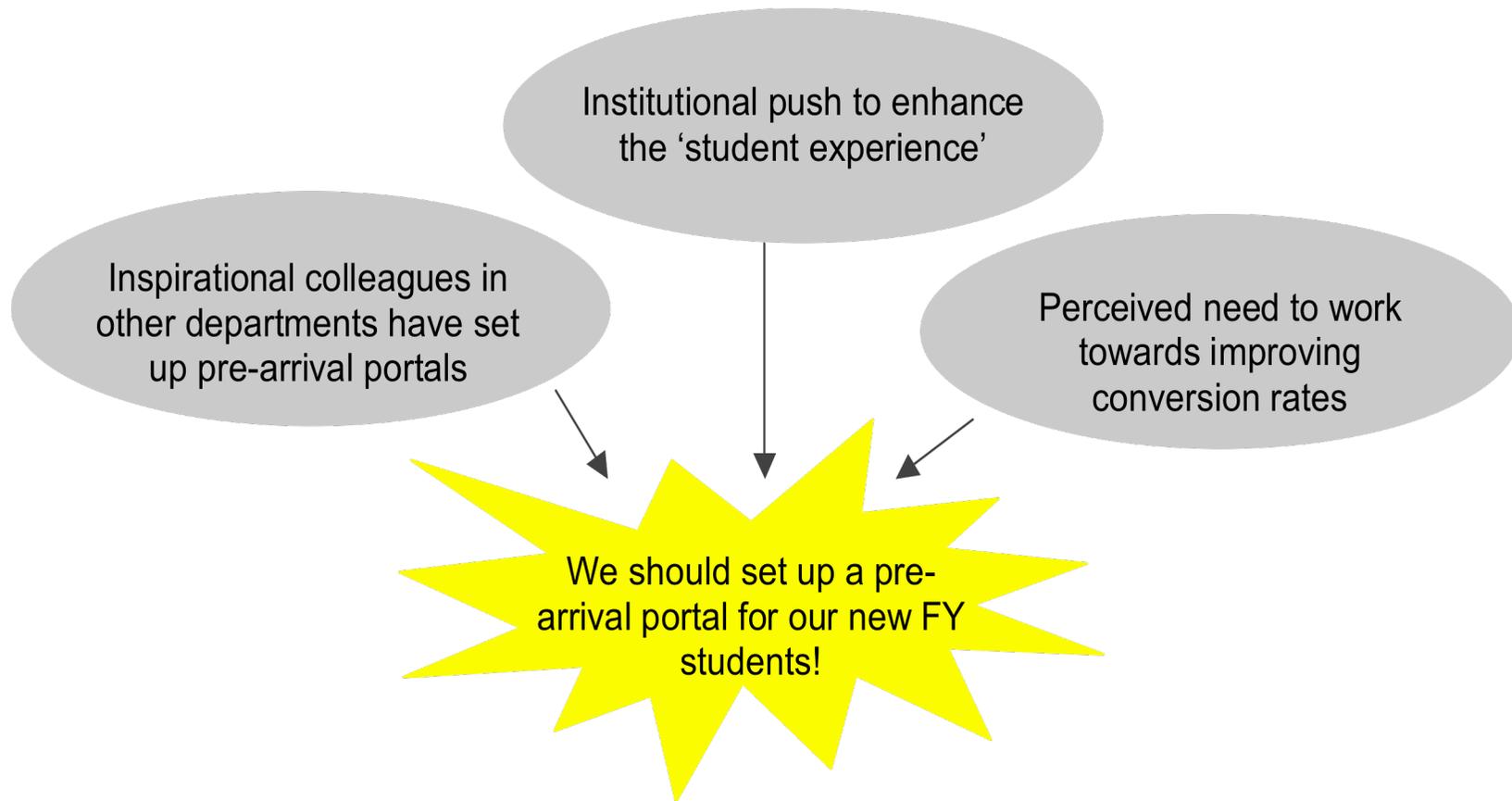


The trials and tribulations of setting up a student pre-arrival portal

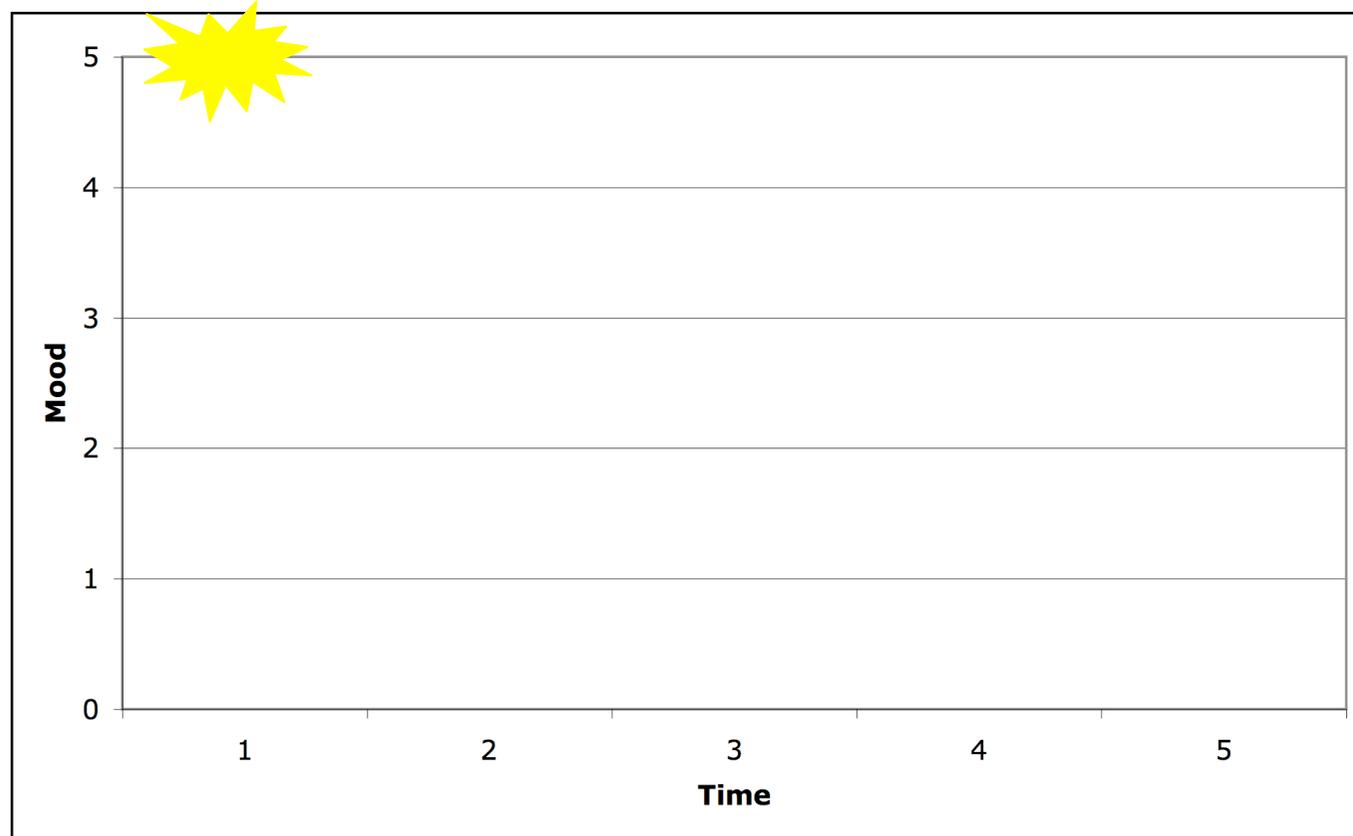
Florencia Franceschina
Manchester Metropolitan University
F.Franceschina@mmu.ac.uk

FY Network Annual Conference,
8-9 July 2010, University of Southampton

How the idea was born



And so a journey began ...



The trials started soon after

- Where do we set up the portal?

Some options:

- University web page
(but which specific area?)
- University VLE area
(password needed!)
- Independent web site
(not corporate or authoritative, but may be simpler to set up)

The trials started soon after

- Does the portal need to be interactive? If so, how do we do this?

