

More diverse and better informed: using student insights to improve teaching

Tim Herrick **University of Sheffield**

Jasper Shotts **University of Lincoln**



Project origins

- Project originated in Brigham Young University USA in 1997 and is now very well established (First University in USA to be accredited by HEA) <https://ctl.byu.edu/scot>
- Project established at University of Lincoln in 2012 which involves training student volunteers to observe and give feedback on teaching outside their discipline of study. <https://lalt.lincoln.ac.uk/improving-teaching-according-to-the-student-experience/>
- Project outcomes shared at HEA national conference July 2017 attended by Tim Herrick from University of Sheffield.
- Conference outcome; Sheffield University expressed interest in developing a similar project and Sheffield and Lincoln staff worked together to establish this project and bring staff and students together from both projects in February 2018. Contact also made with Brigham Young University to share practice and learn from diverse experience
- **Overall aim of this presentation: using the student consultant model to develop more equal staff-student partnerships, and more inclusive and borderless practice**

University of Lincoln- scheme overview

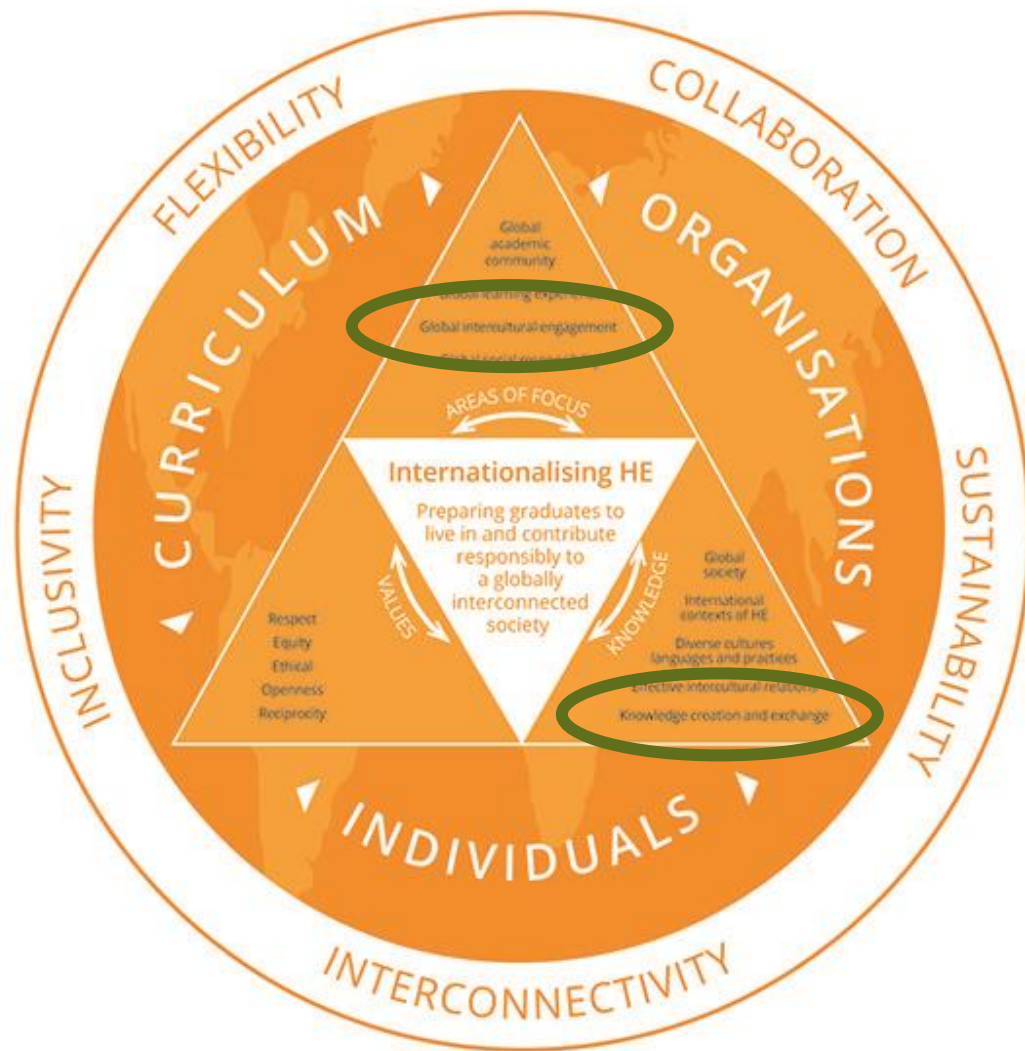
- Student Union recruits and trains students and then links with academic teaching in a discipline different from the student. This project has run since 2012.
- Students observe and give feedback on teaching eg large group, seminar group
- Once confident students lead on student consultation and focus group activities eg around student assessment experience
- In 2017/18, 8 students trained to work across 7 different Schools
- “It is not only about student experience... hearing staff views and understanding what goes on behind the scenes especially around marking is really interesting.”
Lincoln nursing student
- Current challenge –finding a new home for this project –interdisciplinary projects are both valuable and vulnerable to change.

