

Inclusiveness in the 21st Century: Glasgow Caledonian University's approach  
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INCLUSIVENESS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: GLASGOW CALEDONIAN  
UNIVERSITY'S APPROACH

Dr Angela Shapiro, Dr Joanna Marshall Bhullar and Margaret McShane

Angela Shapiro is a recently retired Senior Lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) Scotland. She worked in the Learning Development Centre in the School of Engineering and Built Environment. She supported undergraduates and postgraduates in a variety of disciplines; with particular attention to the requirements of students with disabilities and applied an academic literacies model in her teaching. Prior to joining GCU in 2001, Angela was a Senior Lecturer in a community based further education college, where she specialised in supporting adult returners. Her PhD reflects her 35 + years of teaching adults, with the subject being 'Engaging adult learners with independent learning and critical thinking to enhance citizenship and employability'.

Angela is a founder member of the Gathering the Voices (GTV) Association whose purpose is to collect and digitise interviews with survivors from the Holocaust who came to settle in Scotland. The website is widely used by schoolchildren in Scotland and has attracted attention from across the world. Students have collaborated with GTV in developing educational resources including a Serious Computer Game. Angela has also published a number of articles relating to these topics.

Joanna Marshall Bhullar is a Widening Participation Manager within the School of Engineering and Built Environment at Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland. Joanna manages and supports the delivery of School and College Outreach and Engagement activities with a focus on the STEM disciplines and supports the development and delivery of

strategies and activity to aid students from the most diverse background successful transition in, through and out of university. Joanna has an educational background in Physics and Engineering and over 15 years' experience leading, developing and delivering widening access and STEM outreach programmes. She is passionate about aiding students from non-traditional backgrounds reach their potential through gaining access to further and higher education.

Margaret McShane is a Disability Adviser at Glasgow Caledonian University. She has 18 years' experience of working with students presenting with a wide range of disabilities. Margaret's knowledge and understanding of the issues faced by students with disabilities has been the incentive in considering alternative ways of engaging with new students. She has presented on this topic at numerous conferences and events and is keen that her experience of the benefits of pre-entry student support should be shared.

Margaret has run a pre-entry "Taking responsibility for your own learning" programme for new students over the past seven years in collaboration with academic colleagues from across the three schools at GCU. The aim of providing such a programme is to offer students the opportunity to make the transition from school or college in a more informed and informal induction before the start of the academic year. Students are given information and advice on a range of topics relevant to study and life at University.

### **Abstract**

Since 2011, Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland has delivered pre-entry study skills programmes, specifically tailored to meet the needs of students with disabilities prior to commencing their studies at university. Following changes in the organisational structure, these programmes ceased to exist. Two staff members then decided to collaborate on delivering a new customised programme that would contextualise the type of support required by students with disabilities.

The study skills programme aimed to: increase confidence, engage with support services before the start of the programme of study; encourage students to access support as early as possible and provide useful advice on a range of topics specifically designed to meet their needs.

In this chapter, findings from a small-scale study will be presented that investigated whether a correlation could be drawn between pre-entry support, and increased confidence. Although feedback from attendees at the study skills' workshops has been positive, the impact of this type of support is difficult to quantify. This is partly due to the small numbers of participants and the plethora of student support initiatives at the institution. However, the qualitative outcomes indicate that students have integrated successfully into their degree studies.

### **Glasgow Caledonian University**

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) is currently one of Scotland's largest universities with approximately 17,000 students. The majority of the student population originates from the central belt region of Scotland. Hence, most of the students are home based and commute into the university. GCU is situated in the city centre of Glasgow, on a one-campus site. The university is comprised of three academic schools: the School of Health and Life Sciences, Glasgow School for Business and Society, and the School of Engineering and Built Environment. The university was formerly the Glasgow College of Technology, and following a merger with the Queens College, the University gained university status under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 and is categorised as a post-1992 university. A key element in its mission is its commitment to increasing access to study and lifelong learning (GCU, 2016). The three schools deliver programmes with a strong vocational orientation.

