

Aberystwyth University: 'Beanbag Inductions'

2011 Marketing Innovation Awards Application

Objectives	1
Summary of the project	2
Locations	3
Seating	4
Content	4
Timetabling	5
Technologies and media	5
Snacks	6
Student voice	6
Target audience	6
Budget breakdown	6
Promotional activities	6
Press coverage	7
Evaluation	7
Feedback forms	9
Supporting material	12

Objectives

We wanted students' first experiences of the library to be informative but also enjoyable and engaging so that their associations with the building and resources are positive right from the start. The approach we took was to both inform and manage learning transition into higher education, via provision of 'warm knowledge' which is well documented in the literature.

Therefore we re-thought every aspect of the undergraduate library induction: location, content, marketing, timetabling, technologies, seating: changing every aspect to create a new type of induction that achieved those objectives. This involved some radical (and occasionally controversial) new ideas being poured into the mix.

Summary of the project

First we had to decide on what induction programme and format we wanted to offer. We experimented with various things in the past (including voting systems, games and the Cephalonian method¹) but felt that we needed to completely revise everything and start afresh, taking into account feedback and suggestions we received.

"The I.S. lectures are always seen as a bit boring and a lot of students don't really see the point - could there be anyway to make them more appealing?"

From the 2009 IS suggestions harvest: 'How could Information Services improve their services for new students?'

"Make freshers week less stressful. A reduction in the amount of "compulsory talks," given would be a massive help, as I found it all a bit stressful trying to fit everything in alongside trying to eat, go grocery shopping and sleeping. Everything was a bit of a blur and I had freshers flu from the first Monday as well which meant that I felt pretty ill and drained by the end of the week."

From the 2009 IS suggestions harvest: 'How could Information Services improve their services for new students?'

Induction aims for a "first positive experience in Hugh Owen Library as a welcome space for learning and assistance; engage them as part of a "library community"'"

From the notes of a 19th March 2010 meeting about freshers' events

Therefore induction was discussed in various meetings with lots of creative thinking and innovation proposed. As a result it was decided that we would move from induction time spent just giving *facts* (which are not remembered in the blur of Freshers' Week, and may make the library seem intimidating and authoritarian) to time spent *welcoming* people to library services and creating relationships, making ourselves known to students, and in return gaining useful information from them about their skills, needs, and fears.

This was backed up by our new Director who wanted induction to focus on four elements:

- Welcome
- The staff are friendly
- The place is a good one to come to
- This is just a taster (i.e. help is available later).

So we still wanted to achieve the objectives of orienting students, creating awareness of library services and support, and motivating them to make the best use of the library for their studies.

This resulted in a programme called 'Welcome to your Library 2010', and this application focuses only on the undergraduate sessions, the bulk of which took place 27th-30th Sept, 10am-5pm each day. We created a Sharepoint site for keeping track of all the tasks associated with planning this event.

¹ www.sconul.ac.uk/publications/newsletter/32/2.rtf

Title	Assigned To	Task Status	Description
Decide on what induction programme and format we will offer for next year		Completed	Whether ug and pg are separate or not; by faculty or not; by language or not. Discussed in various meetings.
Create ug/pg timetables	Elgan Davies [epd]	Completed	Beanbag inductions will be the main offering, Joy has publicised details on web [see URL:]. Also on-demand when there are people wanting one and staff to give it; and can timetable them Thu PM or Friday to deal with potential overspill.
Bookings - book rooms	Lillian Stevenson [ls]	Completed	HO Library Seminar Room booked all week; Level F space used too.
Risk assessment		Completed	1. Beanbags - would need to position out of thoroughfare 2. Noise - yes, we could pre-warn regular users, and signage. 3. trailing power cables - should be none 4. We will be there all week 5. Too many people turn up - direct to other sessions (e.g. extra Thu PM or Friday ones).
Finding a book video	Karl Drinkwater [kwd]	Completed	Will go on http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/ls/infoskills/finding/books/ soon. Have a standalone version for showing in sessions. Will be updated as things change.
Bookings - Flipcam	Karl Drinkwater [kwd]	Completed	To book Flipcam for the week and record learner voices of those willing. Need permission form or just ask them at start of clip (check if that is okay). Karl has a list of questions. At the end put it together as a short film to show, and maybe on staff infoskills area? Booked Mon 27 Sept - Mon 4 Oct. Karl and others can be involved in filming.
Arrange an overseer for each day	Lillian Stevenson [ls]	Completed	People to be in HOL all day to ensure the Library session run to plan: Mon: 9-1 Elgan, 1-5 Steve Tues: 9-1 Elgan, 1-5 Steve

Sharepoint induction planning area

We will list the elements making up the inductions and differing from previous years below.

Locations

For the first time, every student received a personalised email invitation to Freshers events, including a Welcome to the Library session. As a result we were facing a potentially larger number of attendees than in previous years. We therefore used two locations on the same floor (Level F of the Hugh Owen Library) - one a traditional teaching room with rows of chairs; the other an open space on the main library with beanbags for seating (further details in the following sections). We wanted to offer choice so did not direct students to one or the other, we just gave them the choice based on whether they wanted to sit on a beanbag or a normal chair. We made it clear that the only difference was the seating - the content was the same, and both were same distance to walk to.

The innovation here was related to the non-traditional teaching space we created - the 'beanbag area'. In one section of the book stock we temporarily moved study tables and atlases to create a large area surrounded by books. This had a number of positive features:

- Ideal for when you wanted to demonstrate book types.
- It links the library and teaching together.
- The shelves and books acted as sound baffles.
- There was natural light and a view of the sea through the tall windows (the traditional teaching room has no external windows), making the open space bright and welcoming.
- The location provided the opportunity for walking through the various floors of the library and introducing students to the planned zoning of the library.

Seating

The beanbag area was so named because we hired 40 beanbags from the Guild of Students and spread them around the space for seating. This involved lots of carrying up and down two flights of stairs by a small group of librarians...

The beanbags could be used in various ways: lay on, sat on, folded into a chair shape, piled up for ultimate plumpness; one girl used a second beanbag as a duvet so only her head popped out. The relevance is threefold: unlike a chair, with beanbags there is more opportunity for individual expression; secondly the random pile of movable beanbags is a stark and welcoming contrast to the regimented line of chairs which say 'you will sit in this order because we have set it up this way'; thirdly the way the beanbags overlap enables people to sit in closer proximity if they wish, creating a more social and inclusive feel.



Happy students falling into the comfort of a beanbag

Content

"Separate the talks of ones areas and the tour of the library services so its easier to attend just the talk as the library is on the whole self explanatory when it comes to layout."

From the 2009 IS suggestions harvest: 'How could Information Services improve their services for new students?'

As a result we gave an informal talk (c.20 minutes) that pointed users to services and facilities available in the library and incorporated a video, then there was an optional tour (also c. 20 minutes). That way people who didn't want a tour or needed to get away to another event could do so.

We had also re-designed a series of leaflets called 'Keyguides', one for each department, which just included the most useful web pages and classmarks for those subjects in a convenient bookmark format. Each student was given the one for their department prior to the presentation.

Timetabling

Attendance at undergraduate library inductions was not organised by faculty as in previous years. Instead the content of each session was generic and open to all disciplines.

This had advantages for the students by making things simpler, and if they missed a session they could just go to another. The new timetabling system naturally brought students from different faculties together which provided the opportunity for cross faculty interaction and networking.

It was also an advantage for us since we had to prepare for potentially large numbers and could then direct people to other times. We were also willing to put on overspill sessions if required (something that we considered as part of our risk assessment).

Technologies and media

To support the induction we created a short film (see supporting materials) which incorporated video footage and a screencast to illustrate the process of finding a book in a more visual way. The film has been made available on our web pages and on YouTube but during the sessions we used high resolution versions with different soundtracks for variety.

A large flat screen TV was placed in the open area connected to a laptop underneath (we used an external mouse and keyboard for controlling it) for showing the video and presentation.

Music was played prior to each session in order to create a relaxed atmosphere.



A presentation in progress using the large TV

Snacks

In the notes from a meeting in March 2010 it says staff were "very keen to stress the importance of a friendly welcome, a smile, a drink and a cake particularly in the first couple of days."

Food and drink were considered. The ideal would be something such as fresh or dried fruit, crudités, and nuts (i.e. things that are cheap and easy to refill, as well as being healthy rather than junk food.

In the end jars of sweets were purchased instead as being simpler and keeping better. These were passed around during the sessions.

Student voice

The learner voice is an important theme² and libraries listen to their users in various ways, including annual surveys. We wanted to capture events at induction so one of our staff carried a Flipcam around for the week. The plan was to also record students talking about their experiences of academic practice and offering tips for other students.

Target audience

The full target audience was every undergraduate, and we contacted them all using an automated institutional system which gave them a personalised induction week timetable.

Budget breakdown

Our approach to budgeting was based on the philosophy of 'low cost but high impact'. Apart from the hiring of the beanbags for a nominal fee we used internal resources, making effective use of staff time, equipment and location.

Promotional activities

The Induction was part of an overall student package, sent to all new students - this was the first year when we have been able to get the inductions featured so prominently. We supported this with effective use of a combination of web pages and printed guidance and information, some of it supported by photos of younger staff on the beanbags (since we hadn't let the real students loose on them yet!) Signage was set up and display boards included timetables and basic induction information.

² <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearningpedagogy/intheirownwords.aspx>



Two of the promotional photos we took prior to inductions

Press coverage

Not applicable to this project.

Evaluation

For assessment we used a feedback form. However there was also the informal evaluation based on gut-feeling from talking to, observing and filming staff and students.

Throughout induction there was one word that resonated above all others: beanbags. "Will they always be here?", we were asked again and again. It is no exaggeration to say that sometimes students rounded the corner, heard the music playing (whether it be 'Sympathy for the Devil' by the Rolling Stones, or a track by Radiohead), saw the beanbags, and their eyes really widened as they gasped before

throwing themselves down. Some students turned up just to see where the induction would be later - then stayed once they saw the beanbags, chatting together, even though the induction wasn't for another 30 minutes. Some didn't leave after the talk and just stayed relaxing and talking. Many declared that they would use the library all the time if they could read on them.



