

# How to Get Students into the Library: Revamping a University Library's Welcome Campaign

**Abstract:** This paper is based on a parallel session presented at the BIALL Conference 2017 by Corryn Walker. The content focusses on a project undertaken by Manchester Metropolitan University Library during 2015/2016 to revamp their 'Welcome and Induction' programme. The project was coordinated by Corryn Walker and Elaine Cooke, both Deputy Library Services Managers. The article covers the background to, and motivation behind the project, its aims and objectives and the changes made to improve how the library welcomes new students to the service.

**Keywords:** university libraries; students; library induction

## BACKGROUND

Manchester Metropolitan University has a student population of over 38,000 and welcomes approximately 10,000 new undergraduate and postgraduate students every year. In 2014, the University undertook a wide-ranging review of the existing induction programme with a view to measuring its impact on student retention figures. The review's findings showed that for many students the induction programme had the opposite of its intended effect. Rather than making new starters feel comfortable, at home and welcomed, they felt overwhelmed and confused. One of the Review Team's recommendations was that the delivery of welcome sessions provided by various support services should be staggered at appropriate times throughout the academic year as opposed to being front-loaded within the first few weeks of the Autumn Term. The Review Team suggested that the initial focus should be on student's academic studies. Despite this emphasis, the library successfully argued that, as one of the services assisting in the process of academic engagement, we should be talking to students and getting them into the library as soon as possible to aid their step up to university level academic achievement. The library received approval to continue with induction talks but with a 'lighter touch' to prevent students from feeling overwhelmed with information. The need to review the content of the induction talk was just the starting point. A project team headed up by Corryn Walker and Elaine Cooke was created with the aim of completely revamping how we start our relationship with new students.

## OBJECTIVES

We wanted to provide students with as many opportunities to engage with the library service as possible.

Feedback from students in our internal surveys indicated that students often considered the library to be quite an intimidating and confusing resource at first. This is understandable if their only engagement with a library prior to university was a small school or public library. The main aim was to make students aware that the library is a friendly, welcoming place at the heart of their university experience, whose purpose is to assist them in making the most of the resources available. One of the first modifications we made was to change the word 'induction' to 'welcome' on all of our materials. This sounded much less formal and set the tone of the whole campaign. Our previous welcome activities had centred on a talk given by subject librarians. Whilst we felt that it was vital to retain this element of the welcome campaign, we also wanted to expand our welcome offer to students by engaging with them in a variety of different ways.

Our objectives included:

- Revamping the welcome talks from subject librarians to make them more promotional, concise and engaging;
- Offer additional welcome events in the library;
- Collaborate more with other university departments making the library feel like part of the university as a whole as opposed to a separate entity;
- Create a promotional video for YouTube (engaging with other social media channels too);
- Get out into the faculty buildings.

We aimed to launch this new 'Welcome to the Library' campaign in September 2016.

## THE WELCOME TALK

Every year subject librarians carry out welcome talks to over 9000 new students. When we reviewed the content of the existing welcome talk we realised that it contained a lot of information that the student did not need to know straightaway, plus a lot of ‘do’s and don’ts’. Being confronted by a list of how many books you can borrow, the different types of loan period plus details of the fines on overdue items was not, in our opinion, the best way to begin a relationship with new students. We wanted students to see the library as somewhere to assist with their studies because of the amazing resources available to them; these resources include a library building open 24/7, knowledgeable subject librarians, the library stock and a myriad of electronic resources they could access from home. We went from slides like the ‘how to avoid fines’ example (shown in figure 1 below) to slides promoting the library’s support for student success (as shown in figure 2, also below).

The message to be taken away from a ‘Welcome Talk’ should be inspirational rather than a list of rules and regulations. As we have many different ways of communicating with students; a face to face helpdesk, email, live chat online, phone, social media and our website,<sup>1</sup> we felt that students

could locate any detailed information relatively easily at the point of need. This meant we could reduce the level of service detail within the welcome sessions themselves.

It was important to incorporate an interactive element to the session to help reinforce the messages we were providing but also to make session attendance more enjoyable. The library had been using Kahoot<sup>2</sup> in our information skills sessions for a while and we decided to incorporate a Kahoot quiz into the welcome talks. We asked general questions about the library service such as library opening hours and also reminded students about following the library on social media. The Kahoot software allows the presenter to view an immediate breakdown of attendee responses to questions onscreen. The answers would indicate whether a piece of information needed to be reemphasised. The welcome talk is intended to last around 20 to 30 minutes so we recommended subject librarians only ask around five questions. This worked well within the constraints of the timeframe and ended the session on a positive note with a student winning a small prize (in our case, a chocolate bar).

