



Transition to Postgraduate Study at Master's Level: Lessons Learned from Students' Evaluations of an Online Induction Resource

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ABSTRACT

Evidence from UK universities' Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) concluded that whilst confident and experienced in their area of practice, some find the prospect of returning to study in an on-line environment and making the transition to Master's Level daunting. In recognition of this, a small group created an online resource '*Preparation for study at Master's Level*' which students have access to as part of the induction process for the taught postgraduate MSc Advanced Practice in the School of Health and Social Care at Edinburgh Napier University.

This paper reports on findings of an evaluation of the on-line induction resource using NOVI survey to explore student's views. 73% of respondents felt that the online resource was helpful in increasing confidence about online learning and studying at Master's level. Qualitative comments reflect other research signifying the importance of social interaction and ongoing support to co-create understanding and development of skills. The lessons learned from students' lived experience informed amendments to both online and face to face content and had an impact on the teaching team by rekindling a programme focus.

Though particular to one programme within one university, the findings mirror themes highlighted elsewhere; that transition to Master's level is complex, involving change and exploration of identity and anxiety about what Master's level entails, all of which make for an emotionally challenging experience. Others who support postgraduate students studying at Master's level can learn from this experience.

Keywords: postgraduate, induction, transition, student experience

Background and rationale for the project

The changing nature of postgraduate study

Postgraduate study in the UK has changed dramatically in the last decade including variety in length of study, mode of delivery and availability of financial support (Macleod, Barnes & Huttly, 2019). Statistics for 2017/18 highlight that taught postgraduates make up 19.4% of the UK student population (Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA], 2019a). This is in part as a result of widening participation agendas (O'Donnell, Tobbell, Lawthom & Zammit, 2009), increased professional demand for postgraduate education (Masterman & Shuyska, 2012; McPherson, Punch & Graham 2017) and an increase in online and distance learning opportunities globally (Durham, 2017).

Coupled with the increase in numbers, higher education (HE) providers need to understand that postgraduate students are a diverse group with complex lives (Bunney, 2017; Macleod et al., 2019; Pollard, Gloster, Hillage, Bertram, Buzzeo, Marvell & Rahim, 2016; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a). Indeed, statistical data from HESA (2019b) reveals that 60.7% of taught postgraduate students are mature (over 25), the majority study part-time, often work full-time, sometimes in high level occupations, and have family and financial commitments (Pollard et al., 2016). Yet, despite these changes, research exploring the needs of this group have been neglected as progression to postgraduate study was seen as a natural transition (McPherson et al., 2017; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013).

Literature review

Whilst many students transition to postgraduate directly from undergraduate study, success at undergraduate level does not mean students are prepared for studying at Master's level (Macleod et al., 2019; McPherson et al., 2017; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013; West, 2012; Wozniak, Mahony, Lever, & Pizzica, 2009). Those returning to postgraduate study can bring lengthy professional working experience which meets the criteria for course entry (Mellors-Bourne, Mountford-Zimmers, Wakeling, Rattray & Land, 2016). However, returners often have a considerable gap between studying (Durham, 2017), can lack confidence and have low expectations of their academic ability (Aird, 2017). O'Donnell et al. (2009) contend that assumptions are made that postgraduate education means simply moving up a higher level rather than developing and mastering the skills

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required. The erroneous conjecture is that transition from undergraduate to postgraduate is uncomplicated, when in fact it is a dynamic process involving change.

Tobbell & O'Donnell (2013a) argue that transition involves identity change, as students' confidence in their ability shifts from seeing themselves as novices to becoming experts. A small study of 5 students' experiences of beginning an online distance learning course described four "layers" of change which involved adjustment to university, online learning, distance learning and development of a sense of themselves as a health professional (Wozniak & McEldowney, 2015). Postgraduate courses are also shorter in length which means students have to "hit the ground running" (p.121), implying that change needs to happen quickly (Wozniak et al., 2009). Others highlight the importance of recognising that change is potentially difficult and that postgraduate students needs are different to undergraduate students (Davis, Peck & Apekey, 2016.).

