Support Student Success – Progress Report

September 2021

BL**OO**MSBURY
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Contents

Introduction

In 2021-22 we committed to implementing a number of initiatives to further enhance our services and support for our students. Below is a summary of what we have achieved so far.

We said...

Enhanced admissions screening

We committed to implementing changes to our admissions testing to further explore 4-year degree candidates' motivations and commitment to HE studies.

We implemented a number of changes to our admissions processes for September 2021 intake. These are outlined below.

We did...

Admissions assessments

We appointed external reviewers (with extensive experience in writing and reviewing English language tests) to review our internal English Language assessment. Our first set of three brand new admissions assessments were launched. A new marking scheme/ points system has been produced and reviewed (it has been benchmarked against external English language tests). Our new assessment is made up two different types of task to test the applicant's reading and writing skills:

1. Reading comprehension

   Applicants must read a short article and then answer a set of questions purposely designed to analyse their comprehension capabilities.

2. Writing

   Applicants need to write a small academic essay on a particular topic.

An Admissions Assessments and Interview Guide has been prepared for applicants, as well as videos explaining what is expected of them during the assessment process.

Interviews

To complement changes to our admissions assessments, we made enhancements to our interview process. Our HR consultant, academic team and admissions team were involved in the review of our interview process.

Interviewers received the following training:

- Training from our HR consultant with regards to conducting the interviews.
- Training from our Disability and Wellbeing Advisor on disability and support services that we provide.
- Training regarding analysing psychometric test results (see opposite).

The interview now comprises of 3 sections:

1. A passage will be read out to the applicant. This will require the applicant to take notes and then relay back what they have heard/ understood. This element of the interview is testing the applicant's listening skills and shows their ability to assimilate/process information.

2. The applicant will be invited to speak on a pre-prepared topic. This element of the interview is testing the applicant's speaking skills.

3. The interviewer will ask the applicant questions related to their reasons for choosing the course/Bloomsbury Institute, their motivation, their commitment etc.

As mentioned above, the Admissions Assessments and Interview Guide has been prepared to guide applicants through this process.

Psychometric testing

We set up a working group to consider the viability of including psychometric testing in our admissions assessment process. A psychometric test would provide additional information and the basis for further exploration of the student's suitability for the programme of study.

The group concluded that this would be of benefit to Bloomsbury Institute. After establishing our requirements and narrowing down to two different provider demos, the working group selected **Saville** as the provider of choice.

The introduction of psychometric testing is a pilot scheme conducted on an 'opt in' basis for September 2021 and January 2022 intake. Psychometric testing is included in the assessment process prior to interview stage. After passing their English assessment, applicants will be given comprehensive information about the psychometric test process and its purpose. Applicants who choose to sit this test will receive their own copy of the results, which they can keep for their records.

The results of the psychometric test will enable interviewers to receive the additional information to inform the interview. Members of staff who will be using the tests to inform the interview have been trained to understand them and to use the information given as a basis for further exploration.

Following our pilot scheme, we will begin an evaluation of the effectiveness of the inclusion of psychometric testing in admissions.
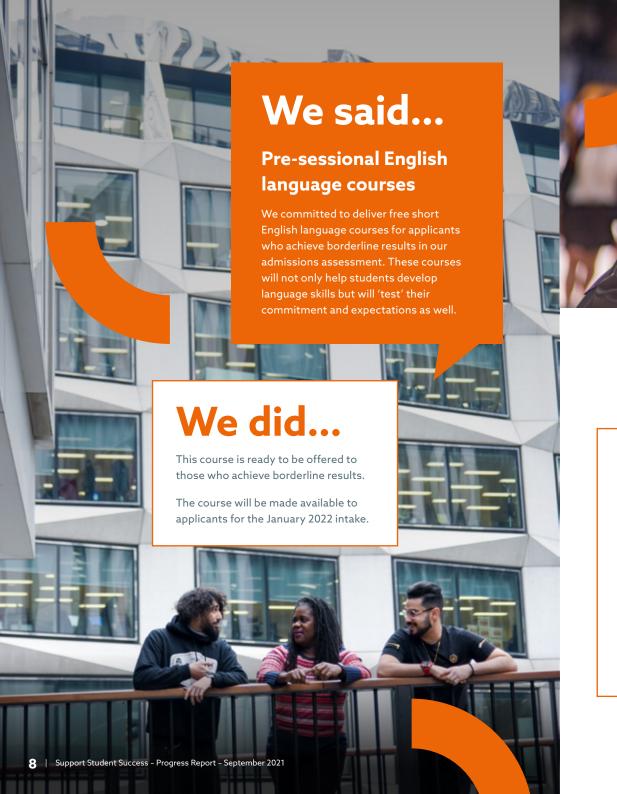
Proctoring

In light of the ongoing pandemic, applicants now have the opportunity to sit our admissions assessments online. To safeguard standards and minimise any possibility of cheating, we received demos of a number of different proctoring software systems and selected **Respondus**.

