

**THE EVALUATION OF THE ACADEMIC,
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING MODEL OF STUDENT
SUPPORT**



**Report for the Learning and Teaching Committee of
the Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences**

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January 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development, implementation and evaluation of the APPL Project is the result of successful collaboration of a number of staff at Kingston University and St.George's, University of London.

As Project Lead I would like to acknowledge the enthusiasm, hard work and support of a number of key colleagues whose contribution was essential to the project: Jean Shapcott, Gillian Lim, Angie Frontin, Hilary Bolton, Sue Coppard, Jen Tapping, Linda Burke, Annie Tibbles, Di Marks-Maran, , Ann Ooms, Clive Allnutt , Graham Morgan, Malcolm Jones, Sharon Urwin and Jane Gay. Thanks also to all Facilitators and students who engaged with the APPL model.



Executive Summary

The Academic, Personal and Professional Learning (APPL) model of support for student nurses was a response to a number of internal and external drivers whose common theme is to enhance the student experience and improve student retention. The APPL model was implemented for student nurses in the September 2006 cohort of the Dip HE/Registered Nurse programme in the Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences. This report describes the evaluation of the pilot study undertaken during 2006 – 7.

Following the implementation of the pilot, a variety of qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed from a number of sources including students (n=73) and APPL facilitators (n = 20). Methods included questionnaires, focus group and statistical analysis. The research design was that of a descriptive case study using Appreciative Inquiry (AI). The research questions focused on the impact of APPL on students and APPL facilitators. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS and qualitative data were analysed using the Framework Method (Ritchie and Spencer 1994).

Students and facilitators reported positive experiences with APPL. The APPL group meetings are perceived by both groups to have a positive impact on the students' experiences at the university and on their study skills. For students, the strongest aspects of the APPL model are helping them: to think more deeply and critically about nursing, to reflect on their clinical placements, to be less anxious about their studies.

A number of recommendations are made to enhance and embed the APPL model in the wider model of student support. Further analysis and refinement of the model will be undertaken in two collaborative research projects with Thames Valley University (funded by the West London Lifelong Learning Ne

The APPL Project

Evaluation



Background and Introduction

There is an imperative to improve retention and reduce attrition from pre-registration nursing programmes. This is both a national and a local imperative. On the Diploma in Higher Education/ BSc in Nursing in the Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences there are significant numbers of students from diverse backgrounds as a result of the widened entry gate into nursing. The programme itself is complex, it is a dual outcome programme with students studying for an academic award (diploma/degree) as well as a professional qualification (Registered Nurse qualification). There are two intakes each year, four branches of nursing, two sites, and with the programme offered at degree and diploma level. The programme is also offered in accelerated and modified modes which means that there are a number of starting and finishing points. The programme takes place over 45 weeks per academic year; for fifty per cent of the course, students are allocated to clinical placements in a wide range of NHS and social care settings.

Drivers for project

The Academic, Personal, Professional Learning model of student support (APPL) was devised to respond to a number of drivers. One of the strongest drivers was a request from student nurses who attended the Faculty's Supportive Learning Environment (SLE) conference in June 2006 (Hodgson and Marks-Maran 2008, in press). At the conference, pre-registration nursing students heard about the experiences of the social work students with learning sets; consequently, they asked nursing lecturers to explore the possibility of establishing a similar learning support mechanism for student nurses.

Following discussions with students and staff, it was agreed that, for pre-registration nursing students there was a need to:

- positively acknowledge and use the experience and abilities of all students
- move away from dependency model and towards a more equitable model of student support
- focus on independent/ deep learning in students
- streamline, strengthen, integrate and focus student nurse support mechanisms

- promote the socialisation/professionalisation process
- promote peer assisted learning and peer support
- “off-set” time spent in large groups with small groups
- provide a positive learning environment to motivate students
- promote student personal development planning (PDP)

An internal review of pre-registration student support provision (Tapping 2006) indicated that the existing personal tutor system was working in some areas but was not working equitably across all students. There was a perceived need to for staff to:

- know students better (there are three elements to this issue; because it is good professional practice to know students, because student references need to be written in light of this knowledge and finally because the Nursing and Midwifery Council require the University to confirm a student’s “good character” before registration can take place)
- demonstrate the effectiveness, equity and efficiency of student nurse support mechanisms
- ensure all students are included in support opportunities
- increase staff understanding of student support needs
- involve more lecturers in the support/ professionalisation of student nurses
- quantify and standardise lecturer time spent on pastoral care
- offer the opportunity to facilitate a small group on a regular basis with clear boundaries
- offer preparation to support in the implementation of groups
- offer ongoing staff support for further development of facilitation skills

The APPL initiative

APPL is a support mechanism designed and piloted in 2006/7 for pre-registration nursing students. The APPL project was one of three Faculty projects aimed at developing a supportive learning environment and was funded for its pilot year by the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee.

The planning for APPL commenced in 2006 with the appointment of a project manager and the establishment of a steering group to guide the development and implementation of the APPL pilot project. A subgroup of the steering group was established to undertake the evaluative research into the pilot project. Therefore, there are two distinct phases of APPL – the planning, development and implementation of APPL; and the evaluative research project.

Planning involved deciding on the purpose and aims of the APPL mechanism and identifying the role boundaries of staff who would operationalise the model by becoming APPL facilitators. Much discussion took place around the balance of the three elements of the role i.e. academic, professional and pastoral. Twenty facilitators for the pilot APPL project were then identified,

each of whom became the named facilitator for a group of approximately 15 new entrants to the September 2006 Dip HE/RN programme. A dedicated preparation programme for APPL facilitators was designed and implemented and subsequently a structured support programme for facilitators was planned for the pilot phase of APPL pilot. This included the creation of facilitated action learning sets for APPL facilitators to foster their continued development as APPL facilitators and to act as a support mechanism for these facilitators. The APPL model was designed with a degree of flexibility in-built. The intention was to implement the pilot model and then, in the light of feedback from staff and students, develop it further in order to meet student and staff needs as fully as possible.

The APPL project was piloted with the September 2006 and February 2007 cohorts. The preparation programme for new APPL facilitators was run several times throughout 2006 and 2007. It focused on the development of facilitation skills and enhancing lecturers' understanding of group dynamics; many facilitators felt deskilled in this area having spent several years teaching large groups. The plan for the APPL groups was for the groups to meet at least 6 times per year for two hours per session and to be relatively unstructured, focusing on issues and learning needs raised by students. However, this absence of structure led to the early APPL group sessions to focus on the two "Ps" on APPL (personal and professional) and little emphasis on the "A" in APPL (academic development). A tension was observed between the desire for equity amongst groups and the desire to meet the needs of individual groups. The steering group recognised that an infrastructure was required to promote equity. With the publication of the literature review of the first year experience (Harvey, Drew & Smith 2006) a tighter structure, based on the recommendations of this report, was created for APPL facilitators so that the two-hour meeting reflected a balance between student and APPL facilitator agenda-setting. Each APPL session, therefore, included time for students to focus on personal, professional or practice issues and concerns, and a time for a specific academic/study skill/ topic to be addressed led by the facilitator; the topics were designed to meet student needs at the different stages of the student journey. Attendance at APPL group meetings was recorded but not mandatory, although all students were actively encouraged to attend. The list of topics for the APPL sessions can be found in Appendix 1.

20 APPL groups commenced in September 2006 and 4 APPL groups commenced in March 2007. A review workshop for facilitators took place in May 2007 and an ongoing APPL support programme for APPL facilitators was provided.

The evaluative research

Research questions

There were two main foci for the evaluative research Project: the impact of APPL on students and their learning and the impact of APPL on the APPL

facilitators. For the students, the focus of the evaluative study was to discover:

- What works in the new APPL model
- Why it works
- Who it works for
- What effects the model is having on students

For the facilitators, the focus of the evaluative research was to discover:

- What aspects of facilitation are seen by facilitators as successful
- What new facilitation skills the APPL project has enabled in facilitators

As such, there were two broad evaluative research questions:

1. What is the impact of the APPL groups on students and their learning?
2. What is the impact of facilitating APPL groups on facilitators?

Research approach

The evaluative research was carried out through a descriptive case study using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the focus of the case study. AI has its history in organisational change. However, AI is also an evaluative research methodology for education especially where research is attempting to monitor the impact of educational change and to explore how people understand their lives (Reed 2006). AI research in education is interested in capturing what is working well in an educational experience, and for whom, why it is working well and how we might translate success in one aspect of an educational endeavour to other aspects of that endeavour. In some respects it is an educational evaluative mindset that sets out to focus on identifying successes rather than on identifying and solving problems.

An example of this research mindset is the difference between undertaking research into why students leave a programme (i.e., researching the problem of attrition) as opposed to researching why student stay and succeed on a programme (what works). In educational research, AI is still in its infancy and educational researchers continue to explore the place of AI in educational evaluative research (Coghlan et al 2003). Currently, AI appears to be an approach to evaluative research, which can be applied to a range of established research methods (action research, case study, narrative, constructivist and practice development research approaches).

Ethical approval

The evaluative research study was undertaken once ethical approval had been granted and was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health and Social Care Science.

Literature review

The importance of student support as a means of improving retention during the first year of a university programme is well documented in the literature. The National Audit Office (NAO) (2007) in a study on the retention of students in higher education recommended that institutions need to:

“...get to know their students and how they feel about their particular course.”

(National Audit Office, 2007, p. 10)

The NAO also recommended that universities need to develop a more positive approach to retention-related activities and recognise how they can improve student success. Drew (2001) found that there were three contextual areas that affected what helped or hindered student learning in higher education. These are:

- Course organisation, resources and facilities
- Assessment
- Learning activities and teaching

In this third contextual area students identified range of skills and activities that helped them to learn including learning self-management skills, being motivated, support from peers and support from others.

Harvey et al (2006) undertook an extensive literature review of the experience of first year students in higher education. The literature revealed a number of key factors that promoted student retention in year 1. Figure 1 indicates the factors identified in the literature review by Harvey et al (2006).

- Peer support
- Expectations met
- Engagement with lecturers
- Goal setting and motivation
- Self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to achieve)
- Discussion of progress
- Making friends
- Assessment
- Understanding the world of higher education (institutional habitus)
- Understanding teaching and learning processes

Figure 1. Factors Affecting Retention and Progression (from Harvey et al 2006)

Yorke & Longdon (2007) undertook a study of the first-year experience of students in higher education. Their findings indicated that two dominant categories emerged related to the best aspects of the first year experience. These were: making new friends and the teaching that they had experienced. The worst aspects of the first year experience were related to workload and time management and poor quality feedback from tutors. In their concluding remarks, Yorke & Longdon (2007) suggested that since making friends was such a significant positive factor in the first-year experience of students, lecturers can assist in this through the pedagogic approaches that they take, using teaching methods that engage the students early on in activities that involve collaboration with each other. Those subject disciplines that offered a high amount of student collaboration and engagement in learning activities were most highly rated by first year students.

The findings from the literature review undertaken by Harvey et al (2006) were influential in the establishment of APPL groups and in the changes that were made to the structure of the groups (described earlier). These developments were later affirmed by the study of the first year experience undertaken by Yorke & Longdon (2007) In addition, the study by Drew (2001) helped to identify the contextual areas that have an impact on that which helps students to learn in higher education.

With specific regard to student nurses, the literature reveals that large and diverse student cohorts pose specific challenges to nurse lecturers with regard to “getting to know” student nurses (Carr 2008).Gidman et al (2000) and Grayson et al (1998) highlight the amount of time is required to adequately support students. The need to support student nurses is of great significance according to Jinks (1997) who states

“how pre-registration nursing students are cared for by nurse teachers is important in terms of students replicating this behaviour when delivering patient care”

Data collection

Data were collected from a number of sources using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data were collected from students, from APPL facilitators and from numerical data collected by the institution about attrition, retention and progression.

Data from students

Student data (n = 73) were collected during the summer of 2007 through a questionnaire. The framing of the questions were influenced by Appreciative Inquiry (Patton 2003) as a way of inquiring into the merit and worth of APPL. Critics of AI (Golembiewski 2000) have suggested that the positive emphasis

of AI can discourage constructive criticism and an unwillingness to address weaknesses in the programme being evaluated. However, Patton (2003) has suggested that by framing the open-ended questions appropriately the balance between strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation can be maintained. Patton's work influenced the way that the open-ended questions were framed to ensure that this balance was created. The content of the questions was influenced by the reports identified in the literature review (Drew 2001; Harvey et al 2006; Yorke & Longdon 2007).

The student questionnaire contained 26 Likert-style and 4 open-ended questions. Within the questionnaires, students were asked to score the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with 10 statements (See Figure 2).

1. Being a member of an APPL group helped students to make friends at the university
2. The APPL group sessions helped students to complete their assessments
3. The APPL group sessions helped students to reflect on their clinical placement experiences
4. The APPL group sessions helped students to develop their study skills
5. The APPL group sessions helped students to manage their time
6. The APPL group sessions helped students to be less anxious about their studies
7. The APPL group sessions helped students with their communication skills
8. The APPL group sessions helped students analyse books and journal articles
9. The APPL group sessions helped students to think more deeply and critically about nursing
10. The APPL group sessions helped students to be a more successful student this year.

Figure 2. Ten statements forming the questionnaire

Student focus group

Additional student data were collected through a focus group with one APPL group.

Data from facilitators

Data from facilitators were collected from a number of sources: questionnaire (n = 20); evaluative feedback from staff development and review workshops; and from a small number of APPL Group summary notes compiled by facilitators after APPL group meetings.

Facilitators' data was also collected through a questionnaire, containing 18 Likert style and 4 open-ended questions based on the same 10 statements as used in then student questionnaires (see Figure 2). Therefore, the content and framing of the questions on the facilitator questionnaire were similar to those on the student questionnaire, allowing for comparison between the two groups.

The student and facilitator questionnaires yielded a large amount of quantitative data (as well as some qualitative data from the open-ended questions). An APPL impact scale was developed based on the 10 Likert-scale multi-choice questions administered in the students' and facilitators' questionnaire. For these Likert-style questions a reliability analysis of internal consistency of the APPL Impact scale resulted in a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.921 for the students and 0.808 for the facilitators. Different standards for an acceptable level of reliability have been suggested, with lower limits ranging from 0.5 to 0.7 (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). The APPL impact scale was judged to have strong internal consistency given that the estimated internal consistency reliability is well above the range of suggested lower limits. It is recognized that reliabilities at .90 or higher are sufficient for making individual-level decisions.

Qualitative data from facilitators came from the evaluations of staff development and the APPL review workshop.

Institutional data

Data related to attrition, retention and progression were collected from institutional records

Sample

A student questionnaire was administered to a convenience sample of 9 APPL groups group from a total of 20 APPL groups. The students' questionnaire was administered at the end of the last APPL session of the 2006-2007 academic year resulting in a 100% response rate.

Of the 73 students who completed the questionnaire, 6 were male and 67 female. Twenty students were younger than 22 years old, 50 between 22 and 45 years old and 3 were over the age of 45. Thirty-two students had qualifications at "A" Level equivalent or higher.

Eleven students attended 1 to 2 APPL sessions, 19 students attended 3 to 4 APPL sessions and 43 attended more than 4 APPL sessions.

A total of 24 facilitators received the questionnaire in June 2007 and 20 completed it, resulting in a response rate of 83%. Of the 20 facilitators, two were male and 18 female. Three of the facilitators had less than 4 years experience as a teacher, two had 4 to 6 years of experience as a teacher,

three had 7 to 10 years of experience as a teacher, and 12 had more than 10 years of experience as a teacher.

Nine facilitators facilitated 3 to 4 APPL sessions during the academic year and 11 facilitators facilitated more than 4 APPL sessions.

Findings

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS; Qualitative data were analysed using the Framework Method of qualitative data analysis (Ritchie & Spencer 1994).

From both the quantitative and qualitative analysis, overall, both students and facilitators reported positive experiences with APPL, and the APPL group sessions are perceived by students and facilitators alike to have a positive impact on the students' experiences at the university and on their study skills.

The findings are presented in four sections. The first two sections present the findings from the quantitative data. The first of these covers a set of questions from the questionnaires that can be identified as measures of the quality of the APPL model. The second section covers a set of questions that cover the APPL Impact Scale as described previously. The penultimate section provides the findings from the qualitative analysis of the open ended questions and other qualitative data (evaluations of staff development and review workshops/seminars, APPL group summary notes and the analysis of the focus group that was undertaken with one APPL group). The final part of this section on findings examines some of the pertinent institutional data related for the period of the pilot.

Quantitative findings

Section 1 - Quality of the APPL model

Students and facilitators were asked to what extent they agree with a number of statements related to the quality of the APPL model. These questions can be found in Figure 3.

1. "I know the names of most of the students in my APPL group".
2. "My APPL facilitator cares that I succeed".
3. "I like the smaller size of the APPL group".
4. "The APPL group is one of the most important sources of my learning support."
5. "The APPL group is one of the most important sources of student learning support."

Figure 3. Questions related to the quality of the APPL model

The findings related to each of these questions can be found in Tables 1 - 5.

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 19
Disagree	3	4
Disagree a little	2	1
Agree a little	19	3
Agree	49	11

Table 1: Knowing Students' Names

	Students - Frequency n = 71
Disagree	0
Disagree a little	0
Agree a little	9
Agree	62

Table 2: Facilitators Care about Students' Successes

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 18
Disagree	2	1
Disagree a little	0	0
Agree a little	8	2
Agree	63	15

Table 3: Group Size

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 16
Disagree	14	2
Disagree a little	16	4
Agree a little	25	6
Agree	18	4

Table 4: APPL Group as Learning Support

	Students - Frequency n = 72	Facilitators - Frequency n = 15
Disagree	23	4
Disagree a little	15	4
Agree a little	28	5
Agree	6	2

Table 5: Struggling to Succeed with APPL Group

The majority of the students (68/73) agree/agree a little that they know the names of the students in their APPL group. The majority of the facilitators (14/19) agree/ agree a little that they know the names of the students in their APPL group. However, four of the facilitators disagreed with that statement.

All the students responded positively to the statement that their facilitator cared that they succeeded; the vast majority (62/71) agreeing that their facilitators cared about their success.

The vast majority of the students (71/73) agree/agree a little to liking the smaller group size, a finding that was echoed by the vast majority of the facilitators (17/18).

For both students and facilitators there were varied responses to the question about the APPL group as learning support. However, the majority of the students (43/73) and facilitators (10/16) responded positively to the statement that the APPL group is one of the most important sources of student learning support.

Responses to the question regarding whether the students would have struggled to succeed without the APPL group were varied for both students and facilitators. However, the majority of the students (38/72) and facilitators (8/15) responded negatively to the statement that students would have struggled to succeed this year without their APPL group.

Section 2 - APPL Impact Scale

Ten statements form the APPL Impact Scale. These can be found in Figure 4.

1. "Being a member of an APPL group helped to make friends at university".
2. "The APPL group sessions helped to complete assessments."
3. "The APPL group sessions helped with reflection on clinical placement experiences."
4. "The APPL group sessions helped me to develop my study skills."
5. "The APPL group sessions helped me to manage my time."
6. "The APPL group sessions helped decrease anxiety about studies"
7. "The APPL group sessions helped with communication skills."
8. "The APPL group sessions helped me analyse books and journal articles."
9. "The APPL group sessions helped me to think more deeply and critically about nursing."
10. "The APPL group sessions helped me to be a more successful student this year."

