

The background of the slide is a photograph of sand dunes. The top half shows the dunes under a clear, light blue sky. The bottom half shows the dunes in shadow, with a starfish visible in the lower right corner. The text is centered over the image.

The STAR Project

(Student Transition and Retention)

**Induction as a longitudinal process within
the School of Biological and Environmental
Sciences at the University of Ulster**

**Sarah Maguire
University of Ulster**

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STUDENT PROFILE

The intake of first years to the suite of BSc Environmental Science degrees in 2001 was made up mainly of NI students (86%). Two students were recruited from the Republic of Ireland and one from Great Britain. The most common basis of acceptance was 'A' levels accounting for 77.2% of students. The average point score on the Honours programme was 15.5 and 9.2 for the ordinary degree. The ratio of male to female students was approximately 1:1

Recruitment to environmental science programmes is continuing to decline nationally and this is reflected in the recruitment figures for UU. The honours programmes recruited 21 students in 2001/2002 compared to 20 in 2000/2001 and the degree recruited 8 students compared to 11 in 2000/2001. However, the course has an increasing number of students entering directly into the second year either due to transfers from other UU degrees or from external HND programmes. In 2001/2002 four students were recruited in this way.

Final year performance is excellent and compares well with national trends. In 2001 the results were exemplary with seven first class degrees being awarded. This performance was commended by the external examiner. Overall 18.9% achieved a first class degree, 46% Iii, 32.4% Iiii and 2.7% III. However, the level of first year non-completion and progression is problematic and the course committee is continually reviewing practice in order to rectify this. This concern has resulted in the School taking a holistic approach to improving performance and retention with induction being a central concern.

INDUCTION AS A PROCESS

The School of Biological and Environmental Sciences at the University of Ulster considers induction to be an ongoing process supporting students through periods of transition. This extends from providing appropriate information about each of the courses available and running open days for applicants and parents through to providing advice on careers and employability to students approaching graduation. In order to plan appropriately a critical phase model approach has been adopted where at each stage a series of questions have been posed (see diagram 1 below). The aim of this approach is to ensure that at each stage students undertake appropriate activities and acquire relevant information and skills to enable them to progress successfully through their degree.

Prior to HE	What information are we giving them (students, parents, teachers)? Do they know what they are signing up to? What do we know about their prior experience?
Week 1	How do we support social and academic integration through social events?
Year 1	How do we identify and support those particularly at risk e.g. monitoring performance, study skills, remediating knowledge gaps? How do we adapt for a more diverse intake? How do we support the development of independent learning skills?
Year 2	How do we induct them into the changing requirements/ standards of Year 2? How do we induct direct entry students? How do we prepare students for going on placement? How do we prepare students for honours project assessment?
Year 3	How do we induct them into the changing requirements/ standards of Year 3? How do we induct them into the world of work/ further training?

The range of induction activities used is summarised in the diagram below

Prior to HE	All publicity materials have been reviewed and sent to prospective students and careers teachers Open day event held for applicants and parents
Week 1	Structured induction week with teaching and learning sessions, meetings with advisors of studies, subject specific library tours, computer induction and a three-day residential field course
Year 1	Fortnightly tutorials with studies advisors, these have prescribed outcomes and linked pieces of assessment aiming at early formative feedback and diagnosis and support of at risk students. The focus is on study skills, time management, oral and written communication, plagiarism and correct academic referencing. Portfolios have been introduced to develop reflection and planning skills. At the end of semester 2 students receive individual advice on second year choices
Year 2	Induction meeting held to discuss changing levels of performance and staff expectations. Tailored induction run for students entering directly to second year. Module on Enterprise and Employability provides careers support and prepares students for placement. Research methods modules prepare students for dissertation work.
Year 3	Induction meeting held to discuss changing levels of performance and staff expectations. Careers advice and information on further training provided.

The induction activities are carried out by a number of staff with overall responsibility resting with Course Directors. Activities targeted at prospective students are organised by a School Recruitment Group. Due to the diversity of the activities it is difficult to identify individualise the impact, however, participants have indicated their appreciation at receiving good quality, timely and useful information. In particular, parents have found the open days to be beneficial in understanding the nature of HE and students have commented positively on the Enterprise and Employability module and its usefulness in preparing them for looking for employment.

Extensive evaluation of the induction field course has been undertaken and this is reported separately.

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