Welcome

Impact Report 2021

US

UNIVERSITY
OF SUSSEX

Contents

Evaluating Welcome with the NERUPI framework

This year, the Student Engagement and Enhancement Team has used the NERUPI (Network for Evaluating and Research University Participation Interventions) evaluation framework to plan and evaluate Welcome Week objectives.

NERUPI is a praxis-based framework, which brings together theory, research and practice to support evaluators and practitioners to design, evaluate and report on interventions.

Our NERUPI objectives for Welcome 2021 were:

1. Academic preparedness:

1.1. Students experience a positive introduction from academic staff, other university employees and students

1.2. Students identify specific skills and capacities needed to succeed on their course and in their subject area

1.3. Students become familiar with learning and teaching approaches on their course and in their subject area

2. Student life and belonging:

2.1. Students experience a positive induction into student life and the campus/environment

2.2. Students engage with students from a variety of social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds to establish positive relationships and form mutual support networks

2.3. Students discover social and leisure, and extra-curricular opportunities

For more information about the framework and NERUPI network, see www.nerupi.co.uk/about/overview

Feedback from students

Students were invited to complete a survey at the beginning (Monday) and end of Welcome Week (Friday) about their preparedness for Welcome. 1,737 students completed the surveys, and the results are displayed below.

Academic preparedness

37.9% of respondents felt prepared for their course at the beginning of Welcome Week. This had increased to 55.1% by the end of the week.

Student comments and recommendations on what they would have liked more information about:

"I would have liked more information surrounding my course and I also didn't have any prior knowledge of the electives before choosing them on Sussex Direct."

"More course preparation."

"More information about how to use Canvas and Sussex Direct."

Student life and belonging

52.7% of students felt informed about the social events and activities they could take part in, at the beginning of Welcome Week. At the end of the week it had increased to 63%.

56.5% of students felt they were informed about the sports and societies they could take part in, at the beginning of Welcome Week, and this increased to 71.7% by the end of the week.

Student comments and recommendations on what they would have liked more information about:

"More information about Freshers' events."

"More postgraduate social opportunities."

"More information about timetabling."

"More info about what will be open on campus."

"How to work kitchen stuff."

Feedback from students

A focus group was held with new students following Welcome Week, and the outcomes show the following key themes:

Academic preparedness

Positives:

Nothing in particular was highlighted by students.

Recommendations:

Canvas
- Produce guidance on how to use Canvas for the Get Ready programme.
- Increase communication about the importance of accessing Canvas and Get Ready.

School community
- All students highlighted that a social event within their courses/Schools followed by a social with School-specific societies would have improved their course experience a lot. It would have also meant that students felt a lot more at ease for starting their courses.

Student life and belonging:

Positives:

Big Welcome talk
- There was a lot of information but it was delivered well.
- It was the most useful and welcoming event of the week.

Events
- Events that were social-based like the Roller Disco and Beach Clean Up were well-received, and meant that students could be informed about the University whilst also having a fun experience.
- The Students' Union events were also good ways to meet new people outside of students' own accommodation groups.

Freshers' Fair
- It was good for enabling students to meet people with similar backgrounds and interests.
- Having it early in the week was favourable as this meant that students had the chance to meet new people very early on.

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Feedback from students

Recommendations:

Provision of information prior to arrival
- Work with students and look at the email comms. The introductory emails received before attending the University were not deemed popular with participants, and they said this was because the emails didn't look important and the online content was very long.
- Work with students and look at the Welcome pages on the Student Hub. Key information on the University website didn't stand out and it was hard to find, and students said they ended up giving up on finding it.

Wayfinding
- More physical signage on campus for Welcome Week as key rooms were hard to find; the maps were good but were a little confusing when students were new to campus.
- Temporary ground markings (in different colours if possible) so that students can follow them to places.

Events
- More partnership with the Students' Union on non-alcohol events, as this can be a great tool for the University to build good communities for students, to create a sense of belonging.
- Students' Union events should be clearly shown to be endorsed by the University, as lots of students paid external providers for events, had a very negative experience and wasted a lot of money.
- Students asked for the Freshers' Fair to be extended, so that the quiet hour could be longer and the end of the session could be later; some students missed out as they couldn't get to campus in time.

Welcome booklet enhancements
- A Welcome booklet either given to every student or sent digitally to students before they arrive, to have a look through beforehand.
- The Welcome booklet should contain a simple list of all sports and societies so that students can see what is on offer.
- QR codes to be put next to services in the Welcome booklet so that students can easily scan straight to specific web pages.

