

# TASO

Supporting disabled students

## City College Norwich: Enhanced Theory of Change

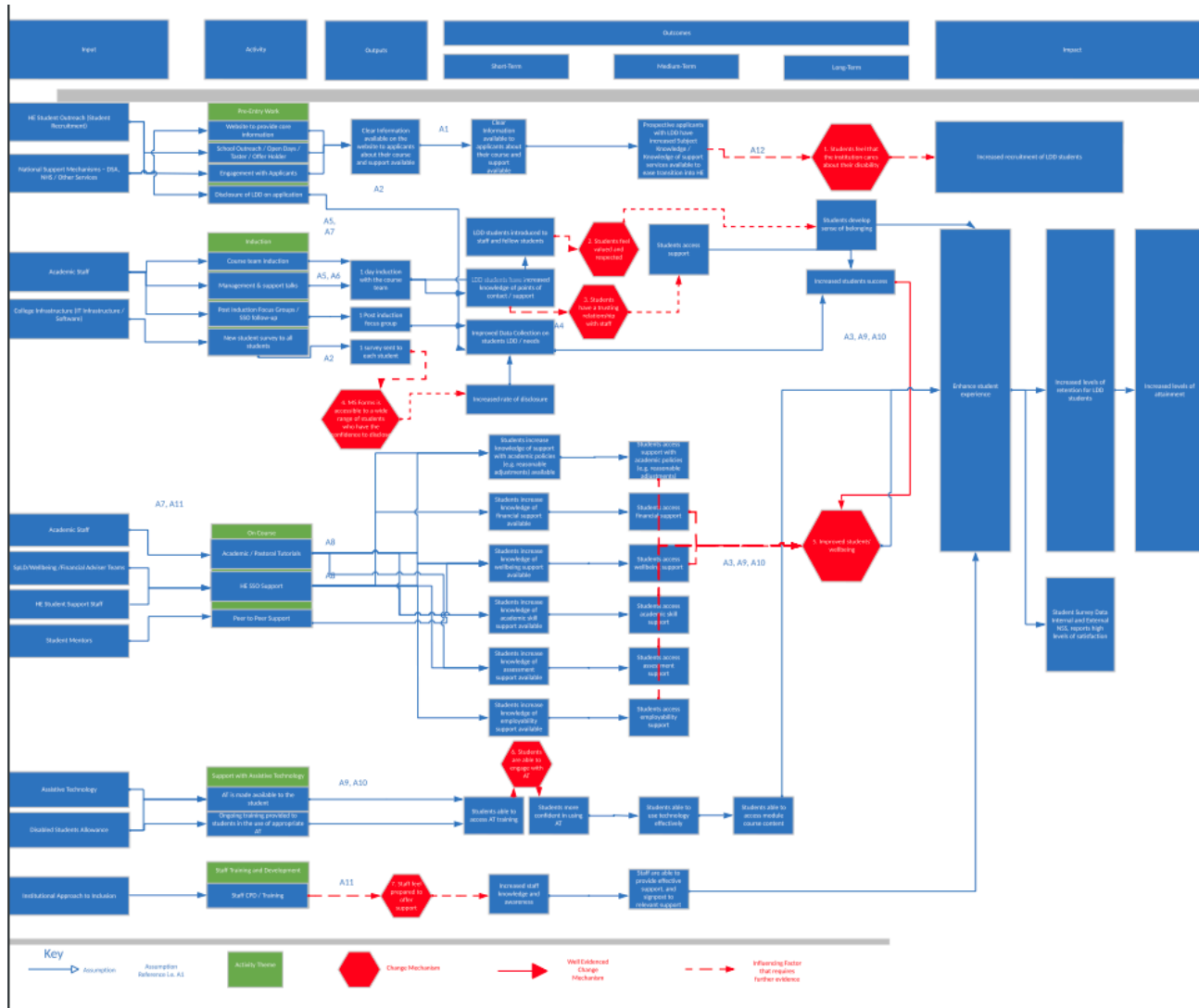
Transition activities to support students with disabilities

June 2024

# Contents

- [ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE UNDERPINNING NARRATIVE](#)
- [VERSION](#)
- [NAME](#)
- [1. WHY IS THE INTERVENTION BEING RUN?](#)
- [2. WHO IS THE INTERVENTION FOR?](#)
- [3. WHAT IS THE INTERVENTION?](#)
- [WHO IS DELIVERING THE INTERVENTION?](#)
- [HOW IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?](#)
- [WHERE IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?](#)
- [HOW MANY TIMES WILL THE INTERVENTION BE DELIVERED? OVER HOW LONG?](#)
- [WILL THE INTERVENTION BE TAILORED?](#)
- [HOW WILL IMPLEMENTATION BE OPTIMISED?](#)
- [WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS / STAKEHOLDERS?](#)
- [CHANGE MECHANISMS](#)
- [ASSUMPTIONS](#)
- [WHAT IS THE EVALUATION AIM?](#)
- [WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS?](#)
- [WHAT METHODOLOGY ARE YOU USING?](#)
- [RISKS AND LIMITATIONS](#)

**ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM – [VIEW LARGER DIAGRAM HERE \(PNG\)](#)**



**ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE UNDERPINNING NARRATIVE**

**VERSION**

V1.3

Contributors: Lisa Collyer

**NAME**

A package of activities to support the transition into higher education for disabled students in college-based higher education.

