

Introduction To Academic Skills



What are the aims of this project?

The project is aimed at Level 4 Law students and would consist of a voluntary set of online 'exercises' or activities together with suggested 'model' approaches to be offered to students, in an easily accessible format, from the point at which they become Unconditional Firm in the Admissions process. The proposal is in line with other developments in Orientation within the University, in recognising the increasing importance of establishing positive and engaged relationships with these students from this early point.

Aims would include:

- To build confidence and expose students to the academic skills they will then pursue further in the course.
- To enhance awareness of the nature of higher education (HE) and to foster the potential for autonomous learning.

Objectives are for the team to produce a set of materials to initiate this process.

What is the background / rationale?

The proposed project derives partly from the ongoing developmental work within the University as regards transition (mainly although not exclusively) from school and college into higher education (HE), with the concomitant concerns as to the 'preparedness' of students in terms of academic skills, expectations of HE and readiness increasingly to take responsibility for their own learning.

The project is also to be built on some existing small-scale and developing practice within the Law Group. The team would like to see these and other elements of Induction and Orientation enhanced and prioritised through this project. While there will be some content specific to Law some aspects would also be of broader applicability.

What are the benefits to student learning?

The benefits to student learning are envisaged as being:

- Building incoming students' confidence and familiarity with some aspects of HE in a supportive, non-assessed context.
- Introducing students to some skills and approaches to academic work which will subsequently be built on within the formal curriculum.

- Encouraging students to begin to think about and reflect on their attitudes to learning.
- Beginning to develop awareness of independent, and autonomous learning and what they mean, and how they can become features of the students' experience here.

The acquisition of satisfactory academic study skills in the widest sense (writing, use of academic English, reading, researching, reflection and critical analysis) and confidence in using them are central to the development of the autonomous learner. This project is intended as a tailored and supportive introduction to such approaches.

How will this project be evaluated?

In partnership with students they will be invited to provide feedback on their views of the project; this would be facilitated by means of a focus group being established to discuss and complete a short questionnaire during Semester 1 09. We would also discuss the project at Level 4 Staff-Student Committee Meetings, which will allow a further evaluation of the project's objectives by both students and staff, the latter particularly in relation to performance by students on individual modules.

Given the numbers involved on the Law programmes (overall target e.g. for 2008 approx. 260) such a project could have a wide impact. As mentioned above, the proposal sits well with University and Faculty 'transition' developmental work, and with the University's increasing emphasis on the importance of the 1st year experience and corporate planning relating to early student engagement through, in particular, induction and orientation processes.

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