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# Using the on-line environment to support foundation degree (level 5) students in their progression to honours degree (level 6).

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University of Plymouth

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## **Teaching Fellowship Award Scheme**

### **Guidance on writing the final report**

*Please read this guidance prior to producing the final report for your Teaching Fellowship Project.*

The final report should consist of a brief (1-2 pages) summary of the project and findings, together with a number of more detailed appendices (possibly in the form of conference papers or articles for publication). The summary will be transferred directly onto the Pedagogic Research and Development Database (see [www.pedres.net](http://www.pedres.net)) Please follow the format below as closely as possible to enable this transfer of information.

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**Names of other staff involved:** None

**Title of project:** Using the on-line environment to support foundation degree (level 5) students in their progression to honours degree (level 6).

**Type of project:** Development Project using Action Research

**Aims of project:** This project aimed to provide information and develop relationships between progressing students and university staff in order to improve their progression experiences. To design, pilot and evaluate the use of a web-site to support Early Childhood Studies (ECS) students in their progression from foundation degree at a partner college to honours degree at Plymouth University.

**Background to project:** Foundation degrees were introduced in the UK in 2000 by the Department for Education and Skills as a qualification which balanced intermediate academic skills with vocational skills (QAA 2004a). One of the many defining characteristics of foundation degrees was that they were expected to widen participation and attract students from non-traditional higher educational backgrounds (QAA 2004a). Although Foundation Degrees are seen as providing 'self-standing qualifications of specific value' (QAA 2004a) there is also the requirement that all students who pass their foundation degree have the opportunity to automatically progress onto the third year of an honours degree (QAA 2004a) and that this progression from foundation degree to honours is 'smooth' (HEFCE 2008:44). However, a Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) report (2004b), found that one-third of all reviews of foundation degrees identified areas for development in the area of student progression and other projects have also found similar results (University of Plymouth SPAT Project) and this has also been identified by research (Morgan 2013)

**Methods used:** The on-line environment included: a weekly on-line office hour for foundation degree students and staff at partner colleges to ask questions of an Early Childhood Studies Plymouth University academic, staff profiles, question and answers, module handbooks, a chat room for progressing students to get to know each other, on-line tasks which could be completed to give examples to students of what is expected at honours level in terms of study skills, web-links to the student union, to the library, to metalib, on-line tasks to do with referencing, a web-link to the Faculty of Education Student Educator Journal, information about progression and progression events and examples of work. The web-site was developed in collaboration with the Faculty of Education Learning Technologists. Nine Partner colleges took part in the research. The project was evaluated mid-term (January) by on-line questionnaires to partner college staff and students. Adjustments were made to the web-site in light of the evaluation. A final evaluation of the project occurred at the end of the project and included on-line questionnaires for students and semi-structured interviews with the Heads of Department at the partner colleges.

**Results: Students and staff were positive about the web-site and stated it was:**

- 'superb'
- 'Really helpful'
- 'having emails to contact people was really good'
- 'showing you examples of the workload prepares you'
- 'reading past experiences of students was great'
- 'please continue this website'
- 'it helped me make up my mind to come to Plymouth'

They identified a number of ways in which it could be improved:

- 'Make a link from our home-page so that we can more easily log in'.
- 'Upload a videoed lecture or seminar'.
- 'More information about the programme'
- 'More photos'

**Associated publications:** Morgan J., Using the On-Line Environment to Support Female Students in Progressing From Foundation Degree to Honours Degree. Currently being written.

**Conference papers:** Morgan J., Using the On-Line Environment to Support Female Students in Progressing From Foundation Degree to Honours Degree. Paper presented at Learning Spaces and Communities, 6th Annual International Symposium for Emerging Technologies for Online Learning. April 9-11, 2013. Las Vegas, Nevada.

VC's Conference, Plymouth University July 2012 Using the On-Line Environment to Support Students in their Progression from Foundation Degree to Honours Degree

**Keywords:** Progression, foundation degree, transition, on-line, support

Please forward the final report to [teachandlearn@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:teachandlearn@plymouth.ac.uk)