APPLICATION FOR COLLEGE TEAM TEACHING PRIZE 2022

Names and departments of applicants:
- Stuart Wrigley, CeDAS
- Katie Shaw, CeDAS
- Dr Kinga Zaczek, CeDAS
- Gerard Clough, CeDAS
- Dr Jan Kosecki, CeDAS
- Dr Zohreh Moghimi, CeDAS

Title of collaborative innovation: Head Start to University Study

If your application is successful, would you like us to add your case study to the Teaching and Learning space?
Yes

Please describe how your teaching innovation is distinctive in one sentence:
This was an intensive taught course to support the transition to undergraduate study, focusing on what’s involved in university study, what it means to be an academic expert and how students can get the most from their studies.

Please describe how your teaching innovation has a specific focus on inclusivity in one sentence:
The course was advertised exclusively to applicants with a contextual offer flag, and content was designed around principles of inclusive pedagogy.

Please describe and evaluate your collaborative teaching innovation (for example creative, novel, original) in any aspect of course design (teaching, learning, assessment) and include reference to inclusion and engagement.

Please write this so that it could be published unaltered on the Teaching and Learning space.

The new 2-day Head Start to University Study course was designed to complement existing transition activities by adding a novel focus on facilitating the social, psychological and cultural adaptation to university study of new undergraduate students with a Royal Holloway contextual offer flag (i.e. meeting one or more of the following criteria: mature entrant, declared disabled, care leaver, attended a 'low performing' school, lives in a quintile 1 POLAR 4 postcode, has parents with no HE experience). The course was developed, delivered and overseen by Learning Developers from the Centre for Development of Academic Skills (CeDAS), with valuable contributions from current students, academic colleagues from all six schools, and other professional services colleagues. Students were encouraged to attend in person, but were also permitted to join online if they preferred.

The course aims, content and pedagogy were grounded in the literature on student success approaches shown to reduce awarding gaps. The course aims were for students to:
- Gain an understanding of the academic expectations of university study;
- Consider the nature of university cultures, systems and approaches;
- Recognise how their personal experience and perspective add value to Royal Holloway;
- Connect with other students and staff at Royal Holloway;
- Increase their confidence to study at Royal Holloway;
Plan ways to get the most out of their first weeks and months at Royal Holloway.

The course was structured around the themes of 'becoming a university student' and 'being a university student', with a combination of input talks and group-work activities to allow students to get to know each other, share experiences, and increase their understanding and confidence. Students were grouped by academic school to enable them to begin to connect with students from cognate disciplines.

One novel aspect of the course was the inclusion of three discussion panels / Q&A sessions to provide insight into different aspects of university study. Student and academic staff panel members were selected to ensure diverse representation, including of ethnicity, neurodiversity and gender-identity, as well as academic discipline. Course participants reported finding these panel discussions particularly interesting and useful.

The course also included two tasks adapted from the literature on ‘Wise interventions’ (see Walton & Cohen, 2011; Harackiewicz et al., 2014; Walton, 2014), which have previously been shown to reduce awarding gaps between students from marginalised groups and those from institutional majority groups. The first task was a 'saying-is-believing' task designed to strengthen sense of belonging by framing social adversity at university as common and transient. For this, short student-produced documentaries sharing students’ experience of finding their feet at university were created by Royal Holloway summer placement students. Participants on the course watched these videos and were asked to write a text, drawing on the ideas discussed in the videos, intended for a future new students at Royal Holloway. The second task required students to answer a series of questions on their personal values. Despite the brief nature of wise intervention tasks, they are thought to have lasting impact if they trigger a positive feedback loop between the self- and social-systems, particular during a period of transition (see Walton, 2014; Yeager & Walton, 2011).

Student engagement with the course content was high and student feedback was very positive. The course materials were made available on Moodle and promoted during Welcome Week and via Peer Guides.

Please describe the actual or potentially beneficial effect on student learning and include discussion of some source of external evaluation and/or (ideally), student feedback. Please write this so that it could be published unaltered on the Teaching and Learning space.

Student surveys conducted at the beginning and end of the course showed an increase in all of the statements included on the survey, i.e.:

- I feel confident that I know what is expected of me at university.
- I feel confident that I have the ability to do well in my course.
- I understand why universities value independent learning.
- I understand why universities value critical, academic thinking.
- I feel confident that I know how to get the most out of university.
- I feel confident that I can develop good relationships with other students.
- I feel confident about talking with university teachers.
- I feel like I will be valued at Royal Holloway.
- I feel like I belong on my course.
- I feel like I belong at Royal Holloway.

