Report statement

Project Title: The Induction Experience of Foundation Students

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Students as Co-Creators LTRC Project Evaluation Guidelines

**Section 1. Executive Summary (300-400 words)**

The Induction Experience of Level 3 and Level 4 Students Compared:

The student members of the team started their university education as level 3 students at University of Westminster (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences). The idea and motivation for this research project came from our experience as foundation students, and especially our induction experience. We felt that the induction process for level 3 students required improvement to match that of level 4 students. This research project will explore which changes the Foundation students would like to see, attempt to identify lessons from level 4 induction, and make recommendations for improvements for future inductions.

The project set out to compare the induction experience of level 3 and level 4 students at University of Westminster’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The project explored: a) students’ perceptions of, and satisfaction with, their inductions in order to identify differences in the student experience at level 3 and level 4, and how it could be improved in the future. The discussion and evaluation draws heavily on original data gathered by the project team using online questionnaires and focus group interviews. The principal aims of the project were a) to identify key differences between level 3 and level 4 students’ induction experience; b) to identify which additional information students would find useful at the beginning of their course; c) recommend ways in which the university can improve the induction experience for level 3 students. It is the project team’s wish, hope and expectation that the findings, some of which may seem surprising, will inform future induction arrangements and hopefully, in turn, enhance student engagement and satisfaction.

This report will conclude with recommendations to be considered by the school, college and university. We will present our findings to the Students Union, to staff at the 2019/2020 Learning and Teaching Symposium, and at the RAISE Conference in September 2019. Finally, but possibly most importantly, we will communicate our findings to students on posters at various events.

**Section 2. Background and Aims (200-300 words)**

The project compared the induction experience of level 3 and level 4 students during their first week at University of Westminster. The focus was on students from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The main motivation behind the project was to ascertain if our lived/felt experience as foundation differed from that of level 4 students, and, if so, how the foundation student induction experience could be improved, possibly by adding certain sessions and opportunities to the level 3 programme, which the level 4 students currently have. The project also aimed to identify other additions that could benefit both level 3 and level 4 students.

There is a need for this project because the project provides the university information on the key differences between level 3 and level 4 student experience of the induction process. Both sets of students come from either college or six form and are of a similar age and a fairly similar background. It is therefore likely that the divergent student experience is due to factors related to differences between the induction programmes themselves.

The project is important because this project informs most students about foundation year as a whole as foundation year is not publicise on the university’s websites. Moreover, the project enables us to explore the reasons why there is a difference and recommend changes to the induction programme in more detail. In addition, the project enables students to understand that being a foundation student does not limit the anyone’s validity as a university student which is a common stereotype of foundation year. The original idea for the project to achieve the aims is to construction questionnaire where students from both foundation and level 4 year can express the advantages and disadvantages of the induction process to identify any similarities between the two groups of students. Therefore, the team analysed the results from the questionnaire which provided descriptive and numeric information.

The project team assumed before embarking on the research that the difference between level 3 and level 4 students would be obvious. For example, it was assumed that level 4 students would feel greater satisfaction with their inductions than the level 3 students.

The people, who are most likely to use the findings of the evaluation, are the academics, who are involved in the planning and implementation of level 3 and level 4 induction processes as the findings enables these lecturers to understand the effects of the induction process from the students’ perspective. Moreover, the research strongly impacts many future foundation students because the findings will most likely influence what the future foundation induction process will include.

**Section 3. Methods (150-300 words)**

The team applied for and received ethical approval for the research project. The team followed appropriate protocols for research ethics. For example, the team made sure that any questions used in the questionnaires are objective to avoid misleading questions that influences participants’ answers. Additionally, the team practiced transparency by providing all participants with a participant information sheet (see appendix), which enabled potential participants to decide whether to be part of the survey.

The team decided to use statistical data with the quantitative data from the questions about the duration of the induction process and the usefulness of the induction process to see a trend between the duration and the usefulness of the induction process.

In practice, while working on the project, the student members of the research team (Marwah and Chelsea) formulated a set of questions to gather qualitative questionnaire data and interview data, including “what else, if anything would you like in your induction”, and a set of questions requiring quantitative answers with the purpose of assessing the alignment of student participation in induction events and their satisfaction with the programme, including “how many days was your induction process” to gather a variety of information that can be analysed. The student members and the academic partner then jointly set up an online questionnaire to attain general responses. In turn, a number of focus group interviews with primarily level 3 students were carried out and the data compared.

The data for this research project were collected using online questionnaires and focus group interviews. The team chose this strategy because online questionnaires is a highly effective method to gathering anonymous data and information, as students find them easy to access and complete on PCs, laptops or smartphones, with focus group interviews permitting in-depth exploration of the research topic. Moreover, the usage of questionnaires allows flexibility regarding the number of participants taking part. This lack of restriction allows the team to explore a variety of opinions and suggestions to compare the differences of induction process experience. The data, gathered in Excel spreadsheets, were readily available for analysis. To encourage students to submit their the answers, the team offered participants a chance to take part in a prize draw for book vouchers.

**Section 4. Results**

This graph presents the overall range of the usefulness and the enjoyment levels of the induction process of level 3 and level 4. Number 1 represents usefulness and number 2 represents enjoyment. The data suggests that the foundation students’ induction process consisted of limited activities compared to level 4 students’ induction process as level 4 induction process had a variety of activities which is why that most foundation students does not find the induction process enjoyable or beneficial compared to level 4 students.

