



UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN

LINCOLN HIGHER EDUCATION
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Project Evaluation Report: 3-Minute Summary

Transitioning students effectively:

a student led approach to mental health support

September 2020

Evaluation covering the period July 2019 – June 2020

Project Overview

Transitioning students effectively: a student led approach to mental health support is a £736,000 project which aims to support the wellbeing of students as they transition from school or college into university. Since the start of the project in July 2020, a range of interventions have been successfully implemented by the project team. Project staff take a holistic approach to the planning and execution of all activities, however project activities do generally fall into two distinct categories – those led by the project team based in Student Wellbeing and those led by the project team based in Student Life. Activities and associated findings for the first year are outlined below.

Wellbeing Led Activities

Overview

- Twenty separate transitional outreach visits were made to fourteen schools.
- 2,061 students, ranging in age from Year 11 to Year 13, took part in sessions with the project team.
- Sessions varied in style from large assembly style presentations to smaller presentations and bespoke workshops.
- During the evaluation period a further five visits had been scheduled, however due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures these visits were postponed.
- The WOW summer school in July 2019 supported 40 transitional students with declared mental health difficulties.
- Fresh Start workshops supported transitional students with concerns relating to homesickness at flashpoints throughout the year.

Highlights

- It is clear from the available evaluation data that transitional outreach sessions are valued by schools and are positively viewed by many of the student participants.
- Across all transitional outreach sessions where student feedback was gathered, 64% of students stated that they felt more confident in their ability to manage stress and emotions (sample: 239 students across 3 settings, years 11-13).
- Across all transitional outreach sessions where feedback was gathered, 53% of students stated that they felt better prepared to manage change and be independent (sample: 239 students across 3 settings, years 11-13).
- 75% of free text responses gathered across all transitional outreach sessions stated that the sessions were 'good', 'helpful' or 'informative' in some way.
- Qualitative data transcribed from video interviews with students indicated that they valued the WOW summer school, with many stating that it had alleviated their anxieties and increased their confidence.

Limitations and learning

- Analysis of questionnaires used to assess outreach sessions throws up a tendency for some students to copy answers from their neighbour. Whilst there is no easy remedy to this, it should be considered as a limitation when analysing the data.

- Standardised questionnaires, whilst extremely useful in terms of comparing data across settings, may not always ask the right questions when workshops are bespoke to the schools' needs. The benefits and limitations of the current standard questions should be considered by the project team.
- Interactive content was preferred by the majority of students who responded and where possible sessions should build in relevant activities.
- No evaluation has been carried out on *Fresh Start* workshops, and this is something the project team should consider in year two of the project.

Digital Led Activities

Overview

- Diverse range of digital content produced by the project team during the evaluation period.
- Student co-production took place on all content covering a range of topics.
- Videos were also produced to highlight the work of the project, including a project overview video and an informational video covering the services offered by the transitional outreach team.
- Podcast series also produced, with the *Fresher Take* series now having released 5 episodes.
- Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing guidelines presented some challenges in producing quality digital content, and there has been a shift in focus to producing more vlogs, blogs and graphic content.

Highlights

- Digital content has reached 29,976 people across all social media platforms.
- Whilst engagement with Student Life content dropped off during the pandemic, mental health content continues to perform well comparatively.
- Fresher Take podcast has performed well, particularly episodes on *Handling Homesickness* and *Social distancing, self-isolation and remote study*.
- *Self-Care Sunday* illustrated series performed well, particularly on Instagram.
- Best performing content was the *World Mental Health Day promo* (reach 8,007) and *Students' react to Men's Mental Health Myths and Facts* (reach 3,076).
- A trial of the Fika app produced statistically significant results in favour of the effectiveness of the app. Fika's content also received positive feedback from focus groups.

Learning and limitations

- Linking content to relevant awareness days in the calendar and to wider events which are happening within the university offers benefits in terms of increasing reach and engagement due to the content being topical (and possibly trending) on social media.
- Evidence suggest that graphics and animations do not perform as well as live action videos. However, the *Self Care Sunday* illustration series performed well, it may be worth creating further illustrative series in future, linking them to specific events and using them to promote live video content rather than using them as standalone posts.
- The timing of when content is released is crucial. When planning for filming and release, specific flash points in the academic year, university led events and national awareness days should be considered, with relevant content released to coincide with these.

- The worst performing content released has been blogs and articles. However, harder hitting mental health content performed well. The project team should consider creating more of this type of content, or possibly creating blogs which compliment video content.
- Content also seems to do well when disseminated via university channels other than the Student Life Channel. Embedding content within existing university channels increases reach and targets students who may not yet be familiar with project content. The project team should look for ways in which content can be more widely shared using other existing university channels.
- Caution should be exercised when considering the high levels of reach the project content has achieved. Reach is not the same as engagement, and some of the audience reached may only have viewed the content briefly, which is often supported by audience retention figures. However, this should not detract from the fact that project content does seem to be drawing a significant audience on social media, raising awareness of the existence of the project.

Challenges

The project has gained momentum in the first year and a huge amount of work has taken place. The main challenge faced by the project team have involved effectively involving partners in all areas of the project. Whilst project resources have been distributed and used by many of the partners, involvement in the planning and implementation of project work has been more challenging due to time constraints, lack of understanding of partner roles and responsibilities, and more recently the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The project team identified partner engagement as one of the main challenges during the End of Year review which took place in June 2020, and both the review and the Activity and Evaluation Plan at the end of this report details the work already carried out to better engage partners and further work planned for year two.

An additional challenge has been in raising the profile of the project both within the university and to a wider audience, with there being some difficulties in getting press releases out through university channels. To address this, a considerable amount of dissemination work took place at virtual events by the project team towards the end of year one, and further dissemination work is planned for year two.