

Guidelines for the Management of School Based Induction to Facilitate Independent Learning

Principles of Induction

The purpose of this Guidance is to support and enable Schools to develop and implement good practice in student induction and to align what is provided by them with the information, support and expectations that are conveyed by Corporate Services.

This Guidance refers to the induction of new undergraduates. However, it is also recommended that it be used as the framework for subsequent years of undergraduate programmes and also for postgraduate programmes.

Induction provides the opportunity for students to meet their peers, their tutors, to familiarise themselves with a new academic environment and to become aware of the range of support services the University of Birmingham (UOB) offers. We have always been proud of the high quality support that we provide to students and it is important that the various parts of the University – Schools, Departments and Corporate Services, together with the Guild of Students work together to provide an effective induction; this is increasingly important as the student population changes, and more diverse methods of delivery and programme organisation are introduced.

Induction provides us with the opportunity to promote our partnership approach to learning, which is student-centred and based on critical inquiry, debate and self-motivation. It is a time where we can stress the importance of active and independent learning, self-reliance, reflection and evaluation, which are crucial graduate qualities and are highly valued by employers. A welcoming, well-structured, participative and informative induction process can therefore be the first step in establishing not only a culture of high achievement, but one of collaboration, trust and openness, which underpins high retention and success.

There is no single model for induction and there are currently a variety of practices within the University. This Guidance aims to provide an outline of the key components of an effective induction process and is designed to be sufficiently flexible to meet the differing requirements of Schools and Departments across the University.

Induction is a set of processes that introduce students to:

- ❑ The university as an academic community
- ❑ The campus as a distinctive social organisation and the providers of central support such as counselling and careers guidance
- ❑ Their school or department as an organisational unit
- ❑ Their programme of study as the academic framework in which they will learn
- ❑ The regulatory framework for their study, learning and progress
- ❑ The academic staff who will deliver the course and assess their performance
- ❑ Staff whose responsibility it is to advise them on both academic and welfare matters
- ❑ Their peer group

The aim of induction is to:

1. Cultivate appropriate expectations of the delivery and management of the programme of study, and highlight our partnership approach to learning (students' academic obligations and the obligations of the staff to the students)
2. Support the development of those independent study habits suitable for higher education

3. Highlight the importance of regular formative evaluation/assessment for promoting achievement
4. Provide the foundations for social interactions between students and the development of communities of practice
5. Promote the development of appropriate and effective communication between staff and students
6. Familiarise students with the university's support services (and campus)
7. Inform students' vocational aspirations

Induction is also required to manage transitions between elements of courses. It is viewed as a sequence of managed outcomes that should occur throughout the first year and beyond. Some of these will be achieved during events that are independent of the teaching system and others will be embedded in the curriculum. The achievement of the outcomes is the key issue, not when or where they are achieved or who facilitates them. This guidance should therefore be referred to not only at the beginning of the academic year, but also during all student transition phases.

Guidance for Implementing the Principles of Induction

1. Induction activities should cultivate appropriate expectations of the delivery and management of the programme of study, and highlight our partnership approach to learning (students' academic obligations and the obligations of the staff to the students)

Guidance

Much information for students is contained in programme and/or module handbooks and web sites. Nevertheless, key elements will need to be highlighted for them and an early opportunity should be taken to ensure that students understand the contents of such materials. Students should be made aware of the need to attend teaching sessions and to submit assignments on time but staff should also be aware of their obligations to support student learning. Consideration should be given to providing all such materials in a format accessible by students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties. Course teams might review:

- The content of School/programme handbooks, web sites, policies and procedures
- Methods for ensuring that students understand the contents of the above (and the underpinning key messages on our approach to learning)
- Whether staff understand the obligations placed on them by the contents of handbooks and web sites (e.g. the timing of assessments, assessment turn round times, the nature and purpose of feedback, etc.)
- Whether students have the skills to access and navigate around electronic systems to acquire the information they may need
- The provision of a tutorial and welfare support system for students and the means by which staff can facilitate students' access to student support services
- How personal development plans are introduced and supported
- How attendance is monitored, and what methods are used to diagnose and address the underlying causes of non-attendance

2. Induction activities should support the development of those independent study habits suitable for higher education

Guidance

Many new students need to be weaned from staff-dependent study skills that they may bring from their previous educational experiences (e.g. dependence on notes, treating information as fact rather than as evidence, surface learning). Peer support,

information re-organisation and searching for evidence need to be promoted. Course teams might consider:

- How students are initiated into ways of studying appropriate to their programme of study and higher education
- How the expertise of support staff (e.g., Information Services, Learning Support and Careers staff) can best be utilised to support the development of skills and attitudes to work
- How and where students are given the opportunity to reflect on, analyse and evaluate their progress
- How assistance in developing study skills can be integrated into the curriculum (early in the course, or when appropriate, students should be made aware of good practice in essay and report writing for their discipline, and should be given opportunities for developing oral presentation skills)
- How to make assessment methods accessible and transparent. The learning outcomes of individual modules and the course should be carefully scrutinised to ensure that they are explicit and clearly understood by all students
- How students are encouraged and supported to establish their own goals and manage their progress towards them
- Variation in the teaching methods employed in recognition of the different ways in which students learn. Prior to studying in higher education, students may have only experienced teaching methods applied to small groups (less than 20)

3. During induction (or early in the course) students should receive regular, formative evaluation/assessment of their work

Guidance

The extensive and early use of formative assessment is a key component of rapid student adjustment and is essential for the development of independent learning. The expected standards of work are communicated to students through the publication of learning outcomes, marking criteria and feedback on assignments. It follows that, if new students are to work at the required standard, they must know what constitutes that standard and how near they are to attaining it. The following should be considered:

- The purposes of assessment and the feedback students receive on their work. Students must know what sort of feedback to expect and how they can actively use it to improve their learning
- The pattern and timing of assignments and likely feedback during the whole of the academic year
- The obligation of staff to provide timely, meaningful and supportive feedback on students' work, in-line with current feedback policy
<http://www.ppd.bham.ac.uk/policy/cop/feedback.htm>
- The recognition of student diversity through the use of a range of assessment tools
- Whether students understand the relevance of marking criteria
- Early recognition and referral to specialised staff of learning difficulties previously undiagnosed
- The role of personal development planning in defining academic standards and stressing the relevance of feedback
- How the effectiveness and timeliness of feedback to students is monitored and reviewed, and appropriate changes made in the light of this evaluation

4. Induction events should provide the foundations for social interactions between students and the development of communities of practice

Guidance

Being at a higher education institution is a social experience for students. Class coherence and peer support are important characteristics of those who are successful. Socially isolated students and those who feel that they do not belong are the most likely to leave. The early establishment of a peer support group (a community of practice) should be a priority for all students. The following should be considered:

- The use of 'ice-breakers' during induction events to promote student interaction
- The use of formative group work early in the curriculum to encourage students to work together and develop appropriate inter-personal and professional skills
- Varying the composition of groups to ensure that individuals have a broad experience of working in different social contexts
- Establishing systems whereby second and third year students mentor/buddy new undergraduates
- Staff support for subject-based student societies to encourage mixing of students and the promotion of student commitment to the course/subject

5. Induction activities should promote the development of appropriate and effective communication between staff and students

Guidance

Effective relationships with academic staff promote student commitment to the course and aid student retention. A system for accessing staff should be in place and it must be reliable and understood by students. The monitoring of students' social and academic progress early in the course is a significant component of student care and contributes to the design of effective student support. Course teams should consider:

- How the role(s) of the tutor and head of student development and support might best contribute to encouraging and supporting independent learning
- Whether the system for gaining access to staff is appropriate and reliable
- Which staff meet new students during the early stages of the course, and what is the purpose of this
- Methods of promoting collaboration, openness and trust (such as small group tutorials, or collaborative project work)
- Means of monitoring student development, the diagnosis of problems, the implementation of effective support mechanisms and progress

6. Induction activities should familiarise students with the university's support services (and campus)

Guidance

When students arrive they are likely to be unfamiliar with the campus and without peer support. Simple guidance indicating relevant key locations to meet immediate academic needs should be provided. Further support may be needed such as:

- Navigation exercises to familiarise students with their School/ Department's physical and virtual environments, services and the location of resources/materials
- Additional guidance to direct students to the resources they need for their particular course

- Ready access to information relating to the Student Support and Counselling service (SSCS), the Careers Service, and the Guild
- Information about how students gain access to Information Services (IS) such as the libraries, learning centers, the computer network, online learning support materials, and the School's Academic Liaison Librarian
- Reinforcing the role and purpose of personal development planning and 'My Progress,' and making students aware of how it will be incorporated into the tutorial system
- Assistance for the particular needs of students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties.

7. Induction should be relevant to and inform students' vocational aspirations

Guidance

Students join courses or parts of courses for a variety of reasons. Induction and early study should help confirm their choice of course or course component and provide an appreciation of professional opportunities afforded by the course. In particular, the following questions should be considered:

- Are there early and frequent opportunities to involve the careers service to support, enhance and promote careers education, information and guidance directly related to the course?
- Would formal and/or informal sessions with alumni who are professionally employed within the subject area help to contextualise induction and the curriculum?
- Could employers input into the induction process?
- Does the curriculum build from students' previous experience and provide work experience/placements that are relevant to the aspirations of the students it has attracted?

8. Induction is required to manage transitions between elements of courses

Guidance

Some students may study abroad for a year and others may undertake work-based activities/placements away from higher education. Students need to be prepared to adapt rapidly on their return. In addition, teaching methods and forms of assessment may vary from module to module and at different stages of the student life-cycle. The following should be considered:

- Induction processes designed to support students experiencing new teaching and/or assessment methods for the first time
- Induction processes for second and third year undergraduates
- Support for managing critical periods in the student life-cycle, such as examinations, dissertation deadlines etc
- The preparation of students for learning away from the institution and the sharing of the learning gained from periods away from the university

Footnote

Here are some useful references/resources on best practice research on induction, generic/transferable skills, formative assessment and guidance on writing clear learning outcomes

1. Case studies from the Student Transition and Retention (STAR) project: University of Ulster
http://www.ulster.ac.uk/star/news/case_studies.doc

2. Materials from the Innovations in Supporting the First Year Experience event held in Edinburgh on 11 May 2006 <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/4516.htm>
3. SPAT Guide: (Student Progression and Transfer) was an FDTL 3 project based at the University of Plymouth. The SPAT guide provides a range of teaching and learning resources for staff involved with the transfer of students across institutions and with the progression of students onto top-up degree programmes. <http://www.spat.ac.uk/index.html>
4. Learning Outcomes:
 - <http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/good/cou3.htm> and
 - http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Bol_sem/Seminars/040701-02Edinburgh/040701-02Linking_Levels_plus_ass_crit-Moon.pdf
 - <http://www.admin.exeter.ac.uk/academic/tls/tqa/outcome.htm> and
 - http://www.ucd.ie/regist/modularisation_and_semesterisation/documents/t&lhandbook.pdf
5. Formative assessment: <http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/assess/as5.htm>
6. Generic Skills: <http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/good/gen.htm>