

The Student Journey: Mapping the links between student support services and academic departments

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Start to Success Project

A whole community approach to supporting student transitions into, through and beyond university

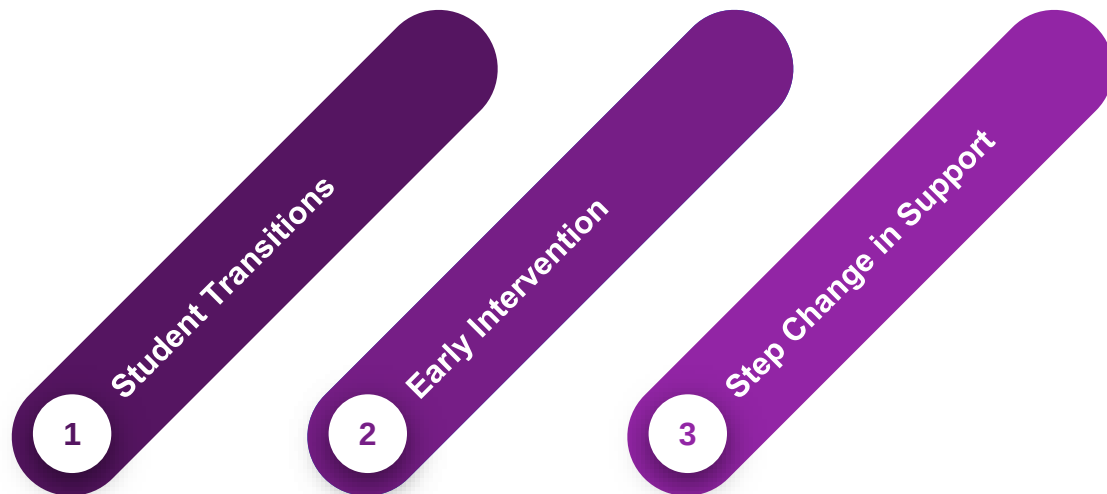
A 2 year project led by Keele and Staffordshire University working in partnership across the region to support the mental health and wellbeing of HE & FE students

3 areas of focus:

- Student transitions
- Early interventions
- Step change in support through partnership working with the NHS

www.starttosuccess.co.uk

Key mental health outcomes:



A whole community approach: the project partners



NHS North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
NHS Stoke-on-Trent Clinical Commissioning Group



Project Officer – Progression and Success

- Improve outcomes for students, particularly those who are identified as high risk, increase engagement with services and develop interventions that will provide tailored support for students
- Map the student journey from application to HE through to completion, encompassing different types of learners
- Identify pressure points throughout the academic year where students are vulnerable to withdrawal and mental health issues
- Develop interventions to support students who take a Break in Studies to continue

Staffordshire University – local population

The main campus is based in Stoke-on-Trent

- 28% of students are drawn from the local area
- 13th most deprived Local Authority in England (2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation)
- Over half of areas are classed as among the 20% most deprived in the UK
- One third of areas are in the 10% most deprived areas
- More than 2/3 of children live in poverty in some areas of the city
- Lower life expectancy
- Lower than average educational attainment, qualifications and income
- Higher unemployment and homelessness
- 28% of students are local – 25% from POLAR4 Quintile 1
- The wider area of Staffordshire is far less deprived, but pockets of deprivation exist

Student demographics – Staffordshire University

Percentage	Characteristic
55%	Commuting
53%	Mature
46%	From lowest participation neighbourhoods
28%	From the local area
20%	From 20% of areas classified in the Index of Multiple Deprivation
18%	BAME
15%	Have disclosed a disability
1%	Care leavers

Characteristics of students

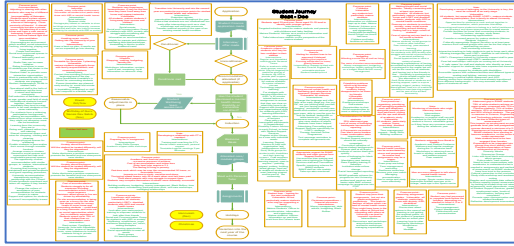
We looked at the needs of different types of students to develop bespoke interventions:

