Engaging first-year undergraduates with critical self-awareness pilot: project report and recommendations – for internal circulation only

1. Recommendations

The project group recommends that:

1.1 All 1st year undergraduate students should have the opportunity and be encouraged to undertake some guided critical self-reflection

1.2 The default model will be:

   a. prior to arrival at Brookes, on formal acceptance of a place, students will be invited to undertake, on-line, two 'personality' inventories which generate an individual profile and guidance on interpretation. [In the first instance these two inventories will be 16PF and VARK but others are currently being explored (e.g. ELLI) and the choice should be kept under review].

   b. the cost per annum, excluding adviser training (see below), would currently be no more than £45K, inc. VAT.

   c. there will also be the offer, and expectation, that on arrival at Brookes, as soon as possible, and ideally within the first three weeks, there will be a meeting with the student's Academic Adviser to discuss their reflections on the profiles generated.

   d. It will also have been suggested that, on arrival, students might usefully put the individual profiles they received in to Mahara as the start of their e-portfolio

   e. all advisers involved will undertake appropriate training regarding the inventories and facilitating reflection. This training to be developed by the project team and delivered by the Careers Centre.

   f. students wishing to follow up the outcomes of the 16PF inventory further will be able to attend workshops offered by the Careers Centre

   g. all programmes will identify a first semester module that includes "critical self-awareness and personal literacy" in its outcomes which will explicitly refer to, and build on, this initial experience

   h. all programmes will be expected to integrate these activities into their current PDP arrangements

1.3 Any programme wishing to opt-out of this central university scheme will have to offer an alternative way of engaging their 1st years with critical self-awareness and this must be approved by AESC

1.4 This provision should be made available from the 2013 intake. There are 323 advisers of 1st years. Half-day workshops would necessitate 7 days approx of training plus associated administration. The Careers Centre can provide this during academic year 12/13 at a cost of £2,500.

1.5 The current working group on Academic Advisers should factor in these proposals when considering the proposed role and associated training. In addition, we hope that this group will also consider the examples in Section 3 (below) and look to consolidate, and possibly rationalise, good practice from across the institution.

1.6 There should be an initial evaluation of this initiative in 2014

Chris Rust & Keith Cooper, 6/9/12

2. Project Report

2.1 Introduction

One of the five graduate attributes that Brookes is now committed to as part of its student experience strategy is "Personal literacy and critical self-awareness". To both highlight and "kick start" this attribute, it was proposed that, as part of induction in semester one, all first-years might engage with one or more 'personality' inventories that might help them to identify and then reflect on their strengths, skills, interests, and motivations. Coupled with this, they could also be entitled to a reflective conversation with an academic advisor, based on the outcomes of the inventory/ies. To test both the efficacy and practicality of this proposal, it was agreed to carry out a pilot during the second semester of academic year 11/12, with 1st year students from one module in each of the four Faculties.

2.2 Background

Personality tests have a history going back around one hundred years, and they have detractors as well as supporters, but many have robust academic pedigrees. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), possibly the best known, and widely used by employers, is based on Jungian theory. Trait theory (and the identification of five global traits now identified with the so-called Big 5 model or OCEAN) and the 16 personality factor model (16PF) was pioneered by psychologist Raymond Cattell. But there are many different personality and motivational models and theories, each one offering a different perspective. The UK copyright to both MBTI and 16PF is held by Oxford Psychology Press.

Arguably the main benefits in developing an understanding of personality typology, personality traits, thinking and learning style theories is in challenging one's understanding of oneself, thus enabling individuals to gain greater insight into themselves, their abilities and their relationships with others. Understanding ourselves is key to achieving our potential in a range of skills and abilities - for example leadership, motivation, empathy - whether the purpose is self-development, helping others, or any other field relating to people and how we behave and interact with others. Knowledge of one's own motivation and behaviour and that of others, both at university and in the workplace, can be invaluable - for example when working in teams or in undertaking group projects or assignments. And it does not only help the individual to do better in such situations but will also hopefully help them to help others to achieve and develop as well.

A major potential benefit from engaging in undertaking such inventories is that it helps to develop an appreciation that while people are different, everyone has a value, and their own special strengths and qualities, and that everyone should be treated with care and respect. The relevance of attitudes, behaviours and preferences - especially at work - is easier to see and explain when we understand that differences in people are often personality-based and may be habitual learned behaviour. People very rarely set out to cause upset - they just behave differently because they *are different*.