Determining what is meant by Master's level study is a key challenge. To provide consistency for staff and students, Quality Assurance Agency Scotland [QAAS] developed a framework of seven facets of 'Mastersness' comprising Professionalism, Complexity, Abstraction, Depth, Unpredictability, Research and Autonomy (Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, 2013). Students' self-ratings of the skills and competencies required to demonstrate each of these facets concluded that they felt ill-prepared. This is significant, since the emotional challenges and resultant impact on learning commented on earlier do not feature in the QAAS facets (Bamber, Choudhary, Hislop & Lane, 2017). A survey of HE staff in 60 different UK institutions highlighted a perceived gap between the facets of 'Mastersness' and the skill set of Master's level students (MacLeod et al., 2019). Exactly what studying at Master's Level entails is a significant theme arising from the literature review and this uncertainty endures throughout postgraduate study (Aird, 2017; McPherson et al., 2017; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013).

Uncertainty is one of the emotional challenges faced by postgraduate students. Aird's (2017) personal reflections about studying at Master's level as an experienced professional practitioner, articulates feelings of inadequacy and anxiety as an '*academic novice*', commonly referred to as '*imposter syndrome*'. Feelings of panic resulting from questioning identity and sense of belonging, leads to a paralysis and inability to access support. Other postgraduates' experiences suggest this is a period characterised by fear of failure (Aird, 2017), lack of confidence and reticence to participate (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a). Described as "difficult" and even "overwhelming" (McPherson et al., 2017), negative feelings can last until constructive feedback on progress is provided which links to additional support (Pollard et al., 2016).

Technology is an integral part of most postgraduate courses yet research on how it supports learning is limited (Henderson, Finger & Selwyn, 2016). Exploring the transition experiences of 23 Master's students enrolled across several MSc courses, Masterman & Shuyska (2012) stated that HEIs are wrong to assume that postgraduate students are competent in digital literacy. Staff views regarding postgraduate students' preparedness for online learning concluded that this is particularly evident when returning after a gap in studying (MacLeod et al., 2019).

International students face additional challenges when transitioning to postgraduate study (Bunney, 2017; Coates & Dickinson, 2012; Davis, Peck, & Apekey, 2016; Evans, Nguyen, Richardson, & Scott, 2018; Heussi, 2012; Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2017a, 2017b). Drawing on student responses to the provision of academic support in two Australian postgraduate programmes and a literature review of first year postgraduate experience, Bunney (2017) identified factors such as culture shock, social isolation, limited proficiency in English, and an unfamiliar academic environment which can make transition challenging.

The literature suggests that transition to Master's level is a difficult period which requires particular support. So, what are the identified factors which might help?

Positive enablers for transition

Pre-enrolment

Induction should start with pre-enrolment (Evans et al., 2018; Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2017a, 2017b; Wozniak et al., 2009; Wozniak & McEldowney, 2015). This is particularly so for students studying via online distance learning, with a three-stage orientation process (Wozniak et al., 2009). The initial phase begins when contemplating study, and requires consideration of "time to study" alongside other current commitments. The second stage supports development of technological skills prior to online learning. The third involves initiation into the online community with ongoing accessibility to resources and support.

Transition as an on-going process

A positive induction experience can impact on both student experience and retention. Drawing on research of first year postgraduate student transition, Bunney developed a framework for embedding academic support starting at orientation, developing across the duration of the course and through to employment (Bunney, 2017).

Connection with others

Many highlight the benefits of social activities during transition (Davis et al., 2016; Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2017a, 2017b; McPherson et al., 2017; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013; West, 2012). This is particularly so for international students and opportunities for them to develop peer support is crucial (Evans et al., 2018). Davis et al. (2016) captured 80 students reflections on induction twelve weeks after delivery, concluding that 'content driven' inputs left students experiencing information overload, whereas interactive, experiential activities enhanced the induction experience for all.

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Individualised support

Student feedback suggests they particularly value individualised support (Evans et al., 2018; McPherson et al., 2017; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013), though Heussi's (2012) small scale study of postgraduate students highlighted that the *quality* of support was the important factor.

Barriers to positive transition

Exploring both student and staff's perceptions of the inherent challenges of postgraduate study, McPherson et al. (2017) identified three main barriers to a positive transition, namely - the significant increase in workload and confusion about what Master's level entails; levels of anxiety about capabilities; integration with other students and development of a sense of belonging. Peer and staff support helped overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness and other transitional issues.

