Introduction

Undergraduate students can often feel underprepared for the pace, volume and level of work that Honours that demands of them (Shovlin and Docherty, 2017). Induction to Honours workshops can help to support students as they transition into this level of study. This induction is based on the IAD Stepping Up to Honours workshop and is an adaptable resource that you can customise for your own School/programme.

This workshop includes activities for students and the session takes 90 minutes to run in its entirety. However, you can also use parts of the session as standalone resources that can be added into welcome talks/personal tutor group meetings/Honours Handbooks. Please feel free to pick and choose activities and slides that you feel will work best in the context of your own programme.

The workshop can be run in any type of venue, including a large lecture hall as students can still engage in the think, pair and share activities whilst sitting in rows. The only resources that you may wish to bring to the session are sticky notes. If you are running the session in its entirety and making full use of all of the activities, it would be helpful to have another member of staff/student ambassador with you who can help to facilitate.

Please find detailed slide by side guidance notes for the session Powerpoint overleaf. A shortened version of these notes is also included on each slide.

www.ed.ac.uk/iad
(Green =School/programme specific context)

1. Title slide. Welcome back third years

2. What this induction will cover
Outlines session content

3. Title slide. What is Honours like?

4. 5 minute discussion activity- what you already know/what you want to know about Honours (pairs/group discussion)

A simple way to build student engagement at the start of the session is to begin by asking students to turn to the person next to them for a short (5 mins) discussion about Honours. Discussion points can include: **what you already know about Honours, what you think Honours will be like and what questions do you have about Honours.** Questions or comments in a lecture hall can be accommodated by using sticky notes which can then be passed to the end of the row.

Sticky notes tend to generate more of a response to questions as they provide an element of anonymity and do not require students to raise their hand and speak in a large lecture hall which can be intimidating. In large groups, only a selection of sticky notes points can be addressed in the session itself and the outstanding questions can be answered through other means e.g. tutorials or Q and As/FAQs on Learn.

5. Honours: some descriptions

The main tenets of Honours level study are covered in this slide: the transition to more self-directed learning and the shift from coursework to supported research. The slide also emphasises that Honours is a long-term development process which students themselves play an active role in. **As not every subject requires students to produce a research dissertation in Honours, please amend this slide accordingly to fit with your own programme.**

6. What is Honours like? (School/programme specific context)

Slide left blank for School specific input.
7. What do UoE students say about Honours?

These quotes are taken from a small scale, qualitative study of transitions to Honours in a Mathematics degree that was carried out at the University in 2016/17 (Shovlin & Docherty, 2017).

This slide illustrates that whilst there is always individual variation in how students experience Honours, underprepared students are more likely to find the transition an especially difficult one.

One of the main findings of this study was that whilst there are many challenges in Honours, the experience itself doesn’t have to be stressful if properly prepared for. This induction to Honours session can form part of this preparation.

8. What do (your School/programme) students say about honours?

As students relate especially well to advice/guidance from fellow students, input from former third year students from your own School would be a welcome addition to this induction as “there is a world of difference between ‘knowledge about’ a university which is readily available in prospectuses and websites . . . and what enhanced induction and student mentors can provide” (Richardson & Tate, 2012 pg. 20).

9. Title Slide. What is expected of me?

Slides 10, 11 and 12. Activity: identify and describe the shift from pre-Honours to Honours in your own words (pair/group activity)

Slide 10

One of the ways to make Honours’ expectations more tangible, is to start with a short pairs/group discussion exercise around pre- Honours and Honours criteria. The criteria that this activity make use of comes from the SCQF level descriptors: https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/SCQF-LevelDescriptors.pdf

Many IAD study skills workshops make use of the SCQF level descriptors as students consistently tell us that they find this framework useful. Specifically, students report that the descriptors help them to “orientate” their present skills set within Honours standards (SCQF level 10) and to “crystallise” expectations.

This short discussion exercise asks students to discuss and reflect on the step up from pre-Honours (level 8) to Honours (SCQF level 10). Whilst the transition from second to third year at the University of Edinburgh usually involves moving from SCQF level 8 to level 10, this
does vary amongst programmes. Slide 12 includes space for your own particular programme context to be included.

The SCQF has five characteristics:

1. Knowledge and understanding
2. Practice (applied knowledge and understanding)
3. Generic cognitive skills
4. Communication, ICT and numeracy skills
5. Autonomy, accountability and working with others.

This discussion exercise focuses on characteristics 3, 4 and 5 as they align with study skills. However, please do consider the inclusion of other SCQF characteristics such as ‘knowledge and understanding’.

