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Participating institutions

University of Bristol: Reflective learners, responsive curricula

University of Dundee: Sustainable peer led teaching and digital professionalism

University of Exeter: Peer-assisted learning at the University of Exeter: Exeter PALs

Nottingham Trent University: What's in it for me?

Robert Gordon University: Strategic embedding of a student-led learning enhancement team

University of Strathclyde: Students as Partners in transforming feedback and assessment

University of Winchester: Students shaping curriculum: ideas, evidence and practice

University of the West of Scotland: Partners in learning/partners in research: Developing a culture of research mindedness in social science students
University of Bristol: Reflective learners, responsive curricula

Project

This ambitious programme seeks to:

- Broaden student engagement, particularly by working with academic societies as well as academic representatives. We want to give students the support to form autonomous communities of learners, related to the concept of belonging expressed in the 2012 ‘What Works’ report.
- Clearly articulate the skills and learning outcomes curricula (and the wider university experience) should deliver to students, and encourage them to reflect critically on this to guide their learning and personal development.
- Through the combination of the above, to give students the ability to shape their learning experience to maximise how curriculum outcomes are delivered and skill-sets developed. We believe that Student engagement is too often merely a retrospective quality enhancement tool that benefits the following cohort. Students should have the ability to affect how pedagogical approaches later in their studies will meet their aims and expectations and suit them best. This requires re-examining student engagement and shaping responsive curricula. It will also involve giving student disciplinary societies the ability to lead on this by providing the means for them to augment the curriculum themselves.

Impact

Bringing these areas together offers a real opportunity to find an articulation of student roles in curriculum review, to develop the engaged student offer, to encourage students to reflect on their past and future development, and to make student feedback more meaningful by ensuring it shapes students’ future experiences.

Project Lead: Chris Wilmore

A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it
University of Dundee: Sustainable peer led teaching and digital professionalism

The University of Dundee School of Medicine actively supports student-led initiatives both in relation to teaching and learning, and student support. There is a well-established peer-tutoring programme and some student projects have served to pilot approaches now integrated into the curriculum.

Others however, whilst proving successful and popular have not been sustained and reached their full potential as students running them have moved into the more demanding clinical years of the curriculum or graduated. New students come with similar ideas to their predecessors and there’s a sense of re-inventing the wheel and duplication of effort.

Project
This programme aims to explore and develop a framework to support sustainability in peer led teaching approaches. Building on current peer led projects staff and students will work collaboratively to weave these together to form a longitudinal curriculum theme around digital professionalism and the positive use of social media by linking to the core clinical problems that form the spine of the curriculum.

Delivery
This will involve students currently involved in running their own Twitter clinical case-based discussions working with staff to develop a programme for training ‘Student online teachers’. Developing teaching skills is a requirement for all medical students as outlined by the General Medical Council, this programme will support this outcome and cover topics such as digital professionalism, facilitating online learning and mentoring.

Impact
The students have already identified that developing student-led online learning helps develop skills for lifelong learning and anticipate the project outcomes will have relevance across HE.

Project Lead: Natalie Lafferty
University of Exeter: Peer-assisted learning at the University of Exeter: Exeter PALs

The vision for student engagement at Exeter is that students must be at the heart of all we do: as evaluators of their experience, engaging students in quality assurance procedures, collaborating with students as participants in decision-making processes, alongside students as partners, co-creators and experts, and agents for change.

Project
In order to satisfy the University’s ambitions for broadening student engagement activity and to empower students to engage more actively in their own learning, the University is undertaking the design and implementation of a cross-institutional peer-assisted learning initiative. This will be rigorously evaluated to promote a cycle of evidence-led development and change.

Impact
The overarching aim of the initiative is:
To explicitly develop, through peer-assisted learning, the University’s ambitions for an extensive, institution-wide approach to partnership between students and staff, and students and their peers, and to promote an ethos where this is highly valued by the institution as a whole and recognised internally and externally as characterising The Exeter Experience.

Project Lead: Elisabeth Dunne

A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it
Nottingham Trent University: What's in it for me?

Nottingham Trent University plans to use the Students as Partners in the Curriculum process to improve how we make changes to courses.

**Project**

At present we ask for student views as part of the change process, but do not systematically embed students into the change teams (Development and Approval Groups (DAGs)). Over the life cycle of this change project, we will recruit, train and support a team of students to become members of the DAGs that make decisions about approval of major changes to courses.

**Delivery**

We propose to investigate different options for how to integrate students into the DAGs. Options might include developing a pool of expert student members or recruiting members only from the course under review.

**Impact**

We will produce reports, case studies and resources to share our findings and present them at relevant conferences.

Project Lead: Ed Foster

A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it
Robert Gordon University: Strategic embedding of a student-led learning enhancement team

Students are experts in their educational needs and are ideally placed to be ‘co-producers’ of teaching, learning and assessment tools. They experience the course in its entirety, a perspective which individual staff cannot possess.

**Project**

The University has established a student-led learning enhancement team the members of which are already involved not only in developing course materials but also as peer-peer mentors supporting final year project students who are also developing teaching materials.

**Delivery**

The team is proving to be an effective conduit between teaching staff and the student body and this is being used to support curriculum enhancement. Fundamental to the success of this project has been the level of engagement and enthusiasm, and the openness of the students to new ideas in what is a novel role for them in undertaking the development of educational strategies and materials.

The believe is that this is an effective model of student engagement, but there is a need to formalise this work and embed it at a strategic level, in a way that will make it accessible to all students. The project has also revealed issues surrounding specific training needs (for both staff and students) that must be dealt with if engagement with the process is to be successful.

**Impact**

This project seeks to explore these needs and develop a suitable framework to support enhancement teams. Students also need to be adequately recognised for undertaking this type of work, and the project also intends to investigate ways in which this may be accomplished.

Project Lead: Kirsty Regan

A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it
University of Strathclyde: Students as Partners in transforming feedback and assessment

The University of Strathclyde has a successful record of working with students as partners in change to facilitate the enhancement of the student experience in a number of key areas. Much of this work has focussed on engaging students as summer interns and participation in the Change Programme will allow us to strengthen our approach to student partnership by building in continuity to our activity: engaging students throughout the year and enabling smooth handover/transfer from one team to the next.

Project

Teams of Departmental/School representatives within each Faculty will be established to provide support and to act as partners with the students involved. A particular focus will be the transformation of the University’s feedback and assessment practices as we work to embed a new feedback and assessment policy.

Support from the Change Programme and colleagues from the Higher Education Academy will allow us harness expertise from outwith the University and gain a wider perspective of the approaches used to working in partnership with students. Additionally we will have the opportunity to share our experiences with an extended audience which could potentially support their work in this area.

Project Lead: Lizann Bonnar

A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it
University of Winchester: Students shaping curriculum: ideas, evidence and practice

‘Students shaping curriculum: ideas, evidence and practice’, draws on the educational development projects of the University of Winchester’s Student Fellow Scheme to rethink curriculum development from a student perspective. It draws on literature about curriculum as social process, as dialogue, and as a contested activity, to deepen student and academic engagement with curriculum processes and sharpen practice in line with evidence.

**Project**
The initiative takes the broad view of curriculum as encompassing the student learning experience, and will explore themed clusters of student-led enhancement activity, including assessment, organisation of degrees, content, and evaluation. These clusters are being activated within the Student Fellow Scheme at Winchester.

**Delivery**
The context for our initiative is the University of Winchester’s high impact measure to improve student engagement called the Student Fellow Scheme (SFS). The scheme has recruited 55 Student Fellows to undertake educational development research, in partnership with lecturers on a critical mass of undergraduate programmes.

**Impact**
Student Fellows are paid bursaries, mentored, trained in research methods, and drawn into a community of practice through working groups, conducting joint research and attending and disseminating findings at conferences. The Student Fellow Scheme is funded jointly by Senior Management and the Winchester Student Union. It is managed jointly by the Learning and Teaching Development Unit and the Winchester Student Union. The Student Engaged Educational Development (SEED) Research Centre provides a forum, events and publication opportunities for Student Fellows and their academic mentors.

Project Lead: Tom Lowe

A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it
University of the West of Scotland: Partners in learning/partners in research: Developing a culture of research mindedness in social science students

**Project**

This proposed project, while focused in itself on the short term, will provide a sustainable model with which to embed student experience of research-led learning and working research partnerships at the centre of the Social Science curriculum.

At the heart of this project is the view that students should be active participants, learning in 'research mode' across the curriculum, thereby engaging them as 'producers' rather than 'consumers' of knowledge.

Project Lead: Neil McPherson

A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it
Reflective learners, responsive curricula: building communities of scholarship

University of Bristol
Case Study

The development of the Bristol Student Partnership originated from a desire from students and staff to develop stronger learning communities at the University of Bristol, where students are empowered to be active players in shaping their educational experience. Bristol has a large pool of engaged students involved with the shaping and enhancing their learning experience, but, much of that work was happening in silos, lacking visibility across the institution, and good practice was not being surfaced and shared.

Our first step was to improve the democratic course representative process, but this project is designed to be the next step - to improve communities within disciplines, by working with student academic societies as key players in the creation of disciplinary communities, and to build synergies across all the other pathways through which students are contributing to building our community of scholars. We started

“The students breathe life into a University, and their input into University life and learning is vital.”

Prof. Jan Noyes
Head of the School of Experimental Psychology
from a set of practical actions to create momentum, and then worked with students and staff to develop The Bristol Student Partnership Vision, to create synergies and ensure we make the most of the ways in which our students engage with the University; to promote and extend the large number of opportunities for engagement and partnership across Schools and Faculties in a consistent way; and to encourage best practice across all the activities.

Aspects of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

The Bristol Student Partnership Project aims to be nothing less than transformative: it aims to revolutionise students’ University experience, from their engagement with their academic studies through to fostering a sense of belonging through effective community building. It is this desire for stronger communities that was a key priority; when students feel they belong within strong community structures, they are more empowered to take on a partnership role. Anecdotal evidence at the University of Bristol suggests that those schools which have traditionally benefited from a strong community spirit have already achieved high levels of partnership working; one of the objectives of our work is to make this common across all 28 schools so that all students can enjoy these benefits. The key aims of the HEA project can be encapsulated within the following bullet points:

- To build strong and sustainable disciplinary societies in all disciplines engaged in academic and community cohesion as a powerhouse of community identity and creativity.
- To ensure students as partners are embedded within a simpler more dynamic and responsive curriculum design process.
- To establish a Student Academic Advisory Group linking all strands of student action advising and supporting the Sabbatical Officers.
- To make visible the very wide range of opportunities for students to engage in fostering and enhancing the experience of all - to enable students to find the opportunities appropriate to them.
- To establish a network through which all those students who are engaged can share and build upon their experience.
- Students and academics feeling positive about their ability to achieve change.

