

Future Directions for Higher Education in Wales:

Students as Partners





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This work strand began its work at the inaugural conference set up by the Future Directions Steering Group in March 2010.

Its first meeting explored some of the different roles in which students had been cast by various initiatives, such as customer, client, collaborator, co-producer, and discussed the merits and demerits of some of these.

Higher education is rapidly altering its view of the role of the student in shaping the learning process and the student experience as a whole. A rich narrative is unfolding as the higher education landscape changes – one that increasingly highlights the importance of the student voice being heard – in everything from shaping curriculum or deciding how money for learning and teaching resources is spent, to designing institutional systems for quality assurance.

The group quickly agreed that inviting student membership of the work strand, beyond the membership of the NUS Wales, who had been co-founders of the initiative that led to the planning of the 'Future Directions' conference and its related activities, was vital in exploring the nuances of these developments.

Subsequent meetings of the group have benefited from a majority of very active student members attending from institutions across Wales.

The condensed case studies that follow are a collection of the ways in which member institutions of this Students as Partners work strand are weaving the ideas and opinions of students, in increasing detail, into the fabric of the collective activity of our institutions. Many contributions contained herein are written by institutional managers or sabbatical officers working closely with the student body – others are exclusively student contributions.

This is not the end but a beginning; we must continue to work together to ensure that students contribute successfully to the future of higher education – not merely as observers, or guests, but as valued partners.

See case studies and additional material at:
<http://studentsaspartners.wikispaces.com/>

Dr Nick Potter
Students as Partners work strand leader
Head of Academic Services, Swansea Metropolitan University



Theme I: Student representation

Aberystwyth University: Student representation system

The initiative was introduced throughout the institution: the target audience was the student body and the academic staff.

Aberystwyth University has long had structures in place for student representation throughout the institution: at departmental, faculty and senior committee level. In recent years, it was increasingly felt that, in order to be more effective in their role, student representatives would benefit from a standard programme of training. Initially, this training was delivered by the Sabbatical Officers of the Guild of Students. In 2010, this was developed further with the appointment of a full-time Student Representation and Experience Co-ordinator, based in the Guild but managed in partnership with the University. The post holder is required to ensure the election of representatives to departmental committees, to deliver a programme of training, and to oversee the student representation structures throughout the University.

Students are elected within their departments onto Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs) by a popular vote of their peers. These representatives, known as 'course representatives', canvass opinion within their departments and bring issues, concerns, and general feedback to regular meetings between departmental staff and representatives. From each of the SSCCs across the University, two delegates – known as 'senior representatives' – are chosen to attend Course Representatives' Council, held after each cycle of SSCCs. The Council is chaired by the Guild's Education Officer and brings together all the departments in order to pinpoint University-wide issues that can be brought to the attention of the Senior Management Team. The final tier in the student representation structure is at faculty level. From Course Representatives' Council, senior representatives are elected to sit on faculty boards as full voting members.

The aim was to enhance and develop the role of the student representatives within departments and faculties, to ensure that proper and effective representation occurred. It sought to make student representatives more than 'lone individual voices' in such consultative meetings and to improve the level of staff-student interaction over the range of issues that affected student learning, environment and curriculum matters at both departmental and faculty level. An additional impact was on the wider student community – it showed that students' concerns could be dealt with as part of a much wider system – i.e. issues were actually going somewhere. Part of this is publicising to representatives and the wider student community the processes involved (i.e. SSCC minutes to departmental boards, senior representatives).

The Guild intends that faculty representatives are intended to complement, rather than replace, Guild Officers. The faculty representatives are drawn from within its

own student base, bringing knowledge of the necessary business and procedures – previously a problem if the Guild Officer had not been a student within a particular faculty.

A co-ordinated approach to student representation has enabled issues to be filtered through to the appropriate management structures in an efficient manner – flagging up issues affecting the student experience. One example is the annual digest of the Council's deliberations that is sent to the Deans' Committee.

Evidence gathered from student representatives also enables the Guild to report effectively and with confidence to the relevant senior University committees.

The student representation system has benefited enormously from a co-ordinated approach. The system is now more robust, with representatives empowered by the structures beyond their own departmental committees. Representatives also benefit from the network of peers and enhanced support from the Guild and University.

Professor Tim Woods
Aberystwyth University

Bangor University: Student Experience Enhancement Strategy

The creation of the University's Student Experience Enhancement Strategy as a collaboration between the University and the Students' Union is an institutional initiative that impacts on all aspects of the student experience.

The aim was to work collaboratively with Bangor Students' Union to produce an institutional strategy that builds on the existing strengths of the Bangor student experience, responds to the national context and identifies key priorities for development over the next three years.

Bangor University's strategic approach to developing the student experience is underpinned by a commitment to partnership working between staff and students across all aspects of student-related activity. The Student Experience Enhancement Strategy was written in collaboration with Bangor Students' Union as an outcome of an extensive consultation process conducted in partnership with students. A student experience consultation event, hosted jointly with the Students' Union, was held in March 2011 to bring together over 60 staff and students in student-facilitated round-table discussions. The event was used to identify areas of strength and priority areas for improvement in the Bangor student experience. An additional Welsh-medium student experience meeting was hosted by the President of the Welsh Students' Union to bring together staff and students in discussing strengths and priorities for the development of Welsh-medium provision.

The consultation event was followed by a web-based form sent to individual students and staff inviting contributions to this review of strengths and weakness in the student experience. There were 406 responses from staff and students.

In collaboration with the Students' Union, the ideas generated from the consultation process were combined with NSS data and existing strategic priorities identified in the Institutional Fee Plan to create the first draft of the strategy, which was presented to a Steering Group for comment in June 2011. Membership of the Steering Group was agreed with the Students' Union and comprised College Directors of Teaching and Learning, Central Services staff and four student representatives. The strategy was approved by the University's Executive Committee and Senate in October 2011.

The strategy identifies current strengths as well key enhancements across six areas:

- the student learning experience;
- the postgraduate experience;
- Welsh-medium provision;
- employability;
- development and design of services and facilities;
- Bangor Students' Union;
- our inclusive community.

The strategy is implemented through an operational plan setting specific targets and timelines for delivery, and is complemented by the University's Student Charter. The implementation of the strategy is overseen by the Strategy Steering Group and is reported to the University Executive through the PVC Students.

The strategy is intended to both build on existing strengths and enhance areas needing development across all aspects of the student experience. The strategy's underpinning theme of 'Students as Partners' ensures that these enhancements are achieved through the embedding of collaborative working with students at all levels and across all aspects of student-facing activity. Examples of specific commitments from the strategy that support the embedding of partnership working across the institution include:

- As part of our commitment to the continual enhancement of the student experience, the University will support the production of an evidence-based annual report, led and published by the Students' Union. Highlighting key areas of work and issues that have been brought to the attention of the Students' Union, the report will feed into the University's evaluation and development of the student experience.
- The University views the Students' Union as the key partner in all aspects of the student experience, and the Students' Union will be an integral voice in all University developments and projects. University services and initiatives will develop robust systems for consultation with students through partnership with the Students' Union to ensure that the student voice is embedded in an informed and representative manner.
- The University is sympathetic to the financial cost of a university education, and is committed to maintaining controlled and transparent pricing for all the facilities it provides for students such as accommodation, catering, sports, nightclub and other social facilities. Where profits are made from students' use of these facilities, there will be reinvestment into the continuing improvement and development of the facilities in line with student feedback.

- To ensure that services and facilities are meeting the needs of our students, all services will develop appropriate mechanisms for gathering feedback from students as part of the evaluation and forward planning of the service. Each service's plan for integrating student feedback into evaluation and forward planning will be developed through facilitation from the Director of Student Experience, in consultation with the Students' Union, to ensure robust student representation across all activities that impact on the student experience. Likewise, future developments in facilities will be planned in full consultation with the Students' Union so that the University can best direct resources towards the needs of its students.
- The University is committed to supporting a fully embedded, Students' Union-run course representative system active in all schools and at all levels. Each school will provide a nominated staff member to be responsible for ensuring course representatives are recruited (via an elections process) and facilitated in communicating with students within the school. Each school will have a fully operational staff-student liaison committee, meeting at least every semester, populated with key academic and administrative staff, course representatives and a cross-section of students from all levels of study, with outcomes fully communicated to all staff and students within the school.

The aims of the strategy cover all aspects of the student experience and so sources of evidence of outcomes will be numerous and varied according to the specific strategic priority. The implementation of the strategy will be monitored by the joint Students' Union and University Steering Group using the operational plan to chart progress in implementation. The strategy embeds processes for consulting with students across all aspects of their experience, and so implementation of the strategy will produce more robust mechanisms for evaluating the quality of the student experience at Bangor and thus in turn the impact of the strategy.

Maria Graal
Bangor University

Cardiff Metropolitan University: Student-led

Teaching Fellowships

The initiative is being introduced throughout the institution. It is aimed at recognising and rewarding good practice in learning and teaching across the University and associate colleges. Following the success of student-led teaching awards in Scotland, the Learning and Teaching Development Unit (LTDU) together with the Students' Union (SU) at Cardiff Metropolitan University are launching similar awards in 2011-12. These awards will provide students with the opportunity to recognise and reward good teaching practice.

Over the past two years, 13 institutions within Scotland have developed and evaluated the impact of student-led teaching awards. Building on these initial pilot projects, Cardiff Metropolitan University is instigating their own Student-led Teaching Fellowships. These fellowships will provide the opportunity for partnership working between LTDU and the SU to establish categories and criteria, develop an evidence-based nomination system and provide opportunities for the dissemination of good practice. The six nomination categories have been chosen to reflect areas identified in the NSS, the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and sector-wide themes.

Students will be asked to reflect on their experience and provide evidence, by way of examples, to support their nomination. Nominations will be gathered under the identified categories and will be judged by a panel whose membership reflects the partnership between LTDU and the SU.

Recipients of the Fellowship will receive the title of 'Teaching Fellow' in the chosen category, together with an honorarium in recognition of their excellence.

It is anticipated that this initiative will have the following outcomes:

- provide opportunities for greater partnership working and empower students to influence their learning experience;
- clearly identify what students value in learning and teaching;
- identify best practice across the University and provide a platform for sharing of this practice;
- improve student satisfaction;
- reward and recognise staff for excellence in learning and teaching, thereby raising the profile of learning and teaching;
- provide an evidence base for good practice within the institution, which can be used for to inform future initiatives;
- promote partnership working between the Learning and Teaching Development Unit and the Students' Union.

This project will be evaluated in July 2012 and when the outcomes will be made available.

Although still in the development phase this project has already provided the opportunity for closer working between the Learning and Teaching Development Unit and the Students' Union. The success of these awards will largely depend on the work of student representatives in promoting the benefits of these awards to students and engaging their support in the nomination process.

The main challenge so far has been on the deciding on the number and key focus of the categories. The danger was to try and achieve too much in the first year rather than demonstrate the value to both staff and students and embed the process. Setting up systems for advertising and deciding on the best nomination process is also proving troublesome. Meeting with other students' unions who have already been through the process has been extremely useful in trying not to repeat mistakes and take on board lessons learnt. What is becoming clear is the need for clear timelines and marketing strategies to capture students' attention to see the value of these awards in enhancing the student experience in learning and teaching.

Ruth Matheson
Cardiff Metropolitan University

Cardiff University: Developing a learning and teaching strategy

The aim was to develop a learning and teaching strategy that would influence and enrich the learning and teaching experience of students and staff at Cardiff University.

The University and the Students' Union worked together to organise a student focus group to find out what students thought about the current learning experience at Cardiff University. Once a draft strategy had been written it was taken to Academic Council, a Students' Union committee with an undergraduate and postgraduate representative from every school, to discuss and make comments. After this consultation a further draft was written, which was then circulated through University committees and senior University management.

This strategy was always seen as something that should practically influence the learning and teaching mechanisms throughout all the schools at Cardiff University and, as a result, it ties in with other projects and strategies that are being created this year. It is deliberately designed to set key principles that all subjects should be able to incorporate, which is why it was important to discuss it with a large range of students.

