**A NEW INDUCTION PROGRAMME FOR A NEW LLB DEGREE – AN INITIAL EVALUATION**

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**ABSTRACT.** This article concerns an induction programme devised for an LLB degree. The background to the implementation of the induction programme is explained and its contents related to the learning and teaching theory. The results of an initial evaluation of the induction programme by the students are analysed and used as the basis for recommendations for modifications to this induction programme and for induction programmes generally. It is noted that there is little written about induction programmes for law degrees; some of the comment in this paper is subject specific, particular note being made of the use of thematic material to which students can easily relate; the need to emphasise and periodically reinforce links between the different aspects of the curriculum is also highlighted, as part of the need to make clear the academic focus of and investment for the future afforded by an induction programme.

**INDUCTION PROGRAMMES – THE LEARNING AND TEACHING THEORY**

It is a truism that higher education has changed almost beyond recognition in the past two decades, particularly in the past ten years, as the government has sought to impose a target aiming for 50% of under thirties participating in higher education,[[2]](#footnote-1) along with the related target of increasing student diversity. It is axiomatic that these worthy aims have resulted in great strains being put on higher education institutions, as they seek to address the needs of a student cohort with a significantly different profile than that which has customarily been the case. Retention of students has become an issue; some researchers[[3]](#footnote-2) have pointed out that unaddressed strains may manifest themselves not only in student drop-out but student underachievement.

These issues are manifest at London South Bank University (“LSBU”): student diversity is reflected in the large ethnic minority contingent (48% university wide, LLB Year 1 2008 71% ethnic minority)[[4]](#footnote-3) as well as by other indicators such as age and qualifications at entry. Efforts to secure wider student participation and retention are some of LSBU’s Key Performance Indicators.[[5]](#footnote-4)

Much statistical and qualitative research worldwide has tried to identify the causes of student failure to complete or underachievement, and suggestions made as to how to address the often interrelated causes. One repeated recommendation is to devise induction programmes, known in the USA as orientation programmes, which involve considerably more than the traditional ‘fun and games’[[6]](#footnote-5) (Richard Mullendore, Professor of College Student Affairs administration at the University of Georgia) and are more ‘academically focused’.[[7]](#footnote-6) That this is a worldwide issue is borne out by the geographically diverse accounts of redesigned induction programmes: Fearn and Marcus touch on orientation at the University of Arkansas;[[8]](#footnote-7) useful accounts are also available, for example, in respect of Curtin Business School in Australia[[9]](#footnote-8) and Napier University in Scotland.[[10]](#footnote-9) LSBU is well in tune: one specific Learning and Teaching Objective is to ‘ensure the curriculum for the first semester on every programme of study prepares the student for success’ (objective 1.2).[[11]](#footnote-10)

In 2008 the Law Department at LSBU was required to revalidate its LLB degree. This afforded a timely opportunity to introduce a wide ranging Induction Programme, specific to the LLB degree; it should be noted that much of the literature addresses faculty or university wide programmes.

Programme redesign is most successful when the issues which drive it are viewed positively as challenges which can be met rather than negatively as insurmountable hurdles: Ozga and Sukhnandan[[12]](#footnote-11) have urged focusing not on the student as the problem, and instead on the effects of ‘interaction between the student and institution’. It is clearly counterproductive to pile blame for lack of preparedness for university study and consequent difficulties entirely at the door of the very students universities are being encouraged to welcome; the perceptive caution urged by Ozga and Sukhnandan[[13]](#footnote-12) for the adoption of responsible marketing strategies is not aimed at turning away potential customers (students) but at ensuring that they make well-informed choices suitable for them as individuals and their circumstances.

The issues which are noted in the research literature as affecting retention and achievement are consistent, and varied. There are practical issues, often centring on financial strains: the burdens of paid employment, poor accommodation and life away from home. However, as is noted in more than one study (eg Thomas,[[14]](#footnote-13) Lowe and Cook[[15]](#footnote-14)), many students cope well with their studies despite such difficulties – Lowe and Cook’s research found that the majority (72%) of students cope better with balancing the demands of employment and of their studies than they had expected.

