

Enhancing student induction to library and IT services in higher education

Julie Moody and Jason Truscott

Plymouth University

Corresponding author(s): Julie.Moody@plymouth.ac.uk;

J.Truscott@plymouth.ac.uk

Abstract

Student induction to library and IT systems in higher education is challenging. Students complain of information overload and often remember little detail. The Academic Support, Technology and Innovation (ASTI) team at Plymouth University set out to combine their skills to produce a memorable welcome talk and a professional set of online materials and support to provide the details needed to become course-ready. This paper outlines and evaluates the approach taken.

Background and Rationale for approach

It has been well documented that it is challenging to make the student induction to library and IT systems effective and memorable. As Trefts and Blakeslee (2000) point out, library instruction, although important, can be boring to deliver and to listen to. At Plymouth University, we had started to develop an "industrial model" of library induction to ensure consistency but we needed a different approach; one which students would not be expecting to grab their attention.

"The unexpected is a great way to bring humor into the classroom. The unexpected plays off the element of surprise, which is really what comedy is all about. It works because it startles or shocks the students to attention. It can also be a good way of challenging the stereotype of the librarian as a passive, calm, mild-mannered individual" (Trefts and Blakeslee, 2000, p.375)

As part of our research, we examined pedagogical approaches which could enable us to enliven our initial input. Baid and Lambert (2010) discuss the use of games or other fun activities as teaching strategies and it was felt that this would be ideal for induction or welcome week. Race (2002) highlights the need to move away from traditional chalk and talk teaching to allow students to become active and participate and there is a wealth of examples of creative library inductions which incorporate these theories. Morgan and Davies (2004) pioneered the Cephalonian method; others have used video, i-pod or Prezi tours (Potter, 2012) or tours based on murder mysteries (Else, 2013). Hassanien and Barber (2007) have discussed the importance of the social aspects of induction and that activities should appeal to

students and encourage social integration; helping to break the ice.

To engage and motivate the students, we decided to develop a quiz show format for the face-to-face part of our induction, delivered in lecture theatres by the team of Information Specialists. Having surveyed the first year undergraduates about what they needed to know within the first three weeks of their course to get them course-ready, we realised that previous inductions had had such a low impact that many students had forgotten them. Our primary aims were to make the students remember the induction and view their information specialist as approachable and fun. Any detail about using the Library or IT systems could be provided in a follow-up online tutorial. With these aims in mind, we developed a "Pointless" style quiz, based on the show broadcast on BBC1. Teams would compete to answer library and IT questions with the aim being to find that all important Pointless answer that none of the 100 people questioned beforehand knew.

Working group

A development group was established to investigate the way forward and tasks assigned to each member of the group (see Figure 1).