### **Widening Access**

GCU has a strong tradition in encouraging greater inclusivity through widening access to higher education (HE) for individuals who may come from families who have not engaged in HE previously. Widening access is generally defined as increasing participation in HE of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and other under-represented groups. GCU is a leading institution for widening access and through a holistic approach; the institution maintains this through a model of partnership working, engagement and support throughout the learner journey. GCU has key access models through initiatives such as the Caledonian Club, Routes for All (GCU's contribution to the national Schools for Higher Education Programme, SHEP) and College Connect (GCU, 2018a)

## University's Approach

GCU reported that in 2017, "...17% of our young entrants were from the 20% most deprived backgrounds in Scotland – the Scottish sector average is 10.4%" (GCU, 2018b). The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a scale used to identify areas in Scotland experiencing deprivation (SIMD, 2016). This categorisation is achieved by dividing Scotland into small areas with roughly equal populations called "data zones" (SIMD, 2016p 03). By using a variety of indicators to measure different sides of deprivation, this can then allow categorisation of each data zone on a scale. For the purposes of this chapter it is reported in quintiles on a scale of 1 - 5, with 1 encompassing the 20% most deprived data zones and 5 representing the 20% least deprived data zones. A key recommendation in the Commission for Widening Access report was that by 2030, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent 20% of entrants to higher education (Scottish Government, 2016). Therefore, in order to continue meeting this target (GCU currently meets this target ahead of schedule), GCU operates a contextualised admissions policy (GCU, 2018c) in recognition that not all applicants have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their full academic potential prior to entry. The contextualised admissions policy takes into consideration the context and circumstance in which a student has achieved their academic grades and offers grade reductions to Widening Access students. In 2015-16, 47% of students at GCU were first in their families to enter higher education (GCU, 2017b).

Articulation is a key Scottish Government policy and is defined as the movement of students from Higher National Qualifications (HNQs) at college into second or third year of a university degree with full recognition of prior learning at college (Scottish Funding Council, 2016). GCU plays a leading role with in the Higher Education sector in promoting the

successful progression and transition between college and university; over 30% of its full-time undergraduates are articulating students (GCU, 2018d). At GCU, an effective infrastructure for articulation exists through the College Connect Strategy and strategic partnerships with Glasgow Colleges. This includes joint planning on curriculum design, admission, transition and continual professional development for staff.

The University's Strategy for Learning 2015 – 2020 has further placed an emphasis on providing a learning environment that is inclusive in its nature. Indeed, within its principles for curriculum design it has been noted that the university would like to see all their students have access to: "...learning [that is] is underpinned by values of equity and fairness, taking account of and valuing diversity and students' differences within mainstream curriculum, pedagogy and assessment" (GCU, 2016 p4).

Despite the positive intentions, The National Disability Team and Skill Report (2004, cited in Madriaga, 2007) found that there is still a low percentage of disabled students in higher education. One of the reasons given is the lack of required skills for the transition from further education to higher education. Holloway (2001, p602) for example, observed that students with disabilities studying in higher education stated that they experienced problems in "...getting information [and] having to make the system work for them." Many of these students lack confidence are unaware of the aspects of independent learning and have challenges to overcome with issues such as time management and motivation. This is exacerbated in the scenario of students who have disabilities such as dyslexia and other physical impairments. For these students it was felt to be advantageous for them to have a short programme, which enabled the students to meet university staff and other students on the university campus at the pre-entry stage.

GCU has endeavoured to meet students' learning support needs through an integrated approach throughout the students' degree studies. One such feature was the establishment of

The Effective Learning Service (ELS) in 2001. The remit of ELS was supporting students with their academic studies from first level through to post graduate level. As reported by Figg, McAllister and Shapiro (2006), the service was originally aimed primarily at students accessing GCU via widening access. However, from its inception, teaching staff wanted to support all of the students through the application of an integrated approach. Accordingly, the ELS team provided supported support to all of the students, irrespective of the individual student's background and educational requirements. This collaborative and inclusive approach quickly gained momentum across the support services and teaching staff.

The ELS' approach was considered as forward thinking as learning support in HE was regarded as being innovative within the provision of student support services. Peelo (2002) indicated that though learning support was derived from a study skills approach, for the most part, learning support practices had moved beyond the remedial or deficit model that this approach implied. The ELS approach applied a developmental approach, which recognised that learners derive from different backgrounds, have different motivations and learning needs. Thus, the pedagogical approach that the ELS offered was one that sought to encourage the students to take on responsibility for their own learning in that they identified what was important, rather than being directed by the lecturer (Illeris, 2006).

