AAM group work and report on ‘Pre-entry online resources’

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Following the presentation at the AAM event by Huon Wardle, we identified two strands to this topic: resources for prospective students yet to decide their university and/or subject, and those who have been accepted for a particular subject at St Andrews.

In relation to the first strand, providing online resources for students deciding on their choice of degree and university, we discussed the possible ways to make departmental content attractive and engaging. We identified the potential of video content, specifically videos made by students (who are best situated to know what their peers will be interested in and how to capture their attention). Kerith George-Briant shared a recent UCAS video competition, as well as her work with student video in ELT, as good examples of how this might be carried out: http://www.ucas.com/news-events/news/2014/adult-nursing-and-computer-science-students-win-love-learning-competition

One immediate result of this has been a plan to launch a student video competition in the School of History (developed by Bernhard Struck).

In relation to the second strand, students who have been accepted, the main challenge is how to get information to them about their subjects and life at the university more generally (for example, reading lists), while making this dissemination of information not too labour-intensive for staff. We identified the resources provided by ELT on their moodle site as an example of best practice in offering online resources for prospective students (Centre for International Foundation Programmes (CIFP)). In addition, we were made aware that there is an early information working group (convened by Hilda McNae) which overlaps with this area of our discussion, so we look forward to their recommendations.

We also discussed the need for providing information readily to all prospective students. Examples of the use of social media sites (such as Facebook) were given, though this seems to be more successful as a student-led initiative, which raises questions about the kind of information being shared (Kerith flagged up a Facebook page with advice given by current PGRS, but monitored by Admissions). An example of good practice identified was the Library’s ‘LibAnswers’ system. William Barlow contacted Hilda McNae for more information on how this is run. As a result we discussed the possible application of this beyond the library, but concluded that this would be too labour-intensive to be run on a department/school-level.

A key recommendation that arose from our discussion is to encourage the dissemination of best practice examples, and to build in the regular checking of other
departments’ websites to any decisions about online resources. We all felt that the main benefit of the exercise was the opportunity to meet and discuss these issues with colleagues from across the university, giving us the opportunity to share examples of best practice.

A central issue we thought it important to raise, however, is that of whose responsibility it is to update departmental websites. There are various people involved in this process (IT staff, administrative staff and academic staff) but we were concerned about the provision of time and labour between these people. We discussed the importance of collaboration in terms of getting this done - perhaps assigning someone to update and implement changes (an administrative or IT staff member) and someone to supply content changes (an academic). In view of this we wanted to highlight the importance of recruiting outstanding IT staff to the university, as they are a key resource in addressing this issue.

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