Introduction: when is a toolkit not a toolkit?

‘[Where support for academic transition is concerned] there is no... ‘tool kit’ that will work successfully for all students in all contexts.’

(French, Kempson and Kendall, 2016)

‘Institutions should seek to shift their own practices, structures and processes in order to accommodate diverse groups of students... rather than focusing on skills-based training or engaging in ever-more explicit articulations of the unchanging expectations of the institution.’

(O’Donnell, Kean and Stevens, 2016)

‘Interventions and approaches [to support students’ transition]... should as far as possible be embedded into mainstream provision to ensure all students participate and benefit from them.’

(Thomas, 2012)

As French, Kempson and Kendall rightly point out, any attempt to provide generalised, context-independent support for transition and progression in higher education (HE) is doomed to fail before it has even begun. As a wealth of international research into student learning in HE has for decades now shown us, we should be always mindful of the highly context-dependent nature of student learning, and of the need to support this learning in appropriately context-sensitive ways.

The ‘tools’ provided in this toolkit, then, are designed to enable programme teams, lecturers, personal tutors et al. to do this vital contextualising work and to avoid the overly generic approaches French, Kempson and Kendall caution against.

They are based, in large part, on current practice at the University of Leicester, but there are also links to additional resources from elsewhere, too. The tools seek to help realise the following four principles, outlined in the LLI’s Moving beyond ‘study skills’: principles for developing effective practice in supporting students’ learning (Rooney, 2015):

1) Support for developing students’ learning should be treated as an integral component of the curriculum and firmly situated within the specific disciplinary contexts in which students’ learning takes place.

2) Practical support should consist of creating spaces for reflective and experiential learning and provide opportunities for students to develop relevant academic practices.

3) Opportunities for dialogue and discussion around expectations, conventions, progress made etc. should be provided at appropriate points in the curriculum.

4) Students should be engaged as partners and collaborators in developing practices to support student learning.
References


