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Understanding the value of a pre-arrival transition summer school for mature students

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Understanding the value of a pre-arrival transition summer school for mature students

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Executive summary

This project aims to understand the value of participating in a pre-arrival transition summer school for mature students. Value is considered as the “regard, importance, worth, or usefulness that something is held to deserve” (AMOSSHE 2011) – in this case the ‘trans:it summer school’. This two day event is run by the University of Bradford in September each year to support the academic transition of new mature students who are due to start their programmes of study.

Most importantly, the project attempts to understand value from the student perspective and to capture the summer school’s role in their early transition through university. It also aims to capture, via a series of vignettes, the personal stories of individual mature students in order to further appreciate their journey. The work is placed in the context of existing sector practice and understandings and also tries to uncover wider issues for mature students and their suggestions for supporting ongoing transition. The study will assist developments at Bradford, but also has wider implications for the sector as it hopes to aid institutions in considering the implementation of their own pre-arrival programmes or to enhance existing mature student support activity.

The project adopts a mixed, but largely qualitative approach, undertaking the following activity:

- A literature review in the area of mature student transition support.
- Online questionnaire of the 2014 summer school participants.
- In-depth semi-structured interviews to explore individual understandings of worth and suggestions for enhancement.

Key findings

A range of practice exists in the sector, both face-to-face and online, to support early transition. Various understandings of the mature student experience are offered and it is clear that successful student transition and engagement at university is seen as key for retention and success. However, there is limited evidence of the value that particular transition support activities have on the individuals that are involved and therefore this study focuses specifically in this area.

The questionnaire activity established that the trans:it summer school programme was well regarded by the participants. 96% of respondents agreed that attending the summer school had helped prepare them for starting university and 98% that they felt more confident about

starting their studies. Building on this, the questionnaire open comments and the interviews identified six interrelated areas of value of the summer school programme.

Expectations and awareness:

- Understanding what was expected of them and what university would be like.
- Awareness of the support on offer and accessing this being normalised.
- Attendance confirming or consolidating their choice to come to university.

Preparedness and confidence:

- Feeling more prepared, confident and less anxious when they started.
- Being able to focus on their studies once university began.
- Involvement of the Student Ambassadors in helping students realise they could achieve.

Familiarity with the campus:

- Being able to see and experience key campus places and study areas.
- Knowing where to go helping them to feel relaxed and prepared.

Relationships and community building:

- Knowing others and making early connections.
- Meeting other mature students, sharing experiences and realising they were not alone.
- Establishing friendships and supportive communities.

Development of good academic practices:

- Being able to hit the ground running with their studies.
- Utilising techniques and information they had learnt / seen at the event.
- Doing well in their course and accessing support.
- Feeling empowered and supporting others.

Establishing an early sense of belonging:

- All the above aspects linking to belonging academically, physically and socially.
- Feeling valued and part of the university.

Conclusions and recommendations

This project concludes that the summer school is of value to mature students and demonstrates how they themselves value and perceive this worth. The personal narratives give insight into individual experiences and provide suggestions for enhancement for both the summer school and ongoing mature student transition. From these combined, the following recommendations are made for consideration:

1. Hold a pre-arrival summer school to support mature student transition that focuses on the key areas of value identified.
2. Build on the summer school by enabling ongoing interaction and wider mature student community development. This includes follow-up events and offering more social opportunities.
3. Increase student engagement in the summer school through further promotion of the event, and addressing the practical suggestions made by students for improvement. Ensure greater awareness of support services for those unable to attend.
4. Consider enhancing mature student support during the programme of study, such as more consideration of mature students in programme induction events, utilising mature student experiences and being more aware of their issues.
5. To further understand how the summer school is of benefit, undertake tracking activity to determine if any trends can be established regarding participants academic outcomes.
6. Aim to expand the summer school concept to other groups of students. For example, those entering via clearing, BTEC routes or those arriving after September.

It is intended that these findings and recommendations be used to develop our practice internally at Bradford and by the sector for those aiming to enhance transition support for mature students.

Project aims and overview

This project aims to understand the value of participating in a pre-arrival transition summer school for mature students. Value is considered as the “regard, importance, worth, or usefulness that something is held to deserve” (AMOSSHE 2011) – in this case the ‘trans:it summer school’ experience. This two day event is run by the University of Bradford in September each year to support the academic transition of new mature students who are due to start their programmes of study.

Most importantly, the project attempts to understand value from the student perspective and to capture the summer school’s role in their early transition through university. Using student articulations of their experiences and their views and suggestions, we aim to identify key strengths, as well as possible enhancements. In addition to the summer school itself, the study aims to uncover, via a series of vignettes, the personal stories of individual mature students and how they have progressed through their first year in order to further appreciate their journey.

The work is placed in the context of existing sector practice and understandings and also tries to explore wider issues for mature students and their suggestions for support. It therefore intends to support not only the development and expansion of the pre-arrival summer school internally at Bradford, but to aid other institutions in considering the implementation of their own programmes or to enhance similar existing activity; and to

offer further recommendations for practice in supporting ongoing mature student transition in higher education.

Background

The University of Bradford has a high number of mature students, with just over 50% of our Bradford based undergraduate students in 2013/14 being aged 21 or over at the point of entering their studies. Each year, the institution runs an on-campus and free of charge two day 'trans:it summer school' in September for new mature students who are due to start at university. The core purpose of the summer school is to support academic transition into university and to achieve this, it aims to enable students to familiarise themselves with the campus, meet other students and make connections before the course starts, and to establish the early development of good study skills.

The summer school is led by the Student Experience and Success Team and is supported by our Academic Skills Advice service and Recruitment and Outreach team. Core plenary sessions are held to welcome students to the institution, and include input from the Students' Union and talks about a range of opportunities available to them during their time here. They also incorporate reflections from current mature students about their journey into university. A small 'exhibition' style stalls event is held to introduce students to support services that they may need, and all other activity takes place in smaller groups. The main workshop programme covers:

- Becoming an independent learner.
- Deciphering jargon and making the most out of lectures.
- Reading strategies and effective note-taking.
- How to write in an academic style.
- Finding and accessing library resources.

A key feature of the event is to enable group work and involve current Student Ambassadors. Our ambassadors greet and register the attendees, provide guidance over the event, carry out the campus tours, direct students between rooms, and work alongside them in the workshop activity, sharing their own experiences informally over the two days.

In 2014, 169 students attended the trans:it summer school. These were allocated to seven groups of approximately 25 and a team of 18 Student Ambassadors were recruited to support the event, the majority of whom were assigned to particular groups to encourage interaction. Each of the seven groups was named after a local place of interest and a competition was held over the event for the groups to find out interesting facts about their landmark. The full 2014 programme can be found in Appendix 1.

Methodology

Overall, the project took a small scale, empirical "multi-method" approach (Gilbert 2008), employing a variety of data collection methods outlined below. Although there was a

secondary research and quantitative element to the research, the main focus was interpretive and qualitative – to examine the views, reflections and ideas that people hold and make use of. It aimed to explore individual mature student experiences from their standpoint and to understand transition and the value of the summer school through a “series of personal narratives and subject positions” (Reynolds and Wetherell 2003).

This method was felt to be the most appropriate for allowing participants to articulate and reflect on their own experiences, to raise what is of importance to them, and to highlight matters or insights that may not have been considered. The work aimed to reveal individual stories and views but was also interested in commonalities and intended to pull out emergent themes. Similarly, it could also reveal possible differences in beliefs both between and within accounts and therefore offer a more nuanced understanding of student transition. However, it is important to note that the findings do not strive to be representative or enable generalisations to be made. Rather than aiming to establish ‘truth’, it strives to contribute to a dialogue on student transition and the value of a support opportunity using the actual experiences and voices of students.

As the project is focused on a particular event – the 2014 trans:it summer school – only mature students who attended this, or who were eligible to attend, have been included in the primary research elements of the project. This is as follows:

- Aged 21 or over (at the time of entry).
- Undergraduate.
- Based at our Bradford campus (so excludes students at partner institutions and those based overseas).

Three research activities were carried out for the study, as follows.

Literature review

A literature review in the area of mature student transition support into higher education was undertaken in order to provide context for the research. This aimed to find examples of pre-arrival support initiatives across the sector, evidence of the value and impact of these and broader understandings on transitions and mature students.

Online questionnaire

The literature review was followed by an online questionnaire for the 2014 participants to obtain largely quantitative data and so identify any common feelings, views or suggestions. It included ratings of each element of the summer school programme¹ and asked how far students agreed with a number of statements – including if it had helped them prepare for university, to feel more confident about starting their studies and if it was useful to meet other students². All of which helped to ascertain if the event is meeting its core aims and

¹ Ratings options for each element were:
Excellent Good Satisfactory Poor Did not attend

² Options were on a scale of 1-5, whereby 5 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree

what features of the programme may be of particular value. An overview of the questions is provided in the findings section (figure 1). The questionnaire also included open questions to enable students to express views in their own words and make suggestions for improvement.

The questionnaire was sent to all 169 participants and 50 students responded, giving a 30% response rate. Ideally, this would have been higher in order to capture a broader range of opinion. However, it does provide a good indicator of the views of the mature student attendees that year.

Semi-structured interviews

Underpinned by the wider literature and the questionnaire data, a qualitative exploration of a sample of the participants took place. These in-depth semi-structured interviews aimed to uncover individual experiences of pre-arrival transition support and to explore this in detail to reveal understandings of value and suggestions for enhancement. They strived to hear the authentic voice and lived experience of individual students, who have situated knowledge of mature student transition into higher education. The interviews also hoped to capture student narratives of their journeys into university and how they feel they, and other mature students, could be supported as they progress through their studies.

