

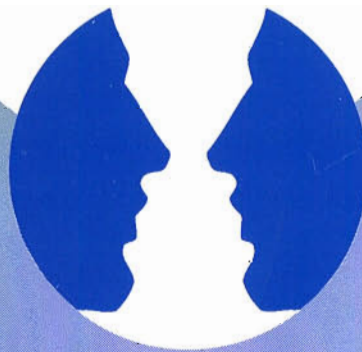
AMOSSHE

No 2 WINTER 1995

CONNECT

THE JOURNAL OF

*The Association of
Managers of
Student Services in
Higher Education*



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Editorial

We hope this does make useful connections for you. For this is the purpose of CONNECT: to provide a forum for exchange on good and innovative practice new ideas, tried and tested approaches – all relevant to meeting the changing and continuing needs of students in higher education. CONNECT is produced with the perspective particularly in mind of those with an interest in the overall field of student services and student affairs: leaders of institutions, student services managers, as well as those offering a specific service.

The topical relevance of the subjects addressed in the articles in this, the second issue of CONNECT, is explicit in most of their titles indicated in the table of Contents. However, readers who have not yet met InSpire – fourth article – may wish to know this is a computer-based student-support information system.

CONNECT's Editorial Group invites readers' comments on this journal as well as offers of articles to be considered for a future issue. A reply sheet is enclosed with this issue if you wish to use it. Or I can be contacted by fax: (0191) 227 4553 and by E-mail: john.rolfe@unn.ac.uk.

For this issue, our contributors, to whom many and warm thanks, are:

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Student Induction: Why it's more than a good thing and what we should be doing

This article is based on a workshop presented in May 1994 by Rupert Bristow, South Bank University and Gill Troup, Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU). The workshop was entitled "Delivering Quality in Student Induction" and was offered to interested staff and students from Scottish Universities through the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals (COSHEP) Staff Development and Training Sub-group. The workshop was subsequently run as an optional session at the AMOSSHE Annual Conference in July 1994.

The paper concentrates on two aspects of the student induction process :

- i) theoretical and policy perspectives on why good student induction is necessary;*
- ii) the aims of student induction, possible models and the essential elements of a successful induction programme.*

Introduction

For the purposes of this article, student induction is defined as any systematic process within a higher education institution designed with the specific purpose of enabling new students to adjust socially, personally and academically to their new learning environment.

The first year of study is the principal focus of student induction, linked as it is with the fact that the majority of students who withdraw from courses do so in their first year (65% at Glasgow Caledonian University, for instance). The process and content of student induction varies considerably amongst institutions. Key variables in the process include :

- availability of resources
- involvement of Students' Association
- age and traditions of institution
- structure of academic year
- student demography

The first section of this article suggests several theoretical and policy perspectives on student induction. These will, hopefully, be of interest and use to colleagues in the design of their own induction programmes and perhaps could form the basis for education and awareness-raising within our institutions about the importance of the induction process for new students.

The US Experience

Colleagues may be aware of the considerable amount of activity which takes place in the United States under the heading of "The Freshman Year Experience" (FYE). Briefly, this stems from an initiative by the University of South California which, in the early 1970's, designed, tested and marketed a Freshman programme entitled "University 101".

This is a modular programme which provides skills-based introductory learning for students as part of the main first year course. It may be credit-bearing and taken by all students on a particular course or in a particular University. The US experience has indicated that these programmes are a worthwhile component of first year course design. So much so that, currently, over 65% of all US Colleges and Universities now offer a First Year Programme.

Since 1983, regional, national and international conferences have been held on the Freshman Year Experience and a considerable amount of research and publication has resulted on the experience of first year students. There is a National Resource Centre for the FYE, based in the University of South California, and the research findings cited below are published in their *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience* (Vol. 5, No.1, 1993).

A considerable amount of US research literature now exists which attests the effectiveness of first year programmes on retention and academic standing of new students. An example is a study by the University of Maryland in 1993 which conducted a random controlled trial to compare the retention and academic performance of 77 1st Year full-time students who undertook an orientation course with 80 students who did not.

Significant differences were found in improved rates of retention and academic performance among first years who participated in the orientation course compared with those who did not. (Note that the study controlled for the effects of personal preference by ensuring that the students who did not take part in the orientation course had indicated that they would like to.)

Of particular interest is the finding in the study that the effect of the orientation course was similar between black and majority students.

The conclusion is as follows :

"Institutions that are serious about the retention of their students should strongly consider endorsing, if not actually mandating, an orientation course for their incoming students in order to help them in their transition from secondary to post-secondary education. Further, institutions which have been successful in attracting minority students and have subsequently found themselves wrestling with the dilemma of how to retain those students should be encouraged by the findings of this study."

The University of Missouri conducts a programme for its first year medical students which has 4 key components :

- academic performance
- career development
- interpersonal relations
- self-development.

Along with the programme, a variety of interventions have been designed including : academic advising; learning skills assessment; peer and individual tutoring; career counselling; and counselling for personal and other problems. This programme has existed since 1988, and a considerable amount of evaluation has taken

place. The retention rate is extremely high (97%) and the belief of the authors is that the first year programme also has a significant impact on the students' ability to develop the appropriate non-technical skills necessary for doctors. Older student mentors are a key component in this process.

It is of interest to note a developmental observation which is made :

"The formation of a new network of social relationships is crucial to the successful autonomy from parents, a task of late adolescence."

It is arguable, then, in the context of student induction that, even the activities which might be regarded as less self-evidently "worthy" such as the entertainments programmes of the Students' Unions, actually fulfil an essential function in relation to student transition to University. If that process of "successful autonomy" from parents is not completed then a student may be more likely to "run home", literally and figuratively, away from University.