We are also using a 'lockdown browser' meaning that while applicants are taking the test, they are unable to visit any other websites on their device at the same time.

An evaluation of our use of proctoring is being presented to our Academic Committee and Board of Directors.

We said...

Pre-sessional English language courses

We committed to deliver free short English language courses for applicants who achieve borderline results in our admissions assessment. These courses will not only help students develop language skills but will 'test' their commitment and expectations as well.

We did...

This course is ready to be offered to those who achieve borderline results.

The course will be made available to applicants for the January 2022 intake.

We said...

Pre-entry courses

We committed to pilot a short taster course that will be offered to all 4-year degree applicants without a Level 3 qualification. We also committed to deliver a one-week pre-entry course for our FY starters on transitioning to HE study.

We did...

Taster course

We trialled this course with a small sample of eligible students in September 2021. We will be conducting another trial of this in January 2022.

Transition to HE course

We delivered a 1 week blended course, including an Articulate course covering all the basics of HE, and drop-in sessions with our academic team.

At the end of the 2021-22 academic year, we will evaluate levels of engagement and continuation for those who undertake the pre-entry courses compared to those who do not. This evaluation will inform whether the pre-entry courses should be incorporated as a compulsory component within our admissions process.

We said...

English for Academic Purposes module

We committed to introduce an additional foundation year module focused on developing students' academic English and study skills.

We did...

We designed and developed optional academic language modules, designed to run alongside the core modules and equip students with a grasp of the technical vernaculars required to study in their chosen disciplines. These have proven to be a success. These modules have been attended by a significant proportion of our students. We will continue to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these modules and make a decision on whether they should become a compulsory element of our foundation year.

We said...

Enhanced attendance monitoring and engagement interventions system

We committed to implement an enhanced communication/reminder strategy to reach disengaging students, utilising more creative and innovative solutions and marketing campaign-type activities designed specifically for the needs of our students.

We did...

The Head of Communications and Director of SEWS have agreed on a social media strategy in the form of an Instagram and Facebook messaging campaign at the beginning of each Semester. These motivational messages will relate to the importance of student engagement and also highlight wellbeing activities. Similar reminder messages will also be posted on Canvas at the same time.

We created the new post of Communications Officer. Our Communications Officer started in September 2021 and will be responsible for all social media messaging.

SEWS Success Champions will ensure that the SEWS webpages are reviewed weekly to provide students with timely information on Engagement and Wellbeing activities. The Success Champions will also create a personalised video to inform students on how to access advice and guidance through SEWS, which will be placed on the SEWS landing page.

SEWS will ensure that Wellbeing and Engagement activities will take place much earlier, and more frequently, in the first semester. This proactive approach will enable SEWS to encourage those students who are high risk to engage much earlier with extracurricular support.

SEWS will also enhance their use of MS Teams, providing virtual interventions for those students who are unable to come into the Centre to meet with a Success Champion for face-to-face guidance and support.

We said...

Mentoring scheme for FY students

Following success in this area previously, we committed to continuing to promote peer-learning in and outside of the classroom and to facilitate this student collaboration by encouraging former FY students to act as mentors.

We did...

Our FY teaching and learning resources now contain a number of activities promoting peer-learning. For example, the Contemporary Themes module has lots of activities designed to encourage interaction and peer learning opportunities. Alongside the 'Grow Your Reading' groups (which are social learning environments) we will also be encouraging students to discuss podcasts/videos in the new Foundation Year Learning Community. This is a MS Teams area with Peer Mentors and FY Lecturers on hand to facilitate student discussions outside of classes and create a peer-to-peer help forum. We also have a new academic lead for peer learning.

We said...

Personal Academic Tutoring

We committed to introducing a 'proactive' Personal Academic Tutoring scheme tailored for FY students particularly at risk of disengaging.

