

“It was hard to find the information I needed”

An online induction tool to enhance the quality of the student experience for part-time taught postgraduate and CPD students

Jan Cooper, Principal Teaching Fellow; Cath Fenn, Teaching & Learning Technology Adviser

Background to Project

Over 95% of the 2,500+ taught postgraduate and CPD students at Warwick Medical School (WMS) are healthcare professionals combining employment with part time study. The transition from ‘expert’ vocational knowledge to learning in a university context can prove to be challenging and a cause of anxiety for some students (Scevak and Cantwell 2001) and therefore preparation for study and on-going support is paramount impacting on the quality of their educational experience. However, less than 5% of WMS taught postgraduate and CPD students attend face to face induction events and report difficulty in finding and navigating online information. There can be an assumption about the digital literacy skills of learners leading to a negative impact on their ability to effectively study (Beetham, McGill and Littlejohn 2009).

Method

A working group consisting of two academics, an administrator and a teaching & learning advisor met fortnightly to plan, develop and review the online induction tool. A learning needs review was undertaken and this was cross-referenced with the existing face to face induction programmes to determine the content of the tool. There was also a recognition that learners should be referred to “deeper information” such as referencing and avoiding plagiarism at selected points.

Graduates’ comments

“I wish I had been able to access this when I did the course.”

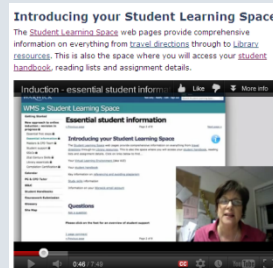
“Very much envy the student starting now - these pages would have been an enormous help and a real boost to getting the most out of the course.”

“I would have found this useful. It was hard to find the info I needed on the main web site.”

“Overall the induction pages look very useful and the information is clearly and concisely presented. Videos good.”

Technology

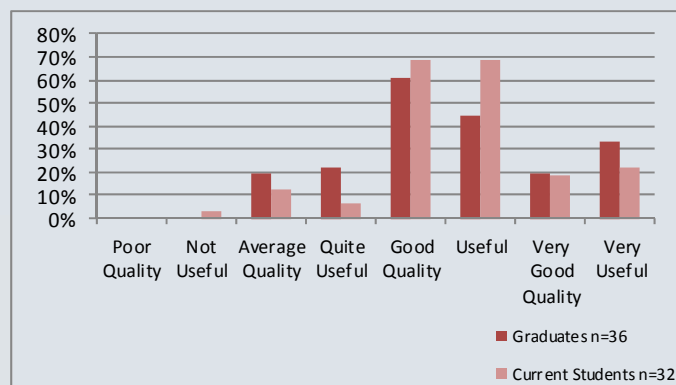
‘SiteBuilder’ the University of Warwick web publishing tool was the platform ‘Camtasia’ was used to provide synchronous commentary on PowerPoint presentations ‘Screenflow’ was used to create narrated videos demonstrating how to navigate round web pages. Videos were embedded into web pages using ‘YouTube’ to enhance the accessibility of this medium



Evaluation

The evaluation strategy for this tool had 3 components:

- Staff feedback**
Formative feedback from both administrative and academic staff was sought in the developmental stages. This was essential to encourage ownership of this innovation - an important component of any change process (Paton and McCalman 2001). Issues identified included quality of video material, relevance of content and ease of navigation through the information provided. These issues were addressed prior to the tool becoming ‘live’ to students.
- Recently graduated students**
were asked to rate the quality and usefulness of the tool using a 4 point rating and asked for comments.
- Current students**
were asked the same set of questions as recently graduated students. The results are summarised below



Further Development

As this tool is in the early stages of implementation proposed further development includes:

- The collection of feedback once students have completed 6 – 12 months of their programme of study to evaluate the longitudinal impact of the induction programme
- Amendments to actively promote an online community for students including the provision of areas/activities that are student led and managed. This is important as, by allowing students an element of control, they are at the centre of learning and can create their own personalised learning environment (Mentis 2008).
- Based on the results of student feedback, consideration of the use of other technologies that may enhance the provision of information and interaction

Conclusion

- This development provided a valuable opportunity to review and revise existing processes
- Initial student feedback suggests that it has the potential to improve the overall quality of the student experience.
- The engagement of both staff and students in the development and online review was particularly worthwhile
- The use and evaluation of a broad range of technologies provides a show case and evidence base to inform teaching colleagues developing subject specific learning objects.
- It is acknowledged that the induction tool does not actively promote the development of an online community. However, learners and staff will be encouraged to build this within their subject specific cohorts and means to encourage this within the tool in the future are being explored.

References

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Contacts

Mrs Jan Cooper, Principal Teaching Fellow, Warwick Medical School
Room A-141, Medical School Building
Tel: 02476150456
Email: Janet.m.cooper@warwick.ac.uk
Ms Cath Fenn, Teaching and Learning Technology Advisor, Warwick Medical School
Room A-041, Medical School Building
Tel: 02476150065
Email: c.a.fenn@warwick.ac.uk
University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL