



Arrival is as Important as Departure when Beginning a New Programme Online

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Before a learner ever participates in a class be it in a traditional classroom or a class online they can often feel excited or apprehensive. For traditional classroom settings the provision of induction classes brings learners physically together, allowing a face to face meeting with tutors and classmates, and this social presence helps to reduce apprehension in most learners before they start their course. For an online learner, induction is carried out remotely and usually in the learner's own time. So is there a need for Induction on line? Learners are not physically together in a room so how do they become reassured and less apprehensive about their future learning? Is Induction online a valuable resource to have and does it really provide and prepare the learner with the tools and techniques for participating in their future programmes?

Induction online may not have the physical interaction with people but people are certainly involved. It is crucial to create a sense of "welcome and warmth" from the moment the learner logs onto to their course to a final reflective feedback from a tutor as they depart to start their first module. Online induction makes it appropriately about *the learner*. It can be argued that excellent online induction design will lay the groundwork for more positive experiences and more confident learners as they work their way through their modules.

Online programmes at the School of Engineering have been designed to connect both teachers and learners to allow them to easily exchange information and transfer knowledge in *real time* regarding different engineering practices. This provides opportunities for learners to problem solve, observe and

assess operational problems and practices in different industry environments (look at current practice), whilst also connecting them to the theory.

The MSc Engineering Practice programme and the MSc Supply Chain Operations programme provides online industry learners with a two-week online induction programme. Delivered using the learning management system Moodle. Although the students are not physically present and often not even online at the same time, it is crucial to create a sense of “welcome and warmth” from the moment the learner logs on. Many of these students are globally dispersed too.

Induction online as a prerequisite of an academic course introduces the virtual learning environment to the learner and provides them with information on “how to do” and “what to know” in a concentrated online area over a specific time period.

Do online learners need this? From past experience at the University of Limerick there is a definite need for induction. Do online learners and their teachers benefit from it? Benefits occur when teachers and learners understand the purpose of the induction. Within this context, induction provides online learners and indeed their teachers with an opportunity to build not only technical competence but also a social and learning presence.

The idea behind the induction module for the online postgraduate programmes is to prevent problems from arising for the learner during the course of the first module and subsequent modules. Induction gives a focus and motivation to the online learner and provides them with the parameters of behaviour going forward. An overview of the programme is presented where general information is supported and all learners are informed of their role and their lecturer’s role throughout the programme. Requirements of the programmes are delivered and the learner works their way through a number of identified e-tivities to support their active methodologies over the programme duration. Dedicated tutors are responsible for monitoring the activity during the e-tivity activities. The e-tivities are spread over the two weeks and certain tasks are required on certain days. Each tutor is encouraged to welcome the learners to the programme and provide regular feedback to postings. With the use of videos and podcasts, step by step instructions, and a constant online presence to answer questions, applaud all efforts made by the learner, reassure the learner and encourage class interactions. In this way, online induction is all about “the learner” bolstering their confidence and technical abilities with the online tools and encouraging socialisation with their class. If a learner can start their modules already comfortable with the online interface and fellow learners, then this will have a positive influence on their early experiences and allow them to focus on their coursework.

Such an approach incorporates a close working relationship with the University’s Science and Engineering Librarian and the University library where the online delivery of information and scholarly resources has proved particularly beneficial in recent years. As indicated within the library/information literature, continuous professional and scholarly development and current awareness are particularly well-suited to the web-based environment. At one time, information literacy and resource-based learning was often very staff intensive and was sometimes impossible to carry out at an appropriate

time for students, the web-based approach is an ideal environment for opportunities relating to the ongoing learning resources as required on and off throughout a student's progress through their course of study. Such an approach means that students have immediate access to a range of resources and materials that suit a more empowered and self-directed approach to their study. By incorporating features within the programme that are modular, interactive and most-importantly of all - student centred, it is possible to cater for a variety of learning needs, approaches and requirements incorporating video, audio, self-guided and text-based and multi-media option as indicated by Science and Engineering Faculty Librarian Dr. Mícheál Ó hAodha who pointed to two particularly useful blended learning resources as developed within the library. "Many recent studies indicated that today's students learners appreciate an approach whereby they can take training into their own hands, work through content at their own paces and repeat parts as necessary or whenever their own time-schedule facilitates this. One particularly-useful resource I created over the past year as relating to Science and Engineering students and particularly the students of the MSc Engineering Practice programme is the **Thesis Preparation** suite of research resources available at: <https://libguides.ul.ie/c.php?g=681741&p=4862468>

Utilizing this short module, the MSc student can identify the literature and scholarly resources required to support their research and garner the range of critical skills necessary to carry out their research for their MSc thesis."

