

Kinga Bochenska, Lecturer in Learning Development, Centre for Learning and Study Support (CLaSS)

## BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

<b>WHAT?</b>	DMUAspire is a pioneering project developed with schools and colleges in Leicester to inspire a new generation of undergraduates from 'hard-to-reach' groups. It is a fully validated Level 4 module to develop digital literacy and academic skills to challenge Year 12 (or equivalent) students to aspire to a university education. Successful completion of the module gives the students the equivalence to 16 UCAS points recognised by DMU.
<b>WHY?</b>	To inspire a new generation of undergraduates from 'hard-to-reach' groups. To build confidence and ambition by providing a real university experience, To prevent future A-level students from the city's deprived estates missing out on the grades needed for higher education
<b>FOR WHOM?</b>	Year 12 or equivalent students from deprived areas of Leicestershire (schools and colleges) at risk of "missing out" on University entry due to A level results. Mixed-ability cohort with a range of educational backgrounds and experiences, often "first in the family" unfamiliar with HE level study, conventions and practices
<b>BY WHOM?</b>	Public Engagement (recruitment, pastoral care) Library and Learning Services (Academic content, delivery, personal tutoring) Educational partnerships (SAP processes, QA, academic boards)
<b>WHEN?</b>	Runs over a week in late June, early July with online pre-work; W 39



## TRANSITIONAL PROCESSES

- are the absolute necessity to understand and recognise heterogeneous needs of students by being sensitive and understanding to their needs; coming from a variety of educational backgrounds (Ballinger, 2003).

## WIDENING PARTICIPATION

- means HE institutions working with school students in order to show them how their lives can be enhanced by university experience and empower them to believe that they can be successful in the academic world (Brunel, 2001).

Contrary to traditional learning environment, **flipped learning** provides learners with reversed input and instruction strategies. The core content is delivered prior to the classroom experience,

usually via multimedia resources accessible online. It promotes the use of technology especially audio visual and students' collaboration and creation during session time (Sojayan and Khaisang 2018).

Traditional Learning



## RATIONALE

### Traditional DMUAspire in 2017

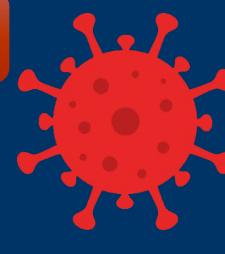
- DMUAspire was delivered for the first time in July 2017 following concerns raised by the Mayor's office. The programme has been developed as a joined initiative by learning specialists (LLS) and outreach professionals (Public Engagement). In its initial form it consisted of one week of real university experience, including academic input in form of lectures, seminars and tutorials, in order to complete three assignments (Reflection, Academic Poster, Group Presentation). Additionally, it included Campus Life and integrating activities such as visiting Leisure and Heritage Centre.

### Flipped DMUAspire in 2021

- In 2021, under governmental lockdown restrictions the programme needed to undergo significant changes in order to be delivered. As teaching of large groups in lecture theatre spaces was impossible, students were invited to DMU Campus being allocated individual study spaces in the library where they could engage with synchronous and asynchronous hybrid learning content. Students were supported by personal tutors with whom they had regular tutorials. Group presentation assignment was replaced by individual reflective presentation about research poster.

### Research Questions

- Realising that Covid Restrictions will end and a form of DMUAspire will not be affected by governmental guidelines, the research questions to ensure DMUAspire reflects the best pedagogic practice, were formulated:
- 1. Which model of DMUAspire provides students with "real and authentic" University experience?
- 2. Which form of the programme content and assessment better promotes students' attainment and retention?
- 3. Is flipped learning, demanding self-discipline and independence, suitable teaching approach for Y12 "hard to reach" student groups?



## METHODOLOGY of data collection

- In order to guarantee validity of data collection as well as provide a wider spectrum of analysis, a variety of research methods have been used. The application of quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (descriptive) approaches assured triangulation of data and increased reliability of findings (Brown and Rodgers, 2002).

## Quantitative

- Students' Programme feedback
- Comparison of Students' results
- Comparison of students' retention

## Qualitative

- Students' Programme Feedback
- Module enhancement plans
- Programme Team reflections



Almost exactly comparable outcomes in terms of retention, pass rate and plans to study between two cohorts. The average pass marks were: in 2018 67%, in 2021 61%.

