

## **Informing Students of the Requirements of Higher Education: A Bespoke Online Solution.**

**School of Healthcare Studies, Cardiff University**

**Key words: fitness to practice; self-evaluation; on-line solution; student engagement; higher education**

### **Nature of Intervention:**

**The ‘Informed Study Project’ (ISP), developed by Cardiff University, is a bespoke on-line self-evaluation providing applicants with the necessary information to evaluate their ability to achieve the programme’s learning outcomes.**

### **Focus of Intervention:**

**The intervention is both academic and professional in nature. The intervention is aimed at both enhancing the student experience and improving practice.**

### **Description:**

**There are multiple institutional, professional and governmental drivers which can influence entry and retention of students in Higher Education. Pre-entry information and transitional support are identified as key factors that promote student success and retention (Higher Education Academy, 2011). Similarly the Equality Act (Home Office, 2010), in terms of anticipatory duty, encourages a pro-active approach to Higher Education (HE). Additionally, healthcare students need to be aware of the responsibilities associated with “Fitness to Practice” (Health Professions Council, 2006). These drivers initiated the development of the ‘Informed Study Project’ (ISP), a bespoke on-line self evaluation providing prospective students with the necessary information to evaluate their ability to achieve the learning outcomes required of the programme.**

**Prospective students (pilot participants who had received an offer on the BSc physiotherapy undergraduate programme) observed a short web based introductory video and were provided with web based text detailing the explicit requirements of the programme. The information was divided into seven sections: lectures, tutorials, practical sessions, workshops, independent learning / self study, placement learning and assessment. Each of these sections provides an insight into the specific physical, mental and professional demands of the programme. The following text example is in relation to tutorials:**

*“The purpose of a tutorial is usually to provide an opportunity for deeper learning of new or previously explored topics e.g. they may take place as a follow-up session to a lecture. Tutorials usually last for an hour followed by a break, but may last up to two hours. They commonly take place in small teaching rooms with moveable chairs and desks and up to approximately 30 students present. Tutorials are generally of an interactive nature and have a wide range of formats. This can vary from working in small groups e.g. of 6 – 8 and presenting information back to the whole group, to performing physical problem solving tasks as a larger group e.g. 15. An example of the latter would be a physical team building exercise (as a means of developing problem solving). If the session is a follow on from a lecture, students need to prepare by reading the lecture notes prior to the tutorial. Tutorials are generally a good opportunity for students to ask questions they may not feel comfortable asking in a lecture format.”*

After reading the web based text, students were required to electronically “sign off” if they felt they were able to fully participate in the programme. In the event of any concerns regards their ability to participate they were advised to directly contact the Diversity and Equality Officer to explore these, in order to inform their decision regarding electronic “sign-off”; concerns were dealt with in a confidential manner independent of the ongoing admissions procedures. Finally, students were encouraged to complete a Bristol On-Line Survey to evaluate the ISP.

It is considered imperative that prospective students are aware of the demands of the programme and consequently give careful consideration to their own suitability and preparedness for the course. It is thought that this will help inform students’ decisions regarding if the undergraduate programme at this institution is appropriate for them, and thus inform the decision making process related to accepting an offer. For those who accept and meet the requirements of the offer it is thought the information facilitates their transition into the Higher Education environment.

Link to conceptual model:

The purpose of student self evaluation is to work in partnership with the HEI to determine if they can effectively participate in the desired programme. This relates to the conceptual model, in terms of maximising student engagement and belonging, where a more informed and engaged partnership between HEI and student can lead to improved retention and success. The ISP maximises this opportunity by commencing at the very start of the student lifecycle and enabling students to engage with the programme and potentially with appropriate professional services as required. This can create a two way dialogue between students and staff even before the student enrolls on the programme. This dialogue may well be in relation to academic aspects, such as if a student has any concerns regarding how

they can potentially achieve the learning outcomes of the programme. The ISP also provides a gateway for students to access professional services within the university such as the Diversity and Equality Officer for the programme, or the university based Student Support Services. Currently the ISP has been implemented within one admission cycle of the Physiotherapy BSc (Hons) undergraduate programme, however, the opportunity exists for further implementation across the institution in the future.

#### Evidence of effectiveness/impact:

A total of 183 offers were made for this particular cohort resulting in 114 applicants (62%) firmly accepting the offer, 14 making this HEI their insurance choice (8%), and 55 declining (30%). It can be seen that there was a strong preference for making this HEI a first choice with regard to accepting an offer. It is hoped that further evaluation will establish if the ISP has been a strong factor with regard to applicants selecting this HEI as their first choice

95 individuals accepted and achieved the requirements of their offer; all 95 of these “signed off”, and 72 (76%) of these completed the survey. Interestingly, between 1/8/11 and 26/9/11 (when the programme commenced), the site received 212 unique views, with an average viewing time of 9 minutes suggesting participants engaged well with the site and that the site received a wide viewing audience. After viewing the site, many unique viewers (24%) then navigated to “Top Tips for Recent Graduates” although there is no direct electronic link to this separate web page. This may suggest that the presented information prompted users to engage with other sources that would help facilitate their transition into Higher Education.

The survey findings identified 99% of respondents reported the ISP provided clear information about the physical and mental requirements of the programme.; 86% suggested that the ISP provided them with more information than they already had; 92% suggested that the ISP process was clear; 81% of respondents stated that the ISP had either increased the likelihood of them accepting the institution’s offer or they already had done so (13 and 68% respectively). Participants were also invited to make comments in relation to the questions. Comments included statements such as:

“The ISP clearly states what is required of prospective students, as well as what they can look forward to” (Participant, 2011 intake)

“Just explains some of the terms used at university. Such as lectures, tutorials etc which can be quite confusing and what exactly they mean” (Participant, 2011 intake)

“I have been given a greater depth of knowledge about the course from Cardiff than from any other university” (Participant, 2011 intake)

Author and contact details:

Sue Annetts, Trevor Baker, Richard Day and Liz Evans

*Email address for correspondence and queries:*

[Annetts@Cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Annetts@Cardiff.ac.uk)

*Website where readers can learn more:*

<http://healthcarestudies.cf.ac.uk/CGII/informed>

Related publications and Resources:

Health Professions Council (2006) Managing Fitness to Practice

<http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10001344Managingfitnesstopractise.pdf>

(Accessed on 22/11/2011)

Higher Education Academy (2011) Engaging Students to Improve Student Retention and Success in Higher Education in Wales.

[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/inclusion/retention/EngagingStudentsToImproveRetention\\_final\\_English.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/inclusion/retention/EngagingStudentsToImproveRetention_final_English.pdf) (Accessed 22/11/11)

Home Office (2010) Equality Act.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents> (Accessed on 22/11/2011]