

Induction in the Institute of Sport and Exercise Science: Enhancing the student experience

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Induction has been described as a “lead-in” to university study (Edward, 2003), aiming to introduce students to university systems, procedures and assimilate them into the university community; however, it is often viewed as a difficult time (Edward, 2001, p. 429; HEA, 2009; Laing, Robinson & Johnston, 2005, p. 244), as students adapt to university life and undergo one of the key transitions of their lives. Recently, Higher Education institutions have become increasingly concerned about the nature of their induction events owing to two key changes in the student cohort:

- the increase in numbers of students now entering HE (Forrester, 2005, p.294; Hassanien and Barber, 2007, p.35);
- their increasing heterogeneity (Cook, 2009; Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001, Frame, 2001, pp.5 & 39).

Concerns such as these have precipitated a shift in the very nature of what “induction” is acknowledged to be (Cock, Nixon, Walker & Walsh, 2008, p. 1; Edward, 2003, p.226; Laing, Robinson & Johnston, 2005, p. 245) and have resulted in root and branch reconsiderations of induction programmes in many institutions.

Carter and McNeill (1998) offer a useful distinction between two different models of induction. The first of these is “something which occurs in the first week of the course, or even the week prior to starting a course” where induction is considered to be a “one-off event’ [...] consisting of enrolment, registration and the transmission of essential course information” (Forrester, Motteram, Parkinson & Slaouti, 2005, p. 294), focusing on the dissemination of data that institutions deem students “need to know” (Nixon, 2009). The second model considers “induction as a *process* which takes place over a period of time and which acknowledges social and personal processes of transition” (view of a project director, reported in Carter & McNeill, 1988).

Induction in the Institute of Sport and Exercise Science has evolved gradually; in recent years, a questionnaire seeking students’ views has formed a part of this process and has informed planning for the following year’s induction. The 2008-09 academic year saw a further development of this component into a research project. This paper presents the findings from this project where undergraduate and postgraduate students completed questionnaires which were thematically analysed and principal themes identified. Students were then interviewed in focus groups about their experiences of induction and how improvements might be made. Staff were also interviewed in course teams and their responses collated with those of the students. Both qualitative and quantitative data analyses were carried out with the resulting emergence of many points for consideration. The identified principal themes were the need to consider induction as more of an on-going process; the desirability of integrating an off-site practical experience; the reduction in time of large-group information-giving sessions; the benefits of incorporating an active research task and the importance of embedding the research process into the induction process itself. These themes have in turn formed an important part of the planning process for the 2009-10 academic year induction.

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