This strategy has only just been agreed after having made its way through the University committee structure. However, it is hoped that it will be one of the documents linked to the Student Charter that Cardiff University and the Students' Union will be writing next academic year, and therefore underpin the learning and teaching experience at Cardiff.

It is too early to give any evidence of actual outcomes, although it has already been influencing other strategies and projects with the principles that it sets.

This strategy will give staff and students a means to articulate what Cardiff University should be providing and reassurance that it is committed to giving resource to the principles laid down in the strategy. It has been assumed in the past that due to the importance of research, teaching was not as valued; however, this strategy has clarified that issue and by including students in the creation of it, makes them more likely to agree with it and want to continue to be involved.

Sarah Ingram
Cardiff University

Cardiff University: Academic representation system

This initiative was introduced throughout the institution, beginning with four pilot schools.

The aim was to enable consistency across all 27 schools at Cardiff University in the purpose, usage and value of academic representatives. The documents and system that emerged from the work was aimed at: staff, to give an understanding and be able to use the system; the students who were representatives themselves; and all other students so that they also could effectively use the system.

There has always been a representation system in place; however, it varies widely between the schools. Last year a task and finish group was set up in the University to come up with some key recommendations. This year the Students' Union wrote up some key roles and responsibilities for academic representatives and discussed them with the representatives themselves before submitting them to the University. This began a partnership of work between the Union and the University, gathering information on what approach other systems have taken and along the way talking to current representatives through Academic Council and in other forums to ask them for their ideas.

Once we had developed a draft system the University and Union met with schools who were willing to pilot the system to make sure that it was feasible. In order for the new system to be launched, it is vital that both students and staff buy in to the concept, and it is hoped that there will be a 'launch' with concise information on the system and its benefits.

The system is being piloted in September 2012. The main concern is the buy-in from students and staff. We have invested time in talking to as wide a range of staff and students as possible and will be monitoring buy-in through the pilot.

Sarah Ingram
Cardiff University

Cardiff University: Student Charter

This initiative is being developed in the 2011-12 session to be published by August 2012.

The aim is to communicate to current students the expectations that the University has of them and what they can expect of the University, throughout their time at Cardiff University. The charter should reflect the spirit of the Cardiff University community and provide a single, central hub of useful information that students may need to access.

The Student Charter is being developed in partnership between the University and the Students' Union. The working group includes two Students' Union sabbatical officers and two Students' Union staff members, and consultation on the charter involves both staff and students.

The charter will be seen and commented on by as many staff and students as possible and will be agreed through the Students' Union committee mechanisms, as well as the University's committee structure.

So far this approach has been successful and even in the primary stages of consultation we have been able to communicate with staff and students across a wide range of disciplines. You can find out about the latest consultations and development of the charter at: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/studentvoice/student-charter/>

The charter itself will be the material outcome of this project in Summer 2012. However, it is hoped that as well as the hub of information that will be collected into one place as a result of this work, it will also provide students and staff with a background from which to develop their own experience at Cardiff University and bring about a feeling of community.

We are currently developing the charter and, therefore, will not be able to know the outcomes for another few months. However, we hope to post another case study on the outcomes of this project, once it has been completed.

It is difficult to assess what the impact of this project will be. It has the potential to define the Cardiff experience, or become another item in the list of things that students should read but never do. However, by engaging with so many students and staff during its creation, we can ensure that it is as relevant and useful as possible, therefore maximising its practicality and hopefully ensuring that it meets its purpose.

Sarah Ingram
Cardiff University

Coleg Llandrillo Cymru: Learner Involvement Policy and Strategy

The Learner Involvement Policy and Strategy were introduced throughout the institution. The overarching aims of the initiative are: to involve students, individually and collectively, to build and improve on all aspects of their learner experience; to strengthen learner participation and learner involvement; and to develop a culture whereby all the staff actively listen, value and respond to learner opinion.

Providing varied opportunities for learners to contribute encourages participation and contributions from all learner groups. The approach is to utilise the Students' Union as a key communication link to the feedback and involvement of all learners. The Students' Union President is a paid post, supported by site representatives. The Students' Union President is a member of the Board of Governors and reports directly to the Corporation Board. Students are encouraged to attend cross-College meetings and the Students' Union President or Executive Officers represent learners on key College committees.

Each course elects a student representative who acts as the spokesperson for that group and attends course team meetings. Course representatives are invited to attend Student Council meetings where the College Managers are invited to attend to discuss areas of interest or issues and gather direct feedback from learners on a variety of issues such as estates strategy and refectory services. There are other opportunities for learners to be involved such as curriculum area meetings, focus groups, learner panels, learner surveys, module evaluations, classroom/work-based observations, staff recruitment, learner portal feedback, comments and suggestion boxes.

The learners have a strong and active role within College life. Direct action from the learner voice can lead to changing policies and procedures where appropriate.

Feeding back to learners on actions taken demonstrates to learners our commitment to gathering and acting upon their views; this further encourages learners to participate fully and engage with our learner involvement processes. We also have posters displayed around College campuses noting 'You said: we did' in response to surveys.

Impact assessment takes place through our annual self-assessment process and is evident throughout the annual self-assessment report.

Lisa Johnson
Coleg Llandrillo Cymru

Glyndŵr University: Development of a Student Representatives Council

In 2011-12, the Associate Director for Student Experience collaborated with the Students' Guild, and several very active student representatives (or 'student reps' as they are often known), to develop and establish a Student Representative Council at Glyndŵr University. This initiative is aimed at strengthening the student voice and providing a visible 'food chain' for feedback of University-wide issues, or persisting programme-level issues where additional support in resolving issues is required. This is also a forum for what students see as best practice to be shared, and for students to have their say in how the University allocates expenditure on resources.

Having identified weaknesses in the existing student representative structure, in consultation with student reps, it became an objective within both the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Widening Access Strategy to establish a Student Representative Council by 2012.

Within the new structure we have developed a new role of 'super rep', formally known as 'student council representatives'. This role is differentiated from the programme representative role as a more senior, mentoring role.

The role of the 'super rep' is to:

- promote the new student representative system and recruit student representatives at subject area assemblies during pre-induction, induction and enrolment;
- sit on the Student Representative Council
- recruit, mentor and be responsible for programme representatives within an academic subject area (there will be 13 or 14 'super reps' in total);
- attend regular meetings with Students' Guild and feed issues back to the Student Representative Council;
- hold shared responsibility for editing and updating the Moodle (virtual learning environment) site for student representatives;
- represent the views of students on University committees and feed back to Student Representative Council and Staff-Student Consultative Committee;
- take part in focus groups for specific learning and teaching and student experience initiatives.

To become a 'super rep', or 'student council representative' as it will formally be known, students will have had to be a student representative already at Glyndŵr or another university, and have evidence of this.

The Student Council meets formally and informally. Minutes are taken at each meeting and the Terms of Reference have been drawn up by the members themselves. The President of the Glyndŵr University Students' Guild chairs the Council, and membership is extended to the Guild's Executive Committee in addition to the newly appointed student council representatives.

Issues discussed at recent meetings include, the results of the National Student Survey, library resource allocation, recommendations on improvements to IT services, and consultation on the next incarnation of the Student Charter.

A programme of benefits was approved to support recruitment to the 'super reps' role: an unpaid but privileged and prestigious University role. Again, students were instrumental in drawing up the list of benefits and these include: the opportunity to attend a conference; a team-building session; sports centre discount; NUS card; Railcard; and free tickets for events held on campus (six per year). These incentives do not hold a high monetary value necessarily, but are deemed to be beneficial in improving personal development and lifestyle.

It is anticipated that some of Glyndŵr's 'super reps' will attend the 'Students as Partners' work strand of the 'Future Directions' conference (but they are adamant that they will not be donning tights or capes as their title suggests).

Sally Harrison
Glyndŵr University

Swansea Metropolitan University: School of Leisure & Sport Management – Leisure & Sport Management (LSM) society

The initiative was introduced into one faculty, (Business & Management) on one scheme (Sport Management) on one module (Sports Development & Planning). It has implications and benefits for other modules and dissertations at Level 6.

LSM is a student society aimed at supporting the development of a world-class workforce for sport and leisure management while also supporting the broader objectives of increasing participation of sport and physical activity. LSM aims to develop future professionals by supporting and producing schemes and programmes that promote sport and physical activity participation to staff and students within the University.

The objectives of the project were to:

- 1) enhance education and skills of Sport and Leisure students;
- 2) widen access to sport and physical activity;
- 3) improve health and wellbeing;
- 4) create successful teams;
- 5) strengthen organisations and partnerships.

LSM also allows Level 6 Sport and Leisure Management students: to represent their views to people who make decisions; to campaign on issues affecting members; and to be part of a supportive community and network. The activities of the society are closely linked with the Students' Union and University health and wellbeing programmes.

The initial outcomes will enable each student to produce a portfolio of work focusing on:

- demonstrating the attainment of key sports development knowledge and skill sets as set out by national industry standards, while undertaking a student volunteer role as an activities development officer;
- producing documentation including detailed analysis of the agreed key area of responsibility including participation levels, facilities, workforce, and access to elite sporting pathways, existing resources and programmes. The portfolio will aim to evaluate the findings of the analysis and to develop key sections of a development and work plan that is responsive to local (key external drivers), policy (Government agendas/funding) and organisational (national governing body) opportunities and or constraints;
- the implementation of work plans as live projects with synthesis of theoretical material and its practical application within the context of a given case organisation;

- the final assessment, where the student will need to produce a small paper (1,000 words) report outlining an annual review of the key project/programme areas involved with while undertaking a volunteer development officer role. The student will be required to present a review of work and recommendations for improvement to current development programmes as result of detailed analysis of the current provision and infrastructure. These presentations need to demonstrate a clear strategic need for undertaking the new programme/ initiative.

Outcomes so far include:

- a community online discussion through LinkedIn set up by staff and students: http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=4051319&trk=hb_side_g;
- the successful organisation and running of events – such as BUCS team fundraisers;
- meetings with Students' Union and University health and wellbeing;
- some knowledge programmes, such as industry talks, have been booked;

All other evidence will be collated by students as part of their assessments.

Early reflections have noted the impact of exposing students to in-class discussions and delivering of programmes that provide a valid and authentic experience. Engaging them in a programme that is dynamic and inspiring has challenged them to apply their theoretical knowledge with skills and technical abilities that will support their long-term development.

Steven Osborne
Swansea Metropolitan University

Swansea Metropolitan University:

'You said: we did'

The initiative was introduced throughout the University to demonstrate to students that the partnership between the University and the Students' Union (SU) is working.

The SU and the University established a point of contact between the SU President and the Head of Quality and Learning and Teaching at SMU. Regular meetings were scheduled and an entirely open agenda was established early on as a principle: nothing was 'out of bounds' for discussion. The University's position was that whatever they could agree to, they would try to agree to; if they really could not then we'd get an explanation why not. We'd publish in the SU newspaper and via other outlets the results of the discussions. The aim is to work together towards better quality enhancement monitoring and feedback. Student representatives will be canvassed to see what the response across the student body is like.

It is early days yet, but a movement towards establishing a culture of partnership has begun. First fruits include a funded student representation scheme designed to set up a sustainable formal faculty representative structure. SU approached the University to ask for a bursary support system for faculty representatives with the view that a funded system would enable a better core structure, which would entail, or at least improve our chances of developing, a better 'marginal' structure. Appointments are being made and though it is too early to tell much, our optimism seems so far to be justified as committed representatives are coming forward and setting up related structures.

John Williams
Swansea Metropolitan Students' Union

Swansea Metropolitan University:

International student ambassadors

The initiative was introduced by the International Office and is University-wide. It is designed to help international students integrate into the city, the University, the faculties and the Students' Union and to support the activities of the International Office.