Spotlight on students' experiences of Welcome Week

India's perspective

I learnt a lot during Welcome Week about what clubs are on offer and how to sign up for them. I also learnt a lot of information about my course; however, some of this info I had to find myself. I feel that we need more social opportunities where I could have met and talked to other students.

I met my flatmates and people that I now work with in Falmer Bar and Northfield Bar. These were my most significant interactions, where I met people who have now become my friends, and people I speak to a lot more. I didn't meet a lot of people from my course.

The highlight of my week was attending the Freshers' Fair on the Monday of Welcome Week and signing up to netball. I also liked starting my shifts at the Students' Union bars as it was a really good way to meet people and find new friends.

India Rhoden
First year BSc International Business (with a professional placement year)

Welcome Week was amazing and something that I will never forget, as I got to meet new people, try new things and live in a new town.

Focus group participant

Everyone looked like they were having a great time, and me and my mates all felt at ease when chatting to the students [Student Connectors] that were working during the week.

Focus group participant

"The quiet room [Chill Out Zone] is a class idea; it just needs to be more engaging and offer stuff like tea and coffee in the middle of campus.

Focus group participant

"I think that the Freshers' Fair was the best part of the week! It's the place you meet people who you have something in common with.

Focus group participant

Feedback from staff

Staff in the Schools and Professional Services were invited to complete a survey about their students' preparedness for Welcome. Nine people completed the survey, and the results are displayed below:

Academic preparedness

The majority of staff (62.5%) said that course inductions provided students with an opportunity to meet their peers in an academic setting.

72.5% of staff said that new students had an opportunity to reflect on their academic and soft skills, such as confidence, time management, critical thinking and problem solving.

The majority of staff (62.5%) said that after attending course inductions, students now had the skills to succeed on their course.

An overwhelming majority of staff (91.8%) reported that during Welcome, students had an opportunity to meet key academic staff and to understand their role.

85.8% of staff said that students were given the relevant information and guidance to feel prepared to make a good start on their course.

Staff comments and recommendations:

"More time with an Academic Success Advisor."

"Continue working towards the NERUPI objectives post welcome as not all of these can be achieved during induction."

"More opportunities for students to reflect on their academic skills."

Student life and belonging

Staff agreed (87.5%) that Welcome and Induction gave students an opportunity to meet peers in a social context.

The majority of staff (71.5%) agreed that students had an opportunity to form networks and to make friends.

87.5% of staff said that during Welcome and Induction, students learnt more about the social and extra-curricular opportunities available to them.

100% of respondents said that students were given the relevant information and guidance to feel prepared for university life.

Feedback from staff

Staff comments and recommendations:

"Specific session for PGRs to be included in the central induction."

"Some more interactive and informal discussion-based events."

Feedback on overall experience

66.7% of staff said that students had a positive induction into student and campus life at the University of Sussex.

Staff comments and recommendations:

"Earlier access to the Canvas site to edit for PGRs, some tailored, central events for PGRs and large bookable spaces for the Doctoral School."

"All events and things taking place in one system. Lots of things [were] spread across Eventbrite, Broadcast and Sussex Direct."

"Change the name of Get Ready, Get Settled and Get Started – these conflict with existing parts of the website and is a bit confusing."

"If Welcome events were added before registration, students were unable to see them in their Welcome timetable."

"It was a lot of pressure to induct so many students in the same three-hour window."

"It was a lot of stress and pressure trying to get faculty and Senior Management Team buy-in to run such a large number of sessions for such a high number of new students."

"It seems a good programme, but I wonder whether it is designed for UG students mainly."

"I don't think live course induction sessions in the afternoon/evening is necessary. The recorded sessions would have been sufficient."

Demographic data

We have looked at the demographic data for the students who booked a place at the Big Welcome and Student Panel events, and compared it to the whole of the intake. This is based on sign-ups as attendance data could not be monitored.

Level of study

Postgraduate taught students were less represented at these events when compared as a proportion of their intake; perhaps because they felt the content would be more relevant to undergraduates. Interestingly, the postgraduate research students was higher as a proportion when compared to their intake.

