

Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery

An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University,
Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and
the University of Westminster



Final report

Written by

**Fiona Campbell, Jenny Eland, Ann Rumpus
and Rai Shacklock**

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Preface

Often when we consider student-centred learning, we treat it as if it is a new concept, when in reality universities were founded on the premise of students being in control of the curriculum. In fact from its inception in the 12th century Frederick Barbarossa granted students of Bologna University in Italy powers of self-government in a pact to help him secure the position of Holy Roman Emperor. Students then had complete control over the curriculum and staff appointments. In an era of students as 'customers', it is easy to forget the relationship students once had with their universities.

This report could not come at a better time. For me, *Hearing the student voice: Involving students in curriculum design and delivery* is a timely reminder that, in fact, students are co-creators, not consumers, of their education. The curriculum is a deeply personal thing, and yet far too often we treat it as a one-size-fits-all product which inevitably fails to realise a student's, or indeed an academic's, true potential.

But if we can make the paradigm shift towards a student-centred rather than lecturer-centred curriculum there will be many benefits and I believe this report will make a huge contribution towards achieving that goal. Students will be far more engaged, see education as both a right and a responsibility and treat studies as a two-way street rather than the one-way transaction government policy seems so intent in asserting. It is also a direction in which students want to travel; the NUS Student Experience report 2009¹ found that 88% of students wanted to be involved in shaping the content of their course.

Of course a student-centred curriculum comes with huge challenges. Aside from the obvious issues of time, resources and space to be able to undertake some of the thinking required to re-design how students can engage with the curriculum, there is the far more important issue of trust. Moving away from the tried and tested methods of bestowing content from teacher to pupil can be scary and uncomfortable; fresh thinking is needed by academics and students alike, and this report has offered some fantastic case studies to kick start that thinking.

Finally, I welcome the broad acknowledgement of the critical role students' unions play in working towards a student-centred learning experience. We know ourselves that we face considerable challenges in ensuring we reflect the wide demographic of students we seek to represent. But nonetheless the legitimacy that students' unions and academic representatives bring is confirmed by this report and taking on the challenge of putting the individual at the centre of their own curriculum is a challenge we must face in partnership.

I commend this report in taking the agenda forward and hope that it can help us go somewhat back to the future and perhaps learn a few tricks from our friend Barbarossa.

Liam Burns, NUS Scotland President
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Introduction

We must engage with students in a richer, more deliberate way at the course level that acknowledges their right... to participate in the development and design of their own curriculum

(James Alexander, NUS President, Scotland, 2007)

Contributing proactively both enhances the curriculum and motivates students.² But how can we enable students to take an active role in the creation of the curriculum? How can staff be equipped to work cooperatively with students in the process? What methods should be used? At what level should they engage?

This report records the progress of the *Hearing the student voice: involving students in curriculum design and delivery* project which explored how universities can meaningfully involve students in shaping the curriculum. Drawing on their recently-completed work within the project *Hearing the Student Voice: Promoting and encouraging the effective use of the student voice to enhance professional development in learning, teaching and assessment within higher education*,³ the project team explored innovative methods which enable students to contribute effectively to curriculum design and development. This was achieved through the development and evaluation of a range of case studies of practice which involved students contributing to the curriculum in different ways and within different contexts. The team aimed to encourage the permeation of this activity within their own institutions by involving academic staff in the case studies and encouraged cross-fertilisation of ideas across the sector by holding a national conference in May 2009. The report includes a reflective commentary on the themes generated by the project activities.

The report has been written by the team representing the four universities who collaborated on the project. Our observations and conclusions are amplified by voices throughout – those of staff and students involved in our case studies and as participants at our national conference.

We are grateful to:

- the Higher Education Academy ESCalate Subject Centre for funding and supporting the project
- all those who contributed to our national conference including Leeds Metropolitan University which hosted it, our colleague Rai Shacklock who organised it with the support of Lucy McCann and the presenters who contributed and the individuals who participated
- those involved in the case studies who have (and are) using the student voice in imaginative ways to enhance curriculum design and delivery

- colleagues within our own institutions who supported the project in many and different ways
- all of the students who lent us their voices.

