Inducting Learners

First impressions count.

The initial weeks of a new course are a vital period in our learners’ journeys. Faced with a new challenge and a new environment they will hopefully be excited, but they will often also have doubts and anxieties. Induction offers us an opportunity to reassure our learners with an early demonstration of both our professional competence and our care for their well being.

Achieving this at a busy time of competing demands requires:

- a clear understanding of the purpose of induction, and
- careful planning

The purpose of induction

Delivery of an effective induction programme begins with a clear focus on the outcomes we wish to achieve.

By the end of induction, we want students to:

- Have developed a rapport with their teachers and peers
- Know the requirements of their new programme of study
- Be part of the College’s ethos of respect, tolerance and decorum
- Know their rights and responsibilities
- Be able to access the resources and support available to them
- Know how to work safely

More than this however, induction should inspire and motivate students to succeed. It should focus on the achievement of ambitions, and the life changing opportunities offered by successful study and College life.

It’s a lot to fit in!

Consider the basics. Learners will need:

- An introduction to course structure through a well prepared course handbook and assessment schedule
- An overview of how the course will meet their Skills for Life needs through Key Skills and support from Skills Upgrade
- Clear messages on the School’s policy on attendance and punctuality
- A strong emphasis on decorum, including an overview of the Student Disciplinary Process
- An understanding of the College’s commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity, and its ethos of tolerance and respect
- To collectively negotiate and agree rules of conduct for the group
- To discuss their rights and responsibilities under the Student Charter including their opportunities to give feedback
- An introduction to the full range of College services available including Study Buddies, peer mentoring, information and guidance, careers advice, enrichment services, and financial support
- To discuss how to be healthy and safe at College, and what they should do if they have concerns about their own or someone else’s safety

This is too much information for learners to retain if packed into one week of delivery. The key insight, therefore, is to treat induction as covering a longer period of up to six weeks. It then becomes a question of planning how these basics will be successfully blended with other induction activities and course delivery over an extended period.
Getting the right blend

Three elements need to be blended together during the first few weeks:

• **Orientation – the basics**
  Naturally, helping learners to understand their course’s structure, find their way around the College, and access College services are priorities. Nonetheless, induction programmes that focus exclusively on orientation will be dry, and do the opposite of inspire as learners struggle to take in large amounts of information. Better to ‘drip feed’ the details over a longer timeframe.

• **Induction activities**
  A range of suggested activities can be found in the College’s Induction Toolkit, and should be adapted to supplement materials of your own. Induction activities offer learners the opportunity to review their achievements, clarify their goals, and explore how their new course contributes to the achievement of these goals. They also give learners the chance to meet and learn about each other, and give you the opportunity to observe how they get on in a group setting. Activities should also be used to establish expectations around behaviour, mutual respect and support. In this way induction will blend naturally into any ongoing group tutorial curriculum.

• **Teaching of the subject**
  Learners will be impatient to begin their studies, and subject teaching should begin from week one. If possible subject specific content should form at least some part of every day during that week.

  The proportion of weekly contact time dedicated to each of these elements will naturally change over the first few weeks. Course delivery will quite properly dominate after an initial period where activities and orientation are more prominent. Nonetheless, the latter should continue throughout the induction period, and some course delivery should feature from the first week.

To get this blend right we must plan an induction scheme of work.

**Collaborate with your colleagues**

Obviously, many course teams consist of several colleagues teaching different parts of the programme. Such teams will need to collaborate on an induction scheme of work if the three elements are to blend coherently. The responsibility for delivering agreed induction activities and aspects of orientation can then be shared across the team. Similarly, when to deliver these activities or teach subject content can be negotiated in advance.

Without this collaboration we may plan effectively as individual teachers, but the learners will have a disjointed induction experience overall. Some elements may be accidentally overlooked or delivered too late. Also the balance of induction activities, orientation and subject teaching might be wrong in any given week leaving learners bored, confused or frustrated.

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**Using the Induction Toolkit**

The Induction Toolkit contains an outline induction scheme of work for developing learning and classroom readiness, and resources to support this scheme complete with teacher guidance notes. The resources include:

- Icebreakers
- Team building and enrichment activities
- Tasks exploring achievements and aspirations
- Learning styles questionnaires

Copies can be collected from Campus Offices. An electronic version will also soon be available on the Transforming Teaching ERIC site.
**Icebreakers**

One icebreaker idea from the toolkit is to task your students with getting into a line in the order of their birthdays, youngest first. This simple task gets students talking to each other and working as a team. It also gives the teacher an early opportunity to see who takes leadership, who is unconfident, who listens, who talks, who problem solves, who just looks on and so forth.

