Students on Student Induction – A Cross-Disciplinary Action Research Project

Ruth A. Valentine

School of Dental Sciences
Newcastle University
Framlington Place
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 4HH

Luisa A. Wakeling

School of Dental Sciences
Newcastle University
Framlington Place
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 4HH

Lindsey J. Ferrie

School of Biomedical Sciences
Faculty of Medical Sciences
Newcastle University
Framlington Place
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 4HH

Alina Schartner (corresponding author), ORCID: 0000-0001-5653-5774

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
King George VI Building
Newcastle University
Queen Victoria Road
NE1 7RU

Clare Guilding

Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia,
No1, Jalan Sarjana 1,
Kota Ilmu, Educity@Iskandar,
79200 Iskandar Puteri (formerly Nusajaya),
Johor, Malaysia.

Grace Peterson

1040 Poplar Ave
Boulder, CO 80304
USA

Email: alina.schartner@ncl.ac.uk

Telephone: + 44 (0) 191 208 8567

Abstract

This paper reports on an action research project where the investigators (engaged in an institutional education research initiative) explored future perspectives on university induction processes through a cross-disciplinary approach. The benefits of induction and the transition experience has implications for student engagement, stress management and mental health, as well as achievement and retention. Student induction and transition into university is therefore an important and complex topic for HE practitioners. The study followed a two-stage mixed methods design, triangulating qualitative focus group data with quantitative questionnaire data (n = 211) from undergraduate and postgraduate students registered on 4 programmes at one British university. Results indicate that students' experiences of university induction were, by and large, positive. Current induction provision was experienced by most students as valuable and helped alleviate anxieties. The importance of social integration and the early use of social media was evident from both the focus groups and questionnaires.

Keywords:

Induction, transition, international students, adjustment

Introduction

The higher education (HE) student body in the United Kingdom (UK) and elsewhere is diversifying rapidly. There are now more than 5 million individuals studying for a university degree outside their country of origin (OECD, 2017), and in the UK, 19 percent of the total student body were non-UK in 2015-16. At postgraduate level, 42% of students come from outside the European Union (EU) (UKCISA, 2018). However, inward mobility is only one of the reasons

behind increased diversity in UK HE. Equality and diversity, and widening participation agendas are leading to diversification in terms of age and ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, in 2015/16 29% of UK higher education students in their first year were black and minority ethnic (BME) (HEFCE, 2018). In light of this increasing diversity, university induction processes now also have to cater to a wider range of needs and expectations. Induction processes normally consist of a week-long period of timetabled events that help orientate new students with the University's policies, processes and practices as well as encourage integration with peers and Programme staff.

Although international students have been found to experience more difficulties than their domestic counterparts, research also suggests that they face many similar challenges including loneliness, social acceptance and academic pressure (Andrade, 2006). Nonetheless, induction processes in many universities differentiate between the two groups and a separate 'International Welcome Week' is not uncommon. This not only foregrounds the idea of difference, but also hides the diversity within the 'international' student group itself (Scudamore, 2013). Adjustment difficulties for both groups are likely to be most salient in the early stages of their transition to university when the number of life changes is high and coping resources are at the lowest (Ward *et al*., 2001). Most students, 'home' and 'international', are transitioning to new living arrangements and social settings without their established support system (e.g. family and friends) close by so facilitating effective integration is a dominant theme in HE (Tate and Hopkins 2013; Vinson *et al.* 2010; Harvey and Drew 2006). Transition, in the context of this paper, is based on "transition-induction" as classified by Gale and Parker (2014) where structure is provided by the institution to promote the shift to HE and is mainly the domain of the first-year experience. The transition experience has implications for student engagement, stress management and mental

health, as well as achievement and retention (Kuh *et al*. 2008; Yorke and Thomas 2003, Ribchester *et al.* 2013). The use of technology in facilitating integration is an emerging theme in the literature, in particular the increasing use of social media in both pre-arrival and in the early stages of university life (Lefever and Currant, 2010; Gray *et al*. 2013). Social media, be it social networking sites such as Facebook, online blogs or twitter, are reported to positively enhance students' transition to university by encouraging connection and interaction amongst peers (Gray *et al.* 2013; Ribchester *et al.*, 2012).

Student induction and transition into the university lifecycle is therefore a complex topic for HE practitioners. The bourgeoning body of research in this area is characterised by multiple perspectives on which format is most appropriate. Hughes and Smail (2015) highlight how some of the existing theoretical models conflict on whether induction should focus on distinct areas such as academic, social, cultural or psychological transition into HE, or indeed if it should cover them all. They propose that although most models have an ethos of support, few are student-led and many lack student engagement because the relevance and timeliness of the induction approach may not yet be clear to the students. In a time of increased student diversity, the need to involve students more centrally in the design and purpose of induction events is more critical than ever.

