

Develop me! Support me! Engage (and retain) me!

Introduction and synopsis

This session outlines the work undertaken at the University of Bradford which has used a social networking platform, Ning, alongside online recourses to enhance students' initial experiences of higher education. When Theme 1 of the conference opens, you are invited to discuss ways of using technology to develop and support students during the critical early stages of their new life at university.

The session involves contributions from the following people at the University of Bradford:

- Becca Carrant, Dean of Students
- Neil Carrant, Lecturer in e-Portfolios and PDP
- Neil McKeown, Learning Technologist

NB. The presentation comprises a number of elements, with alternative formats such as podcasts and transcripts. The elements have been arranged in a specific order. After reading this introduction and synopsis, we suggest that you work through the content in the suggested order, using alternative formats if required.

Introduction

Research has identified that the initial experiences of University can have a significant impact on subsequent student engagement (e.g. Tinto, 1995; Longden and Yorke, 2007). Work at Bradford and Bournemouth Universities has identified that students who make early contact with academic and social infrastructures are more likely to remain involved in their course (Carrant and Keenan, 2008). To support this process, the University of Bradford has decided to use new technologies and e-learning during the crucial initial induction phase, as well as to support and improve student academic skills to aid retention. Social networking, e-portfolios and reusable learning objects have been used to create Develop Me!, an integrated package of transition, induction and study skills support for students to complement face-to-face work.

What is Develop me!?

The Develop Me! model was first piloted in 2006. Since then it has grown considerably in response to feedback from staff and students. Develop Me! currently consists of five different strands. These are:

1. [A social network](#)
2. [SaPRA](#) (the University of Bradford's in-house Skills and Personal Development Activity)
3. [Online skills development resources](#).
4. [Mobile guides](#).
5. [Research into the student experience](#).

We have been actively been researching the student experience since 2005. This research has been fundamental to the refinement and development of the Develop Me!

How did Develop Me! come about?

Develop Me! grew out of a number of different projects which have all focused on increasing student engagement and providing the support learners need, at the time they want it and in a format they can access effectively.

Our development of e-induction has responded to literature in student retention and engagement which shows that students need to engage with either the academic or social spheres of university in

order to be retained. The primary objective has been to enable students to manage the process of transition in social *and* academic terms.

What feedback has there been?

Student and staff feedback has been extremely positive, as evidenced by the rapid growth in the uptake of the Develop Me! approach.

Next Steps

We are keen to continue to develop an approach which puts students at the heart of the student success strategy. In order to do this, a new project called U-SED (University Student experience Diaries) has been launched to provide an insight into the student experience which comprises a series of video and audio interviews into all aspects of the student experience at the University of Bradford. In this session, we have provided links to a short video providing an insight into this approach.

The outputs from U-SED have already been influential in the development of a new student success strategy. A paper, 'Enhancing the student experience' was recently presented to the university Learning and Teaching Committee to outline a new approach to student engagement. This paper feeds in to the heart of the new corporate strategy, 'Making knowledge work', which runs from 2009-2014.

It is an exciting time for the University of Bradford and we are committed to making our student experience as welcoming, exciting and empowering as possible.

Three questions to consider as you work through the content provided in this session

1. How do students give you feedback about their experiences? How effective is this?
2. How do you encourage new students to engage with the institution and to start making links with students/staff once they arrive?
3. How have you utilised technology to develop links between staff and students? How effective has this been?