The importance of students settling into new networks and feeling valued and treated as individuals is also highlighted. Thomas[[16]](#footnote-15) emphasises the significance to students’ confidence and motivation of staff attitudes, and the importance of staff knowing students’ names and exhibiting acts of kindness. Yorke and Thomas[[17]](#footnote-16) refer to the wise policy in one of the institutions they surveyed of involving all staff, academic and support, including housekeeping staff, in supporting students in the early days, contributing to the students becoming ‘quickly ...known in the institution as individuals’, leading to a sense of ‘belonging’ in the institution. Zepke and Leach[[18]](#footnote-17) focus on the significance of support from teachers for improving the academic performance of first year students. However, it is not just relationships with academic staff that make a positive contribution to students’ feeling comfortable in their new environment: Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld[[19]](#footnote-18) underline the importance of making compatible friends: relationships with personal tutors are important, but less so than students being able to make friends with people ‘compatible’ with themselves; they urge attention not to be focused exclusively on learning and teaching strategies as a way of enhancing retention, the ‘presence or lack of social support networks’[[20]](#footnote-19) constituting a major factor for students in deciding whether or not to stay on at university.

Difficulties are not only noted in the practical and personal spheres. Preparedness for the type of study expected in higher education is highlighted as a major problem in a number of studies: Byrne and Flood[[21]](#footnote-20) note that ‘teaching and assessment practices experienced at school may cultivate a particular set of study skills and a learning orientation that may not be entirely appropriate for the more independent forms of learning expected in higher education’ whilst also reminding us that ‘the student learning literature has clearly demonstrated that learning approaches are dynamic and are influenced by the learning environment’.[[22]](#footnote-21) This accords with the suggestion by Ogza and Sukhnandan of the ‘promotion of active learning in the early stages of [a] degree’;[[23]](#footnote-22) their other suggestion of ‘early formative assessment’[[24]](#footnote-23) is also a sensible one, though unfortunately student engagement with non-summative assessment is difficult in many institutions. Lowe and Cook also comment on the lack of study skills for university level education found in ‘students who are carefully and intensively guided by their teachers through an A level course’.[[25]](#footnote-24) It is no surprise that in September 2008 the Higher Education Academy reported on the importance of helping to ensure a ‘smoother transition for ...first year students’ and stated that ‘one key factor leading to students dropping out of higher education’ is ‘the ability to cope with academic work’.[[26]](#footnote-25)

Many universities in different parts of the world are focusing on induction programmes as an opportunity not only for the ‘formal delivery of information about the department and the course’ (the early stages of university studies sometimes resulting in overwhelming overload of administrative information)[[27]](#footnote-26) but also to provide ‘student-centred exercises designed to impart elements of the changed set of social and academic skills required at university’ (Cook and Leckey,[[28]](#footnote-27) who also refer to Gardner’s research indicating that ‘incorporating comprehensive orientation programmes into a first-semester course can increase college students’ chances of academic success’[[29]](#footnote-28)). Length of induction is considered, usefully extending beyond the ‘traditional period of up to a week’ (Yorke and Thomas)[[30]](#footnote-29) in institutions focusing on assisting students whose ‘backgrounds may not have given them an appreciation of what is expected of them’. Induction should be seen ‘as a process instead of an event’ (Lowe and Cook);[[31]](#footnote-30) again, suggesting that it should not be regarded as a short lived affair, and recommending that it needs to ‘promote peer group and staff-student interaction as well as academic preparation’.

Against a background of diverse, not to say rather daunting expectations, different institutions have been designing very full induction programmes, often across the entire undergraduate intake, sometimes across linked programmes, trying to address many of the issues addressed above. Napier University in Edinburgh has a mission statement of seven principles underpinning induction programmes:[[32]](#footnote-31) unsurprisingly, familiarising students into the university environment is mentioned, as is promoting social integration and clarifying expectations of and by students, and early diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses. The need is highlighted for revisiting many induction topics at a number of points in the academic year, raising the question of when an induction programme actually stops. The importance of the entire first year is also appreciated at Curtin Business School, where significant emphasis was again placed on ‘the social aspect of learning’;[[33]](#footnote-32) tutors spent up to half of the first tutorial on introductions, ‘gossiping’ in pairs and introducing each other to the group. Tutors subsequently commented that this friendly start led to ‘increased enjoyment of first year tutorials right through the semester’.[[34]](#footnote-33)

