New Student Induction
A Guide for Staff
Course inductions at NTU

The first few weeks of the first year are crucial to a student’s success at University. The University has steadily improved inductions over the past 10 years and there is now excellent practice to be found across the institution. However, there is also room for improvement and we press all colleagues to think about how they could help new students to start their courses.

This guide has three sections:

1. **Induction Checklist**
   This short checklist identifies eight actions all course teams should use in their new student inductions.

   If you are short of time, please just read this section.

2. **Student-identified induction principles**
   This longer section includes information about student feedback gathered at NTU. It also contains ideas for course teams to implement and some research evidence.

3. **Overview of new student induction**
   This section is included to share the good news about how induction has improved in the past 10 years and provide readers with further theory about induction.

**Links to the NTU Strategic Plan**

This document may be useful for colleagues looking at aspects of the University Strategic Plan, particularly **CO301** – tutorials for personalisation, **CO302** Personalisation articulation, **CO303** – closing the gap ([Success for All](#)) and **CO305** student support emphasising the personal.

**An Induction Year**

Cook & Rushton (2008), propose that a more effective way to structure new student induction is to break it into three phases: pre-arrival, initial induction and extended induction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-arrival</th>
<th>Met through the Starting at NTU web pages, particularly the pre-arrival task and direct communication between the course and students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial Induction</strong></td>
<td>New student induction/ welcome week</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Extended induction</strong></td>
<td>We strongly recommend that course teams consider at least the first term (and possibly the first year) as the extended induction period. We recommend that course teams consider how they induct new students to new forms of assessment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Our starting position is that all course inductions really ought to be spread across the first year, but we recognise that NTU has traditionally focussed on the induction week. This document encourages colleagues to reconsider their induction, rather than start something completely new. We will revisit this idea over the next few years placing greater emphasis on the extended induction.

For further information, please contact Ed.foster@ntu.ac.uk
New Student Induction
Checklist for course teams
## New Student Induction
### Checklist for course teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your induction ...</th>
<th>Induction principles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Provide opportunities for students to develop friendship groups &amp; support networks?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provide opportunities to sample/ practise normal first year learning?</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Provide students their first tutorial during induction week?</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
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<td>4. Integrate the pre-arrival task into the induction programme?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Last at least as long as a normal teaching week?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Use student mentors for matriculation events and for activities such as campus tours?</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Minimise the number of guest lectures (preferably integrate them into normal teaching at other appropriate times later in the year)?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Treat the induction week as the first week of induction and induct students to new elements and concepts throughout the first term?</td>
<td>1, 4, 5</td>
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</table>

The following principles developed in consultation with students. Students were realistic and expected to **start** developing in each of these areas.

1. To have opportunities to start making friends & building support networks
2. To understand what learning is like in university
3. To experience authentic learning and have some reassurance that they can cope
4. To be reminded how their course will benefit their future plans
5. To have a course induction that allows time for other commitments
New Student Induction Checklist

1. **Does your induction provide opportunities for students to develop friendship groups and support networks?**

   Research at NTU suggests that student anxieties early in their University career are predominantly about fitting in and belonging, rather than coping with the academic workload. Does your induction provide any of the following activities:
   - Icebreakers?
   - Name badges?
   - Team tasks & challenges?
   - Off site visits?

2. **Does your induction provide opportunities to sample/practise normal first year learning?**

   Many students would find it reassuring to actually sample real learning activities during induction week rather than listen to lectures about what learning is going to be like. We recommend that all course inductions include ‘normal’ first year learning activities. We’d recommend that lecturers act as reflective practitioners whilst delivering such activities and periodically explain why this particular approach or activity is used. Students who have previously studied BTECs or other non-A level routes may particularly appreciate early opportunities to sample HE learning.

3. **Does your induction provide students their first tutorial during induction week?**

   We strongly recommend that courses offer tutorials during the first week. We also recommend that these ought to be timetabled sessions, not drop-ins. There is evidence from the Success for All literature that drop-ins are best used by more confident students, rather than perhaps those that might benefit most from them.