**1. WHY IS THE INTERVENTION BEING RUN?**

Despite efforts to improve disabled students' access to higher education study, students with disabilities remain an underrepresented group in higher education. Students with disabilities often have barriers to entry to higher education, citing factors such as adjustments to independent living, plus social and emotional adjustments. On entering higher education, students are often unaware of suitable support or accommodations they need and report challenges with getting support put in place at their new institution. Students with disabilities also often perceive that they are not well supported, often because of a limited understanding of their needs from academic staff (Jacobs, et al., 2021 Pino and Mortari (2014) highlight that for students with dyslexia, the onus is often placed on the student to self-identify as having a disability to get learning support in place once they arrive. However, due to a variety of factors, including stigmatisation and labelling (Riddick, 2000; Madriaga, 2007), and not being clear on whom to speak to get support in place means that students with disabilities do not always have the support provision needed in place, in a timely fashion, if at all. Students with disabilities are often reluctant to disclose their disabilities to their institution due to potential stigmatisation. Kendall and Tarman (2016) suggest, HE institutions should be 'proactively encouraging students to disclose' (p. 10). It is therefore important for institutions to proactively encourage students to disclose and put mechanisms in place to support the transition into higher education, ensuring that there is an increased awareness of what support is available and how to access it.

At City College Norwich, our data on continuation and attainment has shown attainment gaps between students with a self-declared learning difficulty or difference (LDD) and their peers. For continuation rates (measured as the rate at which students from different groups remained in HE for 1 year and 14 days from commencing their programme of study) and attainment rates (measured as the rate of students achieving Good Honours, 1st or 2:1 degree classifications or equivalent) these were 10% and 6% respectively. The programme aims to embed multiple interventions into the School of Higher Education to support students with disabilities in their transition into higher education. Furthermore, as it is recognised that support mechanisms need to continue to be in place beyond the initial transition phase, this support continues, throughout the first year of study. In turn, the intervention aims to improve student experiences, and as a result, potentially improve continuation rates.

The School of Higher Education hosts approximately 700 students. Students are studying full-time courses (60%), part-time courses (13%), and Higher or Degree Apprenticeships (27%) containing Foundation or Bachelor degrees. As a College Based Higher Education institution, we are a community-based provider that focuses on career-based, vocational, and land-based HE. As we have a smaller number of students than the average university, the interventions that we provide are not specifically targeted at supporting students with disabilities but involve all of our students. As a smaller higher education provider, we have the resources to offer support in this way.

#### References:

Jacobs, L., Parke, A., Ziegler, F., Headleand, C. and De Angeli, A. (2022) 'Learning at school through to university: the educational experiences of students with dyslexia at one UK higher education institution', *Disability & Society*, 37(4), pp.662-683, DOI: [10.1080/09687599.2020.1829553](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1829553)

Kendall, L. (2016) 'Higher education and disability: Exploring student experiences', *Cogent Education*, 3(1), DOI: [10.1080/2331186X.2016.1256142](https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1256142)

Madriaga, M. (2007). 'Enduring Disablism: Students with Dyslexia and Their Pathways into UK Higher Education and Beyond.' *Disability & Society* 22 (4): 399–412. doi:10.1080/09687590701337942

Pino M, and Mortari, L. (2014). 'The inclusion of students with dyslexia in higher education: a systematic review using narrative synthesis'. *Dyslexia*. 20(4) 346-69. DOI: 10.1002/dys.1484.

Riddick, B. (2000). 'An Examination of the Relationship between Labelling and Stigmatisation with Special Reference to Dyslexia.' *Disability & Society* 15 (4): 653–667. doi:10.1080/09687590050058233.

## 2. WHO IS THE INTERVENTION FOR?

The interventions that are provided at CCN are not specifically targeted at supporting students with disabilities but involve all our students. However, 1 in 4 of our higher education students are disabled (either self-disclosed or with a diagnosis) so the delivery of our intervention will naturally aim to support students with disabilities. This includes students with physical disabilities, specific learning difficulties, and mental health conditions.

A secondary beneficiary of the intervention is the staff at CCN as they benefit from improved knowledge of disabled student needs and skills development.

## 3. WHAT IS THE INTERVENTION?

A multi-intervention transition support package is being run to support disabled students as they transition into higher education. The School of Higher Education delivers a series of activities that can support the transition into higher education. This includes activities

pre-entry, during the induction period (weeks 1 – 7), and for the duration that students are on the programme, The support provided aims to address some of the barriers that students may face as they enter into higher education. The barriers include:

- Adjustments to independent living, plus social and emotional adjustments.
- Challenges with getting support put in place at their new institution. Pino and Mortari (2014) highlight that for students with dyslexia, the onus is often placed on the student to self-identify as having a disability to get learning support in place once they arrive. However, due to a variety of factors, including stigmatisation and labelling (Riddick, 2000; Madriaga, 2007), and not being clear on whom to speak to get support in place means that students with disabilities do not always have the support provision needed in place, in a timely fashion, if at all.
- Students with disabilities are often reluctant to disclose their disabilities to their institution due to potential stigmatisation. As Kendall and Tarman (2016) suggest, HE institutions should be ‘proactively encouraging students to disclose’ (pg. 10). Therefore, it is important for institutions to proactively encourage students to disclose and put mechanisms in place to support the transition into higher education, ensuring that there is an increased awareness of what these are and how to access them.

