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# Building supportive communities by promoting student-led transition teams



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# Overview

- The TRANSIT tool – David Hope
  - background
  - application in practice
- Next steps:after identification – Avril Dewar
  - a systematic literature review
  - our own attempts at an intervention
- Promoting student-led transition teams – Chiara Ventre
  - their role
  - creating a sustainable intervention



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# The TRANSIT tool

David Hope



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# A University of Edinburgh project

- We would like to thank colleagues from:
  - Maths (Toby Bailey and Pamela Docherty)
  - Veterinary Sciences (Susan Rhind and Jessie Paterson)
  - Institute for Academic Development
  - Principal's Teaching Award Scheme



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# Supporting students BEFORE they fail

- Indicators of being “at-risk” are present very early on in university life
- We identified a series of important markers in maths, medicine and veterinary sciences to support at-risk students before their first summative diet
- These included:
  - Is the student attending classes and tutorials?
  - Have they engaged with formative assessment?
  - Are they doing the necessary admin work?
  - Do they take several attempts to complete mandatory activities (hand washing, mini-tests)?



# TRANSIT

- A tool to identify at-risk students
- Takes these measures and combines them into an “engagement score”
- Interventions for those at-risk can then be targeted



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# Guiding philosophy

- ONLY measures reasonable experts consider important are used (attendance/formative performance/professionalism)
- The model does not run blindly: staff are expected to view the output and where appropriate examine what is already being done for at-risk students
- Follow-up interventions must be sensitive and based on educational practice



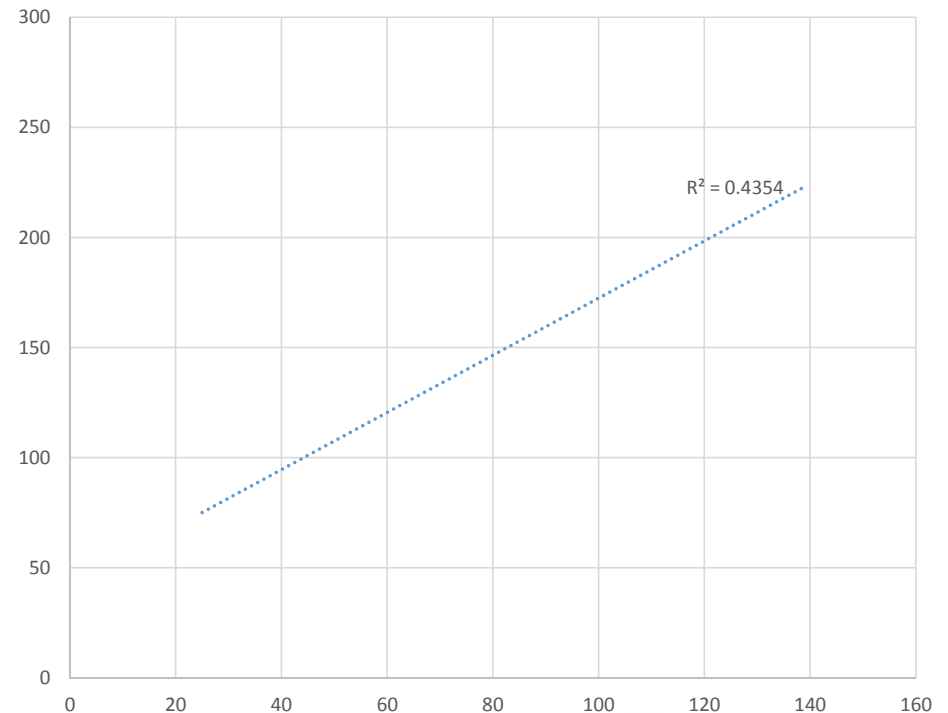
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# Recent TRANSIT performance

- Average of all students = c.200
- Average of “at-risk” = c.151
- A majority of those who performed poorly at the first summative diet were identified ahead of time

Engagement and Summative Performance





# TRANSIT and you

- TRANSIT is open-source and built in *R*
- We are looking to collaborate with other schools to promote early identification of at-risk students
- Email [david.hope@ed.ac.uk](mailto:david.hope@ed.ac.uk) for more information
- Or come along to our bring-and-brag stall later



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# Next steps: after identification

Avril Dewar



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# Knowing and doing

- Early identification of these students is an excellent first step
- BUT what do we do about it?



