

WEST OF SCOTLAND WIDER ACCESS FORUM



The On Track Programme

College Staff Evaluation 2009

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1 Introduction

The On Track project was established in January 2002 by the West of Scotland Wider Access Forum (West Forum) in order to support students progressing from further education colleges into higher education at university or other higher education institutions (HEIs).

Research has indicated that many students making the transition between sectors experience difficulties in the Higher Education Institution (HEI) to which they progress (Gallacher, 2002). Students may experience the learning environment and teaching methods of their HEI as something of a culture shock. A 'skills gap' is reported between transferring and continuing students, with many students who articulate from college found to lack the note taking, critical thinking and research skills assumed of their peers (MacLennan *et al*, 2000: 33).

The On Track project was initiated to address these issues by promoting the concept of the independent learner and providing students with the essential skills that they will require at university.

1.1 Method of delivery

Groups of students about to make, or considering making the transition, from college-based study to degree-level study undertake a 10 hour study skills programme while still at college. The programme is delivered in class at the college by a visiting undergraduate and postgraduate university student.

Between the 2006-07 and 2008-09 academic year the project was active in fifteen colleges in the West of Scotland.

1.2 Role of college staff

On Track's college staff contacts contribute in a number of ways to the operation of the programme. Members of college staff liaise regularly with On Track staff to arrange sessions, often booking rooms and identifying participants. Some have also liaised with college management in support of the programme.

A survey was devised for all college contacts used by the programme in the three most recent academic years (2006-07 to 2008-09), in order to draw on their many combined years of experience and insight into the work of On Track.

2 Methods

A total of 74 members of college staff from fifteen colleges linked with On Track in these academic years. Surveys were sent to each of them. The survey is reproduced as **Appendix A** to this report.

An electronic version of the survey was distributed by email on March 3rd 2009, and this was followed up by a postal version on March 12th for those contacts who had not yet responded.

2.1 Survey details

The staff survey comprised six sections, covering the following topics: personal details; duration and type of involvement with On Track; reflections on On Track's role; reflections on On Track's value; reflections on changes to the programme in the 2008-09 academic year; and wider reflections on transitional support issues related to articulation.

The first five sections of the survey comprised closed questions with space provided for additional remarks. By contrast, the final section of the survey had a qualitative focus and invited further comments of survey participants.

2.2 Sample characteristics

32 completed surveys were returned. One of the surveys was completed jointly by three contacts, so 34 members of college staff participated in the survey overall. The sample comprises 46.0% of all staff contacts involved with On Track between 2006-07 and 2008-09. Thirteen of the fifteen participating colleges were represented in the final sample.

2.3 Data treatment and analysis

The quantifiable data generated from survey responses were coded and inputted into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis. Written, literal responses (string data) were subjected to a separate content analysis.

3 Sample analysis

Before exploring the reflections on the On Track programme volunteered by its college staff contacts, it is important to establish the reliability and representativeness of the survey sample. Survey participants were invited to provide details of the college and department in which they are based, the post title they occupy and the length of time they have been involved with On Track. The responses to these questions are analysed below.

3.1 Colleges represented

Table 1 below presents a college breakdown of the On Track staff contacts who participated in the survey.

Table 1 Survey Participants by College

COLLEGE NAME	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF SAMPLE
Glasgow Metropolitan	6	17.6
Reid Kerr	5	14.7
Motherwell	4	11.8
Cardonald	3	8.8
South Lanarkshire	3	8.8
Stow	3	8.8
Coatbridge	2	5.9
Kilmarnock	2	5.9
Langside	2	5.9
Barony	1	2.9
Central	1	2.9
James Watt	1	2.9
North Glasgow	1	2.9
Clydebank College	-	-
Glasgow College of Nautical Studies	-	-

The only colleges that were not represented in the sample were Clydebank College and Glasgow College of Nautical Studies. Otherwise, a satisfactory spread of representation was achieved.

3.2 Post titles

Table 2 below breaks down the sample according to post title.

Table 2 Survey Participants by Post Title

POST TITLE	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF SAMPLE
Lecturer	9	27.2
Senior lecturer	7	21.2
Course/ curriculum leader	7	21.2
Departmental manager	6	18.2
Assistant head of division	3	9.1
SWAP Access Coordinator	1	3.0
Total	33	100

The above table makes clear the variety and, often, seniority of the college post holders who engage with On Track. Twenty-three of the 33 respondents (69.7%) who answered this question occupied promoted posts within their respective colleges. This points to the important role On Track plays in colleges.

3.3 Departments represented

Table 3, below, breaks down the sample according to college department.

Table 3 Survey Participants by College Department

COLLEGE DEPARTMENT	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF SAMPLE
Science, health and care	12	37.5
Business	5	15.6
Communications and media	3	9.4
Sports	3	9.4
Beauty	3	9.4
Hospitality	2	6.3
Built environment	1	3.1
Education	1	3.1
Engineering	1	3.1
Student services	1	3.1
Total	32	100

The data show that On Track has had particular success in recent years in reaching groups of nursing students. Science, health and care staff accounted for more than one-third (37.5%) of respondents. The second largest group was college staff from business

departments which represented 15.6% of those who responded to the question. In addition, the survey sample comprises representatives of a diverse range of college subject areas, such as communications and media, sports and beauty (all 9.4%). This suggests a great interest in and involvement of a wide range of college subject areas in the On Track programme.