We evaluated the sessions by handing out a postcard sized, questionnaire with just three questions:

Did they like the session?

**How to Avoid Fines**

**Avoiding fines**

- Return books on time
- Renew online / telephone
- Use book return boxes

**How much**

- One week - 50p per day
- Lending - 20p per day
- One day - £5 per day

**How to pay**

- Telephone
- Any library counter
- Card/cash/cheque/ met card

**BUT - just in case...**

**MMU Library**

Figure 1. The previous slides.

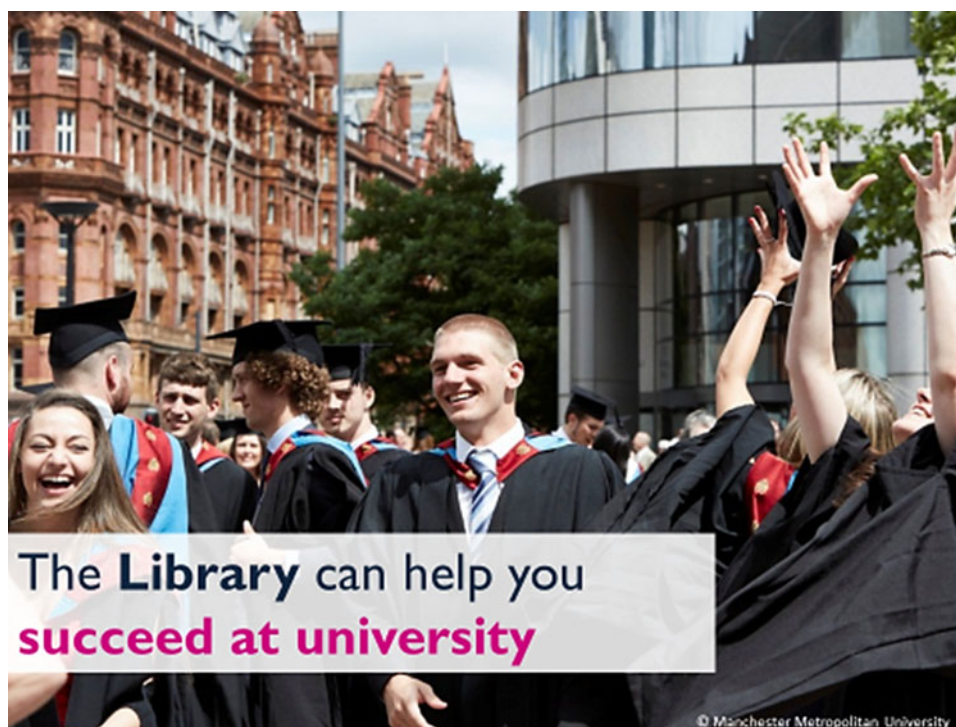


Figure 2. The new slides.

Did they like the way the information was presented?  
Would they like to have learnt about anything else?

We also included a free text box for any other comments. The overwhelming feedback from students was that they liked the session and its format. 99% of students liked the session and the way it was presented. Most of the free text comments we received were about how much they had enjoyed the quiz at the end of the session. We plan on using a similar set of slides going forward and continuing to use a Kahoot quiz where timescales allow.

## LIBRARY VIDEO

The library has been creating video content to assist users for many years. The content coverage is mainly 'how to' type guides on how to use the different functions of the library and its resources. One of the main omissions to this suite of videos was one which welcomed students to the library and gave an overview of the service.<sup>3</sup> Given the highly competitive nature of the higher education market, we realised that there was a need for a short video to promote the library as a key part of the university community. Before we began creating the video, we had a list of requirements:

- The video must have a professional look and feel;
- Show the library in its best light – it must look appealing and welcoming to students;

- Must be short – our YouTube statistics showed that most videos are only viewed between one and two minutes.