Some options:

- Social networking sites (Ning, Facebook, etc.)
- Web form through which students can send us questions
- FAQ list in response to email enquiries

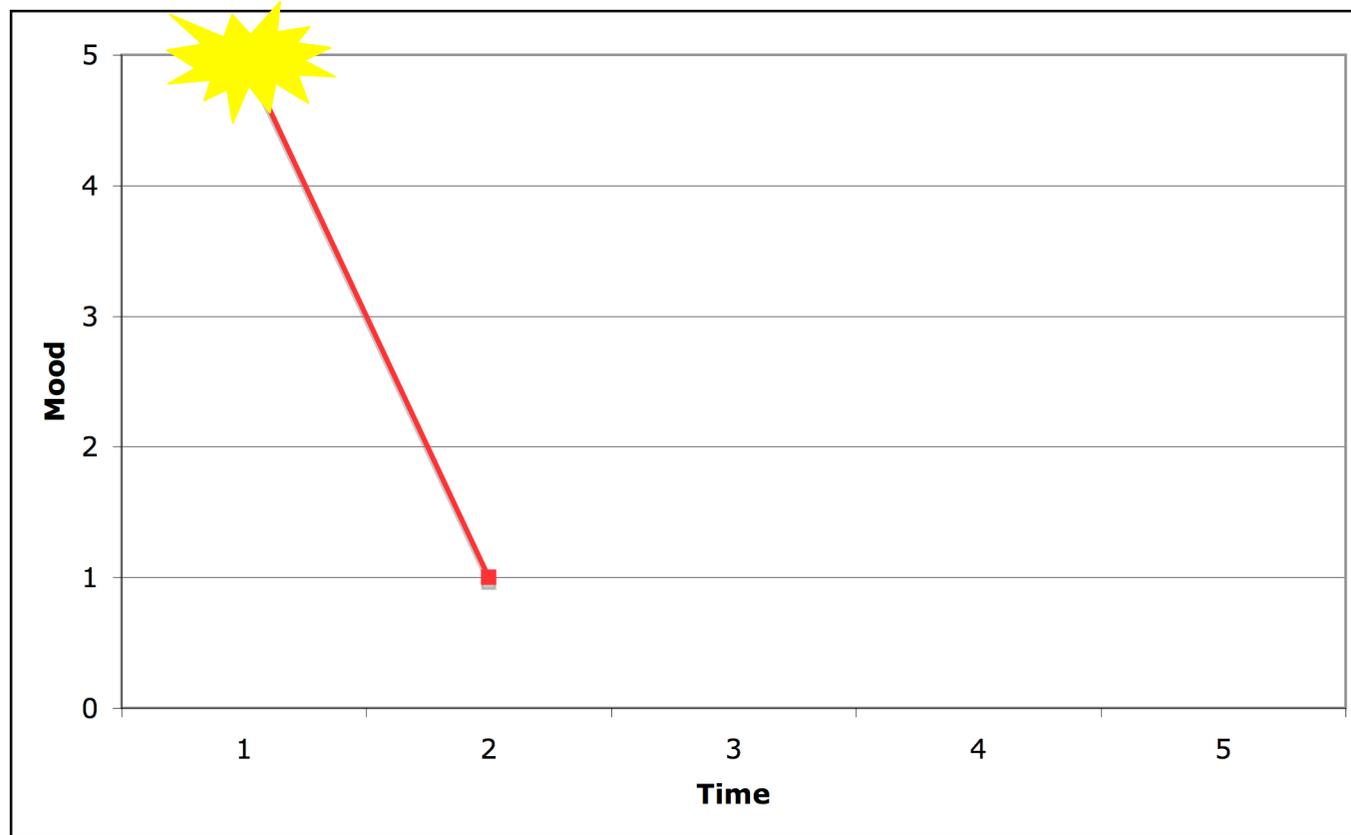
The trials started soon after

- Who do we need to ask whether the idea of the pre-arrival portal is going to be acceptable and viable?
 - Staff directly involved with the FYP
 - HoD
 - Recruitment / admissions team?
 - Marketing / web development team?
 - International Office?
 - Linked degree departments?
 - Previous/current students?

The trials started soon after

- How much technical expertise is needed to set this up?
- Do we need any special software or equipment?
- Who can give us editing rights to the website?
- Who can give us technical support with the website?