3.4 Duration of association

The On Track project was established in January 2002. Table 4 below illustrates the significant duration of experience of On Track possessed by the survey sample.

Table 4 Survey Participants by Duration of Involvement

DURATION OF INVOLVEMENT	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF SAMPLE
Less than 2 years	6	18.2
2-3 years	9	27.3
4-5 years	12	36.4
More than 5 years	6	18.2
Total	33	100

Twenty-seven out of 33 respondents who answered this question (81.9%) had been associated with the programme for more than two years, with an average involvement of around three and a half years. Indeed, 18 respondents (54.6%) have enjoyed more than four years of On Track experience. This implies a continuous interest in and commitment to deliver the programme. It also can be inferred from the data that the survey sample is well-equipped to reflect on the On Track programme from a position of knowledge and experience.

3.5 Level of involvement in On Track programme

That the survey sample is well-equipped to reflect on the On Track programme from a position of knowledge and experience is not only suggested by the duration of association with On Track but also the level of involvement in the programme (Table 5).

Table 5 Form of Involvement in On Track

FORM OF INVOLVEMENT	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF SAMPLE
Encouraging students to attend	32	94.1
Liaison with On Track office	31	91.2
Booking rooms for On Track sessions	30	88.2
Identification of student participants	29	85.3
Liaison with On Track tutors	29	85.3
Sitting in on sessions	11	32.4
Liaison with college management	7	20.6

The above findings demonstrate clearly that the vast majority of survey participants perform a variety of roles in relation to the On Track programme. College staff contacts were heavily involved with liaising with the On Track office and tutors (91.2% and 85.3%, respectively), identifying students and encouraging them to attend (85.3% and 94.1%, respectively), and booking rooms for sessions to take place (88.2%).

The data show that, although not directly involved in the delivery of the programme, the sample was involved in On Track in a number of ways, which require good knowledge of the programme. In addition, a significant minority of just under one-third of respondents (32.4%) indicated that they sit in on sessions as well as helping to arrange them.

3.6 Conclusion

To conclude, the survey sample represents a diverse range of participating colleges and college subject areas. Many staff contacts occupied posts of significant seniority and most exhibited a substantial duration of experience of the programme. In addition, the extent and variety of the contributions made to the programme by its college contacts reinforces the conclusion that the survey participants are well-placed to provide insightful reflection on the role and value of On Track.

The following chapter will discuss, in turn, the sample's reflection on On Track's role and value, respondents' view on the changes to the programme in the 2008-09 academic year and wider reflections on transitional support issues related to articulation.

4 Impact of On Track

In order to establish the distinctiveness and necessity of different elements of the On Track programme, survey participants were asked to indicate whether they considered particular activities to fill a deficit or replicate existing work (Table 6).

Table 6 Necessity of On Track Programme Elements by % of Sample

ELEMENT OF PROGRAMME	FILLS A DEFICIT	REPLICATES EXISTING WORK	DON'T KNOW	NOT STATED
Demystification of university life and study	88.2	5.9	5.9	-
Overall necessity	73.5	-	20.6	5.9
Learning and study skills sessions	64.7	23.5	8.8	2.9
Confidence boosting	61.8	20.6	14.7	2.9
Meeting institutional goals	64.7	14.7	17.6	2.9
Decision-making/ guidance provision	58.8	26.5	11.8	2.9

4.1 Demystification of university life and study

The vast majority of the sample (88.2%) considered On Track to fill a deficit with the work it does to demystify university life and study for learners in transition. This confirms the important role On Track plays in smoothing the transition from further to higher education, and encouraging realistic views of university life and study.

4.2 Overall necessity

Almost three-quarters of survey participants (73.5%) believed On Track to fill a deficit overall. None of those surveyed believed On Track to be replicating existing provision overall, although one in five (20.6%) did not know. The latter may point to a lack of detailed knowledge of the course programme in the sample.

4.3 Learning and study skills sessions

Almost two-thirds of the sample (64.8%) considered On Track's learning and study skills sessions to fill a sectoral deficit. Almost one-quarter (23.5%) disagreed, believing this work to replicate existing provision.

4.4 Confidence boosting

More than three-fifths of the sample (61.8%) considered On Track's confidence-boosting work to fill a deficit. Just over one-fifth of the sample (20.6%) felt it replicated existing work in the field, while a sizeable minority (14.7%) felt unable to answer either way.

4.5 Meeting institutional goals

Almost two-thirds (64.8%) of the sample believed the On Track programme to contribute distinctively to their institutional mission. Less than one respondent in six (14.7%) thought On Track replicated existing provision in this context. A sizeable minority (17.6%) were unable to answer this question either way.

