

'Supporting Students in Transition', CSSI 13th Biannual Conference
15th -16th June 2011, National College of Ireland

Discover University – Transitional Skill Development
Dr Josephine Bleach & Brigina Crowe, National College of Ireland

Discover University is a week-long summer programme aiming to raise young people's personal and educational aspirations by offering them the opportunity to experience a taste of life in National College of Ireland (NCI).

Designed for young people aged 14–17 years from disadvantaged communities, the programme involves a mix of academic taster programmes along with a range of fun and challenging extra-curricular activities. A key element of the programme is a Problem Based Learning (PBL) Project, where participants work in small groups to solve real-life community problems.

Third level students are involved as team leaders. Their role is to act as positive role models for the second level students and to encourage, support and guide the young people through the PBL projects and other activities.

Analysis of the formal feedback from evaluation forms and interviews as well as documentary evidence, informal feedback, observations and field notes inform the findings of this paper.

For the second level students, not only did Discover University raise their interest in and aspiration for a third level education but the involvement of the third level students convinced them that it was within their reach.

For the third level students, it was a valuable experience of leading and managing a project team. Being a team leader helped to sustain their interest in and commitment to their own education and future career.

Together, both groups explored serious social issues. Through their interactions with each other and the communities concerned, their skills and confidence improved.

This paper will outline how the Discover University Programme supported both second and third level students in developing a positive set of attitudes, learning dispositions and skills that will support them, not only through second and third level education, but also throughout their lives.