



“A surreal experience between school and the real world”: student perceptions of their ‘learner journeys’

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# Why is the learner journey significant?

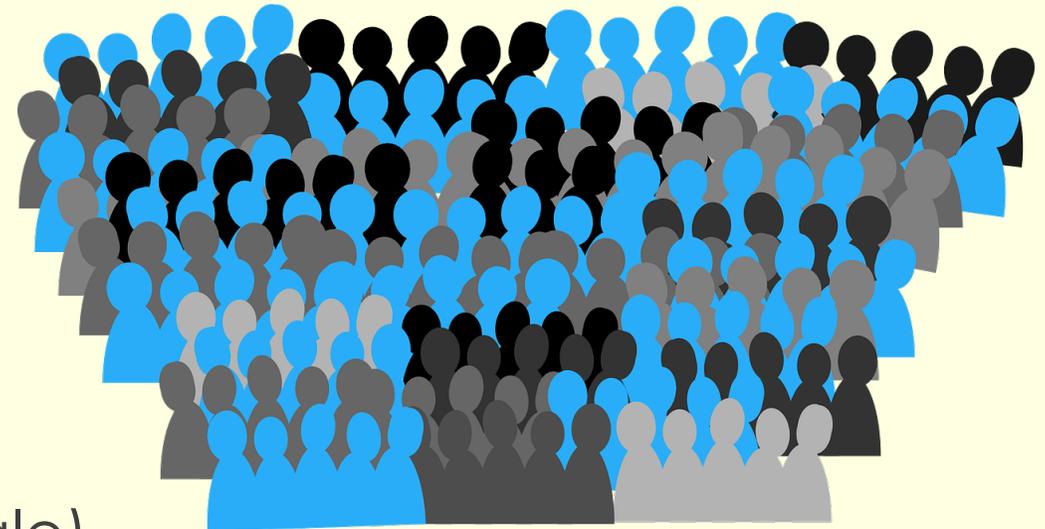
- ▶ Today's graduate requires a more complex and varied skillset than ever before
- ▶ “Graduates need to be more creative, more media literate, more skilled cross-culturally, and more capable of leadership” and have the ability to think “critically about an enormous amount of information” and solve “complex, multidisciplinary, open-ended problems” (Poole, 2013, p.348)
- ▶ This means the learner journey becomes more complex, “starting from an earlier point and journeying to a more distant one” (Poole, 2013, p.348)

# Research aims and objectives

- ▶ Sought increased understanding of student perceptions of their learner journeys by asking:
- ▶ What are the issues, roadblocks, pressure points along the way?
- ▶ When do these occur?
- ▶ Concurrently, asked students for their understanding and opinions on Library Services' role within the journey

# The participants

- ▶ 5 participants
- ▶ 2 female; 3 male
- ▶ 1 first year (level 4)
- ▶ 2 second year (level 5)
- ▶ 2 third year (level 6)
- ▶ 3 mature students (2 male, 1 female)
- ▶ 5 White British
- ▶ 1 declared disability (Autism Spectrum Disorder)



# Emergent themes

- ▶ Five principal themes emerged:
  - ▶ Transition to, and preparedness for, university
  - ▶ Progression
  - ▶ Personal responsibility and engagement
  - ▶ Employability
  - ▶ Communication

# Transition

- ▶ Academic writing
- ▶ Critical thinking skills
- ▶ Disconnect between secondary/Further Education and Higher Education
- ▶ Library anxiety
- ▶ Finding appropriate sources and using them well

Transition from A-level to university is like moving from "a paintball game to the Falklands War"

Some first years had "no idea"

I was "referencing complete rubbish"

"You just feel like you don't know what it is you're asking"

A levels meant I "knew how to write essays"

Students

I didn't feel we were "treated like students" until second year

Tutors thought I had a "higher level" of academic writing skill than I really did.

# Progression

- ▶ Scaffolding of learning
- ▶ Students' sense of clear progression (or otherwise) through modules to create a cohesive whole
- ▶ The perceived “jump” in difficulty/expectations of tutors at level 5 in comparison with level 4



At level 5, I'm expected to "go away and figure it out for myself"

Moving up to level 5 is a "sudden sharp drop"

Modules seem to be "just slotting into any year ... a complete mismatch"

I'm "scared stiff" of writing my dissertation

Going from first to second year it's just like 100% more workload

They didn't *prepare* us, but they did *warn* us

It was "explicit that each assessment built on (to) the next one"

# Personal responsibility/engagement

- ▶ The need for students to do things for themselves
- ▶ Seize opportunities
- ▶ Taking responsibility for seeking help when things go wrong
- ▶ University should encourage students to do this from the outset

At A-level you get factsheets for everything; at university you need to get out there and form your own opinion

Staff can only do so much

You need to "go out there and actually ask for it"

Tasks are set with a purpose but student don't always do them

"Mature students ... know what it's like to work for deadlines ... they know (how) to deal with stress"

A baseline expectation of my course is a willingness to learn and listen, to try new things

Students

# Employability

- ▶ Readiness for the “real world”
- ▶ Can the university environment replicate real world experience?
- ▶ The learner journey as a lifelong experience

“Are we just using the term ‘learner journeys’ as an academic phrase for ‘life’?”

There is no sense of urgency at university

University is “a surreal experience ... between school and the real world”

I’m in third year but I don’t feel like I’m completely finished ... there are options out there; there’s progression

After the course I feel like the journey is just going to stop

Law is “all geared towards getting that job”



Students

# Communication

- ▶ Impact of communication failure
- ▶ Importance of clearly communicating what services are available to students and who is responsible for delivering them
- ▶ Most dissatisfaction was in some way a product of a communication breakdown or failure



"It's a very bureaucratic institution"

"The biggest thing for me ... is talking to someone"

"There's obviously been a lot of dialogue between the library and my lecturers, but they don't seem to have got anywhere"

Students

"There's nothing worse than asking questions ... and not getting the answers"

"Sometimes it feels like ... the library and the university are separate entities"

"Just go out there and say 'I need some help'"

# Implications for engagement/satisfaction

- ▶ Need for clarity around extent and remit of service
- ▶ Taking services to students rather than waiting for them to come to us
- ▶ Meaningful partnerships with academic staff
- ▶ Need for timely, aligned teaching interventions

# References

- ▶ Devine, K. (2018) *Undergraduate students' perceptions of their "learner journey" at the University of Worcester and Library Services' role in this journey*. MSc thesis. Robert Gordon University. Available at: <https://eprints.worc.ac.uk/6907/> (Accessed: 11 June 2019).
- ▶ Poole, G. (2013) 'The coming and going: the work of educational developers when admission criteria and desired outcomes change simultaneously', *International Journal for Academic Development*, 18(4), pp. 344-355. doi: 10.1080/1360144X.2012.696195.