In response this project aimed to evaluate current induction processes at one British university, across subject areas and levels of study (UG and PG), through an investigation of students' opinions about current provision. A secondary aim was to identify implications for practice from a student perspective. Our enquiry was driven by two overarching questions: Do current induction processes meet student needs? What can different disciplines learn from each other and how might this shape future practice?

Research setting

The setting for this case study was a research-intensive university in the North of England. The authors came together as part of an institution-wide, educational research and practice network aimed at fostering cross-discipline collaboration. In line with action research guidelines for academic practitioners (see Arnold and Norton, 2018) our aim was to improve the student experience through the process of researching our own practice, in this case student induction. Through this exploratory project we aimed to change three things: our own practices, our understanding of our practices, and the conditions in which we practice (Kemmis, 2009). The members of the group work in different subject disciplines within the university, teaching on vocational and non-vocational undergraduate degrees within the medical faculty (dentistry, medicine and biomedical science) to postgraduate teaching in the social sciences and humanities. UG degrees have a UK student majority with approximately 10-25% (or capped) international student numbers whereas PG degrees have an 'international' student majority.

The group members have a diverse array of responsibilities within their teaching schools, with roles encompassing management, teaching and support at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level. All authors are involved in student induction processes. In line with an action research ethos, we wanted to understand what 'works' in the current induction provision across our contexts and, ultimately, understand how to improve current practice. The project was supported by an institutional educational development grant which enabled the employment of a student research assistant. This helped to negate power relationships between the authors and the study participants during data collection. The study was approved by the university ethics committee and informed consent was obtained from all participants ahead of data-collection.

Scoping the status quo

Prior to gathering student opinion data, a scoping exercise of induction processes across the three faculties was carried out. The aim was to determine the content of induction timetables for the first week of term that were available online at the time the search was conducted[1]. In total seventeen different degree programme timetables from either undergraduate or postgraduate induction weeks in different teaching schools were reviewed (see Table 1).

<Insert Table 1 near here>

The frequency of induction activity content was compared from each school and anything unique or commonplace to programmes was recorded (see table 2 and 3 respectively)[2]. Across the three faculties, the timetables for induction week were very similar with most, if not all, offering a welcome talk/lecture, IT and library sessions, an introduction to the online learning environment (sometimes optional), and an introduction to student self-reflection tools. University regulations stipulated that all students must meet with their personal tutor and peer mentor within the first weeks of registration, and the majority of induction timetables had time dedicated for this. Engagement with the Students' Union representation and societies was also commonplace, as was information about student wellbeing services.

<Insert Table 2 near here>

Less than a third of the induction week timetables reviewed had identifiable sessions dedicated to international students however, some sessions for specific student groups such as study abroad or exchange students were noted in the review.

---

[1] Search terms were 'induction week' or 'welcome week' on the university website.

[2] Induction week content was analysed by session title only therefore some content may not be included in this review.

Running in parallel to school-based induction programmes were a number of 'Fresher's' activities hosted by the Students' Union. Session times conflicted on at least three out of the five days with only three of the seventeen timetables reviewed signposting dedicated time for 'Fresher's' activities. Generic induction material applicable to all students (setting up email accounts, access to standard university documents and information on tuition fees) was delivered through a university 'pre arrival' website. This website also contained links to support services such as the careers service, the library and student wellbeing.

<Insert Table 3 near here>

Methodology

The study followed a two-stage mixed methods design, triangulating qualitative focus group data with quantitative questionnaire data. Stage one took place mid-way through the first term and consisted of a series of focus groups with UG and PG students, both 'home' and 'international'. The aim was to collect fine-grained qualitative data that would provide insights into how students experience and reflect on university induction processes. It was felt that focus group discussions would allow students to collectively reflect on shared experiences and would therefore generate 'richer' data than one-to-one interviews (Wilkinson, 2003).

The student research assistant invited focus group participation via email to students from each respective degree programme. In total, four focus groups were conducted with UG and PG students across two faculties (see table 4).

<Insert Table 4 near here>

All focus groups were moderated by a trained facilitator who had no prior relationship with the participants. Initial questions were open-ended (e.g. 'What was induction like for you?', 'How did

you prepare before coming to university?') and probing questions were used to follow-up on any salient issues identified by participants. All focus groups were audio recorded with permission from the students, transcribed verbatim for analysis and then anonymised.