International student ambassadors are selected and trained by the International Office staff and are chosen to best reflect proportionately the range of countries/ regions within each year's international cohort. They are officially recognised by the University and paid an hourly rate when representing the University on official functions, etc. They form a very valuable bridge between the International Office and the students and their work is complementary to other aspects of academic and pastoral care provided.

It is anticipated that we shall enjoy: more efficient and effective communication between University staff (including International Office) and students; improved awareness of mutually important matters; increasing internal and external perceptions; and empathy with differing student groups and the international arena generally.

Formal measurement of outcomes is inappropriate as much of the work of ambassadors is intangible. However, improved overall student satisfaction and positive but anecdotal feedback from a number of sources at all levels point to a necessary and valuable service.

Outcomes are monitored informally by, for example, observations, staff and student feedback, anecdotes, etc, and formally via regular review of content of social media communications.

Brian Griffiths
Swansea Metropolitan University

Swansea University: Enhancing the course representatives structure

The initiative was introduced throughout the institution (undergraduate provision at first instance) with the aim of enhancing the Students' Union course representatives system through the appointment of college course representatives for undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research provision to co-ordinate the course representatives system in each of the University's six colleges.

College course representatives have been appointed with effect from 2011-12 following a process of application and interview via a selection panel consisting of members of the Students' Union and the University in order to reflect the partnership approach and shared value of this initiative. The University resource the funding of college representatives through the provision of tax-free bursaries of around £750 per representative.

It is anticipated that the college representatives would assist in the recruitment and promotion of course representatives for each college and assist in the training of such representatives. The college representatives would play a pivotal role in engaging with their college to promote the student voice, actively support the college's Student Partnership Forum and work in conjunction with the University and Students' Union to promote internal and external student evaluation activities. The college representatives will also co-ordinate feedback from the course representatives and produce a report for the Students' Union and the University detailing the key issues and developments within their college. The college representatives would also support the work of the Students' Union Sabbatical Officers through membership of various University committees and review events.

Funding has been secured from the University and the Students' Union is actively managing the appointment of representatives. The role shall inevitably develop over the course of the current and future sessions; however, the initiative has been warmly welcomed by the University.

Rhiannon Hedge
Swansea University Students' Union

Swansea University: 'Have Your Say'

This initiative is being introduced throughout the University between January and May 2012 with the aim of promoting an inclusive, partnership approach encouraging all students to 'Have Your Say' by completing the appropriate feedback survey during the University's designated 'Have Your Say' period, February to April 2012.

The National Student Survey and the HEA Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey are increasingly familiar activities in the academic calendar for eligible students. However, the University wishes to extend this further and offer the opportunity for all student pursuing taught programmes of study to be able to 'Have Your Say' during the February to April period each year.

A Surveys Operations Group was established in partnership between the University and the Students' Union to co-ordinate this survey activity and 'Have Your Say' webpages have been created to support the launch of this initiative on 6 February 2012. Each student will have the opportunity to complete one of the following surveys:

- Swansea University Student Experience Survey (SES) for non-final-year undergraduate students;
- NSS for final-year undergraduate students;
- PTES for postgraduate taught students.

The HEA have agreed to bring the start date of the annual PTES survey forward to 6 February to enable us to launch the NSS, PTES and internal SES on the same date. A launch event has been planned in partnership with the Students' Union and involving the participation of staff and student volunteers.

A 'Have Your Say' facebook page and Twitter account will shortly be launched to enable student to discuss any issues that they may have. Additionally, a range of events are being planned in partnership with the Students' Union including:

- a launch event
- promotional videos from the Sabbatical Officers/key University staff;
- subject area visits;
- poster and graphics campaign;
- college forums
- a planned 'Question Time' event.

It is anticipated that the 'Have Your Say' campaign will enable students to have their voice heard, influence how the University develops and feel part of their University, and will help us improve the student experience.

It is believed that by working in partnership with students we can improve the student experience, though it is not possible to know the outcomes at this stage. The University/Students' Union Surveys Operational Group will closely monitor the success or otherwise of all aspects of this initiative. A full review will then be held at the close of the survey period, such review to be informed by the provision of statistical data on participation rates and feedback from students.

It is anticipated that the initiative will become an essential part of the academic calendar and students will become increasingly engaged in the importance of providing feedback on their experience. The concept of a partnership-led approach is one that we wish to become embedded.

Adrian Novis
Swansea University

University of Glamorgan: Engaging diversity

The initiative was introduced throughout the institution with the aim of achieving meaningful student engagement in a way that respects the diverse nature of the student body and takes account of the needs of all students, including those with protected characteristics.

At the University of Glamorgan we understand meaningful student engagement as working in partnership with students in the development, enhancement and monitoring of learning and teaching policy and practice through a range of inclusive opportunities. Such engagement, while appropriate for all students, expressly addresses the needs of disabled students and other students with protected characteristics.

To ensure engagement with the diverse student groups, the University became one of the projects in the Higher Education Academy 'Meaningful Student Engagement' initiative (<http://hca.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Disability/MeaningfulStudentEngagement2010>). The project was led by students supported by the Head of CELT and the Head of the Dyslexia and Disability service. The students wished to advocate increased engagement of students with disabilities, and other students with protected characteristics, within the institutional processes.

It is anticipated that the initiative will have the result of enhancing the responsiveness of the student voice process to the needs of disabled students and ensuring that student voice representatives understand the requirements of disabled students so as to address them through their representation on the faculty and University Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committees. It will also ensure that issues of equality and inclusivity are addressed at Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committees and it will incentivise the engagement of disabled students with the student voice representative appointment process.

The project saw the establishment of a disabled student group that reports to the institutional Disability and Dyslexia Group. It achieved improved communication with the student voice representatives and course representatives mediated by the NUS Disabled Students' Officer and the institution's equality and diversity systems and processes.

Annual equality and diversity training is now provided for all student voice representatives and Students' Union (SU) officers. Course representatives take part in student-led programmes developed in response to previously identified needs (including credit-bearing programmes and an SU award for volunteering).

This project would not have taken place without a strong student steer. The students excelled in being critical of existing systems and seeking approaches to ensure that such systems and approaches were challenged.

The impact of the project on practice has been significant, but we need to continue to ensure that it is student-led to drive the agenda forward and not co-opted into institutional processes.

Haydn Blackey and Rhiannon Llewellyn
University of Glamorgan

University of Glamorgan: Student voice representative for Welsh-medium learners

The initiative was introduced throughout the institution to ensure that the voice and experience of students of the University's Welsh-medium provision are heard in decision making, both at the University and as part of the University's links with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

Following the success of the student voice representatives (SVRs) at faculty and institutional level, the University saw the need to ensure that its Welsh-medium students were given a distinctive voice. With the University's strategy of increasing its Welsh-medium provision and being an active contributor to the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol developments, the University set aside funding (a bursary) to appoint a Welsh-medium SVR.

The Welsh-medium SVR is required to be a student member of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, who will help to support the promotion of the Coleg to other students at the University and will act as the University's student representative on the committees and student liaison groups of the Coleg.

The Welsh-medium SVR will: liaise with the Students' Union in the development of the Students' Union Welsh Society (relaunched this year) and the Welsh Language Students Committee; liaise with Welsh-medium students and course representatives to identify issues of concern, or good practice, which can be taken forward with appropriate members of staff, groups and committees; liaise with the representatives of the Students' Union, where a need arises, on Welsh-speaking, student-related issues; and inform the Welsh-speaking student body of the results of issues raised on their behalf at University, Coleg and faculty-level groups.

The Welsh-medium SVR will be a member of the Cangen Prifysgol o'r Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and report through that group to the Coleg and to the University's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee.

It is anticipated that Welsh-speaking students and students studying on the Welsh-medium provision at the University can become partners in the strategic decision making of the organisation in respect to their experience and to the enhancement of Welsh-medium provision; will influence enhancements in learning, teaching and assessment; will be closely linked with the Wales-wide initiatives of y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol; and will feel that their voice is heard and respected.

The Welsh-medium SVR role was established at the start of the current academic year (2011-12). To date the Welsh-medium SVR has worked closely with the Chair of the University's branch committee of y Coleg, has attended the meetings of the branch. The Welsh-medium SVR has worked with the University's Welsh-medium co-ordinator to undertake a series of student focus groups to understand the needs and expectations of students studying through the medium of Welsh. The Welsh-medium SVR has represented the University in interactions with y Coleg on a national basis.

In the short time the role has been in place Welsh-medium students have expressed the feeling that they are more integrated as partners in the development of Welsh-medium provision.

Haydn Blackey
University of Glamorgan

University of Glamorgan: Community and Citizenship student voice representative

The initiative was introduced throughout the institution to ensure the co-ordination and development of the students' non-course activities that enrich the all-round experience of students while supporting and enhancing the experience of others including the communities in which the University is located, the nation of Wales and the wider global community.

The University has had many examples where individual students have taken the lead on non-course activities that have enriched the experiences of others. This has included organising charity events, supporting the local community, responding to the needs of disabled people and others with particular needs. All of this has been done in a way that has helped develop social and team-building activities for students. The appointment of a Community and Citizenship SVR is to ensure this work is supported at an institutional level and co-ordinated for the best impact for all.

The Community and Citizenship SVR will help ensure the University's students are engaged in activities that support sustainable development and recognise the students as global citizens. The role is to liaise with students, course representatives and other SVRs to identify suitable activities for team building and socialising, bearing in mind the diversity of the student population at Glamorgan and the University's strong reputation for providing inclusive opportunities for all its students. Such activity may be arranged at faculty level or across the University.

The Community and Citizenship SVR: will investigate existing and new charity or volunteering contacts that would benefit from and welcome student involvement; will promote students' participation in such activities as part of the richness of student life; will attend relevant faculty or University groups in order to fulfil the tasks of the role; and will work with key individuals within the University to ensure the inclusivity, global citizenship and community engagement agendas inform the students' extra-curricular activities.

The anticipated outcomes of this initiative are:

- the enhancement of the profile of community engagement, sustainable development and global citizenship among the student body;
- to support engagement by all the institution's student body recognising and celebrating the diversity of that student body;
- to provide students with the insight to recognise themselves as global citizens able to take a full part in local, national and international society;
- to enable the University to build on its own interaction with the communities in which it is located by co-ordinating institutional and student-led initiatives in those communities.

The Community and Citizenship SVR role was established at the start of the current academic year (2011-12). To date the Community and Citizenship SVR has led a series of institutional initiatives, but it is too early to provide an evaluation. The Community and Citizenship SVR will be attending the 'Future Directions' conference on 26 April 2012, so more detailed information about the challenges and successes to date will be available for presentation at the conference.

Haydn Blackey
University of Glamorgan

University of Wales, Newport: Students as Partners Forum

The aims of this initiative were: to establish a group that consists of staff and students from across the institution, who are able to openly discuss all aspects of the student experience and actively seek to identify actions that seek to enhance experiences and respond to feedback or student suggestion for change; to co-ordinate and monitor the targets set relating to Students as Partners in the Learning and Teaching strategy of the University of Wales, Newport, reporting to the Learning and Teaching Committee; to promote and generate commitment across the institution to the concept of students as partners; and to evaluate the impact of the targets set, reporting to the Learning and Teaching Committee.

The Students as Partners Forum holds a regular monthly meeting that brings together a diverse student and staff group to consider aspects of the student experience as raised through the many channels available, e.g. course representatives, edwelfare, mentors, student services, faculty, etc. Forum membership includes:

- Head of Student Services (Joint Chair);
- Students' Union President (Joint Chair);
- Deputy Head of Student Services;
- Student Advice and Mentor Manager;
- Student Representation Co-ordinator;
- student mentors (x2);
- course representatives (x3: one from each faculty and one from UHoVI);
- student ambassadors (x1);
- student team accommodation representative (x1);
- student support workers (1);
- co-opted representation from CES, CDEL and CELT (x1 each);
- the Chaplain;
- faculty representation (x1 per faculty).

