

A Seamless Pathway?

An Exploratory Study of Articulating Nursing Students

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## 1.1 Introduction

Articulation or advanced entry is the process where a previously gained qualification facilitates entry to university from college into year two or three of a university degree programme (Irwin & Johnston, 2014). This usually comprises a one-year Higher National Certificate (HNC) or two year Higher National Diploma (HND) programme delivered within the college sector. The HNC Care and Administrative Practice (CAP) is an educational course taught within the college sector that aims to prepare students for the role of the Senior Health Care Support Worker (SHCSW) or gain progression or advanced entry to a variety of Health and Social Care Degrees. The HNC CAP was validated by SQA in 2011 and successful mapping programmes were undertaken nationally to establish articulation pathways to four fields of nursing. Students who undertake the HNC CAP have been articulating into year two of nursing programmes for seven years, yet there is a paucity of research examining their transition experiences. Therefore, a research gap has been identified and as a result the following aim and objectives of this study have been developed.

### Aim of study:

To investigate the transitional experiences of one cohort of nursing articulation students at a Scottish University.

### Research objectives:

- To explore the transition from college to university by one cohort of articulation students
- To explore the students' experiences in relation to learning, teaching and assessment
- To examine the retention of HNC CAP students.

Examining articulating students' transitional experiences can produce insight into the challenges they face. In order to implement evidence-based support interventions it is necessary to recognise that transition into university can be a stressful process and is related to attainment, satisfaction and achievement (Hughes & Smail, 2015; Nelson, Smith & Clarke, 2012). Support and orientation are crucial in the initial stages at university, as students are vulnerable to withdrawing due to coping with increased educational demands and the resulting social, personal and lifestyle changes (Hussey & Smith, 2010). Transition into Higher Education (HE) is challenging for most students irrespective of the route taken (Meehan & Howells, 2017; Briggs, Clark & Hall, 2012). Therefore, the findings of this study may also be relevant to students transitioning into HE from school. Many educationalists have concentrated on developing strategies and interventions to support student transition, such as induction programmes and online web resources. Interestingly, the majority of evidence available pertains to entering and completing the first year of an undergraduate programme (Maunder et al., 2013; Nelson, Smith & Clarke 2012; Yorke and Longden, 2008). However, it is suggested that students articulating into second or third year face additional challenges (Northall et al., 2016; Tower et al., 2015; Cund et al., 2015; Cree et al., 2009). This research study has therefore explored a selected group of students' transitional journeys from Further Education (FE) into HE and contributes to contemporary literature. As the author of this study is the HNC CAP programme lead at an FE college, a role which entails supporting articulation, she has a professional obligation and key interest in the outcome of this research study.

## **1.2 Background**

A significant amount of literature exists relating to the challenges associated with the recruitment and retention within nursing degrees (Graham, 2017; Rodgers et al., 2013; Parry et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2010). These challenges do not lend themselves only to Scotland but an international arena (Hoeve et al., 2017). Consequently, throughout Scotland there are various nursing posts that remain unfilled. Vacant nursing posts along with the pressures of an aging population, a growing skills demand and an integrated service delivery all add increased pressure on existing staff (Triggle, 2015; Scottish Government, 2013). Therefore, many

authors agree that widening participation and creating flexible routes to nurse registration must be a key recruitment approach to ease the anticipated nursing crisis due to an aging workforce, a dwindling pool of potential applicants and an international nursing shortage (Scottish Government, 2017a; Heaslip et al., 2017; Melillo et al., 2013). In addition, the completion rates of students achieving a nursing degree are much lower than any other discipline (Woodfield, 2014). Various strategies have been imposed to address the recruitment and attrition levels within nursing programmes, one being the articulation of HNC CAP students to second year nursing degrees.

In Scotland, the emergence of articulation students was enabled by a dual-sector approach to obtain a degree underpinned by the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF, 2001). The framework identifies that an HNC qualification and year one of a degree programme are at an equivalent academic level. Hence, this reduces the learner journey by one year which has financial implications for both the learner and public funding (Scottish Government, 2011). The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has published a ten-year strategy setting an ambitious target to increase advanced entry students from 49.4% in 2015 to 75% in 2025 (SFC, 2016). Due to industry need one programme that has seen an increase in articulation numbers to many Higher Education Institutes (HEI) throughout Scotland is the HNC CAP qualification. In addition, the partnership articulation agreements formed have met increased attention due to widening access policy that has revolutionised the educational landscape, ensuring that fairer access to HE is much more than an altruistic endeavour and that previously under-represented learners have the opportunity to progress to tertiary education (Scottish Government, 2011; Scottish Government, 2015; Scottish Government, 2016). This is inextricably linked to the need for a diverse nursing workforce, and reflects a key principle of the recent Nursing 2030 Vision Policy dedicated to ensuring the recruitment of nursing students who reflect Scotland's cultural and socioeconomic diversity (Scottish Government, 2017b).