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), was employed on all focus group transcripts. Content was initially categorised and divided using the interview questions as *a priori* derived heading. The analytical procedure that followed was inductive (i.e. data-driven) and included three steps. First, the transcripts were read for content to identify 'patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest' (ibid: 86), and broad preliminary codes were generated. In a second step, these codes were condensed into key themes, where a 'theme' was viewed as anything that 'captures something important in relation to the overall research question' (ibid: 80). In a third step, each theme was examined for (a) differences between 'home' and 'international' students and (b) differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students. Two of the authors independently coded the transcripts. Any inconsistencies in coding and data interpretation were then discussed until consensus was reached (Tullo *et al*., 2018).

In stage two, which took place at the end of term, the themes identified in the focus group data were converted into a series of questionnaire items and an online survey was created and distributed to students across the two faculties. Overall, the survey yielded a total of 211 responses, 46 from students in the humanities and social sciences and 165 from students in the biomedical sciences; groups did not necessarily have the exact same induction week timetables as our focus groups. The survey was anonymous and percentages of negative and positive responses were calculated and analysed.

Focus group findings

Twelve themes were identified from the analysis which were conflated into three broad thematic categories; transition to university learning and living, pre-arrival preparation, and induction week (Table 5). Verbatim examples of these themes are provided below.

Transition to university learning and living

Several issues inherent to the transition to university were identified as challenging by the students. Some related to academic issues while others were of a more sociocultural nature. In the latter category, finances and budgeting were concerns several students raised. This included worries about being independent for the first time and managing finances.

> '…my main concern was the cost of living, worrying about whether I would be able to manage finance here because it's so much different.' (International postgraduate student, HSS)

A second sociocultural concern related to linguistic and cultural anxieties. This was especially prevalent among participants who spoke English as a second language who were concerned about not being able to communicate effectively with staff and other students, and how this might impact upon their ability to instigate and maintain contact with local people.

> 'I still feel worried about it to get contacts with the local people because I feel like I still don't understand their speaking, I still need to check twice or third times what they said.' (International postgraduate student, HSS)

Others felt nervous about being around people from a different culture and how they would adjust, in regards to food/cooking, sense of humour, or nightlife.

'On the first night out it was really weird for me being around people who drink because I've never really been in that kind of environment before…' (International undergraduate student, MS)

<Insert Table 5 near here>

Concerns related to academic study included their own capability in terms of study skills, including note-taking, writing and reading skills, with many students expressing confusion about the reading lists. The number of books listed on reading lists confused some students, some classes had many books and other classes had just one. Students were unsure which of the readings were mandatory.

'At first I couldn't really adjust to that, it's I don't know what to do I couldn't finish the reading because at first my reading is really slow so I couldn't finish that I was panicking at first.' (International postgraduate student, HSS)

A further common concern was making friends. A few students had friends or family already at the university, providing an important support system. Students felt that in order to make friends open-mindedness and social initiative are needed.

'I think making friends is always a big, you know worry, somewhere new, you don't know anyone, I didn't really know anyone coming to university but Fresher's Week I just kind of threw myself into it, I don't regret it you know.' (Home undergraduate student, MS)

Students also mentioned practical concerns about living in a new environment. This included aspects such as grocery shopping, getting haircuts, health care and getting around the city.

'My main concerns about the health interest because I didn't think about how this

hospital thing is at the UK.' (International postgraduate student, HSS)

In response to the concerns above students recounted several coping strategies. One was having a

friend or family member that had previously attended university and could be consulted about

their experiences.

'My sister is also here so if I have a problem I just ask her.' (International postgraduate

student, HSS)

Another strategy involved trial and error, and 'learning from mistakes'. One frequently

mentioned coping strategy involved spending time with others who were '*in the same boat*' and

going through similar experiences.

'I would make a discussion I mean share out my experience with my class mates or with

my roommates because they've also maybe encountered those difficulties as well.'

(International postgraduate student, HSS)

Pre-arrival preparation

Social media, in particular Facebook, was highlighted by many students as a useful way to meet

and get to know classmates' pre-arrival. Some courses formed a group pre-arrival and it was useful

for students to get to know each other before the course actually began. Social media benefitted

students in both social and academic ways.

'…like references and things that people who can't find them then somebody will just

post it.' (Home postgraduate student, HSS)

However, some students who were unaware of the Facebook group expressed concern about

feeling 'left out'.