Student Needs

There is a simple argument about the essential nature of the induction or orientation process which is based on theoretical views of human need such as those of Maslow and Alderfer.

In Alderfer's terms, it is self-evident that, until students have met their basic *existence* needs such as food and shelter, they will not be much focused on *relationships*. Individuals will seek to meet relationship needs before they will concentrate on *growth* needs such as acquiring a degree.

If we assume that students have to complete the first two stages successfully in order to reach the third stage, which is where the University wants them to be for successful learning, then the induction or orientation process may be regarded as a means of accelerating that process. It will facilitate better learning, sooner. Enabling students to acquire the knowledge, skills and social contacts to establish themselves as students will make them more successful in their first year of study.

Stress studies

A related issue, which gives credence to arguments in support of orientation programmes, is that of stress and its impact on new students. Stress only becomes a problem when the individual and their performance begins to suffer as a result. The detrimental impact of distress on performance has long been recognised (for example, it is estimated that approximately 40 million work days per year are lost in the UK from illnesses which are related to stress - HMSO, 1992.)

The normal assumption about stress and its causes is that any type of change is stressful and that such stress is cumulative. Holmes and Rahe produced the "Life Events Inventory" (1971) which attempted to attribute a weighting value for each of a series of likely stress factors. Holmes and Rahe suggest that if an individual is experiencing stress factors with a greater value than 300 points, they have an 80% greater likelihood of illness. With points totalling between 200-299, they have a 50% greater likelihood of illness.

Applying these factors* to normal situations faced by new students, the following totals emerge :

- new students living at home
225 points
- new students moving away from home
335 points
- international students leaving spouse
400 points

* Typical factors on the list include · marital separation 65; sex difficulties 39; change in financial state 38; beginning college 26; change in living conditions 25; change in personal habits 24; change in residence 20; change in recreation 19 etc.

There is a clear argument, then, that any activity which contributes to a reduction in the levels of stress experienced by new students will have a beneficial affect on academic performance. There is no doubt that orientation programmes which seek to minimise the impact of the change

faced by new students can assist in this process and, once again, accelerate the adjustment.

A particular type of stress is that which is encountered by many international students - culture shock. Stress is one of several manifestations of culture shock which also include :

- strain through attempting to adapt
- sense of loss leading to disaffection or alienation
- role confusion
- feeling of impotence to deal with new situation

The classic human reaction to stress is the fight or flight impulse. For the many students who find the stress and anxiety of transition to University too much to cope with the reaction is flight and they leave the college very shortly after they arrive. (Figures from GCU indicate that 85% of student withdrawals are by the end of November.)

However, perhaps more important, is the secondary effect of this period of stress on students who remain. Coping with stress is a highly energy-consuming activity and, for many, the natural reaction to a period of prolonged or intense stress is exhaustion.

Applying this to first year students, particularly those studying on more intensive "crammed" semester-based courses, this exhaustion may well manifest itself in impaired/ academic performance in the first year.

Assisting students with the stress of transition to University is, therefore, an essential activity of the institution to minimise student withdrawal and maximise academic achievement in the first year.

Policies and customer service

What other institutional imperatives are there, then, which would lead us to consider induction programmes as an essential aspect of student experience?

The two which most readily spring to mind in the current higher education climate are the great quality debate and the oft-discussed student charter movement.

The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) *Guidelines on Quality Assurance* (1994) do make specific reference to induction :

“Institutions will wish to offer a range of student support services appropriate to the needs of students and to establish quality assurance and control systems to ensure the suitability and effectiveness of these services.” These will include “initial familiarisation” and “induction”.

Mention is also made in both the Students’ Charter proposed by the National Union of Students and, in a somewhat less direct manner, in the Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland :

NUS suggests “an induction module offered to all new students” while the Scottish Office tells students that “When you start the course, your institution should familiarise you with the services for students...which are available...your institution will make it clear what it expects from you as a student and what your responsibilities are - to yourself for your own learning, to your fellow students and to the institution and its

staff”.

It is hard to imagine that this can be achieved consistently and in a measurable form across institutions without some kind of systematic induction programme.

Total Quality Management approaches to service delivery may well provide us with models for University’s approaches to student induction. Key features of TQM methods include the following:

- they are comprehensive
- there is a process of continuous improvement
- there is no external standard
- there is an emphasis on staff/student involvement
- the client is central

Any institution, therefore, which claims to be serious in relation to the quality of its student support and its responsiveness to consumerism and charter principles, should be considering student induction in an integrated and systematic way.

International Student Induction : Separation Versus Integration

Alison Barty

Rationale

This paper will examine the purpose of induction programmes for international students. It will outline some of the specific needs of international students at a large inner city University over a number of years. It will also consider where the needs of international students and UK students co-incide and where they differ. The course at South Bank University has developed over the past four years, using feedback from participating students and coordinating closely with the main University induction process. I am particularly interested in the degree of separation or integration necessary to make the induction effective.

Aspects of Induction

Any induction performs a number of functions, some for the institution and some for the student. Three key functions are:

- (i) Bureaucratic;
- (ii) Social; and
- (iii) Academic.

The bureaucratic function may include enrolment and registration, fee classification, issuing of ID/library/students’ union cards, grant distribution, fee payment or other financial arrangements and mainly benefits the institution.

The social function includes various activities

designed to bring students into contact with each other, to begin to form links, to become familiar with the university environment and social activities. This function mainly benefits the student.

The academic function includes introducing the course programme, receiving any course documents, meeting with course and personal tutors so students are familiar with what is expected of them academically. This function is of mutual benefit to both the institution and the student.