Alignment with the HEA Students as Partners framework

Our principles for the Bristol Student Partnership were developed through open workshops where staff and students worked together. The Bristol Partnership Vision reflects the same aims as the Framework, but it was important to us to use the language and structure that emerged from our workshops, which resonated with students and staff at Bristol. The Bristol Student Partnership Vision 2015-2020 draws upon the approach of the HEA Framework, and was significantly influenced by the fuller publication (see Healy, Flint and Harrington, 2014) but seeks to integrate learning and teaching, with participation in governance and monitoring, and engagement in the wider University community, because we see them as integrally linked.
Figure 1: Mapping pathways of student involvement, around the SAAG and Student Experience Forum.

Approaches and activities developed

The Bristol Student Partnership project forms a central part of a four year programme to change the student relationship with the governance of the University. The work started from representation, to ensure a democratic basis for the work, but has now extended into more complex community building, which is the bedrock of students feeling this is their University.

Prior to the starting of the HEA project, in 2013-14, the entire student representation system was overhauled. The strengthened system is now embedding well, with over 600 course reps elected, a structure of course, School, Faculty and specialist representatives and a full rep training programme implemented. The work in 2014-15 concentrated on three main areas, aiming to address the more complex issue of community building and the way students can effectively become active agents in partnership.

1. Academic Societies – this work is based on vision of academic societies as the bedrock on which to build strong and vibrant communities of scholars as a home base for students. A student intern, Marta Skrzypinska, overseen by the Students’ Union and University jointly, has led a review of our Academic Societies, meeting with every school and society and for the first time mapping our provision. This provided the first comprehensive study of Academic Societies, and resulted in a 23 point action plan, with recommendations for the Students’ Union, Academic Societies and the University, which are now being implemented. Academic Society leaders, Students’ Union representatives and academics met for a workshop, hosted by the PVC Education, to launch this new focus on Academic Societies, and regular follow up events with the academic societies have been held to share good practice and to foster relations and share good practice between the societies. This is strengthening our academic societies, fostering their relationship with the Students’ Union and providing a strong voice to work with the course representative structure.

2. Curriculum Review and Development – a new University process for curriculum review and development has been agreed, and is being piloted in three schools in 2014/15. This places students at the heart of curriculum design and review, building upon their successful role in other quality assurance processes within the University.
3. Student Academic Advisory Group – this development addresses two issues: Sabbatical Officers’ desire for a sounding board to consult that is wider than just the Sabbatical team, and the desire to make visible and foster the expertise and insight students develop through undertaking various student roles. The Student Academic Advisory Group is being piloted this year by the UG Education Officer and Faculty reps. Figure 1 above shows the diverse and rich ways in which students participate in shaping the educational provision of the University; much of this is not visible outside of the individual area of work. The University is working on developing a way to make this massive student contribution more visible and to ensure the expertise developed by students in these roles is recognised and built upon, represented in Figure 1 by the working title of ‘Student Experience Forum’. The model is attracting national attention as an innovative approach.

4. Mapping student involvement and contribution to the University - in a novel piece of work, all the different ways students interact with their University was mapped out at displayed graphically in Figure 1, above. This revealed a number of interactions that we hadn’t initially considered, and revealed the huge amount of different contributions that happen all the time at the University of Bristol.

Resources

A number of resources have been developed as part of our involvement in the HEA project. These include:

- Academic Societies report;
- Mapping student pathways of engagement in University life;
- The Bristol Student Partnership Vision;
- Code of Practice for the Representation of Taught Students;
- Training resources for student representatives on the Bristol SU website.

“Everything they’re asking is what we were thinking three years ago, so it creates a safer environment for them to ask those questions.” (Lizzi Tobin, Medical Imaging)

Impact

All of the work detailed has had the common aim of mobilising students as change agents, and encouraging them to take an active role in partnership. We had planned for the 2014-15 academic year to be the implementation year for the new course rep structure (having been developed in the 2013-14 academic year), and the development year for our work around academic societies, curriculum review and mapping of student involvement with the University. However, we have been fortunate to have had a number of early successes, meaning that we have already managed to start the implementation of our 2014-15 initiatives. This has been extremely positive for the project and has helped quicken the overall timescales. The creation of the Student Academic Advisory Group has helped to join up the dots in student representation, and has enabled Faculty reps to have more of an oversight of issues across the entire University. The work with academic societies has been enlightening and positive. The action plan developed has helped the Students’ Union and schools within the University to better support society leaders and continually enhance the support they receive. This has culminated in a programme of workshops and activities for academic societies to help them develop skills in

“Myself and Bristol Dramsoc were delighted we could nominate a member of staff from the Faculty of Arts, and be involved in the Best of Bristol lectures. It was a brilliant experience to be involved in.”

Lucy Dreznin
President of DramSoc
4th year BA (Hons) Drama & German student
areas they have previously lacked, as well as information sessions for University staff. Other major changes that have arisen from the Students as Partners project include the inclusion of student representatives on all major University committees, giving them a core decision-making role; a changed role for the Students’ Union and academic societies in Peer Assisted Learning schemes; and also, the redevelopment of the curriculum review process to embed students at its core.

There have also been several windfall gains. Once the momentum of student partnership had been established through the project, it has spread outside of the project work. The fact this has led to new areas of engagement which were not planned as part of the project is a welcome and positive indicator of the embedding of change. Four such examples to illustrate are: the reestablishment of the Best of Bristol lectures giving academic societies an excellent opportunity to showcase themselves to large audiences, and play an active role in leading education-focussed extracurricular activity. 7 academic societies took part by nominating an academic viewed as outstanding by their members, to give a talk to the University and general public. It is hoped that the series will become an annual event, with continual involvement from academic societies. The funding of a full-time Student Communities Co-ordinator has meant that we have also been exploring and promoting partnership working within University residences through targeted work with JCRs (elected student committees) and hall staff.

Furthermore, the HEFCE Green Capital fund grant that the University obtained has given students more opportunities to be partners in change in more areas, such as sustainability initiatives. For example, part of Bristol SU’s Student Green Fund work is to work with students to identify curriculum change opportunities for sustainability and then skillling and supporting the students to seek to secure the change. This has led to the development and the successful set-up of a student-led conference to showcase student work and research in any area to do with sustainability in April 2015.

Another initiative recently set-up by students, in partnership with the University, is the Higher Education Community of Inquiry1. This forum is directed by students, in which students and academics reflect on the future of HE and key issues in the national landscape - this coming-together of staff and students as equals and co-producers of insight is a physical manifestation of a culture of partnership spreading throughout the institution, and is another example of the success of this initiative.

We are measuring the success of the work through a set of key performance indicators (KPIs); more students are involved in representation and are progressively moving up through the structure – in March 2015, for the second consecutive year, an Undergraduate Education Sabbatical Officer was elected who had previously acted as a course rep and Faculty rep. Additionally, two of the other candidates for the role had extensive experience as course reps and academic society presidents. Students are now more able to chart their own journeys through the engagement opportunities to develop their own voice within the partnership.

Lessons learned

There have been a number of challenges to the successful implementation of the Bristol Student Partnership project. Due to the highly devolved nature of the institution, using an experimentalist governance approach, we have encountered highly differential practice in different Schools and Faculties; some Schools are already far more advanced than our Vision projects, whilst some require more targeted support. Linked with this is a difficulty in mapping what is already happening – many of the richest interactions happen informally on an ad-hoc basis, meaning that it is difficult to assess the current state of affairs in the round. The devolved nature of

“As a member of academic staff, I really enjoy working in partnership with our students. They have such a refreshing take on knowledge acquisition and a real grasp for how technology can aid learning and their input into our teaching is very much valued.”

Prof. Kate Nobes
Head of the School of Biochemistry
the institution also presents challenges in terms of communication. However it also facilitates innovation and experimentation, enables change to be tailored to particular groups of students and leads to deep change. We have seen partnership become part of the zeitgeist of the institution, at which point, the role of institutional leadership becomes the sharing of good practice and affording value and recognition to these examples.

Another challenge, which is a sector-wide issue, is the difficulty in engaging postgraduate students in representative structures and partnership working. Students enrolled on postgraduate taught programmes are usually only present for a year and spend much of their time working intensively. Consequently, their focus is not necessarily on engagement. Postgraduate research students have a very different University experience in comparison to taught students and often identify more with staff or interdisciplinary research teams. To ensure the partnership work is tailored to their needs, a student intern has been employed to map postgraduate representation as it currently stands, and to work with current research students to develop recommendations to address this issue.

Equality and diversity considerations have been prominent in our work. This year, we have developed ways to ensure the work of the Bristol SU’s Liberation Fora are mapped into the course representative structures and academic community building work, to ensure all voices are heard.

Finally, another key lesson that we have learned is the importance of identifying and sharing best practice, and showing that the leadership of the institution values this work. Additionally, by showing students and staff the benefits that can arise from working in partnership, we are finding more innovation across our Schools and Faculties.

Next steps

Although the HEA project lasts for only one year, we have used it as part of a four year project. The Bristol Student Partnership project is ongoing as we are currently only part way through; the project can be roughly split into 4 phases, where phase 4 is our next step.

1. Summer 2013: overhauling student representation, student membership on central committees and a new system for course representation agreed.

2. 2013/2014: implementation of the new course rep system, with continual training and development. Targeted work with Faculty reps. Bid to be part of the HEA Students as Partners project.

3. 2014/15: developing the Partnership Vision, embedding the representation system and developing communities.

4. 2015/16: turning the Vision into actions and implementing the recommendations and outcomes of the HEA project.

In order for the work that we have done so far to be durable and effective, it needs to be embedded over time and continually refined, with targeted support to areas where change is harder to affect. Representation, developing academic societies and the successful operation of the Student Academic Advisory Group will all require further support and planning to ensure their continued success. Furthermore, as the project continues to widen in scope, by incorporating more community-building aspects, more KPIs will need to be developed to reflect this; by keeping the Bristol Student Vision as a living, continual, iterative document, it enables us to take advantage of other opportunities and continually learn.

