



Meeting our first years: institutional change to support the first year experience

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Topics

- Higher Education in the UK
 - Where are we today?
 - What challenges do we face?
- Nottingham Trent University
 - Who are we?
 - What is our mission?
- Meeting our first years
 - Changes we've made at NTU to help students cope with the transition to higher education



FIRST SINGLE



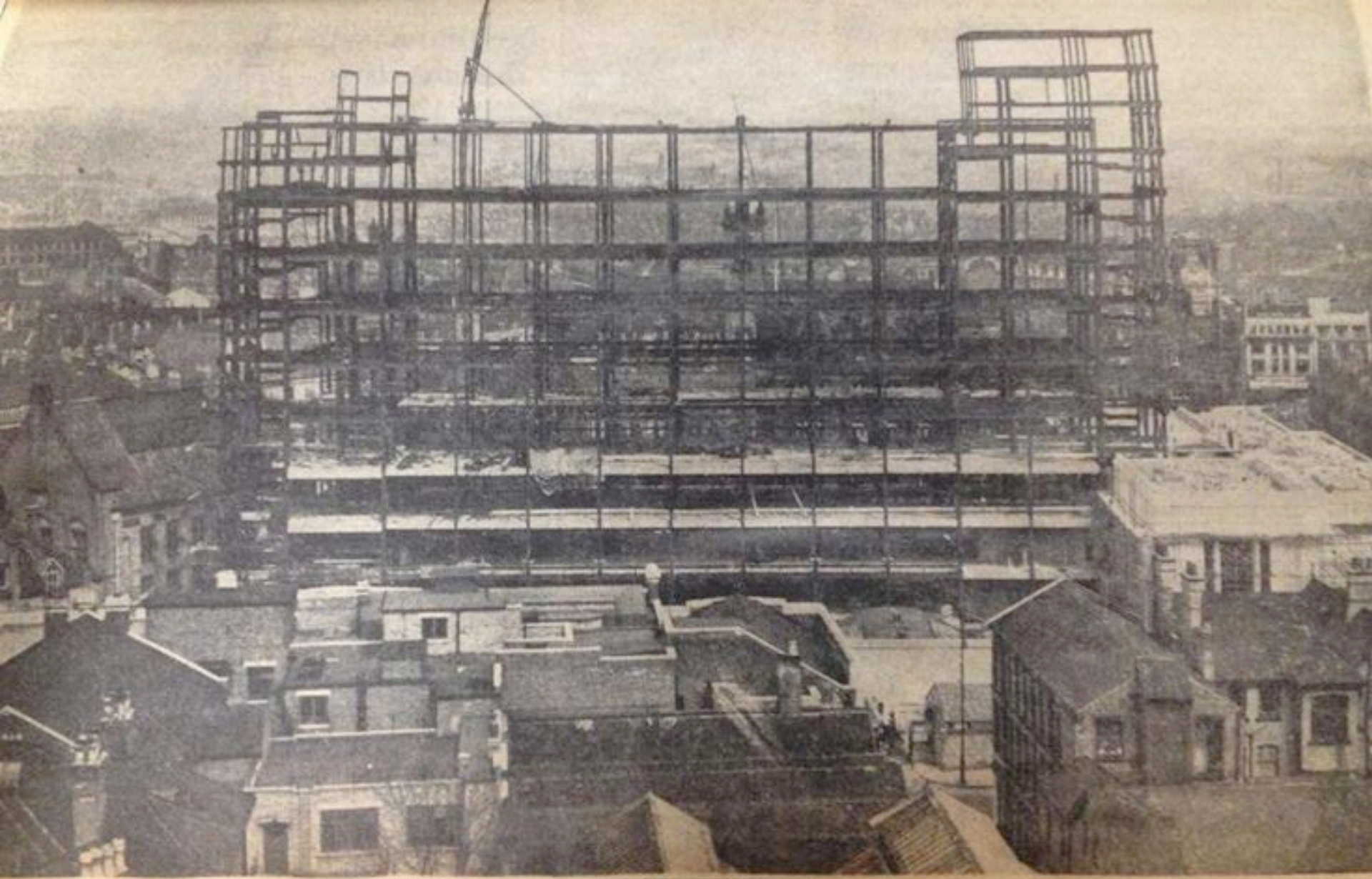
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Higher Education in the UK

- Some respects very traditional
- Still predominantly young people studying full time away from home
- 3 – 4 year degrees
- Relatively few students study abroad
- Over 43% of 18-21 year olds in HE
- Highly socially stratified
 - 5 times more likely to go to university if from the wealthiest background compared to the poorest
- Diverse institutional mix
 - Research intensive
 - Business partnerships
 - Widening participation
 - HE taught in Post-16 Colleges (16-18)
 - Recently seen the involvement of private universities

What challenges does the sector face?