The literature is therefore extensive, though not apparently in relation to law programmes. However, Kift has pointed to the wisdom of taking a holistic approach when considering the design of the first year law curriculum, considering what is needed across the whole programme and integrating teaching across the whole of the LLB, rather than focusing in too concentrated a fashion on the content of each individual subject.[[35]](#footnote-34) Tinto makes a similar point in the context of first year programmes generally, that ‘students typically take courses as detached, individual units...one set of understandings unrelated in any intentional fashion to the content learned in other courses’.[[36]](#footnote-35) This point will be picked up later in this paper, as will some of the other issues emerging from this overview.

**THE BACKGROUND TO THE INTRODUCTION OF THE LLB INDUCTION PROGRAMME**

When the LSBU Law Department was faced with the revalidation of the LLB degree, there was a consensus that the degree should be altered significantly. The reasons for this were various, but perhaps the most influential were those familiar to much of higher education but particularly post-1992 universities: a large increase in student numbers without a commensurate increase in teaching staff, the consequential increasing diversity of the student body and the perceived difficulties many students have to cope adequately with their degree course, and concern about student retention.

A number of changes to the LLB programme were decided upon; the most relevant here was that the full time degree would comprise four units studied over two semesters (Contract, Tort, Public Law, and a new course, essentially an amalgam of English Legal System and Legal Skills, named ‘Legal Skills, Legal Study, Legal System’ which soon became abbreviated to ‘3ls’). The 3ls unit differed from the rest of the first year units in that it for the first two weeks of lectures and the first three weeks of seminars all four subjects’ teaching slots were devoted to an Induction programme run under the 3ls label.

The decision to include the Induction Programme in the new LLB was taken by the Law Department as a whole, in the hope that student motivation could be harnessed by a busy programme of activities, as well as familiarising students with university procedures and geography. It was hoped that ultimately these aims would lead to enhanced progression, retention and student satisfaction, though it was appreciated that it would be very hard to identify and isolate the effects of the Induction Programme as a factor in any of these outcomes.

The main features of the new Induction Programme were as follows:

* Early informal diagnostic assessment of writing skills in a relaxed and individual setting by the requirement to bring to a personal tutor short exercises written during the Induction Programme
* A theme: a number of the sessions were loosely linked by the theme of knife crime (sadly topical, both in time and place); this was also the subject of a staff debate. Students were required to read and discuss newspaper articles and extracts from statutes on the subject of knife crime, and also the well known case of *Fisher v Bell,*[[37]](#footnote-36)relevant to the theme, and also introducing the idea of the possibility of conflicting interpretations of an Act of Parliament
* Related to the choice of a topical theme, the use of materials designed to reinforce to students the idea that law was not entirely unfamiliar territory; one session required identification and discussion of legal issues in current newspapers (adapted from the Twining ‘Newspaper Exercise)[[38]](#footnote-37)
* Repeated cross referencing of the Induction Programme activities and materials to all Year 1 subjects; this point was deliberately picked up whenever appropriate throughout the first year[[39]](#footnote-38)
* Following on from the above point, introductory sessions to topics addressed more formally later in the year: for example, on the concepts of the difficulties in interpreting rules and on consistency in judicial approach: introductory sessions to the doctrine of precedent and statutory interpretation sessions
* Sessions directly relating to the first summative assessment, an elementary case noting exercise, to underline the point that work undertaken during the Induction Programme was a ‘real’ part of the degree. The case in question, *Wandsworth v Railtrack,*[[40]](#footnote-39)was selected partly for its local flavour, concerning a railway bridge near LSBU
* A social programme involving group meetings over coffee with personal tutors as well as a departmental party for new students, staff and some second year students
* Sessions incorporating work on plagiarism, referencing, and practising submitting work via LSBU’s Virtual Learning Environment, Blackboard, to generate an originality report from Turnitin and consider how far paraphrased material could constitute plagiarism; other sessions attempted to introduce administratively based material about matters which experience had shown generated repeated enquiry from students[[41]](#footnote-40)
* An online quiz (with a prize) to test facility with Blackboard and provide an opportunity for consolidation of the administrative information provided
* A holistic approach:[[42]](#footnote-41) all materials for all sessions of the Induction Programme, whether academic, administrative or social, were printed and bound into one (substantial) set of materials, with a view to the different components of the Induction Programme being regarded as related parts of a ‘package’, as well as providing a set of materials to be kept and referred to after the Induction Programme