International Students : Separation versus Integration?

The functions that have been described previously are necessary for all students. For international students the needs are intensified. There can be a high degree of anxiety and expectation which can be eased if the processes outlined above are carried out smoothly and sensitively, with recognition of the consequences of uprooting.

Separation

When considering similarities and differences between international students' needs and those of other students there are other relevant factors. For example, an international student enrolling at a metropolitan University may have fewer adjustment difficulties than a UK student if the international student is a city dweller, has travelled extensively and is a fluent English speaker compared to a UK student who has a rural background and limited experience of other environments.

However, for most international students, the degree of uprooting from a familiar environment will be extreme. There will be real differences in their access to traditional sources of support such as family. In many cases they will be using a language in which they may not be fluent, thus they are at a disadvantage when communicating. This disadvantage is perhaps accentuated by a lack of cultural familiarity. There is, therefore, a need for a process which creates a sense of belonging and connection.

At one stage the international student induction

at South Bank University was separate from the main student induction. It also focused primarily on the social and practical aspects of the process. However when an evaluation was introduced it became immediately apparent that there was insufficient integration with the academic process; we had underestimated the importance of the academic function of induction and students felt confused when the induction event was not linked into the larger induction process. By separating the event instead of linking it explicitly to the main induction, students appeared to be facing a void when the course ended.

Integration

We identified a need to make a stronger link between the international student induction and the general University induction for all new students so the former became an integral part of the whole. At the same time we recognised that we needed to maintain sufficient separation to respond to the specific and diverse needs of this student population. Individual faculties have taken over part of the course so students are able to identify with key administrative and academic staff.

The programme that students are given provides a continuum from their arrival and welcome through their specific induction course to the arrival of other new students and the general induction. The sequence of the international students' programme itself also moves them gradually towards integration. The early part of the programme provides a welcome, enables them to build contacts within the group and delivers vital practical and institutional information. The programme then introduces faculty and academic staff, offering a bridge to the later University-wide events and procedures. Ideally we are aiming for a seamless transition! At present it is a priority as part of that transition to increase involvement from continuing students, both UK and international, as international students consistently report that they have difficulty in making friends with UK students.

Conclusion

The purpose of the international student induc-

tion is to meet the particular needs of international students, which include bureaucratic, social and academic needs. Some of these have to be addressed separately. The induction also serves to assist them in feeling and becoming an integral part of the University community. Studies of international students identify the phenomenon of "triangular students" whose life consists of moving between their eating/sleeping area, the lecture theatre and the library (this

is the extreme of separation). Our aim is to provide a programme and a process which makes this less likely. To succeed in this aim, the induction course itself whether for international or UK students, needs to be seen as part of an integrated support system which kicks in when a student accepts the University's offer of a place and ends when the student moves away from the University to the next phase in their life.

The First Port of Call : a new approach to pastoral care

Anne Webb

The process of taking student support from the periphery of the campus to the faculties is one that we have pursued at Nottingham Trent University for some time; the advantages of being closer to students and staff are self-evident. However, the major impetus for changing the way in which student services have traditionally operated here came from a number of coinciding directions: the steady increase in student numbers, the introduction of a modularised timetable and the diminishing unit of resource in faculties. Our services clearly needed a radical re-think. As a consequence of this reappraisal we took a proposal to the university's Executive Board in the Spring of 1993. It promoted a new initiative in student care.

The paper pointed out the obvious:

(i) Traditional personal tutoring arrangements were at breaking point in many departments. The increased SSRs in faculties had resulted in unprecedented pressure upon teaching staff and correspondingly less time given to individual student needs. This was proving stressful for staff and frustrating for students who could not easily gain access to tutor support.

(ii) Pressures on students were greater than ever before. Financial difficulties loomed large

for most students and these impacted on coursework, career prospects and personal relationships. Moreover, as participation in higher education broadens, the range of student problems is increasing in breadth and complexity as well as in quantity.

(iii) Modularisation and cross-faculty timetables have added to pressures on staff and students. Students studying across faculties reported greater difficulty in finding assistance, often unable to identify members of staff from whom help could be sought. Tutors also found it difficult to give advice that related to another faculty.

(iv) Support Services were overstretched as lecturers referred enquiries to the centre. Service heads frequently requested additional staff to meet the increasing demands. Traditional staff-intensive methods of meeting student needs clearly had to be reviewed.

It went on to envisage two distinctive new roles:

(a) **The Academic Adviser** who would be responsible for providing academic guidance on option choices, electives, pathways, interfaculty opportunities and general academic concerns. These people would be appointed by faculties and housed there.

(b) **The Pastoral Adviser** who would act as the first point of contact for students with enquiries or problems that related to university life in its broadest sense. These advisers would refer to faculty staff or support service specialists as appropriate. This somewhat old-fashioned title was deliberately chosen to distinguish the role from that of counsellors within the Counselling service and Student Advisers in the Union of Students Advice Centre. It also reflected some of the 'old-fashioned' caring for students that the personal tutoring systems were originally set up to undertake.

Various models of operation were considered, ranging from faculty-wide to departmental possibilities. It was concluded that pastoral advice would centre on a number of University Advisory Offices which would be situated in certain buildings; strategic locations which would prove a focal point for the widest constituency of students.

The University Advisory Offices

The offices aimed to:

- (i) Assist personal tutors in their increasingly complex role surrounding pastoral care.
- (ii) Improve accessibility to support services for students who require pastoral advice and care.
- (iii) Cater more effectively for the increasing numbers of students on combined studies programmes and cross-faculty modules.