- What's HE for?
 - Part of the Department for Business & Skills, not dept. for Education
 - Market for higher education between institutions
- Student expectations
 - How does the 'ethics for accountants' lecture compete with YouTube or Facebook?
- Students pay most of their fees directly
 - In the form of a loan, recently raised - up to £9,000 pa
 - If they pay, are they customers, partners, producers?
- Transition from further & higher education
 - Demands on college teachers different to HE
 - Challenging differences: independent learning, feedback, extended writing
 - 1st year myths – 'you only need 40%'



What is Nottingham Trent University?



Nottingham Trent University

- Nottingham Government School of Design opened, 1843
 - Opened in response to fear about British manufacturing being of poorer quality compared to France & Germany
- Developed into a large modern university
 - 6,400 first year students each year
- Proud of our track record on learning & teaching
- Wide portfolio of research activities



Architecture, Design & the Built Environment
Art & Design
Nottingham Business School
Nottingham Law School
Social Sciences



Animal, Rural & Environmental Sciences



Arts & Humanities
Education
Science & Technology





Seeking to understand our first years

Understanding our first years

- The first year experience is a significant part of our
- Learning & Teaching strategy
- Widening Participation strategy
- We use annual surveys, focus groups and dialogue with elected student representatives to understand students' experience of starting as university students

