



City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Cunningham, L. & Holtham, C. (2022). Enhancing engagement and inclusivity through activities codesigned with undergraduates - a case of induction week for business management. EDULEARN22 Proceedings, pp. 4289-4296. doi: 10.21125/edulearn.2022.1023 ISSN 2340-1117 doi: 10.21125/edulearn.2022.1023

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/29957/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.21125/edulearn.2022.1023>

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to [City Research Online policy](#).

ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSIVITY THROUGH ACTIVITIES CO-DESIGNED WITH UNDERGRADUATES - A CASE OF INDUCTION WEEK FOR BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Li Cunningham¹, Clive Holtham¹

1 Bayes Business School, City, University of London (UNITED KINGDOM)

Abstract

In relation to induction there have been valuable innovations in the wider university, also nationally and internationally, but there has been insufficient human resource both to research these and then adapt to a specific context. The current study is to enhance induction week for business management with special focuses on student engagement and inclusion. The study adapts existing viable solutions as well as proposes new answers geared to equity, accessibility and exclusivity. One of the main aims of the study is to draw directly on the interest and experiences of students, explicitly as co-creators for induction, redesigning structure and activities. Consultations with student representatives and the Student Union are also conducted. By involving students in the process (Bovill et al [1]), opportunities and challenges arise from the co-design approach, and these are addressed here..

Keywords: Induction, engagement, community, curriculum, co-design, student experience, equity.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

First year induction for Business Management in a large urban business school was reformed in 2020 and 2021 as a Summer School and Welcome Week, both on-campus and online, building on the concept of “relentless welcome” (Felten and Lambert,[2]). The recently updated strategy of the business school emphasized curriculum review to enhance both student engagement and inclusion, and to underpin three new principles “we care, we learn, we act”. This paper reports on the co-design process in 2022. An enhanced approach to undergraduate academic induction began in 2020, and was consolidated in 2021, but required significant upgrading in 2022 that could only be achieved through additional resources to plan and implement the change. Resources were found from a special project fund, which has involved partnership with students, who lead, research and propose the co-design. It injects student-led activity as a central driver for the improvements to:

- (a) augment the existing faculty-based design, student-led designed activities, with special focuses on a sense of community and belonging,
- (b) help students develop a better understanding of academic importance in the University,
- (c) bridge gaps relating to learning skills between high school and university,
- (d) provide support for a smooth transition to a new, challenging learning environment, and
- (e) enhance opportunities for students to socialize among peer groups and with academics, and therefore to create a sense of community and engagement at the University.

The evolution of induction for the Business Management undergraduate programme is summarised in Table 1. Up to and including 2019, student induction was a patchwork of separate central and school level activities, dominated by practical and administrative information, constrained by physical spaces, with only modest programme inputs.

Table 1: Evolution of induction for Business Management undergraduate degrees

Academic Year	Context	Change Type	School context	Explicit Induction Human resources
2019/20	Conventional	Incremental	Stability	Ad hoc
2020/21	Pandemic 1	Radical	Name change disruption at the same time as COVID	Significant (volunteer)
2021/22	Pandemic 2	Incremental	New school name & values announced	Incremental (volunteer)
2022/23	"Post-Pandemic"	Focussed radical	Embedding new values	Funds for student co-design

The pandemic, and the move to fully online in March 2020, meant that induction for Autumn 2020 had to be rethought centrally. It also provided the opportunity for programme led innovation, in particular for the Business Management undergraduate degrees to introduce more emphasis on relationships and on academic orientation. The pedagogic philosophy was based on Felten and Lambert [2], namely "relentless welcoming". As the business school was shifting its position on inclusivity, there were tentative first steps to introduce that perspective explicitly. And there was an over-riding wish to shift the emphasis of Welcome Week away from information provision towards preparing students for higher education pedagogy that might differ considerably from their high school pedagogy, in effect needing to unlearn some of what had served them well in their teens. Though the ambition was to move towards what Kift [3] calls a "third generation transition pedagogy" with three holistic components, in practice only her first component was achievable, namely:

"an intentional curriculum focus to engage commencing students holistically in their learning, to mediate just-in-time, just-for-me support, and to inculcate a critical sense of academic and social belonging."