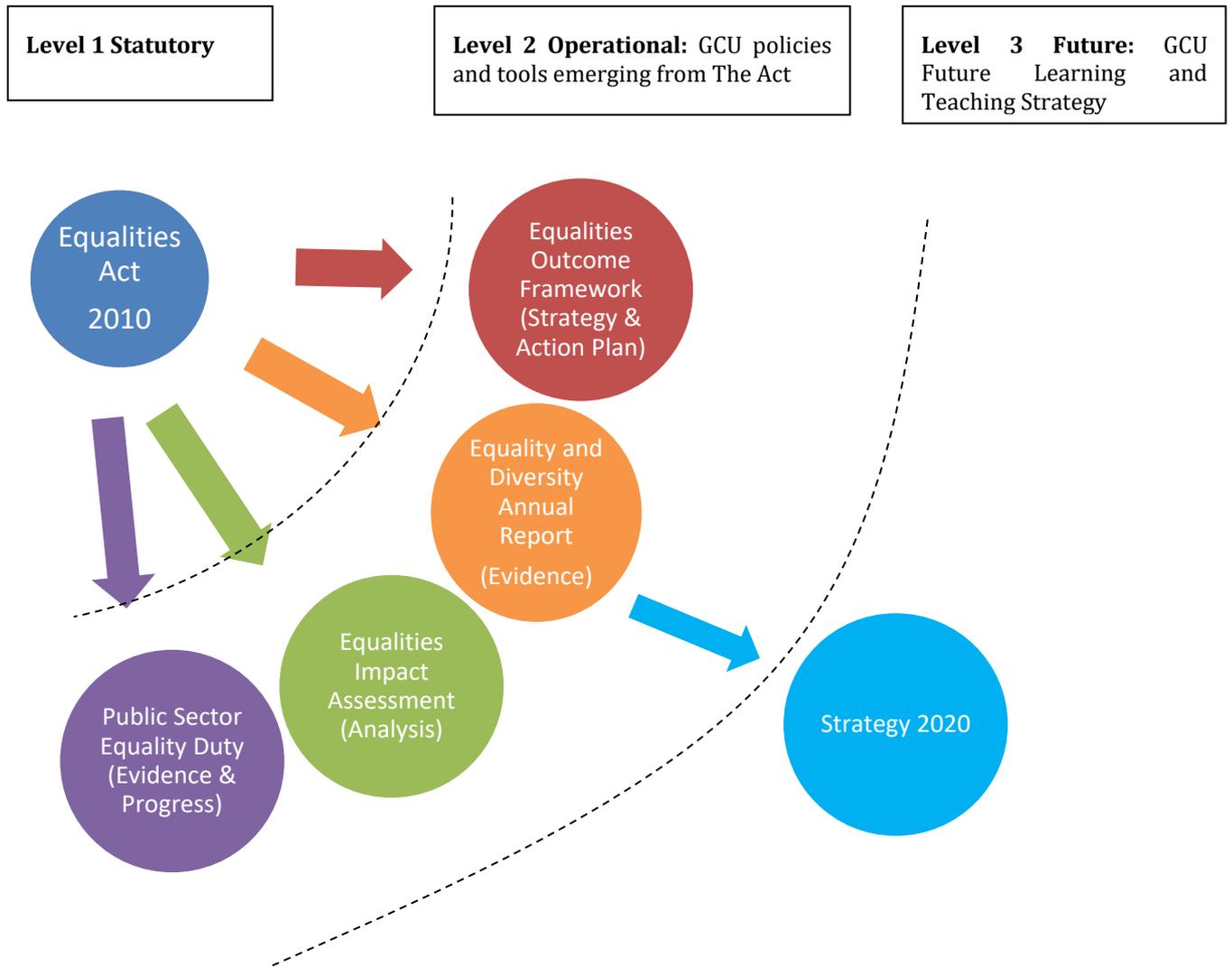
The ELS in its role of supporting students commencing their studies at GCU from widening access backgrounds ran a Summer School programme specifically aimed at prospective students, as many were required to attend as a mandatory aspect of their acceptance of their degree studies. Several of the students attending had disabilities, but despite these challenges, most if not all successfully completed the programme as well as completing their degrees, often to a very high level. The lecturer teaching on the summer programme was the same individual who became involved at a later date with the specially constructed programme, which is the subject of this chapter.