4.6 Decision-making/ guidance provision

Almost three-fifths of the sample (58.8%) took the view that On Track fills a deficit in its provision of decision-making and guidance support to college learners. A significant minority of more than one-quarter (26.5%) considered On Track's work in this area to replicate existing provision, however. More than one respondent in ten (11.8%) felt unable to answer this question.

4.7 Conclusion

The majority of the survey sample believed On Track's work to fill a deficit in every area, although the size of the majority differed between elements. There was near-unanimity on the distinctiveness of On Track's demystification work. A decisive majority considered the programme to fill a deficit overall. In the four remaining categories, around three-fifths of the sample believed On Track's work to be distinctive in each case.

However, significant minorities of around one respondent in four considered On Track's decision-making/guidance provision and learning and study skills work to replicate existing work in the field. Similarly, around one respondent in five believed the confidence-building aspect of On Track to duplicate existing work in the field. This seems to suggest that, while filling a clear deficit, these three aspects of the programme are covered by other initiatives as well; indicating the significance of helping students with decision-making, learning and study skills, providing guidance and increasing confidence. In contrast, the programme's role in demystifying higher education clearly fills a deficit which has not been addressed by other

initiatives in the field. Significantly, none of the survey participants believed the programme's work as a whole to replicate existing provision.

A significant number of respondents felt unable to answer the question. Some survey participants found it particularly difficult to assess the overall necessity of the programme, suggesting that some respondents lacked sufficient knowledge of the programme to answer that question.

5 On Track's value

Survey participants were asked to reflect on the extent to which the On Track programme is valued within the sector. Participants were invited to rate the programme's standing with various relevant groups on a five-point scale from 'very poor' to 'very good'. The results were as follows:

Table 7 Value of On Track Programme by % of Sample

ELEMENT OF PROGRAMME	VERY POOR	POOR	AVERAGE	GOOD	VERY GOOD	NO RESPONSE
Reputation with college teaching staff	-	-	8.8	50	38.2	2.9
Reputation among students	-	5.9	8.8	61.8	23.5	-
Effectiveness in supporting learner transitions	-	-	17.6	38.2	44.1	-
Popularity with participants	-	14.7	11.8	47.1	26.5	-
Reputation with college management	-	-	8.8	35.3	20.6	35.3
Overall effectiveness	-	8.8	14.7	47.1	29.4	-

5.1 Reputation with college teaching staff

The vast majority of the sample (88.2%) considered On Track to have a 'good' or 'very good' reputation among college teaching staff. None of those surveyed believed that the programme's reputation was 'poor' or 'very poor'. However, a minority of 8.8% viewed its reputation as 'average'.

5.2 Reputation among students

Again, the vast majority (85.3%) of the sample considered the programme to have a positive reputation among students, with more than three-fifth (61.8%) of the sample as a whole

viewing On Track's reputation with students as a 'good' one. A small minority viewed the programme's reputation as 'average' (8.8%) or 'poor' (5.9%).

5.3 Effectiveness in supporting learner transitions

Similarly, a significant majority of respondents (82.3%) rated the programme's effectiveness as either 'good' or 'very good'. Indeed, nearly half of the entire sample (44.1%) indicated that the programme was 'very good' at supporting learner transitions. The remaining 17.6% of survey participants considered the programme to be of average effectiveness, with none of the sample rating the programme as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

5.4 Popularity with participants

Nearly three-quarters of the sample (73.6%) considered the programme's popularity with participants to be 'good' or 'very good', although the latter category only comprised a little over one-quarter (26.5%) of respondents. Almost one respondent in six (14.7%) felt On Track's popularity levels were 'poor' among student participants, with around one respondent in ten suggesting that the programme's popularity was 'average'.

5.5 Reputation with college management

Slightly over half (55.9%) of the sample considered On Track to have a 'good' or 'very good' reputation with college managers. None of the sample deemed the programme's reputation to be 'poor' or 'very poor'. A substantial minority of the sample, comprising more than one-third of respondents (35.3%), were unable to answer this question, however. Although many respondents were in relatively senior positions at college only 17.6% were in senior managerial posts. Therefore, a significant proportion of the sample may have found it difficult to answer this question.

5.6 On Track's overall effectiveness

It is positive that more than three-quarters of the sample (76.5%) considered the programme's overall effectiveness to be 'good' or 'very good'. However, a small minority of less than one respondent in ten (8.8%) considered On Track's overall effectiveness levels to be 'poor', while almost one respondent in six (14.7%) felt its overall effectiveness was 'average'.

5.7 Conclusion

There was near unanimity among the survey sample that On Track enjoys a positive reputation among college teachers and students. In addition, the vast majority of respondents took the view that On Track supports learner transitions effectively and enjoys significant popularity with the student participants who go through the programme. Similarly, the survey suggests that the programme enjoys significant popularity among college management.

The positive feedback from college staff confirms the significance of the On Track programme in the widening access field. However, evidence suggests that On Track needs to somewhat raise its profile in terms of improving the popularity of the programme with participants, effectively supporting learner transitions and its overall effectiveness.