'Actually it made me all freaked out I was, everybody knew each other before they come to uni and I was like, oh, my god, I'm so behind'. (Home undergraduate student, MS)

Some international students who were unfamiliar with Facebook (a student from China, as expressed in the transcript), also expressed concerns that they had to learn how to use this social media platform that added to the sense of feeling 'left out'. Others did not feel that their peers were sociable enough and wished that more events that are social could be organised by their course representatives.

Students expressed varying levels of academic preparation before the course, with most saying they did not do very much to prepare.

'Academically I didn't really prepare for it, just mentally prepared to be ready to work but I didn't actually to do anything other than just sort stuff out to live with.' (Home undergraduate student, MS)

A lot of preparation was for practical purposes, such as finding accommodation, buying everyday necessities, and obtaining information about financial matters (e.g. tuition fees). A few students visited the campus/city and spoke to university staff in preparation. Some international students said recruitment agents in their home countries supported them and this helped them feel prepared for coming to university.

Induction week

Students experienced induction week in multifaceted ways. They enjoyed interactions with staff and tours of facilities, however, they described feeling overwhelmed by too much information.

'It wasn't the best memory because it's quite mundane the first week we just had like loads of induction lecturers on like how to use the blackboard and how to use, basically

lecturers on what you expect for the course and like how much effort we have to put in the course…' (Home undergraduate student, MS)

Activities where students have to engage with more students that are senior as part of peer mentoring or 'buddy' schemes were experienced positively.

'I remember for induction week there was a meeting of the year 2's and the year 1's who were all sat in a room and you get to ask the seniors any questions you want and there was a buddy pairing system.' (Home undergraduate student, MS)

Contact with university staff was described as positive with many students highlighting how helpful and friendly staff were. However, in some cases there was concern about lack of contact with staff during lectures, due to large class sizes.

'…the module leader goes around and checks so those who sit in the middle would not have the opportunity for their work to be checked.' (International postgraduate student, HSS)

Students enjoyed social events such as bowling and tea parties, but sessions on vulnerability/crime or talks from the heads of schools were not perceived as useful.

'…I remember sitting the first week of the induction and just thinking well I could be, could be like on a quad bike with the, the freshers at med school and just thinking you know, why am I here, I think a lot of it wasn't much fun.' (Home undergraduate student, MS)

As could have been predicted, Freshers' Week was experienced by students in diverse ways. For some it was a positive experience, enabling them to form friendships early on whereas others found it difficult to balance social activities and academic induction, with some students feeling

that they didn't get their money's worth. Some students were unsure of what Freshers' Week involved before they arrived, or did not feel like any of the activities were aimed at them.

> '…I got to go like paddle boarding I think it was really fun like it was the first time and then I met new people as well so that was loads of fun.' (International undergraduate student, MS)

> '…it really was expensive and I was really hoping to get the most of it but then I found myself in classes most of the time.' (International undergraduate student, MS)

Survey findings

Following the focus group thematic analysis, a quantitative survey (6 questions in total) was designed to explore the three broad thematic areas in a larger cohort of MS students (n = 211) using 5, Likert-scale questions and 1 priority ranking question. Questions were designed to establish whether students viewed each theme in a positive, negative or neutral manner. The HSS questionnaire used a 7 point Likert scale and the responses were collated into 'Positive' (Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree) 'Neutral', and 'Negative' (Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) categories. The MS survey used a 5 point Likert scale, and for comparison to HSS the percent responses were collated into 'Positive' (Strongly Agree, Agree), 'Neutral' and 'Negative' (Disagree, Strongly Disagree) categories. Neutral responses were taken to mean either students had no preference (positive or negative) to the statement or that they did not feel it applied to them and so could not comment. Students were instructed to think back to their particular school based induction events whilst answering all questions. Two statements focused on what students felt about induction events in relation to their transition to university learning and living, one focused on students views of social media in pre-arrival preparation, and two focused on students feelings about the overall usefulness/relevance of induction week

events. The priority-ranking question was based on 8 terms identified by the focus group transcripts as areas of possible concern (Table 6). In addition to the combined ranking, average rankings are presented for each faculty cohort.

The anonymous survey was opened to students from both faculties at the end of the academic year via SurveyMonkey or within a lecture using the student response system TurningPoint. Results of the survey were compared at faculty level and then combined to give an overall student response. It was anticipated that this approach would not only expand findings from the focus group to the wider student population but would also explore in greater depth subject differences and diversity issues in the student groups studied.

Overall the survey revealed that students in both faculties viewed induction in a predominantly positive manner. Combined positives responses across all three thematic areas ranged from 59-72% with negative and neutral responses being recorded in less than 20% of students for all but one of the survey statements (transition).

Social media in pre-arrival preparation – "Social media was an important tool in my preparation for university."