The forum is to take the lead in raising awareness of and responses to the 'You said: we did' campaign, which will form the initial agenda at each meeting along with the development and implementation of an ongoing action plan to enhance the student experience. It will seek to establish new responsive working partnerships between staff and students across the institution and also to open dialogue and planning for the new Student Charter. This forum reports in an official capacity to the University's Student Experience Committee (previously Learning and Teaching).

It is anticipated that a greater understanding of student and staff issues surrounding the university experience will emerge from the forum. An active dialogue between the student body and those internal agencies that seek to support and respond to the student voice will be established. The forum will enable groups and agencies to work in partnership in order to facilitate a greater transparency of plans, activities and support required and already available.

This forum was established in October 2011 and so to date we have little evidence of specific outcomes. However, the initial meeting of the group saw significant steps taken to identify aspects of the university experience that are held in high regard, those that need developing and those that need careful consideration and potential action. The first meeting was creative, open and positive, but the strength and success of this initiative will become more apparent as it progresses through the academic year. The success of this initiative will rest heavily on the openness and autonomy of the group and their commitment to provide staff and students with an equal voice in discussions and debates around the subject of the university experience.

Lawrence Wilson
University of Wales, Newport

Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama: Student representation system

The initiative was put in place by both the institution and led by the Students' Union. It was ratified in their recent constitution, which was agreed by the Board of Directors. The aim was to improve the student voice in senior decision making at the College. The target audience for the initiative is the full student cohort.

The constitution formalised the procedure of feedback to the Students' Union by putting in place a Student Council. All previous student course representatives are invited to this, and it is a place where all issues can be raised. It is a formal and minuted meeting chaired by the Students' Union President. Minutes of this meeting are then taken to SMT where the Students' Union President presents them and any matters arising.

The anticipated outcomes of this initiative are:

- that the student voice is represented at all levels in College;
- to provide better opportunities for collaborative work between students and SMT;
- to improve student satisfaction;
- to empower the Students' Union.

The evidence of these outcomes is the general successful nature of student feedback: all queries are raised at their appropriate level and a feedback loop is always ensured so that the student feels that their voice is important. Another positive point of evidence is the good attendance at the Student Council meetings.

In reflection it means that although the SU is autonomous from the College its members' views are being represented throughout all major boards and checks and balances systems. The creation of the new Student Council also means there is yet another arena in which students can raise their issues and receive feedback on other matters.

In addition to the Student Council, the Students' Union President also sits on all major boards in College – including all course boards, Academic Board, LTSE Board and CQAC Board – meaning student representation is engrained in all the decision-making areas in College.

Robert Garland
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama Students' Union



Theme 2: Students supporting students

Cardiff Metropolitan University: Induction – a joint planning and delivery process (students and staff)

Introduced on specific programmes, the aim of this initiative is to enhance the induction period experience of first-year students studying on the Speech and Language Therapy programme and enhance the transition onto a higher education level programme of study.

Over the last four years as a response to data collected across the institution (focus groups, student withdrawal survey, first-year experience survey and NSS data), a fund has been set up so that individual programmes can apply to the Learning and Teaching Development Unit for funds to enhance the student experience over the first few weeks of term.

One of the successful applicants was Francesca Cooper, Senior Lecturer on the Speech and Language Therapy programme. Previously she had used a number of methods to gain feedback on the previous year's induction programme, including survey and focus group. This had raised some issues regarding getting to know the rest of the group and having contact with the other years within the programme. The programme attracts a number of mature students and also a number of students that are local to the University, and as such the normal events provided to get to meet and get to know their fellow students are not of interest.

A request was made for students to volunteer to assist with review and design of the new induction programme. Three students volunteered who were also in the process of setting up a speech and language therapy society. Meetings were held where the Student Retention Officer, students and lecturer met to discuss what they had found useful during the previous induction they had received and what they would like to see included. These ideas were taken forward and a draft programme designed by the lecturer; this was then discussed once more with the students and the different sessions put into the order the students and staff felt would maximise the experience and create a better flow and development across the programme.

The students were included in a number of sessions, including one where the freshers met the second-year students and had an informal question and answer session with them to discuss fears, expectations, tips for the first term, etc. The three second-year students were also involved in designing and delivering a practical session where students worked in groups to complete a quiz regarding study resources around the campus and online. It included finding journals related to the programme, how you could order different books, where to use computers online, etc. and each group was supported by a second year. The students awarded a prize to the group with the highest score. The aim was that the quiz would allow a normal library/IT tour to be more tailored to the needs of the students on the programme and would include what the second-years wished they had known earlier; it also allowed students to get to know each other by working in groups.

The second-year students also put together a welcome letter from the SLT society, which was included in the welcome packs that new students receive, and a facebook page was created where students could talk to each other.

During discussions between the three second-year students, the Student Retention Officer and lecturer, the idea of forming an online area that could be run by students for students was discussed. They were aware that although the facebook page existed a lot of students were not happy using it and wanted something that provided more of an academic slant as well as possibility for organising social events. This has led to another project being initiated to put these ideas into place.

The main anticipated outcomes are that there will be a feeling of greater social cohesion among the group from the very beginning of the students' time on the course. It is hoped that this will help with the level of peer support that exists among the group and that they will carry forward with them the necessary skills and knowledge that will assist with the transition into the world of higher education. This will include the knowledge that allows them to maximise the use of the library resources in assisting their study, clear expectations of what is required from them to pass the course, where to turn to for help and assistance whether for academic or personal reasons, and will create a sense of community among students across all years of the programme.

Evidence can be seen through the levels of satisfaction shown by students when questioned about the induction period at the start of their first year. It is also seen through the creation of SLT society and greater communication among students across the different years.

One major outcome has been the development of the peer-led online network that provides a space for students to discuss any issues that may occur, and where other students can help them. This space is used to share and discuss study resources, e.g. current television series, books or websites with links to the programme, and also provide a space to assist with employability skills. A strong link with alumni has also been a major outcome from the project with further funding to assist in future development.

The enthusiasm of the students and staff and the will to enhance the student experience have been essential to the success of this project. Also essential is the ability for student thoughts and ideas to be worked into the design of the new programme and for the students to be included in the delivery of some sessions.

Nicola Poole
Cardiff Metropolitan University

Cardiff Metropolitan University: Online community for the Mature Students Society

This initiative was introduced across the whole institution. An online community for Mature Students Society was developed and implemented at Cardiff Metropolitan University in partnership with students. The student-led online 'meeting space' was created to enable learners to collaborate and forge friendships/social groups, provide a platform from which to share their academic, personal and employment experiences, offer and receive peer support, and access relevant learning resources.

Each year, the Learning and Teaching Development Unit (LTDU) conducts a survey of students who have withdrawn from their programmes to establish the reasons why learners leave Cardiff Metropolitan University early and to identify new approaches to supporting and retaining learners more effectively.

Results of the survey have reflected the particular pressures faced by part-time, mature students, which in some instances make it more difficult for them to complete their chosen programme of study. The survey also revealed that the two most common reasons cited by mature learners for their withdrawal included: a) lack of a social support network and b) difficulties balancing home/work life and study.

At the beginning of the 2010-11 academic year, the LTDU offered £500 to fund the development of a Mature Students Society and to pay for a series of social events. The society was open to all mature learners studying at Cardiff Metropolitan University, regardless of their subject or level. The society quickly became a success, recruiting a dedicated society committee and accruing a large number of members. However, there was a concern within the Unit that, while the society addressed the issue of peer support, the second common withdrawal factor for mature learners, shortage of time, could prevent the society from meeting/socialising regularly and thereby cause the group to eventually disband. Exacerbating this problem was the fact that new developments to Cardiff Metropolitan University estates meant that there was a shortage of physical spaces in which students could meet.

At the same time, Cardiff Metropolitan University was awarded Building Capacity funding for its ENHANCE project, which involved identifying and implementing Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) supported project outputs such as tools, services, resources, models and good practice in order to support institutional objectives. Therefore, the project team carried out a literature search of JISC projects in an attempt to ascertain those whose outputs could be adopted to address the issues raised above.

One such project was Higher Education and Lifelong Learning Opportunities (HELLO), based at Leicester College. This project built an online network where foundation degree learners could access support, advice and guidance for educational and social purposes. The students drove this initiative.

The HELLO project found that the online community served to keep students engaged with the College, even throughout the Summer vacation. Therefore, staff from the LTDU met with the Mature Students Society committee to discuss alternative methods for facilitating interaction between members of the society during periods when face-to-face meetings were not possible.

The idea of replicating the HELLO model to create an online community was met with a high degree of enthusiasm. Following consultation between the committee and members of the society about what the mature students wanted and needed from the resource, it was decided that the online space should comprise:

- discussion boards;
- learner profiles/personal spaces;
- private and instant messaging;
- file-sharing capability;
- images, videos and testimonies from other mature learners;
- study skills resources;
- photo gallery/show and tell pages;
- a calendar to schedule society events.

LTDU worked in partnership with the students to design the online meeting space. Initial plans included the use of Moodle and Mahara; however, committee members expressed reservations about the tools; namely, because each student would be required to set up their own personal learning space, which could be time consuming, but more importantly, there was a concern that the level of information technology required to do so would act as a barrier to engagement for some members of the group. Indeed, responses to the Student Withdrawal Survey in 2009 had shown that around 7% of respondents had experienced difficulties using University IT systems, particularly the VLE and student email due to either a lack of competence or confidence. Therefore, it was decided that an alternative tool was needed that would be easy to use, accessible and not require users to set up their own personal spaces within the community.

Following a review of a wide range of technologies, Wetpaint, a free education wiki, was chosen. Wetpaint has an Easy Edit Toolbar that allows users to edit pages and add content by using the same functions as Microsoft Word, a software package most learners are familiar with and comfortable using.

Personal pages were set up for members of the society in preparation for them joining. While the intention was to allow students to have total control over their own pages, there was a concern that the learners would feel daunted working from a blank page. Therefore, two prompts were inserted into each learner's page: 'About me' and 'Why I chose to do my course'.

Students were able to participate in asynchronous discussions and create discussion threads to engage in social chat or dialogue related to academic issues.

A facility for synchronous communication was also added to the website, in the form of an instant chat tool, a free widget called Meebo. Open Educational Resources developed by the TELSTAR project at the University of Central Lancashire on study skills and issues such as balancing work and study, time management and dealing with stress were added to a 'Learning resources' tab within the site.

Although the website was designed to support networking and friendships, face-to-face meetings were still considered important and therefore a calendar of events was developed where students could schedule events and meetings.

A video library was used to post videos of mature students talking about their own experiences of university, including the opportunities and difficulties that being a mature student presents. Finally, a photo gallery was developed, where students could post photographs or images, whether personal or related to their studies, for others to comment on and discuss.

Members of the Mature Student Society were introduced to the online community during a social gathering on campus. The students were given a demonstration of the wiki, including an overview of its features and how to use the Easy Edit toolbar. Each student was then invited by email to register. Privacy settings were then modified to protect students' confidentiality and to ensure that only registered users were able to view and edit the wiki.

Expected outcomes included better access to social support and, in turn, improved retention rates among mature students. A focus group was conducted in May 2011 with members of the Cardiff Metropolitan University Mature Students Society to explore their experiences of the online community. Every student reported that they had found the online networking tool a useful resource. There was also consensus among participants that the wiki was an effective alternative to face-to-face meetings and that it had improved their access to peer support. Most respondents had used the tool for academic and social purposes.

At the beginning of the next academic year, institutional retention figures for mature learners will be analysed in order to establish whether there has been a reduction in attrition rates since the introduction of the online community.

This case study has shown that working in partnership with learners can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes. Students contributed strongly to the development of the online space and were given complete ownership over the resource once created. This not only contributed to the group's high levels of engagement with the resource, but also gave them a sense of empowerment and enabled them to continue developing the community and moulding it to fit their own requirements.