### **Policy Context: Glasgow Caledonian University**

The University employs a number of different equality and diversity tools in the form of policies and strategies; each of these underpins its public sector equality duty obligations under the Equalities Act 2010. This brings together all of the previous equality legislation under one Act which makes it illegal to discriminate against the protected characteristics: age, disability, gender, reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. This concept can be described as embedding equality and diversity issues into working environments and everyday life (Equalities Act 2010) and is conveyed through the Equality Outcomes, which are produced and published every four years. These outcomes are supported by an action plan that describes the steps, accountabilities and measures in relation to their implementation (Equality Act 2010 Part 2, p.5). The legal and policy context at GCU provides valuable contextual information with regards to the accountability structures relating to equality and diversity. It also illustrates the conditions in which the specific pre entry programme; for students with disabilities 'Taking Responsibility for your own Learning' operates within and provides a framework of objectives, which assisted in the evaluation process.

Figure 1 illustrates the equalities infrastructure at GCU. Since disabilities are a protected characteristic under The Equalities Act 2010, these documents demonstrate the structural mechanisms, of The Act in action and the flow of dissemination from statutory level into current GCU policy, action plans and wider teaching and future learning strategies.

Figure 1: Statutory law and policies being implemented at GCU level and their relationship to each other.<sup>1</sup>



There are three main duties required of Public Sector Institutions under Public Sector Equality Duty and these are as follows:

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*“ Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*

*Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it*

Glasgow Caledonian University's Public Sector Equality Duty outlines its commitments to Equality and Diversity issues, for example the Equalities Outcomes Framework details GCU's Equality and Diversity strategy and also forms, in part, the action plan for the current and future objectives (GCU, 2017a). The Equalities Annual Diversity Review records the university's progress and examines the collated evidence towards meeting the outcomes of Public Sector Equality Duty and GCU's own Equality Outcomes Framework.

### **The Role Of The Disability Service At Glasgow Caledonian University**

The Disability Service aims to promote and encourage an inclusive curriculum and GCU's Strategy for Learning 2015-2020 further places an emphasis on providing a learning environment that is inclusive in nature. A disability is defined in the Equality Act 2010 (chapter 15:Part 2: p5) "...as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long term' negative effect on their ability to do normal activities." This includes a wide range of disabilities such as visual and hearing impairments, physical and mobility difficulties, specific learning disabilities (SpLD) e.g. dyslexia, Asperger's syndrome and mental health conditions. The Disability Service is part of a wider Student Wellbeing Service and the team members are able to refer and direct students to other relevant services such as Counselling and a Mental Health Adviser.

As of session 2017, there were approximately 1,400 students registered with the Disability Service, which equates to around 8% of the University's student population. Of this figure, 40% of these students have a SpLD. The model of independent learning is one that is promoted in all of the Disability Services activities across the University. This recognises that students making the transition from school or college may have anxieties, concerns and expectations about the support that they may receive at university. By focusing on how to assist students to develop the confidence to improve their own skills and strategies, it is anticipated that this will have a positive impact on equipping GCU graduates with the necessary skills in their future careers and employment. The Disability team promotes an ethos that aspires to provide students with the skills, strategies and confidence to become independent learners. By promoting a culture that focuses on inclusiveness rather than only one-to-one support, the aim is therefore to ensure that all students have access to appropriate support as and when required.

Irrespective of whether the students have or do not have a disability, all students have access to assistive technology such as Texthelp Read & Write and Mind Genius software. Training on the software is free to all students and staff through workshops or one-to-one sessions with a technology adviser who is part of the Disability team. The training aims to highlight the benefits of using assistive software to assist with study skills such as proofreading, planning and structuring. Students with disabilities are also able to borrow equipment such as laptops and recording devices for short-term loan. In addition to the "Taking responsibility for your own learning" programme, other specialist programmes take place at the pre-entry stage, aimed at students on the autism spectrum and students on the autism spectrum can attend both programmes (GCU, 2017c).