The questionnaire data clearly demonstrates that the all students had access to go to the arrival fair. Yet, according to the same data set, the scope of activities during the inductions for level 3 and level 4 differed: Level 4 induction process consisted of students having a matriculation ceremony, taster session in the course, speaker from outside university, being shown around everywhere and how to use the library and computers, the legal tour, mock lectures, FANS assistance, the judge presentation, tour of the royal courts of justice or in the temple, student fair, societies fair whereas the induction process for Level 3 students consisted of meeting tutor group, meeting peers doing the same course, the quiz, explanation what happens in university and getting to know lecturers. These findings demonstrate that the induction programme for level 4 students had more activities over more days than the programme for level 3 students. This suggests that the difference in overall perception score might be addressed by expanding the level 3 induction programme.

This finding is further supported by the data on student participation in the induction (see graphs below): the perception of ‘usefulness’ of the induction increases with the number of days and the number of activities students attended.

‘Usefulness’ and days attended:

‘Usefulness’ and number of activities attended:

The outcome of the project was that according to our qualitative and quantitative data, although there is few similarities, most of the elements and activities of the induction process were different between the foundation and first year students. For example, level 4 students had the opportunity to experience a great variety of activities during induction process such as matriculation ceremony to welcome new students, taster session for the chosen course and a speaker from outside university.

**Section 5. Discussion (300-600 words)**

The main possible limitation for our research is the sample size. Furthermore, when the team started the research, the time period was busy due to the holiday plans and exam stress. Nevertheless, the data collected enables us to investigate the difference between the two levels in depth which enables us to present the findings. In addition, another possible issue in our research was the analysis of qualitative data as the qualitative data can appear subjective. Yet, the qualitative data allowed us to gain insight into the emotional perspective of a student’s attitude towards induction.

Nonetheless, all the qualitative and quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire further validates the points that the team made because the student respondents gave examples of the activities in the induction process which allowed us to discover any distinctive pattern. Moreover, the findings clearly presents the differences between level 3 and level 4 students’ induction process.

Among the advantages of the focus group data is the depth and openness of the answers. Secondly, another advantage is the use of qualitative data as the team can explore the respondents’ feelings towards induction. Thirdly, one of the advantage of the research is that there was not a time limit which enables participants to have time to vocalise or type a detailed answers to increase the validity of the answers.

The chosen methods of data collection enabled the team to gather sufficient data and gain sufficient information, and to analyse the data, within the time available.. In addition, the chosen methods enabled a range of data types such as qualitative and quantitative data to be presented. Furthermore, the findings reveal the usefulness and duration of the induction process for both level 3 and level 4 students. Moreover, the chosen method enabled the team to achieve the aims of the research which is to explore the differences between level 3 and level 4 induction process, what are the errors of the foundation year induction process and how to improve. Additionally, the results validates the findings in pedagogical literature on the importance of induction for students.

**Section 6. Conclusions and Recommendations (200-300 words)**

In conclusion, even though both induction processes emphasised university life and university structure, there is a difference between the foundation and first year students’ induction experience. The difference is originated from the limited duration and activities that the foundation students had to experience compared to the first year students. For instance, most of the respondents from the foundation year states that the induction lasted 1-2 days and only consisted of 1-2 activities. Therefore, the academics involved in the induction process should ensure that the foundation students have more days with a greater variety of activities to help foundation students to grasp and enjoy the university study even more. Furthermore, the results impliy that the foundation students have not had the opportunity to explore university in more depth. For example, most of the respondents from first year states that the induction consists of 4-5 activities and the induction lasted 3-4 days. Overall, the difference between the level 3 and level 4 students stems from the lack of opportunity, as well as engagement, that foundation students have to be introduced university. Both induction process should consists of the same amount of days and activities as both levels includes different students who are new to the university lifestyle.

Based on the research findings, the main recommendations are that the academics, who are involved in induction processes for new students, should ensure that the level 3 students are given the same number of days and range of activities as the level 4 students.

**Section 7. Dissemination (200-300 words)**

The report and its recommendations will be forwarded for consideration by course leaders, the school, college and university. We will present our findings to the Students Union, to staff at the 2019/2020 Learning and Teaching Symposium, and at the RAISE Conference in September 2019. Finally, but possibly most importantly, we will communicate our findings to students on posters at various events.

In addition to suggesting improvements to the induction for level 3, and to a lesser extent level 4, students at University of Westminster, some of the questionnaire and focus group data may also help inform prospective students about life as a student at University of Westminster. For example, the project’s findings might be beneficial to the college and sixth form students who wish to join university as level 3 students. In addition, the research’s findings evokes discussions and conversations amongst students who are curious about the foundation year. This curiosity of foundation year can lead to the foundation year being featured on posters and being mentioned on the university website to bring awareness about the foundation course.

**Section 8. Reflection (200-300 words)**

The experience of doing a research project was good because the research reinforce our determination and motivation to persevere and complete the project. Additionally, the research experience has taught us about the importance of organisation in order to gain the most effective information for the findings and results.

There was not much problems in the project apart from the time period we started the project as the time period was the most stressful period for many students. Moreover, the qualitative and quantitative data gathered was strongly beneficial to achieving our aims.

Lastly, the next time we have the opportunity to start another piece of research is to start the project for the first cycle as most students would have more time to complete an interview and complete consent forms.