In the pilot we decided to trial 4 inventories: TDI – Type Dynamics Indicator, VbIM (Values-based Indicator of Motivation), TA (Transactional Analysis) Drivers and VARK Learning Styles. For more detail, see appendix

2.3 Using the Inventories

It is vital to remember that these instruments are designed to provide insights into behaviours which impact on preferred ways of working and studying. Given these insights, an individual has a means to reflect and consider how they can enhance or modify these behaviours for the benefit of themselves and those they interact with.

These behaviours are not set in stone. We have choices in how we behave but, as with most habitual learned behaviours, changing becomes more difficult the stronger they are.

Neither should these instruments be seen as infallible. But if individuals want to challenge aspects of the outcome they should be encouraged to consider what evidence they have, what examples they can give, of behaviours that do not fit with the profile - rather than just rejecting something they just may not want to hear.

But most importantly they should be seen as useful prompts for discussion with the student, e.g.:

- Have they identified changes in behaviour that you might like to work on?
- How might the preferences identified influence things like the management of your workload, and your relationships with others?
- Reflecting on your profiles, how might you change the way you work with others, both individually and in teams?
- What light might this information throw on conflicts or problems you may have, especially with your studies?
- If you don't accept this profile, how would you describe how you approach learning, and can you give examples of what does and doesn't work for you?

2.4 Project Details

Four 1st Year modules 'volunteered*', one from each of the 4 Faculties. One criterion was that they should have between 50-75 students in each. The total of students from the four was 276.

Students were invited by e-mail to undertake the 4 inventories, and to reflect on the combined outcomes using a fifth set of questions. It was also suggested that they then meet with their Academic Adviser for a reflective discussion once they had completed the five.

At the end of the semester, students who had participated were invited to complete an electronic questionnaire. Those who completed the questionnaire were warned that they might be subject to a follow-up telephone interview.

All Academic Advisers involved were asked to attend half-day training sessions, and student-support coordinators were also invited.

* NB Staff from Psychology refused to take part, claiming that to do so would be a breach of their professional ethics, because Academic Advisers have not undertaken the requisite accredited training

2.5 Results

a) Engagement

At least 54 (almost 20%) engaged with one or more inventories – not evenly distributed; most from two of the four modules

21 (39%) of those who engaged completed a questionnaire

15 of those were followed up with a phone interview

There was only one recorded take-up of a meeting with Academic Adviser

b) Responses

All but one student said the experience had been useful/valuable and that 'it' should be available for all 1st Yrs

All respondents said it should be earlier. When prompted, they agreed it would be best prior to arrival at Brookes

Some said they intended to see their Academic Adviser but had run out of time

Generally, 4 inventories were considered too many and the TDI and VARK judged probably the most useful

On one module, 27 students made reference to the inventories in their final piece of assessed work – and all got either A or B+ grades

All module leaders were interviewed and very positive both about the experience and the emerging proposals (except one who was less so – main reservation regarding the choices of inventories). One said in an e-mail, "…it would seem to be sensible to introduce it to the students at an earlier stage and it's a good idea for it to be included in a student's initial meeting with their academic advisor, and for the scheme to be linked to 1st year, 1st semester modules."

2.6 Conclusion

An overwhelmingly positive response from those students who completed one or more inventory suggests that this type of intervention would be worth rolling out to all 1st Yrs. The problems of timing and how to increase uptake could both be addressed by engaging students prior to arrival at Brookes.

As for choice and number of inventories, two seems to be the maximum that is sensible. In parallel to this project, OPP have been working with Oxford Brookes Careers Centre and 96 Brookes students developing an automated instrument generating an individual profile, based on 16PF and focused particularly on students. This will be finalized by October, has been rated very highly by both the students and the Careers Centre staff, and has arguably more rigorous theoretical underpinning than TDI. OPP are very keen to continue working with us, so for all these reasons we recommend changing from TDI to use 16PF. Given its focus on learning, the second recommended inventory is VARK. But members of the project team are going on a training course for ELLI (Effective

Life-long Learning Inventory) in September to assess its possible suitability as an alternative.

3. Background evidence from other Brookes' interventions

Over the past few years there have been a number of interventions using Academic Advisers/personal tutors.

3.1 Business School: Pilot Personal Tutor System 07/08

An attempt to 'energise' and make the personal tutor system more proactive, aimed at the 1st Yr, this pilot involved an expectation of four meetings a year, with guidance to tutors on the possible focus for each.