Examining the demographics of the HNC population reveal a diverse and lower socio-economic student group. However, there are various challenges encountered while transitioning to university for this non-traditional learner group (Gordon et al.,

2011). Drawing on key literature published enabled an analysis of strategies that impede or facilitate articulating students' transition to university. Due to limited literature relating to articulating students and specifically nursing students in the UK, it was deemed appropriate to widen the search. Pathways for college students progressing into second year nursing degrees are available in several countries including Australia, New Zealand, US and Canada. Therefore, the search was widened to include any primary research studies from the aforementioned countries. Following critical analysis and synthesis of the selected literature, key themes emerged, namely Preparation Pre-University Transition, Peer and Tutor Support, and Learning Teaching and Assessment.

### **1.2.1 Preparation Pre-University Transition**

The importance of preparing articulation students for transition prior to entering university is well documented (Ingram & Gallacher, 2013; Howison, 2012). It has been recognised that adequate information about the culture of HE can affect students' preconceived expectations prior to arrival (McKendry et al., 2014). Pike & Harrison (2011) claim from their UK-based qualitative study of articulating students that providing sufficient details to prepare students for transition facilitates the progression process and can also reduce anxiety experienced. In addition, they further suggest communication and information-sharing between partner institutes are key to a smooth transition. Thus, strengthening partnerships between education sectors is essential to ensuring the sharing of up-to-date information and common teaching and assessment approaches.

### **1.2.2 Peer and Tutor Support**

Support has been highlighted as essential for students who are transitioning into university (Briggs, Clarke & Hall, 2012; McInnis, 2004). Support can come from various people such as peers, tutors and student support organisations (Banks et al., 2012). Research highlights that meeting other students and lecturers prior to commencing university during a transition module raised student confidence. Indeed, making connections with the lecturer and other articulating students was rated the most significant aspect of a transition-bridging module (Boelen & Kenny, 2009). This echoes findings of action research undertaken in Scotland. The

articulating students within Mayne & Bannerman's (2015) Scottish study noted that having a university link tutor pre-transition made the transfer into the university much easier. It also identified the week-long 'Boot Camp' as invaluable in introducing learning and teaching strategies thus supporting transition (Mayne & Bannerman, 2015). This recent study suggests that building relationships pre- and post-transition could enable students to smoothly transition into a new learning environment.

### **1.2.3 Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

Research indicates that students transferring from FE to HE experience differences in pedagogical approaches and higher expectations regarding standards of work (Bogdan & Elliot 2015; Morgan 2015). Evidence suggests that this difference in teaching approaches and standards is also faced by students who transfer from school (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Krause et al., 2005). Studies also imply that articulating FE students find it difficult to adapt to HE's self-directed learning approach and take ownership of their learning. This may be related to previous educational experience, as within many FEIs in Scotland course handouts are distributed to articulating nursing students, to save them printing costs. The reason for this decision is that nursing students who undertake their first year at university receive a nursing bursary (Scottish Government, 2017c) whereas, students who complete their first year within the FE sector do not. Therefore, similar to other FE students, financial hardship is common and can impact on course participation (Gallacher, 2017). In addition, as HEIs and FEIs resource budgets differ, students may also not have had access to the resources available within HEI, for example database platforms. This could result in a lack of researching skills that is demanded by the HEI assessment methods.

Interestingly, research from Canada demonstrated that despite previously being exposed to diverse learning teaching and assessment methodologies in college, attainment was high in university for articulating students. The authors highlight that rather than being a 'back door' to becoming a degree nurse, advanced entry is a rigorous 'front door' opportunity for students who already hold a vocational qualification (Coffey et al., 2016). This study compared traditional and articulating nursing students and results demonstrated module upon module, year after year that the articulating students were outperforming their traditional route counterparts

(Coffey et al., 2016). A possible explanation for the high achievement rate is that to progress onto the degree programme students required a C grade pass or above in a bridging module, ensuring that only the students with academic ability would be eligible for degree study.

It appears that preparation, partnership working and support are the interconnected concepts to good practice and enhancing the integrity for articulation, as a route to higher education. As universities and colleges in the UK wish students to transition and articulate into second or third year, successfully meeting a diverse range of needs and understanding the student experience is crucial. The political drivers of articulation and widening access alongside the financial cost of attrition ensure it is pivotal that the transitional experiences of advanced entry nurses in Scotland are evaluated through research.

### **1.3 Methodology**

Action research principles and theory underpin this study. Action research involves a cycle of inquiry to reflect on and improve practice. In essence the primary reason for engaging in action research is to enhance a particular situation (Mills, 2014). As a method action research is fitting with the college sector strategy for enhancing the student experience and the subsequent improvement of learning and teaching. A mixed-method approach was deemed appropriate for this study. Historically there has been a long-standing debate between the quantitative and qualitative frameworks of inquiry, which resulted in researchers being aligned to a specific approach (Lunde, Heggen & Strand, 2013). However, a shift in perspective has led to the belief that instead of a researcher being aligned to a particular framework, many disciplines recognise that using these different methodologies to satisfy the research study's aim can strengthen not divide enquiry (Gerrish & Lacey, 2010). Thus, there should not be a dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative approaches; instead they should be regarded as complementary rather than competitive.