Themes drawn from the literature review highlighted a gap in understanding whether an online resource might help students prepare for studying at Master's level.

Resource development and project aims

The School of Health and Social Care (SHSC) at Edinburgh Napier University delivers a taught postgraduate MSc Advanced Practice to UK based health professionals. A 2016 programme review gave staff the opportunity to come together. Evidence from the university's own Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (Edinburgh Napier University, 2016) and Keys' (2016) small scale study concluded that whilst confident and experienced in their area of practice, some found the prospect of returning to study in an on-line environment and making the transition to Master's Level daunting. This resonated with the team who recognized that, despite individual module leaders' attempts to develop academic skills, for many students deficits remained throughout their programme. The team agreed that these skills should be developed pre-entry and embedded and enhanced throughout the programme. As an introduction a small group created an online resource 'Preparation for study at Master's Level' which students could access via the university's virtual learning environment (VLE, Moodle) during induction.

This online induction resource includes:

Online Induction Resource Content	
Welcome and orientation	[Moodle introduction / staff introduction / staff details - contact & support]
Library and Literature reviewing	[what is evidence; videos on literature reviewing, database searching, ref management]
Introduction to academic skills required for the programme	[online academic skills: Getting critical / Structuring essays & reports/ Academic writing/ Improving grammar]
Academic conduct and plagiarism quiz	[Integrity issues - cheating / plagiarism / collusion / falsification / personation]
Preparation for Master's level study workbook	[M level frameworks / critical thinking / work independently]
Students' perspectives	[video experiences re MSc level studying from two previous students on the course]
Padlet for student feedback	[option for online induction participants to comment on the pre-entry course]

Table 1 Online Resource Content

This project asked students to evaluate the on-line induction resource via a NOVI survey. Areas explored were:

- Students' background and previous experience of studying
- Their evaluation of online induction resource content
- Students' views about studying at Master's level
- Students' views about studying in an online environment

Findings are presented in relation to the key lessons learned, their influence on the refinements made to the current resource, suggestions for development of programme wide activities and resources and identification of priorities for future study.

Method

Study design

A NOVI Online survey (NOVI, 2012) was used as a cost-effective way of collating and analysing data in terms of researcher time. Based on themes drawn from the literature review, the questionnaire covered three broad areas - demographics, online learning and studying at Master's level (Appendix 1). The design included quantitative elements, a Likert scale from 1 to 10, and, since qualitative responses provide a richer source of data (Bryman, 2016), open ended responses were incorporated.

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Participants

Sampling was purposeful and pragmatic and included those who accessed the online resource. Participants were UK based, part-time students enrolled on the MSc Advanced Practice programme in the School of Health and Social Care at Edinburgh Napier University. Ethical approval was sought and granted by the School Ethics committee, all respondents being informed that this was a voluntary, anonymous activity. Information about the study was provided verbally at induction to both cohorts and advertised verbally and electronically via module leaders. However, the response rate was very low from both cohorts so a group who attended for face to face teaching (Group 3) were provided with paper copies of the survey. Table 2 documents the three groups who took part in the survey.

Group and Cohort	Numbers	Responses	Rate
Online results (Group 1 Sep 17 cohort)	156	6	3.8%
Online results (Group 2 Jan 18 cohort)	106	11	10.3%
Paper copy of survey provided to students in a face to face teaching session (Group 3, subgroup of Jan 18 cohort)	45	22	48.8%
All three groups completed demographic details	262	39	14.8%
Students exited from survey after demographic information as had not accessed the resource	5		

Table 2 Participant Groups

Data Analysis

Quantitative data, relating to demographics of the cohort, were collated by percentages of responses and or mean variations. These are presented in graph and table format.

Further information was provided by generating a rich qualitative data set. Thematic analysis of the data followed the six stages identified by Braun and Clarke (2006). This meant both authors familiarising themselves through re-reading responses, identifying patterns and themes through inductive, semantic analysis of the participants' responses. A deductive approach was also utilised as these were also related to the themes identified in the literature review. Peer debriefing followed, ensuring that these were consistent. Linking verbatim extractions to the analysis meant that conclusions drawn were transparent and therefore potentially less subjective (Bryman, 2016) as illustrated through the examples included in the discussion section.