It was also intended that:

- (a) The office should act as a resource for staff as well as students.
- (b) Offices should be open at least from 10am - 4pm so that an adviser would be available at clearly defined times to handle the broad range of general enquiries.
- (c) Specialist advisers would attend at designated times which are advertised to students.
- (d) The office would provide a focus for groupwork in response to student need. In the case of study skills, for example, it was hoped that this would help ease the pressure on tutors.
- (e) When an adviser was not present, the

office would be open for information on a self-help basis.

Initially three locations were identified in order to maximise coverage across the two campuses. A fourth office was opened mid-way through the project, enabling two of the university's most isolated buildings to be included in the scheme. In fact, securing accommodation proved to be the most difficult task in establishing the pilot, and we were unable to find the ideal space necessary for a room for confidential interviews alongside a self-help facility. However, temporary space was eventually found and the scheme was set to run from January to December 1994.

Staffing

The Department of Academic Support Services (AcSS), which includes what is traditionally known as student services, has overseen the activities and staffing of the offices, working closely with the faculties and other support agencies within the University. Initially AcSS took the main responsibility for organising the timetable and ensuring adequate cover.

The extent of faculty participation and the nature of faculty links varied considerably according to arrangements for student support already in place. The model we decided to adopt was initiated in the Business School. Here, a *faculty administrator* assisted with staffing the office on a half day per week basis. She dealt with enquiries and concerns that related to faculty matters and academic progress, and acted as an adviser to other office staff. The faculty also provided a *link tutor* - a pastoral tutor with counselling training who offered support to students with personal difficulties and acted as a 'half-way house' between teaching staff and the advisory offices. A two-way referral system was established which worked most effectively. Some faculties nominated year leaders or course tutors as their link people and one faculty appointed a half-time adviser as its contribution to the scheme.

During the pilot stage the offices were staffed by a mix of generic advisers, specialist personnel

who were available to give advice for specified periods each week, and representatives from faculties. The 'specialists' covered careers advice, money advice, and support for overseas students, students with disabilities, mature students and those on the University Combined Studies programme. The university Chaplains were an integral part of the scheme, working closely with both students and staff. A legal advice desk was offered by a firm of local solicitors and this proved a great success. It is envisaged that in future departmental personal tutors will be available to handle enquiries from students during allocated 'surgery' hours.

The offices were managed by the Senior Academic Co-ordinator of AcSS who also assisted with the more complex problems that were to be addressed at a senior level. However, this project formed only part of the co-ordinator's role and it soon became clear that the appointment of a senior manager responsible for pastoral care would be necessary for the scheme to continue effectively.

The Role of the Pastoral Adviser

The role of the adviser has generated much discussion! Whilst it is generally agreed that advisers are there to help and support students, the precise nature of their role is open to debate. For our purposes, the adviser is clearly a listener, as well as someone who can guide, give information or refer as appropriate. However, this can be seen as treading on the toes of other services. In practice, the role has emerged as the offices have developed and further definition of the role is a priority now that the scheme is set to continue.

However, it is clear that the adviser is client-centred and aware of issues of confidentiality but able to refer on or liaise on the client's behalf if required. The adviser is not a 'counsellor' with a capital C, but is often close to issues that Counsellors would traditionally handle. In short, the adviser is a special person (not easily found) with a wide variety of skills and training needs.

Staff Development and Training

A scheme of such complexity and responsibility requires considerable training and a staff development programme has been devised to address the information and counselling needs of the advisers. Training initially focused on helping skills and information skills with the Counselling and Library services involved in this. Seminars and workshops were also held on topics and issues raised by the advisers. Feedback sessions with more experienced advisers offered support to those in the office. The Faculty staff involved clearly valued the opportunity to extend their knowledge of support services and AcSS staff benefitted considerably from contact with people working in the faculty offices.

The Nature of Enquiries

Enquiries have been monitored in all offices. Two thirds were straightforward, ranging from where to find a dentist to how to fill in a form. Others were far more complex. Money related problems were top of the list, followed by queries concerning careers or placements. Personal problems were a close third, with relationships being most common, and bereavement surprisingly high. Other matters covered course related issues, study skills and exams, changing courses, legal advice, chaplaincy issues and problems relating to ill-health or disabilities. Overseas students and mature students valued the opportunity to drop in to discuss difficulties on an informal basis. A major advantage of the approach was that the adviser could address a number of problems simultaneously. In one case of assault, for example, the student and adviser together were able to contact the police, a solicitor, the hospital, the hall warden and the course examination officer in a very short time. Students would often arrive at the door saying 'I don't know if I am in the right place but...'

Monitoring the nature of enquiries and general details of students seeking information has proved invaluable not only in directing the future of advisory offices but as a source of

feedback that can be used in the assessment of student services in general.

Conclusion of the Project and the Future

As the pilot stage progressed, several problems emerged. The pattern of usage varied week by week and according to the time of year. While it was essential for credibility's sake to keep the offices open at advertised times, some services were understandably reluctant to contribute to staffing when they were short staffed 'at home.' Keeping tabs on the information and ensuring that it was updated was a major task. All of these problems pointed to the need for dedicated staff who could organise, arrange and participate in staffing the offices themselves.

However, there is no doubt that the aims of the project have been met. Advisers *are* supporting personal tutors and students *are* valuing easy access to assistance. The scheme *has* brought faculties and support services closer together and student concerns are consequently addressed more effectively. Initial suspicions are being

overcome and referrals are made more often. The offices are also becoming the focus for groupwork. Study skills sessions, maths surgeries and stress workshops have been set up in response to staff and student demand. The offices have acted as a resource for staff as well as students and have proved useful for people employed by the University at all levels. The office is now perceived as central to AcSS' monitoring and feedback systems.

Now that the pilot scheme has ended, the offices have become embedded in the pastoral support offered to all students. A Senior Pastoral Adviser has been appointed to take full responsibility for their management, assisted by a development officer. Already changes have been made: publicity is stronger and better targeted, opening hours have been extended into the evening, self-help facilities are being enhanced, a telephone help-line is being installed. There are many possibilities and the venture has become most exciting. Indeed, we have only just begun.....

Inspire : The Past, The Present & The Future

John Taylor

Determined to Succeed

I believe that determination comes very high on the list of skills needed to progress and succeed today. As a student, I needed to draw on every ounce of my determination just to ensure that I was financially able to reach exam time each year and this more than anything else led to the embryonic idea that would become InSpire for Education.

From a working class background I assumed that nothing in life was free. At different times I worked as a driver/valet, barman, labourer, administrator, insurance agent and ran my carpet cleaning enterprise just to get by. Today's higher education student considers this normal rather than exceptional.

Inspire: How the Idea Started

When I started in second year BA Commerce

(after completing my HND), I discovered I would have to self finance a year. My fees were reduced but not waived so I needed a large sum of money rather quickly. At this point I first met Frances McColm of Napier Student Services. She explained that charitable trusts were a possible source of alternative funding. I was lent the collection of directories and offered help in tailoring applications, but the rest was up to me. Research took around a week and swung from being boring and difficult to mildly amusing at some of interesting things I discovered about charitable funding. I found half a dozen possibles. On contacting trustees from each, I discovered four of these were either inaccurate or out-of-date but I applied to the other two. Within two weeks I received confirmation that one would pay my tuition and exam fees and with my course now started I could concentrate on eking out a living whilst receiving no grant. During

this year I first met David Black who had enough faith in my idea to become involved and is now also a director of Knowledge Tree Systems (KTS).

InSpire began to form as an idea that year as many of my student friends asked me to help them raise money from trusts. Two of them were successful (one received £900 the other £100), and as I helped them I began to see some small pattern in the complexities of trust funding. I had to refuse help to some others as I just could not commit the time required. I remember thinking to myself that there has to be a better way of researching this funding area than a new manual search each time.

I began to wonder whether it was technically possible to develop a computer system that could carry out the time consuming work for the student. In a lecture during my degree I heard of a possible solution. Huge advances were being made in the areas of expert and knowledge based systems and in a few years many things would be possible!

My attendance was terrible that year but I passed all my exams and looked forward to having a grant again. Those were the good old days when students could also receive income support (out of term) and housing benefit (effectively my food money each month).

Third year seemed a breeze as I was not constantly worried about money. But then came problems when my industrial placement fell through at the last minute. I looked for another placement and visited student services to see if they could help. Frances briefed me on why I was entitled to income support and in case my claim was denied gave me a recent Benefits Tribunal finding where she had successfully represented a Napier student with almost identical circumstances. Armed with this I whistled my way along to the benefits office to claim. When an unhelpful woman benefits officer turned me down I was angry. I asked for a review but was denied and by now was furious. I was unhappy about her attitude and I picked up an appeal form and returned the next day to lodge it. I found a placement a few weeks later and

forgot about the appeal.

Developing the Idea

On my return to start my final year, I paid a visit to Frances to say hello and that it was my final year. She asked about my appeal and we laughed when we realised that by moving address I had probably missed my appeal hearing and therefore lost it. One phone call later we were very surprised to learn that I had won and was due to be paid my benefits (backdated). She commented that very few people won these appeals without representation never mind being absent themselves. This money was handy but the principle was important to me. It was obvious I would not have won without the help of student services and from this point on I added the provision of Benefits information to my idea.

I continued to think about my idea but I had many doubts. If it could be built why had it not been? Who could help me build it? If I could build it why would anyone buy a system that helped students gather financial information?

I graduated (just!) in the middle of a recession. By then the whole area of student finance had taken a battering; most DSS benefits had gone; educational expansion had been part funded by freezing grants and the folly of student loans had been introduced. There were few jobs. I decided to use skills learned in my degree and see if I could build the team of people necessary for development and raise the money. A friend of mine, Kevin Birnie, who recently died very tragically, helped me build a demo. I approached the banks and enterprise companies and like many ideas they could not see the concept and doubted the feasibility. I refused to give up and took a job as a gardener allowing me time to think and continued to plan. I conducted market research by means of 110 targeted questionnaires to student services departments nation-wide and on a response of around 50 it was clear that students needed such a system. I showed the demo to Frances at Napier and to four other Scottish establishments. They all, except one, sent me letters of intent - my enthusiasm was rekindled.

Business Plan

I was sure InSpire was needed and that people would buy it. Potential business partners came and went as things progressed too slowly. I prepared a business plan but the Princes Scottish Youth Business Trust (PSYBT) turned me down for funding. The potential partners lost heart and gave up but I would not.

David (my old student friend) and Frances (Napier) continued to show interest so David and I decided to give it a go. The government charters on education were published and the areas we agreed to try and include increased all the time. We continued to try and raise the funding and hatched a new plan to try and set up a joint venture with Napier through their business arm. We put a serious business plan together and I met Alan Cloughley who agreed to help us build InSpire. The team was now together and we formed KTS. Napier Ventures Ltd and John Fairhurst agreed to get involved on budget day 1993 when the three years of student grant cuts were announced and we started to build InSpire as you know it. We moved our offices into Napier University and were successful in raising money from the DTL, British Coal Enterprise and the Carnegie Trust which allowed us to expand the KTS side of the research team.

After a huge amount of hard work our first public demonstration was at your AMOSSHE conference last summer. Your comments and ideas were crucial in the development and Albert Preston's (Bath University) idea of a local module has, as I am sure many of you know, been implemented which allows you to input information on your departments services and on local information you deem necessary. Iain MacArthur's (University of East London) said "we have been waiting for three years for a system like InSpire to come along". This gave us another burst of energy in the days of final developments and amendments.

We were delighted last year to be runners-up in the national Business Software Challenge since it meant quite a lot to us personally and did our credibility no harm in the run up to launch.

Launch

We launched InSpire for Education in Edinburgh on 25 Nov. 1994. David and I have basically been on the road demonstrating InSpire version 1.0 since launch and have now installed the system in over forty universities and colleges. Alan has started developments into version 2.0 which we hope will be ready in the next year. Our staff and domain experts continue to keep a grip on the information. At this point I would like to thank Chris Thornton from Brighton, Chris Cooper from Nene and John Rolfe from Northumbria for having faith in us by buying InSpire in the very early post launch stage, to those who have committed to buy and to those who have taken the time to meet us again.

We have a long way to go and realise that InSpire can be improved. It will continue to develop for as long as you feel it is necessary and we have established a user group as a forum for feedback on InSpire which had its first meeting recently and has gave us some intriguing ideas for version 2.0.

Principals and Vice Chancellors across Britain now say 'student retention' with real conviction as they know it is about to affect their cash flows and that they and your departments/institutions must make ever increasing efforts to ensure that students complete each year (funding stage). Recent CVCP research showed a 188% increase in drop outs related to financial pressure. As an association you have known these things for some time but proving it to the powers that be has perhaps been another matter.

In my experience, many educational associations do not network effectively especially in the area of student service/guidance. One of my priority objectives now is to use InSpire and my network of contacts to create a better forum for discussion, lobbying and information provision between and across educational levels. I now consult with, and in some cases work closely with, funding agencies, voluntary agencies and other educational groupings.

Inspire and AMOSSHE

AMOSSHE is a powerful group of education-

alists. You may wish to take advantage of being the first association to become involved in the development of InSpire by:

- 1 buying InSpire and using it to benefit your students whilst complementing your services. This will make you eligible to join the user group and therefore be part of the official feedback process and become preferred test sites,
- 2 endorsing InSpire as being a recommended and innovative development providing funding information to your students, or
- 3 including on our national bulletin board a new icon (perhaps titled 'useful tips from AMOSSHE').

Non AMOSSHE sales of InSpire now outnumber you. Other associations are enthusiastic about the possibility of using InSpire as a na-

tional bulletin board.

Over the coming year we will be entering the UK F.E. market and are looking to recruit interested institutions or associations to help us market InSpire to them. Two traditional universities are entering discussions as they like to grasp every opportunity for income generation. We have not finalised details yet but it is intended to provide all agents with great opportunities to earn substantial revenues for themselves. Any AMOSSHE members interested?

We at KTS know that InSpire can and will be improved, and I would like to leave you with one thought: as developments on version 2.0 continue, is there anything you wish to recommend or become involved with?

Long may your association thrive and grow!

A Lot of Pain for Little Gain : The Australian Higher Education Contribution Scheme

John Fairhurst

With both major political parties committed to exacting a contribution to the cost of higher education from students, it seems inevitable that there will be a major review of the financial support provided by the government for students in higher education.

Attention has focused on the loss in value of means tested maintenance awards for students but course costs, which students receive regardless of ability to pay, represent a much greater cost. Course costs are currently funded partly by the fee element, attached to a student grant, and the grant in aid received from the funding councils, amounting to approximately £5000 per student.

The assumptions on which the amounts of maintenance awards and student loans are based, need to be challenged. The means testing of

maintenance awards and a parental contribution are dependent upon traditional family units, stable family finances and students who are still dependent on parents; a combination which is frequently no longer the case.

Whatever system emerges, it is to be hoped that AMOSSHE, with its experience of student hardship, will be consulted. It is therefore timely to consider the Australian model, the scheme most quoted as a likely model for the U.K.

The Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) was introduced, by a Labor government, as part of a package of changes in higher education in January 1989.

Principles of the Australian Scheme

Students are required to contribute to the cost of their higher education. The contribution was

\$2355 (approx. £1130) in 1994 for a full-time student undertaking a standard year of a course. The amount was established as 20% of the average cost of a course and is linked to the higher education operating grants index number, broadly the costs associated with the delivery of courses. HECS applies to all undergraduate and post-graduate courses included in the operating grants of the higher education institutions. Students undertaking less than the standard course pay pro-rata amounts.

Each Semester, a contributing student has the choice of two options for payment. Payment may be made in cash at the start of a semester, in which case a discount of 25% is granted, or deferred.

Deferred payments accumulate, at zero interest but rising in step with the Consumer Price Index. The accumulated debt is eventually reclaimed through the tax system. Liability for repayment is incurred when a student's income exceeds \$26402 (£12700 in 1994), payment being made at a rate of 3% of gross income, rising to 5% at \$42006 (£20200). The repayments rates were initially set from 1% to 3% of income so that payments have in effect increased by between 67% and 200% in the five years of the scheme's operation. The taxable income thresholds are changed annually in accordance with yet another index, the index of average weekly earnings.

Institutions are required to provide students with all necessary documentation and ensure that all forms and procedures are completed. All students have to be notified individually of their HECS liability. Institutions are required to calculate the HECS contribution for each student and to collect, by a set date, the contributions of those who have elected to make payments in advance. These payments are retained by the institution. The remaining 25% (discount) of the contributions paid up front together with the deferred HECS payments are paid to institutions in twelve instalments throughout the year, but only for students enrolled within an agreed quota.