Evaluation results suggest that the experience was 'patchy'. Most tutors only saw their tutees between 1 and 3 times (possibly, partly, because of the Wheatley location) and some tutors were judged by the students to be much 'better' – available, helpful and useful - than others. But the conclusion of the evaluation was that "*it is clear when the system does work it works well and significantly improves the student experience*".

3.2 The 'Extended Induction' initiative in Department of Mechanical Engineering and Mathematical Sciences (On-going)

Aimed at increasing retention and managing student progression from the earliest stages, this intervention in Yr 1 involves a series of compulsory weekly workshops. Lead by the PL Undergraduate programmes and co-ordinated by Student Support Co-ordinators, Academic Advisers allocate some of their office hours to the 'extended induction', meaning that they are available for all new students as well as their own advisees.

The interim evaluation reported that, "*the initiative has proved relatively successful with high attendance figures and positive feedback from students*".

3.3 The Personal and Academic Support System (PASS) in Life Sciences (05- on-going)

PASS involves pro-active tutoring in year 1, by Academic Advisers (previously personal tutors), that includes intervention with students who performed badly in semester 1, and mentoring them to turn around their performance. A method for scoring students' science background on entry was developed to quantify entry qualifications and identify 'at risk' students. 1st Yr Academic Advisers are allocated 2 hours per tutee. For Life Sciences' staff, having 8 first year tutees in a PASS tutorial group and 8 x 1 hour group tutorials, the remaining 8 hours are used for one-to-one reviews at the end of each semester.

Evaluation of PASS reported that while "*initially there was some staff resistance to this pro-active approach, evidenced by some tutors not delivering their tutorials, …*[but] *since embedding tutorials into a taught module with assessed coursework, staff compliance rose to 95% in 2009/10*" and now "*reviews document that staff see the benefit to their students and for themselves in building working relationships with*

their tutees." And regarding retention, "*overall, PASS has been credited by the* [then] *School Dean for improving first year student retention by 8.5-9.5 percentage points (over 10% in real terms)*".

3.4 Conclusion re-interventions

All three of these examples of interventions would seem to highlight that if Academic Advisers have a point, and are to fulfil a role, and if the experience of students is to be anything other than 'patchy', meetings between the two, at least initially, need to be formalised and Academic Advisers need to be offered training, and possibly be selected.

4.00 Evaluation

It is proposed that an initial evaluation should be carried out using the RUFDATA framework below, and reported to AESC in 2014.

Reasons and Purposes	Why are we doing the evaluation?	• Benefits realisation (Are we achieving what we set out to do) • Management (What's working, what's not?) • Planning (Will we continue; if so, how?)
Uses	What uses will we make of the evaluation?	• To decide if changes need to be made: e.g. process, choices of inventory • To decide whether to continue • Possibly: marketing, scholarly papers. • Possibly used by OPP both for marketing and further development
Foci	What are the range of activities that we will focus on?	• Student uptake & engagement • Academic adviser engagement & buy-in • Programme Leads engagement & buy-in
Data & Evidence	What evidence will we use?	• A "pre & post' test will be devised in collaboration with OPP • Student engagement – number taking inventories & meeting with advisers • Student evaluation of value – questionnaires, focus groups & telephone interviews • Academic advisers perceptions - questionnaires, focus groups & telephone interviews • Prog. Leads and Module leaders evaluation of value/impact - Interviews with Programme Leads and appropriate Module Leaders
Audience	Where will the	• SMT

	evaluation be presented?	• AESC
Timing	When will the evaluation take place	• 'Pre'-test to be administered October 2012 • Post-test to be administered October 2013 • Further data to be collected, as appropriate, through 2013/14 • Initial evaluation report to be presented autumn 2014
Agency	Who will do the evaluation	Keith Cooper & Chris Rust in collaboration with the ADSEs Possibly & research assistant 13/14

Appendix

Details of the Inventories Trialled, plus 16PF

TDI

Similar to the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®), and underpinned by Jung's theory of typology, the Type Dynamics Indicator™(TDI™) reports on psychological types against four areas of difference. These are:

- o the differences in how people are energised and interact with the world
- o the differences in the way people prefer to take in information
- o the differences in how people prefer to use that information
- o the differences in the lifestyle people prefer to lead.

