What do we mean by ‘transition’ and how can the toolkit help?

‘Transition is a contested concept... which plays out very differently for different groups of students.’

(French, Kempson and Kendall, 2016)

‘What [the research literature on transition]... shares is a complex explanation of transition as more than just a move between educational contexts, or a bounded period of time; instead transition is understood as a complex social phenomenon in which the relationships between individuals and their contexts are inextricably linked. Identity shifts may be experienced at the level of the individual, but these come about through the process of participation and experience in the social context.’

(O’Donnell, Kean and Stevens, 2016)

Our experience of life in general, let alone the specifics of teaching and learning in HE, should be enough to warn us against artificially ‘tidy’ or bounded concepts of transition as an isolated event, a single moment in time, or a linear process of progress between different types and stages of human experience. Where transition to, and progression within, HE is concerned we know that this is anything but a tidy or linear process and we would be doing our diverse student body an enormous disservice to pretend otherwise.

The resources and materials in this toolkit, then, do not pretend that we can somehow pre-fit our students into some implausibly predictable or generic ‘journey’ and then simply support and ‘signpost’ them along the way. Rather, they enable opportunities for greater reflection and dialogue so that the support we provide is properly sensitive to the diversity of students’ needs and experiences.

To help realise this, the toolkit provides:

- **practical ideas** for the different ways programmes can support academic transition
- **sample teaching and learning materials** to adapt and develop for use in different contexts
- **reflective frameworks** for programme teams and individuals to think about the transitions their students make, and how these might be supported

**References**