### 3.1 Inputs

For this transition support package to be most effectively operationalised, several resources are needed. This includes staff across the college to work collaboratively to effectively run and offer support to students. It also required resources external to the college, such as

- HE Student Outreach (Student Recruitment)
- National Support Mechanisms (i.e. DSA)
- Academic Staff
- College Infrastructure (IT/Software)
- SpLD and Wellbeing Teams

- HE Student Support Staff
- Student Mentors
- Assistive Technology
- Institutional approach to inclusion

### 3.2 Activities:

Activities within the transition support package are grouped into categories that reflect the time frame in which the activities take place within a student's transition timeline.

#### **Pre-Entry**

In our pre-entry work, we aim to raise awareness among prospective students of our HE learning environment, which differs from a large university. In engaging in pre-entry work, students can make an informed decision on where to study based on the information provided. The information we provide on the support that we offer students may encourage students to apply to the college. Pre-entry activities occur prior to a student enrolling on the course.

##### - *Website core information*

- o The website holds information including core course information, such as study days and modules. It provides students with information about upcoming opportunities to meet our delivery staff and visit the campuses.
- o Contact details for our course leaders are provided.
- o The website also details the support that higher education students will have access to when they study at City College Norwich. This includes academic support, pastoral support, employability, and progression support, DSA, reasonable adjustments, and financial.



- o A few weeks before enrolment, a new student landing page is visible for students who will be joining the college. This gives details on what to expect at induction, including key dates and times for the academic year. It also provides details on reading lists and useful information on preparing for higher education study.
- *Open Days / Taster Days / Offer holder days/ School Outreach*
  - o We run a series of open events for prospective students to visit the campus and meet the team.
  - o Taster days or sessions in which prospective students can sit in on lessons with other currently enrolled students and become part of the class for the day. This allows students to experience higher education at City College Norwich, have a tour, meet like-minded students, and have an opportunity to determine if the learning environment is right for them.
  - o Our offer holder days follow a similar set-up to taster days.
  - o Dedicated HE Student Recruitment Officer who engages in school and sixth-form outreach to raise awareness of our courses, give details on our unique learning environment, and give details on the support that we offer students.
- *Engagement with applicants*

Course leaders and Student Support Officers engage with prospective students to answer queries about starting their course. This is often through telephone conversations or via email. We also offer students the opportunity to visit on a 1-1 basis to meet our course leaders on campus.

## **Post-Entry**

### *Induction (Weeks 1 – 7)*

Our induction activities occur once students are enrolled. The induction period takes place over a period of 1 – 7 weeks and aims to introduce students to key staff and provide them with key information to embed them into their studies. We feel that having a longer induction period means that students are not overwhelmed with new information over one day or one week. Instead, an extended

duration allows ample time for discussion, questions, and information to be reviewed and revisited as required. Over weeks 1 – 7, the following activities are held:

- *Course Team induction*
  - o Course team induction takes place over one or two days depending on the higher education course. It takes place one week prior to the first teaching day. The purpose of the day(s) is for students who have been accepted onto their course to meet their course peers and lecturers and engage in ice-breaker activities.
  - o Course teams disseminate information to the students about their timetable, the modules they are going to study, and student support services and are provided the link to the new student survey. Students are also supported with IT, logging in to their accounts, and are provided with their ID cards. They are also given tours of their campus and the library services. The purpose of this day is to support students in transitioning into their first week of teaching.
- *Information and Guidance Talks from Management and support staff, including an information leaflet on the role of student support officers*
  - o This talk is provided by the higher education leadership team, and information is disseminated on which member of staff to speak to when a student has a query. The purpose of this is to create clear lines of communication so students know the main point of contact for a particular issue. This is delivered face to face to ensure that students can put a face to a name, but also to ensure that the leadership team becomes familiar with the new students.
  - o The two student support officers (further details on these roles below) also introduce themselves and their roles. They also provide an A5 leaflet to all new students which details their role, aspects of higher education study that they can support with, and how to contact them. This is provided as a physical leaflet so that students can take it away with them. This leaflet is also handed to any students who enroll after these talks.
- *New Student Survey*

- o The new student survey is accessible through Microsoft Forms and is emailed to all new students by one of the Student Support Officers. The survey is discussed at the support talk (see above), and the student support officer explains the purpose of the survey, encouraging students to complete the survey, however noting that it is voluntary. It asks students if they have a disability (including mental health condition) and to provide details of this. It asks them if they are currently receiving any support for their disability or mental health concerns. It also asks if the student has any concerns (i.e. finance, academic concerns) they feel they need support with. Often, this is only completed by students who want to express their support needs. In the 23/24 academic year, we had a 35% response rate of new students completing the survey.
- o The responses to these questions allow us to provide timely referrals to well-being or the Specific Learning Differences Team (SpLD) and inform the teaching team of classroom support needs. It is also a useful method for us to capture data on our new intake of students to ensure that we are putting the interventions and support in place for disabled students, as required.
- o The survey asks for confidence level in academic and IT Skills, which allows us to understand the types of academic workshops we can run for students. Workshops held to support students with academic and IT skills aim to help the transition into academic study. This can be helpful to support students in the first few weeks of study as they prepare for their first higher education assessment deadlines; often students find structuring essays and referencing difficult and these workshops can help to guide students with these to increase their confidence in their writing. The intervention and support we can offer, and tailor for students is determined by the results of the survey.