6 Changes to the programme in 2008-2009

At the start of the 2008-2009 academic year On Track made a transition of its own.

Between its launch in 2002 and the end of the 2007-08 session, On Track was delivered by means of five two-hour sessions of generic study skills support and demystification of degree-level study. As such, all participants worked through the same material.

Following internal and external evaluation of On Track's work, and after sustained engagement with the West Forum and other key stakeholders, a new two-stage structure was developed to enable programme delivery to have a greater focus on particular subject areas. The new programme comprises a general introduction to university life and study in the autumn term (stage one), followed by a subject-specific programme next term (stage two).

Programme evaluation had identified decision-making as a potential growth area for On Track. Therefore, the content of the On Track programme was amended in order to place a greater emphasis on supporting learner decision-making.

On Track's college staff contacts were asked for their reflections on the above changes to the On Track programme in order to gauge college staff's support for the new structure of the programme.

6.1 Two-stage programme

Survey participants were asked how they feel about the new two-stage structure of the programme. The findings are summarised in Table 8 below.

Table 8 Views of New Two-stage On Track Structure

VIEW OF TWO-STAGE STRUCTURE	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF SAMPLE
Very supportive	4	12.1
Quite supportive	10	30.3
Wait and see	6	18.2
Quite opposed	3	9.1
Strongly opposed	-	-
Don't know	10	30.3
Total	33	100

The above data suggest that relatively few survey participants (9.1% of the sample) professed themselves to be opposed to the new programme structure, and none of them were 'strongly opposed'. Slightly over two-fifths (42.4%) of the sample were either 'very-' or 'quite supportive' of the change, while one respondent in six (18.2%) wanted to 'wait and see' how the new structure bedded in. A significant minority (30.3%) of the sample felt that they were unable to answer this question; possibly because survey participants' lacked sufficient knowledge of the programme's new structure and/or had not been involved with On Track since the new structure has been introduced (as stated in Table 10 below, this applied to five respondents).

When the 'don't know' data are removed from the above responses, 60.9% of those answering were supportive of the new structure while 13.0% were (quite) opposed to it.

6.2 Decision-making focus

Survey participants were asked how they feel about On Track's greater emphasis on supporting learner decision-making (Table 9).

Table 9 View of Greater Emphasis on Learner Decision-making

VIEW OF DECISION-MAKING EMPHASIS	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF SAMPLE
Very supportive	6	18.8
Quite supportive	10	31.3
Wait and see	5	15.6
Quite opposed	-	-
Strongly opposed	-	-
Don't know	11	34.4
Total	32	100

The above data reveals that half of the entire sample (50.1%) were 'very-' or 'quite supportive' of the greater emphasis placed within the revised On Track programme on learner decision-making. Less than one respondent in six preferred to 'wait and see' how this change was implemented before coming to a firm view. Significantly, none of the sample professed themselves opposed to the change in emphasis. However, a significant minority, comprising two-third of the sample (34.4%), were unable to answer this question.

When the 'don't know' data are removed from the above responses, 76.2% of those answering were supportive of the new emphasis on decision-making.

6.3 Further comments

Survey participants were invited to add any further comments they wished to make about the recent changes to the On Track programme. Eighteen survey participants provided additional remarks on the following themes:

Table 10 Additional Comments on On Track Changes

PERSPECTIVE ON CHANGES	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF ALL COMMENTS
Positive about two-stage model	4	22.2
Positive about changes in general	3	16.7
Too early to say	3	16.7
Opposed to two-stage model	1	5.6
Opposed to decision-making emphasis	1	5.6
Feedback on student experience	1	5.6
Not involved this year	5	27.8

Four respondents indicated their approval of the new two-stage model of delivery. The following quotes reflect the content of the comments provided by survey participants:

“The two-stage programme corrects an issue previously identified. The timing had been very difficult to gauge – too early and it didn’t seem relevant to students, later sessions much of the information had already been covered e.g. study skills. On Track can now assist students to relate to potential problems.”

“Subject-specific tutors are a must.”

Three respondents indicated their approval of the changes to the programme in more general terms, with one respondent noting that it *“seems to have been most beneficial”*.

A further three respondents felt it was too early for them to come to a judgment about the effectiveness of the recent changes to the programme.

Two respondents offered constructive criticisms of the recent revisions to the delivery model and programme content. In terms of the two-stage model, one respondent offered the following observation:

“Two stages does not fit very well into the college curriculum and guidance delivery.”

The second respondent observed:

“Decision making sessions duplicate guidance work already covered. If these sessions come too late in the session they could be a waste of time for students.”

It should be noted in respect of the latter quote that a significant minority of survey participants (26.5%) indicated that guidance and decision-making support had duplicated existing delivery within their colleges, but this was not uniformly the case across the sector. It may be argued that a more nuanced bespoke approach to delivery, informed more fully by the particularities of individual institutions, could be adopted in future in order to overcome this issue.

