Student Consultation Panel
CONSULTATION ON INTEGRATED INDUCTION
18 – 31 October 2021

A complete record of the discussion can be viewed on the forum: https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=25141.
Below is a summary of key points made by students.

Record of contributions
In total there were **158** posts by **45** students out of the **335** registered, with **99** like/favourite ratings. There were at least **98** independent readers of the forum. Below are extracts from most 'liked' posts.

> In agreement with all the other students I cannot stress more the importance (to me) of having the module website open as early as possible. Most of us work full-time and have many other life commitments (family, other stuff to study, hobbies, health conditions, etc) so it is very useful to have access to the module materials well in advance, so that one can test how hard the module is and so calibrate and plan the study (and the life). Time is, in my personal experience, the scarcest resource.

> My top tip would be: don't just sign up, then do nothing until the module website opens. Engage with the website and have a look at OpenLearn courses relevant to your subject.
>
> I think the modules prepare students well for the change in levels. You're gradually expected to do more reading, critical writing, be more concise, and think for yourself as the modules progress, so I don't think anything specific is needed. Having said that, this year, my subject area offered a 'Stepping up to L3' tutorial, which was reassuring.

> To me, induction means understanding clearly what's expected of me and what I can expect from the OU. It would also include basic housekeeping - a tour around the site showing me the absolute basics I need to be able to complete the tasks expected of me.

1. What 'induction' as a student means to you

It would be great to know what you think of when you hear the word induction, and what (broadly) you think good induction should include when starting at the OU.

- Some students commented they had not been involved in any induction programme/experience.
- Students had concerns about the website navigation for students being a barrier to studying.
- Students felt induction needed to introduce what lay ahead, including the 'valuable resources that will support' students through their module.

- Students described a good induction as 'inclusive and clearly signposted', a time 'to explore the functions available' and gain confidence using them. 'Also a good opportunity to have a good impression of your organisation.'
- Students suggested induction is a time for inductees to understand the values and expectations of the OU community and essential information to prepare students to complete their studies.
- A student commented that the induction meant an introduction to the OU or a module and that it begins when successfully applying. It may also mean having a 'conversation with someone – perhaps even a tutor'.
- Some students felt that other students could suffer in their studies by not feeling comfortable in asking for help and that a good induction should include tackling the fear.
- The OpenLearn 'Being an OU Student' course was seen to be of great help to students that completed the course. However, some students felt it would not be right for them.

2. Induction to your subject area

a) What kinds of things did you find most useful when starting to study your subject? These could include activities or information on your module website, StudentHome, Study Home (accessed via the Study tab on StudentHome) or elsewhere from the OU, or resources you found outside of the OU;

b) What would you like to see additionally provided to help you when beginning to study your subject?

- Students shared positive induction experiences to subject areas including module activities. Subject areas specifically mentioned were Science, Psychology, Humanities and Law. The induction activities included *Are you Ready For* quizzes and engaging forums with interactive moderators.
- Students felt that although there was a lot of information on offer, it was not located in one place and therefore felt overwhelming and unclear. Another student felt that a short tutorial on the OU website would help. Another student praised the informative data on the resources tab.
- Information about referencing would be helpful, which previously featured in the module assessment guide.
- Induction sessions covered how to use Adobe Connect as well as in first tutorials, which appeared to be a waste of time.
- A student commented that an email included advice to read the 'New to OU online guide' which was useful.
- A student commented that 'a dictionary of OU acronyms would be useful'.
- A student felt the OU has a focus on plagiarism which negatively impacts students getting together to explore ideas.
- A student shared that the module description helped choose the right module but having a tutor to answer queries would help. Another student commented that video and audio clips were helpful.
- A student studying a Postgraduate course shared a negative experience and would have welcomed dialogue and support from their tutor.
- A student shared how their confidence and engagement grew once they joined in forums discussions.
- A student suggested that having information on general expectations including assessment hard limits and TMA layouts would help.

3. Induction to the University

Please tell us:

a) what you found most helpful in understanding more about what it would be like to be an OU student, for example adverts, website information, emails, speaking with support staff etc. OR What helpful information about what it's like to be an OU student did you find prior to registering for your studies? This may be from OU adverts, adverts, websites, speaking with support staff and personal recommendations.

b) Were the things you found useful easy to find and were there particular times in the run up to your studies beginning when these things were/would be most helpful?

c) What more could the University do to help new students feel part of the OU?

