



The Challenge: Orientate & Integrate a growing International student body

The international student numbers trebled in a 10 year period (from approximately 500 to 2000 students) putting increased pressure on the International Office and highlighting the need for a more effective pre & post arrival programme. The focus initially was on revamping the existing Orientation Programme. We looked at the overall purpose of Orientation, what information we wanted to impart, how we were currently doing this and from this how could we do this better.

Old way:

- 3 separate orientation sessions per area of responsibility: Undergraduate & Postgraduate; Erasmus; Study Abroad & Exchange
- 1 common welcome dinner

New way

- New position created: International Student Support Officer
- Dedicated Orientation committee established
- New joint International Orientation Programme
- Extended International Orientation from 2 to 7 days
 - Individualised sessions focusing on:
 - Health and Wellbeing Workshops
 - Cultural Difference workshops
 - Academic Workshops
 - Additional social events
- Increased Integration with domestic students
 - Buddy Programme – matching international student with domestic UL student
 - Coffee mornings, Tea evenings over 3 weeks
 - Pizza, movies and bowling nights
- Increased use of social media to disseminate information
 - Pre-arrival emails – weekly emails for approx. 12 weeks pre arrival

- Study bundles: pre arrival app developed with the International office and a local app developer
- Dedicated hours for documentation verification and visa letters
- Orientation student focus groups => student feedback & engagement

Forthcoming initiatives

- Pilot a Global Lounge in Millstream Common Room where teams can have “Meet the team” coffee events in Week 2, 4 and 6
- Offer an Academic Skills support session twice a week to cover topics on
 - Research Skills
 - Accessing online resources
 - Presentation skills
 - How to reference and avoid plagiarism
- Offer more wellbeing events, morning campus runs and mindfulness sessions on arrival

Success of new initiatives:

1. ***Footfall into the office during week 1 fell by approximately 80%***
2. Student surveys: positive responses in internal student surveys
3. International benchmarking: I- Graduate International Student Barometer 2014 & 2017, the survey involves over 18,257 international students across 182 institutions worldwide, including the 7 Irish Universities.

2014 1st in Ireland for:

- International Office (2nd in Europe)
- Home Friends
- Host Culture
- Social activities
- Other Friends

2017 1st in Ireland for:

- social and cultural student integration
- campus environment and campus accommodation support
- Multiculturalism
- Social activities
- Institution orientation & registration
- Recommendation by International Students