Figure 4: Questions related to the APPL Impact Scale

The findings related to each of these questions can be found in Tables 6 -15

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 17
Disagree	12	0
Disagree a little	8	2
Agree a little	30	10
Agree	23	5

Table 6: Students Making Friends

	Students - Frequency n = 72	Facilitators - Frequency n = 17
Disagree	14	2
Disagree a little	13	1
Agree a little	29	9
Agree	16	5

Table 7: Completing Assessments

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 17
Disagree	4	0
Disagree a little	3	0
Agree a little	20	3
Agree	46	14

Table 8: Reflection on Clinical Placement Experiences

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 17
Disagree	8	0
Disagree a little	10	0
Agree a little	30	11
Agree	25	6

Table 9: Development of Study Skills

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 16
Disagree	15	1
Disagree a little	11	3
Agree a little	31	10
Agree	16	2

Table 10: Time Management

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 16
Disagree	8	0
Disagree a little	11	3
Agree a little	25	5
Agree	29	8

Table 11: Level of Anxiety about Studies

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 17
Disagree	11	0
Disagree a little	8	1
Agree a little	26	9
Agree	28	7

Table 12: Communication Skills

	Students - Frequency n = 72	Facilitators - Frequency n = 16
Disagree	18	5
Disagree a little	21	3
Agree a little	25	6
Agree	8	2

Table 13: Analysing Books and Journal Articles

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 16
Disagree	9	1
Disagree a little	6	1
Agree a little	32	8
Agree	26	6

Table 14: Thinking Deeply and Critically About Nursing

	Students - Frequency n = 73	Facilitators - Frequency n = 11
Disagree	10	2
Disagree a little	10	4
Agree a little	34	5
Agree	19	0

Table 15: More Successful Students

The majority of the students (53/73) agree/agree a little that the APPL group helped them to make friends at the university. The majority of the facilitators (15/20) also agree/agree a little that it helped students to make friends.

Similarly, the majority of the students (45/72) agree/agree a little that the APPL group helped them to complete their assessments. The majority of the facilitators (14/17) also agree/agree a little that APPL helped students to complete their assessments.

A very large majority of the students (66/73) agree/agree a little that the APPL group helped them to reflect on their clinical placement experiences. All the facilitators also agree/agree a little that APPL helped students to reflect on their clinical placement experiences.

The majority of the students (55/73) agree/agree a little that the APPL group helped them to develop their study skills. All the facilitators agree/agree a little that APPL helped students to develop their study skills.

The majority of the students (47/73) agree/agree a little that the APPL group helped them to manage their time. The majority of the facilitators (12/16) agree/agree a little that it helped students to manage their time.

The majority of the students (54/73) agree/agree a little that the APPL group helped them to be less anxious about their studies. The majority of the facilitators (13/16) also agree/agree a little that APPL helped students to be less anxious about their studies.

The majority of the students (54/73) agree/agree a little that the APPL group helped them with their communication skills. The vast majority of the facilitators (16/17) agree/agree a little that APPL helped students with their communication skills.

Responses were varied for both students and facilitators to the question about the impact of APPL on students' ability to analyse books and journals. For facilitators, half (8/16) who responded to this questions, responded negatively to the statement that the APPL group sessions helped students with their analyses of books and journal articles.

The majority of the students (58/73) agree/agree a little that the APPL group helped them to think more deeply and critically about nursing. The vast majority of the facilitators (14/16) agree/agree a little that APPL helped students to think more deeply and critically about nursing.

The majority of the students (53/73) agree/agree a little that the APPL group helped them to be a more successful student this year. The facilitators' responses varied, however more than half who responded to this question, (6/11) responded negatively to this statement; 9 did not respond.

The ten statements described in this section form the APPL Impact Scale. This scale was judged to have strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.921 for the students and 0.808 for the facilitators.

In summary, according to students' perceptions, the strongest aspects of the APPL model are:

- helping students to think more deeply and critically about nursing.
- helping students to reflect on their clinical placements
- helping students to be less anxious about their studies

According to facilitators, the strongest aspects of the APPL model are:

- helping students to reflect on their clinical placements
- helping students to develop their study skills
- helping students with their communication skills.

According to students, the weakest aspects of the APPL model are:

- helping students to analyse books and journal articles
- helping students to manage their time
- helping students to complete their assessments.

According to facilitators, the weakest aspects of the APPL model are:

- helping students to be more successful students this year
- helping students to analyze books and journal articles
- helping student to manage their time.

Qualitative findings

Section 3.

Using the Framework Method of qualitative analysis (Ritchie & Spencer 1994), qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the student and facilitator questionnaire, from evaluations of APPL staff development and review workshop, APPL group summary notes and a focus group with one APPL group, were analysed. As a starting point, a coding framework for the open-ended questions was identified and then the remainder of the qualitative data was mapped onto the coding framework. This coding framework yielded some interesting themes and sub-themes that can be divided into three areas of findings:

- benefits to students of other learning support offered by the Faculty
- the best things about APPL groups
- how APPL groups could be improved.

The coding frameworks created from the qualitative data from both students and facilitators can be found in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

Other types of learning support - Most beneficial

Thematic analysis of these statements from the student questionnaires indicates that four of the support services provided by the university/ Faculty were most beneficial to students. These are:

- Library Drop In Sessions (23% of statements)
- The Faculty's Academic "Pop Inn" sessions (23% of statements)
- One to one tutorials with module/CFP leaders (21% of statements)
- The Faculty's literacy and numeracy support services – the study hut (21% of statements).

The remaining 11% of statements indicate that some support is gained by students from a number of other sources, e.g., the University's "Maths Aid" programme, personal study groups; the University's virtual learning environment (Blackboard). From the facilitators' perspectives, the same four support services were identified as being most beneficial and in approximately the same proportion as did the students, except that 40% of facilitator statements indicated that the most used support service used by their students were the academic "Pop Inn" sessions. However, only 9 of the 20 facilitators who responded to the questionnaires provided any answer to this question with 11 facilitators making no response to this question.

The findings show that the library "drop in" services are used by pre-

registration nursing students for help with assignments, referencing and accessing information and resources. Academic “Pop Inn” sessions, which are designed to help students to develop study and academic skills were cited in the open-ended questions as being particularly used for help with assignments, help with learning strategies and for general guidance and advice.

One-to-one sessions with tutors/module leaders are used by students for help with assignments, for help with reflection and often for non-specific reasons such as feeling comfortable with the tutor. Finally, the literacy and numeracy support was cited as helpful primarily for help with exam preparation, confidence-building, and feeling that the tutor who ran the study hut explained things in an understandable way.

The best thing about APPL groups

Four major themes emerged from the students about what was perceived to be the best aspects of APPL groups. These are:

- Characteristics of the group itself (42.6% of statements)
- APPL processes (26.4% of statements)
- The learning atmosphere/environment of the APPL group (19.4% of statements)
- The characteristics/qualities of the APPL facilitator (12% of statements).

Sub-themes of these yield some interesting findings. The characteristics of the group that were identified as being the best thing about APPL: included the small group size (approximately 15 per group); making friends; sharing experiences and group support). The sub-themes within the theme of APPL processes indicate that the processes that were most valued by students were discussing issues/problems with the group and finding group solutions; and learning specific study skills/strategies.

The third theme that emerged as being the best thing about APPL is about the learning environment created within APPL groups. Major sub-themes that emerged include:

- feeling comfortable speaking out in APPL group meetings
- feeling comfortable asking questions

Finally, the fourth major theme about what was best about APPL groups was related to the personal qualities of the APPL facilitator. No major sub-themes emerged but where student identified the qualities they liked in their facilitator, words like approachable, supportive, knowledgeable and helpful were used to describe the facilitator.

The facilitators’ responses to this question yielded a total of 22 statements

about their perceptions of what was the best thing about APPL. One major theme emerged from the facilitators – the group, with two sub-themes: the small size of the group and getting to know the students better. These findings are similar to those of the students. A small number of facilitators indicated that the facilitation processes they were able to use and learning with the students were the best things about APPL.

APPL would be better if...

Seven major themes emerged from the student questionnaires:

- Issues related to timing and timetabling of APPL sessions
- APPL processes
- Student engagement with APPL
- Structure of APPL sessions
- Formality v. informality of sessions
- Changes needed in facilitator behaviour
- APPL needs no changes at all (it is fine as it is).

Sub-themes that emerged from the students within this include:

- Timetabling and timing of APPL sessions – timetabling of sessions were highlighted by both students and facilitators as needing to be improved and better communicated to students; some students wanted more APPL sessions than are currently provided
- APPL processes – Students could help each other more; APPL should be linked to Blackboard activities, APPL should be better linked to coursework.
- Student engagement with APPL – Over 20% of statements made about how APPL could be improved indicated that APPL would be much better if more students in the group attended APPL sessions.
- Structure of APPL sessions – there was a mixed response to how APPL should or should not be structured with almost an equal number of statements favouring less structure or more structure to APPL sessions. A small number of statements indicated a preference for students determining the topics for APPL sessions and that APPL sessions should be specifically linked to other learning activities.
- Formality v. informality – Over 2/3 of statements wanted sessions to be less formal and more relaxed
- Changes to facilitator behaviour – Fewer than 5% of statements about how APPL could be improved indicated that the facilitator should change although specific issues were raised about facilitators' maintaining confidentiality and paying greater attention to students' criticism about the programme

- APPL group is fine as it is – Over 15% of statements made by students indicated that they saw no reason why APPL should change because it is fine as it is.

For the facilitators, 23 statements were identified from their responses about how APPL could be improved and four themes emerged. These are:

- Administrative issues/timetabling
- More students attending
- Consistency across APPL sessions
- Facilitator-related issues need improving

Nearly 60% of the statements were related administrative issues including timetabling of APPL sessions and administration of APPL. The remaining three themes identified by facilitators about how APPL could be improved including more students attending (17% of statements) which is in accord with the responses from students. The other two sub-themes had a very small number of responses.

Findings related to facilitator development and ongoing support

After each APPL facilitator training event/review workshop or seminar, evaluations were undertaken. Findings from these evaluations were mapped against the coding framework for facilitators.

Key themes that emerged from the evaluative data from facilitator development sessions, and review workshops and seminars were:

- Best thing about being an APPL facilitator – including sub-themes of the group/group size; seeing students develop; observing them working with and learning from each other; getting to know students better
- Least favourable aspects of being an APPL facilitator – administrative/timetabling problems
- Best thing about facilitator training course – learning new facilitation approaches; helped me to make changes to my teaching practice; sharing and growing together as lecturers; reflection on my practice as a lecturer
- Need for ongoing support and development as an APPL facilitator

These themes echo the findings from the open-ended questions on the facilitators' questionnaires. The evaluations of the facilitator review workshop yielded findings that, at times, concur with those findings from the questionnaires and also often yielded new illuminative information about the value as well as the challenges of APPL facilitation.

The themes that emerged from the evaluations of the facilitator review workshops are identified in Figure 5.

- APPL successes
(with three sub-themes – benefits of APPL for students; benefits of APPL for facilitators; benefits of APPL as a concept)
- How APPL could be improved
- How support for APPL facilitators could be improved/strengthened

Figure 5. Themes emerging from the evaluation of facilitator review Workshops

Over 90% of facilitators indicated in the evaluations of the review meeting that they perceived APPL to be a success. Figure 6 shows how success appears to be defined and described by facilitators.

Figure 6. How APPL success is defined by facilitators

Figure 7 identifies the thematic analysis of qualitative data from facilitators related to their dreams or vision for APPL.

- Better administration of APPL (timetabling/rooming)
- Degree of structure/focus
- Integration of APPL into the curriculum
- Students valuing APPL
- Supporting APPL (email; blackboard)
- Decrease attrition/increased retention and progression
- APPL positively influencing key skills development
- APPL perceived as a model of good practice
- A vision for APPL in years 2 and 3

Figure 7. Dreams for the future of APPL – emergent themes

The vision for APPL in years 2 and 3 yielded particularly interesting findings. The facilitators saw APPL in years 2 and 3 as being a way in which students continued to get to know each other better, combining the learning aspect of APPL with social events. Facilitators saw an increase in student agenda-led APPL sessions yet at the same time, were seeking a clearer understanding of the role of the APPL facilitator especially related to assessment. Facilitators saw a scenario whereby at the end of year 2, students no longer needed a facilitator for APPL sessions and instead, became a self-managing group. However, other facilitators suggested some innovative changes to APPL

including year 3 students facilitating year 1 students in APPL groups, a concept similar to Peer Assisted Learning schemes. APPL Facilitators saw this as a way to help 3rd year students develop facilitation and mentoring skills

Improving support for APPL facilitators

Figure 8 outlines the key themes that emerged from evaluations by facilitators of staff development and reviews.

