

NOTES ON LEARNING & TEACHING WORKSHOP (26.11.03) ON APPROACHES TO "HE ORIENTATION"

1. Presentation by Thomas Kampe - case study of an HE orientation [HEO] programme being piloted in Performing Arts (*see attachment*); main features:
 - the programme revolves around core learning processes - processing information, locating and evaluating materials, academic discussion, presentation, assembling argument, research for assessments, self-reflection
 - while the programme is concentrated in a particular ("HEO") module, some skills are developed or reinforced in parallel and subsequent modules (i.e. an holistic approach to "orientation")
 - students are assigned a peer from their own year group and the two monitor each other's progress
 - the HEO module operates on the basis of team-teaching, which staff find a motivating way to enhance their teaching, and creates a positive ethos

2. Key points raised during discussions:
 - Concern was expressed about the potential danger of "ghettoising" skills development in particular (HEO) modules, whereas it should be embedded throughout the curriculum¹.
 - This danger might be partly avoided if (a) HEO modules employ subject-related tasks; (b) skills are reinforced in parallel modules; and (c) development continues in second semester and subsequently (as in the Performing Arts example).
 - While modularisation and an over-emphasis on content can pose obstacles to such continuity, some resolution could be found in the idea of "assessment-as-learning" - a notion that implies looking holistically at progression in methods of assessment throughout a course.
 - There also needs to be adequate resourcing of the "orientation curriculum" and incentives for lecturers - to enable proper planning, involvement by truly dedicated staff, and initiatives such as team teaching and student peer support. The system of block teaching was also mentioned as an obstacle that limits opportunities to see students more than once a week.
 - We also need to check our presuppositions about students and find out more about them and their needs (such as their aspirations, what they have already learnt, their preferred methods of learning, work and family commitments etc).²
 - Colleagues in Business studies noted certain strategies useful for HEO, e.g.:
 - getting students to work in teams from the start
 - workbooks for students and staff (containing skills materials and subject-based exercises)
 - a bulletin board for students to raise general issues and provide feedback
 - assessment in the form of a portfolio of learning tasks assembled throughout the seminar programme; the need to complete the tasks promotes attendance, but the actual mark is based on a reflective commentary produced at the end
 - Strategies suggested by other colleagues include:
 - self-evaluation checklists to help students monitor their progress on tasks, or think about the objectives of their essays etc
 - structured reflective exercises to aid (i) students to review their learning experiences and (ii) the tutor to monitor their responses and ability with the subject

¹ Note: the UUMS document (p. 29) suggests that "processes supporting orientation may be embedded across the Certificate level" and that the aim is to develop - "along with other modules throughout the course" - a "range of skills, knowledge and abilities necessary for effective study and achievement".

² One colleague who was unable to attend wished to ask *what do we mean by a "well-oriented" student?*