## **Rationale For Supporting Students With Disabilities From Pre- Entry To Graduation**

In 2011, GCU carried out a major restructuring review and as part of that restructure, the ELS was devolved and the academic staff were relocated into the three Academic Schools. Accordingly, three specialist Learning Development Units were formed. Each one was specifically designed to suit the individual requirements of their own School. For example, in the School of Engineering and Built Environment a specialist Lecturer was appointed to support the students with mathematical requirements. This is a unique model in Scotland in that the academic support required for students with additional needs such as students with dyslexia, is provided within the institution rather than using an external agency such as Dyslexia Scotland. In addition, this support is available to all students at GCU as it takes cognisance of the specific cohort of students where a significant proportion of students are from non-traditional backgrounds.

Although the Summer School had ceased it was deemed imperative to continue to support students presenting with disabilities and or impairments. One of the Disability Advisers collaborated with an Academic Development Tutor/Lecturer to offer a customised programme for students with Disabilities. This was along the same principles as the one of the Summer School programmes that was targeted at Adult Returners, except the new programme was designed solely for students with disabilities.

### **‘Taking Responsibility For Your Own Learning’ Years 1- 5**

Although the original instigators of the programme had carried out qualitative evaluations at the end of each programme, they felt that it would be helpful to carry out an objective analysis of the programme. Funding was successfully obtained from College

Connect and a former research student was employed to carry out an evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme.

Goode (2006) applied a case study approach in a pre-1992 research-intensive university institution, which had carried out a number of positive approaches in supporting the university experiences of students with disclosed disabilities. Twenty one students all self selected to participate in the study. They represented eleven programmes and had different disabilities/impairments. The university where the study took place was widely acknowledged as being an example of good practice, but Goode noted that the interviewees found the experience of coping with the some individuals within institution, irrespective of their disability added an extra level of anxiety. The institution ran a specific induction programme prior to the programmes commencing and all of those who had attended the course, commented how this enabled them to commence studying with awareness, rather than having to consider learning approaches at the same time as coping with their impairment and studying new topics. At GCU, following the experience of the pre-existing summer programmes, the team believed that through the inclusion of a brief programme, the learning experience of the students could be improved if reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities occurred in the transition process. By running a programme that was specifically aimed at assisting students with disabilities in their transition journey, it was hoped that students' confidence and motivation would increase prior to them commencing their degree studies.

The programme was specifically aimed at students with disabilities entering University for the first time. This was in recognition that for some of these students coming to GCU there would be a disparity in terms of study skills, self and academic confidence. Furthermore as noted earlier, given the demographics of the student intake, the staff recognised that students had an extra barrier to overcome. This was borne out of the ADT's

and Disability Advisers' direct experience as practitioners working with the students. The areas included the subjects those students might find challenging such as note taking, academic terminology and academic expectations, accessing library and other services.

Attendance was voluntary and in the first year the programme ran over two consecutive days but gave students the choice of two different weeks. The idea being that this would allow some flexibility for those students that had work or family commitments. Students could choose to attend for the two days in one week or for a day in each of the weeks. The event was entirely organised by two members of staff and this included designing promotional materials, invitations, administration, the production of hand out materials for students on the programme as well as delivering the programme. Topics included: finding your way round the campus; managing your time; effective reading techniques, managing your way round the library in small groups; note taking strategies and the use of assistive technology as study tools, having lunch with students already attending university and the opportunity to meet academic teaching staff.

At the beginning of the first day, students were placed in small groups, irrespective of their selection of study subject. They were given a brief input on how the university functions re timetables and semesters. Then they were asked to complete an informal questionnaire on time management preferences, different study techniques and links to useful sites on the university website such as the Learning Development Centres, the library and GCU YouTube videos on writing essays and reports. In order that they would not feel under pressure, students were placed in small working groups, which remained the same over the two days. The latter part of the programme on day one involved an informal tour round the campus, which was led by staff and students. Feedback by participants indicated that it was a successful part of the programme as it gave them the opportunity to voice concerns and ask questions informally.

Students particularly enjoyed working in small groups, for example, in the afternoon session in the library, they had to find a book and take a “selfie” of the whole group with the book. They also had to write a brief paragraph individually whether they found the book useful or not and the reasons for their opinions. These brief pieces of writing gave the staff the opportunity to find out informally an indication of any specific writing issues. The students also had a gentle introduction into the assistive technology that is available in GCU.

From the first year of delivery, evaluations were circulated to attendees on completion of the programme. This feedback was intended to assess the effectiveness of the programme and to implement any improvements in the following years' programmes. However, the evaluations were distributed and completed on the final day of their programme, and although it captures the immediacy of the students' responses it is acknowledged that distributing and collecting the evaluations in one day gives the respondents little time to reflect upon their responses (Nicol & McFarlane 2006).