In alignment with the focus groups findings, when all student responses were combined, the majority (72%) agreed that social media had been important in their preparation for university. Interestingly however, humanities and social science students responded less positively to the statement (63% in humanities and social science compared with 74% in biomedical science) which may be the result of more diversity within this cohort of students (Figure 1a).

Transcripts from the focus groups had identified that some students (one from China) were unfamiliar with social media being used as an engagement strategy for students as this is

not used in their home country. As the humanities and social science students surveyed had a larger international demographic compared to the mainly UK/EU biomedical science students this less positive response may simply reflect this issue rather than document the students understanding of the worth of social media in university induction. Furthermore, the students within the humanities cohort were studying at postgraduate level and had an older age range (23-27) than the corresponding biomedical science students (18-24). It could be tentatively inferred that because of this difference in age the value placed on the use of social media was inherently different and so would impact on the students' response in the survey.

Clearly, these results suggest that although the majority of students surveyed viewed social media as a positive approach in pre-arrival engagement, this may very much depend on the age and sociocultural (often regional) experience students have had before entering university. This raises an interesting perspective on whether the current focus on the use of social media in university induction is actually able to meet the demands of an increasingly diverse student population.

Transition to university learning and living – "Induction week helped alleviate some of my anxieties about university" and "School based induction should help me to make friends."

Similar to the findings on social media, the survey confirmed that, overall, students viewed induction week as a positive event with regard to their sociocultural transition into university. Data from combined cohorts showed that, on average, students responded positively (59%) to the statement that induction week helped to alleviate anxieties about university. However, a clear subject discipline difference was evident in the survey data. Students from the humanities viewed the anxiety alleviation from induction more positively than the biomedical science students (78% versus 53%, respectively). The biomedical students had much higher neutral responses (29 vs.

13%) and negative responses (18 vs. 9%) to this survey question implying that as a cohort they are unsure as to whether induction week has helped their anxiety issues (Figure 1b). Again this may be as a result of the demographic of students from the different faculties with postgraduate students perhaps having less anxieties about university having experienced the higher education setting before.

Both sets of students responded equally positively to the statement "School based induction should help me to make friends." (64% humanities and social science and 63% biomedical science), confirming comments made in the focus group that induction should always have a focus on social activities and peer to peer interaction (Figure 1c). What is interesting from the survey data is that the humanities students were more neutral than negative to this statement compared with the biomedical sciences students (neutral, 30% vs. 17% respectively and negative, 7% vs 19% respectively) perhaps reflecting an uncertainty about the responsibility of the school to instigate social ties given their prior experiences and expectations of HE.

Usefulness/relevance of induction week events – "I found activities/sessions in induction week adequately informed me for the year ahead" and "On reflection induction week was valuable."

When combined, survey responses were, overall, positive about the use (64%) and value (66%) of induction week. As mentioned previously, it was notable that biomedical science students were less positive than humanities students (60% vs. 78%, respectively) when commenting on how relevant induction week had been for the year ahead (Figure 1d) and on how valuable induction week was (62% vs. 76%, respectively) (Figure 1e). Indeed, these students responded more negatively in all but one of the survey questions (social media) when compared to the humanities students. It is unclear from this survey whether this is the result of a more demanding nature or simply a lack of experience in what HE provision includes. What is clear is the link this

research has to Hughes and Smail's (2015) theory that induction programmes must be seen by students as timely and relevant. Although both cohorts of students had overall very similar content in their induction programmes the students surveyed from the humanities had more sessions specifically aimed at making modular choices whereas biomedical science students had a greater focus on more generic 'study skills' development.

<Insert Figure 1 here>

Figure 1 Percentage of students (MS, n=165; HSS, n=46) responding positively (strongly agree or agree), neutrally (neither agree nor disagree) or negatively (disagree or strongly disagree) to statements about the induction process.

Areas of greatest concern

In the priority ranking question students in both subject areas identified making friends as the most common cause of concern (41%) and new approaches to learning as the second most important concern (23%). For full ranking details see Table 6. The least common cause of concern was the use of social media (1%). Given the comments made by students in the focus group and responses in the Likert-based survey questions it is unsurprising that social concerns are highlighted so strongly here.