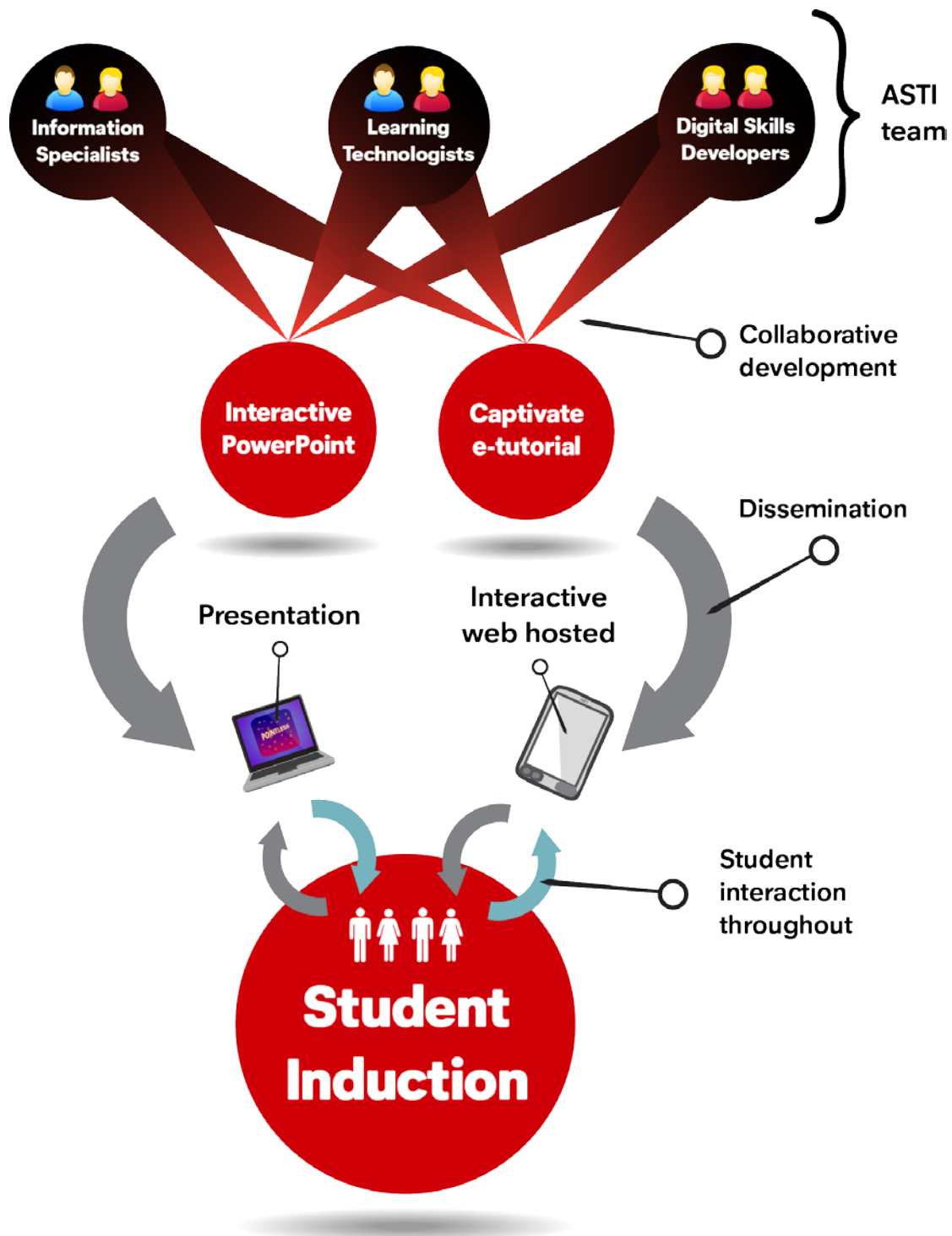


Figure 1: Showing the process of collaborative development, dissemination and student interaction of bespoke digital induction materials.

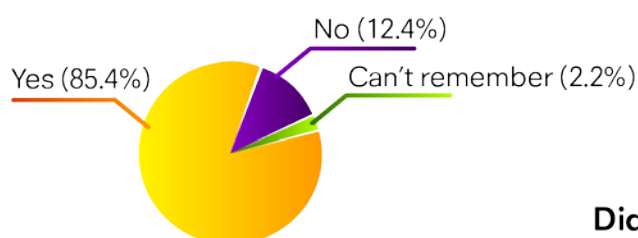
This new approach coincided with the formation of a new team within Technology and Information Services at Plymouth University. The ASTI team, comprised of Learning Technologists, Digital Skills Developers and Information Specialists, contained people with the right mix of skills to approach student library and IT induction in a new way.

preferring a library tour or a “boring talk” while others enjoyed the fun aspects of the quiz and made suggestions for improvement.

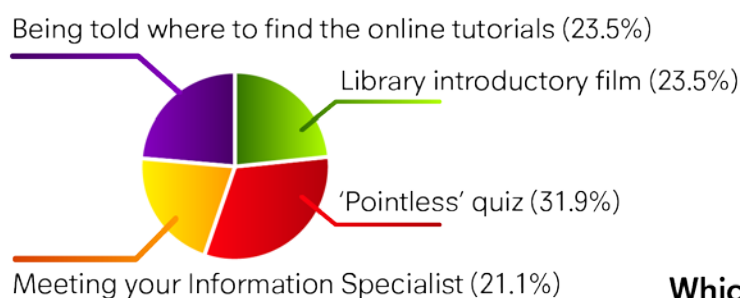
It was interesting to note that of those who said that they had attended the face to face welcome, the Pointless quiz was the most memorable aspect (Figure 3). It was fun to deliver, although it did depend to some extent on group dynamics. Comments suggest that its management with larger groups needs more thought to ensure that all team members can participate. However, the aim of providing something memorable was largely achieved.