Finally, one respondent offered an reflection on his or her own student's experience of the new programme ("*students voted with their feet and although they were positive at first they did not come back for stage two*") while the remaining five respondents indicated that they had not been involved in the programme since the changes to its structure were implemented. It should be noted in respect of the latter quote that a significant minority (14.7%) of respondents stated that the programme's popularity with participants was 'poor'. This issue is explored in greater detail in the learner evaluation.

6.4 Conclusion

The above data makes clear that On Track's college staff contacts are firmly supportive of the increased emphasis placed within the revised programme on supporting learner decision-making, and broadly supportive of the new two-stage structure. However, three out of 13 respondents who were involved in the programme since the changes to its structure were implemented stated that it is too early to comment on the changes, while one, respectively, held negative views on the two-stage model and the decision-making emphasis. Part of this critique has been addressed by On Track. Since the 2009-10 academic year a more flexible delivery format has been adapted. This allows students to choose the elements of the programme and time they want to take part in the different stages.

7 Wider reflections

Where the first five sections of the survey sought to capture quantifiable data wherever possible, a different approach was adopted in the final section in order to gather in-depth information from participants. Survey participants were asked six questions about the landscape of articulation and transitions support in general, and On Track's position within it. All six were open questions. The information, then, was coded and summarised under the different categories mentioned.

7.1 Students in transition

The first two questions in this section sought to establish the views of college staff on the respective advantages and disadvantages possessed by students entering degree study with advanced standing from college.

7.1.1 Strengths

Survey participants were first asked the following question:

“Can you identify any particular advantages or strengths possessed by students entering degree study with advanced standing from a college?”

29 participants answered this question, and in total 35 distinct points were raised within these 29 contributions (Table 11).

Table 11 Strengths of Articulating Students

ISSUE RAISED	NO OF TIMES RAISED	% OF ALL POINTS RAISED (N=35)
Practical skills/ subject knowledge	9	25.7
Confidence	6	17.1
Level of preparation	4	11.4
Self-direction/ time management	4	11.4
Study skills	4	11.4
Maturity	3	8.6
Commitment to subject of study	3	8.6
Links with staff	2	5.7

The data above illustrates the broad range of strengths possessed by articulating students. The area of strength most frequently cited by survey participants was the level of practical ability and subject knowledge with which students are equipped by the time they reach degree-level study. This issue accounted for more than one-quarter (25.7%) of all points raised by the survey sample.

Several survey participants highlighted personal or attitudinal attributes commonly possessed by articulating students. Their levels of self-confidence (17.1% of all points raised), maturity (8.6%) and commitment to their chosen subject (8.6%) were singled out by college staff. In total, these issues accounted for more than one-third (34.3%) of all points raised by the survey sample.

Several survey participants noted a heightened degree of practical preparedness among college students progressing to degree-level study. Respondents identified a high level of preparation (11.4%), self-direction/time management skills (11.4%) and well-developed study skills (11.4%) among such learners. In total, these issues accounted for more than one-third (34.3%) of all points raised by the survey sample.

Finally, 5.7% of the issues raised by respondents related to effective links college students are able to broker with university staff.

The comments of survey participants confirm that college students progressing to degree-level study are well-equipped to enter higher education. They have the necessary practical skills and determination to succeed at a higher education institution (HEI). However, there are also challenges. These are discussed below.

7.1.2 Challenges

The second question in this section was as follows:

“Can you identify any areas of comparative disadvantage or weakness that college students have to cope with when they progress to degree-level study with advanced standing?”

27 participants answered this question, and in total 33 distinct points were raised within these 27 contributions (Table 12).

Table 12 Challenges Faced by Articulating Students

ISSUE RAISED	NO OF TIMES RAISED	% OF ALL POINTS RAISED (N=33)
Less personal tutor support	7	21.2
Autonomous learning	6	18.2
Fitting in to established class groups	5	15.2
Study skills/ critical thinking	5	15.2
Size of institution and classes	4	12.1
Fear of the unknown	2	6.1
Other issues	4	12.1

The above data suggests a reasonable consensus exists among the survey sample on the challenges faced by students progressing with advanced standing to degree-level study.

The challenge most frequently cited by survey participants was the decrease in personal tutor support experienced at university. More than one-fifth of all issues raised by the survey sample (21.2%) related to this subject. Respondents noted that college offers a greater degree of one-to-one support, so the more anonymous manner in which students are obliged to relate to university lecturers may come as something of a 'culture shock'.

A number of respondents reflected on teaching and learning issues that can make it difficult to cope with when college students progress to degree-level study. In particular, respondents reflected on the level of autonomy required of learners at university (18.2% of all points raised) and the study skills and critical thinking expected at that level (15.2%).

Several respondents expressed concerns that college students experience a degree of alienation in the HEI environment. The challenge of fitting into an already-established class group (15.2% of all points raised) and the much greater size of the institution in general and the classes in particular (12.1%) were identified as hazards to articulating students. In this respect two respondents observed that college students often have to combat a degree of fear of the unknown in making the transition to degree-level study (6.1% of all points raised).

