

## Departmental Inductions for Students: Examples of departmental practice

The School has a number of approaches to student induction at central and departmental levels. Induction is a vital process for students. Done well, it can get them off to a great start, helping them find their feet socially, culturally and intellectually. Done badly, it can overload them with confusing and seemingly irrelevant information, increase their feelings of alienation and homesickness, and leave them ill prepared for the challenges ahead. The good news is that, according to the International Student Barometre survey, conducted early in the Michaelmas term last year, much of what is provided early on does help. And indeed our low drop out rates would support this. However, there is considerable variability, and some departments have some very good ideas on ways of easing students into LSE life. This brief guidance note outlines the range of induction approaches used by departments.

Virtually all departments now have comprehensive **handbooks**, handed out at the start of the year, but also available on-line in one form or another. This is important – in that usually by the time students realise they'd like to read their handbook, they've mislaid it. It is helpful if departments can lodge a copy of each of their handbooks with TLC – both to enable us to spread good practice and to enable study advisers to refer to your handbooks when students come for advice. TLC has produced guidance notes for departments on what to include in handbooks, available on request.

A few departments (Media and Communications is one example) have opted to split their **handbook** and hand it out **in stages** – with key administrative info in the first part handed out at the start of the year, the assessment guide handed out before first essays are due, and the dissertation guide provided half way through the first term. This can avoid early overload, and ensure that information is delivered when students are most likely to read it. So long as this is all then easily available electronically, in one place, it is a sensible approach.

Some departments supplement their handbooks with induction information on their **websites** including question and answer/FAQ sections, which offer a number of useful hints for new students. See for example International Relations:  
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/intrel/FAQsnewstudentsqns.htm> .

All departments also have a variety of **face-to-face events**. The most typical face-to-face is a “talking heads” session – enabling students to meet and hear from staff within the department and from other units (in particular, Library, IT, the Academic and Professional Development group (TLC, Language Centre and Careers), and relevant student societies. Those of us from central units have found that coming along to departmental inductions works much better than participating in the central School induction events – it brings us “closer” to the students, often in a much more informal setting, with opportunity to answer questions. The Government Department involves key administrative staff in induction meetings – given their increasing prominence in dealing with many of the legislative issues departments are faced with. Administrative staff are also often “front line” staff when it comes to helping students in crisis or students who might be inclined to bring complaints. The Statistics Department invites a few alumni to their induction, to give students ideas from the start of where their studies may take them.

Content of these events varies. In many cases, they will include some overview of programmes, administrative information, guidance on what to do in times of need and who to turn to. Several departments will also use these first meetings with students to

emphasise, for example, the importance of proper referencing to avoid plagiarism, or the support students can/cannot expect on MSc dissertations in the summer. Although such messages may seem somewhat daunting presented so early, they do appear to have an impact on students – those who have heard these messages from the start are at least aware of how important these matters are.

In terms of event organisation, several departments have noted the importance of:

- having **posters** and **directions** to supplement previous invitation letters and emails.
- ensuring that some seats are left for latecomers near the door – so they do not start in a state of acute embarrassment
- ensuring that the needs of students with disabilities are given due consideration
- inviting early disclosure (to department and/or the DO) of disabilities
- ensuring that dates/timing do not clash with School-level events, and that information provided by the department is cross-checked with the School New Arrivals website.
- ensuring departmental information boards are up to date and welcoming (eg: having photos of staff and their names on display, along with induction information).

Other variations on these standard inductions may involve:

- tours of the School – visiting library and careers, for example, rather than having staff visit the dept. Often student helpers can be a major asset for such tours, giving students their take on the institution.

Early **tutorial meetings** are another common feature of inductions. Tutors may find it helpful to invite students in small batches initially, and to introduce students to each other, and then follow up with one to one meetings. In order to break the ice, it may be worth giving students an agenda for their first meeting.

Many departments have some kind of “**options event**” in the first few weeks. Two main variants here are the standard brief talk with opportunity for questions from several members of staff offering different options. The second variant on this is offered, for example, by the European Institute. As well as having the brief talks, it has a “fair” – with tutors setting up stalls, and being available all in one place for a few hours, with reading lists, course materials, opportunity for interested students to ask more detailed questions.

Several departments work at building up study communities in different ways, encouraging student integration and **social networking**. Most departments will have a welcome party, with refreshments. The Anthropology Department last year ran a Pub Quiz early in the year – mixing staff and students. DESTIN also has a welcome party, open to all students (not just the in-coming cohort) and includes alumni who are invited to wear “Ask me” stickers, to encourage students to find out more about what the programmes are like and life after they have completed.

A few departments follow up the initial induction with more detailed networking events, which can include one and two day events at **Cumberland Lodge**, often involving PhD students, MSc students and staff, and aimed at developing social and intellectual bonds.

A few departments use some kind of **diagnostic testing** early on. This may be a mini-test (eg: Mathematics), an early written piece of work (several departments) or a brief conversation (Language Centre) to get some indication as to whether students may need additional support.

**Note:** For 07/08, Academic and Professional Development (TLC, Language Centre and Careers) have asked departments where possible to give us a single slot in their departmental inductions for **undergraduates**. This is to enable us to make our services more accessible to students. We are also very interested to work with departments on more extensive/interactive inductions, aimed at improving social mixing of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds within programmes. Any department which would be interested in experimenting in this in the future is invited to contact Liz Barnett [L.Barnett@lse.ac.uk](mailto:L.Barnett@lse.ac.uk) in the first instance.

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