Part 1 - Induction Quiz

n = 89



Did you attend the welcome week
library and IT Induction?



Which aspects of the session
do you remember?

Figure 3: Feedback on welcome talk

Although not all had completed the online tutorials, a majority of those who did agreed or strongly agreed that their confidence in using the library and the IT systems had improved as a result (Figure 4). The collaboration between the members of ASTI ensured that the final products looked professional and worked technically. However, the online tutorials were added to the main University induction website. We relied on students noting the URL to locate them after our sessions. We expect this to be solved in future as the University moves over to using Moodle for its digital learning environment. For technical reasons, the assessment activities were separated from the main tutorials and therefore, were ineffective. Although some course tutors required students to print off a certificate of completion, this was not widespread and diluted the impact of the tutorials.

Part 2 - Online tutorials

57% completed

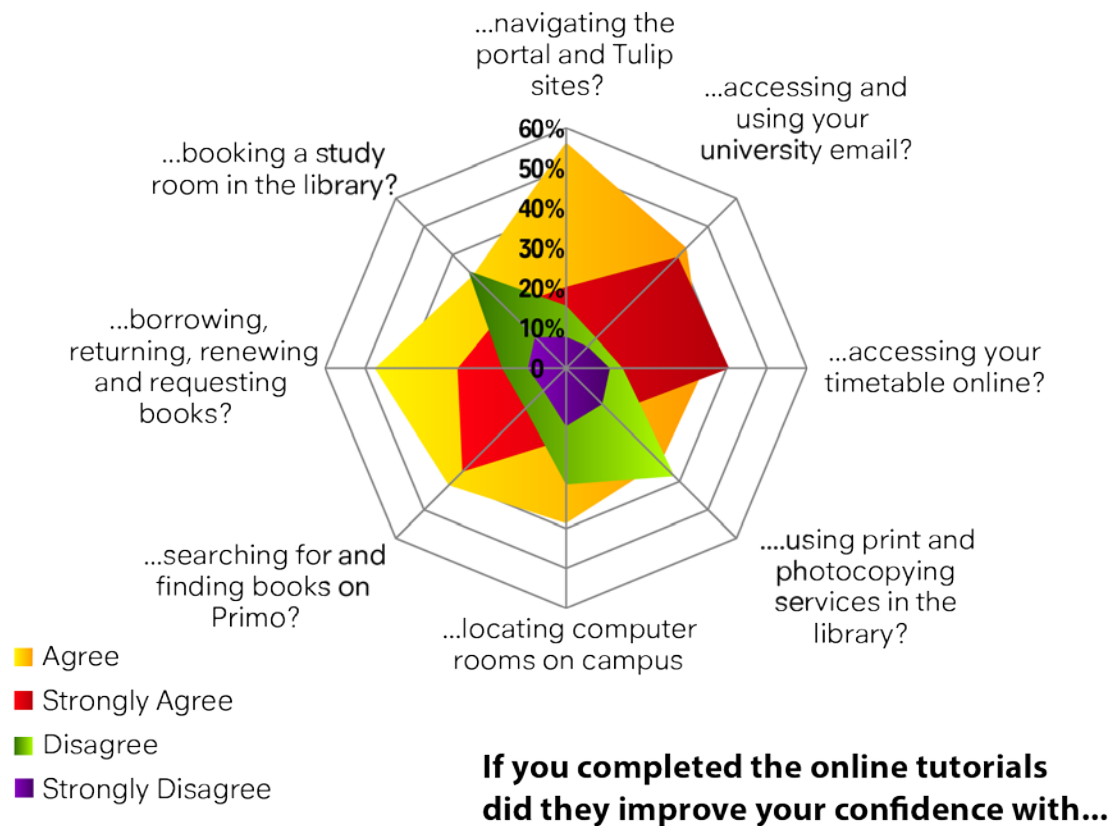
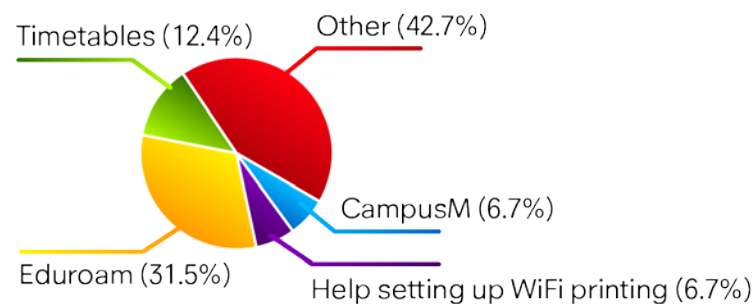