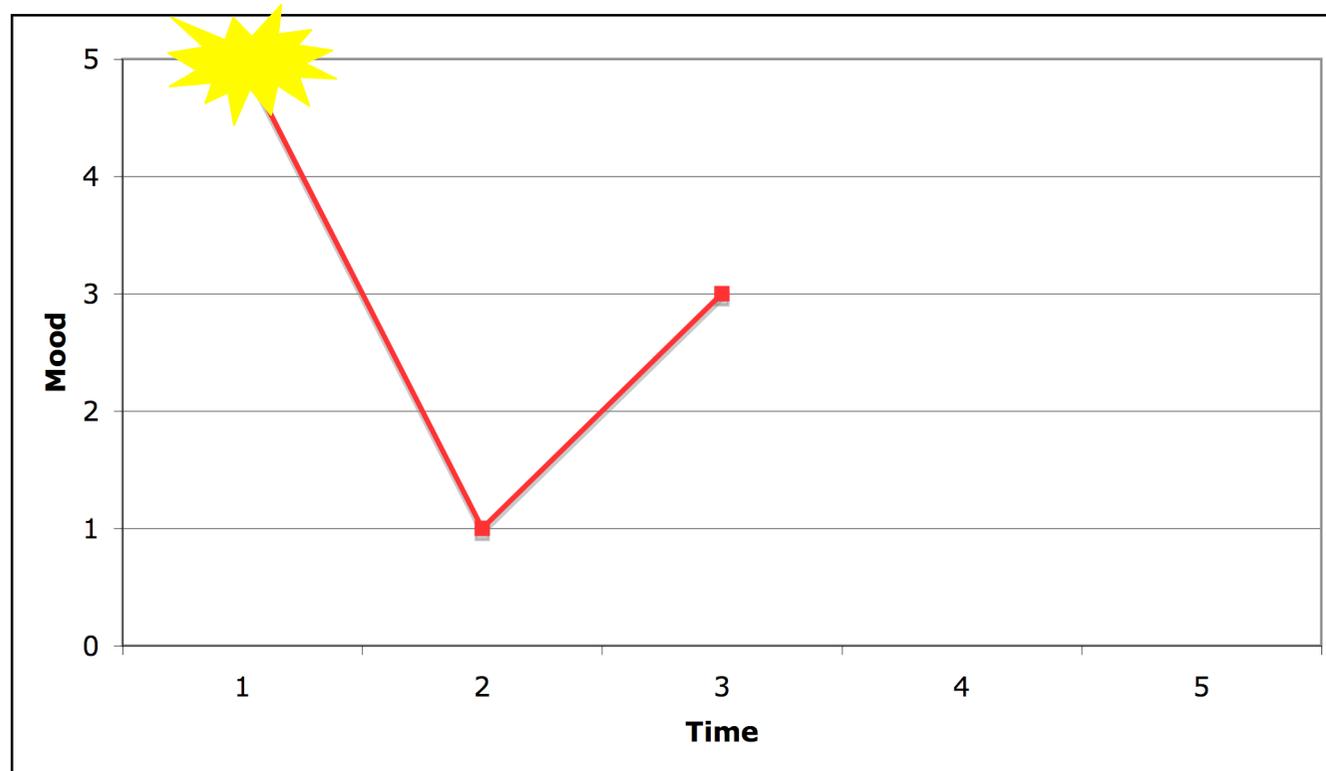
The trials started soon after



Then things began to look up

- Colleagues sent in good suggestions (interesting links for website, pre-arrival tasks linked to the FYP units, ideas for how to make the portal interesting and appealing to students, etc.)
- Some of the previous questions got answered.
- Feeling that some progress was being made.