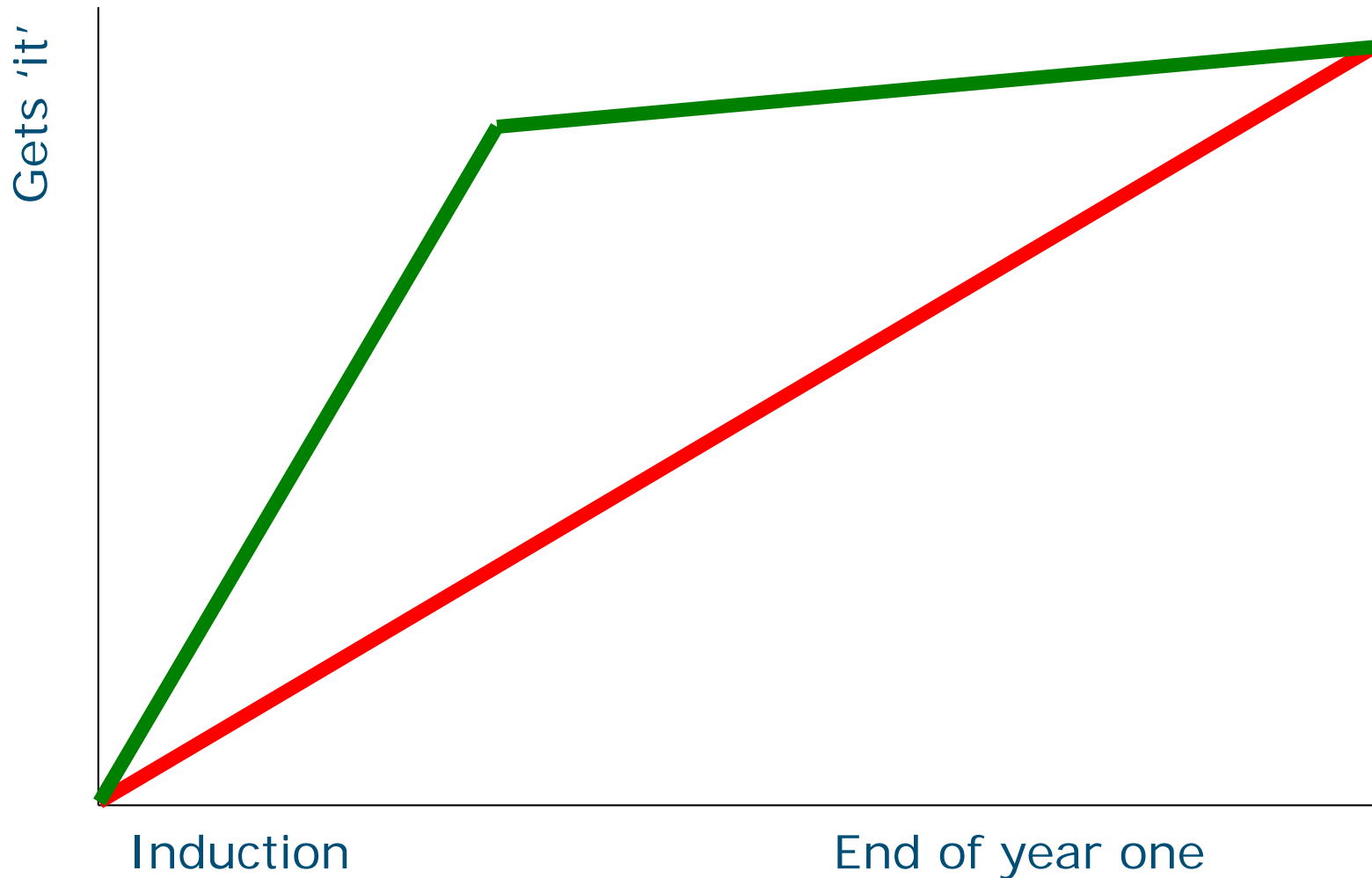
Structural differences

	Post-16 Education	Higher Education
Independent learning	Some, often skills such as note making are guided	Explicitly stated that some independent learning in year 1, but reality often entirely independent
Cohort size	Can be large, usually not	Often enormous, certainly larger than most people's friendship circles
Academic & Student Support	Tend to have less specialist support, but personal tutors more involved	Often excellent specialisms, but require students to be 'adult' about asking for help
Relationship with tutors	Mixed, but relatively high contact time can lead to good relations & often close with personal tutor	Very limited and capped

Differences in the learning process

	Post-16 Education	Higher Education
Assessment	Largely externally assessed	Largely internally assessed
Deadlines	Flexible	Absolutely fixed
Formative Feedback	Formative & before submission deadline	Formative & after submission deadline
Resubmissions	Can be made to make improvements	Very limited and capped

When do we expect students to be transitioned?



The HERE Project (2008-2011)

- Part of the major study “What Works? Student Retention & Success”
- Up to 1/3 of all students had considered dropping out during their first year (doubters)
- The most common time for doubting is immediately after Christmas
- Initial reasons for doubting are social/ fitting in, but quickly become dominated by concerns about the course
 - Not understanding the nature of learning & teaching at university
 - Not understanding feedback
 - Not feeling part of the course community
 - Having a poorer working relationship with their personal tutor
- Ultimately most doubters remain in HE, but they are more likely to leave than their non-doubting peers

What helps doubters?

- Support from friends & family
 - Particularly friends made at university
- Beginning to understand the nature of higher education
 - More likely to be inspired and engaged by interesting learning and teaching, whereas non-doubters are more likely to be motivated by interest in their subject
- Personal commitment
 - Doubters often talked about gritting their teeth and working through those aspects they found challenging
- Future goals
 - Even though doubters might be facing difficulties, seeing how the course might help them achieve future goals was particularly useful



Institutional change to support the first year experience

Developing the NTU first year experience

Stage on the HEFCE student life cycle (2001)	NTU activities
Raising aspirations	Schools, Colleges & Community Outreach
Pre-arrival	Starting at NTU
Induction	Welcome Week
1 st term & moving through the year	Course tutorials & from 2014, student dashboard

Starting at NTU

- Co-ordinated programme from mid-August to the end of September
- All students enrol online prior to arriving on campus
- We provide resources and advice
 - including 7 short videos about starting life as a university students
- Every course also has a course induction microsite
 - Welcome from the course team
 - Pre-arrival induction activity
 - Research, understanding the course or networking with peers
 - Timetable & sources of support



NTU > Starting at NTU > Course inductions

Starting at NTU Course inductions

Your offer

Accommodation

Preparing to arrive

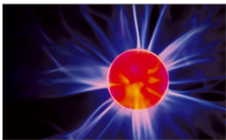
Enrolment

Course inductions

- ▶ What to expect
- ▶ January start courses

Welcome Week

Applied Biosciences, MRes [Back to search](#)



This course has pathways in: Cancer Biology, Cell Biology, Environmental Biology, Microbiology, Molecular Biology, Neuroscience and Pharmacology.

Course content | **Pre-induction material** | **Timetable** | **My learning** | **Assessments** | **Academic support**

Congratulations on securing your place on the MRes Applied Bioscience cluster of courses. We are looking forward to meeting you on 7 January 2013.

welcome from the team

I am Dr Phillip Bonner, your Course Leader, and I'm looking forward to meeting you during induction week.