“As an academic society, we see ourselves a body which exists to link up students, staff, academic studies and extracurricular activities within our School.”

Ellie Pelych
President of GeogSoc
2nd year BSc (Hons) Geography student
In terms of actions, future key steps will involve exploring how opportunities which are presently limited to only some students, could be more broadly provided to all students; for example, the Faculty of Engineering employs student research assistants over the summer vacation, and some parts of the University employ student interns (but not others). Investigating the feasibility of developing opportunities, such as a Student Fellows scheme, similar to the University of Winchester model, are also areas to be explored in terms of maximising student involvement in their educational experience.

Key messages

This is highly ambitious project, but we have achieved all of our targets for the HEA phase of our project. One of the key aspects that has allowed us to do this has been the effective representative structures in place. Although postgraduate representation continues to be a challenge, we have been able to establish a solid framework for implementing more change by having a cogent network of over 600 course reps, all democratically and transparently elected and trained to be effective; it was crucial to have representation working well before embarking on the more ambitious parts of this project. The importance of academic societies in fostering communities within their schools is also notable. This was encapsulated effectively by Ellie Pelych, President of the Geography Society, when introducing the Best of Bristol lecture her society helped organise – see the adjacent box. By giving academic societies the tools to do more and be more effective, without encroaching on their autonomy and differences in approach, the University and the Students’ Union helps these communities to develop further in both academic and extracurricular contexts, which helps students feel more empowered and gives them a better University experience.

Finally, the importance of recognising all the other ways students get involved in shaping their University experience is critical in developing an effective partnership strategy. Often, student engagement is equated to being a course rep; our Vision aims to change this perception. The contribution of students in all their various ways is highly valuable for the institution and is an important aspect of partnership – whether this is being an outreach widening participation ambassador, or being a student intern, as shown in Figure 1. Involving other groups where students feel a sense of ‘belonging’ is similarly important for this same reason, hence the targeted work with JCRs in University residences.

To conclude, the ongoing work on the Bristol Student Partnership project has been rewarding and highly positive. There is much discourse within the Higher Education sector claiming that students are apathetic, consumerist and unwilling to engage; however our work on this project, combined with the highly positive reception from students and staff alike, refutes these notions, and shows a clear appetite for this work to succeed. We truly believe that the future is bright for student partnership at the University of Bristol, and that the University community will be better off as a result.

References

Authors:
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Marta Skrzypinska (Students as Partners Intern)
April 2015

References:
Peer-assisted learning at the University of Exeter: Exeter PALs

University of Exeter
Case Study

Introduction

As noted in our original proposal, the aim of our initiative was to ‘deepen students’ involvement in all aspects of their learning’. Peer assisted learning (PAL) activities are a key avenue to involve students in both their own and their fellow students’ learning processes. PALs at Exeter is an excellent example of partnership, which built on the University's long-standing reputation in this area.

Aspects of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

Enhanced sense of belonging to their academic community, the university as well as a sense of ownership of their own learning.

Alignment with the HEA Students as Partners framework

This aligned with aspects of co-learning, co-designing and co-developing through students being able to set-up peer programmes and/or co-designing peer programmes with staff. This approach enhances and innovates approaches to learning and teaching.

Approaches and activities developed

Through this initiative we have:

1. Created a Peer Support website (http://www.exeter.ac.uk/student-engagement-skills/peersupport/).
2. Increased the number of peer programmes from 3 to 31.
3. Provided a central support hub to assist departments in creating and developing peer programmes.
4. Designed and developed a number of resources for use by all peer programmes at Exeter.
5. Organised and chaired groups for Peer Programme Organisers, Peer Leaders, and a SW Peer Support Network to provide a communication and collaboration avenue.
6. Gained financial support from Exeter’s Alumni Funds to hold a reward and recognition ceremony for peer leaders.

Most of the peer programmes are designed to involve 2nd year students supporting 1st year students. This encompasses the 1st year transition phase with some also providing guidance on specific 1st year modules. All programmes are open to all students within the cohort and are generally optional.

There have been a number of aspects of our initiative that have enhanced the overall awareness of what peer programmes are, how they can operate to best effect, the importance of student involvement in designing and operating the activities. This is particularly important as we have not been working on a one-size-fits-all model or particular scheme such as PASS, but have enabled disciplines to develop schemes organically in the ways that they see fit and best support their particular needs and contexts.

Resources

Staff resource aided in the support of peer programme development as well as the design and creation of training materials. The central team also created various online resources for use by all peer programmes providing a means of evaluation and feedback.
Lessons learned

The main risks and challenges faced were centred on the stability of online environments and the individual password controlled areas associated with social media. However, we managed to overcome this after negotiating with appropriate departments to permit the creation of group password areas. Evaluation of impact is also difficult and we need to continue working at this: qualitative feedback is always positive. However, to what extent is it possible to know whether there is an impact on student attendance, overall engagement and confidence, sense of community, attainment or employability? This is a challenge that we will continue to address.

Next steps

Our short-term future plans are to continue to support the current peer programmes by making them more robust and effective, as well as encouraging new programme development. The longer-term overall aim will be to have a peer programme in every discipline and to develop more effective evaluation tools.

Key messages

Peer programmes epitomise the ethos of students as partners in the curriculum incorporating the co-development and co-delivery of such activities. Well supported peer programmes benefit all stakeholders and greatly enhance the student experience.

Feedback from Staff and Students about Peer Programmes has included:

“Challenging, enriching and exciting”. Amoe Mkena (Peer Support rep)

“...enriching, refreshing and very stimulating.” Jason Chang (Sociology)

“Often the best way of learning is… learning from the people around you and learning from fellow students, as they’re often very aware of the kind of challenges and problems you might be facing.” (Ben Street, Guild, VP Education)

“Everything they’re asking is what we were thinking three years ago, so it creates a safer environment for them to ask those questions.” (Lizzi Tobin, Medical Imaging)
References


Putting students at the heart of the curriculum change process

Nottingham Trent University
Case Study

Introduction

At NTU, new courses or major course revisions are approved using the Development and Approval Group (DAG) process. This process is an iterative one comprising a number of stages including documentary review, initial consultation and a full panel. DAGs are intended to be testing, but in a supportive manner. A panel of senior academics, quality officers and experts interviews the course team to ensure that the fundamentals are in place and develop the course further.

Prior to this project, only one academic school occasionally used students in DAGs.

Aspects of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

This proposal aimed to integrate students as full partners into the course approval process and ensure that their views help to shape the future direction of their courses. We believed that this would have a number of benefits including helping give course teams a richer set of views to consider, but also help students to feel that they could contribute to the development of new courses. We proposed to recruit a small number of students to work as full members of the DAGs.

Students were recruited to participate in DAGs in Schools other than their own. This was felt to be a safer way to ensure that potential issues surrounding the tutor/student power relationship would not interfere with their role on the panel.

Alignment with the HEA Students as Partners framework

The work primarily operated in the curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy sphere. There were further connections to the scholarship of teaching and learning and we felt that the whole process is helping us to consider how we achieve partnership learning communities.

Approaches and activities developed

Staff in the Centre for Academic Development & Quality recruited six paid DAG Student Panel Members. In this first stage, we were keen to recruit students who were already involved in similar work. Therefore the students were recruited primarily by contacting students in similar paid work (student academic mentors) and by communicating with course reps via the SU. Four were undergraduates, one studying a Masters and the final for a PhD.

The students were interviewed by a one of the CADQ Senior Standards & Quality Officers, the VP Education in the SU and the Student Engagement Manager. As part of the assessment students were required to interpret an extract from the DAG report to both test their ability and expose the kind of activity they would be required to participate in. The Senior Quality Officer then trained the students to participate in DAGs, topics covered included the importance of the student voice in the process, how to read the papers and how to gain the most in formal meetings.

Furthermore each of the students were given mentoring and support prior to attending their DAGs.
Four of the students subsequently participated in one of more DAG each. These were:

- LLB Law with Journalism (new course)
- LLM Legal Education (new course)
- ProfD Psychology (new course)
- BA Journalism (major changes to an existing course)
- MA Framework Art and Design (major changes to all courses in the Masters framework)
- MA Documentary Journalism (new course)
- MA Museum and Heritage Management (major changes to an existing course)

**Resources**

We have the job description and person specifications for the DAG Student panel members. We also have the training materials and guidance used for training the students. We don’t currently have them loaded on a web page, so please email Rebecca.Rock@ntu.ac.uk or ed.foster@ntu.ac.uk for copies.

**Impact**

The project successfully recruited a team of student panel members. They played a key role in the course development process. Moreover, their inputs were valued by those staff who worked with them. We feel that we have achieved a small, but significant, step to increasing student engagement with curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy at Nottingham Trent University.

As this project was small scale, NTU used a range of interviews and discussions with the students and staff involved.

"The role of the student on the DAG was very useful as it helps the course team to view the documentation and plans from a student perspective."

DAG Chair LLM Legal Education

"… this was a very positive experience. [Student panel member] was fully engaged, interested in the process and showed maturity in her approach to questions. For the DAG it gave the panel another lens with which to view the proposal and in particular [student panel member] was able to look at the assessment and experience from a student point of view."

DAG Chair LL.B(Hons) Law with Journalism

"I was initially concerned that the documentation would be too complicated to understand and therefore, I would not be much use at the actually meetings but you quickly made me feel more comfortable about it."

Student Panel Member reflections on their first event

"The student gains knowledge of the universities policies and systems; while being made to feel like an integral part of the decision making process. It also helpful for students to know and to see directly, that their needs are being met and their views are being taken into account."

Student Panel Member reflections on their first event.

"I would also be more than willing to go in and talk to groups of students about the experience I have gained and how rewarding it has been for me."

Student Panel Member end of year feedback.
Lessons learned

Fundamentally, the students coped well with the experience of participating in the DAG process. Some found it a little overwhelming at first, and all faced some challenges reading and interpreting the volumes of papers required.

Most academics were extremely welcoming to the idea of students being involved in the process. Some reservations were expressed to the Senior Standards & Quality Officer by academics, but even where colleagues had reservations they welcomed the students.

Recruiting students who were already involved was successful. If we are to implement this approach across the whole institution for each of the 70 DAGs that take place, it may not be practical to adopt this approach.

There were major challenges associated with timetabling. The DAG processes tend to be bunched at the end of the year when academics have clearer diaries. This, of course, can present problems for students who are sitting exams or have completed their academic year. Moreover, adding an additional panel member multiplied the complexity of organising the consultative and the main panel meeting. Taken together, this meant that students attended fewer DAGs than we had originally planned.