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# Systematic Review

- Previous systematic review of effectiveness of learning skills intervention on exam performance (Hattie et. al, 1996)
- Over 1500 articles searched, 789 relevant to remedial interventions
- 66 articles met the inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Quality of the studies is generally poor
  - Less than half had well performed analyses
  - Approximately 1/3 had unjustified conclusions
- Effect sizes are generally very small



# Thematic Review

- Participants: the interventions target three main
  - disadvantaged students (social/cultural)
  - academically 'at-risk' and
  - failing/probationary students
- Measures of effect/success:
  - persistence/attrition rates
  - academic performance and
  - application of metacognitive skills following the intervention
- Type of intervention:
  - Academic
  - Pastoral
  - Metacognitive



# Our interventions

- Running for two years across three schools
  - Mathematics (1<sup>st</sup> year only)
  - Veterinary medicine
  - Medicine
- Content is designed with and delivered by near-peers
- Two to three hour session with no staff present
- Focus on application of metacognitive skills to course content
- New this year: threshold concepts



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# Results

- All students found the workshop enjoyable and many changed their study habits as a result of attending
- Attendees felt the project had been helpful and were not distressed by being identified as 'at-risk'
- No significant differences were observed in immediate summative performance of attendees vs. non-attendees
- Subsequent analysis of later exam performance suggests no long-term improvement, however several of the students who failed the first diet of exams have withdrawn from their courses



# Practical issues

- Timing of the workshop
- What content to include
- Training near-peer tutors
- Recruiting near-peers tutors



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# Take-home messages

- Identifying students who are 'at-risk' can be done sensitively
- Addressing metacognitive skill development alone does not seem to have significantly improved performance
- There is still work to be done to identify 'at-risk' students' needs and how to address them
- The workshop and training materials/guidance notes will be available on a free-to-use basis at <http://sefce.net/en-gb/page/transit>
- Practical issues and aspects of near-peer tutors need to be addressed



# Promoting Student-Led Transition Teams

Chiara Ventre



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# Student Perceptions of Transitioning

- Students had difficulty with knowing:
  - What to learn?
  - What depth to learn to?
  - What approach to take?
- There is a tendency to look to older students or peers for guidance and support, particularly during the revision period
- With hindsight, many felt they would have approached that first semester differently



# The Role of a Student-Led Transition Team

- The concept of peer tutoring is well-established within the university with respect to learning course content
- Peer teachers can
  - deliver material in a more accessible form
  - are equipped to give practical advice based on *recent* experience
- A student-led transition team may be better equipped to anticipate difficulties faced by new students and guide them in developing effective strategies in time for their first set of exams



# Practical Aspects

- Aim: to assist new students in the acquisition of the skills to be effective, independent learners
- Target: students identified as at risk of failure
- Intervention: session(s) targeted at study skills, revision tactics and other key issues common amongst new students
- Tutors: year 3-5 students, ideally with a range of transition experiences and learning styles



# Addressing Pitfalls

- Peer tutors may fall into the trap of simply telling students what they “should” learn
- We would aim to avoid this by:
  - Making our aim clear – to facilitate effective independent learning
  - Training materials focussing on learning techniques
  - Pairing new teachers with experienced role models



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# Creating a Sustainable Intervention

- Previous interventions have failed as the interested students graduated
- Sustainability requires
  - Continuous recruitment of year 3 (and 4) students
  - Training over several years
  - 5<sup>th</sup> year students to pass on experience to new peer teachers
- Incentive
  - Appeal to those interested in peer support and education
  - Long-term: competitive programme with teaching accreditation awarded on completion



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# Helping Everyone

- Even those students not identified as at risk of failure may appreciate some help
- Resources prevent delivery of in-depth interventions to every new student
- A poster with general advice from more experienced students might help point students in the right direction



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