As the aim of this study was to gain an insight into the transitional experience of articulating HNC CAP nursing students, where limited research is available, an exploratory qualitative research design was warranted. Exploratory research is



described as initial research to provide details when a lack of information on a phenomenon exists (Huttlinger, 2011). Moreover, the intent of an exploratory study is to elicit a description on the topic or population it is relevant to. Exploratory research is inductive in nature as underpinning theory is derived from detailed analysis of the data yielded. Exploratory designs have also been effective within the field of nursing to identify some of the main issues of a particular area of interest (Hoeve et al., 2017). In addition, research enabled a rich and context bound understanding of articulation into higher education from the standpoint of the students themselves, thereby meeting this study's objectives. A quantitative approach will also be used alongside the primarily qualitative research, to measure students' retention and success.

The target population for this study was articulating students from a degree nursing programme at one university in Scotland, as these students meet the criteria of the lived experience of transition from FE into second year HE. Therefore, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was utilised. Thirty-six students who articulated in September 2017 at the chosen university were eligible and thirteen responded to the email and agreed to take part in the research study. The first six participants who responded were recruited.

It was decided that face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were more suitable for this research study as they allow the researcher to delve deeply into a topic while also permitting the investigation of spontaneous issues raised by the interviewee (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). To enable some direction in the interview and align the questions to the research objectives, an interview schedule was written. The schedule consisted of a pre-determined set of open ended questions, derived from the previous literature review (see Appendix 1).

Prior to commencing this study, permission was granted from an ethics research committee. Gatekeeper access was also sought to distribute the study details to the participants. In keeping with the ethical principle of autonomy, it was repeated that participation was voluntary and participants had the freedom to choose to take part in the study without any persuasion. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and with no repercussions.

### **1.3.1 Data Analysis**

Data analysis was carried out in two stages. Stage one focused on thematic analyses of data from the semi structured interviews. Stage two examined previous cohorts progression statistics and reasons identified for exiting the programme. Preliminary findings were discussed and explored with a research supervisor as part of internal validation.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step model of thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data as the framework is easily understood and can be used with small sample sizes (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). Arguably the most important benefit of deploying this method was it provided a model to aid the novice researcher to manage the large amounts of data (see Appendix 2).

The researcher searched for themes across the data and during the analysis stage, subthemes were necessary for complex themes and demonstrated the hierarchy in the data. This ensured themes reflected their content. Two themes and six subthemes that were related to the research objectives were identified. The theme names attached were concise and unambiguous and discussed with the researcher's supervisor.

The following section will present an analytic narrative providing the evidence and an account of each theme. The retention rates of previous articulating student cohorts will also be presented alongside the qualitative data obtained in stage one of the study. Existing literature relating to articulation was drawn upon during this phase to demonstrate analysis of the raw data.

## **1.4 Findings and Analysis**

Following qualitative analysis, two key themes namely, Obstacles and Enablers Encountered by Articulation Students: University Transition, and Obstacles and Enablers Encountered by Articulation Students: Clinical Placement emerged. These themes included three subthemes. Quotes from the data illuminate these findings.

## 1.5 Obstacles and Enablers Encountered by Articulation Students: University Transition

### 1.5.1 Informed and Prepared to Enter the HEI

Co-operation and effective communication channels between the FEI and HEI are crucial to enable students to have up-to-date information regarding the university culture and the programme they are entering (Ingram & Gallacher, 2013). Therefore, students would be making an informed choice in choosing the articulation pathway. This was important as the articulation students also need to undertake an online module, in addition to extra clinical hours. Thus, the college staff play a key role between the university and the student to notify and inform them of conditions that are required to be met and adequately prepare the students for the programme they are entering. This close connection between university and college was experienced by five of the participants within this study. Comments included:

“It was as if just kind of handing us over very gently, over into uni.  
It was all done very well.”

This could be attributed to the strategic partnerships and communities of practice established by the joint FE/HE articulation hubs. It has previously been acknowledged that an alliance between the two sectors must exist to provide a ‘more seamless tertiary education system’ (Gallacher, 2006 p.387). This is fundamental as interconnectedness and sharing knowledge are key aspects when designing articulation pathways.

The significance of students’ expectations in relation to the hard work required to articulate emerges strongly in the findings. As articulating students were progressing into year two of a nursing programme, year one skills, standards and 650 clinical placement hours had to be achieved by students whilst they were undertaking year one of their programme at college. In addition, transition into a new environment that has different processes and procedures is important, as knowing what to expect is linked to student success (Mckendry et al., 2014). If the student anticipates what is required and the full demands placed upon them in

advance it can prevent anxiety or stress. Indeed, it has been suggested that a crucial aspect of transition for students was 'feeling in the loop' (Kandiko & Mawer, 2013), as it is common when transitioning to HE that students feel lost, uncertain of what to expect or unsure who to go to for help. The ethos of the HEI and change in culture were very apparent resulting in opportunities for preparation and planning. The students were under no illusions as to the hard work ahead, as one participant reported:

*"It was good, it let you, prepare yourself. You knew what you were coming into. As I say, you prepared yourself for it, so it wasn't a shock to the system. You knew it was going to be hard work, you'd seen it all."*

This targeted pre-university support (see Appendix 5) was highlighted throughout the narratives with two participants specifically discussing the benefits of being shown sample timetables and their timetabled classrooms before they joined the programme. Meeting current university students and knowing how to access support services available, made the transition less intimidating than the participants within this study had anticipated. Feeling adequately prepared by the college sector and ready to articulate into second year of university was also expressed, with participants sharing their readiness to enter university.