4. **Does your induction integrate the pre-arrival task into the induction programme?**

   Pre-arrival tasks were first integrated into University practice in 2011. Student feedback has been positive and most courses now use the pre-arrival task within course induction. You must ensure that the task set is integrated into the activities during induction week.

5. **Does your induction last at least as long as a normal teaching week?**

   Please ensure that the contact hours are approximately the same as a normal course week. Whilst students do want to participate in a range of
Welcome Week activities, they also want to start their student life and if the induction is only a few hours of lectures it can give the wrong impression of the course.

6. Does your induction use student mentors for matriculation events and for activities such as campus tours?

From 2017 onwards, the whole University is using student mentors to support first year students. The mentors will be delivering ongoing peer support, particularly through the first term. One of the first events will be a matriculation event delivered as part of the new student induction. We suggest that student mentors would also be useful for delivering other orientation activities particularly campus tours.

7. Does your induction minimise the number of guest lectures (preferably integrating them into normal teaching at other appropriate times later in the year)?

There is a difficult balance to strike with guest lectures. Students do need to hear about the opportunities and support available and attendance during induction week is generally very good. However, a succession of 15-minute guest lectures is a poor way to remember what the different teams have to offer and increases the time spent passively listening in lectures. Rather than a succession of guest lectures, we would encourage course teams to consider different ways of finding out about the services including campus tours or quizzes. It may be even better to provide guest lectures about the services during the first term.

8. Does your induction treat the induction week as the first week of induction and induct students to new elements and concepts throughout the first term?

No new student is fully inducted at the end of their induction week. Just as no new employee is fully inducted at the end of their first week of employment. It is therefore important for course teams treat induction week as only a phase in the process of induction. We would strongly encourage course teams to plan the remainder of the first term as if it were an extended induction. As you introduce new forms of learning or assessment, please consider how you induct new students to each particular activity.
Student Identified Priorities for Course Inductions

This section details the five priorities identified by students in surveys and focus groups. It also contains recommended actions for ways of meeting these priorities. This section is intended to complement the checklist and provide colleagues with resources.
Priority 1 - To have opportunities to start making friends & building support networks

The HERE Project (Foster et al, 2012) found that 1/3 of students had considered withdrawing during their first year. Amongst those who had considered leaving, but chose to remain, the most important factor that that helped them to stay was friends and family, particularly friends formed whilst at University. Furthermore, Foster et al (2014) found that whilst the main reasons for considering leaving related to students’ courses, doubts during the first term were primarily social relating to fitting in and belonging to the course community.

It can be easy to assume that students will make friends through their accommodation and social activities during Welcome Week and it is the responsibility of all new students to develop relationships with their peers. However, when surveyed in 2011, students reported that the most important place to make friends was within the course. Furthermore, some students are placed at a disadvantage when making new friends by the fact that they don’t live in NTU halls or commute locally from home. This may be particularly important for some groups of students. Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld (2005) found that students living away from their university found it very difficult to break into cliques formed amongst those students living in halls. Furthermore, they found that social exclusion was the most common reason for early departure from University in their study.

Recommended Actions

Icebreakers
There is an icebreakers guide in the section of the CADQ pages for staff to use. We acknowledge that icebreakers can be overdone and some students (never mind staff) don’t like them. Feedback on icebreakers can be skewed by louder, more confident students dismissing their use, but frankly these students don’t need them anyway. We don’t recommend going overboard, but a couple of activities to get students sharing one another’s names or facing a task or challenge would bring benefits.

Reduce the amount of lectures
Edward (2001, p438) quoted a first year student from Plymouth University “When you feel lost and bewildered, the last thing you want is long lectures.” Lectures, whilst time-efficient, are potentially barriers to meeting peers and coping with the anxiety of starting university. We strongly advocate reducing the amount of time students spend passively receiving information in lectures. If you are going to use lectures, please try and build icebreakers or group discussions in to them. If it can be managed logistically, it would be better to run more information-giving sessions in smaller groups with more opportunity for discussion.

Increase the amount of small group work
Students may be uncomfortable with being told explicitly that the course team is socially engineering friends for them. In most cases, we would recommend that groups emerge through induction activities. We’d suggest opportunities to work with more than one group of students on a task with a purpose. The pre-arrival tasks in the Starting at NTU website are one way to do this. We strongly advocate
setting pre-arrival research tasks that will then form a framework for further discussion and small group activities through the week.

