

## Case study for Outduction

Morgan, M (2012) (ed) Improving the Student Experience: The practical guide for Universities and Colleges, London: Routledge.

### **Name and University**

Michelle Morgan, Faculty Learning and Teaching Coordinator and Student Experience Manager, Faculty of Engineering, Kingston University, UK.

### **Title of project/ initiative**

'What next?- preparing to leave' handbook for final year students.

### **Who was involved in the initiative**

Faculty Learning and Teaching Coordinator and Student Experience Manager, Faculty Employability Coordinator, Faculty Placements Coordinator, International Office, Alumni Office and the Student Support Office.

### **Reason for the project/ initiative**

To support students in their preparation for leaving university.

### **Why it was developed**

There was limited guidance and support across the spectrum of support needed for students in the Faculty and those at partner institutions in preparing them to leave university.

### **The target group**

Any student in their final year.

## **How it was developed, what it included and how it was implemented.**

### How it was developed

The idea for the handbook came out of a visit to the International Student Centre at the University of Adelaide. Whilst visiting the Centre, I was given a handbook entitled 'Finishing your studies at University- what now? A guide and workbook for international students'. The handbook, which was given to all international students just before they were about to leave, included a range of advice and guidance on preparing to go home to visas to career planning to practical matters. The handbook was informal, easy to read and not a glossy, corporate document. It was a great way of giving international students advice on making the transition from study to life post university. I was told that the handbook had been developed as a result of international students asking for advice and support.

I decided to implement the idea in my own Faculty but I wanted to take the handbook a step further. Firstly, I wanted it to be given to all students leaving university and secondly, it would be given to them as part of their outduction activities the Faculty operated. These activities started just over half way through a student's course and were designed to get students thinking about what they wanted to do after university and to start preparing them for that eventuality. Outduction activities included employability advice and improving and developing key skills. The handbook would be given to students about six months before they were due to leave.

### What it included

The aim of the handbook was twofold. Firstly, it was to compliment the outduction activities aimed at supporting, advising, guiding and preparing students for life after university so it would include a précis of the employability and key skill information and advice students had already been taught. Secondly, how to make a successful transition from university and deal with potential cultural, social, professional and political adjustments. This was one of the many facets of the University of Adelaide handbook that the Faculty handbook incorporated into its own handbook. I considered this to be a vital part of the handbook and felt that it was insightful of the International Office at the University of Adelaide to address this.

Life at university can be a protected environment. The Faculty has a very diverse student body and it is easy to forget that students may be returning to environments which are fraught with difficulties that they have not had to deal with for a while and may have forgotten how to! For example, it could be returning to a country where there is political unrest or a country/home life where cultural behaviour is stricter. University is also a place where questions and issues can be explored in a safe environment. Returning to a non-democratic environment after one is used to freedom of expression and debate can be problematic.

The handbook included a farewell message from the Dean and information on:

- the re-entry experience;
- further study or a year out;

- career planning (employer's perspectives, career planning, job websites);
- International student information (staying in the UK, Leaving the UK);
- Checklists of things to do (personal and university);
- How to keep in touch (your graduation, useful graduate contact details, being an Alumni).

Certain sections such as the further study and career advice section were more detailed and focused towards engineering students and their specific needs. For example, engineering specific job websites were listed along with the general job website addresses. Information and web addresses were supplied for professional bodies.

#### How it was implemented

Once the draft handbook was written, I circulated it staff in the various different units and to student course representatives for comment. Their feedback fine tuned the final handbook. It was a useful exercise having a variety of colleagues from across the institution commenting on their own information as well as others. The final version was sent electronically via email to all final year students six months before they were due to leave. I do not believe that all information for students should be electronic. Over the years, students have often complained to me that some information is just easier to read and absorb if it is in hard copy. However, in this case providing the information electronically was the most efficient and effective way to target the handbook.

The reasons were:

- it meant that the students did not 'lose' a hard copy;
- it was easy for the student to store and keep;
- they had access to the information post study. If we had put it on BlackBoard, which is our internal information site for students, once they stopped being a student, they would not be able to access the document;
- the handbook could be accessed by students in partner institutions overseas.

And it would be churlish not to admit that it made the initiative extremely affordable.

#### Analysis and feedback

The first year I circulated the handbook to the final year cohort, I asked for their comments on how they thought it could be improved. The students who provided feedback stated that it was a very useful book. The student course representatives had done a good job in helping me put the handbook together.

#### **The cost and timeline**

The initiative was developed very quickly because the concept had already established by the University of Adelaide. I got a copy of the handbook in the March and by the end of April, I had the final Faculty of Engineering version completed. In the first year of the initiative because it was developed quite late in the academic year, students got the handbook almost near the

end of their studies. They were circulated the handbook in the May ready for their departure in June. The following year, the handbook was circulated in January. We still circulate it at this time. Apart from my time and my colleagues across the university, the cost of the initiative was negligible.

#### **How it is/was monitored**

I annually review the handbook to ensure that it is up to date and talk to student course representatives to see if the handbook needs more information.

#### **The outcome**

The handbook is a very useful tool in helping students make the transition from study to life after university.

#### **Has or could the initiative be used for a different group?**

The handbook has been developed for students in partner institutions and for our postgraduate student body. It will be developed for work-based learning students.

#### **Advice and guidance**

- Just do it!;
- Make sure that the handbook encompasses any special requirements for your chosen body of students.

#### **Contact details**

michelle.morgan@kingston.ac.uk

**List key 10 words in your case study for the indexing**

Preparing

Leave

Re-entry

Career Planning

Leaving checklists

Employability

Key skills

Outduction

Visas

Further study