- Specific content areas identified (e.g., models of facilitation; facilitation skills development)
- Role issues/role clarification
- Course information issues (e.g., about branches, placements; assessment; other student support services available to students; where to get specific information)
- Supplementary support for APPL (e.g., administrative support for APPL; use of Blackboard to support APPL; group emails; frequently asked questions)
- APPL groups as voluntary for students or compulsory

Figure 8. Themes related to support for facilitators

Student focus group

One APPL group participated in a focus group interview as part of a Master's Dissertation that was being undertaken by an APPL facilitator. The group commenced in September 2006 and the purpose of the focus group was to explore in depth the perceptions and experiences of one APPL group of students and the specific research question that guided the focus group is complementary to the research questions for the evaluation of the wider APPL initiative, i.e., "How do students perceive the APPL experience?" The questions that were posed in the focus group were designed around the evaluative research objectives. In addition to participating in the focus group, this group also completed the student questionnaire described earlier in this report.

The findings of the focus group data map well against the coding framework used to analyse the other qualitative data and provide richer and deeper insights into both the benefits of APPL and where improvements could be made. Key themes that emerged included:

- Personal benefits of APPL (e.g., feeling supported; sharing knowledge and problems; sense of achievement; smaller groups; making friends; getting along with group members; feeling safe; reduction in anxiety)
- Academic benefits (e.g., reflection on placement experiences;

completion of portfolios and practice placement books;

- Where improvements could be made (e.g., organisational/administrative issues including room booking, timing, communication of details of next sessions; supplementing APPL meetings with written handouts on Blackboard)

In addition, the participants in the focus group preferred greater structure to the APPL meetings with advance information on what was to be covered in the next meeting

Institutional data

Section 4.

Data related to retention, attrition and student progression were examined and comparisons made between these figures prior to the implementation of APPL and after the implementation of APPL.

Student retention is a complex phenomenon and a number of variables affect retention statistics. APPL is one of many initiatives designed to enhance student retention. First year student retention in the pilot year of the APPL model 2006/7 was 2% better than in 2005/6.

Discussion

The findings of the evaluative research project need to be discussed in terms of the extent to which the research aims have been achieved and the research questions answered. Additionally, the discussion of the findings needs to examine the extent to which the findings of this evaluative study maps against, or adds to, the existing literature on support for students.

It is clear from an analysis of the data that the research aims have been met and the research questions answered. A clearer picture of the students' and facilitators' perceptions of APPL has emerged from the study.

Students perceive that there should be more frequent and regular APPL sessions in year 1 and that there should be consistency across APPL sessions about what is covered and what students are provided with in APPL sessions. The question of whether there should be any thematic structure to APPL meetings was raised by a small number of students and facilitators. However, the majority of students and facilitators favour an approach where part of the APPL meeting was unplanned and used for student issues as they arise at the time and where the second part of the meeting is used to address a pre-planned topic.

In terms of the impact of the APPL model, the strongest features for students were the way in which APPL helped them to reflect on their clinical placements, the help that APPL gave in reducing anxiety and the way in

which APPL helped them to think more deeply and critically about nursing. The students, however, also perceived that APPL was weak in terms of helping them to analyse academic literature, helping them to manage their time and helping them to complete their assignments. This may be for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the notion of using part of APPL sessions for specific topics (Appendix 1) only was implemented in January 2007. This meant that for most students, the schedule topic related to analysing academic literature and time management may not have taken place by the time the evaluative questionnaires were distributed to them for completion. Additionally, it is uncertain as to whether not all APPL facilitators kept to the schedule of topics that was introduced in January 2007. It is also possible that, rather than using APPL sessions; students used many of the other support services available for help with their assessments. Indeed the data related to the use of the Academic “pop inn” sessions, library drop in sessions and one-to-one meetings with module leaders shows this to be the case.

For the facilitators, the strongest features of APPL was, as for the students, related to the way that it helped students to reflect on their clinical placements. In addition, for facilitators, the way that they perceived that APPL helped to develop students’ study and communication skills were strong features of APPL. Conversely, for facilitators, APPL was perceived to be less strong in terms of helping students to be more successful, helping them to analyse books and journals and helping students to manage their time.

With regard to facilitator support and development it is clear that the facilitators appreciated the staff preparation and the support programme, they welcomed the opportunity to share experiences with other APPL facilitators and learn from the experiences of others. A picture is emerging which suggests that the ongoing support for facilitators from the regular APPL facilitator review workshops and facilitated action learning sets mimicked to some extent the APPL groups themselves and the learning experienced by facilitators mirrors the learning experienced by students in their APPL groups. This seems to indicate that ongoing support and development for facilitators is an essential part of the APPL initiative.

Although the impact of small groups in higher education has been studied, little research has been carried out on the impact of small group learning in nursing education (Roberts 2006). Lack of support for students, according to the Royal College of Nursing (2002) is one of the factors that lead to high attrition rates. Since the implementation of APPL in the pre-registration nursing programme attrition has been reduced by 2%. Although no causal link has been established between APPL and this reduced attrition rate, it is likely that APPL, in conjunction with a range of other learning support services is creating an environment where students are more likely to succeed and stay on the course.

APPL attempted to give structure to student academic, personal and professional learning and support. This is suggested by Gosling (2003) who stated that in higher education, there is a need for a more systematic approach to supporting student learning. The previous personal tutor system employed in the School of Nursing was inconsistent in terms of the support it gave to all students and was not a systematic approach to supporting student learning in the way defined by Gosling (2003). Personal tutors are more likely to be perceived as problems solvers rather than facilitators of learning (Dobson-Harrington, 2006) and the student/personal tutor encounter was often viewed as a safety net rather than a means for developing mutual trust, support, respect and understanding (Dobson-Harrington 2006).

The data analysis in this evaluation of APPL indicated that learning from fellow students was a significant feature of APPL. This reflects a finding from Lines (2001) who found that students benefit from help from a facilitator to set up collaborative networks to enable learners to help each other. APPL seems to have achieved this. Peer networks and the support of peers enable individuals to discover opportunities and to develop critical thinking skills (Rayner et al 2002)

The literature review undertaken by Harvey et al (2006) highlighted the need for students to integrate both socially and academically into their programme and institution. There is a link between student persisting on their course of study and their satisfaction levels and students who participate in support activities benefit from the support. Harvey et al (2006) also found that often the students who are most in need of support are not always those who make use of it. This may be an argument for APPL being compulsory in year 1. In order to adjust socially and emotionally to university life, students need help to adapt to the new demands of university life, to become autonomous learners, to feel positive and to have a friendship group (Harvey et al 2006). APPL appears to have provided a vehicle to promote adjustment and integration.

APPL was designed to provide a structured and systematic system of learning support for student nurses as one of a range of initiatives to enable students to succeed and to reduce attrition. Drew (2001) identified range of skills and activities that helped students to learn including learning self-management skills, being motivated, support from peers and support from others. The evaluative research into APPL appears to concur with Drew (2001).