- A student commented that Student Hub Live (including YouTube videos) was a great source of information.
- Students commented that the OU Students Association were approachable and helped feeling connected.
- Students commented using forums in advance of module starts to understand what the experience was going to be like.
- Some students were not aware of any induction to the OU. One student found OpenLearn a good way to familarise yourself with the distance learning environment.
- Students commented that having an easy-to-use website (with signposting) would improve the student experience.
- Students who see merit in forums, would like to see connecting online made easier, including a personal notification system, less qualification forums.
- Students felt that module content information that is available is 'excellent' but one students said there is not sufficient information about the experience of becoming an OU student. Two students commented that 'Being an OU student' on OpenLearn was a helpful course.
- Improving students' awareness of the Community tab would help students feel part of the OU.
- The promotion and availability of OU mentors was suggested to be beneficial.
- Students shared negative experiences with regards to IT help and apps.
- A student shared a detailed account of their experience with the OU. The student shared their experience which included how the OU has become less personal and that community should be a focus.
- A student suggested a web-based 'generic induction pack'.

4. Induction to being a student

In this thread we'd like to know more about which skills you think all new students should start their studies with and suggestions about how we can help students check their starting point in relation to these key skills and make these easy for students to find.

- Students suggested a self assessment test/quiz. Although it was commented that this could make students, especially new students, more anxious about studying with the OU.
- Students suggested important skills included: self-reflection, analysis, digital skills, time management, writing, initiative.
- One student shared their negative experience of navigating the OU website and that improvements or exercises/information on how to navigate would help.
- Students did feel that due to the OU's wide offering of courses, skills required did vary.
- A student suggested that there should be 'more targeted support to help students with disabilities feel comfortable to ask for help and to know what help is available'.

5. Getting the timing right

When thinking about induction, we'd like to understand more about when and how much students would like to do or would find helpful. Thinking of your own experience, do you think it would be more helpful to do induction activities before module start, early in the module, at key times over the first year?

And we know that students have different demands on their time so it would be helpful to know a bit more about the amount of time you would expect to use for getting to know the University, introduction to your subject and key skills etc.

- Students felt strongly that it was important for the induction to take place before the module starts, due to time pressures whilst studying. Numerous students suggested it should happen at the time the module website opens. Others felt it could be two months before the module begins or one week before so it was 'still fresh in mind'.
- It was noted that the induction process should be voluntary with 'no pressure to attend'.
- A student commented that new students would 'need to have a level of confidence' to navigate induction before the challenges of studying.

- Some students commented that further inductions may be required if new programmes and resources were introduced later in a course or to other parts of the University or Students Association.

6. Top tips

a) Whether you are new to university study or new to distance learning having transferred some credit from another university, we'd love to hear about the types of information and support you think new students would find helpful that you haven't mentioned in previous threads, and what top tips you would give to a brand new OU student.

b) As well as being new at the beginning of your qualification, there are lots of other times during your qualification which involve new challenges including changing between levels. In this thread it would be really helpful to hear about what information or support you think would be useful to give continuing students at different points in their student journey like the examples mentioned. Also, similar to new students, we'd love to know what your top tips for students moving up to the next study level would be?

- Students commented that peer support and engaging on forums was extremely valuable; although one student commented about the risks of false information.
- Connecting with others (including fellow students, tutors, Student Support Teams) can help students feel more comfortable, confident and improve learning.
- A student commented that experiences between different subjects and different 'unwritten rules and expectations' was a challenge.
- A student shared that the guidance and module materials were clear about expectations which helped students feel supported going into a new module. A student was reassured by the offering of a 'Stepping up to L3' tutorial. Another student praised Mathematics and Statistics materials aimed at planning a route through study, *Are You Ready For* quizzes and reviewing taster materials.
- Taking the time to read the information in full and carefully was recommended by a student.
- A student suggested that an 'actionable list of resources' should be available with a support graphics to help students follow the induction journey.
- A student recommended using previous exam papers to help with revision.
- Students supported the idea of having access to examples of graded essays which would help learning and understanding marking criteria. A possibility of 'dissecting' examples as a group activity was suggested.
- A student recommended attending tutorials to help give a greater chance of passing.
- Students supported the idea of a detailed site map to help students feel confident navigating and finding the wide range of resources available to students.
- A student suggested weekend inductions (like the old summer schools).
- A student recommended new students should try to build a great relationship with their tutor.
- Students recommended starting early, studying when the module material first becomes available.
- It was noted that asking questions may not only help the student asking but also peers.
- A student recommended reviewing and engaging with relevant content on OpenLearn.
- A student advised choosing a subject 'you are truly passionate about and it will never become a chore'.

Date: November 2021