<Insert Table 6 near here>

Discussion and conclusion

The findings from the present study indicate that students' experiences of university induction are, by and large, positive. Current induction provision was experienced by most students as valuable and appeared to help alleviate anxieties. As all teaching schools reviewed in this cross-disciplinary case study were providing very similar core content during induction events (see table 3 and 4)

this could imply that induction programmes of this structure are fit for students perceived needs. Given the complexity of diverse student groups surveyed in this study (under-, postgraduate; Home and International) and the difference in subject disciplines, the findings from this research could help to inform other universities towards establishing a more inclusive induction process. Although it must be acknowledged here that students from the Science and Engineering faculty were not surveyed in this study. We also must acknowledge that there were students who had a negative or neutral opinion of these statements regarding induction but it is difficult to extract if these were the same students for each statement.

Students from this study, both undergraduate and postgraduate, reported strongly that forming social ties early on was an important concern for them, and that this required specific support from the teaching school. This is echoed in other research. For example, Williams (2011) found that induction-based tasks (both academic and non-academic) led to greater interaction between students. While ~ 63% of students positively agreed with the statement 'School-based induction should help me to make friends' (Figure 1c), postgraduate HSS students ranked the importance of 'making friends' as second to 'new approaches to learning' whereas undergraduate MS students ranked this as first (Table 6). This is perhaps unsurprising and driven by the fact that postgraduates are more experienced in HE and understand what is expected of them academically. Nonetheless, making friends ranked as important to this cohort and it may be easy for schools to assume the more experienced student needs less support to form social ties.

It is noteworthy that induction sessions offered in the different faculties often coincided with social activities organised by the Students' Union and the students in the focus groups saw this as a negative aspect of induction. Historically the induction week was left open for university based social activities and was designated as fresher's week alone. This has since changed and

now school-based induction is often part of that week. This warrants further investigation into the social implications this may have. As highlighted in the questionnaire, however, students agreed that the school-based induction should help them make friends and so social occasions timetabled by the academic unit will be important to ensure that students from the same programme meet and socialise. This will inevitably help with their interactions in academic sessions later on (Young *et al.*, 2013).

As the landscape of HE changes and the diversity of students potentially widens, the focus of our induction processes has to evolve to allow a time relevant mechanism that engages this diverse group of students fully with a higher education environment. Research on international students has shown that the early stages of the student sojourn are often the most crucial for student adjustment (Brown and Aktas, 2011; Brown and Holloway, 2008). The international students in this study reported worries around 'understanding the locals', and how they would adjust, in regards to food/cooking, sense of humour, or nightlife: sociocultural circumstances that can be supported by induction activities. Early adjustment and the need for social acceptance is highly likely to also be the case for first-year undergraduate and mature 'home' students. It is therefore imperative that universities engage students early through initiatives that create a sense of belonging and provide opportunities for students to establish peer networks and form social ties (Wilcox *et al.* 2005; Hassanien and Barber, 2007; Thomas 2012).

From the focus groups, striking the balance between social and relevant academic content of induction week is an important consideration with some students feeling they had to sit through 'mundane' lectures. Induction week content can 'suffer' from the inclusion of knowledge that is delivered 'just-in-case' rather than 'just-in-time'.   It would appear that this case study is adding

further evidence to the growing body of support for the concept of "relevant timeliness" in student induction and transition programmes.

Prior to their arrival at university, it is highly likely that students will be at least in some part focused on preparing for university life. However, focus group findings suggested that this seems to be largely related to practicalities such as finding accommodation, although some students did dip into academic work, reviewing notes from past teachings. Our scoping exercise revealed that most academic units send out a pre-arrival pack that includes a printed version of the induction week timetable, a copy of the degree handbook and forms such as student charters or academic agreements. Some courses also provided tasks to be carried out by the students prior to their arrival. Future research could review the material sent out to students and evaluate its usefulness in preparation as well as look at the frequency of relevant task-related activities. This could allow academic departments to tailor their induction provision more strategically to their students' needs, and would mitigate the perceived '*information overload'* during induction week.

A forum to deliver this more tailored information could be a dedicated pre-arrival platform that includes a more social focus with testimonials from staff as well as past and current students. Social networking sites provide the ideal platform for building this sense of community around shared interests and knowledge (i.e. beginning on a particular degree programme, transitioning to university) (Ellison *et al*., 2010). We identified that many students had already formed social networks online before starting university. This concurs with recent research that shows 60-74% of students had already used social networking sites to contact each other before arrival (Ribchester *et al.* 2013). It is of note that not all students use the same platform of social media and, as revealed in our results, some may be at risk of exclusion. This therefore could be school-led technology in the form of a pre-arrival portal to host this sort of pre-arrival interaction.