All summer school attendees were invited to participate in a one-to-one interview and an incentive of a £25.00 Blackwell's voucher was offered. Due to the nature of the research and the desired subjects, the project utilised a purposive sample. All those interested were followed up and 15 interviews undertaken. Each lasted approximately one hour and involved a number of core questions, but also free discussion of issues and alternatives relevant to and defined by the students. In addition to the attendees of the summer school, two interviews were carried out with mature students who had not attended in order to provide a sense of comparison.

Informed consent was sought prior to the interviews and referral contacts were offered for those who wished to seek further support on any of the issues raised. All questionnaire respondents and interviewees were anonymised in the findings and discussion and pseudonyms created for the vignettes.

Overall, there was a good range of interview participants who came from across all five of the Faculties at Bradford and from a variety of backgrounds. However, there were fewer males, black and minority ethnic students and international students than in the wider mature student population. No part-time students participated and a slightly higher proportion of those with a registered disability took part than in the overall population. As only two non-attendees participated it is not possible to draw any conclusions from their input, although useful aspects of their reflections have been included in the findings. It is also noted that the roles of the research team (as student enhancement focused) may have influenced those who volunteered to participate (Mauthner et al. 2002), for example students with a specific grievance hoping this would be addressed, or indeed those with particularly positive experiences to highlight. Consequently, our purposive sample is somewhat less representative of the mature student population than would have been desirable. However, although our interpretive exploration was interested in commonalities

and intended to pull out emergent themes, by nature it was a small scale study and not intended that the findings be representative of the whole mature student population or enable generalisations to be made of all mature students. Instead the project predominantly aimed to explore individual feelings and voices and it was these accounts and the open comments from the questionnaire that were the main focus of the work. Therefore this issue is noted for the purposes of limited possibility to generalise rather than as a criticism of the approach or outcomes.

Interview data was recorded and transcribed and thematic analysis (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Braun and Clarke 2010) used to outline and develop themes, patterns, links and concepts as interpreted from the data and using examples and quotes from the research subjects. These were used alongside the key questionnaire trends to gain an overview of mature student transition and the value of participating in the summer school.

Throughout, the research aimed to be participatory (Maguire 1987) by involving the participants in the production of knowledge and the articulation of what mattered to them, and through collaborating with student researchers. An employability opportunity was also created as part of this, with one graduate intern working alongside the lead researcher throughout the project, contributing to the research design and collection, as well as the data analysis.

Lastly, the underlying motivation of the research was to take the findings forward practically – both at the institution and for others in the sector. Understanding the value of a pre-arrival programme has implications for practice in terms of how to focus such programmes and how to support mature students (and potentially others) as they progress through university. This was a key goal of the project and forms part of the methodology, analysis and overall conclusions and recommendations. In this sense the outcomes fit into the participatory framework of the project, by obtaining student feedback and involving them in what happens to support mature students. This partner orientated approach has been encouraged in terms of the curriculum, assessment and feedback or evaluation (Bovill et al. 2011; Giles et al. 2004), but here considers students as partners in the progression of transition support. Students can not only see themselves as part of a mature student community via attending the event, but also through having input into the research and how the programme and other support for mature students is developed.

Key findings

Key findings from each area of research activity are provided below. Collectively, the data and its analysis enables further understanding and a more detailed picture of the value of the summer school, insight into mature student transition into higher education and how to further enhance practice in this area.

Literature review

Numerous summer schools are offered across the UK by higher education institutions, many of which are part of outreach or induction / pre-induction activity. Examples of such programmes can be found at Kingston University, Newcastle University, Abertay University,

University of Central Lancaster, Heriot Watt University and Glasgow University. Some events focus on supporting particular groups of students, such as international students with language skills or students with particular learning needs, and a few examples were identified of programmes aimed at mature students (such as at Bath Spa University and SOAS, University of London).

It is likely that more transition programmes are offered, but there is often limited information available on university websites as these are, understandably, mostly student orientated and give a brief overview of the event and information on how to apply, etc. These overviews show that schemes often focus on study skills such as academic writing and referencing and can include tours of the institution and city. Schemes generally run for two to three days with many offering a residential option. In addition, there seems to be a growing number of online transition programmes either through a dedicated website of resources, or via online web portals (University of Kent, Nottingham Trent University and Bournemouth University – Keenan 2009). Again, these aim to support a smooth transition through providing advice, resources, information, help with preparing for study and pre-arrival engagement activities.

It remains less clear though what the impact and/or value of transition activities are, particularly with regards to the individuals themselves that are involved. Studies have found links with orientation / induction programmes to academic performance, engagement in extra-curricular activities and developing realistic expectations (Busby et al. in Hollins 2009; Penn-Edwards and Donnison 2011). However, these often focus on activity delivered after arrival, rather than pre-arrival, which is the specific focus of this research project. Knox (2005) has examined the progression and performance of students attending a preparatory module and yet concluded that it was difficult to ascertain its impact due to multiple factors and variables involved. Knox did conclude that the programme was of value from the student perspective through (such as in terms of confidence) and similarly Keenan (2009) notes pre-arrival activity for aiding preparedness and confidence; and it is in this area that this research aims to contribute – through building understandings of value rather than ‘impact’, say on the grades of students who participated.

Looking beyond pre-arrival programmes specifically, there is significant evidence that highlights the importance of student engagement and successful transition in a broader sense (Astin 1985; Tinto 2006; Kember et al. 2001; Mann 2005 & 2010; Yorke and Longden 2008; Krause 2007; Currant and Keenan 2008; Hollins 2009; Bryson et al. 2010; Trowler & Trowler 2010; Trowler 2010; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden 2011; Knight and Rochon 2012; and Armstrong 2015). Clearly, successful student transition and early engagement with the university is important in the sector and is ultimately seen to be supporting student retention and success (Foster et al. 2012; Thomas 2012).

When considering the mature student experience, various studies raise potential issues for these students, such as dealing with conflicting priorities and external demands, like family and children (McInnis and Hartley 2002; Arthur and Hiebert 1996); and practical issues such as course flexibility and timetables being compatible with their circumstances (Yorke 2000). Some argue that ‘adult’ students have focused goals for their education, typically to gain or enhance work skills or to change careers; and that they can view education as a means of

transporting themselves from one phase of life to another (Compton et al. 2006). Uncertainty with the choice to come to university and/or the course (McInnis et al. 2000) is noted, as are concerns over peer interaction, not being able to participate after timetabled sessions and notions of belonging (Kift and Nelson 2005; O'Donnell and Tobbell 2007). However, it is stressed that mature students are not a homogenous group and have different career experiences, family situations and educational backgrounds (O'Donnell and Tobbell 2007) and therefore it is important not to assume that all will experience or indeed want or need the same things.

Whitaker (2008), when discussing first year transition, suggests that proactive interventions should be developed and delivered in terms of the key competencies required to succeed at university. Yet literature or guidance on first year transition support, particularly for mature students, is limited, although some have indicated useful aspects that programmes could contain or aim to achieve. These include running targeted courses that centre on skills and orientation and ensuring reduced effort / time so that mature students can focus on learning (Compton et al. 2006; Kift and Nelson 2005; Tonnes in Newson et al. 2011). All of which reflect the key aims of our trans:it summer school at Bradford.

It therefore seems that a number of institutions in higher education are running transition support programmes either before or after entry and that these can offer face-to-face and/or online activity. The sector has frequently identified the importance of successful student transition and has highlighted some particular issues for mature learners. Although some studies have considered the impact of transition support activity in terms of progression and performance, there is less research into this area and the value that students give to the initiatives they participated in. It is within this context that this research aims to develop understanding – with a specific focus on pre-arrival support for mature students and the value that attending the event had for them.

Questionnaire findings

The student feedback from the questionnaire was largely positive for all aspects of the summer school programme, with input from other students in the student life and student opportunities presentations being particularly valued.

As the core purpose of the summer school is to support the academic transition of mature students, focus was given to how far students perceived attending to have been beneficial. 96% of respondents agreed that *“attending the summer school has helped prepare me for starting university”*; 98% that *“I feel more confident about starting my studies because of attending the summer school”* and 92% agreed *“It has been useful to meet other students”*. A full overview of the questionnaire results is provided in figure 1.

These results suggest much of the programme is indeed useful and therefore of value to the students, and that we are meeting our core aims for the summer school. It is also reassuring that 96% would recommend attending to others.

Figure 1:

Summer School programme item	% rated excellent or good
Student life presentations (talk from the Students' Union and current students)	94%
Presentations delivered on 'student opportunities' (careers and study abroad)	90%
Becoming an independent learner workshop	78%
Deciphering jargon and making the most out of your lectures workshop	88%
Reading strategies and effective note-taking workshop	84%
How to write in an academic style workshop	82%
Library and IT workshop	74%
Library tour session	88%
Campus tour	78%
Mini exhibition	76%
Overall organisation of the event	98%
Statements	% rated strongly agree / agree
Attending the summer school has helped prepare me for starting university	96%
I feel more confident about starting my studies because of attending the summer school	98%
It has been useful to meet other students	92%
I would recommend attending the summer school to others	96%

The open comments from the questionnaire also revealed important detail as to the positives and value for students. As these were so similar to the findings of the interviews, the data have been combined in order to offer a stronger overview of the main aspects and these are outlined in the section below.

Interview findings

Similar notions and factors emerged from all of the qualitative activity and it was possible to draw out commonalities within and across the interview accounts and questionnaire comments. This strengthened the establishment, via thematic analysis (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Braun and Clarke 2010) of a number of trends regarding the summer school.

These key themes are focussed upon understanding the value of the event as stated in the overview – in terms of the “regard, importance, worth, or usefulness that something is held to deserve” (AMOSSHE 2011) from the participants’ perspectives.

Value of the pre-arrival programme

All of the themes are interrelated and together uncover useful insights into how mature students took value from the summer school and what was important and useful to them as they then embarked upon their studies. Examples and a number of student quotes are used throughout for illustration.

