

Regenerating library services for new students

Clare Langman and Nicola Dennis, Information Specialists, Aston University Library & Information Services

Evolution of induction methods

Aston University is a medium sized institution with around 10,500 students (just over 9,000 FTEs). We normally see an intake of around 3,700 students each year. The induction process used to involve taking students on a physical tour of the building in small groups. Over the last 6 years an induction project team has been formulated to create induction themes, reusable learning objects and initiate the involvement of all library staff in providing a welcoming, friendly and responsive programme of activities for all new students.

The induction project team is led by an information specialist and the membership is voluntary. There is an expectation that membership includes staff from each team within the library covering Public Services, Information Resources and Information Services. Previous themes have included a focus on the LOST and HEREOS television programmes which we have used to create posters, postcards and presentation slides. The reusable learning objects were created through the work of Library staff and in collaboration with students and academic staff. They include a series of talking heads focussing on a particular aspect of the library service or resources, demonstration videos – for example a member of staff using the self-service machines and captivate tutorials highlighting the best way to use the Library Catalogue.

The aim for the induction programme is to make the students feel welcome, show them that library staff are friendly and approachable and enable them to utilise the printers / photocopiers, find a book on the Library Catalogue and issue a book using the self-service machine. Any other additional information they retain is a bonus. This year the theme centred on the Doctor Who series as the ground and first floor of the Aston University Library building was recently refurbished so we focused on the idea of “Regeneration”.



Building relationships within the University

Student attendance on our induction programme is usually around 65%. This response has been achieved through the relationships built across the University and with external partners. It has taken time and persistence in continually liaising with different departments the University now automatically includes Library & Information Services in the activities. Examples are being able to provide information in the “Accommodation Welcome Pack” provided by Estates, have a stand at the Information Fair and timetabled slots in students induction programme.

The Induction Team have also liaised with different partners across the University to help boost their profile with the students through the Library Induction programme. These partners include the Learning Development Centre (LDC) who support students with their academic skills while at

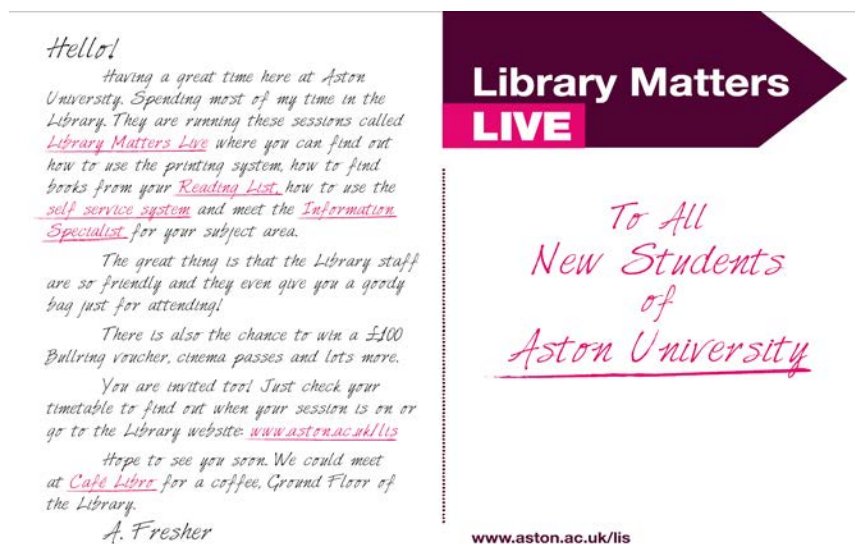
University, the University bookshop and the University Sports and Recreation department. These services have provided material for the induction “goody bags” and the LDC also contributed a video highlighting their services and study space which we used as part of the library’s welcome slides.

We have also built relationships with external partners such as design companies that have worked with the Library Induction team to create designs for our suggested themes. Our Doctor Who theme resulted in the creation of a series of posters, postcards and even a moving image for the video totem. Finally, the Library Induction team liaise with long standing database providers or newly subscribed services to provide additional material for the goody bags and if possible prizes for the induction feedback prize draw.

Engaging students on arrival

Over the last few years a lot of effort has gone into engaging with students before they actually enrol. This year a collection of postcards were designed for students to (hopefully) keep and pin to their noticeboards/fridges. . The postcards were designed to be brief but informative and included information that students regularly ask about. For example, how many books they can take out, opening hours and what sort of help they can get from the Library. They were designed around 4 themes; Help and Enquiries, the building, services and study spaces and Information for International Students. A postcard covering library services and facilities is put into the Residences packs and given to all students who live on-campus (around 2500).

