

# Improving the transition into Higher Education for first year pharmacy students during the COVID pandemic

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**Background:** Transition to higher education can be a rocky and anxious period for any student however it is perceived to be a crucial settling phase, which can affect progression and success in higher education (Morgan, 2013). Yorke (2000) notes that better preparation for higher education could be associated with a reduction in non-completion.

**Description of work:** Within the Master of Pharmacy programme, there is a conscious effort to actively scaffold and support this transition period. There are several initiatives that have been developed to assist students in their early years in higher education. The initiatives aim to provide a rounded transition experience to help support students to excel in their academic careers.

Prior to enrolment, students complete a university online orientation module and also receive a bespoke MPharm transition booklet with specific activities. Once enrolled, students undertake a compulsory Transition to Higher Education module which runs across the first year of the programme to support key groundings in higher education. Workshops to support specific student groups such as those who are First generation students or those suffering from Impostor syndrome were also introduced. In the academic year 2020/21, the majority of workshops were online but were run in real time with significant interactive elements. Integrated case study tasks linking science and practice and communication skills tasks in small peer groups were used. Peer support from students in the higher years of the programme was used with their attendance at some online workshops. This activity sought to inspire and reassure first year students.

**Proposed evaluation:** The impact of the novel Transition to Higher Education module and the other associated transition initiatives will be evaluated in terms of student satisfaction, progression, awarding gap and retention data. Qualitative data from students will also influence the initiatives going forward. It is hoped that cohort specific targeted support will encourage students to reach their potential.

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Morgan, M. (2013). Improving the Student Experience: A Practical Guide for Universities and Colleges. London, Routledge.

Yorke, M. (2000). Smoothing the transition into higher education: What can be learned from student non-completion. Journal of Institutional research, 9(1), pp.35-47