***Post-induction student focus groups / Support officer follow-up***

- o This activity enables higher education delivery managers to obtain feedback by meeting each cohort of new students approximately 6 weeks into the start of the first academic year. This can help to foster positive relationships between students and key course staff. Additionally, it is a method of evaluation. We review what went well in induction and

understand if the students need further support and what it is they need support with. This then allows the manager to arrange the support with the appropriate person to support the student(s) as appropriate.

### ***Ongoing On-Course Support***

This support aims to respond to students' needs as they arise and change throughout the higher education course and to help students transition throughout the first stages of higher education study.

- *Pastoral Tutorials*

- o Students are assigned a pastoral tutor when they enroll. This is usually the course leader. Students have the opportunity to discuss their current experiences, which may involve conversations regarding various aspects of study. This could include finance, well-being, academic skills, or assessments. Following these tutorials, staff will log the conversation on the online student learning record, including any actions to be taken by the staff member or student. This is visible to both the staff member and the student.

- *Academic Tutorials*

- o Students are also offered academic tutorials with their module lecturer for each module they study. The aim of these tutorials is for students to have a 1-1 meeting with the module lecturers to discuss assignment concerns, address misconceptions, and discuss ideas and essay plans.

- *HE Student Support Officer Support*

- o As part of our access and participation plan, we recruited HE Student Support Officers (SSO) to support students from underrepresented groups. SSOs provide a clear point of contact for students and the roles of each student support officer are clearly defined to students on their first day. The SSO (academic) is often the first point of contact for disabled

students to speak to. One HE SSO (academic) provides support to students in areas such as well-being and SpLD team referrals, support with academic policies, reasonable adjustment applications, and academic support.

- o As the SSO (academic) has been in place since 2021, we have been able to conduct an evaluation of the SSO role (formally known as a HE Tutorial Supervisor) in the 2022-23 academic year. The evaluation aimed to determine the contribution of the role to disabled students' success and outcomes in higher education and to understand **why** the role may be impactful for students' success (Collyer, Guy, and Rhodes, 2023). The evaluation highlighted that the intervention supported students with academic policies, financial support, well-being, preparing for live assessment, and support with academic skills. Support in these areas from the HE Tutorial Supervisor led to increased self-efficacy, motivation to continue to study, and feelings of belongingness, with the support the role offers also contributing to students' overall well-being. This research found that "... the closer to the output of the intervention, the more direct impact the intervention had" (Collyer, Guy and Rhodes, 2023, pg.17).
- o The student support officer (academic) also supports students with applying for reasonable adjustments and ensuring that they are implemented throughout their programme. At CCN, students do not need to reapply for their reasonable adjustments each year and there is not a requirement to re-supply evidence each year. However, they can speak to the student support officer if their reasonable adjustments need reviewing. On approval of reasonable adjustments, the student support officer and the student's course leader will be contacted by the HE administration office to inform them of their reasonable adjustments. This saves the student having to inform each tutor each academic year, as the course leader will do this, as appropriate.
- o Another SSO supports students with employability, careers, and progression. This can include developing CVs, interview skills, job applications, and support with finding work experience or placements. The SSO will lead workshops on a series of employability-related items and will have 1:1 meetings with students to support them.

- *Peer to Peer Support*

- o One course area in the school has trialled a peer-to-peer mentoring scheme. New students are paired with a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year student and they are a point of contact for the new student to ask questions and be guided through the first year of study. We also ensure that students have opportunities to meet other classes and socialise outside of their class. This may include extra-curricular opportunities, such as trips. We also ensure that there are social spaces on campus for students to study together.

### **Support with Assistive Technology**

Students can receive 1-1 or group support with an understanding of how they can use the assistive technology received for their studies. We understand that DSA provides support for students with this, but our student support officers act as an additional point of contact.

### **Staff Training and Development**

Our academic and support staff receive departmental training and development on a bi-weekly basis. This consists of topics such as neurodiversity, teaching and learning development, and digital skills. These may be practical digital skills demonstrations, workshops, and speaker-led sessions.

### **Outcomes**

#### *Pre-Entry Work*

The transition support package aims to support students' transition journey as they enter into higher education. The outcomes of the pre-entry activities are to provide prospective students with clear information about the disability support they can receive at the

organisation. By providing this information, prospective students can confidently apply to the organisation to study in the knowledge that the institution offers the type of support they may need as a disabled student.

