

✦ Pre-University Skills Course

Preparing pupils for university



The transition between A-level and undergraduate work is challenging and can be daunting. With this in mind, a team of school teachers and university lecturers devised an academic study skills programme that is intended both to facilitate the move to undergraduate studies and enable pupils to work most effectively within their A-Levels. We have found that those students who arrive at university with these additional skills are more likely to perform well and adapt successfully to university life. Those lacking in such skills, however, are less able to respond to new forms of independent learning and scholarship and, in fact, often under-perform and lose confidence. We feel strongly that pupils and students alike would benefit hugely from being introduced to some of the key skills that will be required of them at university while they are still at school.

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About the Course

The A-level syllabus often makes it difficult for teachers to find the time and opportunity to develop the complementary range of study skills available through this Pre-University Skills Course. The Course is designed to be taught alongside General Studies programmes and is a generic teaching resource, geared towards Arts, Humanities and Science subjects and encouraging a dialogue between the disciplines. While there will be many points of overlap between the approaches taken, the pupils will also learn to understand and appreciate the significant differences between Arts, Humanities and Science methodologies.

The Course is devised as a series of eight lessons for pupils in Years 12 or 13. It offers pupils the chance to re-engage with and substantially build upon the skills work carried out until Year 9 (encompassed in the APP scale). In this way, the course helps to enhance the writing and analytical skills required at A-level in addition to preparing the pupils for undergraduate studies.

Benefits to the pupils

Research has shown that students are more likely to flourish if they have both an understanding of what is to be expected of them and prior experience of work that is geared towards the demands of undergraduate studies. They will feel more able to embark on the transition from school to university, more open to the new challenges that lie ahead and more able to realise their academic potential. Such work also reduces the risk of students dropping out of their degree courses. In short, they will embark upon their undergraduate life motivated and confident about their abilities.

'The problem with inaccurate prior perceptions is that it contributes to a disengagement from the educational (and social) aspects of university life. Such disengagement can have a detrimental effect on academic performance and the personal and social development of the individual. This, in turn, may have a direct impact on student retention.'

Lowe and Cook (2003) Mind the gap: are students prepared for higher education?
Journal of Further and Higher Education
27:53-76

Course Objectives

The aims of the course are to:

- assist students in the transition from school to university;
- provide skills that will help pupils with A-levels;
- make school pupils aware of skills they will need when at university;
- introduce school pupils to the literature produced by staff at university and the literature that drives the academic process;
- show pupils the processes involved in academic research and the process of disseminating information to different audiences at university level;
- make pupils aware of assessment and feedback procedures at university.



Course Information

The course is designed to run in eight one-hour lessons for Years 12 or 13.

Additional material may be completed as homework to reinforce the lesson and enhance learning outcomes.

Lesson 1 – Working with Primary Material

This gives an insight in to the academic process for Arts, Humanities and Science researchers.

Lesson 2 – Scientific Scholarship

This explores the scientific process and enables pupils to learn about and understand the scholarship process which drives those who will be teaching them at university.

Lesson 3 – Arts & Humanities Scholarship

This explores the process which underpins research and scholarship in Arts and Humanities.

Lesson 4 – Synthesizing Information

Pupils will study and assess information from different sources and learn about using this information when writing in different registers.

Lesson 5 – Referencing

Pupils will explore the importance of acknowledging the work of others and techniques to avoid plagiarism.

Lesson 6 – Note Taking & Revision Skills

Pupils will be helped to think about how to approach lectures and texts and how to make their own notes which can then be used for self-directed learning, including revision.

Lesson 7 – Structuring Writing Part 1

This looks at surface structure and structuring an argument and its value in Arts, Humanities and Science subjects.

Lesson 8 – Structuring Writing Part 2

Here students review their own writing, looking critically at the structure of their arguments and the presentation of their essays.

Course Team

This course is the outcome of a collaborative project funded by Excellence East and the University of East Anglia.

Dr Harriet Jones - Team Coordinator

Harriet is a senior lecturer in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of East Anglia. She has taught first-year undergraduates for over ten years and has researched the transition from school to



university extensively during this time, visiting and working closely with schools across Norfolk. She has been employed twice by UCAS to assess the usefulness of A-level equivalent qualifications to Higher Education and has been awarded three HEA-funded projects to study different aspects of the transition to university. She is consulted widely across the University on methods to ease the transition process and has been invited to speak at University and HEA meetings on sixth-formers' perceptions of university teaching.

Dr Adrian Bavage, Deputy Head of Sixth Form, Wymondham High School

Rachael Jarrold, Teacher, Wymondham High School

Dr John Prendergast, Associate Tutor, School of Biological Sciences, University of East Anglia

Dr Cath Sharrock, Lecturer, School of Literature and Creative Writing, University of East Anglia

Dr Caroline Still, Head of Secondary Science, School of Education, University of East Anglia

Anne Vallins, Transitions Project Officer, Academic Division, University of East Anglia

Dr Helen Webster, Learning Enhancement Tutor, Students' Services, University of East Anglia



The University of East Anglia has developed a CPD course aimed to train teachers in the skills and materials required to deliver these eight lessons, in order to meet your pupils needs.

For further information, please visit
www.uea.ac.uk/professionaldevelopment

T: 01603 591574
E: professionaldevelopment@uea.ac.uk



History

The design of the course is based on the University of East Anglia's first year undergraduate skills modules, and draws upon the expertise of staff who are actively involved in helping undergraduates make the transition from school to university. A group of University staff and school teachers first met in January 2009 and devised and wrote the course, which was then piloted at two Norfolk High Schools: City of Norwich School and Wymondham High School.

Testimonials

Wymondham High School

"Traditionally schools have provided opportunities for students to excel in specific subject areas and sometimes overlooked the skills required to transfer those qualifications into the world of work or Higher Education; no more."

"In order to prepare our students fully for university life, they need a variety of skills, not only to improve their ability to communicate orally but also in terms of the written word; the ability to write fluent continuous prose has escaped many. For Scientists, Mathematicians and Engineers particularly, this has always been seen as being beyond their brief."

"My colleagues, therefore, have gone beyond the constraints of their job descriptions to put together a package for young people in the Sixth Form in order to help them write up Scientific and Mathematical pieces in a formal, technical and cogent fashion."

Victoria Musgrave, Head Teacher

"Since completing the Pre-University Course I have seen a distinct improvement in my students' writing. The confidence they have gained from the course is reflected in the maturity of their writing, their attention to detail and the regard shown to the importance of essay structure. A number of students are involved in the Extended Project AS qualification. The course has equipped them with the skills needed to question, research and present an independent investigation. These skills will carry them forward into university life and beyond."

Rachael Jarrold, Teacher

"Our students found it stimulating and for those doing science-based extended project qualifications it was especially relevant"

Adrian Bavage, Deputy Head of Sixth Form

City of Norwich School

"Through the course I have both reaffirmed and gained skills necessary for university study and I now feel more confident about working at degree level."

Sixth Form Pupil

"The course has given me a great insight into the expectations of a university student. Learning key skills in a relaxed but engaging way that differs from an ordinary classroom lesson left me feeling far more comfortable about studying at a higher level."

Sixth Form Pupil

Contact Us

T: 01603 593172

E: harriet.jones@uea.ac.uk