This was done by creating a programme-specific four-week online summer school and a one week online Welcome Week, mediated through Microsoft Teams as the main technology platform. The summer school was in the form of a MOOC, with two webinars at the start and finish of each week. The Welcome Week was an intensive active learning module, with a daily group task activity to be worked on in groups being published at 0800 each morning, an introduction webinar at 1000, then the group work leading up to group presentations at 1500 each day.

For 2021/22, pandemic rules again meant the induction was fully online. The Summer School was shortened in length, and the Welcome Week continued almost unchanged, but with a new Inclusivity Workshop being introduced for all Business School students in line with a new school name and objectives. There were plans to enhance the induction, particularly by adding new technology platforms for which permission has been granted in 2019 but too late actually to use. But resources to design and implement were not sufficient. For 2022/23, it was realised that unless some form of increased human resource could be directed to the re-design of the induction, it could only proceed basically as in a very similar form to 2020 and 2021. An application for funding a project to use students as co-designers was successful, and this paper reports on this project's approach to the 2022/23 design process.

1.2 Sense of community/belonging

The pedagogic principle already used is "relentless welcoming", but this project needs to start from student-centric design, to augment the existing faculty-based design. Sense of community arises because students can mingle online and physically with their peers and faculty before the course itself starts, to compare experiences, to learn from one another, and to get accustomed to the idea of being Bayes students. Feedback in 2020/21 was that students who did not attend summer school, still

valued there being a group within the cohort who were already established to some extent through the school.

1.3 Equitable, accessible, and inclusive

The revised goals and values of the Business School heavily emphasize engagement and inclusivity in all regards. In relation to induction there have been valuable innovations in other schools, also nationally and internationally, but there has been insufficient resource to research these (and others) and adapt to a school-specific context. So, the aim is draw on and adapt existing viable solutions as well as propose new solutions geared to equity, accessibility and inclusivity.

These activities directly address inequalities in student outcomes. They offer an opportunity for students to catch up where they may feel unprepared for higher education at the start of the course. For example, something which would have done differently had more design resources been available, would have been to integrate the other non-programme Summer School activities and particularly the refresher mathematics more effectively.

The project consciously provides opportunities for students to develop generic skills and is created in partnership with them. During the planning of induction in 2021, it became clear that there is a great opportunity to draw on student input, but that it is unreasonable to expect this to be entirely voluntary especially during the summer period. Hence the proposal to fund students to lead, research and propose the co-design.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Framing

This paper outlines a case study of the evolution of undergraduate induction in a business school for the academic years 2019/20 through to 2022/23, with a particular focus on the process of setting up the 2022 activities through a co-design approach with students as partners. It is based on the methodology of a case study developed through participatory action research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison [4, p. 441])

The transition from high school to higher education has a pattern common in many institutions. There are three broad phases: pre-arrival, welcome week and term 1. It is worth noting that Morgan [5] is critical of the concept of an overloaded welcome week, and argues instead that “introduction to study at university” should be carried out throughout at least the whole first year:

“There is a skill to learning how to study at higher education level. Students learn at different speeds and it is not something that occurs over a two week period when students start university.”

While it argues that all three levels of the university are involved in the process, namely, institutional, school and programme, the main emphasis of the current study is on the programme level (see Table 2).

Table 2: Scope of paper by organisational level

	Institutional	School	Programme
Pre-arrival		✓	✓✓
Welcome Week			✓✓
Term 1			

Table 3 shows the programme focus is on welcome week and to some extent pre-arrival, with more concern for relationships and academic orientation than information provision.

Table 3: Scope of paper by transition purpose

	Practical & administrative information	Relationships & socialisation	Academic orientation
Pre-arrival	✓	✓	✓✓
Welcome Week	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Term 1			

The main communication channels involved in business school programme induction are shown in Table 4, and are almost entirely digital, with relatively little relating to face-to-face even in 2021 and 2022

Table 4: Scope of paper by communication channel

	Email	Admin IT Systems	Online Asynchronous	Face-to-face Synchronous	Webinar Synchronous	Online Community
Pre-arrival	✓✓		✓✓		✓✓	✓✓
Welcome Week	✓✓		✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Term 1						

The absence of coverage of Term 1 is not because there is no induction or orientation during that term, but rather that the scope of this project is limited to pre-arrival and welcome week phases at the programme level. Similarly, administrative IT systems, such as registration, are crucial to the student induction experience, and shape the context of this project, but are not directly part of its scope. This paper does not go into depth on communications technologies, but they are a source of potential opportunities for enhancing pedagogic innovation, as well as potential for reducing the quality of the student experience, for example where they are difficult to access or use.

