

## **Building working relationships with peers: an induction activity for students**

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### **1. Abstract**

The initial period of transition to university ('induction') is important as this is when students first meet university staff and are introduced to university systems. Students also meet each other for the first time and start to form friendship groups which will provide a source of peer support throughout their programmes. This case study sets out an activity which we use with the new students on our extended accounting- and finance- related programmes to introduce students to library resources and enable them to start to build working relationships with their peers. The activity begins with information about the library from an Academic Services Librarian, delivered using an interactive quiz format. Students then work in small groups using the library PCs straight away which enables students to start to build friendships and work independently. The final part of the activity includes group presentations to the whole class.

**Key words: Business Education, extended programmes, induction, library services, transition**

### **2. Introduction**

This paper discusses an activity which is part of our induction for new students who join the accounting- and finance-related extended programmes in Greenwich Business School. Getting induction right is important so that we support our students as they transition into university life. Failure to transit from secondary to tertiary education successfully could lead to students dropping out of university. Induction has traditionally been viewed as something provided by a university for a limited time of up to a few weeks, at the start of a student's programme. There is an emerging view that the induction period actually extends beyond this, perhaps over the first year as students transition into higher education (HE) and encounter different parts of the academic year for the first time (Thomas *et al*, 2017). However, even within this view of induction, the first weeks of university are an important period when we need to help our new students develop a sense of belonging (Gregersen *et al*, 2021).

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Induction includes a mix of activities with the aim of providing information, introducing students to members of university staff, and giving students opportunities to get to know each other and make friends (Thomas *et al*, 2017). Peer support is especially beneficial to students to increase their self-efficacy (Reilly *et al*, 2021) and so we need to design induction activities which enable students to build social and working relationships with each other as early as possible in their university journey. Therefore, Devis-Rozental and Clarke (2021) emphasise the importance of designing induction activities which enable social interactions among students. Further, Piper *et al* (2020) suggest that early exposure to group work supports students' transition into HE.

Induction is an opportunity to introduce students to services and sources of support from across the university because it is not only academic staff who are involved in induction activities (Devis-Rozental and Clarke, 2021). There is a certain amount of information that needs to be delivered at induction but if that can be alongside meaningful activities for students, so much the better. What is meaningful for a particular student will be an individual construct but it is reasonable to assume that an activity has greater meaning if it facilitates interaction among students, gives students the opportunity to apply the information they are receiving, and links to their programme of study.

### 3. Case study

This case study discusses an induction activity for approximately 50 students entering the initial 'foundation' year on the extended programmes in the School of Accounting, Finance and Economics in Greenwich Business School. On joining their programmes, extended year students need to adjust to their new environment, acknowledge their new identity as university students, become more independent learners, and meet new peers, faculty and non-academic staff. In relation to the latter, within HE, libraries play a key role "*in building the reputation of the institution and in easing students into and across their program of study*" (Weaver, 2013, p103). Therefore, a well-designed library induction supports students' transition into HE. In addition, a student-driven activity is essential to help students get to know each other and develop friendships (Thomas *et al*, 2017).

Our induction activities for extended students are spread over two days. On the first day, students receive information about the University, Business School and their extended programmes, and there are activities to facilitate getting to know each other. This case study sets out our activity with students on the second day of induction. For the second day, we have designed a three-part induction activity: a library induction, a group research activity and group presentations. In the first session, students learn about the University's library resources

so that they know they can use our study spaces and begin to learn how to access the information they will need on their programme. (This topic is then picked up again via librarian input after induction as it is important not to overload students with information in the first week.) In the second session, students are allocated into groups to research how large companies undertake corporate social responsibility (CSR). In the third session, the students re-join the whole class to present their work to each other.

### **2.1 Part 1: Library induction**

In this session, we invite an Academic Services librarian for Business to introduce students to the library services and how to access information using the resources provided by the University. The content of the session is delivered via an interactive online quiz so students can assimilate useful information about the library in an enjoyable way. By meeting the librarian early in their programme, students know who to contact when they need support to use the library resources. The academic tutors are present in the library induction so that they know what information is being imparted and this demonstrates a whole-team approach to induction including both academic and non-academic colleagues.

This session takes place in a seminar room in the library building. Students then move to a study space in the library to use the University resources for the group activity thereby putting into practice what they learned through the quiz.