- Mature
- Home
- Commuting
- BAME
- LGBT+
- Students with a disability
- Care Leavers/Estranged students
- International
- Postgraduate

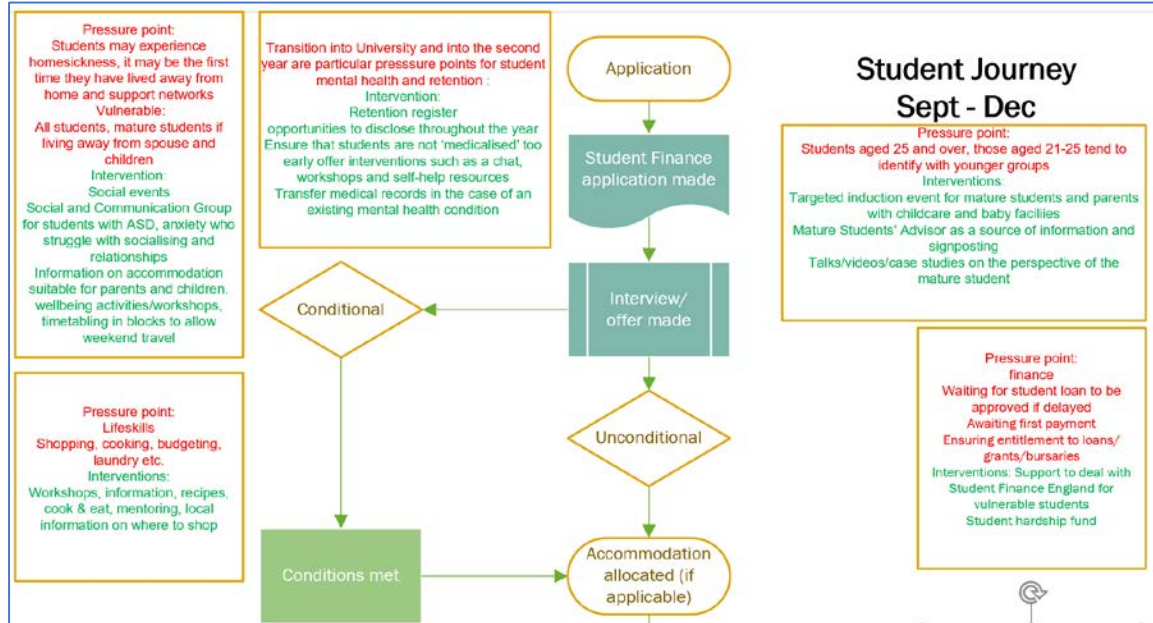
Student Journey Maps

- Map for each Semester of the student journey overall, initially created using Visio
- International Students
- Postgraduate Students
- Break in Studies process

The maps



Maps have been created for each Semester. This is an example of the September – December map