*"It was very approachable, the whole thing, which meant that I feel like I've gone into second year more than capable to pass and everything."*

Another participant also stated that there were distinct benefits of undertaking their first year at a FEI.

*"So, when we then went into class, we had an instant head-start, so I actually felt we were more at an advantage for having done the HNC and boot camp than the first years who went into second year were".*

## 1.5.2 Supportive Academic Learning Environments

All participants discussed the support received from peers during their transition into the HEI. Comments included:

*“It was good camaraderie, because everybody had the same experience.”*

This participant’s opinion matched findings of other articulating students from both UK (Pike & Harrison, 2011) and international literature (Boelen & Kenny, 2009). In contrast to the first-year nursing students who entered university directly from school or college, the articulating students were introduced pre-transition. It also emerged from the data that a significant facilitator of transition into university was the contribution of the social connection of keeping the articulation students together in tutorial groups, thus, resulting in the cohort effect. The cohort effect can evolve when students who have a shared experience bond and form a learning community.

Support from educationalists was also prominent to all participants within this study. The participants discussed different support offered by the academic staff in both FE and HE along the articulation pathway. Unsurprisingly, contact time with academic staff and face-to-face teaching is reiterated time and time again as an aspect students take into account when selecting a university (QAA, 2011; Kandiko & Mawer, 2013). It may therefore be reasonable to suggest that articulation students find the close contact with FE staff an advantage during the first year of their qualification. As many students within this articulation programme have been out of education for a period of time, their confidence and academic literacy can be negatively affected (Rhijn et al., 2016). Therefore, the intimate supportive environment and small class sizes in college can be instrumental in raising confidence and academic grounding before the move to university, as quoted by a participant.

*“I was really stuck on whether to go with university – straight into uni – or go to college, and when I found out that you could go into college and do a year of close, one-to-one, small classes, you know, I keep telling people about it, how it’s such a good way of doing your first year of uni because it is - you just get so much... You get the one-to-one and then you get the help throughout uni as well.”*

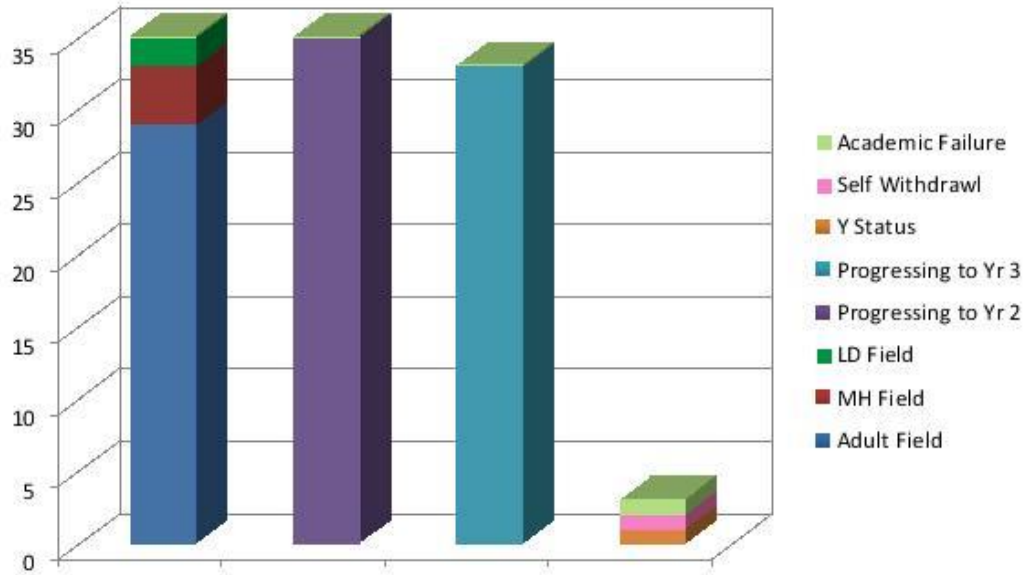
Boelen & Kenny (2009) highlight the need for articulation students to form relationships with HE staff pre-transition. All of the participants within this study identified the university articulation co-ordinator as influential in supporting them throughout the whole process of articulation. The link with the articulation co-ordinator pre-, during and post-articulation was seen as one of the main facilitators of this transition to university. The cohort of articulation students have contact, direction and support from a member of the university academic staff, from year one in college to graduation. The articulation co-ordinator becomes the articulation students' Academic Advisor (AA), providing an opportunity for relationships to be established. Not only was the relationship with their AA important to the participants within this study, the rapport and connection established with the other university academic staff was also deemed crucial. This positive relationship between HE academic staff and the articulating students was discussed by all participants:

*“Some of the lecturers are like ‘oh, you’re an articulation student’, so they kind of expect a little bit more from you. They’re like ‘oh’, because they know how hard you have to work to get there, they realise that well, you’re going to be organised.”*