The initiative also highlighted the importance of listening to students. Working with the society allowed the LTDU to explore the unique needs/concerns of mature learners and to develop a resource that met their specific requirements. This saved time as we did not need to make modifications to the wiki at a later stage.

Finally, we have demonstrated that technologies need not be expensive or complex in order to be used in exciting, effective and innovative ways. A free and easy-to-use wiki tool was found to be fully fit for purpose. Cost is often a major barrier to new initiatives such as these and this case study shows that valuable resources, with the potential to improve student retention, can be developed at little or no cost to the institution.

Loretta Newman-Ford
Cardiff Metropolitan University

Swansea Metropolitan University: Student2student

Introduced institution-wide in September 2011, this approach aimed to target all incoming students. 'Student2student' is an umbrella term for an approach: the basic idea is that whatever support systems the University can provide, the most effective support is peer support.

The Students' Union at SMU has embarked upon a programme under the heading 'student2student', which enlists the help of students already at the University to counsel and help students new to the University.

Although it is early days, there is some evidence that some services have been successful in relation to the numbers of students accessing them. The hope is that the approach will mean improved retention rates and the promotion of an enhanced culture of support and volunteering among students. Wider student involvement in the initiative also means there is a wider pool from which to draw potential student representatives and SU officers.

In the future, we hope to activate the student body more widely to help it become more cohesive so that we can draw on more volunteers for service in the University and in the SU; the more active the student body, the more we will be able to draw out student2student activities.

The basic approach is that we help each other and use our experience to help others.

John Williams
Swansea Metropolitan Students' Union

Swansea Metropolitan University: 'Don't Drop Out, Drop In'

Introduced throughout the whole institution, the aim of this initiative is to ensure that students have made the right choice in their course, mode of study or even their decision to join University. 'Don't Drop Out, Drop In' is a initiative driven by the Students' Union to ensure that students who are uneasy with the decisions they have made about joining University and the course they have chosen have the ability to air their concerns and see what other options are open to them.

It is inevitable that students will drop out of University; however, students who are empowered with knowledge and options and whose leaving process is positive are more likely to return to higher education later on in life.

Promotional materials for the initiative include fliers and posters, as well as digital media such as facebook and Twitter. It is hoped that outcomes will include improved retention rates, enhanced culture of support and volunteering among students, and a wider pool from which to draw potential student representatives and SU officers.

Actual outcomes include an increase in students asking for advice through the Students' Union. Down the line an exercise will be carried out to compare retention rates from previous years. The campaign focuses on creating informed students who are empowered with the decisions they have made.

John Williams
Swansea Metropolitan Students' Union

Coleg Llandrillo Cymru: JISC-funded project – Using peer e-guides to promote digital literacy (PEDL)

The project was introduced throughout the whole institution on a pilot basis in January 2011. The aim is to promote digital literacy among students within the FE sector (including students studying HE in FE), through the use of peer e-guides. It also aims to improve understanding at practitioner level of the value and purpose of ICT (through digital literacy). Furthermore the project should significantly increase the level of knowledge and use of ICT among students at all levels. However, it is in the area of personalisation that the project offers the most innovation in relation to the tailored nature of peer support to individual student ICT needs.

It is implemented through training and support of students to become e-guides (and supporting their subsequent informal networking within a course cohort). The project recognises the key function digital literacy has as a life skill and as the prerequisite for learners on leaving FE being able to function in a digital society.

The main outcomes from the project will be:

- a) recruitment and retention – providing a core set of digital literacy skills should be a recruitment incentive – particularly for those students wishing to become e-guides (which will be incentivised);
- b) skills and employment – the College recognises the importance of creating a digitally literate workforce, who will possess the digital skills that are the prerequisite of working in a digital society;
- c) learner achievement – the College will recognise student achievement in this area through formal or informal qualifications in digital literacy. In addition, the e-guides could obtain formal qualifications in mentoring/advocacy skills;
- d) learner engagement – the project will foster peer-to-peer working, which will be facilitated through the College's VLE and a programme of student drop-in (face-to-face) training sessions. In particular, the e-guides themselves will benefit greatly through the acquisition of a wide range of mentoring/coaching skills;
- e) inclusion – digital inclusion is seen as a key driver for improving social inclusion, and by equipping our students with a core set of digital literacy skills this will hopefully overcome many of the barriers in the technological social divide;

f) widening participation and social equality – we will ensure that target cohorts of learners include student groups who would be regarded as socially excluded or fitting the widening participation agenda. For example, many of the College's HE students, as adult learners, are good case studies for evidence of widening participation.

The project started in January 2011 and will end in December 2011. The interim report stated the following achievements over the past six months:

- developed initial digital literacy skills audit;
- devised core training programme for peer e-guides;
- trained 20 peer e-guides;
- set up peer e-guide course on Moodle to support peer e-guides;
- developed 'Tools and Resources for living and learning in a Digital Society (TaRDIS)' Moodle course (repository of digital literacy teaching and learning materials);
- developed a series of further training sessions for peer e-guides (progression sessions from core training);
- widespread dissemination internally, e.g. via Academic Managers' Group and Academic Board, and externally, via LearnTech North Wales group and at this year's CoFHE conference;
- peer e-guides have increased knowledge of digital literacy skills, despite many having very high levels of knowledge (and ICT backgrounds) prior to commencing the core (and further) training.

We developed an initial diagnostic assessment for use with peer e-guides and their fellow learners. The assessment was run before and after the core training to gauge prior knowledge, as a training needs analysis and, subsequently, to establish 'distance travelled'. This audit was web-based and devised internally.

In liaison with teaching staff 26 learners (covering Levels 1 through to 4) were identified as potential e-guides. This was much higher than the ten pilot e-guides we envisaged. Of those 26 learners, 20 completed the core training programme (which consisted of eight sessions, although we only set a mandatory attendance of one session).

A course has been set up on Moodle to provide support to the e-guides, containing details about the (core and further) training and the skills audit.

A repository (TaRDIS) of teaching and learning material has been set up on Moodle. This has been focused on digital literacy skills, but we are in the process of adding study skills, essential (basic) skills and other relevant support materials.

Moving into the next few months, the project will develop in the following ways:

- enhancing the material on TaRDIS – in particular by increasing the scope of coverage (i.e. more essential and study skills material), adding more campus specific support and developing assessment materials for use by tutors in the classroom;

- finalising the new online skills audit;
- holding two planning days (one in July and one in August) of the whole Library and Learning Technology team (approximately 20 staff) to devise a roll-out strategy across all seven main College campuses;
- rolling out the programme to all student/tutor groups who request to participate in September;
- offering refresher training for existing peer e-guides when they return in September.

By adopting a 'digital society' context for the development of skills, knowledge and attitudes, it is hoped that the wider personal and social lives of staff and students will also benefit, encouraging more effective digital and global citizenship.

Andrew Eynon and Pete Richardson
Coleg Llandrillo Cymru

University of Glamorgan: Student voice representatives

Introduced throughout the entire institution, this project aims to ensure that the student voice is heard at senior-level, decision-making committees at faculty and institutional level.

The creation of student voice representatives (SVRs), originally known as 'super reps', has seen a fundamental change in student participation in strategic decision making. Depending on the size and scope of each faculty, between six and nine SVRs are appointed in addition to the existing network of course representatives. These include undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students. In addition to the faculty-based SVRs, the University is appointing other SVRs (currently four) to project-based roles, such as representing Welsh-medium learners.

A student voice representative is the next tier of engagement from course representatives. SVRs are provided with information from the 'grass root' level by course representatives so that they can represent them, and ultimately the students, at faculty and institutional level.

At faculty level SVRs attend Faculty Board, Faculty Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee, Staff-Student Liaison Committee, Faculty Quality Assurance Committee and Faculty Academic Development Committee. A representative of the SVRs from each faculty is selected by them to attend University-wide committees including Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee, Quality Assurance Committee and the University Ethics Committee.

University committees place student items high on their agendas, immediately after minutes and matters arising, so that the student view is recognised as the first thought of the committee, not an afterthought.

The SVRs work closely with the Students' Union to ensure the student voice is heard throughout the institution.

Anticipated outcomes of this initiative include:

- students becoming partners in the strategic decision making of the organisation;
- students influencing enhancements in learning, teaching and assessment;
- students being an integrated part of the quality assurance framework;
- students feeling their voice is heard and respected.

The student voice representative system has operated for the last three years. Student voice representatives have successfully changed many University processes. The initiative has been picked up by JISC as an example of good practice in engaging students to improve the overall student experience (SLiDA project).

The SVR roles have been key in engaging students and staff in voicing and meeting student needs. Reports from SVRs confirm that they have been able to facilitate change and have developed personal transferable skills as a result.

The SVRs are present at all senior University committees and faculty boards including the University's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee and the Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committees actively making sure the student voice is heard. In the past students would express concerns, issues and needs, but now these are "actually being heard" (Adam, SVR).

New policies on student assessment submission, student library access and the use of social software have all emerged from the integration of student voice in decision making. Changes in practice have also been seen and reported on by the SVRs.

A long-standing and strong course representative system has been enhanced and developed through the SVRs. Course-level representation remains effective, but now the SVRs are able to challenge not only course-level decision making, but institutional decision making.

Denize McIntyre
University of Glamorgan

University of Wales, Newport: Course Representation

Co-ordinator

The position was created to further enhance the course representative system allowing students to work more effectively and consistently across the University through boards and committees. As a permanent member of staff the Course Representation Co-ordinator allows consistency across the years as Students' Union officers hand over:

The Course Representation Co-ordinator role is to manage and promote the process of election of course representatives and provide ongoing support and mentoring for them. They work with the elected student sabbatical officers, other union staff and school staff to promote and support the course representation system. The course representation system was often inconsistent across the institution, so the co-ordinator has helped to ensure elections are run in the same way on every course and has helped to write a paper to be taken through the committee structure to ensure the University, Students' Union and students are all working together on this scheme.

In the first year of this post the course representation structure has been refined to improve representation within the University committee structure. Greater links have also been made with the faculties so that the SU and course representatives have a greater voice within the academic departments. The links with the University will continue to grow giving students a greater voice throughout the institution.

Since this role came into place there has been an increase in the number of course representatives, with more departments of the University electing representatives. This also includes a large number of part-time students being elected and students from our distance learning courses. We have also had examples of issues raised where the co-ordinator has helped to facilitate meetings between representatives and the University to find a resolution.

The impact of this role will continue to develop. The course representation system is in the early stages of redevelopment and is already showing marked improvements as it continues to grow.

Hannah Reilly
University of Wales, Newport Students' Union

University of Wales, Newport: PASS@Newport (Peer Assisted Study Sessions)

This initiative was introduced in September 2011 to work alongside the Academic Skills module within the School of Humanities and Lifelong Learning, particularly focusing on the disciplines of English, Creative Writing and Applied Drama as an initial trial.

The overall aim is to deliver facilitated student-led study sessions that are tailored to the individual PASS group's needs at any particular time and work to complement the class-based learning. The scheme is run in partnership with academics and serves to facilitate immediate feedback on student understanding and academic practice to enhance the student and staff learning relationship.

Second- and third-year students from the discipline are invited to put themselves forward to undertake the role of a Student PASS Leader; this is a voluntary unpaid role. They receive a comprehensive initial training (one day in-house provided by a member of staff who has complete UK Centre-accredited PASS Supervisor training), which covers the principles and skills associated with the role of PASS Leader and Supplemental Instruction/PASS. Further ongoing practical and skills

training is given during weekly debrief sessions, which are chaired by the scheme supervisor and allow PASS Leaders to share experiences and ideas for appropriate activities to use during future sessions. Following the initial training the PASS Leaders are paired up and allocated a group of eight to ten students from the course cohort. They are then required to meet their group on a weekly basis for one-hour planned weekly sessions, which are developed and facilitated by students with collaborative input into the planning stage from subject academics.

It is anticipated that this scheme will encourage a greater individual understanding and confidence in course content from participants and stronger ties between academics and learners. It is anticipated that real-time feedback from students and PASS Leaders could help shape the delivery and design of the module in the future, making it as student focused as possible. The benefits for the PASS Leaders include training and development opportunities and a greater understanding of practical learning techniques as well as experience of managing groups and organising projects and sessions, which will enhance their employability skills and also provide them with a stronger voice with which to engage actively in discussions and planning around the student learning experience.

The scheme is currently in its early stages, but we have already found that students who are engaging in the sessions are reporting that they are feeling more confident in their subject knowledge and approach to their studies. The sessions are being received well and participants are willingly returning week after week. Academic colleagues are reporting that they feel confident in the work that is being carried out within the scheme and that students are responding well to the materials. An initial grades analysis will be carried out shortly to ascertain whether there is a noticeable difference between the grades achieved by those who engage with sessions and those who decide not to engage. There is also interest being shown from modules in other faculties and schools and we anticipate that PASS will eventually become a regular session for each student at the institution.

There has been fantastic backing from academics and learning developers alike in the development of the scheme. Since its launch, the emphasis has been on providing student facilitators with the skills, knowledge and confidence to work in partnership with academics and peers. It has been essential to have academic buy-in with the project and as the scheme develops and the relationship between PASS Leaders and academics grows, the long-term benefits to the learning partnership will become more evident and visual.

Kerry Bellamy
University of Wales, Newport



Theme 3: Curriculum development:

Aberystwyth University: Artistic innovations

I. The performed essay

How can we inspire students to think about knowledge not as given and static, but as dynamic and changing? How can we motivate them to make decisions regarding how to learn?

The 'performed essay' was introduced at Aberystwyth University for Performance Studies students; initially on one undergraduate module and has since been introduced in postgraduate modules. Students are encouraged to begin to reflect not just on knowledge itself but on the processes by which knowledge is acquired and expressed.

We have been using the performed essay as a form of assessment in Performance Studies since the scheme's implementation in 1999.

Performance Studies focuses on a broad spectrum of cultural performance, including theatre, but also dance and spectacle and those ritual-like performances we enact in our everyday life. We aim to forge a link between the creative process of making performance in an art context and the critical process of analysing performances; both those staged as aesthetic events and those that take place in the wider realm of social and cultural life.

The performed essay is used in a Year 2 module entitled 'Performance in Context', which introduces students to a number of social and cultural contexts in which performances occur:

For their first assessment on this module students are asked to write a 'traditional' research essay on one of the principal examples of performance practice and one of the areas of contextual negotiation discussed during the module. The subject is of the student's own choosing in consultation with the module co-ordinator; necessitating individual research and reading in addition to lecture material. Themes in the past have ranged from wedding rituals to cheerleading, from the Haka to freerunning, from Myspace to geisha culture.

For the second assessment, the performed essay, the students are then asked to reconsider and rearticulate the material presented in the essay in a performative presentational format. An accompanying seminar and individual assessment tutorials help students to rework their intellectual argument through means of performance. The formats they choose for their performed essay are varied: PowerPoint presentations, physical demonstrations, stagings of an everyday ritual with audience participation or brief scripted performance pieces are the most common.

The assessment is marked by two examiners and documented by video for the external examiner. All students are present throughout the exam day and are asked to engage with each other's performed essays in the question sessions following each presentation.

Although in format there are similarities to a more traditional presentation, the clear link with the written essay calls greater attention to the performative dimensions of the 'performed essay'. This stimulates students to explore the performative aspects of knowledge making and presentation in an experiential manner.

This form of assessment has proven successful, with very positive responses from students, for the past eight years – and we have recently introduced it into a new MA scheme with similar success.

In 2008, one of the students on the MA Practising Performance was shortlisted with her performed essay for the prestigious Performing Science Award for Scholarly Presentation and Lecture Performance, an international prize awarded by the Centre for Media and Interactivity at the Justus Liebig University, Giessen (Germany) and supported by the Robert Bosch Foundation. In 2011, a PhD student in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies, who is researching the role of the lecture performance in contemporary performance practice, won first prize in the competition, which had attracted over 50 entries from all over Europe and the US.

Heike Roms
Aberystwyth University

2. Assessing creativity: integrating students' self-evaluation into the assessment process through the use of 'artist statements'

This initiative introduced a form of self-evaluation into the assessment process for a creative module, in order to integrate the students' perspective on their own work into this process. It aimed to enhance thereby both the students' and the marker's ability to evaluate how a piece of work meets the criteria of assessment and to appreciate the relationship that the work establishes between conceptual intention and its realisation.

One of the characteristics of the BA Performance Studies at Aberystwyth University, which it shares with similar schemes in art-based subjects within the context of universities, is its emphasis on students' acquisition of a range of intellectual knowledge rather than of traditional technical skills. Even where the learning outcomes for the scheme refer to creative work, they often call for the analytical examination of such work and the critical application of creative principles.

A number of recent case studies (Kleinman, 2005; Cowan, 2006) propose models for assessing creativity that are based on students' own conceptions of what defines creativity. Inviting students to determine how they meet the criteria of assessment helps to address the problem of judging work that challenges or expands the very criteria by which it is assessed. It also helps to distinguish the students' creative ability to conceptualise from the technical skills that are on display in the finished product. It encourages students to develop skills in how to learn, how to monitor their own work, how to establish their own criteria and how to make judgements about their achievements.

Processes of self-evaluation can form an integral part of a self-reflexive practice that encourages students to develop into reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987).

In the context of a module on performance writing, the initiative introduced a form of self-evaluation that drew on professional practice as a model, namely the self-evaluative genre of the 'artist's statement'. Two artist's statements were submitted by each student as part of the assessments for this module. Students were not asked to respond directly to the criteria of assessment as the artist's statement was not designed as a formal self-assessment tool. Instead they were given a set of questions and statements and a breakdown of possible headings designed to initiate and enhance their reflective self-evaluation. Students were supported through a series of seminars and tutorials.

Feedback from students was uniformly positive. Students remarked that the statement "clarified ideas and thoughts that went into the work", even "sparked more ideas and thoughts" and added "much more clarity" to the process. They considered it a "chance to explain ourselves" and "clarify my ideas and concepts to you, the examiner".

Students are given the opportunity to articulate how their assessment addresses (or challenges or extends) the criteria, and to highlight possible discrepancies between idea and realisation. It also enhances students' abilities to evaluate their work against their own objectives and aids the development of self-reflexive skills and articulacy.

Heike Roms
Aberystwyth University

Cardiff Metropolitan University: Curriculum in consultation

I. Exploring employability through student partnership curriculum design

This initiative has been introduced in the Health and Social Care degree programme at CMU with the intention of engaging students as partners (employed student interns) in the development of the curriculum. The teaching materials that they will develop will explore areas of employability for health and social care practitioners and provide students with a sense of professional identity from the outset of the course.

Student-led focus groups will identify the reasons for students' choice of course, transition experience onto the course, potential reasons for fellow students leaving and students' understanding of employability prospects on graduation.

Analysis of the findings will also be used to identify key issues and emerging themes.

These themes will be used to help shape the curriculum through the development of inquiry-based learning and experiential learning opportunities.

Through engagement with potential employers the student interns will identify potential employment opportunities that demonstrate the breadth of work available to Health and Social Care students on completion of their degree.

Multimedia case studies will be jointly developed, to be used in initial induction, which provide students with an opportunity to explore the knowledge and skills required by health and social care workers and help provide a sense of professional identity from the outset of the course setting study expectations.

It is anticipated that students will gain a better understanding of the reasons for students not engaging with the Health and Social Care degree or withdrawing from the course. The work will aid in the development of an induction package that focuses on exploration of the graduate skills that will be developed and sets out early expectations to aid transition to higher education. Further to this, we will continue to build a bank of case studies that are intellectually stimulating and grab the imagination of the students by providing them with real-life examples from the outset and help them develop a sense of professional identity from day one.

The result of this work is intended to be a closer student partnership working, thus aiding staff insight into student thinking and experiences and ultimately leading to a model that can be replicated as a template for student partnership in curricula design.

One of the main challenges to date has been the timescales involved in setting up HR processes that allow us to employ students. This is due to being the first time that student interns have been employed. This is a joint initiative between the Learning and Teaching Development Unit and the staff team on the Health and Social Care programme and has resulted in an increased dialogue around pedagogical principles and how student engagement could be increased within the programme. We have had a small amount of applications for the post of student intern, but many students were concerned as to how this would impact on their current workload and therefore have been reluctant to apply.

The initiative is still in the early stages of development and currently recruiting student interns. A full evaluation of this initiative will be available in September 2012.

Ruth Matheson and Rose O'Driscoll
Cardiff Metropolitan University

2. Globalisation of the curriculum

This is an ongoing project, the overall aim of which is to develop more globalised curricula across CMU. The project is focused on engaging academic staff and students from five distinctly different programmes, i.e. some with mixture of international and local students, some with largely international students, and some with largely local students. Some programmes already have a global context and some are very locally located.

To date, case study developers (academic staff) were approached and the potential for an enhancement intervention was discussed. The proposal to engage students in curriculum development was also agreed. These case study developers have at this stage been identified.

The logistics of employing students is being finalised. It is envisaged that Masters-level students will be employed from each course group to interview/conduct focus groups with undergraduate students to generate some ideas for developing the respective curriculum in relation to globalisation. The feedback from this exercise will then be given to the case study developer to plan (and perhaps undertake depending on time frame) an enhancement of their course.

There will be support for case study developers and students throughout by the project leaders, and an external specialist will be brought in for a round-table enhancement exercise at the point between students collecting the feedback and staff developing the change. There will also be an open dissemination event at the end of the project, which will involve students, case study developers, project leaders and the external specialist.

So far, five programmes have engaged students in meaningful enhancement of their curricula. Students are gaining a greater understanding of how they might be involved in curriculum development and, specifically, globalisation of the curriculum; therefore, the resource will form a starting point for ongoing curriculum development within the Postgraduate Certificate Teaching in Higher Education curriculum, but also academic development across the University.

In September 2012, five cases will be available for others to consider in enhancing their own curriculum with respect to globalisation. The students' reports of their research will be available to staff and the dissemination event will also be available as a digital file. A report on the overall logistics of the project will also be available.

Gareth Barham, Sue Tangney, case study developers and student partners
Cardiff Metropolitan University

3. NSS – learning and teaching: the follow-up

This initiative has been introduced throughout Cardiff Metropolitan University (CMU). It is aimed at creating an enhancement process that involves both students and staff with the National Student Survey results as a catalyst for discussion and action planning. A process was designed to allow the students to work together with academic staff and members of the Learning and Teaching Development Unit to create an action plan to enhance the student experience, which is then reviewed annually at the Learning and Teaching Board. Both the qualitative and quantitative results from the survey are discussed within the process. The results are released in August and put into a one-page format for all programme leaders. Once this has occurred a series of meetings are held where firstly the Vice-Chancellor and the Dean of Learning and Teaching meet with the students from individual schools to discuss the results and areas that need improvement and possible solutions to these areas. The students are mainly third-year student representatives, and representatives from the Students' Union are also present. The results and feedback from the student meetings are then discussed with academic members of staff from the individual schools alongside the results. From these discussions actions and timescales are created and agreed upon and put into an action plan with specific target dates and people responsible for the actions. Progress on these actions is reported on at the Learning and Teaching Board throughout the academic year.

Some examples of actions that have taken place include:

- improved allocated funding to the library – this involved not just the amount of funding but also the way funding was spent; it results in an increase in e-journals and e-books;
- as assessment and feedback is often raised, in a number of schools different interventions have been put in place to help improve feedback methods affecting both timing and quality of feedback. For example, in one instance students had given a poor score for promptness of feedback. Following a discussion with students from that school it was determined that because of the time taken between handing in and receiving feedback the students were unable to use the feedback to assist in their next assignment. This was discussed with the students and one group said all they really required was a one-page synopsis of the main issues the assignment had raised somewhere such as Blackboard so that they could use this information to improve on their next assignment prior to getting their full individual written/audio feedback. This has meant an area has been set up to place themes from marking the assignments that arise as the staff work through the scripts.

This follow-up initiative provided an important opportunity for staff to be able to show how they listen to the students and try to put actions in place where possible to improve the experience. It has enabled staff to discuss why certain things are done the way they are and means what is sometimes seen as negative by students can be explained in relation to QA or professional body requirements.

The process has led to a much more robust delivery of action plans, with both staff and students feeling they have some ownership of what is produced. It has meant that the NSS has really been a catalyst for quality enhancement within the programmes. The figures and comments are just a starting point for the discussions and to highlight areas that need to be focused upon.

Nicola Poole
Cardiff Metropolitan University

Cardiff University: Curriculum design

Cardiff University aims to implement developments to the curriculum design process, initially as part of the JISC-funded PALET project (Programme Approval Lean Electronic Toolset), which will engage students more fully in how they are educated, ensuring a real partnership activity is in place to create the most appropriate educational experience. It is anticipated that this practice will be embedded into institutional processes when the project reaches its conclusions in July 2012.

Staff working on the PALET project have facilitated focus groups with student representatives from a range of discipline areas, to explore how students are/could be involved in curriculum design activities. At the student focus groups, we explored the following questions with students:

- How do you learn best?
- What teaching methods or learning activities help you to learn best?

- Are different teaching methods or learning activities more appropriate to different topics/subject areas?
- Do you know how you'll be taught certain things? Where does that information come from?
- Do you think you have the knowledge/understanding to make decisions about course design? How would you want to use the knowledge?
- Would you like to be involved in helping to design how a course is delivered? How?

Feedback from the focus group can be found here: http://blogs.cf.ac.uk/palet/entry/video_blog_series_students_and. Those involved in the project plan continue working with the Academic Affairs Officer of the Students' Union to ensure that students can be involved in, participate in and work in partnership with staff in the area of curriculum design. It is anticipated that work undertaken by the PALET project will help to ensure that students have more opportunities to create and shape the educational experience of students at the institution.

Georgia Slade
Cardiff University

Coleg Llandrillo Cymru: Curriculum and communication literacy

I. Personal Actualisation and Development through Digital Literacy in Education (PADDLE)

This initiative was introduced in partnership with Coleg Harlech, Coleg Menai, Deeside College and Yale College. The main aim, to create a digitally literate, skilled and confident workforce and student body across all the FE institutions in the North Wales region, by empowering staff to work more effectively within and between organisations through the adoption of communities of practice – to aid teaching, learning and professional practice for all stakeholder groups.

Digital literacy within staff/student learning partnerships is the key to this enablement and we are developing a framework of digital literacy skills that will encompass a broad range of skills, as follows:

ICT/computer literacy: effective use of College network systems, software and communication tools;

- information literacy: ability to find and evaluate information sources;
- media literacy: ability to use audio and visual ICT resources in teaching and learning;

- communication and collaboration: the ability to engage in communities of practice within and between organisations, utilising collaborative electronic tools;
- digital scholarship: the ability to collaborate, collate and share digitally with regard to scholarly activity;
- learning skills: the ability of all staff and learners to utilise appropriate digital skills and technologies;
- life planning: the ability of all staff and learners to utilise digital skills in their everyday lives.

We hope to be able to share a range of strategies to support the development of digital literacy tailored to specific groups of staff and learners. This should also be an exemplary model for staff development and learning materials suitable to be shared across institutions in the form of a digital literacy toolkit.

A key benefit to students is deemed to be the enhanced employability skills. Staff will benefit from enhanced technical and professional competencies, and enable the application of transformational and instructional leadership models to effect cultural change. The real outcomes of the project will be known in July 2013. Project findings will be disseminated to the wider FE and HE community in Wales and the rest of the UK through a JISC Support and Synthesis project, and the project team will disseminate their findings through articles in a variety of library and Information and Learning Technology (ILT) publications and electronic lists – and, in keeping with the scheme, via the project website, Twitter and blog posts.

Andrew Eynon and Pete Richardson
Coleg Llandrillo Cymru

2. Subject pedagogy

This initiative takes place within a module delivered on the PGCE and CertEd programmes at Coleg Llandrillo. It aimed to introduce and explore a new teaching methodology pertaining to the individual.

The plan was to embed scholarly activity as part of the learning and teaching environment and create a greater understanding of research elements/ methodologies and collaborative working between staff and students.

The module is delivered over a 25-week period and support is given throughout. Peer-to-peer work enables a wider source of knowledge and sharing of good practice. Feedback from students being taught directly influences the programme of study and student views are summarised to evaluate and review the subject areas.

It is expected that this method will be measured by an evaluation of the learner progress at the end of May 2012. Already there are improvements from the staff's perspective and greater interaction on the VLE forum.

The module has high hopes to encourage individuals and cultivate a collaborative working environment of teachers of tomorrow. It will empower new teachers to go

into a workplace and change culture in other organisations in order to nurture the pedagogical aspects of teaching and learning and advance best practice in subject areas.

Evidence of actual outcomes will only be fully evident at the end of May 2012, when the evaluation of learner progress has been undertaken and final case studies and poster presentations are assessed and finalised.

Robin Trangmar
Coleg Llandrillo Cymru

Swansea Metropolitan University: Students as partners in the curriculum

1. Optionality

The aim of this initiative was to find out whether curriculum optionality has been increased or decreased through major review or amendment procedures in response to student demand.

It was anticipated that the findings would tell us that optionality was increased due to student demand. Indeed, the short study provided us with evidence that where optionality has increased at SMU, it has been in direct response to student demand.

This is a limited study of limited usefulness. It was designed as a direct way of finding out whether the common-sense assumption that optionality in the curriculum is a response to student demand can be based on evidence. It seems that it can be. It seems, therefore, that we can claim that students have already entered into the process of their own learning as partners in a significant way. The study will progress to the next stage by drilling down into questions such as 'what are the limitations imposed by professional bodies?' and seek to add qualitative findings to the existing data.

Nick Potter
Swansea Metropolitan University

2. Feedback on assessment

Aimed at both staff and students, this feedback partnership initiative develops better understanding and co-operation on feedback on assessment. This work is part of a body of work being conducted in developing partnership between the University and the student body. A key aim now is to spread the structural relationship down through faculty representatives from the University's centre.

Swansea Metropolitan University's Students' Union (SU) President drew up and presented to the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee a proposal for a standardised feedback form for use across the University. Key features include a guide to students on feedback and a student self-assessment section.

The President of the SU and the Head of Quality and Learning and Teaching (who Chairs the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee) worked together on the initial draft, but it was clear from the beginning that the main principles would be the SU's as those had been drawn up by the SU and set out in the specific proposal by the President.

We hope to gain 'buy-in' from students and a better understanding on the part of students of what feedback is (and what it is not) and why it is important. We hope that heightened understanding among the student body will result in better National Student Survey (NSS) scores on feedback.

Further updates will become available during 2012.

John Williams
Swansea Metropolitan University Students' Union

3. NSS reflection

NSS reflection was introduced at academic level with the intention of encouraging the use of National Student Survey (NSS) data to grade the University the same way it would grade an undergraduate student.

This initiative is focused to ensure that what students actually feel about their student experience is directed back on an academic level. The exercise involved marking the University the same way it would grade an undergraduate student:

0 – 39	Fail
40 – 49	3
50 – 59	2.2
60 – 69	2.1
70 +	1

Through the support this exercise has provided the Senior Management Board have agreed and committed to improve course organisation and management. Also standardisation of feedback is being fast tracked through the academic levels of University.

This exercise has really allowed the University and the Students' Union to see areas of the University that are excelling; it has also allowed for areas that need improvement to be identified and therefore an action plan drawn up. In future for this exercise to continue its development, the NSS department codes need to be clear to ensure an accurate result.

John Williams
Swansea Metropolitan University Students' Union

4. Indigo – International textile design trade fair, Paris

The aim of the Indigo project was to allow the opportunity for students and staff throughout one faculty/across modules in second- and third-year BA(Hons) Surface Pattern Design programme to exhibit and sell their work at an international trade fair, Indigo, at Premier Vision, Paris.

Students were offered the chance to experience the textile design industry first hand, in a very direct way – operating as well as observing. The students manage the stand, make sales and promote themselves and SMU at the fair, after initial collaboration with lecturers in setting up the stand.

The Indigo initiative is deemed beneficial in encouraging students to gain a better understanding of common practices within the industry and give them the impetus to define their future roles as they move towards graduation. It also promotes the excellent, innovative work of the Surface Pattern Design students to an international audience. Students have found this both confidence building and inspirational.

The mode of study within modules in the second and third year is tailored to/ or flexible enough to relate to the nature of the event. Textile and paper sample designs are presented to buyers, designers and manufacturers from all levels of the fashion, interiors and surface pattern industry from high street to designer level.

Students have their say in this mode of working as individuals elect to take part and staff select work from their submissions, and relationships are strengthened as staff and students work alongside each other as peers to promote the stand and liaise with the market. All parties aim to return with as many contacts for the course and the individual as possible.

The outcomes are tangible. Students and staff have made sales to international buyers (UK, France, Spain), to some well-known names such as White Stuff and Nina Ricci, and received interest and job offers from these and further afield (China, India).

Other exhibitors, established studios and companies, have visited the SMU stand and shown support for the work on display and interest in the facilities and programmes on offer at SMU. This has led to contributions to the Surface Pattern Design programme from established names in the textile industry met at the fair; e.g. Tracey Brown of Bay and Brown visited SMU and worked with students after engaging with the SMU stand at Indigo.

The Indigo project is now in its fourth year. Each year it is fine-tuned, and each year staff and students alike learn more, first hand, about what is happening NOW in the very fast lane of all things fashion and textiles.

Taking part in the Indigo project and other live projects offered via the course seems to boost confidence in our graduates, and there has been a noted rise in ambition in the graduates of the past few years. Despite difficult times many of our recent graduates are lucky enough to be working in the aforementioned 'fast lane', as freelancers and within companies.

This project has proven to be an inspiration to all that take part. It is the best demonstration possible of the role of a textile designer, available to many of our graduates as a career path option.

Georgia McKie
Swansea Metropolitan University

University of Glamorgan: Curriculum development

I. Internationalising the curriculum: the international students' voice

The aim of this project is to create a student reference group to act as a bridge between staff and students, to support and facilitate dialogue, and to disseminate the results of discussions as widely as possible and in a format that will promote institutional change. As far as possible, the outcomes of this dialogue will be captured in materials that can be directly applied in developing innovative pedagogy used in internationalising the curriculum.

Most HEIs are now engaged in what McTaggart (2003) describes as "technical observance", where there are more opportunities for international exchange, volunteer work, placements, etc. However, deeper engagement, or what McTaggart (2003) describes as "relational participation", where those involved in the curriculum take into account how international students engage and learn requires more work. This is evident in Bennell (2005) and Shiel (2006), where HEIs often only pay lip service to the internationalisation of the curriculum and their focus is still on tailoring their programmes to UK students.

In this project, students will act as co-researchers (Fielding, 2002) and establish a group that can support internationalisation by identifying good and bad practice within the institution. This is different from the normal approach to internationalisation, which focuses on teacher-led staff development and seminars, and is often rooted in the assimilation model of pedagogy.

This project is designed to build upon two previous initiatives (the student voice representatives and the International Curriculum Development Working Group) at the University and to benefit from synergies between them.

The University has a successful student voice representative (SVR) system that has operated for the last three years. Student voice representatives have successfully changed many University processes.

The University has convened an International Working Group (IWG) consisting of staff across faculties and support departments with international interests and experience to concentrate on the internationalisation of the curriculum, and the possible impact on the whole University. The group worked together in identifying what needed to be improved in the learning and teaching of international students in the year 2009-10. One of the recommendations is the need for a more organised and cohesive dialogue between students and staff regarding internationalisation.