The initial concept also included offering students monthly lunch time sessions after the two day programme. The intention was to incorporate issues that had arisen as the students had progressed through their studies, for example, strategies and techniques for examination revision. However, there was poor uptake for these sessions; the feedback appeared to highlight that timetable clashes and the demands of the course on students' time were barriers to offering this additional support. Furthermore, integrated support workshops are available within most of the degrees at GCU and students also receive additional academic support, if required through their LDC.

By the second year, of the customised programme, the original two-person team had increased and included ADT's from the other two LDC's. This enabled the team to revise the delivery so that some of the course content was programme specific. For example the ADT from the School of Engineering and Built Environment focused on writing reports as opposed

to the ADT from the School of Health and Life Sciences held a session on reflective writing. The subject matter of programme was further amended to include short presentations from other support services and the Students' Association. This provided students with an insight into the types of support and information on how to access this support at GCU.

### **Evaluation And Analysis**

As stated previously, a small-scale research project was financed by College Connect to generate data to assess the efficacy of the programme: "Taking responsibility for your own learning"(Dunbar, 2016). The aim was to investigate if there was a correlation between pre-entry support, increased confidence and academic performance. A quantitative focus was applied through examining student evaluation forms that had been distributed to each of the attendees of the workshop over a five-year period (2011-2016). The students were asked to grade the information they were given during the workshop. The students attending were given time to complete these forms just before the end of the final workshop; these were then collated and stored for later analysis.

Additional data regarding the students' exam results over each semester of the studies at the university were also collated to assess if attending the pre-entry programme had any effects on the students' coursework or exam results. The following aspects were considered: Was there any correlation between those attending the programme and their coursework marks and progression? Of those attending the programme, which students were situated in areas of multiple deprivations, direct entrants, or articulating students from college going directly into 2nd or 3rd year.

A total number of 188 students took part in the programme over the five-year period. And 47% of all of the cohorts completed the evaluation forms. The student evaluations and

coursework marks were analysed using Microsoft Excel and the evaluations were then entered into the computer software Nvivo. This allowed for the data to be coded into themes that were emerging from the answers that the students gave. For the coursework analysis, students' coursework results and student entry status was only accessible via encrypted software, ensuring anonymity.

### **Outcomes**

Results from our study indicated that the workshops delivered assisted students in preparing them for university life by including sessions on study skills and writing. Students reported that these sessions alleviated their anxieties with comments such as: *"I think these past 2 days have been invaluable, they have taken my fears away and raised my confidence-loved it!"* [Student evaluation 55] *"Yes as it has showed me the tools I need to become a more confident individual learner-Thank you."* [Student Evaluation 77]

Overall the programme also provided the students with knowledge about the support available and where to find, 80% of the students found that the 'Taking responsibility for your own learning' programme was very useful to them for providing information about the support services available at the university. *"I am now aware of the support systems in place to help me."* [Student Evaluation 84] *"As I sometimes get stressed & I feel overwhelmed the workshop has given me the sources of available support in advance of starting my course. This has gone a long way in reducing my levels of stress."* [Student Evaluation 39]. Additionally, this increased the confidence of those attending and enabled the students to feel more positive about their impending university experience and their future engagement with university life.

## Figure 2 about here

Figure 2 demonstrates quantitative responses from attendees at the 'Taking responsibility for your own learning' regarding each of the topics covered during the two day programme.

On average, 70% of all programme attendees found all of the topics as being "very useful" for preparing them for their studies and for university life. From figure 2 it can be seen that 77% found that the sessions on independent learning and the practical library sessions were the most helpful for preparing them for their studies. *"It has also made me aware of research facilities at the library, places to study and information like journals and newspapers and it's given me confidence to find books and take them out"* [Student Evaluation 49]. The topics evaluated by the students as "being 'quite useful'" were: the campus tour (27%), meeting the staff (30%) and support on study skills and academic writing (38%). *"I was already confident but this helped me how to get more out of lectures, taking notes and reading more effectively"* [Student Evaluation 36] *"Previous uni courses didn't provide info regarding academic style and how to avoid plagiarism, this is a real help"* [Student Evaluation 45]. Twenty five percent said that the course attendance enabled them to meet new people that they could engage with on their course or in their degree studies. Thirty-three percent of the sample resided in the 20% and 40% most deprived data zones (quintiles 1 and 2) on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). In terms of achievement, 3% attained a Masters Degree, 8% achieved an Honours Degree and 23% attained an Unclassified. At the time of carrying out this research, the remainder were still progressing through their studies.

