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Hello, my name is Polly Harper and I'm the academic transition officer at the University of Birmingham.

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My very short talk today is all about how the Academic Skills Centre have tried to support our students to transition to

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their learning university this past year and in particular within this ever changing and challenging online environment.

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Just for a quick bit of context, firstly, the academic skill centre is based in library services,

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and as a team we provide a wide range of academic and digital skills support for all taught students. Of course, over the last academic year.

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We had to adapt our usual service to fit in with online and bimodal learning, and I'll touch on some of these aspects shortly.

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My particular role within the academic skill centre is as the academic transition officer and as the name suggests,

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this role has a particular emphasis on supporting student transition.

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So it covers academic skills support but also running PASS, our peer assisted study scheme,

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which particularly focuses on transition for First-Year students.

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And additionally, over this last year, it's included specifically providing enhance support for our Birmingham Scholar students.

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These are most underrepresented students and this is all part of the university's wider access and participation plan.

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As a team, like everywhere else, I'm sure we provided a wide range of support to help students transition into university and online learning,

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but today I'm just going to focus on a small number of examples of this.

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Firstly, during semester one for our Birmingham Scholar students, we ran an online multidisciplinary peer assisted study scheme. This involved Birmingham scholar.

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Students from higher years meeting the firsts year in small, very informal online groups.

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There were 10 groups and they met weekly, online, and all students were from different subject areas.

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Because of this, they focussed on general transition, settling into university as well as different study skills.

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And you can see a couple of examples here, the kind of activities the leaders used, such as using public and mind Maistre to share ideas together.

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You can see here some of the really positive feedback we received from first years around this,

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highlighting how just being able to meet people from other similar backgrounds is so useful,

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helping to answer their questions, alleviate their concerns, meet new people, develop study skills and boost confidence as well.

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I should also add that we also ran a number of other more subject specific assistance schemes online semester two as well.

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For the Birmingham Scholar students, to support their transition in an online environment,

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we also ran a series of fortnightly bespoke online workshops specifically for them throughout the year.

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These were communicated through their canvas course and hosted via zoom. Previous to this, we had run these kinds of workshops in person, of course.

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So the workshops focussed on various aspects of academic and digital study skills, including time management,

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academic writing, literature, searching, critical thinking, digital tools, learning and plenty of others.

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Attendance was always strong, with an average of about 40 attendees per session across the whole year.

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We also tried some new activity, such as informal study together afternoons,

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where we could be online for the afternoon to get some independent study done with regular structured

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breaks and the opportunity to chat very informally and share how we were getting on as part of this.

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We also did some mindful drawing activities with the students, and I'm really lucky is one of my colleagues is a very talented artist.

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He could lead this, I should add that I actually got quite a lot of my own work done during these afternoons as well.

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So I do recommend them actually. Feedback from the session is really positive with students.

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I think just grateful to know that others were there to support them, working alongside them even while they were at home.

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of course, evolved to support all students to transition into the online studies.

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So our one to one academic skills appointment service went online, too.

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And we found this to be a relatively smooth process, with many students finding accessibility of online appointments to be more convenient ever.

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And interestingly, our 'no shows' went down significantly and feedback in terms of support provided was still really positive to.

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As a service, we also continue to provide bespoke, embedded academic skill support for different subject areas and schools,

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rather than always delivering maybe a series of workshops, as we have done in previous years.

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We offered a more hybrid approach whereby schools could request tailored online resources for students to engage with, optionally

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then followed by either a workshop or Q&A with us. These were all requested via our academic skills menu we offer to academic staff,

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which you can find on our website in case you're interested in having a look at that.

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A new development this past year or so was our involvement in two assessment support weeks,

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which were run to provide additional support for students before they took their online exams each semester.

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And we were quite central to these weeks because we ran a series of at least daily workshops for students on a very wide range of assessments,

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including how to take online exams, also aspects such as writing a dissertation or

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And finally, just a touch very briefly on the kinds of online resources we created this year to help support the transition to online,

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learning. We developed a specific online learning guide which all students received the very start of the academic year.

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whereby we've been discussing various study skills between us in an informal way.

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And these are all available via our YouTube channel.

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And of course, we've continually tried to enhance all our online resources this year, such as our canvas courses,

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videos, and libguides and all of these are available via our academic skills gateway

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But what does our future look like in terms of supporting student transition?

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there was a much more university centralised approach to supporting transition, which is great news.

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I think this particularly in recognition of the fact that students coming from school or college have experienced a huge amount of disruption, and

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they'll need to be very carefully supported. So as part of this centralised approach,

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we've been able to provide and embed many of our transition focussed resources across the university to all different schools and subject areas,

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raising awareness generally of our service to both students and academics to.

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which really focus on transition and some aspects of study skills, and these are run by academic staff, their personal tutors.

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So this year,

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we're really joining up much more with the tutors to provide examples and template resources and activities for them to then use with their students.

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We're also lucky enough to have a maths and statistics office now in post, one of our new colleagues,

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which means we'll also be able to provide much more support around that this year too,.

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Behind all this, of course, sits the ongoing challenge of working out what the right balance for students is in terms of online and in-person support.

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Another challenge is also finding a balance between sustainably providing enhanced support to our various college

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students as part of the access and participation plan, alongside supporting all of our students.

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So there's still plenty more to be done and plenty more challenges too.

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So that's it for me today. Thank you so much for listening. I'm afraid I'm not able to attend the conference in person to answer your questions.

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But if you have anything further, you would like to ask me, please just get in touch via email

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Thank you so much for listening. I really hope you're having an enjoyable conference.