In addition to the major issues discussed above, a number of other points were raised by the survey sample, including that articulating students may lack self-confidence. College students were considered by one respondent to have particular life commitments that present challenges to their articulation process.

Another respondent identified an element of 'inverted snobbery' among college students making the transition to university.

Finally, one respondent indicated his or her view that college students have no weaknesses vis-à-vis other students.

Overall, the survey sample identified a wide range of challenges faced by articulating students. The issues raised by respondents can help to understand the difficulties these students may face when entering higher education, and the level of support they need. Most importantly, articulating students may require personal tutor support when studying at degree-level. They also need to be integrated in university life to prevent feelings of alienation.

Interestingly, while respondents observed a high level of practical preparedness among college students progressing to degree-level study, including the level of study skills possessed by these students, survey participants also stated that students' study skills and level of critical thinking pose a challenge to articulating students. This indicates that, despite the preparedness of articulating students, support may still be necessary for some students once they have progressed to higher education.

7.2 On Track's development

The third and fourth questions in the final section of the survey gathered the views of the sample on the future direction of the On Track programme.

7.2.1 Embedding

Survey participants were first asked the following question:

"To what extent do you believe the work of On Track could be embedded within the participating colleges and HEIs themselves in the future?"

26 survey participants responded to this question and in total 28 distinct points were raised within these 26 contributions (Table 13).

Table 13 Views on Embedding On Track

ISSUE RAISED	NO OF TIMES RAISED	% OF ALL POINTS RAISED (N=28)
Retain <i>status quo</i>	9	32.1
Could be embedded	6	21.4
Embed into guidance provision	6	21.4
Embed within HN programmes	3	10.7
Should be embedded	2	7.1
Combine with careers support	1	3.6
Already embedded	1	3.6

The survey sample identified a number of ways in which elements of the On Track programme could move towards embedding within the college sector.

More than one point in five (21.4%) made in response to this question related to embedding On Track's work within college guidance. The following quotes reflect the content of these contributions:

"It could be embedded at stages within our one-hour weekly guidance delivery."

"Possible link with the guidance delivery throughout the year rather than in a block."

A further 10.7% of the points made by the sample in response to this question related to embedding within the context of Higher National Qualifications (HNQs). For example, one respondent suggested that On Track could usefully pursue *"involvement in personal development planning and the HN Graded Unit."* Another respondent suggested that On Track's work would benefit from *"liaison with the college careers service."*

In addition to these specific recommendations, 21.4% of the points raised were more general indications that On Track's work *could* be embedded. This is expressed in the following quotes:

"Consideration could be given to integrating On Track into the timetable."

"If funding and time allowed this would be good for classes who will go on to HEIs."

“This would be possible, particularly in colleges where learning support staff provide study skills workshops.”

A further 7.1% of responses to this question reflected the view that On Track’s work *should* be embedded.

One further respondent indicated that to a certain extent On Track’s work has already been embedded within his or her college’s SWAP Preparation for Higher Education work.

In total, more than two-thirds (67.9%) of the responses given to this question reflected the view that potential exists for a degree of embedding for at least particular elements of On Track’s work in particular contexts. The remaining 32.1% of responses were decisively in favour of the *status quo*, which confirms the acceptance of the programme in its current form among college staff.

7.2.2 Additional role(s)

The second question in this section was as follows:

“Is there any additional role that you believe could be played by On Track in the future?”

18 survey participants answered this question. The responses are summarised in Table 14 below:

Table 14 Additional Roles for On Track

ROLE IDENTIFIED	NO OF TIMES RAISED	% OF ALL POINTS RAISED (N=18)
None	11	61.1
Campus visit	3	16.7
Access to resources	1	5.6
Aftercare	1	5.6
Note-taking	1	5.6
Target Level 6 learners	1	5.6

As can be deduced from the above table, members of the survey sample suggested relatively few additional roles for On Track to perform. In fact, more than three-fifths (61.1%) of those answering this question indicated that their preference for the status quo.

Among the suggestions that were made by survey participants, two related to activities that already take place within the On Track programme, namely campus visits and support for note-taking.

The remaining three suggestions merit consideration. One respondent requested “*access to resources, on line training, tutorials and revision techniques from the course*”. This seems a suggestion worthy of support. It may be argued that making the On Track materials available in the public domain would help the programme and partner colleges to address concerns about duplication of provision, while at the same time serving to market the programme’s high-quality resources to potential new audiences. A review of the programme’s website in light of these findings is currently underway.

Another respondent recommended that On Track should “*offer support to students when they move on to university.*” To date, the programme’s thinking has been that responsibility for retention passes to the receiving institution after the On Track participant progresses to degree-level study. However, given the challenges articulating students may face when entering high education, ongoing support for these learners is worth reconsidering.

Finally, one respondent suggested a potential new group of participants:

“My HNC and HND students felt that the material covered by the OT tutors had already been delivered as part of their course units - Presentation Skills, Communications and Graded Unit Research – so possibly rather than targeting HN students On Track should consider students at Higher (level 6) who want to progress to university rather than HN level.”