2.2 Frameworks for students as co-designers

Felten et al [6] posited three common contemporary roles for students: as actors (“data sources to inform academic development activities”); as consumers of academic development outputs, and as actors with “legitimate expertise that is necessary for academic development work”. One of their four re-imaginings of student participation, related to students as co-designers of courses and curricula, very much the focus of this paper. One impressive alternative examined but not adopted was that of Cook-Sather [7], who outlines how at Bryn Mawr students act as paid consultants, and arguably as coaches drawing on their own lived experiences, to faculty members.

Bovill et al [1] propose four roles for “students as partners”: representatives, co-researchers, pedagogical co-designers, and consultants. In this project the dominant role was expected to be “pedagogical co-designer”, with some elements of “consultant” and “co-researcher”

2.3 Frameworks for Induction

The UK has a higher education system that increasingly emphasises competition between institutions, rankings, and central-government priorities on, for example, retention rates. Orthogonal to this for some two decades has been growing UK institutional and scholarly pressures to increase the

emphasis on teaching excellence and professional standards, symbolised by the UK's Teaching Standards Framework (Advance HE [8]), and its recognition through a fellowship system (Advance HE [9]) of university faculty achieving different levels of those standards, which now also is accessible to groups within Australasian HE. Significantly funded UK research and development into the student experience has led to a wide range of publications on the first year undergraduate experience, and specifically induction. This has been paralleled in many other countries.

In the context of student success and Thomas and May [10, p. 64] argued:

"If induction is viewed not so much as a time for giving students information, but rather focuses on developing their capacity to engage and belong this could be a useful way to review current induction provision, perhaps focusing on the capacity to develop: supportive peer relations; meaningful interaction with staff; knowledge/skills, confidence and identity as a successful HE learner; and an HE experience that is relevant to interests and future goals."

Thomas et al [11, p. 29] includes a case study of revamped BSc Business Management at the University of South Wales, which had three initiatives – a weekly pre-entry webinar; a reinvention of first-year induction to focus on induction as an experience of belonging, over induction as the provision of information; and an online student profiler for business students being redesigned. It is interesting that our own case in 2020 also introduced initiatives very close to USW's first two.

2.4 Implementing co-design

A Student Engagement Coordinator, recruited from PhD students, provided both leadership and supervision to a team of three Student Engagement Advisers, recruited from undergraduates with prior involvement in student representation or activism. The academic team had already been reviewing sector best practice, most of which has a strong focus on engagement and inclusivity.

Stage 1 involves reviewing relevant induction initiatives, firstly in schools outside the business school, then secondly examining innovations nationally and internationally. Consultations with student representatives and the Student Union are also of crucial importance. After consulting with the advisory group, Stage 2 involves designing activities which can be directly implemented in September 2022.

3 RESULTS

At the time of writing, the project is still in progress, so final results are not yet available. But there are already useful lessons learned.

3.1 Co-Design

Looking at the experiences of student co-design elsewhere, a number of potentially problematic areas can be identified, and the following approach has been developed for briefing the student team in the case study. It revolves around a series of "Frequently Asked Questions".

3.1.1 What does partnership mean?

Cook-Sather and Felten [12] found that a sense of belonging arose from the interaction of three dynamic processes, which we would ourselves also emphasise:

"One process is partners' engagement in meaningful work together. That collaboration both requires and generates the second process: the creation of spaces and opportunities for exploration and growth. The third process, which informs and is informed by both the others, is regular and ongoing affirmation of all partners. Partners engage in these three processes cyclically and iteratively, and the weave they create through their movement among them generates a sense of belonging for both partners."

3.1.2 Why use co-design?

There are two primary reasons. Firstly, there is increasing interest in universities playing a more central role in the endorsement and promotion of democratic principles within its own internal operations. These are characterised by Matthews et al [13]) as democratic citizenship : "...the practices and habits of democratic citizenship – trust, courage, reciprocity, honesty, and more." . Existing and valuable methods of student participation, such as formal representation by student

representatives on university committees have been augmented in a wide variety of ways, including co-design. Secondly, while conventional academic modules have syllabuses rooted in disciplinary structures, the first year experience and particularly the induction process do not primarily derive from academic content. And many academics, who may have little more than their own student experience to draw upon, can recognise that recent student experiences of being inducted have particular value in redesigning existing induction approaches. For this reason, the engagement can be regarded as the “student as expert” approach to co-design.