Not all courses were immediately obviously suitable for student involvement. A number of the courses participating in the DAG process involve non-standard delivery methods, or are for small cohorts of professional staff. The project team therefore felt that it would be difficult for students to contribute to these courses and chose not to include them in the pilot.

The project was conducted as an add-on for already busy staff. If we are to scale this up to our ambition of having students sitting on the majority of DAGS, we will need to reconsider the project’s resources.

Next steps

In the short term, the University will extend the pilot. In 2015-16, we will recruit a slightly larger pool of DAG student panel members to work from earlier in the year with a larger number of DAGs.

The University will review the situation mid-way through the 2015-16 academic year and consider whether or not to increase the number of students involved.

The University and SU will review how we promote the experience to students to reinforce to students the importance and value of taking part.

Key messages

Students made a valuable contribution to the course approval process. Both students and staff felt that this additional perspective was useful.

Training, briefing and mentoring the students so that they felt confident participating was important.

Managing student recruitment and allocating them to DAGs is time-consuming and, at times, extremely complicated.

Rebecca Rock, Ed Foster & Susannah Lamb
Centre for Academic Development & Quality
Nottingham Trent University
June 2015
Strategic embedding of a student-led learning enhancement team

Robert Gordon University
Case Study

Introduction

‘Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced’.
James Baldwin

The higher education sector has experienced significant change over the last few years; change which has been driven by a new funding model combined with increasing student expectations that degree programmes will lead to enhanced employment opportunities (National Union of Students 2011). The financial cost of higher education courses now rests with students themselves, which has led to the concept of ‘students as consumers’ with an increased expectation of ‘quality’ (Singleton-Jackson et al. 2013). The concept of ‘quality’ is captured by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education which lays out its expectations and indicators of good practice in the Quality Code (Quality Assurance Agency 2013). ‘Quality’ courses are those which provide opportunities for students to develop (and evidence achievement of) the skills and practices necessary for the world of work. Such skills include the ability to critically appraise and challenge current thinking in their field as well as contributing to enhancement of practice. Such skills require the development of personal qualities such as resilience and reflective practice.

Recent years have seen an increasing desire to see students turn some of this critical appraisal towards their educational provision and seeking and responding to student feedback has thus become a standard part of academic practice. In this way, students can have some influence in shaping their academic provision, although its retrospective nature means that it will be subsequent students who benefit from their input.

While students appear to welcome the opportunity to contribute in this way, they recognise the limitations of such mechanisms and are often critical of what they see as a ‘one-way’ flow of information. There are more effective ways of promoting student engagement: involving students in ‘educationally purposive activities’ has a positive impact on a number of indicators of student success, including academic achievement and overall student satisfaction (Trowler, 2010). Skills developed through enhancement activities are transferable skills so highly prized by employers. Working in partnership with staff, students bring an additional dimension to course teams: in contrast with staff, they experience the course in its entirety, and are well placed to reflect on its ‘fitness for purpose.’ Such partnerships also allow staff to develop meaningful learning relationships with a smaller number of students who are, in turn, able to work with the larger student body, capturing wider learning needs and desires.

Aspects of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

The School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences at RGU has already piloted a student-led learning enhancement team for the undergraduate Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) course. This had grown out of a previous Higher Education Academy Change Programme, which explored embedding simulation within the curriculum as one possible alternative clinical placement, which is in short supply for pharmacy courses (Regan et al., 2014). The student team were given a basic introduction to teaching and learning theory and practice using materials adapted from the in-house PgCert course. They used this training to support them in tackling a number of student-identified areas for enhancement of the curriculum.

One of the most significant outputs was the development of teaching and learning activities which were delivered as part of a second-year module in the following academic session, thus impacting directly on approximately 150 students. The outcomes (in terms of student achievement) were very positive. The source of the material was discussed with the second-year students before teaching began, and their perception of the activities was captured through questionnaires issued at the end of the semester. The teaching was very
well received, with many of the students saying they would like to see more of this type of student-led activity. Furthermore, some students said they would like to be considered as future members of the student learning enhancement team.

A second particularly successful output was the establishment of a student patient safety chapter of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) which has, to date, engaged some 200 students across the MPharm programme in student-led extracurricular teaching and learning activities relevant to patient safety. These activities have led to a number of publications and conference presentations (including at the HEA national conference in 2014).

Although the pilot was considered extremely successful, the project remained an isolated set of activities, relying very much on the enthusiasm and commitment of a small group of staff and students. The amount of extra work required from the students also potentially impacted on the rest of their degree work. It was recognised that the real value for students would be embedding it as a formalised part of the MPharm curriculum. Consequently, the aims of the SAP Change Programme were to:

- establish a framework for supporting student engagement with the learning enhancement team, including formalised recruitment, selection and feedback strategies;
- develop a specific training programme for student ‘learning enhancers’;
- develop monitoring and evaluation strategies for assessing its effectiveness and ensuring ‘safety’ of students on the team;
- explore the possibility of making engagement with the team credit-bearing.

In order to ensure it was based on a partnership approach from the start a member of academic staff and a student were appointed to jointly lead the Programme. It was agreed that in order to achieve cultural change the Programme needed to align and embed approaches which were inclusive, reflective and collaborative.

Alignment with the HEA Students as Partners framework

The HEA conceptual framework for the partnership model describes four areas of engagement, and acknowledges that it is unlikely that partnerships will be confined to a single area. We believe that this particular partnership extends across all areas, but is most strongly located within ‘learning, teaching and assessment’ but is driven very much by ‘subject-based research and inquiry.’ Indeed, the areas for enhancement identified by students came from a deep understanding of the drivers shaping pharmacy education. This was supported by additional experience, not necessarily shared by staff as many of the students work in pharmacy related roles outside their course, providing a diverse source of information about ‘working in the real world’ useful in informing curriculum design.

Approaches and activities developed

The first step was a series of focus groups between staff and the student learning enhancement team exploring where both the team and the developing framework may sit in relation to existing School and institutional committees which could be considered to have a significant student engagement element. Figure 1 details these committees (and other stakeholders). This in itself was a useful exercise in that it highlighted the inter-relationships between people (both staff and students) and the various different initiatives which had been causing some confusion at times in terms of the potential for overlap between initiatives. One specific example of this was the role of the learning enhancement versus the staff-student liaison committee.
It was decided that no other committee engaged in student partnership to quite the same extent, but it was decided that the remit of the team needed to be made clear, and this began by attempting to define the concept of ‘partnership’ as understood by the members at both an individual level as well as for the Programme. Discussions were based on the premise that not all student engagement is partnership but all partnership involves student engagement and that there is a difference between working partnerships and being partners in learning. There was also some debate about whether a definition of partnership could be established that linked to value and contribution but that in doing so also recognised that the level of staff and student involvement will vary and that that is acceptable. There was a useful discussion at this point about reward and recognition versus personal development: it would seem that student's may not always value their own contribution to the extent that staff do, in part because students tend to value staff contributions more than their own.

Discussions were based around Bovill’s ladder of student participation in curriculum design (2011; see Figure 2 for a simplified version). It quickly came to light that everyone had different aspirations of where on the ladder of student involvement the staff and students were / wanted to get to. Initially, staff had assumed that students would welcome engagement at the highest level, but this turned out not to be the case – the experiences of the pilot study had made them very aware of the fact that there primary responsibility must be to their course of study, and that commitment to learning enhancement activities would sometimes be at odds with this. They felt that their need to be able drop enhancement activity at short notice due to work pressure meant that they were unable to take full responsibility and therefore could not expect to have a high degree of power with respect to curriculum design. In addition there was a view that on a regulated healthcare undergraduate course there were elements that were controlled by the regulator and therefore a truly negotiated curriculum was not achievable. The team concluded that they needed to exercise a shift in mind-set from establishing equal partnerships to meaningful partnerships recognising there will always be a difference between staff and students.
The decision taken by the team was that, for the early stages of embedding, students should be given control over smaller areas of the curriculum. Another advantage of this was that repeated success demonstrated through smaller projects would provide the evidence base for a higher level of engagement in the future. A number of projects have since been undertaken in the following areas:

- Using quality improvement methodology as a mechanism for enhancing teaching and learning. This project has involved using PDSA (‘plan, do, study, act’) cycles to enhance the taught provision in a second year clinical pharmacology and therapeutics module (Buchan et al., 2014; Filion-Murphy et al., in press).
- Exploring the teaching of patient safety across the MPharm curriculum with a view to highlighting areas for improvement based on student and staff experience and expectations.
- Investigating a human factors approach to teaching patient safety.
- Exploring the use of simulated patients on the MPharm course and making recommendations for standardising and embedding their use.
- Developing a range of eLearning scenarios including: ‘disclosure and apology’, medicines reconciliation, therapeutic, clinical and scientific topic areas.
- Exploring the use of a virtual patient to promoted self-directed study.

**Resources**

A number of standardised resources and tools were used to support the Programme. These included tools made available through the HEA Students as Partners Programme and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. Techniques and tools used by staff and students included PDSA cycles, storyboarding, decision making grids, mapping, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. Evaluation tools included thematic analysis and structured feedback.

**Lessons learned**

A number of lessons were learnt:

- Achieving genuine partnership is very difficult, and this appears to be for a number of reasons. There is a power differential (or at least a perception of one) between staff and students. Depending on individual viewpoints, this balance of power can be seen as being in the staff or students’ favour. Students generally perceived staff to have the ultimate power, which some staff agreed with, whereas others felt the desire to improve student satisfaction meant that the power could be seen as residing with students. Inviting
challenge can be difficult for staff and students. The students involved in this work were extremely constructive, but were also quite clear about why and where enhancement was necessary. This is not always easy for staff to hear, even when they are very committed to the principle of student partnership (as this group of staff undoubtedly were). In addition, the students confirmed that they often fear voicing their opinions (the perceived power balance may be a contributing factor). In some cases it was felt that certain staff members can portray an unapproachable persona and come across as defensive to students. These characteristics warn off students from seeking and providing constructive feedback to staff. This is likely to be one of the biggest barriers to wider roll out.