Then things began to look up



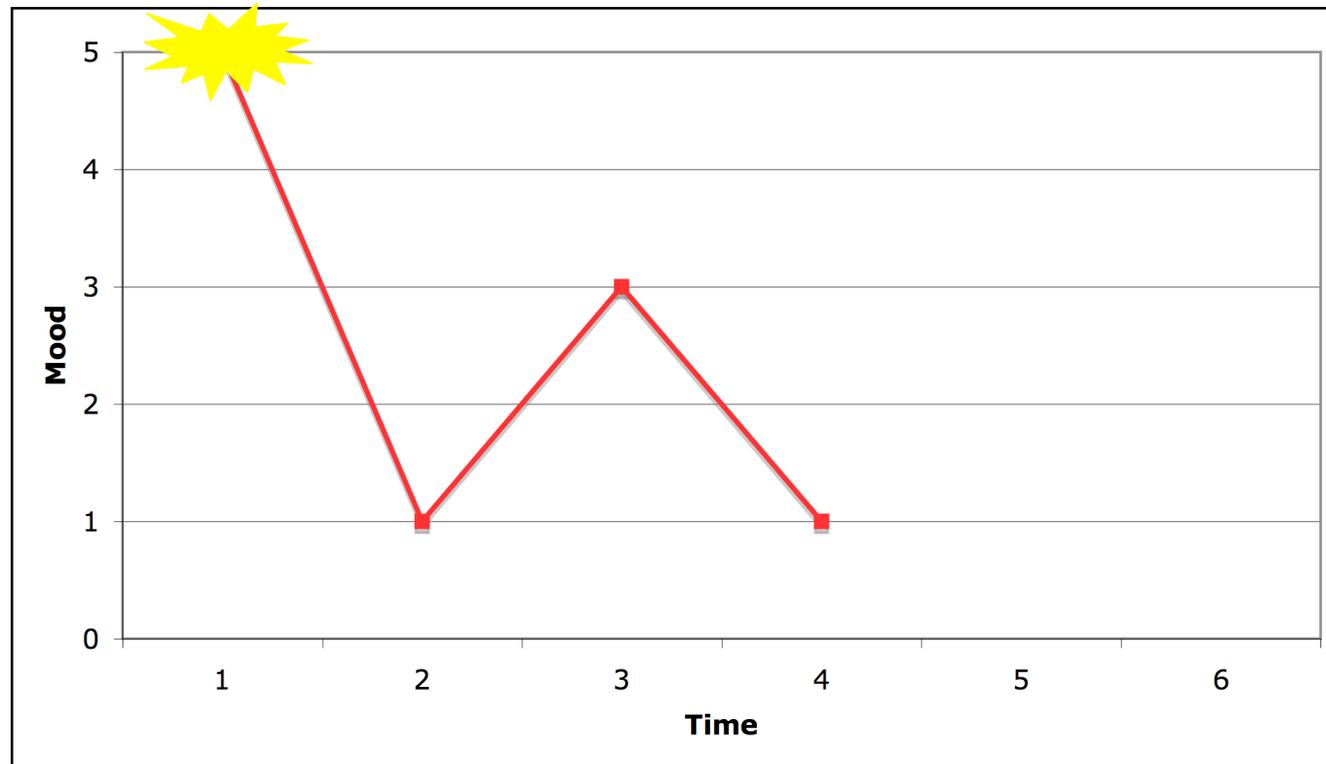
But the excitement was short-lived

- Most things got delayed:
 - Equipment that needed to be purchased had to be authorised, etc.
 - IT staff took their time installing needed software and they needed to pay us more than one visit to sort everything out.
 - Web officer was not overtly enthusiastic to take on our project.
 - Web officer needed to wait for central policy decisions about pre-arrival portals.

But the excitement was short-lived

- Most things got delayed:
 - Recruitment & Admissions suddenly took an interest in our project and meeting had to be set up, etc.
 - Students who promised to help with videos didn't turn up.
 - Exam boards and other work got in the way.
 - ...