Unsurprisingly, students liked the beanbags!

The informal atmosphere we created appealed to students at this early stage at university and we feel they were more receptive to our message as a result. By the time we even began the talk we had chatted with them and established a rapport. The whole thing felt better for both sides. There was a definite connection.

Beanbags + short induction + informality and friendliness + sweets + a lovely open space with a view of the sea surrounded by books + a big screen + a short fun video with music in the background = tiring but fun days.



Staff liked them too. This was the storage room prior to moving the beanbags to Level F.

It should be added that after a few years of declining physical access to the library (even though remote access to our e-resources was going up) this year we have seen a large increase in footfalls.

For example we found that in comparison with Sept 2009, in 2010 we had:

- 50% extra users sitting in level D
- 18% extra students sitting in level E
- Level F remains similar
- 7,374 extra on the turnstile from Sept 2009 to 2010.

(We recognise that there is some time to go before we can have a more robust comparison of usage over time.)

A number of reasons will be contributing to this but we like to think that getting things off to a good start with welcoming and fun inductions is a major factor.

Feedback forms

In total 532 undergraduates attended inductions during those three days (82 more than we saw in September 2009). All were given a short library induction feedback form - there was a prize of a £20 gift voucher as an incentive to students to fill them in. The results and an analysis are attached to this application separately.

We got 144 responses. 81% of those respondents had attended the beanbag sessions. Note that the only difference between the sessions was whether beanbags were mentioned or not - this shows their popularity, that they can increase attendance at sessions.

The questions were open so students could write anything they want. It is therefore interesting that when we categorised their responses many wrote what amounted to the same things, showing a shared appreciation of the core elements. For question 3 "What did you enjoy about the induction session?"

- 60 students wrote about the 'concise, clear and informative presentation'
- 34 students put 'use of beanbags'
- 23 undergraduates made comments on the 'relaxed, comfortable and informal atmosphere'
- and 16 most liked the 'video on finding a book'

These responses suggest that we achieved our goals in making the students feel welcome whilst also giving them the basic information they need without overwhelming them; and that the beanbags were a core element of creating that relaxed and friendly impression.

The attached report concludes that: "It is evident from the above that the induction was a great success and participants found the experience useful and exciting." Our report also points to improvements for the future. We will build on this next year and it has already led to attempts to innovate in other skills sessions. We have purchased beanbags for each floor based on student feedback, colour coded to subtly reinforce the new red/amber/green zoning system (so there are red beanbags on the top floor, which is a silent red zone etc). These are now in constant use.

We will end the evaluation with a selection of quotes from the students' feedback forms which help to illustrate the personal impact this combination of induction elements had.

"It was delivered in a more relaxed way. It was straight forward and very helpful. Quite informative and practical...delivered beyond expectation."

"I really liked the bean bags. The video was amusing, a casual refreshing change"

"Enjoyable as it was short and snappy"

"I enjoyed the pleasant atmosphere and nice attitude of the staff"

"Lovely attitude towards students. Short tight and clear session with a lot of useful information. The small groups of listeners made it all easier for me to take in all the information"

"The beanbags are amazing"

"I like the videos and picture slides, much better than just talking and reading from a screen, very informative, covered pretty much all we needed to know"

"I will love to have beanbags all the time for reading or relaxing"

"The beanbags are really comfy and makes it easy to chat to people."

"Relaxing on the beanbags, music, friendliness, didn't drag on."

"Beanbags are a great idea"

"I can't really fault the presentation. I liked the video"

"The library seems like a very well organised and pleasant place to be and quite progressive"

"Interactive, good mix of visuals and lectures"

"The session covered all that you need to know in a relaxed and friendly way. Staff are all very helpful."

"It was run in a friendly and informal manner with good contact with the public, equipping students with the necessary experience to use the library"

"The beanbags should be purchased for a relaxed reading zone."

"The humour and lightly presentation made it easier to follow. Very detailed film) explanation of frequently asked questions"

"Keep the beanbags"

"Lots of useful information communicated in a relaxed session. Not too much information. I like the emphasis on where to find more help."

"Love it"

"Beanbags are excellent."

"I think the information services staff are really helpful and informative. They are great. Please keep it up."



At the end of the day effective marketing requires innovation. You need the ideas, then you need to 'go for it'!

Supporting material (6 files)

1. Evaluation materials:

- Library induction feedback report (evaluation materials 1.docx)
- Library induction survey results, anonymised (evaluation materials 2.doc)
- Library induction feedback form used (evaluation materials 3.docx)
- Blog post at
<http://aberssel.blogspot.com/2011/01/library-induction-and-learner.html>

2. Video including some of the footage shot, for illustration, not for wider circulation. (inductionvideo.wmv)

3. Session content:

- PDF of the slides shown during the presentation (content 1.pdf)
- Finding a book video file (content 2.wmv)
though versions can also be viewed online:
 - English: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SS2ywBefGZY>
 - Welsh: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDSqfao-ow4>