### **2.2 Part 2: Group activity**

At the end of the library induction session, academic staff brief students on the group activity. It is explained to students that they will work together in small groups to investigate the definition of CSR and to outline an aspect of an individual company's CSR activities. Group sizes are flexible but we suggest around six to eight students in each group is optimal so that the work and presentation can be shared between students. Each group can choose which CSR activities they want to focus on. For example, this could include a company's response to climate change, or action to support society during the COVID pandemic. For those groups who want guidance on which company to look at, we provide a list of companies from different sectors that they can choose from including banking, fashion, electric vehicles and sport. This means students can focus on a sector they are particularly interested in for reasons which might include personal interest or professional ambition. For example, students on our finance-related programmes may want to consider the CSR activities of a bank. This means the activity does not have to be viewed by students as a general induction activity but it immediately has relevance to their chosen programme of study.

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Reilly *et al* (2020) argue that students on extended programmes value bespoke content which is relevant to their subject specialism so we should look for every possible opportunity to make learning activities relevant to students' interests, starting at induction. Using the topic of CSR in the induction activity informs students about what is happening in the world of finance and business. However, it does not require any technical knowledge of accounting or finance so students can apply their pre-existing knowledge and explore their interest in sustainability and corporate citizenship right at the start of their programmes.

Clear instructions are provided to students, including the number of slides and question to answer in each slide. As this is an induction activity, the questions are kept simple (figure 1). This is to ensure that students feel confident they understand and can complete the task, and each presentation will finish in 10 minutes so every group will have a chance to present their work in Part 3 of the activity. The academic tutors help students to form themselves into groups and check that each group has a company in mind and understands the questions before releasing them to work independently. The students then work together in the library and have two hours to create their group presentations. Although this activity includes independent working in small groups, students know how to contact the academic tutors (either in person or by email) if they need help or have any questions during the two hours. This activity creates an opportunity for students to develop friendships, as well as academic and employability skills (for example, teamwork and communication).

### **2.3 Part 3: Delivering a presentation**

The third session includes the group presentations and takes place in a lecture room on the main campus. All groups present their work to the whole class and are asked to introduce themselves before starting the presentation. This is a way for students to get to know a wider circle of peers beyond those in their small group. We recognise that these are new students who may lack confidence and so give students the option of how to present (that is, one or two people present on behalf of the group, or everyone takes a turn at a small part). However, we generally find that most (if not all) students are happy to present with their groups.

By watching their fellow students present, students are able to learn from each other. For example, although there might be two groups who choose the same company, the topics they choose to focus on in relation to how the company helps to combat climate change can be different. In this way, students can learn to see things from different perspectives. The academic tutor provides positive feedback after each presentation to make students feel confident that they are ready for university-level study. Every year we find that all groups create and deliver a presentation, and students are very encouraging toward other groups.

