

## Transitions

We introduced the young people at one college to the project by inviting them to share their experiences of arriving at college for the first time. They remembered their feelings of being in a big, new place where everything seemed different – even the words used to describe people and places. They decided they could help make this time better for new students in the future. Once they had explored their memories of feeling ‘new’ to college, one of the young people, who was a very talented artist, drew some images that the students made into ‘how I feel’ cards to help new students express and share their emotions.

The students then set about the major task of making college information and course prospectuses more accessible and user-friendly. They used a camera provided by the project to identify what they thought were the important things for new students to know about. They drew up a list of these features of college life, focusing on their courses in particular. Using funding from the project, they employed a professional photographer to take pictures of these features. They then had images of staff and students involved in their routine activities in college to show what college was all about.

The students themselves also photographed crucial locations around the building – classrooms, toilets, cafeterias, the reception area – as well as the key people who worked with and supported students with learning difficulties. The students made joint decisions about which photos they wanted to use and how they would be set out in the emerging materials. They decided which photos were most important to include and which to leave out. They investigated how to present their information in the most accessible way for new students and came up with a range of formats. Using their commissioned photographs, they designed some informative posters and had these professionally produced – again, using project funding. They made booklets using photos without words or with a few words, showing what you might do if you went to college. The students wanted their materials to be of the greatest possible use and relevance to new students making their transitions to college. To help with the challenges of all the ‘differences’ that new students encounter when they first arrive at college, the students came up with a simple list of the different words used in different settings – for example ‘teachers’ and ‘teaching assistants’ at school and ‘tutors’ and ‘support staff’ at college – and illustrated them.

The students also came up with the idea that talking to new students directly might be a good way to prevent them from feeling anxious about the move from school to college. They planned a series of school visits. They wanted to go out to meet school pupils to tell them what it was like for them when they had first arrived at college. They wanted to let the school pupils know what it was really like; to tell them who they needed to know (in case they needed help) – and to show them that not only had they survived, but that they had come to love their time at college.

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The students were able to try out these ideas (and more) at a 'sharing event' they organised jointly with school pupils. They planned the event with the school students, deciding who to invite, where and when to come together, what to have for refreshments, and how to display their new resource materials. With a view to improving their transition support materials in future, they provided a 'visitors book' for comments. The students' sharing event was a great success. The college principal attended, as did the families of both school and college students, staff and students from around college, staff from the Connexions service, social services and the support services – and, importantly, pupils from other schools who were likely to come to courses at the college in the future. This work generated and developed links that will be of huge benefit to students making the transition from school to college in years to come.