Income as a proportion of course costs

In 1993, 78% of HECS payments were deferred

(range 65% to 90%, depending on the institution's course and student profiles, the local economy and attitudes). The remaining 22% of payments were from students paying discounted contributions upfront. This represents only 3% of the total course costs in cash (22% of contributions at 75% of the normal rate of 20% of the course cost). The remaining 97% continues to be met by the government; 17% in long term loans and 80% in grant aid to institutions.

Accumulation of Government Debt

The outstanding HECS debt was in excess of \$2 billion in 1994. For comparison, government funding for higher education in 1994 was \$4.9 billion.

Liability for Part-Time Students

Full-time, part-time, and distance learning students on funded courses pay HECS on an equal basis, the actual amounts being determined by the course credit being taken by individual students.

Further Education Sector

Courses in the technical and further education colleges are not liable for HECS, although those of a suitable level may be accepted for credit towards a degree if a student transfers from a college to a University.

Other Sources of Student Loans

Two other sources of loans are commonly used by students. Austudy grants, the equivalent of U.K. maintenance awards, may be commuted to loans by converting \$1 of grant into \$2 of long term, zero interest but indexed loan. Secondly, all Universities have loan funds from which short term (usually within the same academic year) loans are made at zero or low rates of interest.

Administrative Costs

In order to defray administrative costs, \$10 million was granted to institutions in each of the first three years of HECS. This may seem generous but the University of Southern Queensland stated that its share was \$400,000 a year less than it would have received under the

previous arrangements for charging a student a higher education administration charge. The set up and continuing administration costs for universities are high and are indicated in the next section.

University Administration of HECS

Universities have established their own software for administering HECS. One university estimated that the initial work occupied an experienced administrator, a systems analyst and two programmers four months. Annual revisions are necessary to refine the systems and incorporate the changes which are made by government each year.

The procedures to be undertaken each semester are:

- 1 issuing documentation and information to all students;
- 2 verifying the eligibility of students claiming exemption (reputedly many more than those qualifying for exemption);
- 3 administering postgraduate exemption scholarships;
- 4 calculating each student's semester liability;
- 5 collecting up front payments, also any voluntary partial payments from students who have elected to defer payments, by a set (census) date in the semester (this may be done through clearing banks instead of trying to collect cash through the university cash room);
- 6 recording tax file numbers of students making deferred payments;
- 7 the cancellation of enrolments of any students who have not complied with one of the two options for payment by the census date;
- 8 resolving any objections to charges, with refunds or additional payments where

appropriate;

- 9 issuing amended HECS liability statements to all who are due them;
- 10 running programs to produce HECS liability and dues files, validating and correcting the files;
- 11 supplying the tax office with a file of data for HECS liabilities for students who have deferred payment;
- 12 supplying the Department of Employment, Education and Training with a file of data showing the HECS liabilities of all students.

For a university of average size, the workload requires an administrative officer and assistant, and probably with casual assistance at the commencement of each semester. There is a considerable amount of work to be done between the payment periods. There is an additional workload for finance and computer services departments and considerable printing and postage costs.

Strengths of HECS

The apparent impartiality and fairness of the scheme enabled it to be sold to politicians, students and university administrations.

Students contribute only part of the cost of their courses.

Payments can be deferred and are related to ability to pay.

There is a shift in the cost of higher education from the general taxpayer to the beneficiaries.

The establishment of a 'trust fund', into which payments are made, secures the contributions for the universities. This secured income has been offset by charges in the operating grant the universities receive.

Students appear to work harder and retention rates are reported to have improved.

Weaknesses in HECS

The culture in Australia, as in the U.K., has been one of free higher education. Therefore those entering higher education had not made any preparation for payment, either through family saving or deferring entry until the student had earned the money out of which to pay the contributions. It is unlikely that students will source private loans whilst low cost government loans exist.

That HECS produces additional money to fund higher education is largely illusory. The government is funding the debt option taken by both students who cannot pay and those who choose to not to pay up front. The government is also funding one quarter of the contribution of those who do pay up front; in total, this represents 84% of all HECS liabilities. It will take about fifteen years from the start of the scheme to reach the point at which repayments from the initial students maximise.

The contribution is the same for all courses. It is not clear if this is taken into account in calculating the levels of operating grants for different types of course.

A significant part of the cost of administering

the scheme is born by the institutions.

Students have higher expectations of the teaching, services and facilities so that income has to be ploughed back into improving standards rather than expansion (this may rightly be judged a strength but the intension of the HECS was to enable expansion).

Some groups appear to be deterred by HECS. Although overall enrolments appear to have been sustained there are factors which may have assisted the count, e.g. the transfer of nursing education into the university sector.

The level of expenditure to which U.K. students are committed seems to be higher than that of their Australian counterparts who usually live at home.

The potential variables in the HECS contribution, the qualifying student quota, the discount for up front payment, the indices to which institutional payments, debt repayments and salary thresholds are linked, exposes the scheme to manipulation by government and changes which create administrative problems.

BOOK REVIEW

Realizing the Educational Potential of Residence Halls

Charles C Schroeder, Phyllis Mable and Associates

Published by Jossey-Bass Inc, San Francisco, 1994,

336pp.

ISBN 0-7879-0018-4

It may seem to be quaintly anachronistic to feature material on Halls of Residence when so many of the macro-trends influencing higher education point towards student population and participation patterns which suggest the demise of Halls of Residence and when Baroness Blackstone, a keythinker on education in the party which is likely to form the next government, has described them as "a nineteenth century anachronism".

