



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



Loughborough
University



Queen Mary
University of London

Transforming Transitions – A HEFCE Catalyst Project

Executive Summary

Phase 1 Report: FE Tutor and HE Lecturer Perceptions of Student Experiences of Further and Higher Education

February 2018



1 Executive Summary

The transition from school to university is one of the most important a young person makes. For many young people it is an important rite of passage into independence, but it can also be a time of significant challenge. The Transforming Transitions project is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and is putting the spotlight on this transition by working with a consortium of eight universities and further education colleges to look at the experiences of BTEC students across the school-university divide. In terms of background characteristics, BTEC students are more likely to be from black or other ethnic minority groups, or to come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and are more likely to live at home whilst studying. They are also less likely to be as successful at university as students from more advantaged backgrounds with A levels, and BTEC students are also more likely to drop out of university during their first year compared to A level students.

Phase 1 of the project included research with students and staff from participating institutions. Phase 2 focuses on the development and implementation of interventions designed to support BTEC students as they apply for, and then start, university. The interventions are informed by the Phase 1 research.

Key findings include:

- The data from this piece of research reinforce the rationale for this project: that BTEC students are less likely to perform as well as A level students, leading to different levels of academic success throughout their time at university, and are more likely to drop out after their first year
- BTEC students are more likely to find challenging certain elements of study at higher education, including writing academic essays, reading and synthesising information, and research skills
- BTEC students generally find lectures a taxing way of learning. This is likely due to their unfamiliarity which leads to uncertainty as to how they contribute to overall learning
- Assessment methods are also perceived as an area where BTEC students will struggle, particularly with revision techniques and being able to write coherently and convincingly under pressure
- Lack of confidence is perceived as a barrier to progress and performance at both FE and HE levels. Lack of confidence may impact negatively on self-belief, which in turn impacts on learning and achievement
- BTEC students are likely to have been able to choose the ways of learning and assessment methods which suit them best. This is in stark contrast to higher education where lectures and exams dominate
- HE lecturers perceive BTEC students as having benefitted from significant amounts of support while at college, which may account for why they are perceived to find university pedagogy and assessment processes more tricky where a higher degree of self-reliance and motivation is required
- Live at home students, a high proportion of which are BTEC students, are much less likely to participate in the extracurricular opportunities available at university
- FE tutors feel strongly that BTEC courses prepare students for employability and readiness to work through the development of transferable skills. However this training in skills development does not seem to readily transfer to higher education