We have already noted the fact that duplication of provision is not uniform across the sector, so the premise of this respondent’s point will not be true of every college cohort. Nevertheless, it may be argued that commonalities exist between study skills support programmes at various Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels. It may be useful to explore the possibilities for pooling resources between widening access and student support initiatives across the sectors where these similarities are identified.

7.3 Articulation

The final two questions in the survey gathered the views of the sample on the provision of articulation routes between college and degree-level study in their respective subject areas.

7.3.1 Articulation routes

Survey participants were first asked the following question:

“How would you assess the provision of articulation routes from your subject area into degree-level study?”

28 survey participants answered this question. Table 15 summarises the responses given.

Table 15 Assessment of Articulation Routes

ASSESSMENT OF ROUTES	NO OF TIMES RAISED	% OF ALL POINTS RAISED (N=28)
Very good	12	42.9
Good	7	25.0
Not standardised	6	21.4
Could be better	2	7.1
Adequate	1	3.6

The data above reveals that a sizeable plurality of the sample (42.9%) considered the provision of articulation routes in their subject area to be ‘very good’; while a significant majority (67.9%) consider provision to be ‘good’ at least.

One respondent (3.6% of all responses) indicated that provision was ‘adequate’ in his or her subject area, while a small minority (7.1%) indicated that articulation provision ‘could be better’.

Finally, slightly more than one response in five reflected the view that articulation routes were not standardised or uniform in their respective subject disciplines, and articulation arrangements are often *ad hoc*. The following quotes illustrate the points raised on this topic:

“Confusion exists between different degrees as to level of entry, for example students are quoted 1st year, 2nd year and 3rd year entry in different cases.”

“There is no college-wide policy for articulation. This area is left for individual members of staff to offer guidance and support.”

Overall, we may conclude that members of the survey sample were satisfied in the main with the provision of articulation routes in their subject areas.

7.3.2 Subject mapping

The second question in this section was as follows:

“How well does the Higher National level of study in your subject area map into the content of relevant degree courses?”

28 survey participants answered this question (Table 16).

Table 16 Effectiveness of Subject-mapping

ASSESSMENT OF SUBJECT-MAPPING	NO OF TIMES RAISED	% OF ALL POINTS RAISED (N=28)
Excellent/ very good	15	53.6
Effective/ good	6	21.4
Inefficient	5	17.9
Improving	1	3.6
Limited	1	3.6

A majority (53.5%) of those survey participants who answered this question were of the view that the course content in their subject areas maps very well into equivalent courses at degree level. A further 21.4% of respondents considered subject mapping to be effective. Overall, 75.0% of respondents took a positive view of subject mapping in their particular disciplines. The following quotes illustrate the content of these responses:

“Maps in well – the course is designed to articulate in to degree level study.”

“Very well – we have altered the content of the course this year at GCU’s request.”

“Where we have agreements it maps very well. We work with the institutions to ensure this.”

Slightly more than one response in six (17.9%) reflected the view that subject mapping was inefficient in certain areas. For example, one respondent noted that *“the coursework does not always map very well and there are gaps in provision”*.

Finally, one respondent considered subject mapping to be improving in his or her area, while one further respondent considered subject mapping to be ‘limited’.

Overall, the findings indicate that survey participants were satisfied in the main that the course content in their subject areas maps well into equivalent courses at degree level.

8 Conclusion

The survey sample represented a diverse range of participating colleges and college subject areas. Many staff contacts occupied posts of significant seniority and most exhibited a substantial duration of experience of the programme.

The majority of the survey sample believed On Track's work to fill a deficit in every area, although the size of the majority differed between elements. There was near-unanimity on the distinctiveness of On Track's demystification work. A decisive majority considered the programme to fill a deficit overall. However, some survey participants felt that the programme's decision-making/guidance provision, its learning and study skills work and the confidence-building aspect of On Track duplicate existing work in the field.

On Track enjoys a positive reputation among college teachers and students. Most respondents took the view that On Track supports learner transitions effectively and enjoys significant popularity with the student participants who go through the programme. Similarly, the survey suggests that the programme enjoys significant popularity among college management.

On Track's college staff contacts are firmly supportive of the increased emphasis placed within the revised programme on supporting learner decision-making, and broadly supportive of the new two-stage structure.

The comments of survey participants confirm that college students progressing to degree-level study are well-equipped to enter higher education. They have the necessary practical skills and determination to succeed at a higher education institution (HEI). However, there are also challenges. These are discussed below. However, the survey sample also identified a range of challenges faced by articulating students. Most importantly, articulating students may require personal tutor support when studying at degree-level. In addition, they need to be integrated in university life to prevent feelings of alienation.

More than two-thirds of survey participants suggested that potential exists for a degree of embedding for at least particular elements of On Track's work in particular contexts; while almost one respondent in three were decisively in favour of the *status quo*, which confirms the acceptance of the programme in its current form among college staff.

Members of the survey sample suggested relatively few additional roles for On Track to perform. Among the suggestions that were made by survey participants, two related to activities that already take place within the On Track programme, namely campus visits and support for note-taking.