For this activity, use slide 10 to ask students to discuss the difference between level 8 and level 10 and describe the ‘shift up’ in their own words. Using sticky notes encourages participation and allows you to see what students are thinking. Depending on numbers, this exercise takes about 15-20 minutes to run (10 minutes for students to discuss and write their thoughts on sticky notes and 5-10 minutes for a plenary discussion on key points).

The following slide (slide 11) has key terms highlighted that depict the ‘step up’ and can be used as the backdrop to the plenary discussion.

**Slide 11. Backdrop slide for plenary discussion of the shift from “common understandings to complex problems”**

In this table key phrases and terms which depict the shift up have been highlighted. The step up from level 8-10 can be characterised as moving from working within ‘common understandings’ to engaging with and identifying ‘complex problems’. Please note that this is a generic conception of the move to Honours which may need to be adapted to fit within the context of your own discipline. This slide is also a good opportunity to briefly refer to dissertations/long essays/final year projects.

**Slide 12. From “common misunderstanding to complex problems” (school specific input)**

Whilst SCQF descriptors provide a helpful generic conceptualisation of Honours expectations, a subject specific context makes things more tangible for students. QAA Subject Benchmarks Statements provide subject specific material that you may wish to consider using in this slide:


**13. Title slide. Honours skills audit: where am I now?**

[www.ed.ac.uk/iad](http://www.ed.ac.uk/iad)
14. What is STAR-L?

Information slide that explains the STAR-L format (Situation, Task, Action, Result and Learning) to students.

15. Reflecting with STAR-L

Worked example of how STAR-L can help students reflect on first and second year.

16. Individual task: your own experience (STAR-L)

Give students 5 minutes to do this task alone. This is an individual exercise as students may not feel comfortable sharing their learning experiences with each other. The next slide facilitates a group discussion based on the learning from this individual exercise.

17. 5 minute activity: Learning together from the individual STAR-L exercise

After having collected the ideas students have come up with some of the points that you may want to draw out/focus on in the plenary are:

- Course content (‘the what’) isn’t the only thing to focus on: ‘the how’ (Honours study skills) are important too
- We can learn from both positive and negative experiences
- Students can build on skills that they have already been developing in first and second year

18. 10 minute activity: Honours Scholarship Skills audit

This Honours Study Skills audit allows students to reflect in detail on the things they are already doing well and the skills that they might need to hone or develop for Honours. It is adapted from various QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and Cottrell, S. (2014) *Dissertations and Project Reports: a step by step guide*. Palgrave Macmillan.

You can photocopy the self-audit worksheet that accompanies these slides and ask students to complete it in the workshop or send it electronically after the workshop instead. There are no right or wrong answers, it is not a test and for reflective purposes only. Encouraging students to think back to feedback that they have recently received can help them with this self-appraisal. Resources that can help students to develop in all of these study skills areas are included at the end of the Powerpoint.

19. Title Slide. Honours studying: what works?

20. Honours level studying what works? What is high quality learning?

Information slide defining ‘high quality learning’
21. High quality learning (HQL). In short: moving from passive to active learning

The slide highlights that there are ways of reading, studying and revising that are more effective than others e.g. students can spend a lot of time reading, but this does not always equate to learning if it is carried out passively as recall is not being actively tested.

Students often think that highlighting automatically provides a deeper level of engagement with the text, however research (Dunlosky, 2013), shows that highlighting does not correlate with deeper levels of learning. A deeper level of processing and recall is boosted if students regularly practice writing short summaries of their reading and this type of practice also helps to develop their essay writing skills. Writing little and often is the message as opposed to writing a whole essay in one evening.

22. High Quality Learning: how students describe it

This slide includes a quote from a student at the UoE who took part in the transition to honours in mathematics study (Shovlin and Docherty, 2017). His words encapsulate the essence of both high quality learning and the move into Honours.

23. High quality learning: learning from mistakes

This slide reassures that they are not expected to master Honours levels coursework immediately and that getting things ‘wrong’ or ‘making mistakes’ is part of any learning process.

24. Title slide. Your next steps

25. Developing your skills for honours

Asking students to fill in this short worksheet helps to structure their learning from the session and encourages them to adopt a proactive role in their transition to Honours.

This type of activity highlights to students that Honours is not something that happens to them, but an experience that is actively shaped by their own level of input.

There is a word version of this worksheet that accompanies these slides if you would like to print it for students or send it electronically.

26. Development and support resources

This slide provides detail of the IAD resources and support that are available to students.
27. References

Sources


http://research.ncl.ac.uk/studenttransitions/researchoutputs/Richardson%20and%20Tate%20-%20EMERGE.pdf

Shovlin, A. and Docherty, P. (2017) ‘This is not something you solve in week one of third year: applying a transitions perspective to Honours learning and teaching in an undergraduate degree programme’. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* Vol 5 (3). Available at:
https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v5i3.282