Fiona Campbell, Edinburgh Napier University

Rai Shacklock, Leeds Metropolitan University

Jenny Eland, Birmingham City University

Ann Rumpus, University of Westminster

Hearing the Student Voice website available at
www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices/curriculum

Summary

1. The Hearing the Student Voice project aimed to explore innovative methods which enable students to contribute effectively to curriculum design and development. See *Project aims* and *Project achievements*.
2. The project was funded through the Higher Education Academy ESCalate Subject Centre development grant scheme (see www.escalate.ac.uk/4314). The project was collaborative and was carried out by a project team representing four universities. See *Project team*.
3. The project followed from a previous ESCalate-funded project *Hearing the Student Voice: promoting and encouraging the effective use of the student voice to enhance professional development in learning, teaching and assessment within higher education*. The project investigated effective ways of enabling the student voice to be heard in academic professional development to allow staff to engage with the students' view. The project concluded among the ways its work could be extended would be to enable the student voice to be captured and heard in relation to shaping the curriculum. See *Background to the project*.
4. The project team sought to achieve this through the development and evaluation of innovative case studies which included different mechanisms, media and contexts. The case studies – contributed by team members, colleagues within our institutions and in other universities – are explored under the *Case studies* section. This section provides a summary of all the case studies together with an analysis of the approaches covered. Each of the developed case studies are provided in *Appendix 5: Project case studies*.
5. The project plan, outcomes and case studies were shared with the sector through a national conference held in Leeds in May 2009 and other dissemination including contribution to national and international conferences and to internal and other events. The Hearing the Student Voice website also enabled dissemination of all the project's activities. Further information is provided within the *Dissemination of outcomes* section.
6. As a result of undertaking the case studies and through discussions at the meetings of the project team, the conference and with colleagues within our own institutions and elsewhere in the sector, a number of issues arose which are explored in a reflective commentary in the *Themes* section.
7. To encourage staff to use the student voice within their own practice, guidance was provided as part of the outcomes from the initial project. This ten-step approach can be found within the initial project report⁴ and on the initial project website.⁵ The guidance together with the Case study forms (available to download from the current project website⁶) will enable staff to develop, implement and evaluate their own curriculum development activities involving students.

8. The project team has concluded that using the student voice is a valuable strategy which impacts positively on the staff and students involved and the curriculum. However for student involvement with the design of their learning to permeate higher education, cultural changes are needed so that this is regarded as accepted rather than different practice. The process also needs to become an embedded part of existing activity and closer to the heart of provision. We hope this project will contribute to these changes by providing exemplars of practice and practical advice and by raising the profile of hearing the student voice and the value it brings to higher education. See *Conclusions*.
9. The *Bibliography* contains details of literature relevant to this project.

Project team

Fiona Campbell

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Liz Beasley (until May 2008)

Director of Assessment, Learning and Teaching, Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education, Leeds Metropolitan University

Jenny Eland

Educational and Staff Development Unit, Staff and Student Development Department, Birmingham City University

Ann Rumpus

Deputy Director, Westminster Exchange, University of Westminster

Rai Shacklock (from May 2008)

Head of Languages and English Language Teaching, Leeds Metropolitan University

Project aims

This project aimed to explore innovative methods which enable students to contribute effectively to curriculum design and development by:

- developing and evaluating case studies of practice enabling students to be meaningfully involved in shaping the curriculum
- equipping staff in the partner institutions to use the student voice by involving academic teams in the case studies and in the cross-fertilisation of ideas through inter-institutional networking
- disseminating the outcomes of the project to the academic community so as to equip staff to involve students in shaping the curriculum and to address some issues of curriculum design more effectively.

Background to the project

The project followed from a previous ESCalate-funded project *Hearing the Student Voice: promoting and encouraging the effective use of the student voice to enhance professional development in learning, teaching and assessment within higher education* which investigated effective ways of enabling the student voice to be heard in academic professional development to allow staff to engage with the students' voice.

Two case studies from that project focused on professional development but within a curriculum development context:

- At Leeds Metropolitan University students were at the centre of curriculum planning by bringing their perspective to module development at a time when it could influence change. The students felt valued by the process and contributed carefully considered and insightful views; a key factor appreciated by the staff involved.
- At the University of Westminster, continuing students and alumni expressed their views about curriculum design and delivery on a masters programme. The student participants provided constructive feedback and took the exercise very seriously. The staff found having the students' comments was invaluable, and generated more reflection than other forms of feedback.

The report of the project concluded that its work had provided 'a foundation for further involvement of students for other purposes, including curriculum development'.⁷

Case studies

This project aimed to capitalise on the experience of project partners through the development and dissemination of case studies featuring in-depth examples of good practice. The case studies were developed by members of the project team and other collaborators to meet needs within their institutional contexts but also to have wider transferability. The project delivered eleven completed case studies from six institutions which have together shown that the student voice can effectively contribute to the design and development of their curricula.