The current induction programme as illustrated in Figure 1 below is not allocated any credit weighting. There are mixed views over this. The induction is, by design, about learning the tools, about learners socialising and expressing themselves on their posts, and submitting truthful (and possibly negative) feedback on their experiences, without worrying about a grade. Not allocating credits to the programme however also leads learners to feel that the two weeks of induction are not really important. Industry learners especially have noted that if they have to commit to two weeks work they should be getting academic credits for it. The jury is still out on this topic.

Induction Programme

COURSE

Tutor: Dr. Ingrid Hunt

Duration: 2 Weeks

Start: August

OVERVIEW

The induction module is a way of easing our students into an online learning environment. Enabling the student to become familiar with components of the programme, methods of learning and helping them to become effective online learners. Induction provides the student with skills to progress successfully onto their chosen programme of study.

Any nerves or lack of confidence from the student will be alleviated during the induction period and it's a great opportunity for students to meet tutors, fellow learners and look forward to starting their programme in a safe dedicated online space.

AIMS:

- Provide an introduction to the online learning management system Moodle.
- Introduce students to fellow learners on their programme with the opportunity to meet students on other postgraduate programmes.
- Provide students with resources and tools to become effective online learners
- Complete a number of dedicated e-tivities focusing on areas that are important for gaining confidence in online learning, engagement and assessment completion.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Moodle: Students will be given a selection of e-tivities (online activities) by way of introduction to practicalities of online learning.
- Introductions: Induction provides a space for students to introduce themselves and start communicating with others.
- Resources: A number of documents, links, videos will be available with information and guides on academic writing, class etiquette, netiquette, group work, etc. to assist the student on their learning journey.
- Confidence: Students will make the transition to study online smoothly and start their first programme module with confidence that they understand the learning management system and know their fellow learners.

PARTICIPANTS WILL:

- Learn to navigate Moodle, creating a profile, uploading documents, presentations and engage on forums, etc.
- Gain an understanding of the nature of online learning and expectations for their chosen programme.
- Connect with fellow learners adding to their global network.
- Access relevant resources and a repository of subject matter relevant to online learning.

REFLECTION:

Throughout the programme duration we encourage engagement in reflective practice. This enhances the students learning considerably and it is an activity that students enjoy.

During induction, students have an opportunity to understand what reflective learning is about and there are a number of resources and tasks given to provide students with the confidence and skills to reflect on their ongoing learning and experiences.

Figure 1: Induction Information

Testimonials - Postgraduate Learners - MSc Supply Chain Operations Cohort 2019/ 2020

- *Very structured and informative, it helped to understand and learn Moodle navigation and generated very interactive discussions between participants, resulted in smooth start of the programme.*
- *I'm pleased to say that the induction experience has given me the confidence and platform to push on with my studies. It has alerted me to key components of study especially with mindset and attitude and especially time management.*
- *The support from the contributions of the online classmates and especially words of encouragement and support from the tutors will help guide me in my way through this series of study.*
- *The induction has given me the understanding of what is required for this course. It has allowed me to think outside the box as well as get used to the Moodle interface. It will be a big commitment but the fact everything is so easily accessible it should make things easier to balance. Looking forward to the challenge.*
- *I found induction very helpful and effective at introducing me to the systems and people I will be interacting with over the course of the programme. Support was available throughout the induction which eased any apprehension I had before starting.*
- *For me it is a well thought out programme and a very interesting journey completing it - I feel ready for the next step!*

For further information please view <https://www.ul.ie/gps/professionalflexible-programmes> & <https://www.ul.ie/library/>