**Start induction on Monday**
Undergraduate inductions need fitting around Welcome to NTU in the Royal Centre, but that event only lasts one hour (plus obviously travel time from Clifton and Brackenhurst). Whilst it’s good to give students time to settle in and find their way around the campus and city, it would be better to fit this time in after they’ve had the chance to meet people on their course. We would advocate running some getting to know one another sessions on Monday.

**Use tutorials to continue building social support networks beyond induction**
Group tutorials can form a valuable opportunity to develop support networks. If at all possible, please ensure that you include tutorials in the induction week.

**Use second and third year student buddies**
When asked, many second year students will say that they are happy to take part as buddies, leaders of campus tours or even run small group discussions. The experience at NTU has been that it can be a little more difficult to get them to actually turn up and help with induction. It’s worth persevering with as they can help translate academic language and help put students at their ease. There tends to be a better take up if students are recruited during the summer term rather than emailed over the summer holidays. Obviously they’ll need reminders sending through the summer. It may also help recruitment if they have a clear role.

**Off-campus trips?**
A number of courses took students off campus to take part in activities such as outdoors training, gallery visits, arts projects and using specialist tools. Student feedback about these activities has been highly positive, although a few students who stayed away overnight felt that they’d missed some opportunities to make friends in the main Welcome Week course. It’s particularly important to warn students in advance so that they can plan ahead for any childcare needs.
Priority 2 – To understand what learning is like in university

Ozga & Sukhnandan (1997, 1998) researching problems with student retention found that one of the most common reasons for early withdrawal amongst students was a lack of preparedness for HE. This was particularly the case amongst young students who tended to adopt a passive approach to university. Early leavers had often failed to anticipate the differences in teaching and learning between FE and HE and instead had focussed unrealistically upon aspects such as the social life. Students tended to concentrate upon arriving at university, not what they would be doing once they arrived.

There are clearly significant differences between post 16 and the first year of higher education.

Foster, Bell & Salzano (2008) interviewed new students to understand their prior experiences of studies.

Some key differences were identified as follows:

- Students were used to being taught in smaller, more intimate, groups
- They often had very close relationships with their tutors, interviewees told us about being able to ring their tutors at all hours
- They were used to significant amounts of feedback on drafts
- Students had produced extended pieces of writing, but often with word counts for particular sections or by submitting the work one section at a time
- Students had encountered fairly flexible deadlines
- Students had been able to re-submit strategically to improve grades
- Non-attendance was monitored closely and students are pursued if they fail to attend
- Finally, it was often tutors who asked to see students to discuss feedback etc., many students were not experienced asking for help and guidance

It is important to note that there were some differences between students who had studied A levels and BTECs, but that they were less pronounced than staff might assume.

Students were asked what would be the same or different about learning now that they had started at University. Although some students were very aware of the differences, many had naïve perspectives about concepts such as independent learning and clearly would benefit from guidance from staff.

The transition into higher education is potentially significant and it can impact on early withdrawal and perhaps more importantly a lack of understanding of the form learning takes can hinder student engagement. Once again, we strongly recommend that course teams start these discussions during induction and continue them as part of the NTU Course Tutorial system.

The University therefore recommends that course induction starts before students arrive on campus. In 2011, NTU launched the Starting at NTU integrated web pages. These contain information about enrolment, finance, Welcome Week and, very importantly, course inductions. Each year, these resources are uploaded in June and July. From July onwards each year, all new students will be able to see:

- A welcome from the course team
• Course induction timetable
• A pre-arrival activity
• Information about assessment, studying and academic support

Further guidance can be found on the CADQ Running a Course Pages

Recommendations

Starting at NTU pre-entry activities
Please do ensure that you carefully plan the Starting at NTU pre-arrival task and embed it into your course induction. Student feedback has been very positive about the pre-arrival information. Students generally like the opportunity to start thinking about their course before they arrive. Where there have been criticisms, they relate to communication and integration into the course induction. For example, some students complained that they didn’t know they had to do pre-entry tasks, a few reported that they had, but that they felt like they’d wasted their time as they weren’t subsequently used.