3.1.3 Who does the co-design involve?

For simplification, we summarise the two groups as “academic sponsors” and “student engagement team”, trying to avoid a managerialist hierarchy.

3.1.4 Why should students be paid?

While conventional student representation is normally unpaid, this project involves both a substantial commitment of time during vacation, and plus one of the central roles in this project is consultancy which would typically be paid. Several of the most successful student co-design initiatives have involved students being paid, including Birmingham City University (Freeman [14], Warwick University (Woods & Homer [15]), McMaster University (Healey et al [16]) and an Ontario teaching and learning institute (Marquis [17]).

3.1.5 Will emphasis on engagement with students reduce capacity for engagement with wider School faculty and professional staff?

In previous years the design and implementation programme-based induction activity fell heavily on just two faculty members. It was vital for the enhanced induction for 2022 considerably extend this engagement, not least as buy-in from staff would be important for securing their input, not least to the “relentless welcoming” approach.

3.1.6 Are students expected to contact or survey peers, or instead rely on their own opinions and views?

It was clarified that student co-designers were not expected to represent the whole student body, but neither should they take a purely personal perspective, needing to bear in mind what their wider peer group, or clusters within the peer group, might want or expect, shaped by their knowledge about peers acquired by regular contacts over the year.

3.1.7 How can mismatch of aspirations be avoided?

This question has turned out to be very significant, and is addressed in some length. As in any project, clarity and realism of project objectives within resources and timescales is essential. Secondly, of crucial importance is that the academic team are fully transparent about their own priorities and about constraints on them as academics, and which they may explicitly or implicitly impose on the student team. Thirdly, there needs to be an explicit process to enable ongoing dialogue, in particular to enable students to challenge, for example, such priorities and constraints. Given that consultancy work can imply a client-contractor relationship, and also that the academic-student relationship typically involves a power imbalance, creating a climate where frank dialogue is achievable cannot automatically be assumed. Table 6 shows the actual framework used in this project.

TABLE 6: Framework for academic team exposing priorities and constraints, as basis of dialogue

	Degree Of co-design	Type of proposal	Academic/pedagogic process	Information Content	Communication & Presentation "Style"
1	Minimal	Existing plans, mostly from 2020/21, which can now be implemented in 2022	From academic sponsors	Mostly available, but needing re-working	Academic sponsors articulate
2	Authentic	New items implementable in 2022	From academic sponsors (cases from other schools and externally) Items from student team	To develop from new	Academic sponsors suggest Student team proposes
3	Radical	New approaches for 2023 and beyond	Items from student team	To develop from new	Student team proposes

If students were performing a conventional student placement, this would typically be given instructions by the faculty member, which they then carry out. For example, a website carrying programme information needs to be updated. As the project evolved, it became clear that a proportion of the project work would broadly fall into this category. This was above all to implement improvements that had been decided on in 2021, but could not be implemented then due to lack of human resources. However, work carried out to the lecturer's instructions is close to a client-contractor relationship, and harder to see as co-design. At best, this represents only a minimal level of co-design.

In what might be regarded as more authentic co-design, the academics might propose the objective, and key constraints. In some cases, tasks that might have been done by the academic themselves (e.g. interviewing project leaders in other universities) were entrusted to students. But it would then be left up to the students as to how that objective is achieved, as long as it can be implemented within the named constraints (for example time and resources).

At the most advanced end of the co-design spectrum, it was envisaged that students might propose changes that were impossible to implement in the short-term i.e. in 2022. This could be, for example, because they would require changes in school or university regulations or processes.

It was vital to the spirit of co-design that such changes were encouraged and articulated, despite them falling outside the 2022 induction timescale. These could be described as radical co-design.

There were several main points which arose from this spectrum of co-design (minimal-authentic-radical). Firstly, it is important for any given academic objective to be clearly identified in relation to the spectrum, so student participants are clear up-front how many degrees of freedom they have on each of the key tasks. Secondly, in a project based around co-design, at least a majority of the project work should be authentic or radical co-design. It also became clear that regular plus urgent contact would be needed, not simply for conventional project management purposes, but also to surface actual or potential tensions arising from ambiguities over the actual level of authentic co-design achieved. Finally, in the final column of Table 6 we suggest that the academics involved explicitly clarify key words in relation to presentation and communication style. For the minimal option, a term such as "articulate" or more strongly "require" could be used to communicate requirements. When it comes to the authentic option, academics should use a more passive term such as "suggest". By contrast, students should be encouraged, in stronger terms, to "propose". This term is also suitable for student ideas under the radical option.