Initiatives like this are already under way at some universities (Marshall, Nolan and Newton 2016), and there are indications in the literature that an approach of this kind has a positive effect on students. A pre-arrival website could also help universities to manage students' expectations and reduce uncertainty. Prior research highlights discrepancies between students' pre-arrival expectations and the subsequent reality of studying in the new environment. For example research by Brinkworth *et al*. (2009) in the Australian HE context, revealed discrepancies between students' expectations and experiences in the first months of studies; with students recognising that school will be different to higher education, but being surprised at how quickly they were expected to adapt to this new environment of learning. A similar study of medical students in the UK indicated that students had started university with expectations about the educational environment that were subsequently not met (Miles and Leinster, 2007).

Due to the nature of the groups surveyed in this study it was difficult to draw out the requirements of different subject disciplines over the possible effects of under- or postgraduate level from the focus group responses and the choices the students made in the survey. While unique elements of induction specific to spark the interests of different disciplines (research conference invitation, lab induction, art exhibition) are evident across the University, it is difficult to determine the individual value of these from this study.

This exploratory case study has investigated the opinions of a diverse population of students on the value, usefulness and design of student induction as a whole. The importance of social integration and the early use of social media was evident from both the focus groups and questionnaires. Preparation for university was explored and as well as the practicalities of sorting out living arrangements, social media appeared important in this preparation. From this evidence, a conceptual illustration of a students' perspective on the important dimensions of induction has

been proposed (Figure 2). It illustrates the dimensions of induction drawn from the major themes of the focus group discussion: transition to university learning and living, pre-arrival preparation, and induction week (school-based content). The practical, social and academic dimensions increase and decrease in student priority throughout the different stages of induction. In the pre-arrival period, the focus is on the practicalities of beginning university. Some students may still be arranging some of these practicalities after they arrive. When entering university, social appears to be the dominant focus for our students and by using social media, some students may have already begun social dialogue pre-arrival. As social circles are formed over time it will become a less dominant focus and, as influenced by the degree programme content, the emphasis on the academic side will increase as the course moves on. Academic activity very early on is unlikely to receive full attention and may be lost in its relevance to the students at that time. However, as reflected in the ranking of items of concern, PG students' focus shifts to a more academic setting and, as such, they may require increased academic content in the initial induction.

<Insert Figure 2 here>

This work may be informative to other institutions when reviewing and designing their own induction processes to meet the needs of students and therefore of the following recommendations are proposed:

1. HE induction activity for all students should have a strong emphasis on social interaction.
2. Content should be timely and relevant i.e. postgraduate students value the importance of social ties but require more of an academic focus earlier than UG.
3. A pre-arrival portal may be useful for an inclusive beginning to social interactions, management of practicalities with a view to mitigate 'information overload'.

Acknowledgments

References

Andrade, M. S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities. Adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5 (2), 131-154.

Arnold, L., & Norton, L. (2018). *HEA Action Research: Practice Guide.* Available at https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/hub/download/AR%20Guide.pdf (last accessed 23 January 2019).

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Brown, L., & Aktas, G. (2011). Fear of the unknown: a pre-departure qualitative study of Turkish international students. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 39 (4), 339-355.

Brown, L., & Holloway, I. (2008). The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at an English university. An ethnographic study. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 7(2) 232–249.

Brinkworth. R., McCann, B., Matthews, C., & Nordström, K. (2009). First year expectations and experiences: student and teacher perspectives. *Higher Education*, 58 (2), 157–173.

Ellison N., Lampe C., Steinfield C., & Vitak J. (2010). With a little help from my friends: social network sites and social capital. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self: Identity, community and culture on social network sites* (pp. 124–145). New York: Routledge.

Gale, T., & Parker , S. (2014). Navigating change: a typology of student transition in higher education. Studies in

Higher Education, 39(5), 734-753.

Gray R., Vitak J., Easton E., & Ellison N. (2013) Examining social adjustment to college in the age of social media: Factors influencing successful transitions and persistence. *Computers & Education*, 67, 193–207

Harvey, L., & Drew, S. (2006). *The first year experience: Briefing paper on integration*. York: Higher Education Academy.

Hassanien, A., & Barber, A. (2007). An evaluation of student induction in higher education. *International Journal of Management Education*, 6(3), 35–43

Higher Education Funding Council for England HEFCE (2018). Student characteristics. Available at www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/HEinEngland/students Accessed 6 August 2018

Hughes. G., & Smail, O. (2015). Which aspects of university life are most and least helpful in the transition to HE? A qualitative snapshot of student perceptions. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 39(4), 466-480

Kuh, G. D., Cruce, T. M., Shoup, R., Kinzie, J., & Gonyea, R. M. (2008). Unmasking the effects of student engagement on first-year college grades and persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79, 540–563.

