

The background of the slide is a photograph of sand dunes. The top half shows a wide, gentle slope of a sand dune under a clear sky. The bottom half shows a closer view of the sand's surface, with a starfish partially visible in the lower right corner. The text is overlaid on this image.

# **The STAR Project**

*(Student Transition and Retention)*

## **Organisation of Registration Week**

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## SUMMARY

The School of Applied Sciences in Huddersfield University have developed their practice in registration week so that it fulfils both the requirement for formal registration and the need to begin the process of early integration of students into the department. A study skills module has been brought forward to the start of the registration week. Students write up the practical that they undertake during registration week for their study skills module. The induction also incorporates social activities by giving the students a day to join clubs and societies, which is an important aspect in integrating into the Higher Education environment.

**Key words:** retention, induction, study skills

## INTRODUCTION

With increasing numbers of students entering university from a wide range of backgrounds the emphasis on their first impressions has become more important. Good practice in relation to induction suggests that opportunities should be available to facilitate both academic and social integration (Carter, *et al.* 2003). The first week of making friends and getting to know lecturers can play a crucial role in helping retain these students by making the university environment one in which they feel secure.

There is considerable variety in the ways in which different institutions and subjects address induction. Some, such as the University of Central Lancashire's Flying Start programme (UCLAN 2005) have introduced pre-induction events which allow students to experience University life in the summer before entry, but it has not been practical to offer this to all new entrants. Others, such as Environmental Science at the University of Ulster has introduced a residential induction prior to the start of teaching, but this is expensive and subject specific.

However addressed, induction processes have to be able to make students from different social and academic backgrounds feel comfortable in the university environment. At Huddersfield, registration week plays a vital role in helping students settle into a different living and working environment relatively quickly.

## RELEVANCE TO THE STAR GUIDELINES

At its outset the STAR project researched, produced and published a set of guidelines based on the causes of student attrition and which pointed the way

towards possible good practice. The STAR guidelines relevant to this case study are 2.1, 2.3 and 2.5.

- 2.1 Induction activities should familiarise students with the local area, campus and its support services.
- 2.3 Induction activities should support the development of those independent study habits suitable for Higher Education.
- 2.5 Induction activities should promote the development of good communications between staff and students.

Cook, *et al.* 2005

## **THE PRACTICE**

Biology programmes within the school started approximately ten years ago, and induction practices have evolved and been refined over that time. In 2003, when student feedback was analysed at university level, many students thought that much of registration week was 'a waste of time'. In response the University required that study skills development was included in induction activities so that the students were focused and more actively engaged. Applied Sciences already had incorporated this into their induction structure. Attendance during this week is virtually 100%. Most of the timetabled activities involve staff; only attendance at the Union Societies Fair is not managed by academic staff. See the timetable as appendix 1.

The Study Skills module, introduced during registration week, is a 20-credit point module which runs throughout the whole of first year (Appendix 2). It is conducted by the personal tutors, who are academic members of staff. Students are required to attend weekly and this indirectly helps the tutors to build up a relationship with their tutees.

Some of the activities that are integrated into the first week can help 'level out' some of the differences in the ability of students from different educational backgrounds.

This registration week contains academic work to keep the student interested; it also allows for social activities such as a free day to attend the Freshers' Fair. The students are shown around the various facilities available to them and meet the staff. They are also made aware of their access to student services and the extent of the support on offer should they require it. Thus there is a balance of both social and academic activities that can help students integrate into the Higher Education environment more quickly and more effectively.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

Staff within the Department arrange the induction programme. Other staff, associated with the library and student services, however, contribute to events. Since this is a scheduled teaching week the staff involvement cannot be viewed as "additional" activities. The tutorial scheme (one meeting per week per student group) is part of a study skills module.