To achieve a professional look and feel we had to look outside the library for expertise. The budget for the welcome campaign was not substantial and precluded the use of a corporate filmmaker. Instead, we looked for talent closer to home. The University Marketing department put us in contact with a teaching assistant from the University's School of Art who made freelance films. He was also an ex-student. He possessed the right mix of knowledge and experience to create the video we wanted. Having researched other videos of this type, the one area we decided to invest in was music. We paid for a license to a piece of music in order to make our video stand out from the crowd. Using talent within the university was undertaken partly out of necessity, but also to show how the library can collaborate with other members of the institution. The library is often seen as a stand-alone department not regularly working in partnership with other services. During the revamp of the welcome campaign, we made it a priority to engage with other areas of the University.

## COLLABORATION

We wanted the library to feel part of the University's welcome campaign. In order to achieve this we asked for library representation on the University level committees

for the Welcome Campaign. Membership of the committees meant that, for the first time, content from the library was placed on the University's welcome webpages and events guide. Students could link to our tour booking page which meant that library tours felt like part of the University Welcome events rather than something the library organised separately. We incorporated the University Welcome branding in all our publicity materials, which again led to a more inclusive look and feel within the library. Small details like members of library staff wearing University welcome badges meant that students could easily identify the library as part of the University welcome campaign. This also helped staff to feel more engaged with the welcome campaign.

Another University department we worked with was the Widening Participation team. This team organised event days where students who were identified as belonging to a group with a higher than average risk of dropping out (e.g. mature students, first generation students, etc.) were invited into the university for pre-enrolment sessions to help them to settle into university life. We offered coffee mornings in the library where we showed attendees the library in an informal way to hopefully remove any fear factor they may have had about using the library service.

One of the disadvantages of working collaboratively was that we had to work to another department's time-scales. This led to some last-minute concerns and necessitated the creation of contingency plans going into the future. An example of this was the creation of a university wide hashtag to use on promotional materials. There was a substantial delay in a decision being made which caused a delay in our materials being sent for printing. We now make sure that we have back up publicity materials which may be missing certain details but still contain the relevant library information. Despite these issues, the benefits of collaboration, for example, the raised profile of the library within the University, far outweigh the negatives.

## STAFFING

We realised that the current staffing within the library would not be able to provide us with the staff resource required for all the extra activities we had planned; tours, outreach in faculty buildings, attendance at university wide events, and a welcome desk in the library. We decided to use one of the University's best assets and employ student ambassadors for the first three weeks of term. As the University recognises that peer to peer support is an important way to aid retention they employ peer mentors at the beginning of the academic year. We wanted to replicate this model in the library. The library has a history of employing students as IT Rovers and Shelving Assistants. The Library Student Ambassadors acted as advocates of the library and promoted the service in a slightly different way to library staff, as they were students themselves. They knew the best times to come into the library, the best places to sit and even

advised on the best place to get a sandwich to bring into the library. We used them in a variety of locations and found that the level of student interactions always escalated when the student ambassadors were working. The student ambassadors were especially useful when used in a roving capacity. Some new starters may have felt more comfortable approaching a fellow student.

The student ambassadors were used on our social media channels too. We filmed them providing "top tips" which was a good way of giving out advice. In the future, we would like to utilise the ambassadors for more social media activities by letting them have a takeover Instagram day using the "stories" feature. Seeing the library through the eyes of a fellow student rather than a member of staff should encourage students to make more use of the service.

## OUTREACH

One of the main drawbacks of trying to promote the library service within the library building is that we were already preaching to the converted. We were talking about how wonderful the library service is to students who had already taken that first step through the doors. We investigated university-wide events that were taking place and asked to be a part of them. In 2016, the library took part in the University welcome festival where new students can collect their ID cards and take part in fun activities whilst finding out about the different areas of the university. The library also took part in the Freshers Fair event, which allowed us to engage with lots of new students who might not necessarily have come to the library.

Another area where we wanted to have a presence was the faculty buildings. We were keen to show that we work closely with academic colleagues and have representation within teaching spaces. To this end, the library had stalls in the faculty buildings that were most geographically remote from the library to try to encourage students of these faculties to visit us. We created a film to show how to get to the library from the faculty buildings to show how easy the walk is. A lot of students still have the misconception that the library is just about books. By talking to them in their faculty buildings, we were able to banish some of those misconceptions and encourage them to visit. To help "break the ice" we had various tools at our disposal. We created a quiz, had lots of freebies and made "selfie" frames.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a communication tool that has become much more important over the past few years. The welcome period is a vital time for getting new students to sign up to follow the library channels on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. To encourage students to sign up we created a prize draw to win Amazon vouchers. We found many students did this as they were hearing about it in their Welcome talk from their Subject Librarian.



