



## Thrown in at the Deep End? Exploring Students', Lecturers' and Teachers' Views on Additional Support Lessons at University

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### Abstract

#### *Background and questions*

Transition from school to university has gained considerable attention in recent years. Research suggests that students experience multifaceted challenges as they begin university study [1], which are often attributed to ineffective pre-university education [2] [3]. In many countries, universities are addressing these challenges by offering additional support lessons, in an attempt to bridge new undergraduates' skills and knowledge gaps. For example, a Mathematics department at a Canadian university has adapted its first year course to provide additional substantial instruction in the fundamental principles of calculus [4].

The British Government has indicated its desire for the reform of A levels (qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds) in England and Wales to ensure better preparation for university study, through greater collaboration between schools and universities in curricular re-developments. The present study relates to this issue and addresses three research questions:

1. What is taught in additional support lessons for new undergraduates?
2. What are lecturers', undergraduates', and A level teachers' views of the lessons?
3. Do the teachers think that the knowledge and skills covered in the additional support classes can be included in A levels, or are they already included in A levels?

#### *Methods*

Case studies of additional support lessons were conducted at Biology, English, and Mathematics departments in nine contrasting UK universities (three universities per subject). Qualitative data collection sessions comprised: lecturer and student interviews; lesson observations by researchers and A level teachers; and facilitated discussions between the teachers and lecturers.

#### *Analysis*

The case study data was transcribed, coded and analysed thematically. Comparisons across participants and universities related to 12 themes including: knowledge and skills covered in the additional support lessons; and recommendations for changes to be made to the content taught in the A levels.

#### *Findings*

There were several commonalities in the content and skills covered in the universities' additional support lessons. In English, these included emphasis on critical thought development and academic writing. The focus in Biology was on data analysis and report-writing. The findings from this study are discussed in relation to longitudinal curriculum coherence. Furthermore, the methodology could be employed in other countries to inform curricular developments and school to university transition.

### References

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