And yet... and yet... Many Universities, old and new, have recently undertaken quite ambitious halls of residence construction programmes; indeed 100,000 additional places were created between 1990 and 1995 at a cost of one billion pounds. Whilst most of this work has been triggered by attempts to compete more effectively for students within the existing landscape of the market place, there may be more than a short term role for halls of residence in a significant

sector of the market. Recruitment of international students may be influenced by the three-part pincer movement of declining British world influence, the desire and capacity of more countries to offer higher education within their national boundaries and competition from more providers but many UK institutions are likely to remain active in this field and will wish to provide halls of residence to support their activity. In addition it is quite probable that the British (or perhaps to be more precise, predominantly the English) middle class rite of passage which involves 18-22 year olds attending a university away from their home town, full-time for a period of years, may prove more persistent than some current analysts anticipate, despite the further changes in student funding which are likely to occur in the next five years.

It may seem equally wrong-headed to feature the review of a book which looks at the educational potential of halls of residence when explicit and structured 'development' programmes in halls have, generally speaking, not been adopted within the British Universities and, some would argue, they are very alien indeed to the student expectations of hall life in a British University.

Despite all these points, I think it may be appropriate for us to think carefully, critically and radically about how the structure and organisation of halls of residence can contribute to achieving and meeting some newly emerging University goals and concerns and, as a consequence, to justify giving 'air-time' to this review. What follows is not a critique of the text in terms of the strength of its theoretical foundations, or an evaluation of the outcomes which it claims for the programmes it describes or the qualities of the text. Instead it is an invitation to reflect upon the opportunities suggested by a book which focuses explicitly structuring, organising and facilitating Halls of Residence communities in order to support and integrate student learning across a whole range of curricular and co-curricular issues.

At an early point, the book acknowledges that Halls of Residence may be costed differently by

different professional and interest groups when it asks the question "Is it possible that the goals of those building, maintaining and operating halls of residence do not have student learning as their goal in the first place?". Most British readers - use to literature on Halls of Residence which emphasises facilities management - would probably answer with a qualified 'yes'. A view which would be supported by many of Martin Blakey's observations in his recent essay on student accommodation (in Hazelgrove, S, Ed., *The Student Experience*, SRHE/Open University Press, 1994). He writes "in common with many other non-teaching functions, accommodation services have been separated from the academic side of the institution. Involvement by academics in student accommodation....has been minimized." Later, he goes even further - "By transforming themselves into major accommodation suppliers and separating student accommodation from the academic agenda, many institutional providers are now in the same situation with regard to student tenants as the private sector... indeed, it may be easier in the future if accommodation officers saw themselves as being straight housing suppliers..."

Mabel and Schroeder's book takes quite the opposite view. True, it is critical of some current strategies underpinning personal development programmes in Halls of Residence in the USA, quoting with approval the words of one critic who suggests that they simply reflect the latest whim of pop psychology and are rarely linked to specific academic or educational outcomes. But it goes on to describe and evaluate a number of other hall-based programmes, staffed by teams of teaching staff, student services staff and student mentors/tutors. Programmes described include schemes based on subject elements of the standard curriculum, language theme halls, the development of international and cross-cultural understanding, a shared commitment to environmental issues, foundation programmes concerned with values and freshman year orientation programmes concerned with developing the skills of studentship and reflection upon the process of being a student.

Listing the problems of translating programmes

like these into UK higher education is relatively easy. How will they be staffed? The involvement of teaching staff in residential programmes runs counter to the increasing distance between professional roles and personal lives noted by John Earwalker (in *Helping and Supporting Students*, SRHE/Open University Press, 1992). The logistics of registration and module selection would make it difficult to allocate student to hall areas according to subject and many might feel that allocation procedures based on these principles would themselves be unacceptably alien. UK Halls tend to have a high annual turnover of residents which disrupts residential communities. Architecture and housing law may provide different but equally unyielding constraints. Students may perceive the programmes as intrusive and have the feeling of being 'overdosed on education'.

On the otherhand there are forces for change which suggest that the terrain of UK higher education could be fertile territory for such ideas. Established influences such as Enterprise in Higher Education and Higher Education for Capability, in conjunction with anticipated changes in graduate employment patterns have placed personal development (previously and predominantly the preserve of Student Services specialists) on University agendas. There is a growing acknowledgement of the importance which student peers, mentors and tutors can play in the educational process; the Robertson Report (*Choosing to Change*, HEQC, 1994)

has suggested that universities should structure and support such influences by awarding academic credits to those who participate. Institutions are concerned about the anonymity and fragmentation associated with mass higher education and modularisation. On a different level, a number of Heads of Student Services are concerned about the levels of vandalism in Halls of Residence. Universities are concerned about attrition rates which Williams and Fry (in *Long Term Prospects for British Higher Education*, Institute of Education for CVCP, 1993) have described as becoming a major cause for concern in the 1990's.

All who are concerned with these developments and challenges may find it worthwhile to turn aside to look at Mabel and Schroeder's work, which introduces us to schemes which claim to demonstrate evidence of improving academic performance, enhancing personal development and creating a stronger sense of community and belonging.

The concept of the student as a customer and the uneasiness of "in loco parentis" may lead many to be sceptical of programmes of this kind on the grounds that they are intrusive and paternalistic. Others might argue that Student Services current obsession with consumer babble is preventing us from making what they would describe as "responsible interventions" based on a commitment to facilitating learning.

Desk-top setting up by

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Printed and Published

**at University of Northumbria at Newcastle for the Association of
Managers of Student Services in Higher Education**