We hoped that use of social media would take away some of the worry for students about using the library. As mentioned, we made short videos that explained how to get into the library, and also how to borrow a book, how to return a book and how to create a Library PIN. This content was uploaded on to our various social media channels. We made use of some of the current social media trends such as “bookface” (our interpretation of this trend is to photograph a member of library staff with their face obscured by a book but the photographer manages to make the difference between the book and person appear seamless). Giving students a mix of the quirky and the practical has made a real impact on follower figures. Instagram had the biggest jump in followers from under 400 to nearly 1000.

To create an additional buzz around social media we ran a *find the golden ticket* competition in the library. Every day golden tickets were hidden in the library and the library’s social media channels released clues to their location. This had the added benefit of promoting visits to the library. If a student located a golden ticket they could exchange it for a coffee and cake at one of the university cafes. Collaborating with another university department, in this case the University’s Catering Team, during Welcome was another way to raise our departmental profile within the University.

## EVALUATION

Evaluation has always played a large part in planning and adapting the library’s information skills sessions. We wanted to adopt this ethos and thoroughly evaluate the entire Welcome campaign. Alongside the evaluation by student attendees, all staff presenters evaluate their Welcome sessions in order to be able to compile accurate statistics and to allow a forum for suggested format or content changes.

This method of evaluation clearly focussed on the Welcome Talk and it was decided that as so many changes had been made to the Welcome programme of events that we should evaluate the campaign’s impact a short while after the end of the Welcome period. This was completed using a short survey. We asked students to comment on if attending a welcome talk, going on a library tour, or talking to someone from the library had made it more likely that they would visit the library. Whilst the Welcome talk made the most impact (which is to be expected as this is where we have most student interactions), the library received lots of positive feedback for the outreach stands in faculties and our attendance at Fresher’s Fair. Social media still has a long way to go before it makes the same kind of impact on students as face to face engagement. However, the library is going to look at other types

of social media to try to engage with students on more popular channels such as Snapchat.

## FUTURE PLANS

The new Welcome campaign has opened up channels of communication with other departments of the University which the library had little or no contact with before. This has created the opportunity to bid for funding for the Library Welcome campaign. The funding has allowed the Library to become a larger part of the University’s Welcome Festival, held the weekend before the University’s Autumn Term begins. The library “Chat Zone” (a relaxed area on the ground floor of the library) will be transformed into a temporary “Craft Zone” for craft making. It is hoped that students will make their first trip into the library at this event making them more likely to use the library in the future.

The library will be taking over the University’s Snapchat channel during the Welcome period to communicate with new students. This should be an effective way of reaching a large social media population without having to build a following on our own channels. It is hoped that the library will collaborate with other services using social media during the academic year.

## CONCLUSIONS

The project to revamp the Library’s Welcome Campaign proved successful on many fronts. Awareness of the library has risen across the university and feedback from new students shows that they feel welcomed and less intimidated visiting the building.

The key elements and advice I would give to anyone undertaking a similar project are:

- Use the resources available to you and your institution. Staff and students from other departments often want to gain experience and will work with you at a reduced cost;
- Work on your key messages and promote only those during Welcome. Giving too much information at the start can make the library seem a daunting place;
- If institution-wide events are taking place make sure that the library is included;
- Collaborate with other services. Students will see the library as part of their whole University experience rather than a separate entity;
- Social media is an important communication tool but nothing beats talking with students face to face, especially if you can do this away from the library.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.library.mmu.ac.uk>

<sup>2</sup> <https://kahoot.com> Kahoot is free web software which allows the user to create quizzes which can be played in real time using mobile devices.

<sup>3</sup> The completed video can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3OLn8AmwWo>

## Biography

Corryn Walker has worked in the legal information field for 19 years. First as a Graduate Trainee and Assistant Librarian at Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, followed by two years at the Inner Temple Library. She has been the Law Librarian at Manchester Metropolitan University for the past 11 years. Alongside her subject responsibilities, she co-manages the library's Welcome and Awareness Campaigns. She is currently a member of the BIALL Supplier Liaison Group.