Domicile

	Welcome Week	1st Dec 2020 new entrants
Non UK	41%	34%
UK	59%	66%
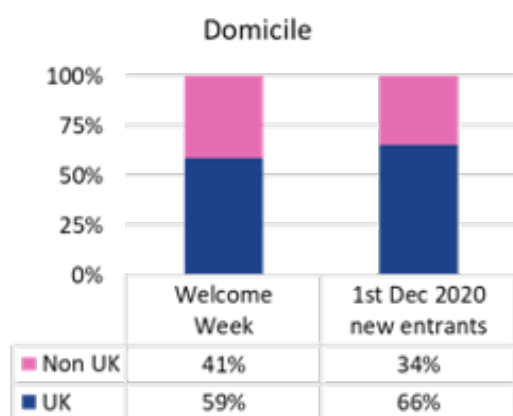
As a proportion of their intake, a higher proportion of international students signed up for the Big Welcome and Student Panel, compared to home domiciled students.

BAME students

	UK	Non UK
Welcome Week	22%	66%
1st Dec 2020 new entrants	24%	72%
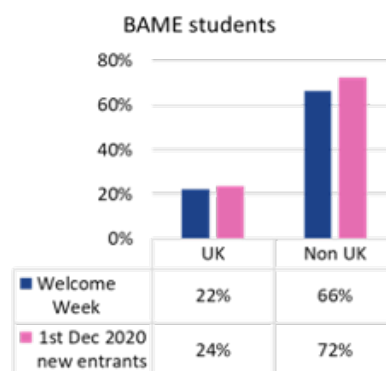
A lower proportion of BAME students signed up for these events, compared to the intake for this group, for both UK and overseas domiciled students.

Schools

School	Welcome Week	1st Dec 2020 new entrants
Business	16%	23%
Central Foundation	4%	7%
Education & Social Work	3%	11%
Engineering & Informatics	6%	7%
Global	12%	8%
Law, Politics & Sociology	10%	9%
Life Sciences	8%	7%
Mathematical & Physical Sciences	3%	3%
Media, Arts & Humanities	12%	13%
Psychology	16%	9%
Visiting & Exchange	6%	2%
Institute of Development Studies	5%	2%

There is an even spread of Schools showing a consistent level of proportion of sign-up, those with a higher proportion of engagement, and lower proportion of engagement, when compared to their intakes.

NB The Welcome data has been compared to the 2020 student cohort, due to availability of reporting data.

Social media

The University put out various content on its social media channels, to engage with new students and highlight key information to them. The engagement with these channels is summarised below.

Instagram

Date	Type	Views	Likes	Comments	Engagement
09-Aug	IGTV	4825	0	1	11%
18-Aug	Reel	9516	310	9	22%
20-Aug	Reel	15900	642	13	36%
23-Aug	Reel	4000	41	1	9%
27-Aug	IGTV	5712	0	3	13%
03-Sep	IGTV	3046	0	3	7%
10-Sep	IGTV	2206	0	0	5%
14-Sep	Photo	0	616	9	1%
15-Sep	Photo	0	1357	13	3%
15-Sep	IGTV	2405	0	1	5%
18-Sep	Photo	0	599	1	1%
20-Sep	Photo	0	1920	8	4%
21-Sep	Photo	0	2680	41	6%
22-Sep	Reel	10100	605	6	24%
24-Sep	Photo	0	1335	13	3%

Engagement Formula:
(No.of views+likes+comments) / (Total no.of followers)

Date	Type	Reach	Reactions	Shares	Engagement
13-Sep	Story	7366	36	3	16%

Story Engagement Formula:
(No.of reach+reactions+shares) / (Total no.of followers)

Type	No. of Posts	Percentage of Posts	Avg. Engagement
Photos	6	38%	3%
IGTVs	5	31%	8%
Stories	1	6%	16%
Reels	4	25%	23%

Engagement Key:

Range	Level
<10%	Low
>=10% and <20%	Average
>20%	High

Summary
- A total of 16 posts were uploaded to the Sussex Instagram page from the beginning of Get Ready to the end of Welcome Week.
- The Reels and IGTVs were created by the Student Connectors (nine posts in total).
- From the tables, we can see that most of the posts made to the Instagram page were standard photos, yet these posts received the least amount of engagement.
- The Reels, on the other hand received the most engagement; however, there was a period between 23 August to 22 September where no other Reels were posted.

Recommendations
- There should be more focus on the type of content that performs well with the current Instagram algorithm. Currently, Instagram favours short-form content like Reels, so it reaches a wider audience, and more people are likely to see it on their feed.
- IGTVs and Photos receive less traction, so ideally more Reels should have been posted consistently during Get Ready and Welcome Week.
- Unfortunately, the Instagram algorithm is ever changing and the things that work and get high engagement now, may not in the future. So before developing a social media schedule, we will look at the style of content that is performing well at that time and focus more content around that.