*Short Term Outcome*

- Clear Information about the course and support available to students.

*Medium Term Outcome*

- Applicants have increased knowledge of the support services available to ease the transition into higher education.

**Induction**

The aim of induction activities (delivered between weeks 1 – 7 of the course) is to introduce students to key staff and students on the course so that students build positive relationships and rapport with course teams and course peers. The outcomes, therefore, of these activities are to increase student knowledge of who to speak to and help build students' confidence in seeking support for their disability, by declaring their disability, thereby increasing rates of disability disclosure. This may be through an online Microsoft Form, or this may be directly to a course team member or student support officer. The outcomes of induction activities are also to help students to access support and also build a sense of belonging within the School of Higher Education, by facilitating activities demonstrating to students the organisation values and respect them. In turn, an outcome of this induction work is that support is provided or arranged for students early on in their higher education journey.

*Short Term Outcomes:*

- Students are introduced to staff and fellow students.

- Students have an increased knowledge of points of contact and support.
- Improved data collection on students' LDD needs.
- Increase rates of disclosure.

*Medium Term Outcome:*

- Students access support.

*Long Term Outcome:*

- Students develop a sense of belonging.
- Increased student success.

***On course support***

The outcomes achieved by providing a range of on-course support, which is ongoing support within the first year of higher education, are that students receive support that is targeted to the support needs required. By having tutorials with course team members or student support officers, students should be more knowledgeable of the specific support that is available. They then should be able to ask for the support that they need, meaning that the support that is accessed is individualised to meet the needs of a specific student. The impact of this is that they have an improved student experience, which can lead to increased levels of retention and attainment for students.

*Short Term Outcomes:*

- Students increase knowledge of support with academic policies.



- Students increase knowledge of financial support.
- Students increase knowledge of wellbeing support.
- Students increase knowledge of academic skills support.
- Students increase knowledge of assessment support.
- Students increase knowledge of employability support.

*Medium Term Outcomes:*

- Students access support with academic policies.
- Students access support for financial support.
- Students access wellbeing support.
- Students access academic skills support.
- Students access assessment support.
- Students access employability support.

**Support with Assistive Technology (AT)**

In providing support to students with assistive technology, the outcome of this support is to ensure that students are more confident in using the assistive technology that is provided to them at the start of their higher education study. If students feel more confident in using the technology for their learning, this means that they are using it more effectively to access their course content, learning materials, and assessments.

*Short Term Outcomes:*

- Students able to access AT training.

- Students are more confident in using AT.

*Medium Term Outcome:*

- Students are able to use technology effectively.

*Long Term Outcome:*

- Students able to access module course content and learning.

**Staff Training and Development**

Whilst much of the support package is directed at supporting students, it is important to ensure that as part of an ongoing support mechanism, staff are provided with regular CPD and training on how to support disabled students. The outcome of this work means that staff are prepared to provide effective support to students with disabilities, but also that they can signpost to the appropriate support service if they are unable to provide the support themselves.

*Short Term Outcome:*

- Increased staff knowledge and awareness of disabilities and supporting students.

*Medium Term Outcomes*

- Staff are able to provide effective support and signpost to relevant support.

## **References**

Collyer, L., Guy, A. and Rhodes, S. (2023) Supporting students with self-declared learning difficulties and/or disabilities: an evaluation of the role of a higher education tutorial supervisor [online]. The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education: London. Available at:

[https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/TASO\\_Contribution\\_Analysis\\_City\\_College\\_Norwich\\_December\\_2023.pdf](https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/TASO_Contribution_Analysis_City_College_Norwich_December_2023.pdf)

## **WHO IS DELIVERING THE INTERVENTION?**

### **Pre-Entry**

- Website core information – this is facilitated online.
- Open Days / Taster Days / Offer holder days/school outreach – facilitated by, course delivery teams, and student recruitment officer.
- Engagement with applicants – facilitated by, the course delivery team, including the administrative office and management team as appropriate.

### **Induction (Week 1 – 7)**

- Course Team induction – facilitated by, the Higher Education Delivery Manager, course leaders, and lecturers.
- Management and support talks – facilitated by the Head of Higher education, Higher Education Delivery Managers, and HE student support officers.
- New Student Survey – facilitated online, by HE student support officer (academic).

- Post-induction student focus groups / Support officer follow-up – facilitated by Higher Education Delivery Manager / HE student support officer.

### **Ongoing On-Course Support**

- Academic / Pastoral Tutorials – facilitated by, module lecturers/course leaders and personal tutors.
- HE Student Support Officer Support – facilitated by, the HE support officer (academic) and HE Support Officer (progression).  
The support officer (academic) has expertise in a range of support areas, including mental health training. However, they are not a trained counsellor and will refer students to the college's central wellbeing team for specialist support. The SSO (academic) will refer students to the SpLD team for needs assessments and will work with this team to arrange reasonable adjustments for students.
- Peer support – facilitated by course peers.

**Support with Assistive Technology** - facilitated by HE student support officer (academic) as requested by the student. This is often after the student has received their assistive technology through the DSA process.