Demographics

Though the overall response rate to the survey was low, no significant differences were noted between cohorts or sub-group responses so results are presented together. Demographic data was completed by all three groups (n=39). Figure 1, the level of previous study, demonstrates that, despite coming from health professional backgrounds, the majority, 64% (n=25), were studying at Master's level for the first time.

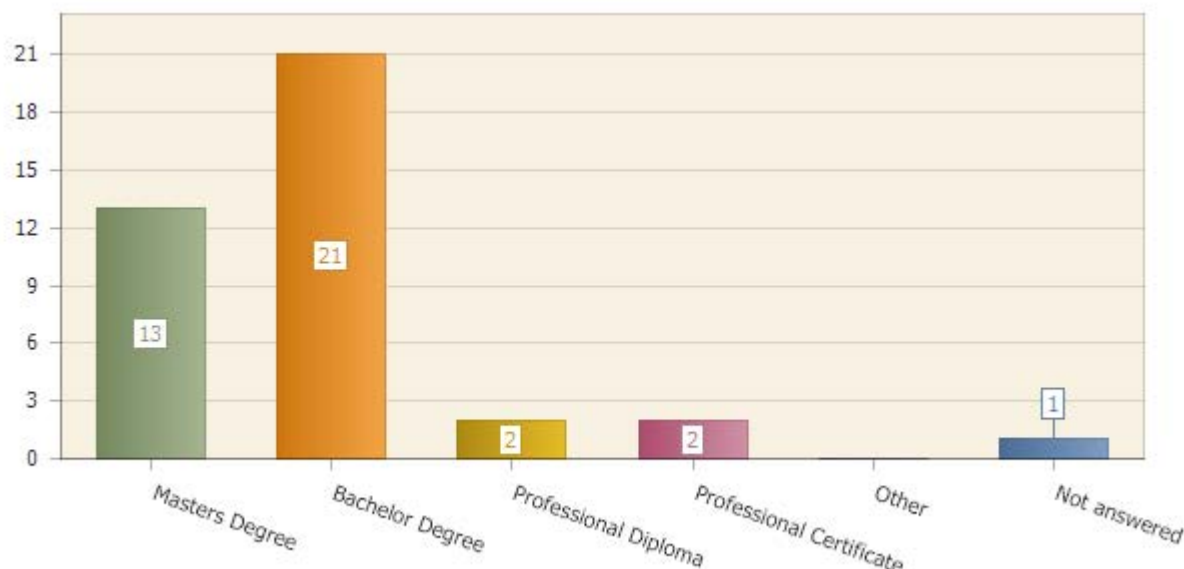


Figure 1 Previous level of study

Other demographic information demonstrated that 33% (n=13) were returning to study after more than 5 years and 46% (n=18) had no previous experience of studying online before.

Findings

Overall view of resource

The remainder of the survey was completed by students who had accessed the resource as part of their induction (n=34). Overall the resource was deemed helpful since 73% (n=25) rated it 7 and above on the Likert scale. Table 3 demonstrates minimal differentiation for each section of the online resource.

Online Induction Resource Content	Mean	Std Dev
Welcome and Orientation	7.3	1.7
Library and Literature reviewing	7.8	1.8
Introduction to Academic skills required for the programme	7.7	1.5
Academic Conduct	7.6	1.7
Preparation for Master's Level Study	7.4	1.6
Student's Perspectives	6.5	2.0

Table 3 Mean and SD scores, online induction resource

Online learning: the pros and cons

51% (n=20) had previous experience of online study and 15% (n=5) provided qualitative positive comments about online learning. For example, highlighting the flexibility of studying online which meant *“learning at own pace”* and *“able to fit study around home and work is a fantastic tool”*, or benefits such as *“access to wide range of resources and learning materials”*. Positive comments about online learning at another university demonstrated that postgraduate students have choice and capacity to transfer learning credits between institutions to suit their own needs.