Social media

TikTok

Date	Platform	Views	Likes	Engagement
20-Aug	TikTok	937	25	85%

*Engagement Formula
(No.of views+likes)/(Total no.of followers)

Summary
- Only one TikTok was posted throughout Get Ready and Welcome Week. This was a repost of an Instagram Reel posted on the same day.
- TikTok videos using the hashtag #sussexuni have a combined total of 5.6 million views. Students and prospective students seem to be highly engaged on this platform. Therefore, this was a missed opportunity to incorporate more TikToks in the social media campaign.

Recommendation
- Instagram Reels can also be repurposed and posted on TikTok without additional editing, so in future, it is suggested that all the Reels created for the Instagram page should be reposted to Sussex's TikTok.

YouTube

Summary:
- Only two videos were posted on Sussex's YouTube channel during the Get Ready period – Living in Halls (Connector Video) and Skills Hub: Skills and Strengths.
- This could be due to not having enough time to create YouTube content or not being able to get videos approved to go up on the channel.

Recommendations:
- Like Instagram Reels and TikToks, some videos that were created for Canvas would perform well if they were reposted to Sussex's YouTube channel; for example, Living in Halls has received 96 views on Canvas/Panopto since being posted, yet on YouTube, it has received over 550 views.
- Videos such as Getting Ready for University and How to Be a Good Flatmate have 165 and 70 views, respectively. The Connectors put in a lot of work creating videos that were not seen by a lot of students, and it would be advantageous if we could put some of them on the YouTube channel to showcase their hard work, reach more students and gain more subscribers.

Email comms

Students received up to six emails over the summer sent from our CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system; these emails were designed to inform students of the key information they needed at particular times. This included directing them to take part in the Get Ready programme, instructing them to complete Online Registration and reminding them to check their Sussex email account.

Students received different versions of each email, depending on their level of study and whether they were an international student or not; this allowed us to provide students with the information that was necessary for them.

A summary of each email's open rate and click through rate is shown below:

- Our average click through rate is 51%, which is excellent, compared to an industry standard that rates 1-5% as being good.
- As anticipated, higher rates for collecting username and password and completing registration are evident, as students follow the instructions in the email and click through to complete the tasks.
- Click through rates seem to go down by the time people are looking at the Welcome checklist email, but this is to be expected at the end of the campaign.
- These numbers include students progressing from Study Group.

Email	Received	Open	Clicks	Open rate	Click through rate
UG results day	4,308	3,960	1,534	92%	36%
Collect your username and password	3,304	3,060	2,075	93%	63%
Thanks for collecting your username and password	4,793	4,524	2,865	94%	60%
Complete registration	6,914	6,511	4,814	94%	70%
Look at your Sussex email	5,268	4,847	2,152	92%	41%
Welcome checklist	7,352	6,410	2,896	87%	39%
TOTAL	31,939	29,312	16,336	92%	51%

Webpages

The New Student pages on the Student Hub contained all the information relating to Welcome Week. The following analysis encompasses visits to either www.sussex.ac.uk/study/new-students or https://student.sussex.ac.uk/new-students.

Date range: 10 Aug - 27 Sept 2021 (48 days) compared to 13 Aug - 30 Sept 2020 (48 days).

72,549 sessions	- 10%
37,405 users	+ 3.5%
3:42 mins av. time on page	+ 3.4%
18:18 mins av. session duration	- 15.5%
34.6% bounce rate	+ 31.3%
5.9 pages per session	- 15.5%

Acquisition (how users arrived at the site):

39,488 sessions	Google organic search	- 4.7%
15,973 sessions	Direct traffic	- 0.5%
14,600 sessions	CRM email	- 19.7%
2,456 sessions	Sussex Direct referral traffic	No comparison
1,328 sessions	Bing organic search	- 4.2%
754 sessions	Instagram	+ 604.7%

The biggest increase in traffic came from Instagram. Though it only generated 754 sessions, this was up 604.7%, so the posts on Instagram were definitely successful.

Recommendations:
- With a large proportion of users finding the pages from search engines, for next year it would be good to create a clearer distinction between the purpose of particular pages and the motivation of the users visiting a page, which overall will make it easier for users and search engines to find and navigate pages.
- As discussed in the social media section, Instagram will continue to be utilised for content.

