

Dr Steve Tucker and Dr John Barrow

*Fresh approaches to persistent problems: Innovative case studies in transition management*

This parallel session explored some fresh approaches towards a number of problems and challenges which have impacted upon staff time and resources. These challenges have been namely; an increase in student numbers from across a diverse spectrum of backgrounds, increased student expectations (in line with the rise in tuition fees), and more broadly, advances in the curriculum and in technology.

These challenges can have a potentially detrimental impact on student retention and overall student satisfaction. With this in mind, Dr Tucker and Dr Barrow discussed some methods towards overcoming these challenges in relation to several different case studies in transition management.

'Students 4 students': peer mentoring as an approach to support and retention. Beginning in CLSM, the innovation was then piloted in the Schools of Divinity, History and Philosophy (CASS), before being rolled out. Initially some students were deterred from signing up as they felt there would be an associated stigma. However, this was resolved by making it mandatory. Currently over 270 students are signed up as mentors for next semester. Training and advice is provided by Student Support and Registry, and those mentors who take part are eligible to apply for a STAR Award.

Blackboard retention centre: this is an automated retention system which is embedded in 'My Aberdeen'. It was initially piloted on two of Dr Tucker's courses. The system can track student's grades and highlight students who are 'at risk' e. g. attendance. Automated, customised or indeed personalised responses can then be sent. However, it was acknowledged that this system has encountered teething problems, such as incorrect responses sent out to the wrong students.

Online support packages and Students as partners: these included surveys and resources available through the Skills Support Centre. Various resources have been made available to students, including materials collated from ACHIEVE.

Overall there was a very fruitful and interesting discussion generated. In addition to sharing their own experiences, many questions were raised within the group regarding the various methods and innovations described.