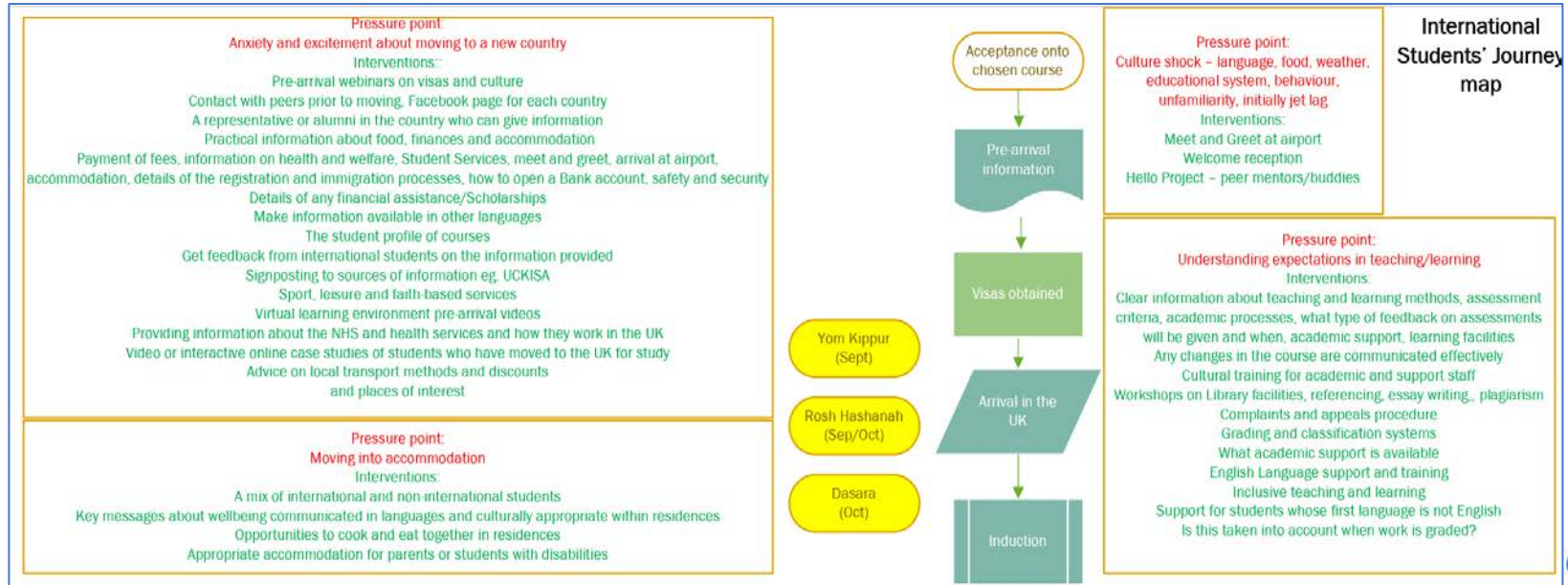
Here is an excerpt from the map, showing the process, pressure points and interventions at each stage of the student journey

Pressure points and interventions

- In the 3 Semester maps, we identified pressure points which would apply to students overall at each stage of the journey:
- Transition into University
- Living independently of family and friends network
- Finances/budgeting
- Accommodation
- Making friends/isolation/loneliness
- Academic support
- Careers

International students

The journey for international students encompasses more complex changes which can also be mapped to enable easy identification of pressure points and suggested interventions



International Students

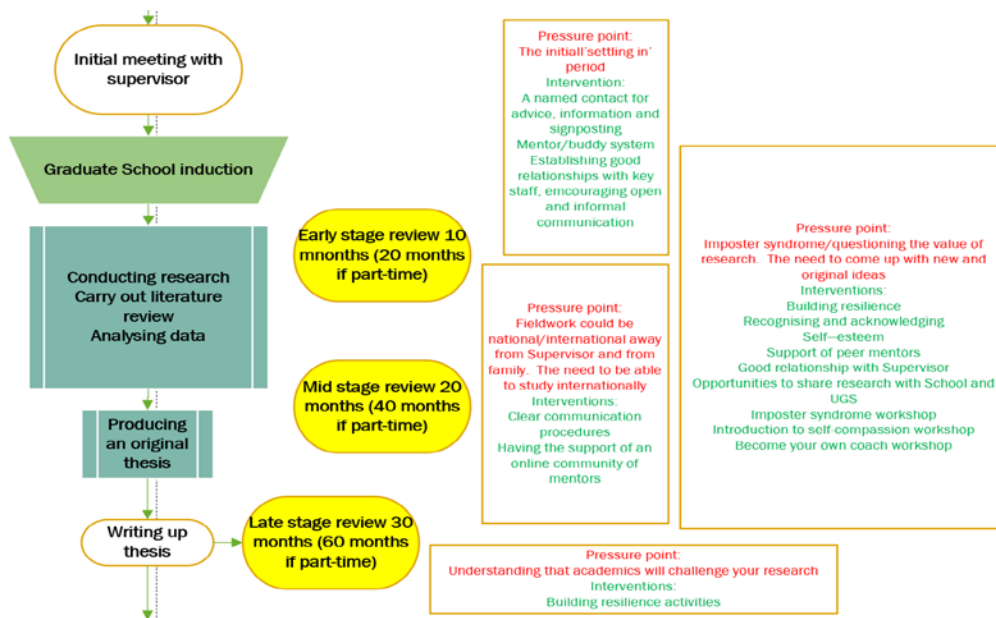
- This student journey map has been used to support the planning of the Are you OK campaign, designed to help students look after their wellbeing whilst at Staffordshire University
- It includes self-care – taking time for yourself to do the things you enjoy, sleeping properly, healthy eating, exercise
- Deliberately avoids the use of the words ‘mental health’ – aims to address the needs of students from cultures which stigmatise mental health or do not acknowledge it as an issue
- The map enabled easy identification of the pressure points and challenges for international students using a visual representation of the student journey