Discussions about differences
Run discussions with student groups about differences between learning in college and at university using resources such as learner contracts. This might be an activity that 2nd years could facilitate.

Tutorials
Please use tutorials as opportunities to explore questions that students may have and encourage them to think about how learning will be different and what they’ll need to do differently whilst here at University.

Using the NTU Student Dashboard to understand your students’ entry qualifications
If you log into the tutor view in the Dashboard, you can see the breadth of entry qualifications possessed by your new students. The field “entry quals” is completed by students during enrolment. In this case, diploma at level 3 means BTEC.
Priority 3 - To experience authentic learning and have some reassurance that they can cope

Further to Priority 2, it is vital that students have the opportunity to actually sample the type of learning they will encounter during their first week at University.

Recommendations

Sample some learning activities
Clearly there’s a balance: if you start to deconstruct all the forms of academic writing students might be expected to do, it will potentially kill off all enthusiasm/scare students witless. However, students are keen to understand some of what learning at University is about, so provide opportunities to taste a range of learning and teaching examples, but provide opportunities to discuss how they might be expected to engage with them as they are engaging.

One of the most productive areas for discussion might be to look at feedback on work. In an NTU survey, around 80% of students in FE/VI form were able to submit multiple drafts and get feedback on each draft. Students are therefore likely to have conceptually a very different understanding of what feedback is and what it’s used for. They may need help understanding how they are expected to use summative feedback in subsequent assignments and be supported to develop strategies to do so.

There may also be some benefit to introducing the students to sample assignments, but it’s probably too soon for most.

Group activities
As well as creating good opportunities for students to make friends, group work can give students the opportunity to start to understand learning in higher education. At NTU, students have been asked to do a wide range of tasks during induction: presentations on their academic subject, presentations on learning, arts projects focussing on a key aspect of Nottingham, etc. These kinds of activity would fit well in, among other things, a first Course Tutorial session. If possible, students should be given the opportunity to use any specialist equipment they will be using (theodolites, computers, sewing machines etc.) if health & safety and time allow.

Campus Tours
First year students often feel lost during the first few weeks of term and will describe the confusion felt at having to navigate their way across the campus. We would strongly advocate providing a campus tour as part of the induction experience.

Key locations to visit might include:

- Nearest computer labs
- Course Leader’s Office/ First year Tutor’s office/ School Office/ location for coursework hand in
- The library (particularly short loan, main shelves for the course and information desks)
- Student Support Services
- Students’ Union
This might be an excellent activity for second year students to facilitate.

**Engaging with NOW, the Student Dashboard & other electronic resources**
Given the importance of NOW as a learning platform and source of information, we’d strongly recommend some engagement as part of the induction. We’d recommend encouraging students to use NOW to complete a learning activity rather than comprehensively lecturing to them.

We would strongly advocate using the Dashboard in any 1-1 meetings or tutorials and talking to them about the importance of engaging with their studies.

**Course Reps & feedback**
Although the first week may be too soon to hold course rep elections, it would be valuable to introduce the concept during course induction. It may be particularly useful to either bring in a course rep to the session or describe changes that were brought about because of course reps or feedback.
Priority 4 – To be reminded how their course will benefit their future plans

Although the majority of students choose their course because of the reputation of the course or institution, a significant number will make the decision due to factors such as ‘reputation of the city’, ‘because friends or family went to that institution’ or even for ‘no particular reason’ (Davies & Elias 2003). Students entering through clearing may be a particular problem group as their decision-making appears to be even less rational and thought-through.

Roberts et al (2003) found that the difference between students who had doubts about their course but stayed and those who had doubts and departed was that the first group was able to see how the course would benefit their future careers/life plans, whilst the second couldn’t. Johnstone (1999) found that students who were motivated more by family expectations than personal goals were almost 20% less likely to progress. Similarly, those who hadn’t actively chosen a particular course, but just wanted to go to university/leave home were significantly less likely to progress.

The student interviewed during the development of this guide weren’t particularly interested in the details of careers and planning for their future, but they did want some inspiration about how the course would benefit them.

It would therefore appear to be a sensible precaution to encourage all students to think about the benefits of the course during their first few weeks.