Expectations and awareness

A common feature of the data related to students believing the summer school gave them an understanding of what was expected of them and what university would be like. Many highlighted the programme for showing them how learning would be and how to tackle study and assessments, etc. The content itself was seen as enjoyable and informative, with the workshops and talks being praised for a range of items including:

- Reading strategies and note taking.
- Structuring essays.
- Time management.
- Understanding the library.
- Navigating IT systems, email and using the VLE.
- Understanding lectures, workshops and seminars.
- Maths support.
- Highlighting wider opportunities such as Students’ Union activities, career development services and study abroad.
- Group work and working together to solve problems.
- Hints and tips from the student ambassadors.

Participants also took value from having a good awareness of what support was on offer. Several talked about how they had discovered and been reassured by what was available to them in terms of support staff and services, facilities and opportunities. This included knowing where to go and/or who to contact should they need help and an understanding that people were there for them and that they wouldn’t be left struggling. In addition, they said they knew to ask questions once they arrived and accessing support appears to have been ‘normalised’ as a routine part of university expectations. Some articulated a sense of relief knowing about all the support available, others felt it had removed the shame of accessing support services, or believed it gave them confidence to ask for help – as the following illustrates:

“I have seen how helpful and encouraging the university staff are. I really appreciate that they are there to help with any issues I may have and I will be more confident asking for help because of that.” [survey respondent]

“I feel confident about seeking maths help without worrying that it would be frowned upon.” [survey respondent]

“I learnt a lot from it and it kind of put me in the right mind to go and find out some other things and ask some more questions. I kind of knew where I was going... it led me onto the academic skills which I probably wouldn't have done otherwise. I'd have been too ashamed to go to them, I'd have been too ashamed. But having experienced that little snippet, it was like, no it's not about that, it's about what's available for me. So that was really good.” [Interviewee]

A somewhat unexpected issue that arose was the notion of the summer school confirming or consolidating a student choice to come to university or study the course, and we saw from the literature that mature students can be uncertain about their decision. Therefore this may have possible implications for the retention of mature students, who may not have concluded this before being 'thrown in at the deep end' once studies commenced. Some said attending had helped them choose the institution, or that it had made them feel they had made the right choice or resolve to stick with their choice, as these interviewees show:

“I would say it helped because I pretty much made up my mind then that I wanted to come to the University... I would say definitely I made up my mind then and [for] the course as well. Then I was sure... that's what I want to do and from then on I was looking forward to starting to be honest...” [Interviewee]

“Personally, I think I came at the right time. I felt welcome and the summer school that I came to, it gave me a better idea of what was offered. Really, when I came I wasn't 100% sure of what I wanted, but afterwards I pretty much made up my mind” [Interviewee]

Therefore, there was a sense of the summer school providing some good groundwork before studies began and enabling students to see what would be expected, how things worked, where to seek help and that coming to university was what they wanted to do. Some valued this because they felt they 'wouldn't have had a clue' if they'd gone straight into lectures or that they would have started 'with their eyes closed'.

Preparedness and confidence

Closely related to the above theme were perceptions of how the summer school had enabled participants to feel more prepared to commence their studies. This was often described in terms of having increased confidence, both of which, as we have seen, are supported by the high quantitative scores from the online questionnaire.

Students also discussed feeling less anxious when they started because of the summer school. They described being less daunted, more reassured and able to speak to others. For many, attending had made them feel calmer, more relaxed and had reduced their nerves for the first day or week, as we can see from the following:

“I think it's a really good service for mature students, it is quite life changing, and I think to address those anxieties and what's in place to help them is definitely so helpful. That first week we walked in excited rather than nervous and it made such a big difference.” [Interviewee]

Interestingly, reflections identified that the summer school had really focused on support and expectations, which could be glossed over or lost amongst the wealth of information given in induction week. It was also raised that the face-to-face nature of the event was better than reading large amounts of information and so it seems that university information is being delivered effectively and allowing students time to digest key aspects. This combined with notions of feeling more relaxed can be seen to have helped students concentrate on their studies once they started. Reflecting previous studies that suggest support for mature student transition should help them to focus on learning once they start (Compton et al. 2006; Kift and Nelson 2005; Tonnes in Newson et al. 2011), some believed they were more able to take in information and to focus when university began and that they felt 'ahead of the game' or could hit the ground running. The following comments help us to understand this:

"after your initial induction week you do get thrown into it. So had I not had [this] I would have probably missed a lot of information. I'd have gone to the lectures and then a couple of weeks later thought I needed that and somebody says, well you got that in the first one, whereas I was kind of ready to hit the ground running. I knew what I was expecting and I had my little hints and tips that I had taken down from that first summer school lectures so that was really good." [Interviewee]

"...I think it was a really helpful thing... the anxiety a lot of us were feeling, which if we had started that first week, it would have had an impact on how we take in information and I think it definitely gave you that opportunity to get those feelings out of the way before starting" [Interviewee]

"The first day that I started, yeah, I felt more prepared, so less stressed... and therefore I could study and concentrate more because I was more relaxed. And it helped build your confidence as well." [Interviewee]

"[It gave me] confidence to hit the ground running and get on with my studies without worries." [survey respondent]

A final aspect of this theme concerned the role of the Student Ambassadors at the event, with a number describing how these students had helped them to realise that they could achieve at university too. Part of the summer school programme involved hearing reflections from the ambassadors, as well them engaging with the attendees in group activities and tours over the event. Participants repeatedly noted this involvement and found it useful to hear first-hand experiences and advice, as well as other mature students' journeys into university and how they had progressed. As we can see below, participants talked about how this made them feel they could achieve too and again links to the possible impact on retention raised in the theme above as students realised, through interacting with the ambassadors, that they could be a student and they could achieve.

"[they] made you realise that, you know, it's possible. That everyone started from the same level, because it feels like an unreachable goal when you first start, so it just made it a bit more real and less daunting." [Interviewee]

"because you think if they can do it I can. It makes it a more realistic goal" [Interviewee]

Mature students seem therefore to have taken value from the event as it helped them to feel more prepared, confident and less anxious. Being able to focus on their studies was a benefit as was being inspired by Student Ambassadors to see that they could achieve. All of which appears to have led to a perceived smoother transition into university for these students.

Familiarity with the campus

Many students talked about the value of having seen and experienced the campus and a range of physical spaces. This was via the scheduled tours that form part of the programme, but also the workshop spaces, the lecture theatres where the plenary talks took place, the library and areas to eat or get coffee.

Knowing where things were and what places looked like emerged as important. This sense of familiarity helped them to feel they knew where they were going and alleviated some anxieties as they'd already 'walked through the doors' and 'got the feel of the place' before study began. This contributed to positive outlooks and again being prepared to study and able to get on, as outlined by these participants:

"Early familiarisation of the campus and university life in general will hopefully help me hit the ground running with my studies." [survey respondent]

"When I came, after the summer school, I was quite chilled, I was quite relaxed, I went and got a coffee before my modules, I knew where I was going so yeah, it took all that first day thing out of the way, because I had been to the building before, so I would say it's a massive benefit yeah." [Interviewee]

The importance of the campus in understandings of belonging at university has been highlighted in higher education (Lefever 2012) and here again we see that early grounding in the physical spaces of the university was of value to students as it offered familiarity, helped students feel relaxed and was a key aspect of the expectations and preparedness themes – with seeing and experiences actual spaces where they would study offering this.

Relationships and community building

A key reoccurring theme from the data revolved around the summer school enabling the early development of peer relationships. Many interviewees praised the event specifically for getting to know others and making early connections. This emerged in two main strands, firstly that just knowing or recognising others once they started had been useful and reassuring. This had helped them break the ice and forge contacts which they still had now. A lot of the participants had worried before arriving that they'd feel isolated and so it had made an important difference to them, even if it was just to meet up for coffee or simply be asked 'how are you getting on?' Several reflected how not having these connections would have been difficult, for example:

"So all this was new to me and without it I would have struggled to be honest, so if I hadn't made those relationships at the beginning of it and I'd have come here not knowing anyone, I think I would have really struggled to be honest." [Interviewee]

Secondly, the role of building relationships specifically with other mature students was clear.

Many highlighted meeting others 'like them', who they felt were in the same boat. Often they had been concerned about being the only mature student on the course, or that they wouldn't 'fit in' with younger students. Through meeting mature students at the summer school this had been alleviated and comfort was taken in interacting with others in similar situations. This also connects to confirming their choice to come, raised in a previous theme, as realising that others had had doubts too was reassuring:

"because up until coming to the summer school I was still in a situation of thinking have I made the right decision? Am I doing the right thing? Can I do this? Once I mixed with other people who I knew were coming from different walks of life, and they were saying 'I don't know what I'm doing either', obviously it means a lot to you..." [Interviewee]

A number of interviewees talked about mature students having particular worries. This was in part due to perceived differences in personal situations (for example family or childcare commitments, finance, educational background) and also that they don't necessarily meet others in accommodation or 'typical' student social events. Narratives included how it was good to share experiences and concerns, some of which were quashed by other mature students, and how realising that they were not alone again relieved anxiety.

This reassurance from and interaction with other mature students had been a real source of strength for some and had enabled them to build groups once the course started, which had been carried through the first year and been mutually supportive on the course. These examples give a flavour of the aspects raised above:

"... I liked meeting the people, because some of [them] I still know now, and so I think it was good to meet other people, and see what, you know, the directions they were going, and I think it helped because when you come to university on the first day, if at least you know someone, some familiar faces... because at least you can talk to someone and say hello, whereas [otherwise you would] come in like a fish out of water on the first day. I felt comfortable with them and it helped when I was doing things I wasn't familiar with, when you're picking out things like modules, at least I could then turn around and say what do you think? So I think it helps a great deal getting to know people before you come." [Interviewee]

"... when I was at home I felt I was the only adult student, but when I got here I found that there are so many of my age and there are some even older. So the people I met that day, I still have memories and each time I see them I smile because they were the first people I met. From that day I felt so much at home, I felt so comfortable in myself and what I was doing... I found that there was nothing to worry about at all. Because there are people who were in my shoes, who were worried just as I was, so it was nice." [Interviewee]

"It's scary... starting university when you're older and to meet people before your first day it was really nice, it was like a comfort because everyone was sort of in the same situation with a family, left a job, you know pursuing a dream, so that was a real comfort I think, it was amazing actually." [Interviewee]

“I mean younger students have come from school or college so the learning is still present, they have been doing it. Whereas a lot of us hadn’t, so it was definitely reassuring, and I mean some of the people I met on the summer school I’ve stuck with now... it’s definitely made it all a bit more personal and easier to support each other.” [Interviewee]

Overall it emerged that friendships had been made at the event and that several small mature student communities had been built from it. This was mainly within the course context if students had met others from the same department, but was also the case for those in different areas as some talked about still seeing or meeting up with those they met at the event from other parts of the university.