University of Sheffield

- Students and staff volunteers from different disciplines, partnered to engage in dialogue about the staff member's teaching
- Might be one-off observation and discussion; longitudinal relationship; or student mediating feedback from other students (e.g. through focus group)
- In 2017/18, 17 pairings, involving 22 staff and 16 students
- “Familiarity is key” (Sheffield, student): a sense of connection and relationship between participants was the most important factor for success
- Not perfect; best guess is that 3 partnerships didn't go anywhere, and another 2 faltered. Industrial action disrupted the rhythm of the project.

University of Sheffield





© Higher Education Academy, 2015

Internationalising Higher Education Framework

Areas of focus:

Global intercultural engagement

Knowledge creation and institutional exchange

Institutional internationalisation agendas

- University of Lincoln strategy is to increase opportunities for;
 - Outward mobility of students
 - Staff development and thought leadership and outward facing activities
 - Internationalising the curriculum to reflect increasingly diverse student population and workforce
- The University of Sheffield seeks to increase opportunities for international engagement and understanding, for staff and students alike

Knowledge creation from the scheme

- **Value of staff working with students outside their discipline** – staff understanding discipline-related factors, e.g. gender
- **Sustaining a more balanced staff-student dialogue** – working across institutional structures, to maximise the impact of engaged and enthused students
- **Succession planning** – involving established student volunteers in future student training, both face to face and digitally
- **Key value of coming together and learning across institutions** – a dialogue to enable different voices to be heard in a more responsive community of practice.

Learning from collective practice

- **University of Sheffield** pair staff and students to work through an agreed series of teaching observation and feedback events, and provide a supportive network to support participants and promote progression and reflection on practice.
- **Brigham Young University** “ don’t need to do much to recruit”; use word of mouth and target new academic staff as practice is so well embedded (over 25 years).
- **University of Lincoln** have created a flipped training programme which includes filmed exit interviews with student consultants experienced in various observation and enquiry led roles.

Learning from you

What practices of student partnership are you particularly proud of in your own work, or in your own institution?

Happy to hear responses from anyone in the room

Impact of the schemes: Individual

- Staff really valued having a conversation (especially with students) about their teaching: “The insight that you get goes far beyond the insight that you get from module evaluation questionnaires” (Sheffield, staff)
- Students learnt from seeing what happens (a) backstage in teaching, and (b) in other departments; “I definitely know a lot more about the process of developing teaching resources and materials now than I did before entering this project and it's also helped me to make my own presentations better (for example, in a graded group project).” (Sheffield, student)

International student experience a good teacher is

- **Approachable**
- **Flexible**
- **Makes explicit** expectations about teaching and assessment activities and makes offers of support (but not in front of other students)
- **Understands** challenges students may face both living and studying abroad perhaps through their own international experience

Impact of the schemes: Institutional

- **For staff**, a sense of community and togetherness: the best part of the Sheffield project was “being involved with a community of practice at the university around teaching, and actually getting to get together with academics from across the university” (Sheffield, staff)
- **Students** reported a greater understanding of structural factors influencing L&T within University of Sheffield (3.6 on Likert scale after project, up from 2.6 before)
- “Social aspects of learning really matter” (Lincoln, student)– arrangements to address and reduce (international) student isolation through events and buddying schemes

Impact of the schemes: Sector-wide

- Student insights as a gentle way into greater development of student partnership: “I have confirmed to myself that working with students as producers in learning and teaching development can be a very positive experience” (Sheffield, staff)
- Increasing the sense of the unique position of student observers, being able to relate to other students in a way that staff cannot
- Working with student insights to change and develop teaching and support staff development for successful HEA fellowship applications.
- Raising the profile of partnerships for learning to change practice at both local and strategic levels of teaching and learning within institutions and influence practice across the sector.

Potential limitations

- Student engagement, and staff engagement
- Time is always going to be a challenge
- The politics of institutional support for the schemes
- Self-selecting groups: how to make these schemes more popular?



A question for you

How should we recognise student development through this kind of project?