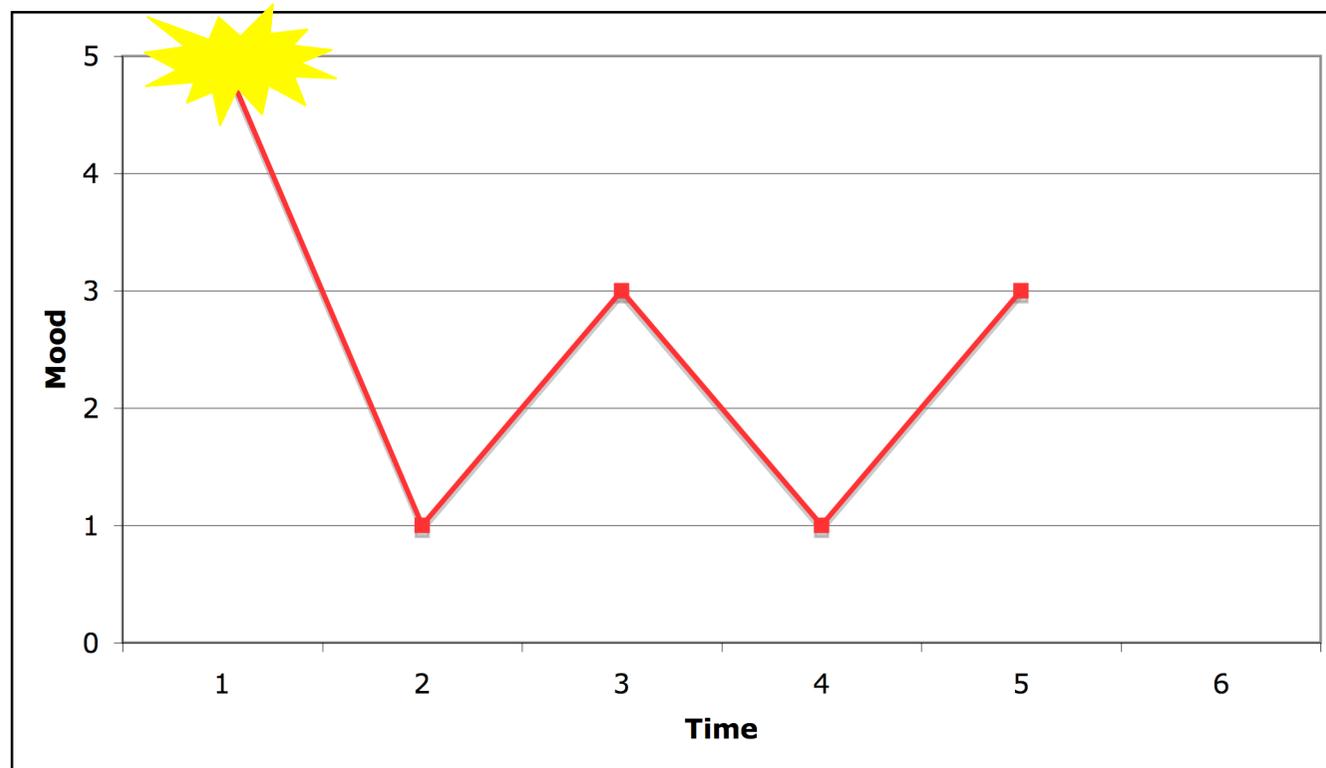
But the excitement was short-lived



Slowly things started to get done

- We got some access to web space to start drafting portal.
- We got a student volunteer to help with videos for portal.
- The software and hardware (*BB Flashback*, *Dreamweaver*, podcast server, webcam) worked well and allowed us to start to produce the needed materials.
- Feeling of progress returned.

Slowly things started to get done



More difficulties emerged

- Design/marketing expert was not impressed by initial efforts (e.g., some features looked home-made and might do more harm than good).
- We felt somewhat constrained by the corporate template.
- We found other university portals looked much nicer than ours.

More difficulties emerged

University Enrolment | Foundation Year | MMU

http://149.170.116.190/welcome/prearrival.php

BBC News R4 World Service Google Bing Dictionary MMU Novell WebAccess MMU WebCT

homepage A-Z Index Current Students Staff

Manchester Metropolitan University

Foundation Year

Welcome

Meet the Staff

Your First Week

University Enrolment

Study Skills

Ask a Question / FAQs

MMU Homepage » Foundation Year

Before you start your Foundation Year course

Pre-entry activity

Before coming along to induction week we'd like you to complete an activity which we hope will help you to settle into university life and resolve any fears or anxieties that you may have about starting here at MMU.

This activity will feed into a group activity that you will undertake with some of your fellow students in one of your core units, Academic Methods. All will be explained during induction (see [induction week information](#)).

