

LEARNING DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OVERVIEW FORM

Project title	Engineering Learner Independence	Project ID No	CLAD – HIST024
Strategy area/theme	Engineering		
Start date	Jan 2007	Completion date	March 2009
Project type	Learner independence project		
Level	Undergraduates	Programme of study	Various for second year undergraduates
Aims	To provide second year undergraduate students with an opportunity to gain practical experience of site work in a controlled environment and at a time when their other work is not top priority.		
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Survey of staff and student needs and expectations of induction 2. Reports and proposals for changes made to relevant school committees 3. Implementation of on-going induction processes 4. Evaluation of project and reports to relevant school committees 5. Identify changes to processes based on evaluation and experience 6. Dissemination of project outcomes <p>PRE-INDUCTION</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Production of pre-arrival resources and activities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing script that dealt with 5 key skill areas - Emotional intelligence, Critical thinking, Team Building, presentation skills and report writing. - Production of animated DVD - Filming of staff talking heads for each section of DVD - Filming of student perspectives on each of the five areas above - Links and resources on WebCT 2. Pre-induction contact and activities via WebCT 3. Evaluation of student responses 4. Identify and implement changes to processes based on evaluation results 		
Overview	<p>Induction can be an important tool in helping students become independent learners. It is also important to maintain the support as a continuum through the first academic year.</p> <p>The School now admits students directly to each of the following years: Foundation Year, First Year, Second Year (mostly overseas), and the Third Year of BEng and MEng (exclusively overseas). The number of direct entrants to later years in particular is set to increase and thus induction will be important at all levels. Uptake of optional support systems was low with students generally reporting that they are able to cope without help. Subsequently, however, once work was submitted for assessment it became clear that these new students did not understand the different learning styles required and in particular had no concept at all of what constituted plagiarism.</p>		

The above demonstrates there is a need to address the significant issues of dealing effectively with Induction during the first few weeks of arrival for both students new to the University setting in Foundation and Year 1, and direct entrants into Engineering at Birmingham in Years 2 and 3. This will provide the student with a raft of tools to help them support and develop their learning styles.

The continuum should comprise the following milestones

- Pre-Induction contact and activities via WebCT and letter
- Freshers Information (e.g. learning styles, plagiarism)
- Consolidating Freshers Information during autumn term
- Week 7(12) student-driven formal meeting with tutor reflecting on learning
- Late autumn term provision of coursework marks direct to student
- Formal staff-driven Academic review in January to which students bring copies of actual marks
- Mid-spring student-driven formal meeting for further reflection on learning, time management etc.
- Formal end of year Academic Review in June

In addition to these specific elements there is a need to provide students with tools to help them develop their learning styles, reflect on their learning and record their reflections for use in the future. In that sense a very broad use of the word Induction is intended.

There are a number of issues that need addressing such as how to present welfare and learning skills information to students at a time when they are inundated with further information about the course itself in addition to social and extra-curricular activities. They get overwhelmed and yet are expected to start operating properly in their first academic week. They also need time to come to terms with a change of approach which is different from what has been acceptable at school. Several departments provide excellent guides to help students prepare for learning. But the reality is that students will only learn when they commit the errors and get useful and constructive feedback to encourage them to develop (one of the reasons for linking these two aspects in this project). Although this is likely to take time away from subject-specific learning, staff should recognise that students who are not prepared for learning are unlikely to be able to retain the material from the first few weeks of the course.

The above issues were addressed several years ago by a few of the departments independently but since the teaching of level C has been combined and the introduction of the block timetable, departments have lost flexibility over the first few weeks of term. It has also led to increasingly poor attendance and high failure rates. It is now time to re-evaluate the previous good practices in the light of the new knowledge about induction strategies and the changed character of our students to see what can be re-introduced.

The two most important issues with respect to learner independence that need addressing over the two-year period from 2006/07 to 2007/08 are

1. Induction of new students, including use of PDP to encourage reflective learning from arrival at the University and progression through a continuum of support throughout Year 1, and
2. Feedback, working with staff and students to embed processes to improve effectiveness and appropriate use of feedback to facilitate learner independence.

Further Information	<p>For further information on this project please contact CLAD at University of Birmingham</p> <p>cladprojects@contacts.bham.ac.uk quoting CLAD projects HIST024</p>
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