Being aware that the university has many other mature students and being able to interact with these at the event prior to starting, seems to be of significant worth to most of the participants. We know that peer support is key in successful transitions for mature students (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education 2013) and this work reveals that a core element of the value of the summer school lies in the importance of early bonding and the start of building supportive mature student peer communities.

Development of good academic practices

Alongside all the previous themes, understandings of how attending had benefitted participants in their programmes of study also emerged. Several participants described a sense of being able to just get on with things and, as touched on above, talked about how after the summer school they had been able to get their ‘head straight’ and so could take in and focus more when the course started as they’d seen things before. For some, the summer school had put in place what they’d be using and had set their mind up ready for study as independent learners, as we can see from these excerpts:

“...there were endless lists of what you could come to and it’s really important for somebody my age having not been in education, you lack confidence. They just push you in the right direction and say “maybe you need to be thinking about writing like this”...[and] grammar and punctuation as well, building an argument, I think they are really important.” [Interviewee]

“... you have to research everything, look everything up yourself, and it is very much like you have to be motivated, and I think certainly the lectures that we got in the first couple of days put me into the right mind for that, definitely.” [Interviewee]

“...I didn’t really have a clue about how it worked at University and it was [this] that kind of set me up because... it told me that I was going to be an independent learner and I had to go away and find things for myself rather than being told things. Which looking back on it now was exactly what I needed because I’ve never been to university.” [Interviewee]

As interviewees discussed their time on the programme, a number reflected how they used the techniques they’d seen / learnt at the summer school or would refer back to the workshops they had attended or the comments of the student ambassadors. For example, they talked about pacing their work, organising their study, diary and time management, knowing to ask questions or for help and to communicate with other students. In addition,

they knew of the wider aspects of university, such as careers and extra-curricular opportunities and the importance of engaging with these. So value emerges in that attendance affected behaviour once they started, as good study habits and practices had been set or developed. For example:

“I think it just gave me a starting point. It helped with thinking about my taking notes, because I did go and buy different coloured books for the different seminars so I did take that through, and trying to do a bit of reading, you know, and not just leave everything to the last minute. Definitely pacing myself has been really important.” [Interviewee]

“I think just having that summer school and hearing people say just ask for help; don’t wait until you’re really struggling. These people are here to help you. So to have that said and kind of reiterated quite a few times – to know the academic support was here” [Interviewee]

As part of the interviews, students were asked to comment on their progress and most noted that they had been doing well and were getting good grades and feedback. Some had done better than they had expected and were seeing their grades improve over time. A few had experienced difficulties and issues on their course but were overcoming these and growing in confidence through the course and assessments.

Participants talked about how they were enjoying university and felt settled and happy that they’d coped. They certainly knew of the support on offer and had been accessing it – such as personal / other tutors, the library, academic skills advice, counselling or disability services. Linking back to expectations and awareness, the students understood that these services were there for them to utilise and that it was not problematic, but a positive practice to ask for and access support.

Interestingly, the summer school appears to have had less value academically to those who had been on an access programme, as some shared how they already knew about studying at university and support from their previous course. However, such students still highlighted the benefits of the summer school to them in terms of easing nerves and meeting others.

Some knew others who hadn’t attended the summer school and suggested that they had been ‘on the back foot’ and wished they had come. Those interviewed who had not attended also talked about doing well and making friends but said less about accessing support and appeared not to have as strong study habits as the attendees. However, as only two non-attendees were interviewed it is not possible to explore this further. Similarly, some interviewees reflected that they felt they were more focused on their work than younger students, and were more organised and keen to make the most of the opportunity. Again though, it is not possible to conclude if attendance at the summer school had any influence on this.

So overall, many of the participants reflect on feeling they had a head start as they had been able to get into student life before the programme started. One final element of this was a sense of empowerment that came through, largely due to interviewees describing how they had used their early knowledge and experience not just to help themselves but to support

others. For example, they had relayed information from the event back to others during the early weeks, and had been able to show people locations and tell them about resources; some had even gone on to become Student Ambassadors themselves because of the event.

Therefore value is ascertained from the summer school as it has enabled students to hit the ground running with their studies, have techniques and information to use and has encouraged the establishment of good academic practices and the benefit of accessing support – both of which the participants were demonstrating. Although we cannot say that attendance at the summer school directly resulted in the students doing well on their courses (as so many other variables are involved), it does seem that the summer school offers a good solid starting point in which to build on for success. In addition, the programme has even fostered some to feel empowered and motivated to support other students in their transition.

Establishing an early sense of belonging

All of the areas of value that emerged speak to understandings of belonging at university, which is commonly noted as important for student transition, retention and success (Thomas 2012). Belonging can be defined as “a sense of ease with oneself and one’s surroundings” (May 2011 p.368). It can also be seen as operating at a number of levels – with other students, to the course and to the wider university or campus (Foster et al. 2011; Lefever 2012). Via this work, we can begin to see how the summer school is supporting belonging:

- Socially – through social connections to other students and developing groups.
- Physically – through familiarisation with the campus and spaces.
- Academically – through developing expectations and awareness of study and support, fostering confidence and preparation and starting to develop good academic study habits.

One final aspect of this is a sense that the summer school makes the students feel valued. This is not just in terms of being aware of support, but the overall tone of the event. Input from senior staff was noted, as were the consistent messages from all about what was on offer and making the most of their time at university. Similarly, the welcome and acknowledgment of the importance of their decision to come to university was appreciated and attendance at the event perhaps emerges as the first step in feeling welcomed and part of the institution. The following thoughts help to illustrate these points:

“There were a lot of different voices but all the voices were saying the same thing. You knew that there was somebody very high up who came and spoke to us and then there were people who worked in volunteering and the [union]... [you] just got a very big flavour of everyone from the uni and them all saying, you know, you should be proud of yourselves, you’ve done really well to get here. Just that really meant a lot I think. Before that you are just applying from home, it’s all just paper work you’ve come and done the open days... [so] this is really important, you are changing your career, it’s just that little bit of acknowledgment I think, you are making a step out. You are changing your life, you are giving up a lot...”
[Interviewee]

“I’d been to the taster days and they have an applicant day... and I’d come along to that, but then it’s like you are not still here, but once I had come to the summer schools it’s like you are here, you are part of it... so as soon as I started on day one I belonged here.” [Interviewee]

Mature student journeys

As part of the project aimed to understand the mature student experience of transition, interviewees were asked to talk about their journey into higher education. This included why they had decided to study, how they felt before they arrived and if they had any concerns.

As noted in the literature, mature students are not a homogenous group (O'Donnell and Tobbell 2007) and indeed, each interview revealed a different story and situation. However, it was clear how important coming to university was to every participant and a sense of how big a change this was for the individuals really emerged. Some had a clear career or goal in mind, others were more motivated by learning, the challenge or a long term desire to study at university. Most felt anxious or daunted before arriving, some were overwhelmed, although many had mixed feelings and were often excited too.

Confirming previous studies, mature students had a number of concerns before arriving and during transition. They worried about how they would manage the change – such as balancing family or childcare commitments, financial concerns, coping with the work, or adapting from full time work to study. Several reflected on their fears about being able to use technology at university and most had been concerned about ‘fitting in’ with younger students or being the only older student.

However, there were differences of opinion on if mature students were more anxious than other students when arriving. Some believed they were because of the above issues and because they believed they had more external stress and less free time. However, others talked about having less anxiety as they didn’t have to worry about things like money as they were financially secure, or about moving away from home and being independent for the first time. A few raised concerns about their educational background not being A-Levels or college and it was suggested that it was this (the route into study) that was actually more significant than their age. One student summarised that mature students may be different, but younger students still have challenges’ and that there are less differences once students have settled in.

These issues perhaps raise the possibility of offering the trans:it summer school, or an adaption of it, to other groups of students. It is acknowledged that all students could potentially benefit from additional transitional support into higher education and so it is an intention of the team at Bradford to look into expanding the inclusivity of such activity.

The student vignettes provided in appendix two offer a flavour of these personal journeys into higher education. They have provided a context in which the value of attending the summer school has been addressed and have been particularly useful for understanding how important it is to reassure mature students, raise awareness of support and establish clear expectations, good academic practice and enable supportive connections to be made.

Wider mature student issues

A key intention of this study was also to highlight wider mature student issues and how to support these students beyond the summer school. These are outlined here, in the areas for enhancement section and are also incorporated into the recommendations.

Several students raised on programme difficulties that they hoped could be addressed. These include encountering mixed support from personal and other tutors and wanting to develop better relationships with tutors, where mature students didn't feel talked down to and that enabled mutual discussion and feedback. Issues with timetables and how these fitted into their lives were also noted, as were specific placement concerns and wanting support planning future goals for those who don't have a specific career in mind. A number also raised the perceived poor behaviour of other students in classes who didn't listen and/or who weren't prepared for tasks – which linked to a wider perception that they, as mature students, were more conscientious in their studies and more motivated to do well because of how much being at university meant to them.

Importantly, several suggested that more support was needed for mature students and that, after the positive experiences of the summer school, more interest in their progress could be shown. Some reflected that they had been included at the start, but now felt somewhat abandoned or displaced. Therefore how to build on the successes of the summer school as students' transition through their first year and beyond is a key consideration for the future.