- Students are capable of extremely high levels of engagement and commitment but this has to be managed very carefully if their degree study is not to be negatively affected.
- In asking students to be partners, staff are potentially exposing students to some of the pressures that staff face. Staff are generally older, more experienced, and supported by induction processes. They are (probably) more likely to have developed skills of resilience that students may not have. This has to be considered as part of any established framework.
- Students are transient partners, whereas staff tend to be permanent and this means that thought has to be given to recruiting, training, supporting and retaining student partners as well as ensuring meaningful and rewarding engagement.
- True embedding of such schemes requires ‘buy-in’ across the school, the institution and beyond.

**Next steps**

The project has proved very successful so far, but there is a lot of work to be done before there is an established and embedded framework to support the original aims of the Programme. The student learning enhancement team were recently shortlisted for a Student Participation in Quality Scotland (SPARQS) award, as well as having been recognised through the internal awards system (where they were awarded an Outstanding Group Contribution award at the Student Involvement Awards in 2014). They have now contributed to 5 publications and numerous conference presentations. There is still work to be done on formalising the framework for students as partners in curriculum design including how to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness. The plan is to continue to take a project-based approach to enhancement activities as this makes student partnership manageable. Once the framework is finalised and on the back of this success, the team hope to seek financial support from the institution to roll this out across the School initially.

**Key messages**

One of the key challenges with any ‘students as partners’ work is the transient nature of student involvement and this can vary depending on the individual, their year of study and the course itself. This needs to be taken into account when establishing a sustainable framework for supporting student engagement and requires a formalised recruitment and training process. There is also a requirement for staff development in order to ensure a shared vision can be achieved with a sense of common mutuality. Training needs to include sessions on building resilience and dealing with challenging situations and individuals. The framework also needs to be underpinned with a strategy to assess the effectiveness of the programme with key measurables in order to demonstrate value. This approach takes time and the support of senior management is essential. Thomas Kolster was quoted in a Guardian newspaper article as saying 'If we want a better world, we need to tell a better story’. Communication also plays an important part and is essential to building a cohesive and effective student/staff learning enhancement culture. Effective communication is also important in managing curriculum changes. Programmes like this also benefit from a culture of continuous improvement: a common purpose, a defined process with clear measures of success and staff and students who are actively engaged and working to continually improve the educational provision.
References


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Students as Partners in transforming feedback and assessment

University of Strathclyde
Case Study

Introduction

In recent years, the University of Strathclyde has funded students to work with staff in discipline-based research and pedagogically focussed university-wide initiatives. In the summer of 2013, four student interns (one from each of the University’s four faculties) were funded for 12 weeks to work in partnership with staff to improve assessment and feedback practices across the University. At the end of the initial 12 week period, the student interns made a series of recommendations to the University that were based on interviews, survey, and focus groups with students and staff from across the institution, and a review of relevant pedagogical literature. The findings from their work contributed to a review of the University’s Assessment and Feedback Policy and Procedures and the working group who developed a new University Assessment and Feedback Policy comprised student membership from both the University’s Students’ Association and the group of student interns.

Many institutions have undergone policy reviews in this area over recent years; however, such policy reviews have not necessarily led to consistent improvement of practice at ground level. This initiative sought to ensure that students and staff have the knowledge and resources to engage in effective practice, as outlined in the new policy. The student interns involved in this initiative engaged the wider university community of students and staff to develop such resources, to support a process of change, so that promoting effective student learning is central to our assessment and feedback practices. This report outlines the approach taken at the University of Strathclyde, lessons learned, and our next steps.

Aspects of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

Recent National Student Survey (NSS) results indicate that assessment and feedback remains an area of concern for the University of Strathclyde. Away from the NSS, it has also been acknowledged that assessment and feedback practices in higher education require transformation to be fit for purpose, so that they enhance student learning and prepare students for life-long learning (Boud & Falachikov, 2006; The HEA, 2012). This initiative recognises that progress is most likely to be made if all stakeholders (students, academic staff, and professional services) are engaged in the change process, and as such marks a significant stage in the University’s journey to improve assessment and feedback practices across the institution.

Alignment with the HEA Students as Partners framework

The partnership model practiced at Strathclyde reflected various aspects of the HEA’s Students as Partners Framework (shown in Figure 1) at different points in this initiative. The student interns’ project involved ‘co-researching and co-inquiring’ as the students investigated effective practice in published literature and within the institution. Student input into the development of a new University Assessment and Feedback Policy (both in terms of membership of the working group and student representatives seeking wider consultation with the student body) aligns with the ‘quality enhancement’ component of the framework, and the resources developed by students to support the implementation of the policy, as well as the continuing journey to enhancing assessment and feedback in the institution aligns with the ‘co-learning, co-designing, and co-developing’ part of the framework. The initiative was underpinned by an authentic belief that only partnership working will deliver the necessary level of change to assessment and feedback practices. This initiative has largely focussed on change at an institutional level, and while such partnership working is present at other levels within the institution, it perhaps is not yet the norm in approaches to enhancing the student experience of assessment and feedback at all levels (e.g. faculty, programme, and class levels).
Approaches and activities developed

- A partnership approach was adopted by the student interns and staff working together over the summer of 2013. The group of student interns created their own work schedule and worked as a team to conduct an audit of current practices across the institution, taking into account the perspectives of students and staff. The role of staff on the project team was to provide the interns with guidance and support when needed. The students provided staff with updates via weekly presentations to the project team. A main output of the interns’ work was a series of recommendations to the University on improving assessment and feedback practices across the institution.

- An Assessment and Feedback Working Group was established to consider the recommendations made by the student interns and to develop a new University Assessment and Feedback Policy and review of Procedures. This group comprised student and staff representation from the internship project, as well as an academic representative from each of the four faculties, further student representation from the University of Strathclyde’s Students’ Union’s Vice-President for Education, and a representative from Professional Services’ Education Enhancement team. This group met many times during 2013-14 and consulted widely with students and staff in all four faculties and Professional Services. A new Assessment and Feedback Policy, underpinned by four principles of assessment and feedback, was approved by Senate for implementation in 2014-15. The group also reviewed the following related University policies/guidance: Procedures for Assessment and Feedback, Guidance on Assessment and Feedback in Large Classes, The Use of Computers in Examinations, The Use of Turnitin, Guidelines for Online Assessment Submission, Motivational Merit and Distinction, Compensation Scheme and Progress, and Policy on Invigilation in Examinations.

- Two of the student interns who worked in the summer of 2013 (including the intern who sat on the working group) continued to work in the summer of 2014 to create resources to support students and staff in fulfilling their responsibilities in relation to assessment and feedback, as outlined in the new Policy. These students produced a resource for students to communicate their ‘rights and responsibilities’ under
the new Policy, and collaborated with staff in writing a guidance booklet for staff on implementing the Policy. Again, the wider student body was consulted in developing these resources. It was recognised that developing students’ understanding of assessment and feedback, their awareness of what they are entitled to, as well as what they are responsible for, is necessary for students to become instrumental in the change process.

- The interns were joined in 2014 by a group of three new student interns whose objective was to develop resources to support students’ reflections on feedback received on assessments. Previous interns developed a university-wide resource to support students with Personal Development Planning (PDP), and the aim of this project was to explicitly communicate to students the importance of reflecting and acting on feedback received on assessments. Again these students consulted with the wider university community and worked as a team to develop a ‘Reflect on your feedback’ resource for students and staff. This resource was made available to all students on the PDP section of the University’s virtual learning environment (VLE) over the course of the 2014-15 academic year.

Resources

Below is a list of resources already developed:

- A new University Assessment and Feedback Policy, effective from September 2014. [https://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/cs/gmap/academicaffairs/policies/assessment_and_feedback_policy_-_Effective_Sep_14.pdf](https://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/cs/gmap/academicaffairs/policies/assessment_and_feedback_policy_-_Effective_Sep_14.pdf)

- A booklet designed by students for students, ‘Making the most of your assessment and feedback’, to develop students’ assessment and feedback literacy. The aim of the booklet is also to communicate the new Assessment and Feedback Policy to students in terms of what students can expect from the University in this area, and those aspects for which students are responsible. [https://www.strath.ac.uk/media/other/learningteaching/Making_the_most_of_your_assessment_and_feedback.pdf](https://www.strath.ac.uk/media/other/learningteaching/Making_the_most_of_your_assessment_and_feedback.pdf)

- A booklet designed by students and staff for staff, ‘Assessment and feedback for effective student learning: A guide for staff on implementing the University’s Assessment and Feedback Policy’.

- A series of resources, ‘Reflect on your feedback’, designed by students for students to support students’ reflections on feedback received on assessments. Incorporating Gibbs reflective cycle, the resource includes an introduction to the different components of Gibbs reflective cycle and the benefits to students in using it to support reflections on assessments and feedback, as well as a reflective log template which guides students through the components of Gibbs cycle for a given assessment and related feedback.

- A series of staff ‘Reflect on your feedback’ resources, designed by students and staff, for staff, includes posters with QR code linking to the student resource on the University’s VLE, a powerpoint slide for use in induction meetings etc to communicate the resource, and a ‘Reflect on your feedback’ sticker (includes signposting to the online student resource, and is available in electronic and paper formats) that can be added to feedback on assessments.

- Incorporation of the new principles of assessment and feedback into the Class and Course Approval Process.

- Development of the VLE to support implementation of the Assessment and Feedback Policy. For example, the VLE now includes a setting in the online assessment submission tool where staff set a deadline by which feedback will be returned to students. This setting facilitates communication to students about when to expect feedback, and also enables monitoring of adherence to this aspect of the policy i.e. expectation of timing and adherence to the timeframe.
Impact

- On the new principles of assessment and feedback, students were largely positive, with comments such as: "I like it, all my departments do things differently...and it makes it confusing to know what...they need to give to us," and "I like it, it's very clear and easy to understand", but also reflected some skepticism "Sounds good if it will be followed don't feel all points are followed now, especially in feedback terms, with timings and students being aware of criteria", and "Great but good luck getting people to follow them."

- Dissemination activities have included:
  - Publication of ‘Making the most of your assessment and feedback’ booklet for students. The booklet has been distributed to thousands of students across campus, including to new students in induction sessions, and an electronic copy is available on the university website.
  - The University of Strathclyde’s Students' Union (USSA) ran separate Student Congresses for each faculty, where student representatives met with key faculty and university staff to discuss various aspects of the student experience. A session on assessment and feedback focussed on the published resources and discussed the role of student representatives in transforming assessment and feedback practices at class, programme, and faculty levels.
  - A member of the team involved in this initiative has presented the student interns’ project work and new policy multiple times to new staff taking the PG Certificate in Advanced Academic Practice.
  - External activities have included: A poster presentation at the HEA STEM Conference in 2014, where the team of student interns won the conference prize for 'Best Student Poster'; and presentations at Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland events (2014-15) and the 2015 International Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education.

