Student Union and Institution Partnership Award

The Student Fellows Scheme - A partnership between Winchester Student Union and the University of Winchester

Winchester Partnership Vision:
To embed an inclusive culture of opportunities for engagement and partnership across the institution. Winchester Student Union (SU) and the University of Winchester have co-created an initiative to engage students and staff on meaningful educational development research partnerships institution-wide.

Background:
The Student Fellows Scheme (SFS) is the result of meetings between the Executive Committee of the SU and the Learning and Teaching Development Unit (LTDU) to expand active student engagement at Winchester. Partnership was the priority from the outset. The Scheme was co-funded by the Student Academic Council and the University Senior Management Team. This gave both parties an equal stake in decisions. While creating successful partnerships and improving student engagement and employability were key goals of the scheme, the research undertaken by these partnerships was designed to effect real change at programme and institutional level. Prioritising impact in this way encouraged staff and students to work closely on issues that are important to them, and engendered a stronger relationship between the SU and the institution to improve the student learning experience.

Structure of SFS 2013/14:
Tom Lowe, VP Education SU and Camille Shepherd LTDU Research Officer planned the logistics of the SFS. Student Fellows receive an honorary bursary of £600 to support their engagement. The SU brought the networks of the student body to the Scheme, whilst the LTDU brought experience and expertise in teaching and learning.

A successful partnership has emerged through negotiations between the SU, Learning and Teaching and Senior Managers reflecting our differing priorities for student (and staff) engagement. At times there have been inherent tensions around how ‘student-led’ the partnerships were, to what extent they served institutional needs, and how staff perceive their roles. These reflected the pioneering work of the SFS, in its ‘proof of concept’ stage, which has followed a much smaller Student Fellows Scheme through the JISC funded FASTECH project. The success of the planning stages of the initiative was contingent on the participation and commitment of all parties and their mutual priority to enhance student engagement.

When recruiting students and staff, the access of both partners was integral to the communications, publicity and success of the scheme. Prospective Student Fellows (both undergraduates and postgraduates) were invited to send in the following documents:

- Curriculum Vitae
- An academic reference
- A statement of purpose outlining their suitability and areas of research interest.
The application process was rigorous and competitive to ensure high calibre Student Fellows. It also provided applicants with useful employability experience by participating in panel interviews and delivering presentations. Interviews demonstrated the applicants' understanding of higher education and enthusiasm to engage with processes to improve their experience at Winchester. Following successful recruitment of 60 fellows, they were trained to conduct social science and educational research in partnership with leading educational researchers Prof. Graham Gibbs and Dr. Tansy Jessop. Having already received staff expressions of interest to work with Student Fellows, a pairing of partners followed and projects were collaboratively created by Christmas vacation 2013.

Example projects:
To engage students and staff as partners in the SFS, few restrictions were placed on the scope of the research and enhancement areas. This created a wide range of projects including; methods of assessment and feedback, the combined pathways student experience, student engagement, curriculum design and technology enhanced learning. A few sample projects are listed below with descriptions from the participating students:

Laura Hutber and Carol Kilgannon
*Providing a Physical Approach to Learning and Teaching the Law*
'To develop interactive and effective methods of teaching and learning difficult legal concepts with a view to increasing accessibility and student engagement on the course as a whole.'

James Fowler and Tom Lowe
*Student Engagement at the University of Winchester*
'The project aims to address the nature of the Student Engagement and to gauge the levels of Student Engagement at the University of Winchester'

Akil Morgan and Dr Simon Boxley
*Assessment... Beyond Competition?*
‘An in-depth look at what assessment is, aiming to find out, right back to first principles..."What is the role of assessment as you see it?" "What do you think the wider function of assessment is?" and "Do you think assessment is educational?"

Esther Sutherland and Dr Stuart Sims
Evaluating the Student Fellows Scheme
‘Exploring the nature of the Student Fellows Scheme in areas such as demographics, motivations and the ‘time-poor’ nature of student life using survey data.’

Reflection and moving forward:
In reflecting on the first year, we have refined the scheme for its second year. Specifically, we are providing three defined pathways to allow more tailored training, guidance and future development. Rather than restricting the scope of the scheme, these three pathways are designed to broaden the focus and increase the number of projects which explore institution-wide issues.

Three pathways:
1. Enhancement Aimed Projects (EAP)
Researching issues identified from key performance indicators, staff and students develop the project together.

2. Evidence Led Projects (ELP)
Researching evidence-based issues developed by students, being matched with suitable staff members.

3. Institutionally Strategic Projects (ISP)
Researching issues of importance to the whole university, developed by staff, students or in collaboration

This redesign was also undertaken to make the process more transparent and accessible to staff members who were often unclear about the nature of their role due to the focus on engaging students in the initial roll out of the scheme.

Our partnership:
The co-operative relationship by the co-leaders of the SFS representing the two bodies, students and institution, is core to the partnership within the scheme. Our partnership has directly led to the success of the scheme and continues to grow into a strategic area, which we are aiming to disseminate on a national scale.

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