## EFFECTIVENESS

Induction activities are designed to aid new students to integrate both socially and academically. The effectiveness of these activities has to be judged against that background. The activities themselves address a particular concern of staff:

*“One of the problems we find with students now is that they have pretty minimal experience of practicals. So we get them in and using these things right at the start.”*

The emphasis placed on practical experience in the induction is only sparsely reflected in the student comments which are mainly focused on the social benefits of induction. Thus the only comment related to the practicals in a lengthy student focus group was:

*“In the lab during induction week we had to do some practical exercises. Some of us hadn’t come from a scientific background and found it really hard to follow. When a student guide helped with induction this year, she made sure she put them in?”*

Feedback has been gained from student-staff liaison committees and also from questionnaires. Generally the feedback has been positive for the study skills support. In particular mature students appreciate activities related to plagiarism and referencing.

*“It’s very good and very well explained. We are doing an essay right now about plagiarism, so next time we’ll know how much we can copy.....(Laughter).. The other day my tutor showed me.... he put an excerpt through and it came up with the plagiarised bit in red. The thing is, I’m in final year, and I never really believed that they’d got the software.”*

A mature student

### Student Opinions

A group of 7 students were interviewed. Five of these were mature and the others represented the more traditional intake. This group of students was very positive about the usefulness of the week devoted to induction activities.

*“By the time the induction week was over, you’d made friends. When I walked in I felt that I was the only one who felt like I did. Then I found that everybody felt the same. By the time you start the lectures you’d built up close friendships. To me anyway the ones I met in induction week are still my friends.”*

A mature student

One particular aspect of the induction which was praised by the students was a booklet which had been produced by a second year student who was, in the year in question, involved in showing new students around.

*"I think that we had the best induction because one of the second years made a booklet and she put in everything, even how many students come here and when it was built. We asked her questions; we had a tour."*

A traditional entry student

Another traditional final year student commented:

*"I read through it, and if I had had that in my induction I'd have been laughing. She even put in hobbies and interests of the teachers, so you get to know them as well."*

The only mild rebukes from this group of students related first to the Wednesday on which students were free to attend the Freshers Fair and second to the information distributed about the induction week activities. Thus the student-organised activities appear to focus on traditional aged students

*"I just kept thinking that if I were young it would be fantastic....None of us joined any student societies because of the cost....The Freshers Ball was £30 per ticket!"*

New students did not apparently appreciate the extent to which they would have commitments during induction week.

*"We got a timetable on the day that we started – Monday- I can understand why they found it hard to fit all the modules in. But it's hard especially when you've got children in childcare."*

Overall students gained the impression of a well-organised but friendly department which had rules to maintain academic standards. Thus one commented:

*"It was very well organised, but my overall impression was that it was very stern; more stern than I have ever come across. I used to think that university was dead casual. They had to lay the law down and they did. You knew exactly where you stood and if anybody misinterpreted there was no reason for them to."*

The need to tailor induction to suit the needs of specific student groups is illustrated by the comment of one mature student:

*"I remember somebody came in to talk about life at university and I can remember thinking I don't know what I'm doing here because it was aimed at young students. The things they were talking about- like you can't just live off kebabs- and I thought - Oh My God. It was basically just for them and I thought why am I sat here?"*

## CONCLUSION

New students benefit from the approach taken to the organisation of activities in this week, particularly in their social integration and their appreciation of plagiarism. It is less apparent that the practical skills acquired figure significantly. By integrating induction activities into registration week the University communicates the importance of these activities and the expectation of good attendance. The organisation of many events can be improved and the students interviewed in Huddersfield had the wit and confidence to identify where appropriate changes might be made.