- Evaluation (and monitoring) activities:
  Implementation of the new Assessment and Feedback Policy was effective from September 2014, but it is recognised that the change process is a journey and will take time. Evaluation and monitoring activities will take place across the short, medium, and long term and will include:
    - Monitoring the assessment and feedback strategy noted by classes and degree programmes in relation to the new principles of assessment and feedback via the Class and Course Approval Process (C-CAP) and Internal Review processes.
    - Evaluation of student satisfaction with assessment and feedback via internal (survey sent to all undergraduate students) and national surveys (for example, National Student Survey and Postgraduate Teaching Experience Survey).
    - Data relating to students’ access of online resources, such as the ‘Reflect on your Feedback’ resource. In the months following its launch at the start of the academic year, the four resource documents have been accessed via the VLE by between 208 and 477 users.
    - Long term, one may expect to see a reduction in the number of end of module examinations that are scheduled across the institution due to a more diverse range of assessments being used.
    - Current developments in the University, such as a University strategy on flexible learning and the development of systems to support learning analytics, may facilitate future evaluation in this area.

- An unexpected and positive impact of this initiative was the extent to which the student interns’ employability was enhanced. Two of the interns who graduated in the summer of 2014 found that graduate employers were interested in their experience of working alongside staff and representing the student voice to influence University policy and practice across the institution; both students successfully attained graduate level employment either prior to graduating or soon after! Again, two members of the intern team who are due to graduate in 2015 are also reporting a high level of interest in their internship from prospective employers.
At least two recommendations made by the student interns, 1) establishment of a peer mentoring scheme for students, and 2) development opportunities for staff, coincided with USSA’s developing a peer support initiative for students across the university and with the Strathclyde Teaching Excellence Programme (STEP), due to be launched in June 2015 with various development opportunities (including lunchtime workshops) for staff involved in teaching.

Lessons learned

- **Key enablers:**
  - Buy-in from across the institution; engagement of students and staff from all faculties.
  - Funding of student interns to facilitate partnership at an institutional level.

- **In hindsight:**
  - The approach taken was holistic in recognising that the transformation of assessment and feedback practices requires engagement of staff in various roles across the institution (for example, Estates). The Assessment and Feedback Working group should have comprised representation from other areas of the University, including those parts of the Student Experience and Enhancement Services that are involved in, for example, timetabling of examinations and return of grades.

Next steps

A priority over the coming months is to gather and make available various tools and resources to support students and staff in developing effective assessment and feedback practices.

- **End of summer 2015:** A new ‘Sharing Effective Practice in Learning and Teaching’ platform, hosted within the University’s Learning and Teaching webpage, will showcase case studies proposed by students and staff in all learning and teaching areas, including assessment and feedback.

- **End June 2015:** The University will launch the new Strathclyde Teaching Excellence Programme (STEP), which will provide a diverse range (topic and format) of teaching development opportunities, including in the areas of assessment and feedback and student-staff partnership working.

- Continuing the conversation with students and staff and building communities of practice.

Key messages

- Work done in partnership with students to develop policy and improve practices will make it more likely that outputs align with students’ concerns.

- Acknowledge that students have responsibilities in the assessment and feedback process for practices to be effective, as well as staff involved in teaching and assessment.

- Develop resources and opportunities for students and staff to develop effective practices, in alignment with policy.

References


The Winchester Student Fellows Scheme

University of Winchester and Winchester Student Union
Case Study

Introduction

The purpose of the Winchester Student Fellows Scheme (SFS) is to recruit, train and empower up to 60 students annually to work alongside academics and professional staff on targeted educational development projects. These projects address a diverse range of topics which vary in scope and size but must be relevant to enhancing the student learning experience. The SFS is an attempt to both increase the level of student engagement with teaching and learning at The University of Winchester and to empower students to address varied issues, problems or barriers to a satisfying teaching, learning and social experience on mass (Sims, Lowe, Hutber, Barnes, 2014).

The SFS has developed from the pioneering work done in its ‘proof of concept’ stage in 2012/13. This involved a much smaller scheme as part of the Jisc funded FASTECH project. The success of this initial stage allowed us to secure funding through negotiations between the Student Union (SU), Learning and Teaching Development (LTD) and Senior Managers by demonstrating the benefit that such a programme could have to the students involved and the whole institution. There was a clear case for something to fill the gap between issues raised by students about their courses and how these issues could be addressed. The majority of funding for the SFS is used for a £600 bursary provided to each Student Fellow to support their activities and time commitment. We also support students with any additional costs that they incur throughout their projects.

From 2014-2016, the SFS has now seen two years of a cross-institution roll out of 60 Student Fellows per year, who have each had significant impact on large variety of educational development projects across the University of Winchester.

Aspects of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

The SFS aimed to empower students across the institution, at any level, to work in partnership with staff members in educational enhancement projects to better the student experience at Winchester. The original motivation for the project came from meetings of the SU and LTD to address the participation gap in Student Engagement at Winchester, between the volunteer Student Academic Representatives (StARs) and the SU Executive Team. The introduction of a large student participation scheme such as the SFS, enabled through bursaries and partnership commitment based on NUS’s Manifesto for Partnership (NUS, 2012), to allow students to commit time to work with staff on enhancement projects across the institution. Due to students applying to work on a certain area, motivations were high and 100 hours per student, across the whole academic year could be devoted to tackling barriers to education, seeking enhancement in practice and looking to better the overall educational experience at Winchester.

Alignment with the HEA Students as Partners framework

The Winchester Student Fellows Scheme has taken steps to align with all areas of the HEA’s Framework for Partnership in learning and teaching (HEA, 2014), through following our core aim “to embed an inclusive culture of opportunities for engagement and partnership across the institution” (University of Winchester online, 2014).
The Winchester SFS’s activities are aligned with the HEA’s framework below:

The scope of the SFS is broad, with the scheme allowing students to focus on a wide array of research areas to better the student educational experience. In regards the HEA’s published model for students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education (Healey, Flint and Harrington 2014), SFS projects largely fit into the three criteria; ‘learning, teaching and assessment’, ‘curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy’ and ‘scholarship of learning and teaching’. In regards to the fourth area on the model, ‘subject-based research enquiry’, the University of Winchester has ran for four years, the Winchester Research Apprenticeship Program (WRAP) which gives the opportunity for discipline specific co-research of staff and students together.

Alignment with Partnership Principles and Values (HEA, 2014):

Authenticity, Inclusivity, Reciprocity:
Stakeholder engagement is a key priority to the running of the SFS. As further detailed below, deliberate steps are taken to engage the wider University and student body to spread the impact and reach of the scheme. For the participating staff partners and Student Fellows, guidance is given to their partnership relation when working together on a project, to ensure motivations and maximum benefit from the partnerships are experienced.

The SFS emphasises that students are the experts of the ‘student experience’ whilst staff partners are experts of their discipline and field of work. When partnerships are created between staff and students at Winchester, these two experts can create real impact. Also staff partners are not limited by department/level, which has seen senior staff members work with Student Fellows and non-academic departments participate in educational development projects to better the student experience.
Empowerment, Trust, Responsibility:
The coordinators of the SFS (SU and University LTD) are taking time from their own commitments to empower students to make change across the institution. The bursary reflects trust, as the SFS has no hoursheets to account for their time, or weekly compulsory contact time to complete their ‘SFS work’. The Student Fellows are free to work in a way which suits them, when best for them, to enable flexible projects around their studies. Through a bursary scheme instead of hourly paid students, Fellows are free from an employer-employee relation which allows students to work freely with their staff-partners independent of management structures within the SU or the University.

Student Fellows have responsibilities to report back on their findings across the academic year, in four phases. These offer opportunity of Student Fellows to give peer feedback, spread wider staff engagement of the individual projects of the scheme and for the SFS coordinators to report back to University/Union committees on the schemes progress. These four report phases are:
1. Project Plan and Aims
2. Peer Presentation (5 minutes) to other Student Fellows on progress.
3. Student Fellows Conference (15 minute presentation)
4. Final Report (flexible format)

Challenge and Community:
Student Fellows participating in the SFS are challenged in a ‘real-world’ project to create an enhancement or change based on evidence gathering, research, project management and networking. Social science research methods are taught in several training sessions as part of the SFS, offered on multiple occasions to remain accessible to students with multiple commitments. Student Fellows have expressed the SFS experience to be ‘invaluable’ as an extra curricula activity alongside their studies. At these trainings and at as many occasions as possible, the Student Fellow community are bought together to reflect on their projects and experience, to share findings and give peer feedback. The SFS has been a catalyst in creating a community of educational enhancement at Winchester by ensuring stakeholder engagement has proven exciting and ground breaking for both students and staff.

Approaches and activities developed

How are students recruited?
The SFS has a rigorous application, interview and induction process to ensure that students are properly equipped to carry out this work and that they are participating for ‘the right reasons’.
The SFS is advertised extensively across the institution, in particular through our intranet and social media. The experience and expertise of the SU in engaging with students is invaluable at this stage. Prospective Student Fellows are asked to submit a CV and a supporting statement outlining both their suitability and their areas of research interest. The applications are reviewed by the co-directors of SFS and those of a suitable standard are then invited to a panel interview. The panels are always made up of a mixture of staff from the SU and LTD to reflect the partnership which supports and maintains the SFS. The interviews cover various topics but are specifically focused towards ensuring a high level of commitment to the issues they would like to address.

**How are staff recruited?**
Staff recruitment takes place in two key ways:

1. An open call is made for people who are interested in pursuing educational development projects that could benefit from a student’s assistance or input

2. Recruited Student Fellows are asked to identify staff members that they would like to work with and that have relevant knowledge or experience for their desired project

In the initial phase of the SFS, relying on existing networks and early adopters of new practices has been an effective way of promoting engagement further to colleagues.

**How is the scheme managed?**
One of the ways that we believe the SFS works so well is that it is managed in partnership between the LTD & SU. In particular, Research Fellow Dr Stuart Sims (LTD) and Tom Lowe (Vice-President of Education, SU) jointly manage the running of the scheme in consultation with various other colleagues. This allows us to draw on our varied and complimentary expertise; specifically the SU provides access to communication networks of the student body and a strong mandate for supporting student engagement, whilst the LTD bring experience and expertise in teaching and learning.