**Staff Training and Development** – facilitated college-wide, by the Head of Higher Education, and Higher Education Delivery Managers. External organisations may also be introduced to deliver specialised training.

### **HOW IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?**

#### **Pre-Entry**

For pre-entry transition activities, they are delivered in a range of ways, as outlined below:

- Website core information – online platform.
- Open Days / Taster Days / Offer holder days/school outreach – these events may take place face-to-face and online.
- Engagement with applicants – we engage with our applicants in several ways, including telephone conversations and emails, 1:1 building tours, and visits.

### **Induction (Weeks 1 – 7)**

For the first 1 – 7 weeks of the academic year for new students, we deliver the majority of the support activities face-to-face, as detailed below:

- Course Team induction – face-to-face classroom delivery, delivered as a group.
- Management and support talks – face-to-face delivery, delivered as a group. An A5 leaflet is also handed out at this event which details the two student support officer roles and their contact details.
- New Student Survey – online via MS Teams.
- Post-induction student focus groups / Support officer follow-up – face-to-face group focus groups / individual support officer 1:1 follow up face-to-face, email or telephone.

### **Ongoing On-Course Support**

Ongoing course support is delivered in a variety of ways depending on the needs of the students, as detailed below:

- Academic / Pastoral Tutorials – face to face or via MS Teams. Delivered on a 1:1 basis.
- HE Student Support Officer Support – telephone, email, and face-to-face. Delivered on a 1:1 basis. Reasonable Adjustment support is offered collaboratively by the SpLD team and student support officer – face-to-face. Students can apply for reasonable adjustments to be carried over in each academic year, and this is achieved by students completing an MS Form to

request this. This is then processed by the student support officer (academic). This process stops the need for students to re-apply for reasonable adjustments each year.

- Peer to Peer – delivered as the students wish. This is most likely to be in person, on campus.

### **Support with Assistive Technology**

Students can be supported by the student support officer, often face to face, delivered primarily 1:1.

### **Staff Training and Development**

Staff training and development is delivered by college-wide leadership and development teams, Head of Higher Education, and Higher Education Delivery Managers. These are delivered as a group, often online via MS Teams or face-to-face.

### **WHERE IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?**

All activities above are delivered on City College Norwich campuses, or through CCN online communications, including Microsoft Teams.

### **HOW MANY TIMES WILL THE INTERVENTION BE DELIVERED? OVER HOW LONG?**

#### **Pre-Entry**

- Website core information – ongoing availability before enrolment. The student landing page is available a few weeks before enrolment detailing specific first-day information.
- Open Days / Taster Days / Offer holder days/school outreach – these are spread throughout the year, totalling 25+ events.

- Engagement with applicants – these are facilitated ad hoc, as needed, and requested by applicants.

### **Induction (Week 1 – 7)**

- Course Team induction – This is a one to two-day induction depending on the HE course. Delivered one week before the first teaching day.
- Management and support talks – This is a one-hour talk, delivered one week prior to the first teaching day. Delivered as part of induction.
- New Student Survey – online via MS Teams. Provided to students on induction, one week prior to the start of teaching. Email communications one week later will be sent out by the student support officer to encourage completion.
- Post-induction student focus groups / Support officer follow-up – A one-hour focus group conducted after 6 weeks of delivery with each new student cohort. Students can email the HE student support officer (academic) as needed to discuss support requirements.

### **Ongoing On-Course Support**

- Academic / Pastoral Tutorials – personal tutorials are conducted with every student three times per year for one hour (or variation i.e. 6 x 30 mins). Academic tutorials are typically delivered once per module, ranging between 10-20 minutes per student.
- HE Student Support Officer Support – Ongoing throughout the academic year, varied duration. Students will request one-to-one support with student support officers as needed. For Reasonable Adjustments, once these have been arranged and are in place, students can arrange a meeting with the SSO to review them.

**Support with Assistive Technology** –arranged with the student support officer, as and when a student requires it. These can be facilitated both as a group and on a 1:1 basis.

**Staff Training and Development** – one hour bi-weekly CPD delivered to HE staff. All staff are required to attend two teaching, learning, and assessment training days per academic year. These training days provide staff with a range of CPD opportunities, with a suite of training sessions relating to equality, diversity, and inclusion.

#### WILL THE INTERVENTION BE TAILORED?

The activities are designed to be flexible in their delivery. This means that they can be adapted and tailored to different groups of students or individuals. For example, support can be facilitated face-to-face or via Teams depending on the student's preference, or the student could request multiple shorter tutorials regularly, or one longer tutorial spaced across the academic year. Many of the support activities we offer are 1:1 and can be tailored and designed to be of benefit to the student's individual needs depending on their need at the time of accessing the support.

#### HOW WILL IMPLEMENTATION BE OPTIMISED?

Activities to support transition are regularly reviewed and discussed with staff and students. We ask staff and students each academic year for their feedback on our induction activities, which means that they can be tailored each year based on the feedback received.

At three intervals in the academic year in course committee meetings, we obtain feedback from student representatives to understand areas of the course that are working well, plus areas for development. This allows us to adapt our interventions in-year that could relate to support students to have an improved student experience. Student representatives are student volunteers who are appointed by their course peers to represent the class views at wider departmental meetings.