Figure 4: Feedback on online tutorials

The drop-in sessions generated a variety of enquiries (Figure 5), indicating that a more personal approach is welcomed by some students.

Part 3 - Open Access

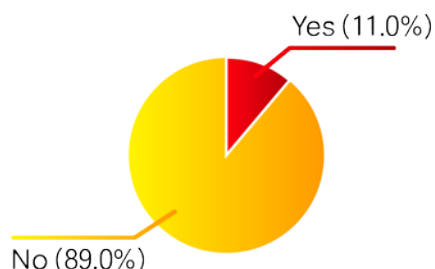


During induction week did you visit the open access area in Babbage or library reception for any of the following?

Figure 5: Feedback on drop-in sessions

The Library bite-size sessions might have been better scheduled for induction week. The take-up at the end of September was low (Figure 6); by this time most students had got the answers they needed.

Part 4 - Library Bite-Size sessions



As a follow up to the online tutorials, we offered Library bite-size support sessions (get that book/lost in the library). Did you attend either of these?

Figure 6: Feedback on the Bite-Size sessions

Conclusions

In conclusion, our "industrial model" had improved and the interactive aspects worked better. We aim to consider these key points for next year:

- Improve accessibility of tutorial
- Improve the assessment - ensure cooperation with personal tutors
- Mix online and face-to-face support with extra drop in possibilities for less confident students
- Manage expectations of students - the welcome talk is only the start. Other opportunities to learn the basics
- Improve balance between fun and information in the welcome talk- provide key information and use Pointless to reinforce

References

Baid, H. and Lambert, N. (2010) 'Enjoyable learning: the role of humour, games, and fun activities in nursing and midwifery education.' *Nurse Education Today*, 30 (6), pp.548-552 [online]
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2009.11.007> (Accessed: 3/01/2014)

Educause, (2012) *7 things you should know about badges*. [online] Available at: <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/eli7085.pdf> (Accessed: 14/01/2014)

Else, O. (2013) 'Murder in the library' *LILAC 2013*, University of Manchester Library, 25-27 March [online] Available at: <http://prezi.com/yioybjlk3m9/murder-in-the-library/> (Accessed: 3/01/2014)

Goodall, D. and Pattern, D. (2011) 'Academic library non/low use and undergraduate student achievement: a preliminary report of research in progress' *Library Management*, 32 (3). pp. 159-170 [online] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435121111112871> (Accessed: 3/01/2014)

Hassanien, A. and Barber, A. (2008) 'An evaluation of student induction in higher education' *The International Journal of Management Education*. 6 (3) pp.35-43. [online] Available at: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/bmaf/documents/publications/ijme/vol6no3/ijme6380pagehassanienbarber.pdf> (Accessed: 30/01/2014)

Morgan, N. and Davies, L. (2004) 'Innovative induction: introducing the Cephalonian Method.' *SCONUL Focus* 32, pp. 4-8. [online] Available at: <http://bit.ly/1aMatrK> (Accessed: 30/01/2014)

Potter, N. (2012) *Creating interactive maps with Prezi*. [online] Available at: <http://www.scoop.int/web-tools-to-go/p/1851805158/2012/05/28/creating-interactive-maps-with-prezi-by-ned-potter-on-prezi> (Accessed: 3/01/2014)

Race, P., (2002) *The Lecturer's Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Learning, Teaching and Assessment*. 2nd edn. London: Kogan Page

Trefts, K. and Blakeslee, S. (2000) 'Did you hear the one about the Boolean operators? Incorporating comedy into library instruction' *Reference Services Review*, 28 (4), pp. 369-377 [online] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00907320010359731> (Accessed: 3/01/2014)