## FINDINGS

2018

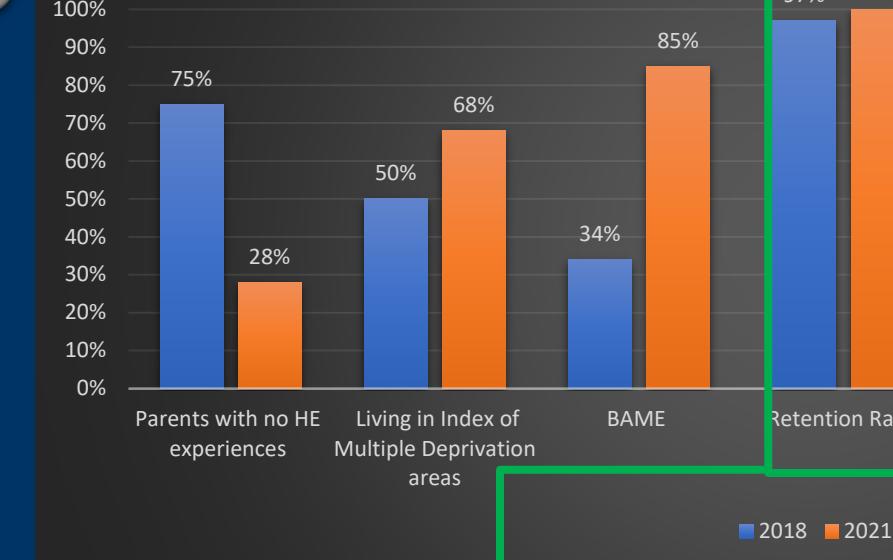


2018	Gender
60 students	30% male 70% female



2021	Gender
46 students	46% male 54% female

### Comparison of DMUAspire 2018 and 2021 cohorts



Students from 2021 will be applying for 2022/23 academic year, at the moment no data is available.

**DMUaspire**

DMUAspire	2018	2021
<b>Students</b>	<p>"I really enjoyed meeting new people and getting a realistic experience about how university would be like"</p> <p>"The BBQ and climbing wall was a great evening but I also enjoyed making the poster in independent work."</p> <p>"I enjoyed meeting new people and learning about the sort of assignments I will get at university."</p>	<p>"It was an actual university module so it gives a realistic experience of being a university student"</p> <p>"The assignments were challenging but I loved to do it."</p> <p>"I enjoyed most the taster sessions as this provided me with a valuable insight into University life, and it will prepare me for higher education in the future."</p>
<b>Tutors External Examiner</b>	<p>"DMU Aspire is an inspirational concept which we are proud to be part of. The students have thoroughly enjoyed the activities, courses and were certainly inspired to aim high. Many have gone on to university and were in a much stronger and more informed position to do so."</p> <p>"As last year, this innovative project has been designed in order to encourage a diverse range of candidates to experience the benefits and rigours of higher education with the clear intention of broadening access to H.E. and to nurture social mobility."</p> <p>"This project is a distinctive and innovative one. It captures highly intense lever 4 input and assessment within a very short period of time, probably induction module for students to "live" this experience for longer would benefit them more"</p>	<p>"Delivering this module in a 'Covid-safe' manner did involve the students sitting at computers for long periods of time, with fewer interactions with other students and less movement than usual."</p> <p>"The quality of teaching was of a high level, learning certainly took place (as seen in student reflections) and the assessments resulted in some excellent outputs."</p> <p>"Despite unprecedented circumstances, DMUAspire remained to be an impressive project with underpinning purpose of preparing school students from WP backgrounds to thrive to achieve in HE setting."</p> <p>"The most impressive aspect was the quality of students work that has not only compared but at times exceeded work of Level 4 students from other institutions."</p>

## CONLUSIONS

Unfortunately, the conducted study based on comparative analysis of students achievement, retention as well as students' and staff feedback; has not brought conclusive results.

## Answers to research questions

- Both Programme designs created "authentic and real university experience" for the peculiarity of time and HE environment that they took place. However, from students' responses it is evident that "traditional" delivery provided greater opportunities for social interactions and development of friendships.
- Both forms of delivery resulted in highly similar results in terms of achievement and retention. However, tutors were in favour of maximising their time with students during tutorials by providing learning content in flipped manner.
- Students joining DMUAspire in 2021 have already gone through a year and a half of online education; therefore, they seemed to be equipped with strategies allowing them to engage independently with online content.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the future, a balanced combination of both programme designs seems to be the most appropriate.

- There should be an equal emphasis on flipped learning focusing on core content delivery and traditional model allowing social interactions and rapport building. In the contemporary hybrid HE environment, only recreating this dynamics in DMUAspire can guarantee continuation of authenticity and real taste of university life.