

Student Futures Manifesto Theme 2: An Induction into University Life for Each Year of Study

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Overview

To briefly summarise this project, 6 consultants were given individual themes to research at the university, and then provide recommendations for the university to follow to improve the university experience. The theme discussed within this report is 'An Induction into University Life for Each Year of Study', which looks at each different year and what help is provided for that year of study at the beginning of that year. Feedback was gathered through two main avenues, a survey which was available to all students which are part of the students Union, and then focus groups, where a small number of students were asked more in-depth questions in order to gain a greater insight into the survey results. The results told us that the support for first year is unparalleled in comparison to the other years. It also told us that the information provided at the welcome talk can sometimes be 'overload', which leads to students not retaining the information they are given, unfortunately resulting in them not having the ability to assess the services they may need.

To alleviate these issues, three recommendations have been suggested. The first is to provide opportunities for students to integrate with other students in different years of study, this would allow the students in lower years to receive first hand advice from people who have been exactly where they are now, and it would also potentially offer the opportunity to build relationships, which would offer students another way to ask questions.

The second recommendation would be to provide varying different forms of signposting within welcome week, which would remain accessible all year round. This could be in the form of social media posts, or even campus/department tours with your personal tutor and tutor group, which would allow for students to get a more personalised welcome.

The third and final recommendation would be to offer an extra-curricular opportunity for students to explore and campus and the services offered. An example of this is already done within the School of Sport and Exercise Science and could be adjusted such that each group that partakes in this opportunity is comprised of different years of study. This would help to refresh years 2 upwards, whilst keeping the experience for first years.

Introduction

Each year of study can be vastly different from the last, particularly for those who joined the University in October 2020, the "Covid Kids". When we join most teaching, particularly lectures, were delivered online, so we did not get the opportunity to build in-person learning skills. This was further solidified when teaching was moved entirely online during the second lockdown.

Coming back to university for my second year was hard in so many different ways; Not only was it fully face-to-face teaching for my course, I was also entering a year which would contribute to my final degree classification, so the pressure was much greater. I don't know of many students who didn't get distracted in their online lectures, maybe doing some chores, or enjoying a game whilst the lecture played on a forgotten screen, with no real worry as you could just watch the recording later. But there was no way students could get away with that in face to face, and being able to relearn staying focused for a few hours straight on a lecture was definitely difficult for most, yet there was next to no support for this, nor was there much support on how the year was laid out, or what was expected of us as students.

The aim of this report is to provide three clear, concise outlines for actions the University should take to improve each student's induction into each different year of study. The report will be accessible to all and aim to appeal and help as many students as possible with its action suggestions.

Methods

Survey

In order to provide a list of recommendations which accurately reflect what the study body both want and need, a survey was released, which all students who were registered as part of the students' union could fill out. The first survey which was released had around 5 questions from each consultant and looked for quite 'wordy' responses, and it was believed this was the reason this survey was not filled out as much. After meeting as a team of consults along with staff, the survey was paired back, so whilst still providing each consultant with responses, it would take considerably less time to fill out, making it more appealing to students. As this was done through the students' union platform, we were also able to gain further information regarding age, year and college, which gave us very interesting insight into the responses themselves.

Focus Group

Alongside the Survey, focus groups were also conducted to gain more depth feedback to more specific points. This gave an opportunity to talk directly with a range of students, and the groups were split so were working with our paired consultant. Each group last for an hour, with 30 minutes dedicated to each consultant. To encourage students to sign up for the groups, there was a chance to win £10.

Results

Survey

The feedback from the survey will be bullet pointed below:

- Majority of students felt that all of the current information relevant.
- Some students felt that it was information 'overload' in the welcome talks.
- Students couldn't always remember all of the information given to them.
- Some students wanted more information on assessments and opportunities available to them throughout the year.
- Students seemed in agreement that welcome talks currently contain
 - Course Information
 - Key contacts
 - Some signposting
 - Some opportunities
 - Structure of University life
- Students utilised blackboard and the library services the most at the beginning of new years.
- Module resources as well as the university website were also used.
- Personal tutors were not mentioned as much as expected.
- 10% of students did not feel prepared for their current year of study, 44% felt somewhat, 26% felt fairly well prepared and only 20% felt well prepared.
- There was data of the years of study of the students who answered which was useful in providing the recommendations.

The following word clouds were generated in response to some of the questions, which can be seen in the caption.

An additional point to this recommendation is for schools to use other forms of communication for this signposting. Whilst students do use their emails, the amount received mean it can get easily missed and PowerPoint's are not the most engaging form, particularly in welcome week when they may see a lot of them. One way could be a campus/department tour within tutor groups, which would not only provide a more personalised approach, but it would also allow for students to ask more questions. This could work very well alongside recommendation 3. Another way could be creating a few social media posts detailing the signposting needed, as this is far more engaging and accessible than slides.

Recommendation 3: Offering an Extra-Curricular Opportunity to Explore and Campus and its Opportunities

Within the School of Sport and Exercise Science, they complete a project within their first welcome week wherein they had to complete a scavenger hunt which would help them orientate themselves around the university and provide them with necessary knowledge about what is available. This is an incredible idea in terms of helping new students orientate themselves whilst meeting new people as it is a group project.

This concept could be built upon to include all year groups, such that the groups need to be comprised of a range of years, which would fit in nicely with recommendation 1. This would still provide the same opportunities for first years, while also creating another path to meeting students in different year groups, as well as given students in later years a 'refresh' on what services are available.