

## Student Transition to the UK Project

# Creating a rolling induction programme for international students Keele University Students' Union

## About Keele and Keele Students' Union

Keele has around 10,000 students, 17% of which are international. Around 3,000 are accommodated on campus. International students have dedicated support from International Student Support which is part of Student Support and Development Services.

Advice & Support at Keele (ASK) is an advice service provided by KeeleSU. ASK delivers free, independent, confidential advice, information and representation to Keele students and delivers immigration advice to Tier 4 students studying in the UK. We host an annual training conference for club and society committees. Emphasis is on 'hard to reach' students. In 2015-16 we focused particularly on international students.

At KeeleSU we are lucky to have a number of active international student societies: 20 country specific societies and one large International Students Society. 17% of International Students are in clubs and societies which is lower than the Keele average of 35% engagement. We assume many students engage in the activities of these international societies without being members.

## Why this project?

KeeleSU set up a project with the Learning and Professional Development Centre (LPDC) and



Santander to research the experiences of international students whilst at Keele University and the 'Keele University Students' Union International Student Experience Study' was produced in August 2015.

The principal aim of the research was to suggest measures which would increase international student involvement with the services of KeeleSU. The report identified a gap in the welcome that was given to international students during the different stages of the academic year. There were many events for students arriving during 'Welcome Week' but students arriving outside of this time had a very different experience.

This project planned to implement some of the recommendations of the plan by developing a welcome support package for international students arriving in the UK at any point in the year.

The welcome package ran alongside events during the academic year which were available to both existing home and international students. These events celebrated the different cultures of the students that are present at the university.

## What did we do?

The project ran from August 2015 – July 2016.

### Step 1.

Identified key members of staff to be involved in the project.

### Step 2.

Email to all prospective students asking if they would like to meet up with us shortly after they had arrived at the university. This was sent centrally by the University who had a strategic plan to target communications with international students.

### Step 3.

Commissioned artwork to advertise the service.

### Step 4.

Wrote a job description and recruited a specific member of student staff.

### Step 5.

Employed five students who were either international or who had studied abroad to compile information about the local area to support a newly arrived international student who had missed the main welcome event.



### Step 6.

Employed a copyeditor to distill and format all information and commissioned professional graphic designers to enhance the visual appeal of material.

We used events such as the World Festival launch party in February attended by approximately 250 students to talk to students about what services they needed to know about during induction.

### Outcomes

- We created a service for international students arriving throughout the year to request a personal meeting with a student staff member on arrival at the University.
- Cultural events were hosted to celebrate the cultures of the different students that are present at the university.
- Legacy materials for newly arrived international students, including: what you need to know before and when you arrive, food, shopping, travel, local information, sources of help. Existing students were recruited to create local information

for other international students to help the induction process. Materials were peer reviewed by international students. In addition resources were displayed at a barbeque and comments were then used to further develop the materials.

### Positive unintended consequences

- After meeting one student who arrived on a Saturday morning with two dependents and no accommodation organised, we discovered this is not uncommon. This led to a change in process and the University is now asking for confirmation of accommodation arrangements prior to arrival.
- Previous research highlighted the fact that campus maps weren't adequate as they didn't include accommodation block letters. This has been fed back and will be changed for the start of the new academic year.

### Challenges

- The project was not the responsibility of a single member of staff and it was challenging to fit the work in around daily demands of existing roles. It really needed further time dedicated to it at a time when many other demands were being made.
- Identifying who was due to arrive in the UK, and when, and getting in touch with them. Take up was low and we did not have the resources to investigate why. However factors could have been information overload and a possible communication barrier.
- Employing a student staff member. The work was erratic and we could not guarantee hours.
- Funds – we had failed to factor in money for gifts/'freebies' for students arriving late and funds had to be found from a different project.

### Sustainability

The information pack has been created and can be re-used. It could be supported by a volunteer role with training from SU advice staff or staff

could support a future project on a rota.

## Recommendations for other institutions

- Carefully consider your method of dissemination of information to reach as many students in need as possible. We used memory sticks with information loaded on to them for the target students as they are research students.
- Create a mechanism to test the usefulness of the information that you send out to your international students before and during arrival. This may include asking questions of international students such as:
  - Does information come at the right time and in the right format(s)?
  - Is there too much or too little information?
  - Is the information understandable/digestible?
  - Should there be different information for students that come from different home countries?
- Ensure you have the right people involved in the project – you need buy in from the institution
- Make sure you can dedicate the time – it doesn't have to be a lot but it can make a big difference, get a team!
- Get existing students involved, including students who have experienced arriving after the main events and those who have studied abroad
- Think about what materials and freebies you can give to students
- What's good for international students is (generally – excluding visa info) good for home students, so once you have done the work, roll it out to all students

## Further information

Support for international students at Keele: <https://www.keele.ac.uk/studentservices/internationalstudents>

'Keele University Students' Union International Student Experience Study' was produced in August 2015.

Published materials available from [www.keelesu.com/advice](http://www.keelesu.com/advice)

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