## CONTEXT

<b>Institutional context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 18,000 full and part time students</li><li>• 6500 full time</li><li>• 3800 sandwich students</li><li>• 7800 part time students</li><li>• 35.6% of entrants are mature</li><li>• 1200 academic staff</li></ul>
<b>Departmental context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 65 Biology undergraduate students (2001/2)</li><li>• 3 left early (&lt;6 weeks)</li><li>• 6 failed academically</li><li>• 12 transferred at end of 1<sup>st</sup> year to physiotherapy. In normal years only one or two transfer to other programmes.</li><li>• 45% male 55% female</li><li>• 9% mature students</li><li>• 30-40% live in Huddersfield</li><li>• 20-30% are within daily travelling distances</li></ul>

## REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX 1

## Registration Week Timetable

DAY	ACTIVITY	STAFF INVOLVED
Sun	<b>Open day</b> Parents attend with students for a tour of the campus, a visit to the halls of residence and meet members of staff	
Mon	<b>A welcome to the students</b> This also includes an introduction to the staff <b>Complete registration forms</b> Forms for the school record system are completed <b>Student services talk</b> This lets students know what services are available <b>Introduction to the University Learning Centre</b> This was previously the library, which now has a suite of networked PCs which are available 24 hours a day <b>Talk from Head of Department</b> This is to inspire students to progress and work hard by showing them through the means of a presentation, examples of successful students <b>Module option choice forms</b> Students select which modules to do in Year 1 <b>Visit the School Resource/Learning Centre</b> This contains resource material and networked computers	All Biology staff All Biology staff Student Services Learning Centre Staff Head of Department All Biology staff Year One Tutor
Tues	<b>Enrolment</b> The students are taken over to the central enrolment area by staff	Year One Tutor
Wed	<b>Fresher's Fair</b> Students are free to attend this and to join clubs and societies	
Thurs	<b>Laboratory safety</b> The students get a handbook and do a 10 minute test to ensure they have learned the essential points. They must complete this test before they are allowed to work in a laboratory. Failing students have the opportunity to repeat the assessment. <b>Introductory laboratory class</b> This is designed to get the students using equipment such as auto pipettes and spectrophotometers to build up their experience of practical skills. This introductory laboratory class is also the start of their study skills module and they have to write up this practical for that module	All Biology staff All Biology staff
Fri	<b>Discussion of laboratory data</b> This is guidance on how to handle data and plot graphs. The students also have to write up this practical and present their report as part of the assessment in the Study Skills module. <b>Tutorial</b> This is the start of the Study Skills module. Personal tutors are responsible for the direction of students' study skills development	Year One Tutor Personal Tutor

## APPENDIX 2

### Study Skills for Biologists

<p><b>Module synopsis</b></p>	<p>This module will introduce students to the study, and learning skills required to successfully complete an honours degree. The first part of this module will focus on information technology and provide an understanding of the operation of computer packages for teaching support, word-processing, database searching, virtual learning and spreadsheets. Armed with this knowledge each student is given a topical area or issue in biology to explore and asked to communicate their findings in a short talk to teaching staff and fellow students; each student also prepares a poster and a written scientific style report. This will enhance the student's study skills and enable them to gain experience in communicating scientific information, both orally and visually. Student's progress is monitored by small group tutorials with personal tutors. This is predominately a self-study module, which will be assessed by course work with the support of personal tutors. Students are also encouraged to use e-mail for problems encountered out of scheduled tutorial times. The module is essential for first year students studying biology. It is assessed by a range of exercises and presentations.</p>
<p><b>Outline content</b></p>	<p>In all cases references will be made to the application of the packages to problems taken from Biology.</p> <p>Operation of program manager, loading of programs, switching between them and importing/exporting data, printing and page set up.</p> <p>Sending/receiving email and Web access using university system.</p> <p>Operation of the basic functions of Word - opening, finding files and starting files. Editing, formatting, spell checking and tables.</p> <p>Use of databases, building files, ordering/retrieving information and reporting output.</p> <p>Basic principles of spreadsheets, data input, mathematical operations, graphical output and Importing/exporting data.</p> <p>Utilisation of virtual learning environments.</p> <p>Communicating scientific information: general aspects of writing essays and reports, literature survey and reviews, organising a poster display and delivery of oral presentations.</p>