The survey sample was satisfied in the main with the provision of articulation routes in their subject areas and the mapping of course content in their subject areas into equivalent courses at degree level.

8.1 Lessons for the future

The positive feedback from college staff confirms the significance of the On Track programme in the widening access field. However, evidence suggests that On Track needs to somewhat raise its profile in terms of improving the popularity of the programme with participants, effectively supporting learner transitions and its overall effectiveness.

A few survey participants held negative views on the programme's two-stage model and the decision-making emphasis. Part of this critique has been addressed by On Track. Since the 2009-10 academic year a more flexible delivery format has been adapted. This allows students to choose the elements of the programme and time they want to take part in the different stages.

A request of one respondent for *access to online resources and training* is currently addressed by the programme leader.

References

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Appendix A

ON TRACK EVALUATION 2009

COLLEGE STAFF CONTACTS



THE ON TRACK PROGRAMME IS FUNDED BY THE WEST OF SCOTLAND WIDER ACCESS FORUM, A WIDENING ACCESS ORGANISATION. QUESTIONNAIRE FEEDBACK FROM INSTITUTIONAL STAFF CONTACTS LIKE YOU HELPS US AT THE WEST FORUM TO ASSESS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR ACTIVITIES AND IMPROVE THEM FOR THE FUTURE. WE WOULD BE GRATEFUL IF YOU COULD ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT YOUR PERSONAL DETAILS WILL REMAIN STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL AND YOU WILL NOT BE IDENTIFIED IN ANY FUTURE EVALUATION REPORTS. YOUR RESPONSES WILL NOT BE SEEN BY THE ON TRACK TEAM.

PERSONAL DETAILS

Your name: _____ Post title: _____

College name: _____ Department: _____

INVOLVEMENT WITH ON TRACK

How long have you been involved with On Track? _____

In which ways have you been involved with On Track?

LIAISON WITH ON TRACK OFFICE <input type="checkbox"/>	IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS <input type="checkbox"/>	ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO ATTEND <input type="checkbox"/>	LIAISON WITH ON TRACK TUTORS <input type="checkbox"/>
BOOKING ROOMS FOR ON TRACK SESSIONS <input type="checkbox"/>	SITTING IN ON SESSIONS <input type="checkbox"/>	LIAISON WITH COLLEGE MANAGEMENT <input type="checkbox"/>	OTHER (PLEASE GIVE DETAILS):

ON TRACK'S ROLE

What is your opinion of On Track in terms of the following: *(Please mark your choices with an X)*

	FILLS A DEFICIT	REPLICATES EXISTING WORK	DON'T KNOW
DECISION-MAKING/ GUIDANCE PROVISION?			
DEMYSTIFICATION OF UNIVERSITY LIFE AND STUDY?			
LEARNING AND STUDY SKILLS SESSIONS?			
CONFIDENCE BOOSTING?			
MEETING INSTITUTIONAL GOALS?			
OVERALL NECESSITY?			

ON TRACK'S VALUE

What is your opinion of On Track in terms of the following: *(Please mark your choices with an X)*

	VERY POOR	POO R	AVERAG E	GOOD	VERY GOOD
EFFECTIVENESS IN SUPPORTING LEARNER TRANSITIONS?					
REPUTATION AMONG STUDENTS?					
REPUTATION WITH COLLEGE TEACHING STAFF?					
REPUTATION WITH COLLEGE MANAGEMENT?					
POPULARITY WITH PARTICIPANTS?					
OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS?					

In the 2008-09 session, On Track has moved to a new two-stage structure comprising a general introduction to university life and study (stage one) and a more subject-specific programme thereafter (stage two). How do you feel about this change? *(Please tick)*

VERY SUPPORTIVE <input type="checkbox"/>	QUITE SUPPORTIVE <input type="checkbox"/>	WAIT AND SEE <input type="checkbox"/>	QUITE OPPOSED <input type="checkbox"/>	STRONGLY OPPOSED <input type="checkbox"/>	DON'T KNOW <input type="checkbox"/>
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(PLEASE TURN OVER)

In the 2008-09 session, On Track has amended the content of its programme in order to place a greater emphasis on supporting learner decision-making. How do you feel about this change? *(Please tick)*

VERY	QUITE SUPPORTIVE	WAIT AND SEE	QUITE	STRONGLY OPPOSED	DON'T KNOW
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SUPPORTIVE <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	OPPOSED <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Please add any further comments you wish to make about the recent changes to the On Track programme in the space provided:

WIDER QUESTIONS

Can you identify any particular advantages or strengths possessed by students entering degree study with advanced standing from a college?

Can you identify any areas of comparative disadvantage or weakness that college students have to cope with when they progress to degree-level study with advanced standing?

To what extent do you believe the work of On Track could be embedded within the participating colleges and HEIs themselves in the future?

Is there any additional role that you believe could be played by On Track in the future?

(If appropriate to your own role)

How would you assess the provision of articulation routes from your subject area into degree-level study?

How well does the Higher National level of study in your subject area map into the content of relevant degree courses?