**Team building**

The chance to observe your learners problem solving together is also presented by several toolkit activities aimed at developing communication and team work skills. They give learners the chance to get to know each other by variously challenging them to design and build sweet containers, construct a described (but unseen) Lego toy, and negotiate their way through a maze.

Another activity based on a desert survival scenario delivers powerful learning about the value of collaborative working and supporting each other as a group. The team solution almost always outperforms every solo effort. A classic task centred on who to prioritise for rescue from danger has a 'hidden' learning outcome around the role of prejudice in our decision making.

It offers an opportunity to build on this idea and explore with learners the College’s values of respect, tolerance and equality.

**Enrichment**

Well planned enrichment activities can be genuinely inspiring by providing learners with positive experiences they have never had before. They help convey the real sense of possibility offered by education. The toolkit, for instance, contains an ‘Induction London’ activity that has been used with great success by the School of Cultural Industries.

**Individual learning needs**

It is also important to allow time for learners to reflect on their past achievements, set goals, and identify any potential barriers to their future success. The toolkit contains a number of activities to facilitate this process including a ‘Lifeline Exercise’, ‘Letter to Yourself’ and different learning styles questionnaires.

Asking learners to investigate their own learning styles during induction can be insightful. Often learners will be unfamiliar with the concept and will not be used to thinking about their strengths and weaknesses, and planning their own learning in light of them. It is also fun!

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**Inducting learners into the use of ICT and e-learning**

ICT and e-learning make a vital contribution to learner success and therefore form part of any effective induction.

Again resources are available to support course teams, including a student guide to using College computers. Book an induction to the Learning Centre for your students. They will receive an introduction to this guide as well as an induction to the Learning Centre’s rules and systems.

The guide is given to all College students during their Learning Centre induction.

Learning Facilitators talk them through logging-on/off, using the College Network, appropriate usage of the Internet and email, and using Blackboard.

It is also available on Blackboard. Log-on, go to the ‘Learning Centre’ course and then click on the ‘LC Induction’ button.
The same area also contains Excel and interactive Word versions of the learning styles questionnaires in the Induction Toolkit. There is therefore an opportunity to integrate a Learning Styles activity with an induction to using Blackboard.

Alternatively, a video-based e-learning resource introducing students to Blackboard is available online. It can be accessed by students from the Start/All Programs/Blackboard Induction tab on the Student Network.

First Tutorial

The end of the induction period is the perfect time to take stock of progress. The learners will have learnt a great deal about their course and themselves, and the course team will have had many opportunities to observe individual progress in a variety of contexts. Induction should therefore culminate with the first tutorial and the creation of an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). A detailed discussion of this process will follow in the next issue of Sharing Excellence.

Let us know what you think

If you wish to give any feedback, make a contribution yourself or have a suggestion for topics of future issues then please contact Kit Jillings, Assistant Director Teacher Training at Kit.Jillings@lewisham.ac.uk or ext. 3271.

Also please share any induction activities you have for inclusion in future editions of the Induction Toolkit.

Summary

- Treat induction as lasting up to six weeks. During this period blend basic orientation with group induction activities and the delivery of course content.
- Plan this mix carefully. Collaborate with colleagues to create an induction scheme of work for the whole course.
- Use enrichment visits to demonstrate the inspirational experiences and life changing opportunities offered by education and College life.
- Get the basics right. Provide a comprehensive course handbook. Ensure learners are clear on how to work safely in their new environment.
- Promote a culture of decorum, equality and respect. Lead an activity negotiating rules of conduct for the group including attendance and punctuality.
- Ensure learners are clear on how to access all the services available to them. If possible invite Learner Services colleagues to lead ‘guest’ sessions.
- Use the activities in the Induction Toolkit to give learners the opportunity to learn about themselves and their new peers.
- Book a Learning Centre induction. Ensure learners are inducted into the use of ICT and e-learning.

In Issue eight...

We will discuss the process of creating Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for your learners and how they are informed by induction.