There are also a variety of other opportunities for students to have their voices heard and to provide feedback on the activities we run, in which they may be given vouchers for participation.

### WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS / STAKEHOLDERS?

For our support activities to be successful, a collaborative approach is taken across the college. A whole institutional coordinated approach is facilitated, involving the head of school, managers, administrative teams, support teams, and lecturing staff to design, implement, and deliver the range of activities the School of Higher Education provides to students to support the transition into higher education.

Our HE colleagues, including the student support officers and course delivery teams, work together to provide holistic student transition support. Our HE Student support officers work collaboratively with the wider college support services, including the college's Information Advice and Guidance Team, Library Team, Wellbeing Team, and SpLD Team to ensure that students are referred successfully.

Students are also a key stakeholder and their opinions and feedback is essential. They can shape the way in which interventions are designed and delivered throughout an academic year.

### CHANGE MECHANISMS

Change mechanism 1

#### **Students feel that the institution cares about their disability**

Vickerman and Blundell (2010) note the importance of pre-enrolment contact between students and institutions to support students' success. Providing students with key information on support for disabled students and providing them with the opportunity to engage

with higher education support teams and tutors improve students' transition experience, by informing them of what they can expect in terms of support. By highlighting that the college is proactive in raising awareness of the support available can help to show students that the college values and cares about ensuring that disabled students are supported and could encourage students to choose a particular institution to study at. In turn, we encourage more disabled students to attend higher education, with the knowledge that students will have a range of support available to them to ease the transition. In turn, students being aware of available support prior to enrolment, means that on enrolment, they may enquire about accessing support sooner, and get support sooner, which can help with the retention of students.

Change mechanism 2

### **Students feel valued and respected**

Students may undergo a significant life transition as they enter higher education. Students may have to navigate independent living and develop new social relationships, whilst also adapting to a new learning environment. Students with disabilities can find it challenging to develop positive relationships with others and seek support from university staff. However, these relationships with peers and key staff are important to foster and develop a sense of belongingness in higher education, particularly during the transition phase. Proactive initiatives facilitated by the university for disabled students, and opportunities to form friendships (Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, and Newman, 2015) can help students feel valued and respected by course peers and staff. In fostering an inclusive learning environment, disabled students can feel valued and respected by those around them, thereby enhancing their student experience and transition experience.

Change mechanism 3

### **Students have a trusting relationship with staff**

Higher education institutions need to aim to support students' confidence to share their disability. UCAS (2022) identifies that applicants with hidden disabilities are 'more likely to feel uncomfortable sharing an impairment' (pg. 5). Therefore induction activities holding activities with students that aim to foster and build trusting relationships with staff are important to help with students transitions. Clear channels of communication and contact with key staff and responsive supportive staff are required to help build trust and therefore gives students the confidence to declare their disability.

#### Change mechanism 4

### **MS Forms is accessible to a wide range of students who have the confidence to disclose their disability**

Using Microsoft Forms as a mechanism for students to declare their disability can encourage greater response rates as a wide range of students can access an online method of communication. For some students, discussing their support needs with another person may be a barrier to support, therefore, providing an alternative means of requesting support is important to provide for those students. In turn, this provides students with the confidence to disclose as there is a method of disclosure that meets their needs.

#### Change mechanism 5

### **Improved student wellbeing**

Our evaluation of the role of a student support officer (Collyer, Guy and Rhodes, 2023) has identified that accessible 1:1 support can increase students' self-esteem, and motivation to study and decrease stress and anxiety levels. In providing students with disabilities

the opportunities to engage with on-course support with course teams, in which students can access tailored support in response to their individualised needs, could lead to improved student well-being.

#### Change mechanism 6

##### **Students are more confident using Assistive Technology to support learning**

Students have reported that they are often given their assistive technology but are often unsure how to use it effectively (Jacobs et al., 2021). Greater opportunities to support students to understand how to use their assistive technology, to be proficient, and to be confident in using it to support learning can reduce barriers to learning for disabled students.

#### Change mechanism 7

##### **Staff feel prepared to provide support**

Literature indicates that there is a lack of training for staff on how to respond to diversity in learning and teaching, highlighting that this is vital to ensure that staff who support students can proactively respond to their needs (Vickerman and Blundell, 2010). As Hopkins (2011) suggests, training for staff on disability awareness should be 'regular and compulsory'. Therefore, to help develop inclusive practice and improve disability awareness and support for students, institutions should consider how these can be operationalised. Once staff are trained, this could lead to staff feeling that they feel more prepared to support students with disabilities and therefore students are better supported.

