

Preparation for Transition (don't survive, thrive)

Bury College



Project Synopsis

As part of Bury College's high school liaison strategy, the Preparation for Transition project's primary objective was to research the issues affecting key stage 4 learners' transition into post 16 full time education. The findings from this research have enabled Bury College to develop a range of new high school liaison activities, launch a dedicated pre-entry web site and influence the induction process for new post 16 students at the start of their course.

Project Aims

As part of its 3 year high school liaison strategy, Bury College works closely with over 3500 Year 9, 10 and 11 pupils across 45 partner high schools each year. Whilst this strategy has been highly effective in engaging with pre-16 students and increasing the total number of enrolments into post-16 education at Bury College, it was felt that more research was needed to help understand the following:

- Sources of information on post-16 choices available to key stage 4 pupils
- Key stage 4 pupils' attitudes towards progression into further and higher education
- Key stage 4 pupils' intended post-16 destinations and the reasons for this decision
- Attitudes towards progression into post-16 education and the concerns that key stage 4 pupils may have
- Potential college services that key stage 4 students may consider accessing prior to enrolment to facilitate the transition process

The findings from this primary research, which involved 465 respondents completing the online questionnaire and supporting secondary research on progression into post-16 education, would then be used to influence the existing high school liaison strategy. This would include developing a range of new activities aimed at building awareness of the skills needed to make a successful transition into post-16 education, enhancing the information that applicants receive prior to enrolment to ensure that they are fully prepared and changing the college induction process to facilitate the new students acclimatisation into a post-16 institution.

Whilst there is a large quantity of research available on transition into Higher Education, little research has been undertaken into the transition process that key stage 4 pupils must go through when progressing into further education. The project team were particularly keen to address this gap and identify how this potentially difficult stage in a pupil's journey could be made easier. In terms of innovation, the research has played a significant role in influencing the design and content of the pre-entry website: Be the Best (<http://bethebest.burycollege.ac.uk/home.aspx>). This website is accessible through the home page of the main Bury College website and each applicant is provided with a unique log-in to access information on how to get involved in student activities, the college's facilities, planning

work-loads and time management, study guides, research skills and subject specific information packs.

Project Delivery

As part of the project, a research officer was appointed in May 2010 and who initially focused on secondary research activity. The primary research started in the Autumn term of 2010/11 and required the creation of an online survey which partner high schools were able to access via the Survey Monkey website. Crucial to the success of the research was the successful engagement of Heads of Year for Yr. 9 and 10 in partner high schools who played a pivotal role in ensuring pupils completed the questionnaire during class time. In total 159 Yr. 10 pupils from four partner high schools and 306 Yr. 11 pupils from six partner high schools completed the survey. To facilitate engagement with the schools, each Head of Year was offered the opportunity to receive a report analysing the results of their pupils' questionnaire input. The deputy heads of each partner high school also received regular updates on the research findings as part of Bury College's pre 16 curriculum engagement activity.

The project was closely monitored by the steering group which was chaired by the Principal. Interim findings were also reported through the formal management reporting process to Bury College's senior management team (SMT). A particular outcome of the secondary research was the acknowledgement of the importance of understanding a partner high school's profile in terms of demographic composition and GCSE performance and how this can impact on a pupil's attitude towards progression. The primary research also enabled the project team and SMT to explore the links between a school's overall profile and the pupils' attitudes towards careers, course choice, overcoming barriers and general levels of aspiration. As a consequence, further analysis of retention and achievement by school and course level over a period of time has commenced with a view to further identify any particular trends and potential solutions to retention issues on a school by school basis.

Project Outcomes

Detailed below is a summary of the online questionnaire findings:
Comparison of Year 10 & 11 Responses

Year 10 - Sample size : 159 Year 10 students	Year 11 - Sample size : 306 Year 11 students
What has helped them to decide which college is their first choice?	What has helped them to decide which college is their first choice?
Reasons for selecting a college as first choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of travel (64%) • Positive feedback from current students (49%) • Provision of the right mix of courses (42%) • High achievement rates (42%) • Influence of family and friends (41%, 40% respectively) Of less importance for this age group were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to college (17%) • Taster sessions (12%) • Information on the website (20%) 	Reasons for selecting a college as first choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum offer (73.1%) • Secondly, a positive experience of dealing with the college is crucial: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Atmosphere at the open evening (54.2%) ○ The way staff spoke to them at the open evening (45.8%) ○ Good interview experience (48.1%) • Exam pass rates (50.5%) • Prospectus (43.4%) Of less importance were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taster sessions (12%) • Visits to the college (11%)