We also distributed postcards during the Move-in weekend when the Library was used as a central point for parents and students to sit and have coffee. Library staff welcome students and parents to the Library and promote the Library Matters Live sessions. Library Matters Live invitation postcards



were handed out to students, promotion via the LCD screens throughout the Library as well as posters on the A frames outside of the building.

The main Induction period at Aston University spans 2 weeks. The first week is International Orientation Week and focuses on the International Students. This year, for the first time, we held welcome talks for International Students which supplemented the Library Matters Live sessions. These appeared on the academic timetable and were classed as compulsory. Attendance was strongly encouraged from the Pro Vice Chancellor downwards. The talks ran throughout the day,

starting on the hour and lasting 30 minutes. They involved using a mixture of Power point and the key parts of the LIS website. The main message was that LIS staff are friendly, approachable and there are lots of routes they could take too to get help. We also covered issues such as Copyright and using an academic library in the UK which are often new concepts for International Students.

The second week is for home and EU students, entitled Fresher's Week. An Information Fair is held twice during the fortnight which LIS are involved in. LIS has a stall with a promotional poster display, staffed by LIS staff wearing Need Help T Shirts. The main point of our attendance is that we present LIS as a friendly, welcoming service and encourage students to attend Library Matters Live. We hand out theme branded paper bags containing a few chocolates and an invitation. All students we speak to are offered the chance to enter a prize draw to win one of the smaller prizes e.g. cinema tickets.

Library Matters Live

Library Matters Live sessions are timetabled over a 2 week period in consultation with the Schools. Each degree programme is timetabled to arrive at a particular time, with the maximum of 60 students per session. Sessions were advertised on the LIS Induction webpage, on the Library LCD screens, via the VLE and the Library Blog.

The sessions comprise of 3 zones; On arrival, students are met by an Information Specialist (IS) or Information Resources Specialist (IRS) in the "Getting Started" zone. Staff give a general welcome to LIS and the Learning Development Centre via a power point presentation and short video. Following the Getting Started presentation, students are divided into 3 groups and sent to one of 3 demo points. One group stays with the IS/IRS and receives a Catalogue Demonstration, one group are taken over to the Reserve and Collect Zone, staffed by an Information Assistant and watch a demonstration of how to use self service facilities, including issue, return, renewing, paying fines and collecting reservations. The third demo point involves a Printing and Photocopying demonstration, staffed by a Public Services Assistant, supplemented by a short video clip showing how to top up a printing account. The students moved round the zones after 10 minutes. Evaluation forms are handed out which students are asked to complete and hand it in to the Library Help Desk at the end. The incentive is a Goody Bag and entrance in to a prize draw. Every student who attended did hand in a form which was useful in terms of recording attendance statistics. All forms with a comment or suggestion were entered into a prize draw to win an iPad 2, £150 Waterstones voucher, £100 Bull Ring Gift card or £50 voucher to spend in the campus bookshop. Prizes were kindly donated by database suppliers, with the Bull Ring card paid for by LIS.



Student reaction

Overall feedback was really good, with lots of students giving really positive comments. The following give a flavour of the sorts of comments they made.

"Poster campaign is really cool!" (UG student)

“Loved the Dr Who Design” (UG student)

“I’m so grateful to be here!” (UG student)

“Really well organised, much better than my previous uni” (PG student)

There were also lots of comments which will be used to feed into the planning for next years’ Induction.

What didn’t work well

Induction 2011 was the first time we had run the sessions in this format on the Ground Floor. The Ground Floor is one of the major spaces available for social study so it gets very busy. Although a portable mic system was used for the Getting Started presentation, there were lots of problems with crowd noise and both students and LIS staff not being able to hear. However, holding the sessions on the Ground Floor meant all the demonstration points were located close together which made it easy to move the groups around.

The other aspect of Induction which didn’t work that well was that 2 of the Schools left it too late to put the induction sessions in the students copy of the timetable. For this reason attendance by students from these Schools was significantly lower than the other Schools. Attendance from the students in the Schools who had booked in advance and had included the sessions in their timetables was really good this year.

Conclusion

Library Matters Live has good endorsement from the senior management team within the university as well as the management within the Library and is viewed as an important part of the academic induction programme. The Induction team has built up the profile over a period of 6 years getting involved with different activities over time. The involvement of all the library staff has been key to our success. It is very much a team effort spanning all levels of staff in the Library and only works because we have had buy-in from people. The Induction sessions have evolved in answer to student feedback, which has been really useful in telling us what students want from an Induction. By keeping it as a basic introduction to LIS services and facilities rather than the traditional Induction into a specific subject area, students are kept interested as it something they need to know there and then, and making it more interactive in future will hopefully continue to engage them with LIS.