Recommendations

Graduate destinations
When introducing the course to students, make sure that you tell them about where graduates have gone on to work. It may also be worth talking about placements to them. What student quotes do you have from recent graduates or final students after their placements?

Engaging with the course
There is a danger that talking about the outcomes of higher education will encourage students to believe that just serving their time at university will lead to them getting the graduate job they expect. It is therefore important to emphasise how the skills and attributes will be developed.

- What will the students do that will build up attributes that employers are looking for?
- What skills will they develop?
- What relevant knowledge will they have?
- What activities do they need to engage with in order to develop these outcomes?

Wider benefits of the course
Please note that we are not recommending that you talk about the benefits of the course purely in terms of employability. What other benefits will the students gain from studying the course?

- What do final year students say about what they have learnt about themselves?
- How have they changed/developed?
Priority 5 – To have a course induction that allows time for other commitments

How long should the induction timetable be?

Student feedback in the acceptor surveys (October each year) has always included criticisms of clashes between Welcome Week and course inductions, particularly early morning starts; students want to enjoy the varied social life on offer and feel that they need some time to sleep. Obviously, there’s a danger that course teams will feel under pressure to create a timetable that runs for two days starting at 11 and finishing at 3 with a healthy 2-hour lunch break in the middle. We are not advocating this.

Those students interviewed to develop this guide were realistic about the importance of course induction. They typically felt that induction ought to last 3 – 4 days, although not all day long on all of those days. Some students with inductions lasting 4 days felt that the content could have been covered in 3 if it had been paced better.

Whilst there may be pressure to keep inductions short, it appears that student satisfaction is better in those Schools with slightly longer and more active inductions.

Perhaps the best guide would be to try and create a course induction timetable that has similar hours to the taught hours in the normal week. For courses with low contact hours, we would advise higher contact hours than will normally be the case in the first year.

Recommendations

3 – 4 day duration
Run induction courses over 3 – 4 days and make the overall number of hours comparable with normal studies. We would recommend putting on activities earlier in the week and, unless there is a timetabling need or sound pedagogical reason, avoid activities on Friday.

Start on Monday
Start induction activities on Monday and fit them around Welcome to NTU, starting with introductions, an opportunity for students to get to know one another and what they’re expected to do in the week. For the Schools with Welcome to NTU talks in the middle of the day we recognise that this may be harder to do as students may not wish to attend course activities, Welcome to NTU and then further course activities. If this is the case, we’d strongly advocate a Tuesday start.

Early starts and late finishes
If possible, avoid early mornings and late afternoon sessions; this may be more important on the first day. Clearly this is much easier to write than to actually timetable.
**Blocks of time**
One piece of student feedback suggests that, during Welcome Week, students would prefer to be taking part in induction activities in solid blocks of time rather than in individual hours. Once again, this is easier to write than deliver, but it may be particularly important during induction as students aren’t necessarily yet comfortable using the social spaces and library spaces in the gaps.

**Fitting around Welcome Week activities**
Welcome Week each year now contains around 500 activities. Most are in the evening or at weekends, but we wanted to create a mix of activities for students with free time that they could engage with throughout the day. Realistically, most students expect to be able to attend the Freshers’ Fair, so it would be worth planning some time for them to attend into your timetable. The Freshers’ Fayres are normally as follows:

- Monday 25th (10am-3pm) – Brackenhurst
- Tuesday 26th (10am-3pm) – Clifton
- Wednesday 27th (10am-4pm) - City (Sport)
- Thursday 28th (10am-4pm) - City (Societies)

We’d encourage course teams to leave 2 hours for students to participate in the Freshers’ Fairs.
Improvements in course inductions at NTU 2005 - present

This section explains how course inductions have become more interactive in the past few years and how student satisfaction has risen over the same time.

It’s not essential reading, but we wanted to share the good news.
New Student Induction at NTU: A Summary

Overall, NTU does well at inducting new students. This year, in the annual Welcome Week survey, 85% of students said they were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with their initial University experience and spoke positively about the professionalism of the welcome they received. Students give positive feedback about their course induction. However, there is considerable variation between schools and room for improvement in most areas.