Areas for enhancement

As well as addressing the above issues, both the questionnaire and the interviews identified a number of suggestions to improve the summer school itself. These were mainly practical issues, all of which will be taken into account when planning the 2015 event and other potential transitional activity.

These suggestions included:

- Consider the amount and balance of workshop content as some felt there was a lot to take in, others that more was needed.
- Include items on team and group working.
- Hold a mock lecture.
- Consider running events for specific departments / programmes.
- Make workshop materials accessible earlier and/or online.
- Include more informal opportunities for students to just chat and get to know others.
- Reduce the size of each group and involve more Student Ambassadors.
- Increase promotion and awareness of the summer school so that more engage.

To address some of the items raised in the last section, more on-programme acknowledgement of mature student issues was also suggested. Such as: consideration of mature students in programme induction events (for example opportunities to meet other

mature students on the course); better utilisation of mature students' experience and their focus on work; and greater awareness of their issues, such as personal tutor support, timetables and addressing the perceived behavioural issues of younger students.

One common idea that came from the interviewees for supporting mature students beyond the summer school was to build on the event and help them to continue to meet, interact, share and support each other. Students mentioned holding a follow up event/s, more social or society based opportunities that happened during the working day when they were on campus, and increased engagement with the students' union mature student sabbatical officer. Therefore aiming to establish a wider mature student community across the university is a key consideration for the enhancement of ongoing mature student transition at Bradford.

Conclusions

This research has enabled understanding of the value of a pre-arrival transition summer school for mature students. It provides an insight into how students perceived its worth and usefulness to them and how the event, and wider support for mature student transition into university, could be enhanced.

The literature review provides context for the study and shows that a range of practice exists in the sector, both face-to-face and online, to support early transition. Various understandings of the mature student experience are offered and it is clear that successful student transition and engagement at university is key for retention and success. However, it also reveals the need for greater understanding of how particular mature student transition support activities are valued by the participants involved and so, this study aims to contribute to and build on this dialogue, specifically in this area.

The quantitative data provides a broad picture of student views on the content and use of the summer school programme, and how common experiences were. Alongside this, the qualitative data (from the questionnaire and the interviews) offer insight into how the event was of value and how it could be improved. The individual exploration of students' perceptions of the transition summer school via the interviews and their journey narratives, have helped to shape our understanding of mature students' experiences of transition and their ideas for change and further enhancement.

It is encouraging to find that all those interviewed discussed how the summer school had been worth attending and how it had been important to them to some degree. Each offered a range of aspects that were of value and not all took value from it in the same way. Yet collectively, and combined with the questionnaire data, they allow us to establish the core themes that show how the event is supporting and easing mature student transition into university – offering a positive starting point for the course that can be built on over time.

The mature students themselves identified these areas of value and highlighted how attending had helped in: developing expectations and raising awareness of what university will be like; supporting students to feel prepared and more confident about beginning their studies; enabling familiarity with the campus; supporting the early development of relationships and community; and building good academic study habits that have been

utilised over the first year. We are reassured that the value revealed reflects the overall aims of our summer school programme and that it can be seen to support transition academically, physically and socially, together helping to create an early sense of belonging. One interviewee helps to summarise this:

“I think it was both the academic and the social, you had the academic side to it which was good because it gave you some good background knowledge and it just helped you, sort of guided you, through it but then seeing things and meeting people, the social aspect, was on a par with it. It was just, it’s a fantastic idea just to have that for mature students because I think it’s a comfort and it helps along the way, it helps because I was a bit like that thinking ‘Oh I can’t do this, I can’t do this [either]’, but after my two days I was like, I can do this. It made you feel like you were a part of it.” [Interviewee]

It has been suggested that programmes aimed at mature students should help them to focus on their studies and adopt positive learning skills that shape their learning experience (Compton et al. 2006; Kift and Nelson 2005) and this project has confirmed that this is taking place at the summer school. Whittaker (2008) argues that students should be empowered through transition strategies which seek to help them achieve a high level of self-efficacy in terms of learning skills and understanding expectations. We can see this beginning to emerge, especially as the narratives themselves highlighted feeling empowered – to approach their own studies and also to support others. The above are also potentially important to the formation of learner identity in higher education (Briggs et al. 2012) and we hope that through the pre-arrival summer school we have helped mature students start this process before the course starts and at the very beginning of their journeys into university.

The student vignettes gave us a flavour of these journeys and the particular issues mature students feel they face and also where they think things can be made better – not just to the pre-arrival programme – but to how else they can be supported as they progress through their studies. Not only can we therefore make improvements to the event itself, and these suggestions will be fed into the planning for the 2015 programme, but we can also consider how to build on this success and for more sustained support for mature students. This speaks to common understandings of the importance of an ongoing transition and the value of organising supportive activities over the first year (Teeside University 2011). In this research we see that mature students had on-programme issues that can be fed to our programme teams for consideration, and that they would like continuing and dedicated support and further opportunity to discuss their progress and needs. They also wanted to be able to liaise with other mature students and have opportunities that cater to them. We believe that progressing such suggestions would help us form an active and engaged mature student community at the institution.

As well as the value for transition, there may be possible value for progression, retention and success. Some comments suggested that attendance at the summer school confirmed their choice to come and we know that successful transition, engagement and a strong learner identity is important for student achievement. Tracking this however, was beyond the scope of the project and yet we would suggest there may be value in undertaking such

activity with the summer school participants and future cohorts to see if it is possible to determine if any trends exist and if there is any impact on student success.

Our findings mean that the summer school will continue and hopefully expand at Bradford. We aim to increase the numbers of mature students engaging in the event and plan to widen the scope of the programme to more students. Although a number of the concerns addressed by the summer school were arguably more relevant to mature students, it is suggested that the core content would be beneficial to other groups of students and in aiding their transition into university. We feel the programme could be adapted and run to support other cohorts – such as those entering via clearing or a BTEC route, or those arriving outside of the traditional September entry point. Beyond our own institution, we anticipate this study will also be of use to the sector in terms of developing new or existing programmes and support for mature students, and in considering successful student transition into higher education more broadly.

Overall, this project concludes that the summer school is indeed of value to the mature students that participated. The study demonstrates how they themselves value and perceive this worth, and the personal narratives give insight into individual experiences and provide suggestions for enhancement for both the summer school and ongoing mature student transition. From these combined, the following recommendations are made for consideration in the section below. The detail provided in these has been taken from the ideas offered by the subjects themselves, who are thus participating in the development of mature student transition support at Bradford.

Recommendations

Internally, we endeavour to continue our ‘trans:it summer school’ and will look to incorporating the practical suggestions made and the ideas for ongoing support; hopefully to expanding it to more mature students and other student groups.

As a result of the research we would recommend the following actions and/or activity:

Hold an annual pre-arrival summer school to support mature student transition that focuses on the key areas of value identified: building expectations, preparedness and confidence, and positive academic study habits, familiarity with the campus and making peer connections.

1. To build on the success of the summer school by enabling ongoing interaction and support between student peers and developing a wider and stronger community of mature students. This could include the following:
 - Hold follow up meetings or events for mature students to check how they are getting on, to revisit key information / core skills, and to discuss any emerging issues or concerns.
 - More social / society opportunities during the working day rather than in the evening so mature students can engage.

- Greater awareness of / interaction with the Students' Union mature student sabbatical officer.
2. Increase student engagement in the summer school and ensure greater awareness of support services for those unable to attend. For example:
 - Greater promotion of the summer school and its potential benefits.
 - Address the practical suggestions for improvement made by students to enhance engagement during the event.
 - Promote as a mature student event to encourage participation.
 - Enhance promotion and accessibility message of support services for those unable to attend.
 3. Consider enhancing mature student support during the programme of study, such as:
 - More consideration of mature students in programme induction events (for example, opportunities to meet other mature students on the course).
 - Utilise mature students' experience and their focus on study.
 - Be more aware of their issues (for example, improve personal tutor support, address perceived behavioural issues of younger students and offer support with future goals planning for those who don't have a specific career in mind).
 4. In order to further understand how the summer school is of benefit, undertake tracking activity to determine if any trends can be established regarding participants academic outcomes.
 5. Aim to expand the summer school concept and programme to other groups of students, for example:
 - Clearing students.
 - BTEC route entrants.
 - Late-arrivers.
 - January starters.

It is intended that these findings and recommendations be used to develop our practice internally at Bradford. We also believe that they are applicable to the wider sector and could be utilised by other institutions who have a transition programme already, who are looking to introduce similar initiatives and to those aiming to enhance transition support for mature students.