These statements about confidence, understanding expectations, sense of belonging and being valued were included due to their association with reduced awarding gaps.
The following student feedback comments capture some of the areas of the course students found most useful:

- “Head start has been very enjoyable. From the panels to meeting new people it is an experience I will never forget and will use the new skills and information in my future studies at Royal Holloway.”
- “I enjoyed the group project aspect of the course due to the fact that it allowed me to meet new people and learn how to work well in a team, for example, and allowed me to develop valuable skills which will undoubtedly be a fundamental part of my degree program.”
- “The group project was really fun, which I didn't expect! I met 2 nice people and we worked really well together and made a fantastic presentation.”
- “The discussions with the panellists about their own experiences was an introspective and quite useful way of showing what sort of mindset you need to be in for University.”
- “[I most enjoyed] the fact they got students in to give their own personal experiences of uni - this really helped and I felt it was good to have people our own age talking to us also.”
- “What I enjoyed most was meeting new University Students, chatting with them and undergoing a group activity with them. It made me feel more confident in how to adapt to a new environment at university and how to make new friends.”

It is expected that the inclusion of the ‘wise intervention’ tasks described above might have impacted the long-term outcomes of students on the course. The literature on the impact of ‘wise interventions’ suggests that although students may not be aware of their impact, or indeed remember participating in them, they have been shown to have a lasting impact on improving academic outcomes of some underrepresented or marginalised students (e.g. Cohen et al, 2009; Harackiewicz et al, 2014; Miyaki et al, 2010; Walton & Cohen, 2007, 2011; Walton et al, 2015).

**Please briefly describe the contributions made by individual team members both to the task and to the effective functioning of the team.**

The course was designed collaboratively by Katie Shaw, Stuart Wrigley and Kinga Zaczek. All three designed the course structure and curriculum. Katie designed the wise intervention tasks and wrote and delivered one of the lectures. Stuart wrote and delivered three lectures, and organised and chaired the panel discussions. Kinga and Katie promoted the course and made practical arrangements. Kinga also guided on course content relevant to students studying numerically-focused scientific disciplines. Gerard Clough oversaw the creation of the student-created videos, including recruiting and guiding the placement filmmakers from Media Arts, and ensuring that a diverse group of students was represented in the videos. Zohreh Moghimi and Jan Kosecki, together with Katie, Stuart, Gerard and Kinga all taught on the course.

**Please describe any help which you have received from professional support staff (e.g. Careers, CeDAS, Educational Development) in developing, implementing or evaluating your initiative.**

- Administrative colleagues in CeDAS (Alanah Harrington and Nicky Valentine) supported student registration and arrivals.
- Colleagues from various professional services supported the practical arrangements. These included: External Comms – promoting course to offer holders; Student Engagement – guiding on which professional services teams to involve and potential practical issues; Accommodation and Student Administration – supporting arrangements for early arrival; Disability and Neurodiversity – guidance on transition needs of students with declared disabilities & promotion of course to offer holders registered with D&N.
- The academic staff who participated in the panel discussions / Q&As were:
  - Dr Jessica Chiba (English)
Dr Douglas Cowie (English)
- Dr Shahmima Akhtar (History)
- Prof Sarah Ansari (History)
- Dr Edward Madigan (History)
- Dr Karl Mason (Social Work)
- Dr Rita D'Alton Harrison (Law & Criminology)
- Prof Sukanya Sen Gupta (Business and Management)
- Prof Matthew Hague (Computer Science)
- Prof Hugh Shanahan (Computer Science)
- Prof Victoria Bourne (Psychology)
- The students who participated in the panel discussions were:
  - Nate McShane (Comp Sci)
  - Ellie Matthews (Physics)
  - Sehr Shahid (Economics)
  - Ffion Jenkins (PIRP)
- The students filmmakers were:
  - Phoebe Dowling (Media Arts)
  - Maria Drakopoulou (Media Arts)
- The student storytellers were:
  - Ellie Garratt (English)
  - Erjill De Vera (Computer Science)
  - Monika King (Languages, Literatures and Cultures)
  - Annabel Jones-Gammon (Geography)
  - Bazla Samin (Media Arts)
  - Alice Goode (Languages, Literatures and Cultures)