Co-creating with Welcome Week Lead Connectors

This section looks into the experiences of five Welcome Week Lead Connectors and one Welcome Graduate Connector, who worked on the delivery of the Welcome programme 2021. Seven students were hired to work on the project, which lasted five months. Due to the small sample size, informal interviews were conducted to gather meaningful, in-depth qualitative data.

A summary of their feedback relating to the delivery of the Welcome programme is provided below.

Get Ready

Get Ready videos

Student Connectors enjoyed being involved in the making of Get Ready videos. It gave them the space to be creative, work with university staff and practise their communication skills. The videos were:

- Navigating the Student Hub – the most viewed video of the whole Get Ready.
- Introduction to the Student Life Centre – second most viewed video and an example of co-creation with Professional Services staff.
- What to bring to your accommodation animation – the video had a good number of views on YouTube and Instagram, and it was the most creative of all videos.

- Being a good flatmate – the video picked up some views but putting it on Canvas lessened the exposure.
- BlackBullion – again, the video picked up some views but ended up being hidden on Canvas.
- Useful tools to help with time management – similar situation of a handy video being buried in Canvas pages with very few views.

Get Ready structure

Most of the students commented that the five-week Get Ready programme was too long and oversaturated with information. They highlighted that bite-size videos work best because students want to receive information quickly.

The students did not understand the Your Course, Your Support, Your Progress themes and struggled to figure out which area their videos fit. However, they felt the Welcome Graduate Connector did a fantastic job improving Canvas and making it more user friendly. Interestingly, the Connectors looked back at their experiences of Welcome, and they admitted they have not engaged with Canvas. They questioned whether Canvas should be used more as a repository, and then social media and the Student Hub as the primary sources of information.

Co-creating with Welcome Week Lead Connectors

Social media campaign

This was the first time that Student Connectors ran a Welcome social media campaign. The students saw it as a positive move forward to making social media a regular Welcome feature. The general feeling during the interviews was that social media is the best way to engage students, especially pre-arrival. One student said: "This is where young people are [Instagram and TikTok]".

Student Connectors also highlighted that the key for engagement is peer-to-peer advising. This is backed up by a high number of views, especially for Instagram Reels and IGTV (see page 11).

The students recalled some challenges when working on the social media project. The most significant issues were internal communication (especially when decisions were needed to move forward), and the lack of resources to make the clips (staff had to take part in recordings). However, these can be solved with early planning.

Welcome Week

Student Connectors talked at length about their experiences of working the Welcome Week (including Welcome Weekend). Surprisingly, the students shared similar opinions about what went well and what didn't during the week.

> I felt so proud to lead on the Student Panel. I made it work even though I was really nervous. It was nice to support students. I will have the confidence to run events in the future.

Welcome Week Lead Connector

> Working as a Welcome Week Lead Connector has exceeded my expectations. It was amazing to be trusted to lead on projects.

Welcome Week Lead Connector

Positive feedback

- Positive atmosphere: All students said they felt the atmosphere on campus was positive, and they all had fun. They enjoyed working with Ask Me teams and agreed that everyone worked hard to answer students' enquiries, give away Welcome booklets, run campus tours, and support each other with complex questions or simply help set up or carry things. Two students who worked the previous Welcome compared their experiences and recalled enjoying themselves more and being "less miserable".

- Staff members: The Student Connectors reported enjoying working with particular members of staff, who injected much-needed positivity throughout the week, and the huddles were mentioned as a fun way to "start people off on a positive note at the beginning of our shifts". Also, one student said that meeting Kelly Coate was an amazing experience as "she was only someone I knew from emails", which made them feel valued.

- Big Welcome, Student Panels, Wellbeing sessions, Treasure Hunt: Student Connectors enjoyed running face-to-face events. It boosted their confidence, and they found the experience rewarding. They felt empowered to lead on projects and will take those experiences with them for the future.

Co-creating with Welcome Week Lead Connectors

> I loved the variety of the work. I could do stuff that wasn't just 'brain-dead'.

Welcome Week Lead Connector

Negative feedback

- Attendance: Some student-led events were poorly attended. This was disappointing because they worked hard to plan their presentations. The students suggested it was most likely due to insufficient promotion. However, the early starts (e.g. 9 am for Big Welcome) could also be a factor. The Connectors pointed out that a big student night out took place in town on Wednesday, which meant campus was "dead" the following day. Lack of signage for events was pointed out as a potential reason too.