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*Student Fellows Presentation and Dissemination Training, (February 2015)*
What projects have taken place?
Student Fellow Projects explore a wide-range of educational development subject areas including:

- Assessment and Feedback
- Innovative use of technology
- Addressing NSS feedback
- Increasing Student Engagement
- Employability
- Addressing module evaluation feedback
- Innovative forms of learning and teaching

Impact

Many projects make significant changes across the university including the following:

- The introduction of video module guides in English.
- Reviewing and improving module feedback forms with student input in Performing Arts, Modern Liberal Arts, Sports Studies, Childhood Youth and Community Studies and English Literature.
- Developing, enhancing and evaluating foreign exchange program across Sports Studies
- Developing alternative ‘physical’ teaching resources in Law.
- Development and management of a student-led ‘study buddy’ scheme in Fashion, Media and Marketing.
- Allocation of a dedicated space for commuter students on campus

Lessons learned

The Student Fellows Scheme has seen success across the University of Winchester, as a genuine model of Student Engagement and staff-student partnership to enhance the student experience. Winchester has seen two institution wide cohorts of the SFS (2013-14 & 2014-15); developing into a scheme which prioritises internal dissemination of practice so a Student Fellow’s work can have impact beyond their programme. A key factor to this progress has been stakeholder engagement of not only the students involved, but many staff members and bodies across the institution.

As stated above, the student experience of the Student Fellows themselves has always been a priority to ensure the scheme is rewarding to be part of and accessible to get involved in. On top of this, across the two years of full institution roll out, greater student body and importantly staff engagement has emerged as priority of the running of the SFS. This is both through reporting to the committee structures of the Student Union and University, but also through meetings with key stakeholders (Deans of Faculties, Senior Managers, staff partners of the SFS, academic staff body). The benefits of reporting back has spread the word of the work of the SFS so projects can have more impact, but also provided the SFS team with a large pool of critical friends who have contributed to further develop the scheme.

(Student Fellows Conference, March 2015)
Internal dissemination became a priority in 2014-15, which led to the Student Fellows Conference in March 2014, where all SFS presented in parallel sessions to staff and students from across the University. On top of this, an intranet sharing pages of resources/reports was created as a hub for dissemination accessible by all staff and students. Further external dissemination has seen the SFS team and Student Fellows provide consultation and presentations at conferences such as Change Agent Network (CAN), Researching, Advancing & Inspiring Student Engagement (RAISE) and Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA). The SFS has also been shortlisted for the HEA and NUS Students’ Union and Institution Partnership Award (Highly Commended) in 2014 and the Student Experience Initiative Award in the Guardian University Awards. For the participating Student Fellows themselves, the experience and employability benefit has been commended by those involved. Due to the above, the University of Winchester and Winchester Student Union have shown support to continue and further develop the SFS in the foreseeable future.

Next steps

The Winchester SFS conducts a yearly review of each Student Fellow’s project reports and feedback in regards to areas such as; impact, partnership, methodology and experience on the scheme etc. This process was conducted by a panel of staff and students in the summer of 2014 after the first cross-institution roll out, and is set to be repeated annually. This process allows the impact of the scheme as a whole to be measured, but also a time of reflection to ensure the scheme remains relevant for the students and staff involved, and the University/Union prioritise when planning the next cycle of the SFS (2015-16).

The coordinating team of the SFS are keen to spread this model beyond Winchester, providing consultation to several institutions to date and disseminating at conferences and staff development days. The team are open to enquiries on our experiences and to present at events.
References


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Partners in Learning/Partners in Research: Developing a Culture of Research Mindedness in Social Science Students

University of the West of Scotland
Case Study

Introduction

To position the work of the Partners in Learning/Partners in Research initiative, an extended literature review was carried out as a first step. Key significant strands of this literature are highlighted below to provide context and background.

In their seminal work, ‘From Teaching to Learning’, Barr & Tagg (1995) argue that the ‘traditional’ instruction paradigm locates learners within a restrictive, heavily structured learning environment that subdues and encourages dependent and passive engagement. Brew (1996) argues that in this type of learning environment, there is little opportunity or indeed attempt to build a learning community or to connect students and academic staff. Learning is often rigid and heavily structured, reducing the opportunity for collaborative and co-creative open-ended learning. It was recognised that engaging a learning in partnership methodology that supported research-led learning would require a shift from ‘telling students what they need to know’ to facilitating self-directed inquiry-based learning where students took on the role of independent and self-regulating learners, to produce ‘new knowledge’, to learn in what Hodge et al. (2008) term ‘discovery mode’. This active approach to learning can be seen in the work of the Reinvention Centre (2007) and Neary and Winn (2009), which identify all students as researchers, as producers, involved in the same research processes as staff. The recognition of the potential of engaging students in active research activities is evident in the work of Healey & Jenkins (2009), Levy et al. (2011) and Levy & Petrulis (2012). More widely, the potential of actively engaging students in partnership learning activities and the development of their own learning experience can be seen, for example, in the work of Healey, Flint & Harrington (2014) (students as partners), Bovill, Cook-Sather & Felten (2011) (students as partners in curriculum design), Dunne & Zandstra (students as change agents), Taylor & Wilding (2009) (students as collaborators). Using this literature to underpin the initiative, it was agreed by the team that a central objective and key output to be achieved through the initiative would be to develop an appropriate methodology and model for learning in partnership: one that embraced the principles of ‘co-production’ and ‘co-creation’ within a research-based learning environment that promoted a culture of collaborative, negotiated and open-ended learning. This was further framed by the work of Brew (2006, 2010) and Levy et al. (2011) who identify the enabling and empowering potential of participation in inclusive knowledge-building communities. The HEA framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education (Higher Education Academy, 2014) was used to contextualise the work of the initiative.

Beyond the academic literature, further drivers were provided by the QAA Enhancement Themes (see here), the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence in the secondary sector in Scotland (see here), and its potential impact, and the institutional Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and Corporate Strategy (see here). The initiative aligns clearly with the new Corporate Strategy, which explicitly states a commitment to learner-centred learning and the provision of a transformative collaborative and co-creative learning environment that engages students as ‘active partners in learning’.
Aspects of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

Development of research skills and competencies and research mindedness within a framework of collaborative and co-creative learning.

Aim

- To design and develop a sustainable learning in partnership methodology and model with which to embed student experience of research-based learning and working research partnerships in the curriculum

Objectives

- To design and pilot a module structured around partnership learning and research activities
- To develop a learning in partnership methodology and model to support staff and students working together in the design of research-based learning and the discovery of knowledge
- To support the development of communities of learning within the curriculum and modular framework
- To implement the use of the Xerte online technology to engage students in research-based co-creation and co-production of re-purposable learning outputs
- To inform the institution and wider sector of the experience and outcomes related to the students as partners in the curriculum change initiative

Alignment with the HEA Students as Partners framework

The HEA Framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education (Higher Education Academy, 2014) was used to contextualise the work of the initiative. The pedagogic rationale and conceptual model of students as partners in learning and teaching underpinned design and development across the initiative, with the learning in partnership methodology & model fully aligned with the Framework. The central emphasis placed on co-inquiry, co-creation, co-production built on the partnership principals of authenticity, inclusivity, reciprocity, empowerment, trust, community and responsibility.

Approaches and activities developed

The newly developed research-focused module, Researching the Social World B (RSWB) (20 credit, Level 9) was identified as an appropriate vehicle to operationalise the pilot. Developed prior to the pilot but yet to be fully structured, the RSWB module had been designed to mobilise Boyer’s (1990) ‘scholarship of engagement’, placing a central focus on the reconnection of teaching and research through the introduction of inclusive and participatory pedagogies, by integrating negotiated learning, and by positioning students as active researchers and co-producers. Students and staff worked in partnership to identify the central operation of the module and the assessment structure. It was agreed that a dialogic learning model would be implemented, respecting the partnership principles of mutual respect, openness, honesty, inclusivity and reciprocity and the right of all stakeholders to be involved, informed and consulted. To support this process, students due to undertake the module took part in focus groups to discuss their expectations of learning on the module and the opportunities for partnership that might be embedded, and also to consider the structure of the module and how it fitted with the wider curriculum.

Through this process, it was agreed that a central element of the module would be to structure the learning activities to support students to work collectively in undertaking self-identified and defined research, the findings of which would be presented as a learning object using the Xerte learning technology. The reason for the use of Xerte lay in the nature of the technology, a freely available technology, originally developed to support inclusivity in relation to the end user. This emphasis on inclusivity for those who might engage with the end product was important but equally important was the simplicity of the tool for the developer and the fact that development could be a collective activity, undertaken on site and remotely. Also of importance was the potential to re-use and re-purpose the learning objects produced for future learning. As such, Xerte was identified as an appropriate technological vehicle to support a learning in partnership methodology and to showcase the outputs of research-based learning. While the staff members of the team were proficient in the
use of Xerte, it was recognised that students would require some instruction. To support this, a brief presentation outlining the pedagogic rationale for using Xerte was produced (see slides [here](#)) and a student ambassador/Xerte Champion framework designed. The introduction of a structured system of peer support was an important development as it created a sense of security for students and provided a number of avenues to elicit support and guidance where necessary. It also developed a rich learning network, characterised by knowledge exchange and shared learning. In parallel to this, a professional development workshop was organised to support School staff and students in the use of Xerte. From this workshop, it was decided that a Xerte learning object outlining the potential and use of Xerte would be useful to support staff and students. This object was developed in parallel with the module (see object [here](#)).

The module was then developed to structure active engagement with the research process. This was achieved firstly through the introduction of a series of collective formative exercises where students worked in groups of 4-6 on the retrieval and evaluation of secondary data. These formative exercises built towards a formal evaluation of a dataset, which was part of the summative assessment framework for the module. Prior to undertaking the summative assessment, students worked with peers and staff to negotiate the marking rubric for the assessment, which provided them with an interesting formative experience that ‘flipped’ the learner/teacher role and informed completion of the assessment. Groups then designed and collectively carried out secondary research projects, the findings of which were then presented in the form of Xerte learning objects and summatively assessed. To support student reflections on their learning experience, a final individual reflective assessment exercise was embedded in the module structure. Data from the assessment was then triangulated with data collected during the pilot and structured module feedback. Engaging with students at all times during the development phase, throughout and beyond the period of the module, allowed the initiative team to begin to develop a clearer and deeper understanding of the methodology and model implemented, which supported a reflexive consideration of how this might be represented in a way that provides a simple but useful tool against which to map this type of methodological approach/learning activity. This led to the production of the model highlighted in fig.1 ([below](#)), informed by and aligned with the concept and values of the HEA Framework.