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Appendix one: Trans:it Summer School September 2014

DAY ONE								
9.00-9.30	9.30-9.45	9.45-10.30	10.30-11.00	11.00-11.15	11.15-12.15	12.15-13.00	13.00-14.00	14.00-15.00
Registration Richmond Entrance Area Tea and Coffee in the Atrium	Welcome JSB	Student Life Talk from UBU (15 mins) Reflections from Student Ambassadors (30 mins) JSB	Student Opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers and placements (20 mins) • Study Abroad & Student Experience & Success Team (10 mins) JSB	Into groups – break with students ambassadors	Lister Park Group Library workshop (JBP 2.7 - meet Library Welcome Desk)	Lunch	Lister Park Group Library Tour (meet Library Welcome Desk)	Lister Park Group Becoming an Independent Learner (Chesham B0.26a)
					Centenary Square Group Campus Tour (meet Atrium) Student Ambassadors		Centenary Square Group Library workshop (JBP 2.7 - meet Library Welcome Desk)	Centenary Square Group Library Tour (from JBP 2.7)
					The Alhambra Group How to Write in an Academic Style (Chesham B0.33)		The Alhambra Group Campus Tour (meet Atrium)	The Alhambra Group Library workshop (JBP 2.7 - meet Library Welcome Desk)
					National Media Museum Group Reading Strategies and Effective Note-taking (Chesham B0.26b)		National Media Museum Group How to Write in an Academic Style (Chesham B0.33)	National Media Museum Group Campus Tour (from B0.33) Student Ambassadors
					Saltaire Group Deciphering Jargon and Making the Most out of your Lectures (Chesham B0.24)		Saltaire Group Reading Strategies and Effective Note-taking (Chesham B0.26b)	Saltaire Group How to Write in an Academic Style (Chesham B0.33)
					St George's Hall Group Becoming an Independent Learner (Chesham B0.26a)		St George's Hall Group Deciphering Jargon and Making the Most out of your Lectures (Chesham B0.24)	St George's Hall Group Reading Strategies and Effective Note-taking (Chesham B0.26b)
					Little Germany Group Library Tour (meet Library Welcome Desk)		Little Germany Group Becoming an Independent Learner (Chesham B0.26a)	Little Germany Group Deciphering Jargon and Making the Most out of your Lectures (Chesham B0.24)
Groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lister Park - Engineering, Informatics and Life Sciences • Centenary Square - Management, Psychology and Combined Studies • The Alhambra – All other SSIS • National Media Museum - Adult Nursing • Saltaire - Midwifery • St George's Hall - Child Nursing, Mental Health Nursing and Occupational Therapy • Little Germany - Physiotherapy, Sport Rehabilitation, Health Wellbeing and Social Care and Radiography 								

DAY TWO						
9.00-9.15	9.15-10.00	10.00-11.00	11.00-12.00	12.00-13.00	13.00-14.00	14.00-15.00
Registration Student Central Tea and Coffee in Student Central	Meet services and support at the University Student Central (exhibition space)	Lister Park Group Deciphering Jargon and Making the Most out of your Lectures (Chesham B0.02)	Lister Park Group Reading Strategies and Effective Note-taking (Chesham B0.26b)	Lunch	Lister Park Group How to Write in an Academic Style (Chesham B0.33)	Lister Park Group Campus Tour (from B0.33) Student Ambassadors
		Centenary Square Group Becoming an Independent Learner (Chesham B0.26a)	Centenary Square Group Deciphering Jargon and Making the Most out of your Lectures (Chesham B0.02)		Centenary Square Group Reading Strategies and Effective Note-taking (Chesham B0.26b)	Centenary Square Group How to Write in an Academic Style (Chesham B0.33)
		The Alhambra Group Library Tour (meet Library Welcome Desk)	The Alhambra Group Becoming an Independent Learner (Chesham B0.26a)		The Alhambra Group Deciphering Jargon and Making the Most out of your Lectures (Chesham B0.02)	The Alhambra Group Reading Strategies and Effective Note-taking (Chesham B0.26b)
		National Media Museum Group Library workshop (JBP 2.7 - meet Library Welcome Desk)	National Media Museum Group Library Tour (from JBP 2.7)		National Media Museum Group Becoming an Independent Learner (Chesham B0.26a)	National Media Museum Group Deciphering Jargon and Making the Most out of your Lectures (Chesham B0.02)
		Saltaire Group Campus Tour (meet Student Central) Student Ambassadors	Saltaire Group Library workshop (JBP 2.7- meet Library Welcome Desk)		Saltaire Group Library Tour (meet Library Welcome Desk)	Saltaire Group Becoming an Independent Learner (Chesham B0.26a)
		St George's Hall Group How to Write in an Academic Style (Chesham B0.33)	St George's Hall Group Group B Campus Tour (from B0.33) Student Ambassadors		St George's Hall Group Library workshop (JBP 2.7- meet Library Welcome Desk)	St George's Hall Group Library Tour (from JBP 2.7)
		Little Germany Group Reading Strategies and Effective Note-taking (Chesham B0.26b)	Little Germany Group How to Write in an Academic Style (Chesham B0.33)		Little Germany Group Campus Tour (meet Atrium) Student Ambassadors	Little Germany Group Library workshop (JBP 2.7 -meet Library Welcome Desk)

Appendix two: mature student vignettes

Rosemary

How did you feel about coming to university?

Terrified, I was terrified. I had been out of school for over 10 years. I've got two kids, I was giving up my job to come and do it, so finances were a big concern. I was wondering if I'd be at the right level, if I could get back into learning. I think just generally it was life changing. I had tipped my life upside down to come and pursue it.

What were your concerns?

I'm doing nursing and I know it's an intense course. I was wondering about the impact that would have on my children. My little boy needs quite a lot of input; I was concerned that I wouldn't have the time for him.

I was giving up my job to come and do it so finances were a big concern. We have had to make cutbacks. I was thinking "oh God, I'm going to start this course and then I'm going to have to leave because I just won't be able to afford it". It's general concerns – am I wasting my time, giving up my job, and then I'm going to come back with my tail between my legs because I can't afford it?

What was your experience of the summer school?

I was so scared about coming, and then when I got here and realised there were so many likeminded people that have given up jobs, and, you know, completely changed their role. You don't know if you're going to be able to manage but when you hear everyone else worrying and supporting each other, it definitely made an impact.

And speaking to third year students, that was really helpful. It made you realise that it is possible, that everyone started from the same level, because it feels like an unreachable goal when you first start, so it just made it a bit more real and less daunting.

After having done the summer school, I wasn't as scared and nervous. I felt a bit more relaxed and comfortable. You had sort of got that out of the way so you could get your head straight into taking in the information and learning and familiarising yourself with the uni. That first week we walked in excited rather than nervous.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

It's going alright. I think you definitely see how far you've got to go, when you're reading your feedback. When we got out into practice, that was definitely the high, because you realise [not just] how far you have got to go, but how far you have come, and how much that theory helps you in practice, and you know, it all sort of, it's like a jigsaw, it all sort of fits together. But yeah placement definitely was my highlight.

Bill

How did you feel about coming to university?

I was very anxious because it was a whole new thing for me. I'd been in business for many years, but I hadn't had an academic history, so it was a complete new thing for me.

What were your concerns?

Mainly my age, whether I could absorb anything, how old my brain was. My concerns personal to me [was that] I'm classed as a disabled student, so this was on my mind as well.

What was your experience of the summer school?

Mind blowing! It was a good atmosphere, the people that were there were very supportive. I think it helped me when I'd started because at least I'd got a feel of the place, I'd got around the building so I knew where I was going so obviously that took away that anxiousness.

I liked meeting people because some of them I still know now. It helped because when you come to University on the first day, if at least you know someone, some familiar faces, at least you can talk to someone and say hello. I felt comfortable with them and it helped when I was doing things I wasn't familiar with.

Up until coming to the summer school I was still in a situation of thinking have I made the right decision, am I doing the right thing, can I do this? Once I mixed with other people who I knew were coming from different walks of life and they were saying, "I don't know what I'm doing either", obviously it means a lot to you.

When I came, after the summer school, I was quite chilled, I was quite relaxed. I went and got a coffee before my modules. I knew where I was going so, yeah, it took all that first day thing out of the way, because I had been in the building before, so I would say it's a massive benefit.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

Surprisingly good. The highs were getting my assessments back from the first semester, they were all highs. I did quite well and a lot better than I thought. I knew which one was my weak subject and I know my strengths.

Bearing in mind that I'm not going to say my age because your recording! Bearing in mind that besides texting and emails I wasn't there, in terms of technology [and now] I'm using WhatsApp, all sorts of different apps, I'm keeping in touch with people now, so to do the coursework and the projects, and the team work and everything else. The benefit of coming to the summer school was that I got to know people. Without it I would have struggled to be honest.

Victoria

How did you feel about coming to university?

It was daunting, quite scary. I had done the access course at college, I had done the previous year of studying but I didn't really know what to expect. I've always worked full time for years, and been a parent, and I'm from another city so I've never even really come into Bradford. Then to change from a full time job to part time, it's quite intense.

What were your concerns?

I was a little bit concerned that there'd be a lot of younger people, so I would feel sort of out of place. I mean it's not a massive problem or anything like that I just supposed it would make me feel a bit out of place more than anything else. There's from 18 up to God knows what age isn't there? And everybody's got different life experiences and stuff, so as a mature student perhaps there is that. And I think it's harder to learn as well.

What was your experience of the summer school?

Overall it was really good. It was tailored to University studying rather than college, which was nice. The library activity was really useful. Getting to meet other people that are going to be on the same course, other mature students was good.

The tours around the building, seeing what a lecture theatre looks like because I'd never seen inside a lecture theatre as well, the library tours, getting a bit of a head start with log-ins at the library as well, that was useful.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

The first day that I started I felt more prepared. With the lectures, I knew more what to expect. The summer school did go through the difference between lectures and seminars and the different types of learning.

I feel like the summer school helped with the whole preparation and organisation, the different tips of how to study and be organised. So I've carried that through the first semester and I feel that it's helped, and I've got good feedback.

Overall, I've enjoyed the course, I think being a mature student, I've got a lot of life experience and, for example, I've worked for years and done various bits of training [and] things are sort of duplicated and repeated on the course, but I understand that everybody's on different levels so sometimes I've felt a little bit frustrated because I've done that. I've already experienced that before, but I understand.

Eli

How did you feel about coming to university?

Personally, I think I came at the right time.

What were your concerns?

Because I've got a small family, I have dependents, I didn't know how that was going to work. With me living outside of Bradford, coming here every day, I wasn't sure if I was going to manage. Before I knew anyone I thought it was just me but then I have met a few people even on my course, who are more or less in the same situation. I think the main thing for me was to find out more about what the University offers. You know when you are applying you are not really sure what the course really involves.

What was your experience of the summer school?

I felt welcome and the summer school that I came to gave me a better idea of what was offered. Really, when I came I wasn't 100% sure of what I wanted but afterwards I pretty much made up my mind.