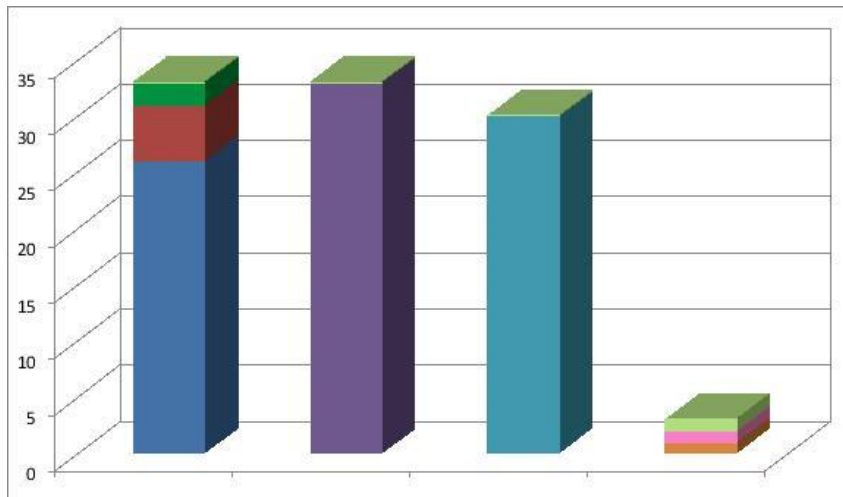
If academic staff acknowledge students' experiences and knowledge, it can in return instil belief, motivation and confidence to succeed. This is vital given academic failure is cited as one of the main reasons for attrition within nursing (Cameron et al., 2011). Examining the retention rates of the last two cohorts of articulating students (Figure 1) demonstrates a low attrition rate with only one articulating student in each cohort leaving the programme due to academic failure. An additional student left each cohort for non-academic reasons and a third student from both groups is taking time out to return in the following academic year (Y status). Furthermore, this data highlights the attainment of the articulating students with a success rate of 100 % in cohort 5 graduating in September 2017. In cohort 6, out of 33 articulating students, 30 are currently on track to complete their final year.

Figure 1. Assessment, retention and progression data

Cohort 6 articulated 2016



Cohort 5 articulated 2015



### 1.5.3 Acclimatising to a Different Academic Culture

Teaching, learning and assessment approaches differ across college and university sectors. Consequently, there is a concern amongst some sections of HE to the value of articulation as students entering from FEIs will not be able to cope (MacLennan et

al., 2000). This was not reflected by five of the participants within this research study, who quickly overcame challenges, accessed support required and were optimistic of the assessment experience:

*“It’s been fine. I was worried about the step up to level 8, how my writing would be, but I’ve done well. I’ve passed my assessments so far, so I’m pleased.”*

Although the participants were now confident about the assessment process, initial difficulties were highlighted. When articulating students enter HE they have likely had no exposure to criteria referenced assessment grading and marking schemes utilised by the HE sector for each academic level. This is due to most units being assessed as either a pass or fail in college. Consequently, the participants found it difficult to gauge their own ability.

*“I got 75, so I was really quite chuffed with that, considering I had absolutely no idea what level I was, and I don’t know how you could change that”.*

It has been suggested that articulating students should receive specific support to prepare them for the higher expectations relating to critical and analytical skills. Subsequently, it has been suggested that bridging modules can enable students to cross the FE/HE divide (Winter & Dismore, 2010). Within this study all participants acknowledged both the ‘Boot Camp’, a week-long induction, and a specific online transitional module as necessary, as they enabled familiarity with university pedagogy and different learning styles. This was highlighted by one of the participants:

*“Maybe there’s things you’ve missed out on. I just write a note and look them up myself”.*

The previously mentioned transition module and ‘Boot Camp’ may be the catalyst in improving a student’s level of academic capital. Therefore, the benefits of ‘Boot Camp’ in closing aspects of the curriculum gap while introducing students to a self-directed learning style were key. The success of a smooth transition for articulating students can be based on their attitude to independent learning (Christie, Barron &



D'Annunzio-Green, 2013). It has previously been recognised that there are variables that can influence self-directed learning such as age (Yuan et al., 2012; Elzubeir, 2009). As the participants within this study were all mature students and increasing age has been linked to increased self-directed learning, this also could have influenced the participants' self-directed learning approach and correlates with Knowles' adult learning theory 'andragogy' (Knowles, 1984) which originally claimed that adults become more self-directed as they mature.

The participants in this study felt confident in their ability to articulate and satisfied that they had been adequately informed about the culture of the HEI. In addition, as mature students, who had taken time out of education, some of the participants appreciated the small college classroom environment at the beginning of their programme. Findings also indicate that specific staged targeted support such as tailored teaching sessions in college and university, designed to bridge the gap between FE and HE, have been facilitating factors in enabling fluid transition directly into second year of university.