The APPL evaluation indicates that the facilitators have been enabled to know their students better and to understand their learning issues, which supports the findings of the National Audit Office (2007) who recommended that institutions need to get to know their students and learn how they feel about their programme. In addition, the National Audit Office encourages institutions to develop a more positive approach to retention-related activities and recognise how they can improve student success.

Finally, the evaluation of the APPL pilot indicates that student perceptions of their APPL groups are more positive than those of their APPL facilitators; it could be surmised that APPL facilitators underestimate the impact of APPL

groups for students and the impact APPL facilitators can have.

Many of the key factors that promoted student retention in year 1 from Harvey et al (2006) that were referred to earlier in this report (Figure 1) seem to be the same factors that were rated highly by students and APPL facilitators alike. Finally, Yorke & Longdon (2007) found that making new friends in year 1 of university was an important factor in student retention and satisfaction and that the pedagogic approaches offered by universities should facilitate socialisation by choosing pedagogic approaches that engage students in collaborative learning activities. The APPL research supports this.

Recommendations

APPL facilitation would be improved if students were given a better briefing about the aims and objectives of APPL at the beginning, including written information about the purpose and structure of APPL. This has already been implemented with the creation of APPL handbooks for students and for facilitators. Students who have experienced APPL should be invited to talk to new cohorts of students about APPL.

Year 2 and Year 3 of the APPL model need to be informed by feedback from students and staff, they then need to be implemented and evaluated.

The APPL model needs administrative support in order to be better organised regarding timetabling and rooming, students having dates, of APPL dates in advance, including the theme for the next session.

In the evaluation, facilitators and students explored the issue of compulsory / voluntary attendance at APPL groups with both groups presenting arguments for both approaches. There needs to be further and wider discussion of this issue in the School of Nursing. Information needs to be sought from other institutions that use APPL - type groups, which are compulsory and integrated into the curriculum and the timetable to inform the discussion.

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Appendix 1

Academic Topics for APPL groups

1. **Establishing good study skills in Year 1 as a foundation for Years 2 & 3** (e.g., how do you learn and what helps learning? Difference between memorising and learning; understanding and meaning; seeking and using advice; helping each other to learn; importance of reading newspapers, professional journals and reports; surface v. deep learning; different learning styles; personal goal setting, "By the next APPL meeting I will have")
2. **Organisational skills and time management** (e.g., Organising paper /notes/handouts; sharing practices; commitments v. priorities; keeping a journal v. relying on memory; importance of planning; making "to do" lists; organising your study time; Making best use of other support facilities – library, academic drop inn, study hut, module leaders)
3. **Assessment and the language of assessment** (e.g., Purpose of assessment; Previous experience of assessment; formative and summative assessment; how do we assess - essays/ MCQ /exams /OSCE s /on-line/practice assessment; why different types of assessment; language of assessment; assessment criteria/word limits/grades; how to plan for different assignments; the importance of answering the question, the role of drafts; essay writing; getting started; exam -: planning revision; what is feedback and what do you do with it?)
4. **Managing worries and anxieties** (e.g. Worries and anxiety as a part of life; knowing what worries you; evaluating the seriousness of personal worries; managing anxieties and worries – what helps; preparing for exams/managing the worry of exams; constructive preparation; keeping healthy; using mock examinations; breaking material down into manageable chunks; making and using a study/revision timetable; practice writing under exam conditions.
5. **Motivation and goal-setting** (e.g., what is motivation; what does it feel like and where does it come from; How can you increase your motivation; how can lecturers motivate you: how can you motivate yourself and each other; using positive words and phrases; setting small goals and celebrating reaching them; pacing yourself; writing a reflective diary)
6. **Communication skills development** (e.g., communicating at different levels; New words /terms/ languages; The language of clinical practice and the language of higher education; experience of encountering these new languages; Importance of always checking the meaning of words that are not fully understood; Communicating in different media; Different types of writing; Different types of verbal communication; communicating with each other; communicating with lecturers; communicating with patients and clients; how do all of these differ?)
7. **Critical thinking, reading and analysis** (e.g., Critical thinking is a set of methods aimed at exploring evidence in a particular way; .Active learning versus passive learning; Questioning- an important skill in HE; Our previous experience of learning; Why do we need to become "critical" as nurses? How do we demonstrate our critical skills when we write? Critical thinking is associated with reasoning and rational thought; How can we develop our critical and analytical skills

Thinking about moving up to level 2; Year 2 APPL groups

Appendix 2

Coding Framework for Qualitative Data – Students

1. Other types of learning support - Most beneficial

Total number of questionnaires received = 73

Total number of qualitative statements made by students about which other types of learning support were most beneficial to them = **81 statements**

Type of support	Number of statements	%
1.0 Library Drop in sessions 1.1 Help with assignments (3/19 statements = 15.8%) 1.2 Help with referencing (7/19 statements – 36.8%) 1.3 Help with information/learning resources (9/19 statements = 47.4%)	19/81	23%
2.0 Academic “Pop Inn” sessions 2.1 Help with assignments (9/19 statements = 47.4%) 2.2 Heal with learning skills/strategies (2/19 statements = 10.5%) 2.3 Guidance/support/advice (2/19 statements = 10.5%) 2.4 Non-specified help (6/19 statements = 31.6%)	19/81	23%
3.0 One-to-one sessions with CFP/module leader 3.1 Essay/assignment writing ((7/17 statements = 41.2%) 3.2 Help with reflecting (3/17 statements = 17.6%) 3.3 Felt comfortable with the teacher (1/17 statements – 6%) 3.4 Non-specified help (6/17 statements = 35.2%)	17/81	21%
4.0 Literacy/numeracy (study hut) 4.1 Help with exam preparation (6/17 statements – 35.2%) 4.2 Gave me confidence (1/17 statements – 6%) 4.3 Explained things to me in a way that I could understand (1/17 statements – 6%) 4.4 Would recommend study hut to others (1/17 statements = 6%) 4.5 + ve comments about study hut teacher (5/17 statements = 29.3%) 4.6 Non-specified help (3/17 statements = 17.5%)	17/81	21%

5.0 Other 5.1 Maths Aid (1/9 = 11%) 5.2 One to one with APPL facilitator (6/9 = 67%) 5.3 Personal study group (1/9 statements – 11%) 5.4 Blackboard (1/9 statements = 11%)	9/81	11%
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2. Best thing about APPL