**EVALUATION - METHODOLOGY**

It was decided that the Induction Programme, being a considerable departure from previous practice in the Law Department, was an innovation that merited its own evaluation. This was undertaken by the Year 1 LLB students in the middle of semester one, the Induction Programme having taken place during the first three weeks of the semester. Mention is briefly made below of the possibility of evaluating the effects of the Induction Programme in the longer term.

The means by which the new Induction Programme should best be evaluated were considered carefully. Initial thoughts were to administer to the Year 1 students (about 180 in all) a fairly detailed questionnaire addressing features of most of the twenty activities comprising the induction programme and to inviting numerous free text responses. Reading Bell[[43]](#footnote-42) threw doubt on the wisdom of this approach. Ever practical, Bell warns that questionnaires are ‘fiendishly difficult to design’, that ‘the more structured a question, the easier it will be to analyse’ (no small consideration with the number of responses anticipated). A sample questionnaire evaluating an Induction Programme at Curtin Business School (McKenna et al)[[44]](#footnote-43) served to convince that the exercise could be complicated unnecessarily. Accordingly, it was decided to administer a questionnaire based on the one used at Curtin, simply listing the various activities constituting the Induction Programme and asking students to rate them from 1 to 5 in terms of interest and usefulness. As already stated, the Induction Programme was introduced with a view to harnessing student motivation as well as familiarising students with the university, and it was considered that a measurement of these indicators provided a straightforward but also appropriate way of evaluating the operation of the Induction Programme at an early stage after its first presentation, although it was recognised that ‘usefulness’ would ideally be measured at a later stage since evidence of this attribute would hopefully develop over time. The questionnaire also invited ‘free text’ comments.

Additionally, there was interest in exploring the views of participants in the Induction Programme in a less directed way. It was therefore decided to conduct a focus group of a small number of students in the hope that the ‘non-directive nature’ (Curtis and Redmond)[[45]](#footnote-44) of a focus group would best encourage ‘members of a homogeneous group’ to explore their ‘views, feelings and experiences’.[[46]](#footnote-45) The students were volunteers from the whole of the Year 1 full time LLB cohort; the sampling bias is evident and inevitable, the self-selection process leading to a small group of well-motivated and engaged students. Curtis and Redmond assert that ‘such a bias is only a problem if ignored’ and indeed, postulate that random sampling does not always generate the best focus group discussion.[[47]](#footnote-46)

The focus group discussion included many helpful insights both expected and surprising. It would be an interesting challenge to try to devise a means of evaluating the longer term effect of the Induction Programme: the issues of progression and retention are obvious touchstones, though as already stated, isolating the effect of the Induction Programme from that of the rest of the degree would be difficult in the extreme. A project analysing retention and/or progression would probably wish at least to acknowledge the existence of the Induction Programme, whilst being a different project of greater complexity. However, it has been noted that much research into the first year student experience focuses on such indicators as retention and progression and that there is room for more analysis of the experiences of the students concerned,[[48]](#footnote-47) as was indeed the particular emphasis in this study both in the questionnaire and in the focus group discussion.

**ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRES AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

**General Overview of Results**

As stated above, this analysis bears out a number of the points made in the relevant literature. The results will be outlined of the Likert scale answers to the questions asked on the questionnaires, and related to the free text comments on the questionnaires and to the focus group discussion.

A total of 118 questionnaires were returned. The questions ‘How interesting?’ and ‘How useful?’ were posed in relation to specified activities or related activities in the Induction Programme. A summary of the results in tabulated form is at Figure 1.