In addition, there is increasing evidence that the difference between the educational experiences in further education/ VI form college is significant. Gaps in subject knowledge are more widely known about. Increasingly, there is evidence that there are significant gaps in the skills and autonomy developed, and approaches to study in post-16 education that can lead students to misinterpret the experiences they encounter in the first few weeks of term, particularly during course induction (Foster, Salzano & McNeil, 2011).

Student Feedback

As part of the ongoing review of course induction, we ask students to reflect on their experience of induction. Recent feedback is as follows:

![Student feedback chart]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>My teachers/lecturers have been approachable and supportive</th>
<th>My course induction was well organised</th>
<th>I found my Course Induction interesting</th>
<th>My Course Induction has explained what kind of learning I will engage with</th>
<th>My Course Induction provided me with the opportunity to make friends to get to know others on my course (changed in 2009)</th>
<th>The pre entry material helped me to prepare for my induction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>78</td>
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Nottingham Trent University
New student induction: A guide for staff
April 2017
page 18 of 22
The percentages indicate the number of students who rated each criteria 4/5 out of 5. Due to space pressures, these questions were not asked in 2012.

Overall the feedback is positive.

Clearly students feel that tutors are approachable and that the induction gave them a flavour of what was to come. Satisfaction with course organisation has steadily increased. Where students complain about organisation, they will most frequently cite lack of information about induction or normal course timetables.

We were interested to note that students felt that course inductions could have been more interesting. This may be due to the fact that students are contrasting it with the busy social whirl of Welcome Week, but nonetheless, we would request that staff strive to create interesting activities in the first week.

**How course inductions have changed at NTU**

In 2005, we analysed 63 undergraduate course induction timetables from across the University to better understand what was included within a typical induction. Clearly lots of averaging has taken place to get to this point and this masks considerable variation. However, overall we see that almost 2/3 of all induction time was spent in a lecture theatre listening to the course team or a succession of speakers from the Students’ Union, Student Support Services, the Library etc. Although clearly there are many different types of lectures, we were concerned that students’ initial experience of life at University is very passive.

In 2009, we repeated the process, this time looking at 66 course induction programmes. This time, we noted that the average duration of the course inductions was slightly longer. In 2005 the average course induction lasted 11.4 hours. In 2009, the average course induction increased to 12.8 hours. More importantly though, the mix of activities had changed. Whereas in 2005, almost two thirds of all time was spent in some kind of lecture, in 2009, this had reduced to 1/3. We saw a greater use of workshops and group projects – all activities we would strongly encourage.
The changes from 2009 to 2015 are less dramatic. This time there, 79 inductions were sampled and there was a continued reduction in more-passive forms of learning. We were slightly concerned to note that average time spent in induction is slightly lower (12.1 hours) than 2009.

Overall feedback remains highly positive. However, when we look at differences across Schools, there are noticeable differences. The most noticeable is the response to the statement “My course induction has provided me with the opportunity to get to know other students on my course.” In the most satisfied School, 81% of students said agreed or agreed strongly, whilst in the least satisfied School, 41% of students felt the same. There are clearly issues about
extracting meaning from average scores from an online survey, we will continue to work with Schools to find ways to improve new student inductions.

**Starting at NTU**
From 2011 onwards, all NTU courses upload their course inductions to the www.ntu.ac.uk/starting_at_ntu web pages. Included in each section is each course’s induction timetable and pre-entry activities. This is a great resource for anyone wanting to browse for ideas to include in course inductions. We heartily recommend looking at this resource.

There are plenty of excellent examples of course inductions taking place within NTU, but the best practice isn’t consistently adopted. It’s hoped that in some way this resource will help rectify that situation. It’s entirely understandable that there are plenty of pressures on teaching staff at the start of term, but we do feel that all course staff need to be significantly involved in the induction of new students, not just the lonely course leader or first year tutor.

Further information about Welcome Week events can be found at

http://www.ntu.ac.uk/adg/running_a_course/_pre_arrival_induction_and_transition/induction/index.html

If you would like to discuss course induction in any further detail, please don’t hesitate to contact ed.foster@ntu.ac.uk ext. 88203 particularly if you have good ideas to share.
Bibliography


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