Kemmis, S. (2009). Action Research as a Practice‐Based Practice. *Educational Action Research*, 17(3), 463-474.

Lefever, R., & Currant, B. (2010). How can technology be used to improve the learner experience at points of transition?

http://technologyenhancedlearning.net/files/2010/04/ELESIGliteraturereviewFINAL240210.pdf
Accessed 7 August 2018

Marshall C.A., Nolan, S.J., & Newton, D.P. (2016) Widening Participation, Higher Education and Non-traditional students: Supporting Transitions through Foundation Programmes (pp. 119-133). Palgrave Macmillan

Miles S., & Leinster S.J. (2007). Medical students' perceptions of their educational environment: expected versus actual perceptions. *Medical Education*, 41(3), 265-72.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD. (2017) Education at a Glance 2017. *OECD Indicators.* http://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm
Accessed 7 August 2018

Ribchester C., Wakefield K., & Miller G. (2012) Creating a Transitional Space for New Students Through Pre-Induction Social Networking. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 36(3), 455-467

Scudamore (2013). Engaging home and international students: A guide for new lecturers
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/rachelscudamorereportfeb2013.pdf Accessed 7 August 2018

Tate S., & Hopkins P. (2013). Re-thinking undergraduate students' transitions to, through and out of university. Higher Education Academy.

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/gees_10_transitions_resource_tateandhopkins.pdf Accessed 14 July 2016

Thomas L. (2012). Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme. Higher Education Academy.

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/what_works_final_report.pdf Accessed 14/7/2016

Tullo E.S., Young T.J., & Lee R.P. (2018). Medical students' views about person-centred communication in dementia care. *Dementia*, 17(5), 573-584.

UK Council for International Student Affairs UKCISA (2018). https://ukcisa.org.uk/Research--Policy/Statistics/International-student-statistics-UK-higher-education Accessed 7 August 2018

Vinson, D., Nixon, S., Walsh, B., Walker, C., Mitchell, E., & Zaitseva, E. (2010). Investigating the relationship between student engagement and transition. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 11, 131–143.

Ward. C., & Kennedy, A. (2001). Coping with Cross-Cultural Transition. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 32(5), 636 – 642.

Williams, C.T., & Johnson, L.R. (2011). Why can't we be friends? Multicultural attitudes and friendships with international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations,* 35(1), 41-48

Wilkinson, S. (2003) Focus groups. In J. A. Smith (ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 184-204). London: Sage.

Wilcox, P., Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). 'It was nothing to do with the University, it was just the people': The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30, 707–722.

Yorke, M., & Thomas, L. (2003). Improving the retention of students from lower socio-economic groups. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 25, 63–74.

Young T.J., Sercombe P.G., Sachdev I., Naeb R., & Schartner A. (2013). Success factors for international postgraduate students' adjustment: exploring the roles of intercultural competence, language proficiency, social contact and social support. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 3(2), 151-171.

Authors' biographies:

Dr Ruth Valentine is Deputy Dean of Undergraduate Studies in Faculty of Medical Sciences at Newcastle University. She received her first Degree in Food and Human Nutrition from the University of Newcastle in 1999 and a PhD in Molecular Biology in 2002. Her research interests are in nutrient gene interactions with a particular focus on zinc and fluoride.

Dr Luisa Wakeling is Lecturer at the School of Dental Sciences at Newcastle University. She obtained a BSc Hons Pharmacology from Newcastle University and subsequently a Ph.D. in

Molecular Nutrition and Biochemistry. Her area of expertise is Nutritional epigenetics and ageing.

Dr Lindsey Ferrie is Senior Lecturer at the School of Biomedical Sciences at Newcastle University. She received a BSc. (Hons.) Pharmacology in 2002 and a PhD in Neuropharmacology in 2005. Her research interests are Neuropharmacology and neurotoxicology.

Dr Alina Schartner is Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University. She obtained an undergraduate degree in Political Science from the University of Salzburg in 2004, a MA degree in Cross-Cultural Communication and Education in 2010, and a PhD in Applied Linguistics in 2014. Her research interests are in the internationalisation of higher education and the social psychology of communication.

Dr Clare Guilding is Dean of Academic Affairs Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia (NUMed). Prior to moving to NUMed in January 2017 she was employed in the School of Medical Education at Newcastle University in the UK. She has an undergraduate degree and PhD in Neuroscience from the University of Edinburgh and worked for eight years conducting postdoctoral neuropharmacology research at Glasgow and Manchester Universities.

Grace Peterson obtained a MA in Cross-Cultural Communication from Newcastle University in 2016. During this time she also worked as a research assistant on departmental projects.