In terms of interest, the answers to the fourteen questions ranged from 3.13 to 4.26; in terms of usefulness, the results were 3.01 to 4.20. On the whole, the scores for ‘interesting’ and ‘useful’ for each question correlated quite closely, the score for ‘useful’ being slightly higher for most questions. The most useful activities were seen as being those examining the case *Wandsworth v Railtrack,*[[49]](#footnote-48) which it had already been emphasised to the students would form the basis of their first summative assessment, and activities exploring the distinction between civil and criminal law; the staff debate also scored highly for ‘usefulness’. The least interesting activity was deemed to be a seminar requiring students to research answers to various administrative issues facing a new LLB student at LSBU, though it scored slightly more highly in terms of usefulness.

Of the free text comments on the questionnaire, some directly contradicted each other; this did not happen in the focus group discussion, possibly an inherent ‘risk’ of a well motivated, self-selected group with an apparent tendency towards consensus (for example, in the discussion about activities introducing Personal Development Planning and meetings with personal tutors) such as is noted by Krueger, cited in Curtis and Redmond.[[50]](#footnote-49) It is difficult to know how to react usefully to (free text) comments that the sessions “...are a little bit too fast” when other students say “...we could perhaps have benefitted from a faster pace”!

**Activities providing administrative information**

Free text comments about activities dealing with administrative information (seen as crucial by staff) were muted in their enthusiasm, though not all were entirely damning: “Seminars on administrative information I didn’t find very useful”; “Some lectures on unlaw [sic] related things appeared a bit unuseful [sic]. Still happy they were in though for general help”. In the focus group there was no evident desire for more ‘administrative’ overviews. Activities explaining Personal Development Planning (“PDP”) were summed up in the comment about the PDP related sessions “It’s like ...it’s good for you in the long run. It’s like cod liver oil: ugh but it’s good for you”, which appears to encapsulate the response to the more general, administratively based activities and reflects the findings at Curtin Business School (McKenna et al).[[51]](#footnote-50)

**The Staff Debate and the ‘Knife Crime’ Theme**

Response to the Staff Debate was very positive (mean scores of 4.26 for interest and 4.11 for usefulness) and elicited appreciative free text comments: ‘Was the best part and the most useful’ and ‘Need more debates’. However, the focus group discussion proved its worth here, the comment being made that “It would have been better if students were involved”, a desire not just to watch staff debating being taken up again in the suggestion that opportunities to debate should be provided in seminars (in the debate the debating roles were taken by members of staff though students were invited to contribute when the debate was opened to the floor). In fact the Staff Debate was conducted between members of staff largely with a view to introducing new students to some members of staff with whom they might not otherwise come into contact until much later in their studies. In future years this objective needs to be clarified better or the format modified to facilitate greater student participation.

Comment should be made here of the subject matter of the debate which as previously explained concerned the problem of knife crime, a theme running through a number of the activities. Zepke and Leach[[52]](#footnote-51) highlight the importance of learning being placed within a social context and it was hoped that the choice of this theme, which as noted above unfortunately has particular resonance in south London, was one which students could relate to or would consider relevant. Many students did appear to appreciate their existing knowledge being valued, something encouraged by Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall to build student confidence.[[53]](#footnote-52) This was particularly noticeable when the staff debate on this theme was opened to the floor but the theme was also commented upon positively in the focus group discussion.

**Social networking activities**

The literature demonstrates the importance of new students developing good social networks and relationships with staff (for example Thomas;[[54]](#footnote-53) Yorke and Thomas[[55]](#footnote-54)); the most overt recognition of this in the Induction Programme was the Law Department Party. The party scored roughly in the middle of the range of mean scores for interest (3.42); perhaps its lower position in the hierarchy of mean scores for usefulness (3.05) reflects the difficulty of students evaluating at this stage the benefits of such activity, which in any event can only be part of a wider picture of making students feel at home and develop networks. Whilst careful design of early seminar activities is important in fostering social networks, by giving opportunities for introductions and for group work activities, a social event more explicitly recognises their importance.