The identification that supportive educational environments are crucial for a successful transition aligns with existing research (Dumbleton et al., 2008). The participants felt the university academic staff were aware of their specific needs and valued the close link with their AA. Moreover, it emerged from the data that a significant facilitator of transition into university was the contribution of the social connection of keeping the articulation students together in tutorial groups, thus resulting in the cohort effect. These findings are similar to the study by Hughes & Smail (2015), involving first year students who found peer support to be the most helpful aspect in helping them transition into HE.

The findings of this study highlight areas of best practice that can be transferred to all students transitioning to HE. The main implications arising from these findings are that key interventions, precisely designed and delivered to support these students appear to have eased their transition and enabled them to successfully cross institutional boundaries. The study also demonstrated that students felt well prepared and confident to articulate from college to university education and that this stems from the robust partnership model between HE and FE that formed through this articulation pathway.

Perhaps one of the most prominent aspects of transition into the HEI discussed by the participants in this study was the difference in assessment approach, in particular the assessment marking scheme which was new. Despite limitations, the outcome of this research has implications for practice. A formative or draft assessment can be submitted and marked at the 'Boot Camp', allowing the students to gauge their level and buffer the stress associated with familiarising themselves to a new approach. Furthermore, a review with the SQA of the assessment methods currently utilised within the HNC CAP qualification must also be undertaken to ensure alignment between HE and FE. This will entail the researcher working with SQA and the senior external verifier for healthcare to review current practice and develop strategies for increased collaboration.

## **1.6 Obstacles and Enablers Encountered by Articulating Students: Clinical Placement**

### **1.6.1 Role Identity - Stuck in 'No Man's Land'**

The participants felt that wearing their specific college uniform, which is different to that of the national student nurse uniform, impeded their clinical experience. This was affirmed by the following participant quotation:

*"You're working as hard as anyone else, but they would say 'you're just a college student, so you can't do this, you can't do that' kind of thing."*

Clearly the articulation students perceived themselves as student nurses who were wearing a college uniform. Developing professional identity is vital and Wenger et al. (2002) emphasise that the work place allows professionals a space to promote a sense of identity in which to define their place in the world. The process of constructing an identity as a nursing student is necessary to learn the norms, culture and standards of the profession they aspire to become part of (Traynor & Buus, 2016). Previous studies involving nursing students indicated that clinical placements shaped their identity and allowed them to experience their future reality (Maranon & Pera, 2015; Price, 2009). However, this did not reflect the experiences of the participants within this study. Feeling subservient to other first year nurses contributed to the students' frustration in relation to placement. As well as not having

a role identity due to confusion over uniform and status, if the articulating students felt that they were not recognised or treated equally to university students, this could impact on their learning and success within the clinical area.

### **1.6.2 Missed Learning Opportunities**

Limited learning opportunities and unfavourable treatment were clearly expressed by the participants.

*“Just with the whole, being in college you tried to pry it out of them, but you got, ‘Och, that’s fine, you’ll get that in university, so you didn’t get the depth of knowledge that they potentially had to give to you”.*

“Because before it’s been ‘oh, you’re just a college student’ and that stigma. It is kind of rude”.

The perceived inabilities of college students by the staff in the clinical area were discussed by all participants within this study. However, worthy of academic debate is the change in provision within the Scottish education system in that HE delivery accounts for one third of the portfolio within the majority of Scottish colleges (Gallacher, 2017). In addition, the dual-sector approach, in which different institutions take responsibility for specific years of the degree programme, has been in place since the early nineties. For over a decade, articulating nursing students have successfully undertaken their first year in a FEI, where their HNC qualification is placed on the SCQF at level 7. Yet the evidence suggests that clinical staff are unaware of the in-depth underpinning theory to which the participants are exposed.

### **1.6.3 Experience and Passion**

Having health or social care experience has been linked to success in student nurse education. It is suggested this is due the ability to quickly relay theory to practice, thus solidifying existing clinical skills, as individuals with prior care jobs come with foundation knowledge to build upon (Tower et al., 2015). Indeed, throughout many countries care experience has become a pre-requisite to enter nurse education (Merkley, 2015; Schmidt & MacWilliams, 2011). Furthermore, the Cavendish Review carried out in the wake of the Francis Inquiry (concerning the failings at

Staffordshire NHS Trust) recommended that previous caring experience should be mandatory for all potential candidates entering nursing degrees (Cavendish, 2013). Half of the participants within this study were working within the healthcare field prior to taking up a role as an articulation student. Comments from these participants about the clinical area included:

*“Oh, you can tell you’ve worked as an auxiliary, you can tell you’ve got experience”.*

The students also referred to achieving high clinical grades:

*“I don’t know, I’ve just had really good reports. I’ve had A s every time I’ve went”.*

The students who did not have clinical experience also alluded to having a positive assessment throughout placement. Particularly notable was the passion for becoming a nurse and enjoying the clinical practice environment that was discussed throughout the interviews. An extract from a participant highlights such enthusiasm:

*“Every placement I’ve been on since HNC, I’ve got an A. So I love... That, for me, is where nursing is. I love being out”.*

It may be reasonable to assume that these participants were intrinsically motivated. This type of motivation is associated with individuals undertaking a task for enjoyment and not a reward. Students who possess intrinsic motivation adapt better to change and perform better (Hoeve et al., 2017) it is also associated with effort and a deep approach to learning (Jensen, 2015). Research studies have indicated the high levels of motivation in articulating students (Hayden, Jeong & Norton 2016; Penketh & Goddard, 2008) which both Jarvis (2005) and Vanthournout et al. (2012) claim is the single most influencing factor in relation to success in education. Finding the work enjoyable and interesting are markers for intrinsic motivation. Having a strong desire to be a nurse and enjoying the clinical component of nursing has also been linked to retention.