ARE
YOU

A blue speech bubble with a white outline, containing the text 'OK?'.

OK?

Postgraduate students



Postgraduate students

- Currently working on a range of interventions using the mapping as a guide to pressure points and challenges:
 - Transition Handbook
 - PhD myths and challenging unhelpful PhD culture
 - Things I wish I knew before starting
 - A Day in the Life of a PhD/Masters Student
 - Imposter syndrome
 - Conflicts of identity between PhD students/staff
 - Resources for specific groups of students – part-time, self-funded, parents, international

Break in Studies

- Exploring a holistic approach to the delivery of support for students who take a break in studies due to mental health and wellbeing issues
- Only 50% of students return after taking a Break in Studies
- The aim is to ensure continuity of support and a more personalised and personable approach to care and support at these difficult points of transition
- Survey carried out in June/July 2020 to students who are currently taking a break or who have previously taken one

Break in Studies

Findings

The top 3 reasons for taking a break in studies were:

- Wellbeing
- Health (physical)
- Personal

Most students took their break in the first year or second year of University, with much lower numbers in their final year or postgraduate

74% of students said they found arranging the break in studies extremely, moderately or slightly easy

Break in Studies

Findings

- Just under half the students said they received no communication from the University during their break
- Of those who did receive communication, the most popular method was email (sometimes automated)
- A smaller number of students had telephone contact or meetings with their Personal Tutor
- The highest sense of engagement was with students who had some form of contact, particularly telephone/meetings rather than emails
- For most students, engagement with their Personal Tutor before, during and after the Break in Studies process was a main source of support

Break in Studies

Recommendations

- Clearer information needed – handbook on Break in Studies and the option of part-time study if appropriate
- A consistent approach across the University – some students were getting significant support, others were getting no support
- Communication and engagement at regular agreed times throughout the break (depending on the student's wishes)
- A personalised plan to help each student integrate back into University, with holistic support from academic/student support services and targeted workshops

Next steps

LGBT+ students

BAME students

Mature students

Commuting students

Students with a disability

- Using findings from the Alterline Wellbeing Survey, and discussions with Students' Union group networks, focus groups and interviews
- I will be looking in detail at the needs of the above groups of students, and developing maps with specific and targeted interventions to support their progression and success
- Some preliminary work has already been done – for example, a survey carried out by the LGBT+ Network Lead last year identified that 72% of students from that group experienced social isolation/loneliness
- Currently researching the experience of BAME students, and particularly black students, working with members of staff and the student community at Staffordshire and Keele with the aim of delivering interventions to promote a sense of community and belonging
- Working closely with the Disability Team at Staffordshire to support the Quiet Transition event with presentations on Supporting your Wellbeing and Supporting your Learning for students with ASD

Conclusion

- Mapping the student journey can support campaigns and strengthen collaborative working between academics and student support services by identifying in detail the challenges faced by students throughout the University experience
- Specific barriers and challenges relating to under-represented groups can be mapped to enable tailored interventions which support progress at each stage
- Mapping a process such as Break in Studies enables easy identification of options and pathways to support student success

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Thank you