**Activities designed to explain about assessments**

Many of the free text comments evinced a desire to know how to cope with and start work to prepare for assessments. To some extent these comments demonstrate a lack of understanding about the Induction Programme: as was explained clearly to the students, the first assessment consisted of writing a simple case note; sessions were devoted to an analysis of this case and case noting technique. Time was also devoted to the practicalities of submitting coursework to the anti plagiarism checker, Turnitin. Probably more still needs to be done to convey the message that the Induction Programme contained elements directly related to assessments and was an integral part of the first year course. This message does appear to have taken on board by some: “Overall it ...gave a good sense of how to tackle future study” – gratifying in the context of the problems noted in this regard by Byrne and Flood[[56]](#footnote-55) and others - but some felt differently “...made you wanna just get on with it and get stuck in – learning – starting the course”.

Part of the philosophy of the Induction Programme was that most topics would be revisited in more detail at a later date. Did this make students feel that the Induction Programme was not a ‘real’ part of the course? The Focus Group participants clearly appreciated the benefit of introducing topics which would be developed later on; however, maybe more needed to be done to clarify more widely this approach and its benefits. One is reminded Lowe and Cook’s suggestion[[57]](#footnote-56) that induction should be ‘a process instead of an event’.

**The last word...**

It is worth highlighting the unique experience of one of the Focus Group participants. This student was actually in her second year and had therefore experienced the first year of the ‘old style’ LLB degree, but having not passed sufficient units to progress to the second year was starting her LLB degree again. She was therefore able to compare the short, one day induction provided on the ‘old’ degree with the new Induction Programme, and was overwhelmingly positive about the improvement and indeed the need for it: [last year] “...you were just left to your own devices...we needed more grounding”; “I swam. Didn’t sink but boy, didn’t like it”. Her Janus-like contribution to the focus group discussion amply bears out the views of Curtis and Redmond[[58]](#footnote-57) that random sampling (which would probably have missed her) does not always generate the best focus group discussion.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The conclusions and recommendations are divided into two parts, the first covering points arising from the evaluation of the Induction Programme and the second looking briefly at whether the impact of the Induction Programme could be evaluated in the future. Issues which appear to merit further consideration or research are noted.

**Points arising from the Evaluation of the Induction Programme**

The focus in the Induction Programme was essentially on enhancing students’ ability to cope with their academic studies[[59]](#footnote-58) rather than on the practicalities of life, although as has been explained, attention was also paid to the social integration of students and to increasing their ability to cope with administrative aspects of their new lives at university.

The significance of the choice of topics, themes and contexts utilised at this early stage deserves comment and is a fruitful subject for further research. It has already been explained that a number of the activities were loosely linked by the theme of knife crime, that this was well received by students, and that pedagogically this was a deliberate attempt to engage students by building upon their existing knowledge. The choice of the knife crime theme was not the only step taken in this regard: the Twining ‘Newspaper Exercise’ referred to above is designed, inter alia, to remind students that they know ‘quite a lot of law already’[[60]](#footnote-59) and other activities were designed to reinforce this message (for example, the scenarios illustrating the differences between criminal and civil law) and encourage students’ confidence in their own competence.[[61]](#footnote-60) Given the number of largely unfamiliar abstract concepts with which students will of necessity be faced during the first year of their legal studies, for example, consideration, parliamentary sovereignty or the doctrine of precedent, allowing students to bring their own past experience to their learning is important and indeed can help to avoid early alienation.[[62]](#footnote-61) The positive reception to this approach confirms the research mentioned; the approaches adopted may be particularly appropriate to law degrees or other subjects which may not have been studied before and involve unfamiliar concepts.

The balance between ‘academic’ content and ‘administrative’ information needs weighing up carefully. The focus group discussion reinforced the view that there is a place for sessions imparting administrative information, but their presence needs to be explicitly justified: administrative information is rarely exciting, often overwhelming,[[63]](#footnote-62) but if students are alive to the difficulties that they might avoid by being aware of certain procedures and sources of information, it is perhaps received more willingly, as is confirmed by the questionnaire results indicating that whilst such sessions might not be interesting they are recognised as useful. It is suggested that sessions addressing information about handing work in or procedures for notifying absence are embedded in sessions about assessments, the academic programme and ‘how to pass’ so that administrative information is contextualised and its relevance and ultimate concern to the students more obvious. The online quiz, which endeavoured to consolidate and test understanding of such information, may be made compulsory in future years.