## References for all change mechanisms

Collyer, L., Guy, A. and Rhodes, S. (2023) Supporting students with self-declared learning difficulties and/or disabilities: an evaluation of the role of a higher education tutorial supervisor [online]. The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education: London. Available at:

[https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/TASO\\_Contribution\\_Analysis\\_City\\_College\\_Norwich\\_December\\_2023.pdf](https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/TASO_Contribution_Analysis_City_College_Norwich_December_2023.pdf)

Hopkins, L. (2011) The path of least resistance: a voice-relational analysis of disabled students' experiences of discrimination in English universities, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(7), 711-727, DOI: [10.1080/13603110903317684](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110903317684)

Jacobs, L., Parke, A., Ziegler, F., Headleand, C. and De Angeli, A. (2022) 'Learning at school through to university: the educational experiences of students with dyslexia at one UK higher education institution', *Disability & Society*, 37(4), pp.662-683, DOI: [10.1080/09687599.2020.1829553](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1829553)

UCAS (2022) 'What is the experience of disabled students in education?' UCAS, Available at:

[https://www.ucas.com/file/610106/download?token=1kwt\\_gKE](https://www.ucas.com/file/610106/download?token=1kwt_gKE)

Vaccaro, A, Daly-Cano, M, & Newman, B. (2015). 'A sense of belonging among college students with disabilities: an emergent theoretical model'. *Journal of College Student Development*, 56(7), October 2015, pp. 670-686.

Vickerman, P. and Blundell, M. (2010) 'Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education', *Disability and Society* 25(1), pp. 21-32.

WonkHE (2022). Easing the transition into higher education for disabled students. Available at:

<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/easing-the-transition-into-higher-education-for-disabled-students/>.

## ASSUMPTIONS

### Assumption 1

#### **Applicants engage with outreach activities pre-entry**

There is an assumption that prospective students will engage with the pre-entry activities and the information being provided to them.

### Assumption 2

#### **Students disclose information about their disability to the college.**

There is an assumption that new students will disclose details of their disability to the college through the new student survey. This is to allow for support to be arranged for the student as early into the academic year as possible.

### Assumption 3

#### **Support is targeted to meet individual student needs and provided in a timely manner**

There is an assumption that support is tailored to meet the individual needs of students, rather than a one-size fits all approach. This is provided in a timely fashion as required by the student.

### Assumption 4

#### **Institutional activities are conducted in a timely fashion**

There is an assumption that support activities conducted by the college staff are completed early in the academic year.

Assumption 5

**Students are engaged in the induction activities**

There is an assumption that students take part in the induction activities between weeks 1 – 7.

Assumption 6

**Activities will raise awareness of support mechanisms**

There is an assumption that the activities run by the college will raise awareness of the support available to students. There is an assumption that students do not currently know about the support that is available.

Assumption 7

**Student to staff ratio is low**

There is an assumption that for support to be effective, there is a low staff-to-student ratio.

Assumption 8

**Support is provided on an individual basis**

There is an assumption that tutorial support is provided on an individual basis to be effective for students and to meet their individual needs.

Assumption 9

**Staff are effective in supporting students**

There is an assumption that staff are providing support that is effective and making a positive impact on students' experience.

Assumption 10

**Cross-institution support services can provide support**

There is an assumption that support services across the college have the capacity to support students effectively.

Assumption 11

**Staff attend training and training is sufficient to enable staff to support disabled students effectively.**

There is an assumption that staff will attend the training and the training that staff receive is sufficient to give them the confidence and expertise to support disabled students effectively.

Assumption 12

**CCN has a USP for providing support to a diverse range of student needs, in a personalised way.**



There is an assumption that if people know that CCN provides support to a diverse range of student needs, in a personalised way, this will result in prospective students deciding to study at CCN for this reason.

#### WHAT IS THE EVALUATION AIM?

To understand the overall impact of a transition support package for disabled students in higher education.

#### WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS?

The main question to be addressed in this evaluation is whether a range of transition activities can help to impact students' transition experiences. This can be explored through the following questions that will address each part of the transition support package:

- o How does a range of support activities work together to help support the transition experience of disabled students?
- o How do pre-entry activities support students to transition into higher education?
- o How does a 7-week induction period help to support students' transition into higher education?
- o How does ongoing on-course support help to support students' transition into higher education?
- o How does training for assistive technology help to support students' transition into higher education?
- o How does staff training and development impact students' transition into higher education?
- o What adaptations would be needed to successfully deliver the support package?
- o Are there any elements missing from the support offered to aid transition for disabled students?

#### WHAT METHODOLOGY ARE YOU USING?

A qualitative-led study will be carried out. We will be obtaining feedback from participating students and key stakeholders who facilitate the delivery of the support package. This will include focus groups with students and key stakeholders and will also include

demographic and quantitative data regarding which activities and the number of activities that students took part in. This would help to understand how each element of the support package works together to holistically support students. The findings of this evaluation would help to inform the refinement and further development of each activity within the package of support. This would allow evaluators to determine the key range of activities required within a transition period to provide disabled students with the most effective transition support offering.

**RISKS AND LIMITATIONS**

RISK AND LIMITATION	MITIGATION
The staff involved in the activities do not have the capacity to provide support to all students who require it.	College management to be involved to ensure staff have capacity. This will require line managers to review the workload and prioritise support activities.
Students do not engage in support activities available.	To increase awareness of the support available on campus and the benefits of engagement. This could be increasing the promotional activities we conduct and the channels in which we do this, for example, virtual learning environment announcements, posters on campus, and email.
Students do not receive support in a timely fashion.	To ensure sufficient capacity and staff are trained on the importance of timely support.