Information in the prospectus (15%).	
How do they feel about progressing on to college?	How do they feel about progressing on to college?
<p>Negative areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coping with tougher exams and their ability to meet course work standards. A major concern is the prospect of leaving old friends behind with 51% indicating that they felt either nervous or worried by this prospect. <p>Positive areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year 10 respondents felt positive about their ability to complete course work on time, achieve the required grades required for progression, choosing the right course to progress onto and the prospect of being treated like an adult by college staff. Finding their way around a new college, making new friends and travelling to and from college were all seen as positives. 	<p>Negative areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The major worry facing Year 11 students is the prospect of leaving old friends behind with 49% of the cohort indicating that they were either nervous or worried by the prospect. Whilst the sample was generally positive about the transitions process, they felt concerned about coping with tougher exams (34%), writing essays to the right standard (29%), getting the grades needed (32%) and finding their way around the college. <p>Positive areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respondents felt positive that they had chosen the right course (64%) and were excited about the prospect of being treated like an adult (69%). Making new friends and travelling to college were all seen as positive by 71% of the sample.
What other services provided by a college would they use?	What other services provided by a college would they use?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year 10s are seeking practical solutions which address their worries and concerns regarding transition into post 16 education. Just over half would favour access to a free coach and 64% would access subject specific resources such as study guides. Similarly, 63% would also access web pages on how to study and write essays at a higher level and 56% would use a webpage with information about starting at college. The sample found the prospect of a summer school less appealing with 83% saying no or maybe. They were also less keen on having access to either a staff or student mentor with 58% responding negatively to a staff mentor and 65% saying no or maybe to a student mentor. They also did not feel particularly enthused about the prospect of a webpage with video clips of students taking about their experiences. The sample was split 50 -50 when asked if they would access a Facebook group to keep up to date with college news. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year 11s would access a coach 71% and 72% would access study guides. Access to a staff mentor was seen as a positive by 61% of the respondents but the students were evenly split when asked about access to a student mentor. The sample also liked the idea of a webpage providing information on how to write essays and revision tips (66%) and on information about starting at college (59%). Of less interest was a summer school with 76% saying they would <i>definitely not</i>, or <i>maybe</i>, access this. 51% said they would use a college Facebook group to keep up to date with college news.
What other services would they like a college to provide?	What other services would they like a college to provide?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only five suggestions for other services were made by Year 10 students, three of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 57% of comments refer to facilitating the settling process.

<p>which related to financial support (including free meals). The other comments were for more Open Days/Taster Days and information about support for students with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21% of comments refer to financial help especially with the demise of the EMA. • 14% of comments refer academic support.
<p>What else could have been done to help make a more informed choice about progression?</p>	<p>What else could have been done to help make a more informed choice about progression?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses group into 5 main areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information, Advice & Guidance (33%) ○ Student Performance at High School (20%) ○ Personal Research (16%) ○ Access to Colleges (16%) ○ Year 9 Options (11%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses group into 5 main areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information, Advice & Guidance (49%) ○ Access to Colleges (19%) ○ Student Performance at High School (12.5%) ○ Year 9 Options (7%) ○ Personal Research (4%) • While there is a tendency to focus IAG towards Year 11, a number felt they needed more information sooner, 21% of comments about IAG refer to a perceived need of more information about FE in Year 9 to inform decision-making on Key Stage 4 options. 7% of respondents expressed concern about some of the Key Stage 4 options they had taken.

Research Conclusions

The reasons for selecting a post 16 institution vary between each year group with Year 11 students citing the curriculum offer as the key deciding factor and ease of travel as the primary factor for Year 10 students. The primary concern for Year 11 students was the prospect of leaving friendship groups behind with 49% indicating that they were concerned or worried by this prospect. Year 10 students were also concerned about leaving friends behind with 51% indicating that they felt nervous or worried by this prospect. Year 10 pupils were also more concerned about coping with higher level course work. When asked about which other services pupils would like a college to offer, 72% of Year 11 students requested access to study guides and 66% responded favourably to the idea of webpage's providing information on how to write essays and revision tips. Year 10 students tended to favour practical offers of help such as free coach service and liked the proposal for a website dedicated to preparing for college.

Be the best website

As a result of the responses gathered by research with Year 10 & 11 pupils, the project team developed a website designed to support the transition from High School to College.

The site included information for prospective students on:

- Getting involved in college life (e.g. details of Student Action Group, enrichment activities)
- Our campus facilities
- Getting to college (transport links)
- How to organise their time & finances
- How to prepare for studying at KS5 (e.g. guides on essay writing, research skills)
- The various ways the college supports them in their learning.

The site launched on 27th June 2011 and received 1,203 unique visitors by the start of term on 8th September. To date 2,469 unique visitors have accessed the site, which is publicised in the high school presentations and on the Homepage of the Bury College website.



<http://bethebest.burycollege.ac.uk/home.aspx>

High school liaison activity

As a result of the responses gathered by research with Year 10 & 11 students, the project team also developed a series of presentations and activities designed to help pupils to think about future career paths and subject choices and feel confident about starting college.

These include:

Future Focus

This presentation is designed to give year 8, 9 or 10 pupils an opportunity to think about career planning and motivate them to achieve in school. It has also been delivered as an event for pupils and their parents, helping them to work with the school in supporting their children as they think about their future.

Be the Best

An introduction to the Be the Best website, designed to help Year 11 students answer any questions they may have about college and give practical tips on studying at Key Stage 5.

Marketing Challenge

An activity helping pupils to develop their skills in research, teamwork, planning, budgeting and presentation. This involves several days' preparatory work at school mentored by college staff, culminating in a visit to the college to present their work to a panel of senior college staff. The research has reinforced the importance of giving pupils the opportunity to experience the college and meet the staff, which has resulted in a wider range of curriculum taster sessions being offered to high schools.

Sharing project findings

The findings from this research project have already been shared with those partner schools taking part in the online questionnaire and disseminated to deputy heads through the college's



pre-16 curriculum collaboration group. The findings will also be shared with a college from West Yorkshire who have expressed an interest in improving conversion rates from pre-16 activity through to enrolment into their college.

