

## The Role of Emotion in Induction - workshop

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### ABSTRACT

Research indicates that induction activities can have a significant positive impact on the transition experiences of new students (Mayhew, et al, 2010; Harvey, Drew & Smith, 2006.) However, there are also indications that traditional induction practice, which seeks to provide important information to students, may not be ideal.

Investigations also indicate that many students experience high levels of distress during their first few weeks at a new university. At Derby, in a random sample of 353 students surveyed using a validated measure of distress (CORE-GP), 63% were found to be experiencing clinical levels of distress during the first 6 weeks. Students who experienced high distress were also likely to indicate that they were lonely, overwhelmed, homesick and restless, while those who had low levels were likely to indicate they felt settled in and part of the community. This is important because the work of Le Doux (1995; 1998) and others has identified that, high levels of distress diminish the capacity of an individual to engage with new learning. Given the high level of new learning, that students are required to undertake, during transition, this poses a potential problem and may explain why many do not remember what they are told during the beginning of term.

This workshop asks participants to reflect on and discuss potential conflicts between what institutions want from induction and the emotional felt needs of their students.

The workshop also explores an intervention trialled at Derby. Using research findings we identified two partial explanations for levels of student distress

1. Mere exposure (Zajonc, 1968) – that students are experiencing an anxiety reaction to an unfamiliar environment. This suggests we should speed up familiarisation in reality and imagination.
2. Student ability to meet underlying physical and emotional needs in the new environment. This suggests we should
  - a. Help students to recognise and use the strengths they already have
  - b. Support them to acquire skills necessary to meet their needs
  - c. Help them to see clear and practical pathways to success
  - d. Reduce emotional arousal so they can think clearly to accomplish all of this

In response, at Derby, we developed a new intervention in the form of a presentation that aimed to reduce negative emotional arousal, build hope, raise motivation, improve understanding of the link between wellbeing and learning, increase sense of belonging and help students to clarify and commit to personal goals.

Quantitative and qualitative feedback indicated that the pilot had been broadly successful with 82% of students identifying it as the best part of their induction. Analysis indicated that students had responded to different elements of the session and interpreted it according to their own immediate need. We also saw increased willingness to access support.

The workshop provides an opportunity for participants to take part in elements of this presentation, including learning 7\11 breathing. Discussion then focusses upon whether participants believe there are advantages to remodelling induction to focus on emotion; whether there are risks to this approach and what the challenges might be to implementing such a model.

## REFERENCES

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