In contrast, 26% (n=9) provided negative perceptions of online study e.g. describing it as *“confusing at first”* or complicated by *“different computers and mobile devices interacting differently with the website”*. Navigating the VLE presented difficulties such as *“often not used to its best advantage- can be frustrating if not understood by Faculty also”*. The following quote highlights the difficulties with returning to study after a considerable gap: *“My computer skills are basic (probably due to age!) so a huge learning curve”*.

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Despite these comments, 90% (n=30) scored 5 and above on a Likert scale when asked if the course had 'improved your confidence to learn in an online environment'. This is significant given 46% (n=18) had no previous online learning suggesting this was a good introduction.

However, the data also highlighted that the use of technology posed challenges. For example, 65% (n=25) felt more confident navigating the VLE but 33% (n=13) were still unsure and suggestions for how to improve the course included more information about the VLE. Further comments suggested an awareness of the need to be active learners e.g. *"need to practice"* and *"although the more I do the better it gets"*.

The relational aspect of learning

Negative comments about previous online learning also highlighted the importance of relationships (Davis et al., 2016; Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2017a, 2017b; O'Donnell et al., 2009; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013; Tobbell, O'Donnell, & Zammit, 2010; West, 2012). When asked about their previous experiences of studying online 26% (n=9) provided strong negative emotional responses suggesting this transition is an emotive and challenging time - *"did not enjoy the experience"*; or it was *"a bit overwhelming at first"*.

Although 71% (n=27) responded yes to the question *'I feel more confident knowing that I am not on my own'*, 39% (n=14) said yes to *'I still feel I am on my own'*. Comments highlighted the feelings of isolation experienced - *"online learning still feels isolated despite use of forums"* or *"isolated except when I came back into class"*.

Similarly, 33% (n=13) commented that they were still unsure about learning in an online environment - *"just don't like it as much as face to face learning"* and that they *"miss face to face contact"*. 31% (n=12) responded that they were *"unsure how discussions help them learn"*. Only 51% (n=20) felt more confident that they understood what online learning entailed, with 15% (n=3) commenting *"sometimes"* suggesting these were areas for further development.

Beyond modular level, they were asked about their ongoing relationships with University academic support services. Further work is required to increase awareness as only 68% (n=25) agreed they were aware of online and face to face academic support.

Master's level study

Research suggests that students are ill-prepared for Master's level study (Bamber et al., 2017), the rationale for developing the resource, so several questions in the survey explored this. Asked *'to what extent has the course clarified your expectations of what is required at Master's level'*, 73% (n=25) respondents rated 7 or above, which correlates with the overall helpfulness of the online resource. Only 26% (n=9) felt the course had helped to *'increase confidence about working at Master's level'* although 81% (n=31) agreed that the online course was *'a good reminder of academic skills'*. However, 44% (n=15), said it had not increased their confidence with 9% (n=3) providing the following reasons-

"Neither yes or no. I need to start the first module before I can make a definitive decision on this question"

and another remarked

"Not sure I am practiced enough at this level of study to enable me to complete this course".

A further comment -

"Sometimes I feel confident, then sometimes I feel as though I am sinking"

demonstrates dramatic shifts in perception of their ability with negative emotional consequences.

Skills deemed pre-requisites for Master's level study, such as the capacity to work independently (Tobbell, O'Donnell & Zammit, 2010) were explored. Though 54% (n=20) agreed that they felt more confident *'working independently'*, 35% (n=13) felt unsure about *'working on their own'* and a further 27% (n=10) either did not respond or added clarifying comments. These reiterated the emotional and relational aspects of learning identified earlier- *"Sometimes I feel isolated"*, whilst another had *"some anxieties"*, and another added -

"I have some concerns that I miss something during the module which increases my stress levels".

Confidence about theoretical aspects of working at Master's Level was evident in the 61% (n=24) who agreed they had a better understanding of what *'critical thinking entails'*. However, 47% (n=16) were *'unsure about applying the theory of critical thinking'*, with one suggesting *"require more confidence with this"*. Overall, the data suggests that though many feel more confident about theoretical aspects of Master's level study, there remained a lot of uncertainty about what Master's level study involved (Bamber et al., 2017; Keys, 2016) and that interactive opportunities to practice academic skills were required.

Discussion

Lessons learned: influencing adaptations to the online resource and induction processes

Whilst some student comments highlighted the benefits of flexible study relating to online learning, others suggested they still struggled with technical aspects which they need for administrative aspects of their course (Henderson et al., 2016). Students

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also required to learn functional skills such as searching, retrieving and critically reviewing evidence (Masterman & Shuyska, 2012) and how to develop their 'online persona' (Wozniak & McEldowney, 2015), i.e. learning to use a range of different technologies such as Webex, lecture capture and online discussion boards. Staff added or updated the online resource content for each of these topics. However, as an introduction, the quantitative data suggests that overall the online resource was deemed helpful and increased confidence in what online learning entailed (73% rated it 7 and above). This is perhaps particular to the surveyed groups since many were returning to study after a significant break.

Though originally conceived and used as a resource for students post matriculation, pre-enrolment information might have benefited the surveyed student group who felt "overwhelmed" (McPherson et al., 2017; Wozniak et al., 2009). Therefore, the resource has now been added to an open area of the institutional VLE to offer new students pre-enrolment access. Section 3 of the resource provides an introduction to academic skills which many found helpful. However, topic specific academic support is still required (West 2012) so work to create a consistent, staged approach to the development of academic skills across the programme has also commenced (Bunney, 2017; Wozniak et al., 2009).

Induction needs to address 'relational' aspects of belonging, of a shared learning experience and feeling part of a community (Davis et al., 2016; Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2017a, 2017b; O'Donnell et al., 2009; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013; Tobbell et al., 2010; West, 2012). Qualitative comments in this study suggested this does not occur since some felt "isolated" or did not know what support was available. New information has now been added about the role of the Personal Development Tutor (PDT) and other supports across Edinburgh Napier University. Additional content highlighting that many others find this potentially challenging may also be beneficial for transition (McPherson et al., 2017; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a; West, 2012).

Comments from students highlighted that a key aspect missing from the Induction resource was interaction with other students or tutors. Indeed, the qualitative data suggested online learning can elicit strong negative emotions so information that they 'are not alone' and advice on how to develop a persona as a '*novice academic*' was added (Aird, 2017). Benefits of social support have been raised within the resource (Davis et al., 2016; Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2017a, 2017b; McPherson et al., 2017; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a; West, 2012). A social event has been included for those who can attend a face to face induction and further opportunities are being developed such as shared writing retreats.

As well as being part of a learning community, postgraduate study aims to develop students who are self-directed (Casey, Clark, & Hayes, 2017) and have expertise to work independently but many respondents were still unsure at this stage. Staff perceptions are that students may experience this as being "left to their own devices" (Macleod et al., 2019), so support, which enables students to bridge the gap between novice and expert (Bunney, 2017) and progress to autonomous learning, should be incremental throughout the programme.

A principal reason for resource development was to help students start thinking about what Master's level entailed and how postgraduate study fitted with their work and other commitments (Wozniak et al., 2009). Section 5 included reflection on these, encouraging students to identify supports in their wider social networks (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b). However, one of the key lessons learned was that many remained unsure of what Master's level entailed, mirroring findings from other studies that this is an enduring feature of postgraduate study (Keys, 2016; McPherson et al., 2017). Since learning is an active and constructive process, developing academic skills and being able to make qualitative judgements about what constitutes Master's level work requires active involvement that is sustained (Sambell, McDowell & Montgomery, 2013). Interactive exercises using exemplars (Rattray & Smith, 2015; Smith, Worsfold, Davies, Fisher, & McPhail, 2013), delivered at a point when students need them (Masterman & Shuyska, 2012), and where feedback on progress is provided (Bamber et al., 2017), are all factors which will inform the development of Master's level activities throughout the programme.

Strengths

Synthesised evidence from the UK wide Advance HE Postgraduate Taught Experience (PTES) survey (2018), coupled with the digital foot print of how students actually used the resource, and informal positive feedback in the form of Padlets, all add to the '*evidence mix*' enhancing the scholarship of this project (Bamber, 2015). We have also drawn on our own experience, and one with a unique perspective of students across the whole school, allowing us to make evidence informed improvements to current induction processes. Moreover, the dissemination of this scholarly activity will add to the collective understanding of the lived experience of postgraduate students (Bamber, 2015) and enable others to consider the questions posed and lessons learned from the perspective of their own institution (Masterman & Shuyska, 2012).