![Fig.1: learning in partnership](image)
One aspect of the learning in partnership approach taken on the pilot module that is worthy of particular comment is framework for peer support designed to support the learning methodology employed. This took the form of a Student Ambassador/Xerte Champion framework, which was implemented ahead of the start of the module and used to support peer learning across the pilot. The role of Student Ambassador was filled by a member of the initiative team (who was also a student on the module). Her role was to liaise with staff members and students throughout the module and to coordinate the Xerte Champion group, who supported peers in the use of Xerte and shared knowledge with students and staff on various aspects of the technology. There were 6 champions, 3 who were undertaking the module and 3 from the year below (Level 8). The reason for this structure was to introduce a rolling and sustainable model for peer support. Reflections on the Student Ambassador role and wider project have been capture in a Jisc Case Study produced by the Ambassador, titled ‘Xertifying the learning experience: supporting peers in the production of learning objects’ (see here) (the case study was awarded first prize in the Learner Ambassador category in the RSC Scotland Jisc iTech Awards 2014).

**Resources & outputs**

*Internal communication & impact (example presentations)*

- Researching the Social World B: Learning in partnership (here)
- Learning in Partnership: From outcome to outputs (here)
- Personal development planning, employability and learning in partnership (here)
- Rethinking the personal tutor system at UWS (here)
- Learning in Partnership: students as partners in curriculum design (here)
- Learning in partnership: Doing things differently in a 21st century university (here)

*External communication & impact (examples)*

- Xertifying the learning experience: supporting peers in the production of learning objects at the University of the West of Scotland (case study) (here)
- Xerte at the heart of student-led learning – the case of the critical collaborator at the University of the West of Scotland (case study) (here)
- From outcomes to outputs: shifting the culture of assessment in the 21st Century learning environment. PedRIO: pg 44-7 (occasional paper & presentation) (here & here)
- Structuring creative collaboration: considering the potential of Xerte to facilitate and support active, inquiry-based partnership learning (SEDA conference presentation) (here)
- Generation X: Learning at the X-Roads (Jisc RSC Scotland conference presentation) (here)

*Posters presented at UWS Learning & Teaching Conference and external events*
**Impact**

The breadth and depth of student feedback captured as part of the initiative evidences a positive and powerful learner experience. The data is currently being collated and cross-referenced and a number of publications are planned to showcase the analysis and evaluation of the initiative and student reflections. For now, the feedback highlighted below (and in the linked presentations) provides a snapshot that is representative of the wider student feedback on the learning experience.

“There was a sense of lets work together...a sense of control and ownership...we were all learning together.”

“I felt like the lecturers wanted to hear my opinions and work together to help structure the module, and learning together with the lecturers as creators, as a combined unit...was different to anything I have done before at university.”

“This way of learning...is designed to allow the student to realise their own potential...I believe that this new way of learning is the way forward.”

Feedback from the student partners is also worth noting:

“Since becoming involved in the project, my experience of university has changed dramatically. I now feel more engaged...and wish to be a part of creating a better learning environment for students...[I] have begun to take ownership of my own learning. This has been beneficial to me both personally and academically”

“Having joint ownership of this project showed me the transformative potential of learning in partnership, especially when students are engaged as ‘active collaborators’ and ‘co-producers’”

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**Impact**

**Student**

The feedback matrix collated around the module clearly indicates the following as key strands of shared experience:

- Students welcomed and embraced the fluid and flexible learning environment, often speaking of ‘freedom’ to learn;
- When supported appropriately, students are comfortable learning in ‘discovery’ mode and cope well with the related uncertainty and ‘risk’;
- Students developed positive inter- and intra-group learning communities and were comfortable sharing learning. The learning in partnership methodology clearly facilitates and encourages the development of student/student and staff/student relationships;
- The cross-year peer-support methodology provides sustainability and encourages sharing of experiences widely across the student body. This has been embraced by Level 8 students in
supporting Level 9 students, creating a clear line of communication of expectations for years to follow;
Student partners have presented research activity at the British Conference for Undergraduate Research - see here & here - as well as engaging fully and presenting work at the HEA Students as Partners in the Curriculum workshop events.

Staff

Staff actively engaged on the initiative were inspired by student engagement and remain committed to the development of the learning in partnership methodology. Through the students as partners in the curriculum project, and beyond, they have developed a rich network of contacts and critical friends engaged in similar and complementary activities. The development of this network has been an important outcome of the initiative and will have an on-going influence on staff development around learning, teaching and assessment across the institution.
The initiative communication strategy has been developed to support staff involved in or interested in developing learning in partnership structures and activities. This has been achieved through presentation of the methodology and model and interim findings at the institutional learning and teaching conference - see here (includes student feedback).
The work of the initiative has been embedded in the UWS PG Cert Teaching and Learning in Higher Education programme. Through the work of the initiative, staff directly involved in teaching and learning are challenged to re-consider and re-evaluate traditional views on the power relations in higher education. Student partners have been actively involved in this process, engaging and challenging staff on the programme to ‘think differently’

Institution

The impact of the initiative at the institutional level can be evidenced in a number of key areas:
The potential of the learning in partnership methodology and method and the impact of the initiative has informed the work of the office of VP&PVC (Education) and has been identified as a central tenet of the institutional Education Enabling Plan. The Plan, currently in production, which will support the operationalisation of the Corporate Strategy;
The initiative has also informed the development of the institutional commitment to ‘programme primacy’ through the central emphasis on supporting the development of student belonging and a stronger sense of identity;
The work of the initiative was showcased at the UWS Enhancement Led Institutional Review, where it formed a central focus of the institutional display of work around the Developing and Supporting the Curriculum Enhancement Theme;
The work of the partnership team has now been embedded in a series of institutional level discussions around policies and practice, including: student engagement, personal development planning, personal tutoring & student representation;
The potential for extended impact of the initiative at the institutional level can also be seen in the quote below, taken from institutional submission to Guardian University Awards

At UWS we are excited by this initiative…this learning in partnership approach will enable the university to benefit from the students’ creativity and insight and will help foster a community of learning in which we all feel we belong. Now we will extend this novel approach across the University.

(UWS Dean of Students)
The communication strategy engaged throughout the initiative has been sector as well as institutional facing. This has supported a rich matrix of knowledge sharing around the initiative. This is evidenced in the following outputs:

- Presentation of the work of the initiative at an Enhancement Led Institutional Review Sharing Practice Sector Event, Glasgow, June 2014;
- Presentation to (then) Cabinet Secretary for Education by student partners outlining learning in partnership as preparation for Curriculum for Excellence (here).

As noted above, the work of the initiative has also been presented at the following conferences:

- 19th Annual Staff & Educational Development Association Conference, Nov 2014 (here);
- Higher Education Academy/Pedagogic Research Institute & Observatory Inclusive Assessment in Practice Conference, Nov 2014 (here). The conference submission was also published as part of the PedRIO Occasional Paper Series (here);
- Jisc RSC Scotland Annual Conference and iTech Awards, June 2014 (here).

Related scheduled presentations:

- ALT National Conference. ‘Can students act as ‘change agents’ in reshaping the learning landscape?’ Manchester, 8th-10th Sept 2015.

Moreover, the work of the initiative has informed the HEA on how better to support the sector in this area and has supported the articulation of the HEA Framework for Partnership.

To ensure that the initiative continues to have an impact at the sector level, the team will organise an ‘ambassadorial tour’ of select HEIs. This tour will target PVCs Education/Learning & Teaching and university staff working in relevant areas.

A further focus for extending the work of the initiative lies in development of cross-institutional communities of practice. While at an early stage, the initiative has provided a solid foundation to achieve this goal.

**Lessons learned**

Key lessons learned:

Learning and teaching in partnership promotes educational and social transformation. There has been a reflexive recognition of how powerful learning in partnership and the development of cross-stakeholder learning communities can be for all stakeholders;

- Fully equal partnerships are not always achievable, or desirable. Equitable partnerships that harness and build on the strengths of all stakeholders should be the focus of student as partners activity;
- It is important to engage in deep dialogue with all stakeholders ahead of any initiative to support engagement; During this dialogue, it is important to consider and ‘design in’ flexibility and sustainability to support the extension of the work of the initiative;
The dialogue should also clearly articulate partnership principles, emphasising mutual respect, trust and belonging. The articulation of these principles will support learner transition through the development of ‘safe space’;

Finally, students will thrive in a fluid and uncertain learning environment where the pedagogy and pedagogic structure of learning is clear. They will comfortably engage with self-determined and negotiated learning practices if they are explicitly enabled as active partners within a structured supportive and supported learning framework:

*I was apprehensive as to be honest it looked a bit daunting. When the lecturers spoke about this ‘new way of learning’ truthfully I felt as if I was going to be part of an experiment…I soon realised…they were starting to create a new way of learning and for me a better way of learning. Instead of being stuck in a lecture for two hours having so much information being thrown at you, working in the labs, finding out our own information, working more independently but with help still there actually made me feel as if I was learning more. (RSWB student)*

**Next steps**

**Short term:**
- Presentation of the work of the initiative to the sector (see ‘Sector impact’ section above);
- Production of journal articles outlining and evaluating the work of the initiative, to be submitted to appropriate journals for peer review.

**Medium term:**
- Organisation of an ‘ambassadorial tour’ of select HEIs to share knowledge of the work of the initiative;
- To use the experience of the initiative to support the embedding of collaborative, co-creative research-based learning in all programmes across the School of Media, Culture and Society, and to support more widely at the level of the institution.

**Longer term:**
- Extend work of initiative in the area of learning analytics, focussing on the potential of collaborative student research to support engagement and self-reflection through the development of learner agency.

**Key messages**

Engaging students as partners in learning and research develops confidence, builds resilience and inculcates a sense of belonging. This agency supports student engagement and self-regulation, and enhances employability.

**Last word to one of our student partners**

Kety Faina, Student Partner in the Partners in Learning/Partners in Research initiative at the University of the West of Scotland discusses her engagement with the Students as Partners in the Curriculum Change Programme at a learning in partnership showcase event held on the University’s Paisley campus as part of the institution’s induction week ahead of the 2014/15 session.

[Click image to open YouTube link]
Project team

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