Building on the successful SVR system and the IWG report, two international student voice representatives (ISVRs) were recruited to lead an International Student Reference Group (ISRG) including both international and UK students. The ISRG will be responsible for identifying both positive and negative experiences in internationalising the curriculum. With the support of the IWG, the ISRG will be tasked to identify five key areas in internationalising the curriculum that they would want to promote across the institution. The IWG will be able to support the ISRG in relation to securing resources and providing technical know-how in the promotion of their findings. The IWG will also be able to help secure further political support within the institution and in a wider environment.

Both face-to-face meetings and online discussions are being used throughout the project to aid the gathering of positive and negative experiences. A project wiki, that will in the first instance be private to the group to encourage honest discussions of any issues, will be used. Once the five key areas are identified by the ISRG they will be made available on the project blog by the ISRG to promote and invite wider discussions. At the same time, the two ISVRs will provide weekly reflections on the developments and discussions on the blog to provide insights into the process of internationalising the curriculum using students' voice. The blog will also become a key output and resources for others wishing to adopt a similar process in engaging students in internationalising their curriculum.

The IWG and ISRG will discover what is memorable in the experience of internationalising curriculum. Academics from the IWG will provide examples of current good practice or propose changes that they would implement based on the findings from the ISRG. These good practice or proposed changes will be used to create case studies in both written and video formats. If the good practice or changes are replicable within a classroom environment, videos of simulated teaching scenes based on the findings will be created. It is envisaged that these videos will be developed by our students from the area of Media Studies to involve even more students as partners in the development.

The materials will be designed so that they can be used to generate discussion in workshops. For example, they will be piloted in the University as staff development seminars, run by or in collaboration with members of the ISRG, to initiate discussion among staff about the nature and impact of internationalisation on their practice. The materials may also be used to run workshops with international students, to explain what their expectations of the curriculum might be, and which methods might be considered legitimate for them to use to try to ensure that the curriculum meets their expectations. The materials could also be used with UK students to explore their expectations of the curriculum, and how they feel about enriching the curriculum through internationalisation.

The blog and the case study materials are informed by student research and created by students as key evidence of outcomes. Staff development and proposed changes informed by the research are a key outcome of the project.

The project is currently ongoing, it is envisaged that the discussions generated from this project will act as a catalyst to changes needed in the internationalisation agenda, but also move from simply having students as data source to students as co-researchers. The case study materials will be used to enhance current staff development events in internationalisation and will generate positive impact to students' experiences.

At the time of the 'Future Directions' conference we will be able to present progress to date, while looking at the way this initiative will inform the future of student voice in the international dimension of curricula.

Alice Lau
University of Glamorgan

2. Students as partners in curriculum design

The aim is to ensure that the student voice is a key part in curriculum design, development and delivery throughout the University of Glamorgan.

Curriculum design needs to address the student voice in the planning, design and delivery of the curriculum. Building on examples, like the BCUT-Sparc project (<http://blogs.test.bcu.ac.uk/tsparc/what-is-t-sparc/>), the University has reviewed its quality framework to ensure student input throughout the process. Thus students are not only consulted as part of the usual evaluation cycle of courses, but are appointed to validation and approval panels and faculty quality assurance committees to ensure the development of curricula that are student informed.

In response to academics who often think they know best, we will use student-delivered staff development to ensure that the student voice informs course design and challenges academic preconceptions. While academics retain their leadership in their disciplines, their links to industry and employment do not always reflect the detailed knowledge of the students. Thus students will inform and enhance the curriculum design by their input.

This approach is in its pilot year, and the main validation and approval cycle is yet to begin. The outcomes of the first year of the cycle will be evaluated to ascertain the effectiveness of the approach.

Haydn Blackey
University of Glamorgan

University of Wales Trinity Saint David: Curriculum development

1. The Student Researcher, Journal of Undergraduate Research

(<http://www.trinitysaintdavid.ac.uk/en/lrc/thestudentresearcher/>)

This initiative was introduced throughout the University of Wales Trinity Saint David from Autumn 2010.

The target audience for this research is undergraduate students and lecturers who teach undergraduates, with three specific aims:

1. to promote students as partners in the development of this initiative (students have been part of the editorial board from the inception of the journal and central to all decisions);
2. to showcase the research achievements of all students across all levels and disciplines of the University;
3. to promote and engage students in research as part of their undergraduate study thus highlighting a core value of university education as contributing to the development of discipline knowledge.

University of Wales Trinity Saint David was a new university in 2010, created from both Trinity Carmarthen and Lampeter University; it has three faculties (Humanities, Arts and Social Studies, Education and Training). The Student Researcher began in Autumn 2010 and was the first student participative project that linked both campuses together within the new institution. The editorial board membership comprises of one member of staff and one student from each faculty across campuses plus one central support colleague and support from the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Studies. A student representative was approached at the start of the initiative, through the Dean's recommendation, to join the editorial board. As members, students were equally responsible for all aspects of the publication process from developing the initial timeline for publication, meeting the publisher, through to cover design, proofreading and final dissemination and distribution following publication in September 2011.

All meetings are held face to face providing students the opportunity to visit and meet peers across campuses and disciplines. Additionally student editorial board members are offered the opportunity to participate and present at related national conferences.

We are seeking the proactive engagement of students with the process of production through active and full membership of the editorial board. This will result in the production of an annual journal (hard and electronic copy) that showcases undergraduate students' research.

The project promotes research-based learning into the undergraduate curriculum through the setting of innovative assignments by tutors; we intend that students' aspirations will be raised in aiming to publish in the journal, in turn lifting academic writing standards.

Publication of the first volume (September 2011) proved a success with large amounts of student interest in engagement with the editorial board and publishing within future journals.

As a direct result of involvement in the initiative, founder editorial board members presented their thoughts about the journal and experiences at the 'Research-Teaching Practice in Wales' conference at Gregynog Hall near Newtown in Mid Wales. Additionally two student editorial board members will present their own undergraduate research and a second paper on The Student Researcher project at the British Conference of Undergraduate Research, University of Warwick.

The Student Researcher is used as a teaching and learning tool in academic disciplines and study skills courses by both staff and students as it showcases all levels of work across a wide range of disciplines:

We believe that publishing undergraduate research is important and empowering to all undergraduates, because we feel that most undergraduates believe that publication is not within their reach at this level. We hope that it becomes a target that students can aim for, and aspire to, and we also hope that it will guide other students.

Sarah Goodridge and Selina Ali (editorial board members), blog quote (<http://nexus-wales.blogspot.com/>), October 2011

The impact of this initiative is both tangible and intangible. Tangibly there is a hard-copy (and electronic) journal produced by and with the undergraduate students at Trinity Saint David. Each stage of the first journal was discussed and planned with the students on the editorial board. The confidence of the students on the editorial board has notably grown throughout the project as they propose extended initiatives for future publication, and research into the volume one uptake and use across the University.

The unintended and unseen benefits relate to the insight gained by the students on the editorial board who have been at the centre of a development project. Additionally increased knowledge and understanding of the links between a tutor's research, student learning and their understanding of the higher education sector means they now feel part of, as opposed to a consumer of, their education. For students publishing and aspiring to publish, the journal has, as the quote above notes, put publication and recognition within their reach, again changing the dynamic of how students feel about their own learning and participation within higher education.

As the now expanded editorial board plans the next journal (2011-12) we are discussing postgraduate research students' involvement with the process and proposing partnerships and mentors between undergraduates and related postgraduate researchers. We look forward to the expansion of The Student Researcher and the changing student membership on the editorial board.

Kathryn James
University of Wales Trinity Saint David

2. Marking database: a tool for tutorials

The aim of the initiative is to facilitate a clearer dialogue between students and academic assessment that meets quality assurance auditing requirements.

The project sets forth a system that allows more time for tutorial-based feedback. By streamlining the process of assessment and focusing on providing a tool to the students to base the tutorial around, students have become more focused on understanding the relationship of their outputs to the learning outcomes. It also helps to avoid generalised written feedback that is not necessarily related to learning outcomes, project tasks and assessment criteria.

We use this tool at Levels 4, 5 and 6 on the BA Acting and BA Theatre, Design and Production pathways, but are considering expanding its use to the Welsh-medium pathways in the School.

This system provides a number of benefits to both academic staff and students within the School in that the database:

- provides a central, secure gateway for the collection of marks;
- ensures a direct link between learning outcomes, project tasks, assessment criteria and student feedback;
- provides a clear structure to be used by all tutors on every module for the marking of coursework;

- allows the printing of an 'assessment map' for each student for each assessment. This map acts as the key discussion point between tutors and students;
- allows the Head of School to monitor the appropriateness of assessment criteria and to track student progress across a range of modules;
- allows for easy collation and transfer of marks onto MIS system;
- provides a clear, accessible record of all marking carried out within the School in any given year.

The School of Performing Arts is conducting more tutorials with students. The feedback, as evidenced in annual reviews, is that the students like the ability to chart their progress in a clear manner they understand. Additional feedback suggests that they are able to ask clearer questions about their feedback.

Tutors spend more time in direct communication with students about their progress. This form is printed and distributed to the appropriate student when the work is returned, and also used at interim points for feedback. This year the School has also introduced a series of self-assessment points where a student has an opportunity to assess him/herself using the sheet. This process allows for a discussion about their perceptions of their progress against those of a tutor. It is emphasised to the students during the orientation process that the criteria are not mathematically weighted (i.e. that each criterion is not worth 20%, thus determining the final mark as an average), but that the feedback form is a map that indicates the student's strengths and weaknesses on any particular project.

Mark Kelly
University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Glyndŵr University: GTV – students as partners in Wrexham and North-East Wales

GTV is a concept developed in partnership with students, initially within the curriculum, but now the project also exists outside the curriculum across the academic area of creative industries, media, performance and humanities at Glyndŵr University.

GTV is an online platform aimed at connecting students with each other; at the same time integrating the University and its students as partners in the communities of Wrexham and North-East Wales. The concept for the platform was developed through Level 5 Broadcasting and Journalism students' engagement with the Welsh Government's vision, For Our Future – The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales (2009; <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/forourfuture/?lang=en>)

The challenge for our students was to come up with a media solution that meets the objectives of creating, “a higher education community which, through the combined efforts of its members, transforms lives and livelihoods across Wales ... equipping individuals, whatever their background, with the knowledge, skills and attributes to achieve maximum intellectual and personal fulfilment; fostering a culture of exploration, discovery and intellectual challenge that generates international recognition, respect and engagement; exploiting (its) knowledge base effectively through working with businesses and employers in and beyond Wales; offering flexible, accessible and learner-centred provision; contributing to the reviving and sustaining of communities and the shaping of a democratic, civilised and inclusive society; contributing to the future renewal of the Welsh economy by raising the skill level of the Welsh workforce and by supporting businesses to become increasingly innovative and competitive” (For Our Future).

This is what the students say:

GTV exists to aid community cohesion. We want Glyndŵr University to become synonymous with a superior student experience. To achieve this, we must create opportunities for students to stumble upon all things new, from people to perspectives, cultures to encounters. Our success in this endeavour hinges upon one vital ingredient – a close-knit studentship that blends seamlessly with the community beyond its campuses. This vital ingredient doubles as an important ally in ensuring that the Wrexham community fully enjoys the benefits of having a university on its door step. Students will play a bigger role in the community as they become more aware of the many personal and professional development opportunities our town has to offer. Community spirit has the potency to plug skills gaps and expand the local economy – also by encouraging students to adopt Wrexham as their home after they graduate.

At the time of the ‘Future Directions’ conference, Computing students are in the process of redesigning the online platform for GTV. Production teams have a number of bespoke programmes already completed and ready for the site as well as archives gathered from previous student works. Examples include, ‘A Taste of the Community’, produced in collaboration with Communities First and the Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham (AVOW) and a short series about the challenges facing Wrexham’s three historic markets. Progress is slow, quality is high! The site in development can be found at: <http://www.wearegtv.com>.

Sally Harrison
Glyndŵr University



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