The course

Welcome Week

- During the first week of term, most UK universities have a 'freshers' programme
- Welcome Week is freshers & quite a lot more
- Programme of 350 activities
 - Cultural, social, sporting, academic
- Supported by 400 student volunteers recruited by the SU
 - The coolest gang on campus
- Specialist and targeted activities for:
 - Mature students
 - Local students
 - International students
- High levels of student satisfaction with from across the student population



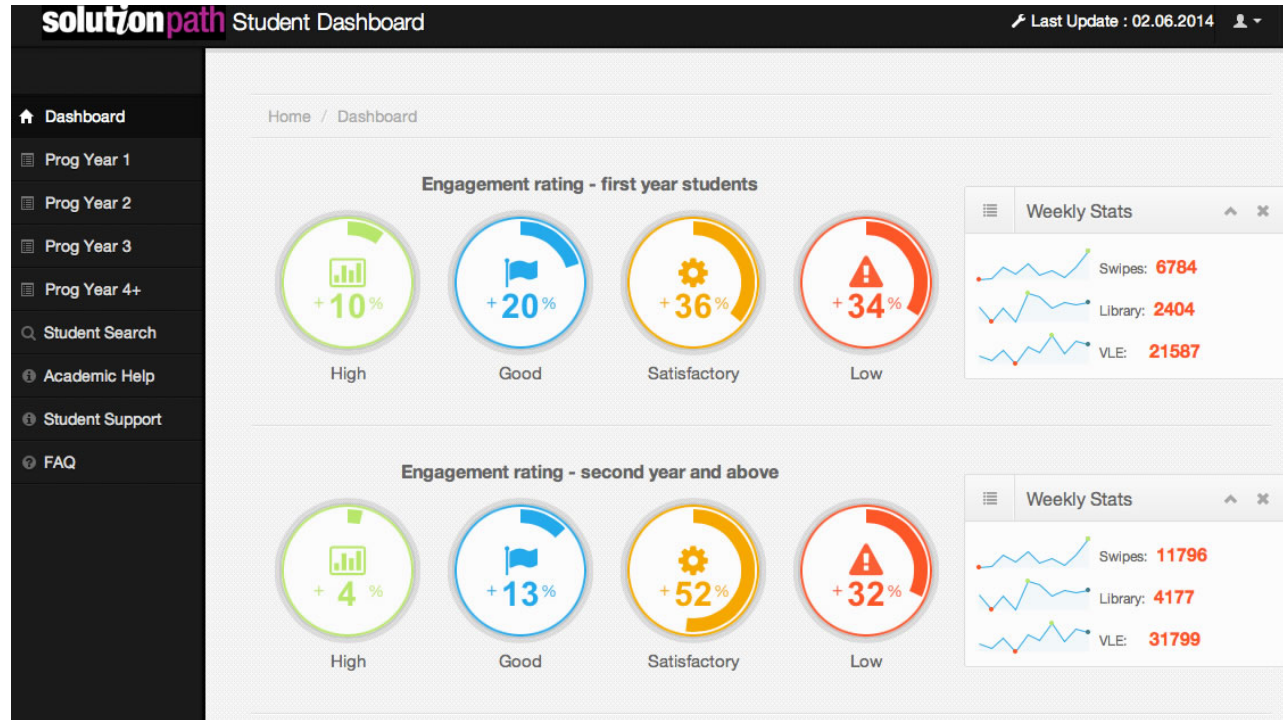
Course Tutorials

- Small-group academic tutorials for between 8 – 12 students
- Goals
 - Relationship building within the course group
 - Building a working relationship with tutors
 - Helping students to make the transition to learning at university & learning within the discipline
- Structure
 - Designed to have a large amount of small group discussion
 - Encourage groups to see connections across the course, rather than within discrete modules



Student Dashboard

- Learning analytics software
- Draws data from the VLE, student records, library & timetabling
- Draws it together into a single location for personal tutors
- Engagement rating for students across the year within the cohort
- Raises alerts for tutors
- Framework for discussions & relationship building



In conclusion

- Higher Education Sector
 - Faces great pressure over our purpose, competition within nations & across nations
 - Around new technologies and student expectations
- We are seeking to find ways to adapt to these challenges
 - Some work well, some don't yet
- First year is the crucible
 - Help students to move from expectations in college to expectations of university education
 - Likely to be a slow process that takes time & returning to themes
 - Involves significant dialogue between tutors and students
 - A sense of belonging for all students
 - Engagement within the curriculum

Thank you for your time

- Does anyone have any questions?