It is noteworthy that only one student identified the need for assistance with essay writing and other such skills specifically, given the wealth of literature highlighting deficiencies in study skills and the consequent detrimental effect on transition to and retention in higher education[[64]](#footnote-63) and the widespread perception amongst academic staff of such deficiencies. The Induction Programme and the rest of the 3ls unit contain much material aimed at developing and reinforcing study skills; of relevance here is Goldfinch and Hughes’[[65]](#footnote-64) research into the effect of student perception of their strengths and weaknesses in various generic skills on their first year performance; their findings that student confidence in their abilities in certain key skills is often ill-founded appear borne out by the evaluation of the Induction Programme. Future investigation might address the reasons for the disparity between student and staff perception of the need for study skills, and how such material is best presented to maximise student engagement with it.

The ‘packaging’ of the Induction Programme needs to be reconsidered. First impressions are significant. Whilst the materials included the ‘3ls’ unit title on the cover page, and students were told that the Induction Programme constituted part of the 3ls course and also contained subject matter integral to the other first year units, it was clearly seen by some students as a separate entity holding them back from starting on ‘real work’; the appropriateness of an academic focus for induction programmes, as promoted by Mullendore, is seen as endorsed by this misconception.[[66]](#footnote-65) Again, the recommendation here must be even more crystal clear explanation (there already being a good deal) on how the academic content of the Induction Programme constitutes an essential foundation for and links in with all of the first year units. Material in the Induction Programme which links with and is revisited in[[67]](#footnote-66) the Year 1 units, such as the work on the distinction between civil and criminal law, should be presented in terms making the links quite clear. Such work included consideration of scenarios involving tort and contract problems, not labelled as such since the focus was on developing an understanding of the difference between disputes between individuals and disputes between the individual and the state. It might be helpful to conclude such activities with a brief explanation of the formal legal subject area of each scenario. Making explicit the links between the Induction Programme and the first year subjects, and indeed between those subjects themselves, is consistent with Kift’s recommendations to design the first year curriculum to constitute a coherent foundation for the degree and to use ‘integrating devices’ across the whole of the LLB,[[68]](#footnote-67) and with those of Tinto to ensure the overall academic coherence of courses rather than constructing them out of discrete units.[[69]](#footnote-68)

Overall, however, the question arises, as already noted, as to whether induction was seen by some students as too much of an ‘event’ and not enough of a ‘process’ (Lowe and Cook),[[70]](#footnote-69) the investment made by the length of the Induction Programme[[71]](#footnote-70) requiring explicit clarification to the students.

**Future evaluation of the impact of the Induction Programme**

One student perceptively evaluated the Induction Programme with a pithy adaptation of Donald Rumsfeld’s famous words,[[72]](#footnote-71) “I probably would be able to tell you a better answer later in the year. Right now that is an unknown unknown”. This underlines the point that the Induction Programme was intended to be the introduction to a three year programme of study and to have benefits lasting throughout that period. It may also justify a follow up evaluation at the end of the year, though the timing of such a follow up would have to be calculated tactfully to avoid end of year ‘evaluation fatigue’. A follow up evaluation could usefully include prompted options and questions which could not meaningfully be posed in the first evaluation, about the value of Induction Programme activities which introduced concepts developed later in the year. The benefit of revisiting induction topics later in the academic year, as suggested by Napier University, has already been noted.[[73]](#footnote-72)