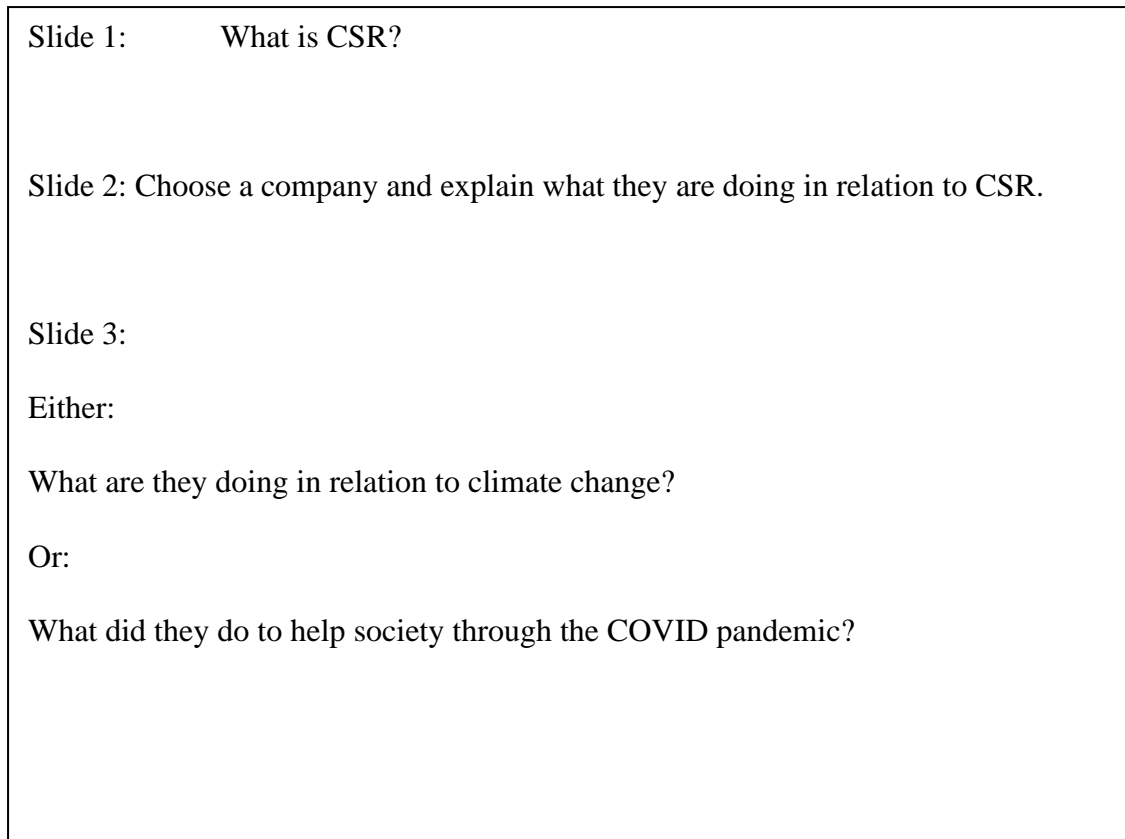


Figure 1: Task instructions

#### 4. Discussion

There are several benefits of the induction activity described in this case study. First, students are able to start to familiarise themselves with the University's resources and the study environment. The three parts of the activity take place in different rooms and different buildings. When moving from one building to another, students get the chance to explore the campus and become familiar with the environment. In particular, having the first two sessions (library introduction and group activity) in the library makes students aware of, and able to access, library facilities which promotes engagement with their future studies. Second, students have the chance to get to know each other and develop academic and employability skills when working together. Students can also see the different ways that their peers think when watching each other's presentations. Third, students learn about CSR. CSR is playing a growing and increasingly important role in finance and business but the term is new to many students. Some felt challenged initially after receiving the topic as they were not sure what CSR is. However, together they managed to apply their existing skills (teamwork, research, communication and problem-solving) to learn what CSR is, as well as build an idea about the specific CSR-related activities that companies undertake. Fourth, students build confidence in their ability to study at university level as they see that they can use their previous knowledge

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and skills to learn a new subject-related concept. Some students felt more confident after the group presentation as they had successfully finished an activity designed by academic staff. Fifth, students start to build working relationships with staff who will support their studies as they go through their programme. This includes not only academic staff but also the librarian. Meeting the tutors and librarian helps students build connections so they know who to contact with any future issues. Sixth, students start to have experience of delivering presentations at university which will be of benefit as there are presentations in various modules on their programmes.

Participation in the 2022 and 2021 sessions was good with all groups preparing a presentation which they then delivered to the other students. We have received positive feedback from students saying that this induction activity helps them explore their new environment, build friendships with peers, get to know academic and supporting staff, and feel more confident about their university studies.

We deliver this activity to approximately fifty students each year. The initial library induction and then group research session can be used with any size of cohort. However, with a larger cohort, a challenge would be to have time to watch all the presentations in the final part of the activity. This could be overcome by dividing the groups between two (or more) rooms so that students present their work to different tutors.

### 5. Conclusion

Adapting to HE can be challenging for transitioning students as they are initially unfamiliar with their new environment. Students can easily doubt their ability to succeed at university if they feel they do not fit in. This can cause a lack of motivation to study or engage with the other students on their programme. This kind of issue can be addressed by induction activities and encouraging students to use library services early (Thomas *et al*, 2017; Weaver, 2013). In this case study, we have shown how we embed a staff-driven library introduction and student-driven activities into an induction activity to support students' transition into HE.

There is an emerging view that the induction period extends beyond the initial weeks and throughout the first year of a programme, as students settle in and start to experience HE (Tett *et al*, 2017). However, the initial period is important as this is when students first meet university staff and are introduced to university systems. Students also meet each other for the first time and can start to form friendship groups which will provide a source of peer support throughout their programmes. Our case study shows that in the activities which we design to

facilitate this interaction, it is possible to bring in subject-related content which will increase the relevance of induction in the eyes of our students.

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