Sharing the lessons learned from our study has had an impact on the programme team by rekindling a programme focus with a shared vision to improve the student experience. It is a reminder that transition to postgraduate study is challenging, particularly for this programme where many are experienced healthcare practitioners, highlighted the need to offer early support and to build a community of learners. It has also reinforced the need to develop a staged programme of academic skills and masterly activities.

Limitations

The findings captured the perceptions of a specific group of professional practitioners and the perceived usefulness, to those particular students, of an online resource prior to study or completion of any written assessment. This subjectivity is of note since students tended to over-estimate their capacity to apply the theory of 'mastersness' (Bamber et al., 2017) and only experienced what Master's entail when they failed the first assignment (Bamber, 2015). A low response rate for the online survey was not unexpected given 46% had not studied online before and many expressed a lack of confidence working with

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technology. One of the main limitations of the study was that the sample group were from one programme, school and university (Macleod et al., 2019).

Future research priorities

Given the dynamic nature of transition highlighted in this paper, further longitudinal research which explores different student groups views of what aids or hinders the development of Master's level skills prior to study would be of benefit (Tobbell et al., 2010). Though only one student was unsure how online discussions aided their learning, coupled with feelings of isolation, this suggests that further research into how students develop technical skills and online persona is required.

Conclusion

This study explored students' views of an online resource developed to prepare them for studying at Master's level. Overall, the students who completed the online survey deemed the online induction resource as helpful. However, like other studies, findings suggest that anxiety about what Master's level entails endures and interactive experiences to develop a shared understanding are required. Many, studying online for the first time, commented that the resource improved their confidence. However, they also highlighted the need to develop technical skills and an 'online persona' to be able to learn online effectively.

Data provided valuable lessons on how to improve the online resource. For example, by providing information that other students also find transition a challenging time, this could alleviate anxiety. Similarly, providing access pre-enrolment, gives students more time to consider how study will affect them and identify what supports and skills they have or will require.

Sharing the findings with the programme team has also reminded us that transition to postgraduate study is an emotionally challenging experience. This has rekindled our commitment to attend to the relational aspect of studying so face to face induction processes have included opportunities for social interaction to promote the development of a shared learning community. The team also plan to continue to develop a suite of incremental programme wide academic skills.

This evaluation focused upon one programme in one school in one university but the findings mirror those of other taught postgraduate student experience research which highlights that transition to Master's level is a complex, dynamic process involving change and exploration of identity. Studying online adds to the complexity and can elicit profoundly negative emotions such as feelings of isolation. Further longitudinal research which explores how students can be supported with the development of Master's level skills over a programme of study would be beneficial.

Biographies

Lindsey Robb is a lecturer in the School of Health and Social Care at Edinburgh Napier University since 2010. As route leader for Advanced Practice in Child Protection she has a particular interest in supporting experienced practitioners develop academic skills and led the group which developed the online resource.

Sheena Moffat is a Subject Librarian within Information Services, supporting the School of Health and Social Care at Edinburgh Napier University. She has professional interests in systematic reviewing, applying evidence to practice and student transitions.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to others in the team who developed the resource: Nessa McHugh, Anne Jamie, Claire Coleman, Ruth Paterson, and Paddy Perry.

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Appendix 1

Evaluation of online Induction course – 'Preparation for studying at Master's Level' available on the SHSC Advanced Practice programme

Questions

1. What is your field of professional practice or discipline?
2. Have you completed any previous study before? If so to what level?
3. If you are returning to study - How long is it since you last studied?
4. Have you studied in an on-line environment before? If yes please expand
5. Did you access the online course?
6. To what extent did the course build on your previous experiences of studying?
7. What did you find most helpful about the induction course?
8. What did you find least helpful about the induction course?
9. Have you used any of the materials from the online induction course during your module? If so can you explain which materials you used and why?
10. Can you identify anything that you would like to see included in the module?
11. To what extent has the module increased your confidence about what is expected at Master's Level?
12. To what extent has the module improved your confidence about learning in an online environment?