

Getting it Right from the Start: Enhancing the First Year Learning Experience

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What do first year students say about their first experiences of Higher Education and what can we do to enhance their learning experience? The University of Teesside has had a first year experience strategy for over 10 years. The University also co-hosts the Annual International First Year Experience and Students in Transition Conference, and began the European First Year Experience Network. Drawing on this experience and on research at Teesside and beyond, this paper provides the opportunity to consider the importance of effective FYE strategies. The presenter is co-editor for a forthcoming collection called 'International Perspectives on the First Year Experience' and will discuss evidence from this collection as well as work done with first year students at Teesside. This presentation is based on evidence drawn primarily from two sources: firstly, the literature and institutional practice review undertaken for the collection; and secondly, a mixed-method research project undertaken at Teesside. The latter included a quantitative survey of over 800 first year students about their initial experiences of studying in HE, face-to-face qualitative interviews with approximately 30 students, and e-mail interchanges with a number of others, all of which invited them to reflect on their first year. The project also included an evaluation of several specific faculty-based strategies.

Using this evidence, some key issues and challenges for supporting first year students will be identified, and examples of possible strategies to address these areas will be offered. Examples will be drawn from a variety of countries and contexts.

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