4 CONCLUSIONS

When the student co-design project was conceived, the proposal was based on a general understanding of the implications of co-design. There was awareness of the considerable volume of research and development into induction innovation over at least two decades. But it was only after the project secured funding, and its activities actually began, that the practical implications began to emerge. Firstly, there was the need to ensure that there was value from the funding in terms of ensuring sufficient practical improvements to the 2022 induction process. Secondly, there was the inevitable balancing needed between faculty priorities and aspirations, and those of the student team. An authentic co-design relationship requires additional processes which have not been needed when there is more hierarchical decision-making under the leadership of academics. Thirdly, there was the need, as in any time and resource-limited project, to balance multiple objectives within finite resources and under time pressures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was funded through the University Connects funding scheme.

REFERENCES

- [1] C. Bovill, A. Cook-Sather, P. Felten, L. Millard, and N. Moore-Cherry, "Addressing potential challenges in co-creating learning and teaching: Overcoming resistance, navigating institutional norms and ensuring inclusivity in student-staff partnerships," *Higher Education*, vol. 71, no. 2, pp. 195–208, 2016.
- [2] P. Felten and L. M. Lambert, *Relationship-Rich Education: How Human Connections Drive Success in College*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020.
- [3] S. Kift, "A decade of transition pedagogy: A quantum leap in conceptualising the first year experience," *HERDSA Review of Higher Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 51–86, 2015.
- [4] L. Cohen, L. Manion, and K. Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 8th edition. London ; New York: Routledge, 2017.
- [5] M. G. Morgan, "Re-framing the First Year Undergraduate Student Experience," *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 5, no. 3, Art. no. 3, Oct. 2013, Accessed: May 02, 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/144>
- [6] P. Felten *et al.*, "Reimagining the place of students in academic development," *International Journal for Academic Development*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 192–203, 2019.
- [7] A. Cook-Sather, "Dialogue across differences of position, perspective, and identity: Reflective practice in/on a student-faculty pedagogical partnership program," *Teachers College Record*, vol. 117, no. 2, pp. 1–42, 2015.
- [8] Advance HE, *The UK Professional Standards Framework*. York: Advance HE, 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf>
- [9] Advance HE, "Fellowship of Advance HE." Advance HE, 2022. Accessed: May 07, 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/fellowship>
- [10] L. Thomas and H. May, *What works? Student retention & success programme*. York: Higher Education Academy (HEA), 2012. [Online]. Available: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/student-retention-and-success/what-works-student-retention-and-success-change-programme>
- [11] P. L. Thomas, M. Hill, J. O'Mahoney, and P. M. Yorke, *Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change. What works student retention and success final report*. York: Higher Education Academy, 2017. [Online]. Available: https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/hub/download/what_works_2_-_summary_report_1568037359.pdf
- [12] A. Cook-Sather and P. Felten, "Where student engagement meets faculty development: How student-faculty pedagogical partnership fosters a sense of belonging," *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 3–3, 2017.

- [13] K. E. Matthews *et al.*, "Enhancing outcomes and reducing inhibitors to the engagement of students and staff in learning and teaching partnerships: Implications for academic development," *International Journal for Academic Development*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 246–259, 2019.
- [14] R. Freeman, L. Millard, S. Brand, and P. Chapman, "Student academic partners: student employment for collaborative learning and teaching development," *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, vol. 51, no. 3, pp. 233–243, May 2014, doi: 10.1080/14703297.2013.778064.
- [15] K. Woods and D. Homer, "The staff–student co-design of an online resource for pre-arrival arts and humanities students," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, vol. 21, no. 2, Art. no. 2, Apr. 2022.
- [16] M. Healey, A. Flint, and K. Harrington, "Students as partners: Reflections on a conceptual model," *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 8–20, 2016.
- [17] E. Marquis *et al.*, "Navigating the threshold of student–staff partnerships: A case study from an Ontario teaching and learning institute," *International Journal for Academic Development*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 4–15, 2016.