The model is particularly useful for:

- understanding and developing yourself
- understanding and developing others
- understanding what motivates others
- understanding others' strengths and weaknesses
- working in teams - by ensuring that all relevant necessary capabilities are represented in the team
- allocating and agreeing tasks and project responsibilities
- agreeing roles and development with others and for oneself

VbIM (Values-based Indicator of Motivation)

The Values-based Indicator of Motivation (VbIM) maps traditional values like reward, influence and altruism and matches these with more contemporary concerns relating to relationships, as well as more abstract concepts. It provides both breadth and depth and is intended to give insight into the balance between individual and group/societal values, and those which are sources of individual satisfaction or meaning. In this way the questionnaire is centred on four areas:

- **What I want for myself**: reward, fame, well-being, excitement, change, conceptual;

- **What I want to become**: personal growth, career progression, influence, legacy, wisdom, transcendence;
- **What I want from others**: social contact, integrity, connection, openness, collaboration, inclusion;
- **What I want from society**: altruism, tradition, culture, harmony, libertarian, accountability.

Transactional Analysis (TA) driver behaviour or working styles

These are behaviours which have grown up sub-consciously as a result of decisions we made early in our lives about what we needed to do to be okay.

The decisions may have been based on how we saw parents and significant others behaving or how we felt we needed to behave for other reasons, such as to receive praise or avoid criticism. These are very helpful to us and when we understand them we can work to their strengths through choice, rather than because subconsciously we believe we have to do things this way to be okay. The five identified working styles are:

- be perfect
- be strong
- try hard
- please others
- hurry up

The importance of recognising the relative strengths of these in ourselves and others is that we can then work to the best of them rather than be unthinkingly *driven* by them.

The working style *Be Perfect* means that we will are likely to be really good at doing accurate detailed reports, likely to be neat in our appearance and have clean and tidy homes. If we have this style and are under stress it is likely that we would beat ourselves up for not being good enough, for making a mistake, for something being out of place, etc.. Of course, we created the rule about what perfection is, and then when we don't meet up to it we have a go at ourselves. This may also mean that we expect others to be perfect too which can be hard on the colleagues we work with.

If we have a *Be Strong* working style we will probably be great in a crisis. We can take control of situations and people will often feel safe around us. The difficulty is we may come across as aloof and not express feelings very often. For us there is a tendency to say "it is" rather than "I am". The former phrase distances us from our feelings, enabling us to feel safe. We may stand apart from playful activities fearing we may look stupid. Instead of saying this, however, we are more likely to condemn the activity as stupid and put down the person who suggested it.

If we have the *Try Hard* style we are likely to be great pioneers. We love new projects and new things to do. We probably have a great wealth of information as we like to gather different ideas together. We are best working under pressure. When stressed we may start too many things. We are more likely to start things but not finish them so celebrating achievements may not happen very often. We get sidetracked by starting to experiment with different ideas or ways to do things. We are likely to use phrases such as: "I'll try and do what we agreed" or "What I am trying to tell you is".

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If we have the *Please Others* style we are likely to be a great team member. We like to please people without even asking them how we can do this as we prefer to guess. We can see both sides of an argument and attempt to calm things down. We will be keen to do things for others, often to the point of rescuing them. Decision making is not our strong point and we may frustrate people by not expressing our own opinion. We prefer other people to determine priorities, not us. We worry about changing our behaviour in case others won't like us.

Those of us with the *Hurry Up* working style will probably get a great deal done in a short amount of time. If reports are wanted in on time we are the person to do them. However, we tend to overload our time table and take on too much. This may mean that important aspects are overlooked. We are likely to be impatient with others and often finish their sentences for them. We may make only superficial changes as we are so quick to get on with things and not take an in-depth perspective. We might select priorities so quickly that a significant area is overlooked.

VARK (Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinaesthetic)

The VARK learning styles model provides a very easy and quick reference inventory by which to assess people's preferred learning styles and then, most importantly, to **design learning methods and experiences that match those individual preferences**:

Visual learning style involves the use of seen or observed things, including pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, flip-chart, etc.

Aural learning style involves the transfer of information through listening: to the spoken word, of self or others, of sounds and noises.

Read/Write style prefers learning through the written word and is probably the method most favoured by traditional models of studying at university – making notes, reading text books, writing essays.

Kinesthetic learning involves physical experience - touching, feeling, holding, doing, practical hands-on experiences.

16PF

This inventory explores sixteen personality factors against the five major personality traits:

Extraversion

Independence

Tough-mindedness

Self-control

Anxiety

The computer-generated report provides particular insights useful for leadership development and for career development and planning, encouraging the student to

consider how successful they may be in areas such as: interacting with others, making decisions and taking the initiative, and the ways they problem-solve, cope with stressful conditions, and interact with others.

Further possible background reading

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