Your task:

1. Think about any fears or anxieties that you have about coming to university. These could range from money worries to being away from home, meeting new people, coping with nerves or just not knowing what to expect.
2. Access the following website: <http://www.studentstories.co.uk/>
Browse the Audio Clips, Student Articles and Videos sections to find out how other students have dealt with the worries that you are facing now.
The Links & Art section has links to resources that may also help you to deal with any issues that you have before you even arrive.
Use the search box to enter keywords to find resources of specific relevance to you. Examples of keywords might be 'friends', 'money' or 'nerves'.
3. From reading these stories note down any strategies you might employ to help you to overcome these fears or anxieties.
4. Chat to other students during induction and find out what their worries are. You will probably find that there are many students with the same concerns as you.
5. Bring your thoughts with you to your first Academic Methods class ready to take part in a group activity.

General advice for before you arrive at university

MMU ['What to do before you arrive'](#) page

MMU ['What to bring with you'](#) page

MMU ['Ask a student'](#) page

Information about living as a student in [Manchester](#) and [Cheshire](#)

Information [about MMU](#)

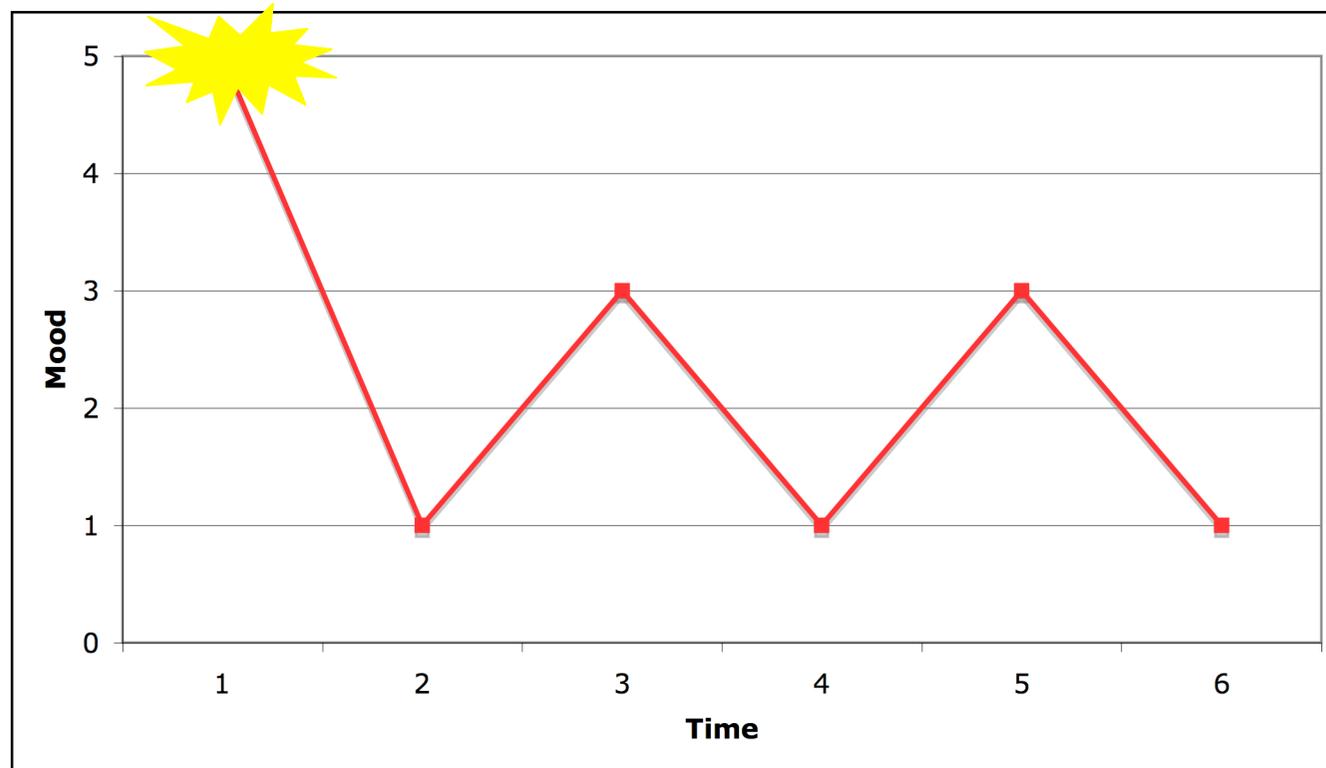
General advice about [student life](#) from the National Union of Students (NUS)