I was so looking forward to it because I thought this was the chance for me to get to know what I want to know. I think the best thing about it was to meet staff and students. I met other applicants that were in the same situation as me at that time. Some were saying, wow you have a lot going on, but then as I'm speaking I found a few people not far from where I live and we are commuting together now.

I would say the summer school helped because I pretty much made up my mind then that I want to come to this university. It was enlightening to know what the University offers [like] I know there is a mature student's officer. It's something I didn't expect when coming to University, that there will be somebody really looking after people like you. So I think it was a chance to know about the different things the university does. When you are coming you think I am just studying, but then you realise there is a lot more on offer.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

I would say I was comfortable. Even now I don't regret it, of course there were challenges there, you are supposed to learn and be challenged.

I have been to my personal tutor and I have also been to academic skills and such like, just for some maths and CV writing, presentations... [and] just generally asking questions. Things like essays are not my strongest point so I thought I'd get a bit more help with that. I think they are really really helpful.

Margaret

How did you feel about coming to university?

Oh my God, it was a good feeling! I didn't want to go anywhere else apart from Bradford. I was so excited but it hit me, thinking how am I going to cope?

What were your concerns?

I am in my mid 30s and the younger ones are in their world of technology. So I was thinking how am I going to get it right? I want this so much but how is it going to be done? I was scared.

I had been to Bradford University but I hadn't been inside it. I didn't know where the library was, I didn't know where to start. So everything was just overwhelming, just too much.

What was your experience of the summer school?

When I was at home I felt I was the only adult student, but when I got here I found that there are so many of my age and some even older, so the people I met that day, I still have memories. Each time I see them I smile because they were the first people I met. From that day I felt so much at home, I felt so comfortable in myself and what I was doing because there are people who were in my shoes, who were worried just as I was, so it was nice.

The summer school helped me with confidence. It made me realise that I can speak as well, that I can be comfortable in my own accent, in my own language, so that I can learn. My best moment was the library because the first thing I wanted to know is where the books are. Before I started I was like 'Oh my God, the library is so big. Where do I start?' But the library tour, the things we did then, that was very important.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

Amazing! I've had the best time. Do you know, over the years I felt like I'm just nobody. I felt useless. Of course I worked, I've done other things, but to come and learn to be a professional, that is the best thing I've done, so I feel so confident now. I feel like I am somebody out there. I feel like I can go and just be like anybody else. I like what I do and I can't wait to graduate so I can do it.

Penny

How did you feel about coming to university?

I think I was more excited than anxious because it was something that I wanted. I was really excited when I got my unconditional offer. I was more ecstatic than anything. I think the nerves followed, but quite a long time after. I'd always wanted to do my degree. It was just, I suppose, realising I could do it. Sometimes when I'm walking up to the university from the train station I still can't believe that I'm here. I don't think that will ever go away.

What were your concerns?

When you get over the excitement and then you're on the course, there's a reality of 'can I do this'? Can I sustain the work to my standards, looking after everything at home at the same time, because as a mature student I haven't got the luxury of only having to look after me, I've got two children to look after and a husband. It's the enormity of that that brings anxiety. So there's a little bit of panic because it's uncertain.

What was your experience of the summer school?

It was a bit overwhelming, it was daunting I suppose. I remember having to find the table with my surname on and sticking my name on and thinking 'my God I'm here', and then looking at everybody else who was looking exactly the same as me. But the fact that we could come before everybody else, it settled me a little bit.

I met a really good friend, she was the first person I spoke to and now she is a really good friend on the course, so had I not come to the summer school I think I wouldn't have known any faces. A lot of people had been to college to do access courses, they knew each other, but I hadn't had that, I had done that on my own so I didn't know anybody.

Talking to people and understanding why they wanted to come into this as well, it eases your nerves a little bit because it's quite a big step as a mature students coming out of one thing to doing a completely new thing. I also got a good understanding of what I needed to do. How I'd need to write things, knowing where to find your handbook and, I suppose, navigate the system. The system's half the battle, navigating blackboard, knowing that you've got your faculty site, and then your module site. Knowing I could go to the library for support and tutors for support was great.

The summer school took away the blind panic. I knew where I was going. On that first day, you were seeing it for the second time rather than the first time so I could take in a lot more. On day one there's over 300 of us coming in and that was quite tough, because it was anarchy, and you think 'Oh my God I don't know where I'm going'. Being able to spot people that you know and thinking, right ok, so at least I know that person was nice. I think it made me feel more confident that I had made the right decision.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

Really quick, like I can't believe it when we joined the tutor said in a blink of an eye you will be qualified, and I said 'oh right yeah, ok' and we are 6 months in and due to go on our second placement. I just can't believe where the time has gone.

I am really happy that I've coped, and I feel there has been times where I was in danger of burning out as there was a lot of work front loaded. But this semester has been much better, it's been a lot easier, we have had a lot more seminars, and directed study work where I find that I learn more by just talking to people. I've had no trouble at all, no issues, but it's gone so much quicker than I've expected it to.

Stacey

How did you feel about coming to university?

I was really nervous. I had been to university a long time ago but I just felt like I didn't get to go and do really what I wanted to. [This time] I just thought it was a bit more me. I only applied here and I got in. I live very near and I needed to be near for my kids. I'm glad I got in because there are only 20 spaces on our course so.

What were your concerns?

I was worried about fitting in, being older than a lot of people that were at uni. I wasn't sure how I'd cope with the workload. I've got children so I wasn't sure how I was going to manage my family. I had a lot of doubts about whether I should be doing this at my age and whether I should have just got on and carried on with my job, so there was a lot of anxiety about that.

What was your experience of the summer school?

Again, I was really nervous but everyone was really friendly and welcoming. There were things that were really important that really helped me to settle in, things that I really wouldn't have found out if I hadn't done it.

There was a very in depth library tour, we did some talks about how to take notes in lectures. Just knowing about the services and that you thought, well at least if I struggle then I know where to go.

We had people to take us around - Student Ambassadors. They just made me feel more at ease. They were all mature students as well so they were able to just talk about how they had settled in, how to manage time, keeping on top of things, that kind of thing, just little snippets of information. I also met two people that were doing my course on that day.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

After the summer school I felt much more relaxed. It gave me more confidence. I picked up things that I needed. I sat down as soon as I had my timetable and put the whole thing in my diary up until Christmas. I'm always the one who knows which room we are in. I really did plan my deadlines and I have seen the difference in my marks because of that. I'm much more planned and have time to go over things again. If I hadn't gone to the summer school, it would have been scarier. I wouldn't have had any idea about how to manage.

[Now] it's going ok. I've been surprised by my grades being better than I thought they would be. I'm heading for a first and I got a 2:2 in my first university degree, so that was a big shock. Placements have been good and I like that we have that in our course. So yeah it's been good. I can't believe it's nearly finishing.

Tina

How did you feel about coming to university?

As a mature student I felt it was a daunting place. That sounds quite bizarre for someone who has some sort of life skills, but you know it was very daunting, and bewildering. That's how I felt when I knew I was coming.

What were your concerns?

The size of the campus, finding my way around. Obviously we are in such a big cohort, just under 200 of us when we first started; it was really daunting just walking in to a lecture

room. I don't think you realise that when you say yes to the position or when you know how many students there are going to be.

What was your experience of the summer school?

There were quite a lot of people, which was quite good because they had other people on different courses that were already here and were mature students, and it was easy to go over and just ask them things. The chance to talk to someone already going through the stresses that I'm currently having to go through, for me it made it feel like it was actually achievable. [Then] I think, just for those first few weeks, it's nice to know that there is someone else, someone you can come and say hi to.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

The highs have been the practical sessions and I don't think we have enough of those. In the first semester it's quite nice to get hands-on as I think it builds your confidence before you go out onto placements.

I chose Bradford because I thought I would get the support as a mature student and I have to some extent. I don't want spoon feeding but I expected just a little bit more support than what I'm getting and that's from a personal tutor perspective. I don't just have internal university stress, I have like external children stress. And I know that's quite normal and I know it's about just getting a balance. It's just about survival isn't it? You just do the best you can. But I think a lot of mature students have a lot of expectations of themselves, that isn't being judgemental that's just from listening to what they say.

Kelly

How did you feel about coming to university?

After being excited for getting the offer, which was brilliant, I was absolutely terrified. In order to get to university I needed an access course because I didn't have the A levels. I didn't do it at college, I did distance learning. So coming from working, I had no experience whatsoever of educational facilities. So it was terrifying to think that I was going to come back!

What were your concerns?

I think it was the fact that there would be a lot of younger people that would be out partying. I knew that my course wouldn't necessarily allow that as it's quite an intense course with the study and the work placements, but it was that I wouldn't feel at home, I wouldn't fit in, because I'd be more like somebody's mother rather than another student, that people wouldn't see me as another student.

What was your experience of the summer school?

As soon as I got the email saying did I want to come it was absolutely I do! Because I just need to know where I'm going, I want to know so I don't feel like a fish out of water on the

first day. As far as I remember, they put all the students on one course together and that was brilliant as we automatically started bonding before we were even on the course.

There were various talks put on for us. We had a tour of the campus, lectures about study skills and reading. Because I'd done the distance learning, I'd done it on my own, I didn't really have a clue about how it worked at university. It also introduced me to academic skills which I'm really glad of because I booked myself on a couple of the courses which I probably wouldn't have done otherwise. I'd have been too ashamed to go to them, but having experienced that little snippet it was like, no it's not about that, it's about what's available for me.

The first week was not stressful at all. I knew my way around; I knew some of the people. It was a smoother transition than it would have been had I just turned up on day one. One thing I did that was very useful was I enrolled during the summer school. I got my little badge so it's like you are here now, you are a part of it, and so as soon as I started on day one I belonged here.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

Some of the academic things, I've had good feedback but I wouldn't say it's been easy. But I've taken the opportunity to seek out help for it so I've used my personal tutor and I've been to the workshops and other things. I've put a lot of time into it. We had a summative assessment and I've had really good feedback.