Number of student questionnaires received = 73

Number of statements made about the best thing about APPL = **129 statements**

Theme	Number of statements	%
<p>1.0 The group</p> <p>1.1 Small size (20/55 statements = 36.4%)</p> <p>1.2 Friendliness/niceness of people (3/55 statements = 5%)</p> <p>1.3 Made friends/got to know people (12/55 statements = 21.9%)</p> <p>1.4 Sharing experiences with group (14/55 statements = 25.5%)</p> <p>1.5 Similarity between experiences in the group (1/55 statements = 2%)</p> <p>1.6 Group support (5/55 statements = 9%)</p>	55/129	42.6%
<p>2.0 APPL processes</p> <p>2.1 Discussed issues/experiences and found solutions (20/34 statements = 58.8%)</p> <p>2.2 Learned specific study skills/strategies (12/34 statements = 35.2%)</p> <p>2.3 Learned ways of handling situations in the future (1/34 statements = 3%)</p> <p>2.4 Good email support between APPL sessions (1/34 statements = 3%)</p>	34/29	26.4%
<p>3.0 Learning atmosphere/environment</p> <p>3.1 Comfortable speaking out in APPL sessions (20/25 statements = 80%)</p> <p>3.2 APPL helped build self-confidence (1/25 statements = 4%)</p> <p>3.3 Comfortable asking questions in APPL sessions (3/25 statements = 12%)</p> <p>3.4 APPL decreased anxiety about first placements (1/25 statements = 4%)</p>	25/129	19.4%
<p>4.0 Qualities of the APPL Facilitator</p> <p>(Including approachable, supportive, knowledgeable, helpful)</p>	15/129	12%

3. APPL would be better if.....

Number of questionnaires received = 73

Number of statements made about how APPL could be better = **63 statements**

Theme	Number of statements	%
<p>1.0 Timetabling/timing/length of APPL sessions</p> <p>1.1 improvements to timetabling needed (5/16 statements = 31.2%)</p> <p>1.2 Should be more time for each APPL session (1/16 statements = 6.2%)</p> <p>1.3 Sessions should be shorter but should be more of them (9/16 statements = 56.2 %)</p> <p>1.4 APPL sessions should have a break in the middle (1/16 statements = 6.2%)</p>	16/63	25.4%
<p>2.0 APPL processes</p> <p>2.1 More information needs to be given (2/11 statements = 18.2%)</p> <p>2.2 More opportunities for reflection needed (1/11 statements = 9%)</p> <p>2.3 Students need to help each other more (3/11 statements – 27.3%</p> <p>2.4 More links should be made between APPL sessions and Blackboard activities (1/11 statements = 9%)</p> <p>2.5 APPL sessions should be used to work on coursework, clinical skills/OSCEs (4/11 statements = 36.4%)</p>	11/63	17.5%
<p>3.0 Student engagement with APPL</p> <p>(APPL would be better if more students showed up to sessions)</p>	13/63	21%
<p>4.0 Structure of APPL sessions</p> <p>4.1 Should be more structured/better structured (3/7 statements = 42.9%)</p> <p>4.2 Should be less structured (1/7 statements = 14.3%)</p> <p>4.3 Students should determine the topics for APPL sessions (2/7 statements – 28.6%)</p> <p>4.4 APPL sessions should be linked to other studies (1/7 statements = 14.3%)</p>	7/63	11.1%

<p>5.0 Formality/informality of sessions</p> <p>5.1 APPL sessions should be more formal (2/6 statements = 33.3%)</p> <p>5.2 APPL sessions should be less formal/more relaxed (4/6 statements = 66.7%)</p>	6/63	9.5%
<p>6.0 How facilitator should change to improve APPL</p> <p>6.1 Facilitator needs to respect confidentiality more (1/3 statements – 33.3%)</p> <p>6.2 Facilitator needs to pay more attention to things that students say are wrong with the course (1/3 statements – 33.3%)</p> <p>6.3 Facilitator needs to answer emails in a more timely fashion (1/3 statements = 33.3%)</p>	3/63	4.8%
<p>7.0 APPL group is fine as it is and does not need to change</p>	10	15.9%

4. My ideal APPL group would look like

It was impossible to code the responses to this question as they were all so very different. The results of these findings seem to indicate that each student has individual ideas about the ideal APPL group with little (if any) consistency across students.

Appendix 3

Coding Framework for Qualitative Data – Students

1: Other types of learning support - Most beneficial

Total number of facilitator questionnaires received = 20

Total number of qualitative statements made by facilitators about which other types of learning support were most beneficial to them = **15 statements**

Type of support	Number of statements	%
1.0 Library Drop in sessions	3/15	20%
2.0 Academic “Pop Inn” sessions 1.1 positive comments reported by students to facilitator (5/6 statements = 83.3%) 1.2 negative comments reported by students to facilitator (1/6 statements = 16.7%)	6/15	40%
3.0 One-to-one sessions with CFP/module leader	3/15	20%
4.0 Literacy/numeracy (study hut)	3/15	20%

NB: 9 out of 20 facilitators did not respond at all to this question. It could be suggested that the absence of answers to this open ended question is because the facilitators did not know whether students had used other support facilities

2: Best thing about being an APPL facilitator

Number of facilitator questionnaires received = 20

Number of statements made by facilitators about the best thing about APPL = **22 statements**

Theme	Number of statements	%
5.0 The group and the students 5.1 Small size (6/15 statements = 40%) 5.2 Getting to know students well (9/15 statements = 60%)	15/22	68.2%
6.0 Facilitation processes (e.g., listening/supporting/helping students; watching students' develop relationships; being part of the group's journey; learning from students)	5/22	22.7%
7.0 Perceived value of APPL to students (e.g., APPL is better than previous student support arrangements; students understand the programme better because of APPL)	2/22	9%

3: APPL would be better if.....

Number of questionnaires received = 20

Number of statements made about how APPL could be better = **23 statements**

Theme	Number of statements	%
1.0 APPL would improve if administration of APP improved: Communication/timetabling/timing/length of APPL sessions 1.1 Rooming/room size/appropriateness of room (7/13 statements = 53.8%) 1.2 Timing of APPL sessions (3/13 statements = 23.1%) 1.3 Others (3/13 statements = 3%)	13/23	56.5%
8.0 APPL would improve if more students attended APPL sessions	4/23	17.4%
9.0 APPL would improve if there was consistency across sessions	3/23	13.1%

<p>10.0 APPL would be better if individual facilitator-related issues were addressed</p> <p>(e.g., individual facilitators had more time to prepare for sessions; Individual facilitators had a better understanding of the CFP programme; An individual facilitator was off sick for an extended period and could not meet with students)</p>	<p>3/23</p>	<p>13.1%</p>
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APPL facilitation would be really excellent if the following changes were made:

Two facilitators indicated that they perceived APPL to be excellent in its current form and do not see the need for any changes to APPL.

Two facilitators did not complete this question.

The remaining facilitators (n = 16) made individual statements that, similar to the students' responses to this question, cannot be grouped in any way.