Help with budgeting for university from the [UNIAID Student Calculator](#)

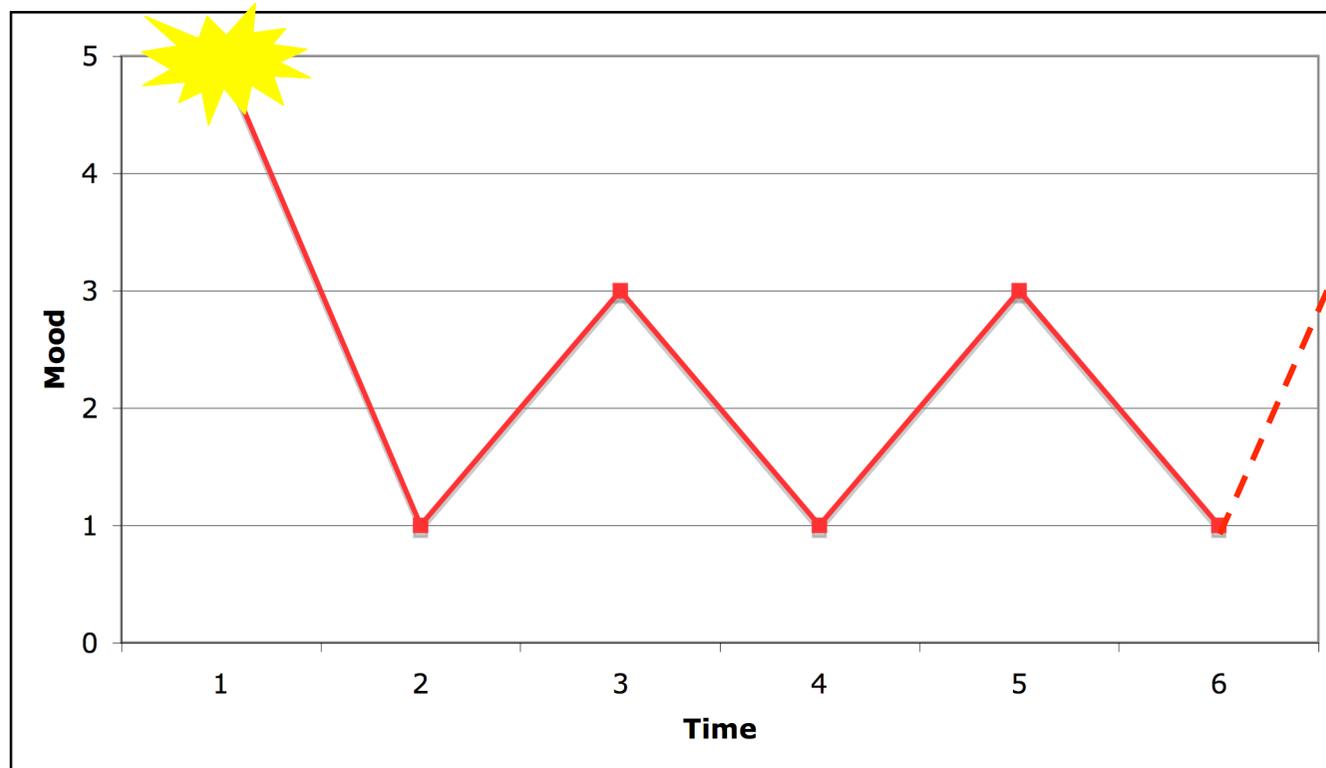
More difficulties emerged

- We started to worry about getting everything done in time for launch of site (planned for 1st Aug).

More difficulties emerged



But we're optimistic!



What we have learned so far

- Plan with plenty of lead time.
- Don't be too ambitious the first year you run a pre-arrival portal.
- Seek feedback from different members of staff and students.

Some remaining questions

- Have we left any important stakeholders out of the development process?
- What's the best time to launch pre-arrival portals? Is August too late?
- Is it better to have open or pass-worded portals?

All comments and
suggestions welcome!

Thank you