- Events: Students found that some of the Pick and Mix sessions were only to give out information. They thought it might not be the best angle to engage students, as most enquiries could be answered through the Student Hub. The suggestion was to focus on community-building events like the Treasure Hunt and Sports for Wellbeing, where students had the opportunity to make friends.

- Chill Out Zone: Some of the students felt that it was a missed opportunity. The idea was good but needed more promotion during the week. Also, one student pointed out that the Chill Out Zone would work better during term-time as a nice space to clear their head after an intense day of lectures.

- International Students: Two Student Connectors mentioned that they dealt with a high number of enquiries from International students. Even though they managed to help them, they felt ill-equipped to support them due to a lack of knowledge about specific services, e.g. visas.

Recommendations:

- Create a project plan or work framework before the Connectors begin working to help manage expectations.
- Offer time management training to new Connectors.
- Expand training for Ask Me students about accessing services for International Students.
- Evaluate the Get Ready, Get Settled, Get Started categories to avoid confusion.
- Evaluate the length and structure of Get Ready to avoid overwhelming students with information.
- Promote on-campus events more to ensure better attendance, including the Chill Out Zone.
- Evaluate the scheduling of the on-campus events.
- Ensure good signage across the campus.
- Be aware of social events outside of campus that may affect student engagement.
- Reduce the number of campus tours.
- Place Ask Me signs on or next to the gazebos.

Student Connectors' contribution to the Welcome programme was invaluable. The voice of students must be woven in to future Welcome planning because they truly understand the experiences of their peers.

The Welcome Programme project has a great potential for co-creation. It allows Student Connectors to be creative, learn new skills, and drive innovative ideas to make Welcome better for all students.

> I enjoyed taking control over things. Normally, I would do jobs for others, but here I was, leading on organising an event [Treasure Hunt] for new students.

Welcome Week Lead Connector

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The experience of Welcome Week Connectors

Twenty-five students worked with the team as Welcome Week Connectors to deliver Welcome Week. Afterwards, a group of 10 took part in a focus group to gather feedback on their experience. Connectors were asked a serious of questions covering what they enjoyed, what they found challenging and whether they felt proud to be a Connector.

Most students were very positive about working as Welcome Week Connectors and stated that it was an enjoyable week where staff and colleagues were friendly, kind and understanding.

However, there were some aspects of the role which Connectors found challenging. One Connector found the morning shift timing difficult and would have liked for there to be an option on which time of the day to work. Several Connectors stated that they found one staff member difficult to work with, which impacted on their enjoyment of the role.

Some Connectors stated they were proud of their Connector role, and in particular being part of an initiative like the Connector Programme. However, others stated they were more proud of previous longer term Connector roles, whilst one Connector did not feel proud to be a Connector in this role, as they equated pride with how much work they put in and reaching a goal outside of their comfort zone.

50% of Welcome Week Connectors said they would like to work as Connectors in the future because of the experience and new skills they could gain from the role.

> The Connector role kept my spirits up at a time when I was struggling emotionally. It was really enjoyable for me; it was more than just a job.

Welcome Week Lead Connector

However, 50% said it would depend on the length of the role. They stated they would be more likely to take on a different short-term Connector role because they wouldn't be able to commit each week to a long-term role whilst being a university student. All Connectors would recommend applying for the role to other students, stating it was a good start to the year and a chance to meet new people and gain experience.

Several Connectors viewed the Connector role as beneficial and an opportunity to spend time with friends, have fun and help new students. They said the role was a great introduction to the University and an opportunity to get paid before the start of the busy term. However, some Connectors stated this role did not feel as important as other longer-term Connector roles.

Overall, Welcome Week Connectors enjoyed the week and had a great time meeting new people and gaining skills and experience. However, miscommunication in some cases made the experience challenging for some Connectors, and broader questions about feeling proud to be a Connector varied widely amongst Connectors.

Thank you

Finally, we would like to thank all our colleagues involved in planning and delivering Welcome 2021 across the University.

Welcome is a huge project each year, and Welcome 2021 would not have run as well as it did without the hard work and collaboration of so many.

Thank you very much to everyone involved!

The Student Engagement and Enhancement Team

Welcome 2021 was led by the Student Engagement and Enhancement Team, in the Student Experience Division.

The following team members contributed to this Welcome Impact Report:

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www.sussex.ac.uk/schoolsandservices/student-engagement-and-enhancement