The focus has so far been on the evaluation of the students’ response to the Induction Programme; as stated above, it was thought desirable to take a student centred approach and not just evaluate by reference to progression and retention statistics. However, to make the students’ response the exclusive focus is to deny the role of the reflective practice of teachers in enhancing curriculum design. Whilst impressions and views have been expressed informally by the staff involved in teaching the Induction Programme, a more thorough survey of all the staff in the Law Department could harness their reflections in a more directed way and reinforce the point already noted that all staff have a significant role to play at this important early stage.[[74]](#footnote-73) A survey of staff might also usefully be divided into immediate impressions and impressions of the impact of the Induction Programme later in the year when some of the topics introduced in the Induction Programme were revisited more rigorously and formally: anecdotally, teaching staff appear to consider that such topics were more easily assimilated by the students than in earlier years. Such a survey could contribute to staff development, the need for which to support the widening participation agenda has been noted.[[75]](#footnote-74)

Mention has already been made about the apparent lack of studies on induction programmes specifically for law degrees, and it could be useful to investigate further the extent to which other law departments have subject based induction programmes and their content, particularly the balance between subject specific and general activities, between academic and social activities, and the extent to which the programme content is chosen on the basis that it will be revisited and reinforced at a later stage. For many students law is a new subject; this needs acknowledging, but students also need reassurance by careful choice of early study material that not all is unfamiliar.

Ultimately the value of induction programmes needs to be seen in the context of student satisfaction with their course and of progression and retention, closely related issues which have generated much consideration worldwide and at LSBU but which are outside the scope of this study.

**Figure 1 – Summary of results of evaluation questionnaire**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **How interesting were the activities?** | **Mean result** |  |  |  |
| Activities 1 and 3: looking at newspaper articles, statutes and cases on knife crime | 3.82 |  |  |  |
| Activity 2: analysing contents of a newspaper (the Twining ‘newspaper exercise’) | 3.25 |  |  |  |
| Activities 4 and 6: differences between civil and criminal law | 3.98 |  |  |  |
| Activity 5: presentation by Law Librarian on the Library and support services | 3.19 |  |  |  |
| Activities 7 and 9: case law and *Wandsworth v Railtrack* | 4.01 |  |  |  |
| Activity 8: PDP | 3.40 |  |  |  |
| Activity 10: seminar on resolving administrative problems at LSBU | 2.98 |  |  |  |
| Activities 11 and 18: how to write a case note, looking at *W Healthcare Trust v H* | 3.81 |  |  |  |
| Activities 12 and 14: Ethics and Plagiarism | 3.14 |  |  |  |
| Law Department Party | 3.42 |  |  |  |
| Online Quiz | 3.21 |  |  |  |
| Activity 17: interpreting rules | 3.88 |  |  |  |
| Activity 21: guided Library tour | 3.13 |  |  |  |
| Staff debate on knife crime | 4.26 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **How useful were the activities?** |  |  |  |  |
| Activities 1 and 3: looking at newspaper articles, statutes and cases on knife crime | 3.79 |  |  |  |
| Activity 2: analysing contents of a newspaper (the Twining ‘newspaper exercise’) | 3.43 |  |  |  |
| Activities 4 and 6: differences between civil and criminal law | 4.20 |  |  |  |
| Activity 5: presentation by Law Librarian on the Library and support services | 3.30 |  |  |  |
| Activities 7 and 9: case law and *Wandsworth v Railtrack* | 4.16 |  |  |  |
| Activity 8: PDP | 3.46 |  |  |  |
| Activity 10: seminar on resolving administrative problems at LSBU | 3.18 |  |  |  |
| Activities 11 and 18: how to write a case note, looking at *W Healthcare Trust v H* | 4.02 |  |  |  |
| Activities 12 and 14: Ethics and Plagiarism | 3.42 |  |  |  |
| Law Department Party | 3.05 |  |  |  |
| Online Quiz | 3.01 |  |  |  |
| Activity 17: interpreting rules | 3.96 |  |  |  |
| Activity 21: guided Library tour | 3.15 |  |  |  |
| Staff debate on knife crime | 4.11 |  |  |  |

The table shows the mean results from the 118 questionnaires returned, which posed the questions ‘How interesting?’ and ‘How useful?’ in relation to specified activities or related pairs of Induction Programme activities. Respondents were asked to rate the activities according to a Likert scale of 1-5 where 1 was ‘very uninteresting’ or ‘not at all useful’ and 5 was ‘very interesting’ or ‘very useful’ respectively.

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