We did...

We introduced our Personal Tutoring programme for our September 2021 cohort in Week 2, when students had their first group tutor meetings. Tutors and tutees have been meeting one-to-one since then.

The Academic Lead for Personal Tutoring has created a range of resources for the programme and a dedicated Team enables tutors and tutees to communicate easily.

The one-to-one meetings have all resulted in actions or services being recommended to each student. This means that those students are much less likely at risk of disengagement. Verbal feedback from our students has been very positive so far.

We said...

FY Graduates

We said that we would look to employ former FY students who have graduated to teach on our foundation year and act as 'role models' for our students. Three former students have taught on a sessional basis in 2020-21 and will continue teaching with us in 2021-22.
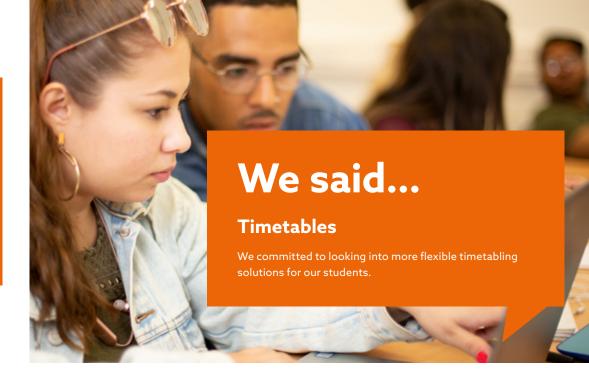
We did...

Within our In-Bloom scheme, we designed a pathway for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) to support this. Initial details of this opportunity have been shared with our Level 6 Business Management students.

We said...

Widening Participation Forum

We aimed to launch a Widening Participation Forum (WPF) through which staff would be encouraged to undertake active research into various areas related to delivering HE to 'widening participation' students.

We did...

The Forum was launched, and meetings took place on 7 April 2021 and 2 June 2021. The EDI Academic Lead and the Equality Society Lead presented at the first Forum on topics around language and Black Lives Matter. The Head of EDI led the second Forum to explore the topic of barriers to engagement.

In addition, complementary initiatives have been / are being taken to encourage and support research in this area e.g. the creation of a research grant for staff engaging with our Widening Participation Forum to explore the impact of students'

external commitments (e.g. family responsibilities, working hours) on their engagement and academic success, with a specific focus on students within our target groups [see page 34, APP 2020-21 to 2024-25]. This is set out within our Research Strategy 2021-24 and a process document is being developed to deal with research requests under the WPF grant fund.

One of our newly appointed Senior Lecturers (Foundation Year) is undertaking the role of Academic Lead for the WPF.

We said...

Timetables

We committed to looking into more flexible timetabling solutions for our students.

We did...

For academic year 2021-22, our new applicants were able to stipulate their preferred days of study during the admissions stages; students can also request a change of timetable via their SSP.

From September 2023 we are looking into implementing a timetable self-selection system (that is possible through our current software) to enable all students to build their own timetables. Our Timetabling

Working Group have held meetings and introduced a new Timetabling Principle that allows students to choose their timetables at the enrolment stage. Our Head of Operations is currently reviewing these procedures and the IT technical infrastructure to deliver this.

We will undertake an evaluation of our flexible timetables as per our APP, and act on the evaluation findings.

We said...

Further review of module specifications and teaching and learning resources

We committed to continue reviewing and updating our module specifications and teaching and learning resources to employ the most effective and engaging teaching approaches and learning technology solutions and to further enhance employability skills development.

We did...

The Deputy Head of the School of Business and Accounting has also set up a Foundation Year Learning Community on MS Teams. This will be hosted by a team of Peer Advisors and Foundation Year Lecturers to help answer questions and stimulate discussion around the topics.

Our Academic Lead for Learning Enhancement has created an Articulate course for Foundation Year students to complete before induction, which should also help to get them onto the digital platforms in advance of the course, so that we can help develop their digital literacy in the digital essential sessions in the first week.

In terms of employability skills, we have enhanced the Start Your Own Business assessment element of our Contemporary Themes module to involve industry standard pitch decks, such as SlideBean and Sequoia, to develop students' ideas. There is also a greater emphasis on developing creativity and storytelling skills (as these were recently highlighted as being in the top 10 skills businesses say their sector has a deficiency in6).

We will continue to review and update our module specifications, as appropriate.

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