## Discussion

Hughes and Smail (2014) investigated which aspects about higher education students regarded as being important in the transition process. Two of the key factors were making friends and thinking positively about the experience. These two factors were also commented on by the participants in that they valued the opportunity of visiting the campus, when the campus was quiet and that they also enjoyed meeting other students who had also experienced some challenges when embarking on further and higher education. Glasgow Caledonian University focuses on enabling students from deprived areas in Scotland or first in the family to attend university. Having additional challenges in coping at university with disabilities exacerbates these challenges. The outcomes although qualitative appear to indicate that the students enjoy attending the two day programme. Students especially enjoyed meeting other students before the commencement of their studies, many of whom had similar concerns. They also commented positively on the opportunity in meeting staff and current students. Staff connected with students' academic programmes made themselves available to answer questions and students with disabilities currently enrolled and attending GCU had lunch with the participants of the "Taking responsibility for your own learning" programme. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that this was a small-scale study with limited time and resources. It would have been useful to have had one-to-one interviews or focus groups with the students who had attended and with the staff who were responsible for running the programme.

Also worthy of consideration was the fact that some students found it challenging to attend two days on campus as many were in employment or had caring responsibilities and so found it difficult to attend both days. The staff running the programme were also concerned that students had had insufficient time familiarising themselves using the university intranet. Therefore to rectify this a blended learning approach was included as part of the programme in 2017.

The advantage of applying the blended learning approach is that this incorporates traditional classroom methods and independent study; therefore the student learns through a combination of digital and online media. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) for example, point out that no blended learning programme is identical and that the approach applied, depends on the institution, the learner, the instructor and the ease of access to technology. An important element is also the locus of control held by the student in relation to time, place, path, or pace. As Vaughan (2014) observed, blended learning in its ideal format, involves lecturers and students working face-to-face and continuing to collaborate in an online environment. Furthermore, ideally, blended learning should also include the characteristics of constructivism such as personalisation, personal responsibility, critical thinking and working in partnership (Al-Huneidi & Schreurs 2012).

The inclusion of blended learning from 2017 amended the “Taking responsibility for your own learning” programme as students now attended the campus for the first day, enabling them to meet with other students and staff and participate in group activities. The assigned groups from the first day were then asked to collaborate in small groups online using padlet on the second day. Padlet is an online application that creates a live bulletin board that enables the participants to interact with teaching staff and one another.

The students were also given the option of using padlet on campus in one of the computer laboratories, so that they could access support from the teaching team if required. In practice, only one student attended on campus, and simultaneousl the teaching staff interacted with the other students online. The feedback was extremely positive, in that the students enjoyed the experiences of engaging with the staff via a virtual learning environment.

### **Conclusion**

In this small-scale research project, it was not possible to report to what extent there was any correlation between students attending the 'Taking responsibility for your own learning' programme and students' coursework marks or exam results in their degree studies. This was due to the fact that there was the potential to identify individual students, as the number of participants was relatively small in comparison to the overall university population. This is sensitive data and the institution must meet the requirements as set by the HESA guidelines where data cannot be published when percentages are based on fewer than 22.5 people in each grouping of participants. For that reason, the outcomes reported, focused on qualitative results.

However, students enjoyed attending the two programme and although questionnaires were distributed and collected at the end of the two day programme, students would informally say to the staff during the semester how much their confidence increased. They liked that they knew their way round the campus and could show students on their induction where places were. They enjoyed meeting other students and staff in a relaxed atmosphere. Even if they did not remember much of the content, the important outcome was that they knew where to find the information.

### **Future Research**

Future research will seek to expand this study to explore if student performance is impacted upon negatively by residing within the most deprived SIMD data zones in Scotland. Many of these participants were first in their family to experience academic study in higher education. As other studies have indicated students with disabilities or impairments often experience anxiety commencing higher education. It would be insightful to examine if presenting with these two characteristics would influence the outcome of their academic performance.

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