I think because the fact that I'm a mature student means I've got the family and everything else to consider, I go to work and go home, I study and then I've got the family so I don't really have the time to be a student. So I treat it very much like, this is my job.

Michaela

How did you feel about coming to university?

In terms of my feelings when I was coming to uni it was sort of mixed feelings. I am thinking I am a mother and the only working person in the family, full time employed, thinking of leaving my employment. It was really stressful on my side, thinking about the bills. Coming to full time education, it really takes you down because you constantly get reminded of your situation at home. You want to deal with it, as well as concentrating on what you are doing, but you feel excited as well – that you are taking a step forward in your life. Coming to uni made me excited that at least I am going back to a professional level where I was, so it was exciting.

What were your concerns?

I had no idea at all what it was going to be because this is my first time to be in education in the UK. I didn't have a mental picture of what it's going to be like – how I'm going to be contacted? The length of the lectures? It is a big issue for me, because of the different accents and all that.

What was your experience of the summer school?

So when I came the first day then it just all started from there. It was interesting meeting new people, getting new ideas from people. We had so many workshops and I think they were really helpful.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

At the moment I am actually into it and I'm actually enjoying it. Although the work is intense, I am coping. When we started getting feedback from the lecturers, I think I have got to have the confidence, now at least I know that I am meeting these challenges. I can do it as the feedback started becoming very positive. So at the moment I think I am going with it and it's ok, I'm fine.

Rebecca

How did you feel about coming to university?

Well, I'm 30 so I've been in employment for the past 13 years. I've got 2 children and so it was a bit scary. I've always worked for the same company and I just felt like I couldn't get any further with my career. It was something that I wanted to do to further myself, but I was really scared about jumping from my full time employment to going back to school.

What were your concerns?

The timetable. Obviously with children you have to sort childcare out. Money, how am I going to manage for money? Am I going to be able to still afford to run a house and pay childcare? What am I going to expect from university? What is it going to be like? I've not been in education for a number of years.

What was your experience of the summer school?

I enjoyed it. We did some workshops on writing skills, I found those helpful. I thought it was really good moving between the classrooms and being shown around by somebody who was actually on the course that I was going to be attending.

Over those two days I built up my friendships. It was weird as you sort of get your clique straight away. You get your group of friends, we swapped numbers and yeah it was good.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

I think my confidence has come a long way. I feel more positive. Obviously I'm still learning. I'm going to get things wrong, but this is the place for me to practice.

I've attended a few academic skills workshops. Knowing they were free, and there were endless lists of what you could come to. It's really important for somebody my age having not been in education, you lack confidence. I think the summer school gave me a good insight because your lecturers just gloss over it.

I've shocked myself with my grades. Having such a big break from education you think 'am I going to be on par with all my peers?' And yes, I am. So that feels nice, it's good.

Sam

How did you feel about coming to university?

I couldn't wait to start, I was really really excited. I was born and brought up in Bradford and didn't get the chance to go to university when I was younger. I always wished I had and I had always wanted to come to Bradford. I had seen the buildings, used the swimming pools, so it was a really big deal for me. It was quite emotional, I couldn't wait to start.

I'd stopped work due to health issues and I wanted to do something constructive. I still wanted to be a good role model for my daughter and I always enjoyed learning as well. I had always wanted to go so my husband said 'go to university, do it now'. So that was the thing that motivated me.

What were your concerns?

My concerns were around my disability and I was conscious about being able to get around campus as it was quite big. So what I did before I did anything was to go and speak to the disabilities service, and actually get a feel for the size of things, what a typical timetable would be like so I could make sure I could do that first.

What was your experience of the summer school?

It was really nice to meet people. There were a lot of people actually whom I was on the access course with, so it was nice to actually meet up with them again after the summer break.

I did some of the tours, the library. They got us onto the system and everything which was very exciting because then you feel like you can start to have a look around at things.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

I just feel like I've not enjoyed it as much as I could have done. I didn't meet my personal lecturer until two weeks till the end of semester and there were a couple of tutorials or seminars that were missed so I didn't have the opportunity to meet everybody. [For my assessments] it's been brilliant, it's going really really well. The assignments are no problem and I enjoy them and I like the lectures. No issues academically at all.

Louise

How did you feel about coming to university?

Oh God! I can't even describe it to you. There were nights I cried. I was checking UCAS 24/7. I was getting obsessed with it actually. Then you'd get an email from UCAS and you thought

'oh my God'. I'd put it on par with actually having a baby. It was that sort of feeling of happiness.

What were your concerns?

Because I am a mature student, I think it was a major concern. It was like I'm going to come to university and everyone's going to be getting drunk and I've got a family at home. Is it going to be like school? Like are you going to be the older student and everyone's going to be young? Is there going to be any support? I think they were the major concerns really.

I gave up a well-paid job. I had to think about my son who is very young. I had to think can I do this? I think there is a lot of doubt in your mind because it's not just a couple of days, its full on you know, 40 hours, so it was a really hard decision to make.

What was your experience of the summer school?

When we first came I was nervous and everyone was friendly. It was nice to think that this isn't going to be as daunting as I thought. Listening to second and third year students about their experience was really helpful because you know you can read it all, but listening to them face to face, it was really good. It was a bit of a relief knowing that there is support out there if you need it. Your fears and worries were sort of quashed on that first morning listening to students.

To meet people before your first day was really nice. It was like a comfort because everyone was sort of in the same situation with a family, left a job, you know pursuing a dream, so that was a real comfort, it was amazing actually.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

Really well, I think you get out what you put in. I remember the first day, I couldn't sleep the night before, I was a nervous wreck. But when I got in and saw the faces from the summer school that I had been chatting to, it was a relief. That feeling of being lost, you know that horrible feeling, it helped me with that. You see people and think, oh yeah I remember this bit, and I remember them, and it's just a sense of calm over you.

Brian

How did you feel about coming to university?

I was in an industry when the financial meltdown happened and everything tightened up. A few years previous to that we decided to have children me and my wife. We tried me working full time, us working part time, but it worked out childcare costs were just too expensive so we decided one of us would have to give up work. Then there was an open day at this university, and I thought well I'll go and take a wander along and have a look. I took a look at the courses and found something that is very interesting. So, I came down and spoke the programme leader. I explained my situation, that I left school when I was 14, I didn't have any GCSEs or anything but it's something that I've always felt that I could do but I

wasn't going to go back and take the necessary qualifications if I felt there wasn't a chance of me getting here. She convinced me to go and told me that what I needed.

So because I'm a primary carer for my two children I had to do it in stages. I had to do one subject per year and it's taken a long time to get here. So you know when it came to coming to university and when I got my offer, I had already put in a lot of the leg work. So it was never a question of if I would do it or not.

What were your concerns?

I was mainly concerned about being at uni around 18/19 year olds, because I remember when I was that age, I was very immature, very young. So it was how I would cope with being around people I considered to be kids really. And would there be other mature students like myself, because I've not met anybody outside of uni like me who has come back to uni at my age. So these were some concerns, but not enough to make me think that I didn't want to do it. I wanted to do this for a very long time.

What was your experience of the summer school?

I was a little bit apprehensive beforehand, as you would be as it was a new experience, it's a whole new world. I didn't realise that there would be other mature student there. I didn't realise the university had the whole academic skills department and we had a couple of classes in there and it became important. We had a couple of classes about compiling CV's, applying for jobs, all kinds of things like that. That's when I realised how important that part of the university was, because there are a lot of people who get degrees who can't get jobs and I think part of that is because many of them probably don't realise how to compile a CV, or how to conduct themselves at an interview, and so support with this is really important.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

For the first day actually in uni I wasn't nervous at all. I was expecting to be, even though I had had all that prolonged wait to get up to it. I mean it's seven years since I came to the open day and in that time I've done 3 GCSE's and an A level. I've been slowly preparing all that time. I knew exactly where to go, exactly who to speak to because I knew where everything was, where the atrium was, where the reception was, so yeah, I was perfectly comfortable to come along and find my way about. This is what I mean about getting my bearings and familiarity with everything, I knew where student central was, where the library was, where the sport centre was, where I'd have most of my lectures, where the labs were, I knew all of that, which is a big thing, because when you don't know it and there's all those other students as well and you're all trying to find different things, it's not easy for the university to guide every individual as to where they need to be. It really did help so I can't sing its praises highly enough I think it's a great idea.

Sameena

How did you feel about coming to university?

It felt like it was a maze. I didn't know where to go or who to contact really, I felt like how am I going to get in, is it going to be a big Interview process? I just rang a number and they said come in and see us because it was so late in the day and I brought my certificates in and literally within half an hour they emailed me to say I've been accepted onto the course. I didn't do an access course, and I don't have any A levels, I did my GCSE English only two years ago and so that's how I came on, I came on my experience really.

What were your concerns?

The only concerns were if I knew what I'd let myself in for really. Whether I'd be able to cope with the amount of work that is there. I think terminology was another one, whether I would be able to understand the terminology that was being used. I got told it was quite fast paced as I had not studied for a while.

Then the other concerns were financial. Whether I could afford not to go out to work and come to study, because the student loans and grants are quite meagre really, especially if you're a mature student and you have kids as well, they're not exactly great.

What was your experience of the summer school?

Initially I was thinking maybe it's a waste of time, that you know, it's going to take another few days of my time and I'd rather really just go onto the course. But then I thought if I'm going to start it I might as well do it properly and let's see what will happen.

As it happened when I came it was very useful. It was good because I got to meet a lot of mature students, from the course and other students.

Overall how do you feel your first year at university has gone so far?

It's been really good, I was, to be honest with you thinking of leaving but that's due to other commitments as well as the financial element, as next year I probably won't get as much help financially because my youngest child will be out of university so. In terms of actually studying, I've surprised myself because I think I've got about four firsts and two high 2:1s, so I wasn't expecting that. I think I'm the only one in my class who has got a couple of firsts in some subjects so I've sort of surprised myself as to how it's gone.



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