Recommendations following this study include the tripartite relationship between university, college and clinical practice being strengthened to ensure that the

pathway is not only robust but enhances and supports the relationship between academia and practice. On-going development of clinical staff's understanding and accurate, up-to-date information on the articulation pathway is essential. Therefore, the current communication channels and information flow will be reviewed. This could in return change the perception of the staff in the clinical placement that the syllabus in the HNC CAP is radically different from first year university and lacks the underpinning theory and rigour required. Finally, a reasonable approach to confront the confusion could be to provide the articulating students with a universal student nurse grey uniform whilst undertaking their clinical placement hours at college. This has the potential to ensure that students are afforded the same opportunities as other first year students.

## **1.7 Conclusions**

The transition experiences for participants within this study have been predominantly positive with current research revealing that customised support interventions may be the key to a smooth transition. In a bid to orientate and introduce articulating students to the university environment and culture, transitional induction days, an online transitional module and 'Boot Camp' have been instrumental. Important findings also included that knowing what to expect, being adequately prepared by both FE and HE, and having strong peer and academic staff support, seemed to empower the articulation students within this study to transition successfully into second year. This model of collaborative transitional support could also be replicated for students entering first year of university.

Due to the Scottish Funding Council's ten-year articulation strategy and current widening access policy, enhancing this articulation pathway is imperative. In this respect, this study provides new insights to this growing student body and identifies factors that aid or hinder their transitional experiences at one university in Scotland. The capacity to link conceptual findings from the focus setting to other contexts is the desired outcome of qualitative research (Kitto, Chesters & Grbich, 2008). Although it is acknowledged that this research study was undertaken at a single institute, the rich, descriptive data yielded from this research may be of significant

value. In addition, there were diverse characteristics within the sample population which are representative of articulation students nationally. Therefore, the results and recommendations of this study may have relevance to institutions who support articulating students or transferability to similar settings.

The impetus to increase widening participation into higher education in Scotland led to strategies being introduced to encourage a greater liaison between FEIs and HEIs to enable 'efficient flexible learner journeys' (Scottish Government 2011, p13). Whilst the experiences of participants within this study do not mirror some earlier research in Scotland within the field of articulation, it may be reasonable to suggest the findings indicate that the endeavours of the former articulation hubs and SFC policy to encourage stakeholders to establish a more seamless pathway across the FEI/HEI interface are developing positively.

As the recognition of the importance of supporting this increasing student body continues to grow, it is important that researchers listen to the voice of the students themselves to identify what enables them to progress and flourish. Proactively addressing students' concerns will improve the learner journey for future cohorts of nursing articulating students. The previous recommendations cited will therefore be introduced and evaluated. Frequently good practice often resides at local level, however in a quality-assured education system within Scotland, with the student experience placed firmly in the centre, rather than a piecemeal approach, a comprehensive research programme is required to capture and disseminate best practice. This would also serve to evaluate whether experiences are endemic to multiple colleges/universities or programme specific.

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## **APPENDIX 1: Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

### **Semi-structured Interview Guide**

#### **Opening**

**Greet participant. Introductions. Explain the process of interview. Explain the audio recording. The participant will sign two informed consent forms and keep one. Participants informed that they can withdraw from or make request to stop the interview at any time.**

1. Why did you choose the articulation pathway?
2. How did you feel when you were informed that you had a place to articulate?
3. Tell me how the college prepared you for transferring into university?
4. Tell me about the strategies that the college put in place to support transition into university?
5. What are your views on the transitional information / study days at the university?
6. Tell me about the transitional online module and boot camp?
7. Tell me about joining and participating into your new class?
8. What are the factors that helped or hindered your transition experience?
9. How have you found the academic and clinical assessment at university?
10. Is there anything else that you feel that the college or university could have implemented to support you?
11. How do you feel about your progress both academically and clinically?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

#### **Prompts**

Can you tell me some more about this?

How did you think that this affected you?

Is there anything else that you found useful?

