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Helping BTEC students to prepare for university: mathematics-based activities for non-mathematics students

Day 2 – Parallel V (15.00-15.30)

Since 2011, the University of Bath has provided support for vocational entry students who have difficulties with the mathematical content of their course. This has included: provision of pre-sessional material, additional small group support and alternative teaching arrangements.

Development of this support has been informed by current students entering through the BTEC route in three subject areas: Sports and Exercise Science, Electronic and Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. Full details were presented at CETL-MSOR 2012 and CETL-MSOR 2013.

This provision will now be embedded in the 'On Track to Bath' scheme, an initiative to encourage students from widening participation backgrounds to apply for selective universities. This targeted support aims to motivate current BTEC students to consider university and to enable them to build their mathematical skillset over a more practical timescale.

In this session, we will discuss the 'On Track' BTEC programme. We will motivate the creation of the programme and draw upon experiences so far. The importance of this early interaction between Further Education and Higher Education will be highlighted. In particular, we will present a reflection on a summer school, including student feedback, and focus on the advantages of providing this timely and sustained face-to-face interaction prior to students applying to university. Moreover we will highlight how technology is integrated into the programme and will discuss the important roles that both technology and face-to-face interaction play in this programme.

Entry onto the 'On Track' programme is selective and begins towards the end of students' first year in FE. There are four main subject-specific components of the programme, completed in the following order: preparatory mathematics tutorials, a three day residential summer school, a series of tutorials running throughout their second year in FE and a problem-solving day at the university. Individual project work follows both the summer school and the problem-solving day. Additional generic application support completes the 'On Track' package. Elements of this scheme have been piloted previously but the 2014-15 cohort, comprised of students from the three subject areas, will be the first group to complete the full 'On Track' programme.