

'EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE': STUDENTS TALK ABOUT IMPROVING STUDENT ATTAINMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The Power of First-hand Experience

'We have data, they have testimony'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06yfyqf>

'An axiom is not an axiom until it's proved on a pulse'
(Keats)

Tom Shakespeare (A Point of View 2016, from
6.38 minutes)

What works to close the attainment gap?

- Literacy teaching works (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014)
- PISA surveys show that increasing reading engagement could mitigate 30 per cent of the attainment gap (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014)

Academic support

- What does academic support do?
- Going forward and improvements
- Recommendations

What is the AAH Academic Support service?

- Lecture series
 - One-to-ones
 - Subject specific lectures
 - Bespoke workshops
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Review of the AAH Academic Support Service

- Participants:
- Fifteen students
- Undergraduate and (some) postgraduate students
- 18-21 and mature students
- Home and International students

Research questions

- What is useful about the academic support service?
- Has anybody been to the lectures? What has been useful? What other themes/topics would students like the programme to contain?
- Has anybody had a one-to-one? Has it been useful? What has been useful about the one-to-one? Anyway of improving the one-to-one service? What do you think about cutting the one-to-one sessions and moving to group sessions in order to help and reach out to more students?
- How did you hear about the academic support service?

Research Questions

- If you could give the university one piece of advice about how to improve the actual process of studying, then what would it be?
 - Is there anything you'd want this service to do that it currently doesn't?
 - Is there anything the School doesn't do that you'd like to see?
 - Student attainment is one of NTU's key interests. NTU wants to help our students to succeed at university. What can NTU do to help you succeed at university?
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To note

'Lisa Clughen' and 'The Academic Support Service' are used interchangeably throughout this presentation.

Growing intellectually and obtaining detailed feedback

- A lot of the time, the feedback we get on our writing is simply that, it's feedback, its retroactive, and as a result we have to go back over our own work and say 'Oh, I've done that wrong, I could have done that better.' What Lisa does is help with the whole start of the process and say before we actually sit down and write, these are the building blocks, these are the principles, this is what to avoid, this is what to include, so by the time that we do get feedback, hopefully, there are not those silly little blunders that we can make and foolish errors, because we've been made aware of them beforehand. [...]
- Mature Student

How to learn and develop

- She covers a lot of things that aren't covered in lectures, which I think is one of the main draws of why people come here, because, if lecturers expect you to write a certain way and lots of people don't already have that knowledge, they come to Lisa's lectures to, or one-to-ones, to really understand and develop themselves personally.

-Finalist

The value of Lisa's expertise and the importance of community learning

I think Lisa is a very personable person and like since the first lecture I had with her, I've really felt like at home at Nottingham Trent, as if without her sort of presence and this network of students that come here regularly to get academic support, it would be a big part of university that would be missing. I can't really imagine what it would look like without it.

-First year student

The value of Lisa's expertise and the importance of community learning

I've had one one-to-one with Lisa [...], and it was massively beneficial. I would say that the reason it was is because I was speaking to someone who is dedicating their time to supporting people. Rather than someone who's, you know, you can talk to current students, but they're studying for a degree, you can talk to tutors, but they're teaching. Whereas Lisa support, [there's], you know, dedicated time for that. Without that, it could feel like there weren't people who had the time to actually go through topics and I definitely don't think it should be scrapped.

- First year student

Going forward

- Keep Lisa's sessions going.

-First year student

- It is an amazing service. It's helped me so so much. From being in first year and getting mixed grade to now not really worrying about getting a low 2:1, even. It's helped my writing so so much and it's given me that guidance to get the grades I really want.

- Finalist

Improvements to the service

- 'Clone Lisa'
- 'More slots'
- 'This should be part of the course.'
- 'Make it a bigger department. Make it an actual mini-department in itself.'

Conclusions and recommendations

- Feedback
- Different approaches to learning, e.g. community, one-to-ones, etc
- Expand the service
 - The importance of cultivating the research community
 - More slots
- Consider ways in which Academic Support can be integrated into academic courses
- Ensure academic support continues in order to ensure student attainment

PANEL QUESTIONS

1. What one thing has most helped you with your attainment at university?
2. Feedback. Give an example of one thing a tutor said in your feedback that was helpful.
3. Can you give one piece of advice to the university to help improve attainment?

Questions or Comments?

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References

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014) *Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education*. [online].

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/education-attainment-scotland-summary.pdf>

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