Skills Guide

A Guide to Effective Induction

Induction is a process of introducing new members of staff to their workplace and role. It may include meetings, events, documents and online materials, and it should begin as soon as the new employee arrives.

The success of the University depends upon our ability to recruit and retain excellent people at every level. First impressions are important, and induction procedures can make the difference between retaining or losing good people.

Effective induction can
- make the new employee feel welcome, helping them to successfully settle into their new role;
- enable them to learn the role and perform it well;
- provide clarity on performance expectations;
- lead into an effective probation process: the purpose of a probationary period is to ensure that anyone taking up a new appointment is, within a reasonable period of time, able to gain a full understanding of the requirements of the post and to achieve a satisfactory level of performance – induction is crucial to this process.

Inductions should be organised before the new starter arrives to ensure that they start their employment with the University successfully, and there are some basic requirements for the induction of any new starter.

Before a new starter’s first day at work
- They must receive the standard contracts, cover letter and attachments provided by CoreHR: see http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/recruit/newstart_arrange/contracts/
- They will also need to know at what time they should arrive, what they should bring with them, to whom they should report, and (if there are particular clothing issues relating to health and safety or business requirements) what they should wear.
- Behind the scenes, the line manager should have planned an induction programme, drawing up a programme of events and meetings for the new member of staff, and a checklist of what should be covered.
- The line manager will also need to have covered practical issues such as organising the physical space in which they will work, informing other colleagues that a new employee is to join the department, and (if necessary) arranging work permits.

On the first day in post
- There are procedural matters which must be covered: see http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/recruit/newstart_arrange/ and see also the new starter checklist http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/usinghris/user_support/new_starter/#d.en.75231.
- The new starter should be shown round the department (especially the location of fire escapes, and facilities for refreshments and toilets), be told about fire and evacuation and reporting procedures, and be given the basic information about their role and the induction process.

By the end of a new starter’s first few weeks in post they should understand the following:
- the function of their role and what is expected of them;
- who the key members of staff in the department are and what they do;
- the basic geography and the facilities of the department;
- training and development needs and how these are to be addressed, including whom to approach should they identify any further induction/development needs;
- the relationship of the process of induction to the probation and PDR processes, and when their mid-probationary review meeting will take place.
What does effective induction look like?

New staff should start their new post with a structured and planned induction programme, tailored to the needs of the post which they are taking up. The induction process may include:

- meetings with, and introductions to, peers and colleagues;
- welcome events run by the department, division or the Oxford Learning Institute;
- documentation including information about the department and the role;
- online materials and learning including the Oxford Learning Institute’s online induction course¹ and the University’s webpages for new staff²;
- help with learning the role (see below under ‘The requirements of the post’);
- time and opportunity to allow the new starter to identify and meet their learning and induction needs.

Apart from the ‘Basic requirements’ covered above, induction covers two broad areas: the working environment and culture, and the requirements of the post including how the new starter will learn the role.

The working environment and culture. Without adequate context it can be very difficult for individuals to fully understand their role and what they are ultimately contributing. Every new employee should be provided with a background to the functions of the University³, its mission, its business, and a little of its history.

Each unit, department or faculty department at Oxford has its own organisational structures and procedures; there are also ‘cultural’ aspects of departmental life: the rules and norms which are not usually written down. It is important that these are communicated early on in the induction process, otherwise new staff may consider their behaviour to be appropriate and acceptable when it is not. This applies equally to new staff who have worked at the University before. The line manager is best placed to provide most of this information and guidance, which may include practical aspects like access to facilities of the department (such as stationery, photocopying, expense claims); formal and informal communication methods (from departmental committees to coffee breaks and social events); and norms and expectations concerning matters such as working hours, dress codes and smoking.

The requirements of the post. New members of staff need to understand what is expected of them in their role, otherwise problems may arise with successful completion of the probationary period. Informing a new member of staff about the requirements of the post is best carried out by the individual’s line manager. If the previous post-holder is still working in the department or the University, they may also be involved.

Learning how to carry out the new role may involve being shown how to perform aspects of the role, watching demonstrations or observing activities, and taking on new tasks under close supervision, as well as attending courses or workshops. The line manager plays a crucial and ongoing role in helping a new starter to learn, by providing opportunities for them to understand the requirements of the role, assess their own skills and learning needs, and be open about what they need to learn. Most of this takes place in one-to-one meetings (‘supervision’), probationary reviews and PDRs, but line managers should arrange for new employees to be able ask for help whenever necessary. There is specific guidance on induction for research staff⁴, and Departmental Administrators (and equivalent roles)⁵

Summary

1. Induction is crucially important to the successful recruitment and management of staff.
2. It requires planning ahead: some things must be done before or immediately after the start date.
3. Induction should be linked to probation, so that new starters fully understand what is required of them.
4. It represents your best opportunity to help a new employee settle in well.
5. You only get one chance to make the right first impression!

¹ [http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/seminar_desc.php?cat=az&ls=&cc=IND/ONLI&page=3&id=]
² [https://www.ox.ac.uk/staff/about_the_university/new_to_the_university?wssl=1]
³ [http://www.ox.ac.uk/about]
⁴ [http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/cops/rsemp-career/]
⁵ [http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/daproject/induction/]