**Thank the participant for taking part and their time.**

**Close interview**

## APPENDIX 2: Braun & Clarke (2006) Six stage model of thematic analysis

### Phases of Thematic Analysis

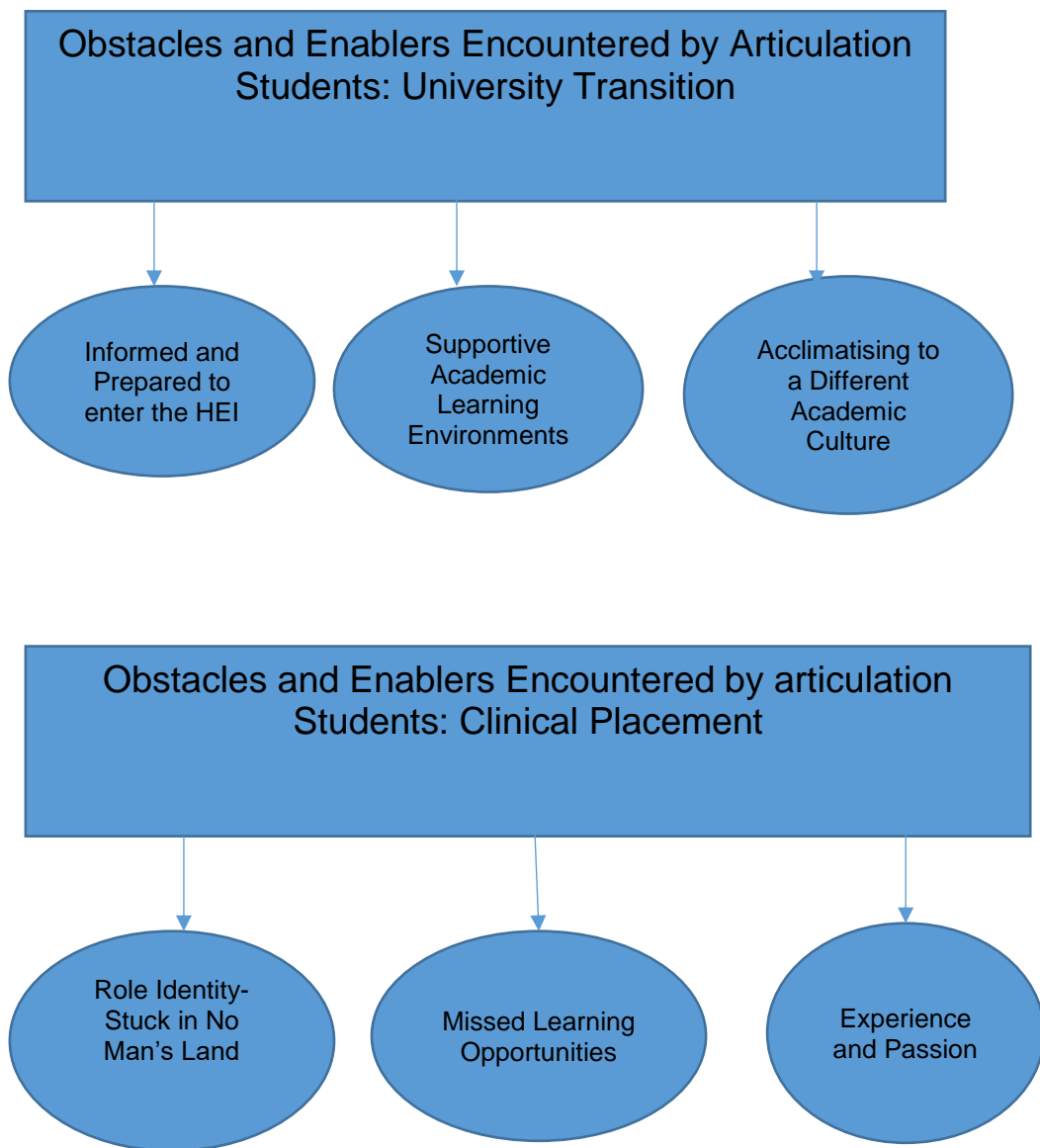
	Phases	Description of Analysis Process
1	Familiarise yourself with data	The researcher transcribed the data independently. Although, this was a lengthy procedure, consensus is evident that immersing oneself with the data is highly valuable and a necessity to gain an overall understanding. The researcher then read over the transcripts, noting initial analytic observations about the data in a research diary.
2	Generating initial codes	At this stage the researcher attached preliminary codes to the transcribed data. The next step taken was to group all the coded relevant text together. To ensure this stage was undertaken systematically, the extracted data coded was collated into an electronic table.
3	Searching for themes	At this stage the researcher collating codes into potential themes. To search for the themes across the codes, the researcher created a visual thematic map to aid the exploration and combining of the identified 29 codes (see Appendix 3). As patterns and conjectures emerged, potential overarching themes were identified across the dataset, enabling the salient and most meaningful essence of the data to be captured, to answer the research aim. In total, five themes were identified at this stage.
4	Reviewing themes	Reviewing and refining the themes to determine if they reflected the coded data and entire data set, was crucial to demonstrate validity. Initially, two themes and nine subthemes that were related to the research objectives were identified.
5	Defining and naming themes	At this stage the researcher had to return to stage four as overlap was identified within theme one. The six subthemes within theme one were collapsed to three (see Appendix 4). These themes were then named using definitions which captures the essence of each theme while also demonstrating what is unique regarding its content.
6	Producing the report	A selection of vivid, compelling extract examples were used to produce the report. Relating the analysis back to the research question, objectives and previous literature reviewed.

BRAUN, V. & CLARKE, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. **3**, pp.77-101

### APPENDIX 3 : Thematic Code Map



## APPENDIX 4: Final Thematic Map



## APPENDIX 5: Staged model of collaborative transitional support