Summaries of the case studies are provided below followed by an analysis of the approaches used. The full case studies are provided in *Appendix 5: Project case studies*. The case studies were written up using a common template and this – together with the student permission form – is available to download from the project website at www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices/curriculum. The common themes which emerged in the case studies are explored in the *Themes* section.

Summaries

“Not another bloomin’ essay”: students taking control of assessment

If, as Brown and Knight (1994)⁸ tell us assessment is at the heart of the student experience and if we agree with Ramsden (1992)⁹ that from our students’ point of view, assessment **always** defines the actual curriculum how can we motivate them to take a deeper approach and take more control? The answer may lie in letting them decide their own method of assessment. This case study is built on an ‘experiment’ carried out with HE in FE students who did just that. After a group of Foundation Degree Early Years students complained when given ‘another bloomin’ essay’ they were asked to design their own assessment. The case study is based on two groups of students designing the assessment for three modules, and, in one module, also the content and methods of learning (with tutor input and support).

Contact: Jenny Eland, Birmingham City University

“Our Week 1”: using new and continuing students’ voices to evaluate their induction and orientation experiences

The university’s move to a 20-credit structure commencing in academic year 2008/9 aimed to benefit students by enabling them to develop their understanding in greater depth by offering increased opportunities for enhanced learner autonomy. A key aspect of the move is the designation of Week 1 of each trimester as an opportunity to work cooperatively, creatively and with imagination on a range of activities to enable students to engage in broader preparation, social integration and orientation. This case study formed part of an evaluation of Week 1 which enabled students – both new and continuing – from each faculty to reflect on their experiences of the first Week 1 and to

make any suggestions for enhancement which could be fed into Week 1 of future trimesters.

Contact: Fiona Campbell, Edinburgh Napier University

Closing the Loop on Student Feedback

This study contributes to a wider project that had previously been funded by the Higher Education Academy. It was a progression with regards to using feedback from students, in a focus group, to make changes to the curriculum and to assessment. For this case study it was decided to replace the original method of collecting data via a transcript to using a filmed session with the students and then transcribing the comments. This allowed the viewer to determine if the comments were delivered in a positive or negative manner. This method of data collection allowed for all points that were raised to be picked up, recorded, considered and then appropriate changes made where necessary. This case study is the outcome of this approach of closing the loop on feedback.

Contact: Rai Shacklock and Julia Tum, Leeds Metropolitan University

Student Online Discussions: assessing the masses

Large cohorts of students present a variety of difficulties for academic staff in terms of both teaching and assessment. This work looks at the opportunities offered by the innovative use of online discussions for the assessment of large cohorts. It highlights how the students work as groups whilst being marked as individuals, have the opportunity to develop critical analysis and can be engaged throughout the period of teaching.

Contact: Stephen Henderson, Leeds Metropolitan University

Listening to Students in Biosciences modules

Many criticisms of work on gathering the students' voices, where this information has been gathered at the institution or course level, is that the comments are generic and difficult to apply to particular modules, and hence less useful in curriculum development. It was also seen as important to create a method for students to input into their learning and to stimulate an increased dialogue with academic staff. In this work the issue has been addressed in two modules in Biosciences where comment has been directly sought from the students studying the modules.

Contact: Mark Clements and Mark Kerrigan, University of Westminster

Using a "Think tank" to hear Students' Voices in an Art and Design module

This case study was initiated as part of the *Incurriulum* project, an NTFS Fellowship project, run in conjunction with Norwich University College of the Arts and the University of Bedfordshire, which aims to analyse the factors which enable students with Specific Learning difficulties (dyslexia, dispraxia etc.) to be successful in higher education when studying art and design and to examine how these approaches (and in particular

attributes of assessment) could be transferred to other subjects. An analysis of the factors that supported the learning of such students was undertaken by a detailed examination of learning on art and design modules in the three institutions. This work within the University of Westminster incorporated hearing the students' voice into the project.

Contact: Katie Hayes, University of Westminster

A “Big Conversation” on feedback

Good feedback is essential to good learning, but students routinely express dissatisfaction with the feedback that they receive. The reasons for this are very varied, and despite the voluminous literature on feedback may be surprising and specific to particular modules and lecturers. Hence learning from generic 'one size fits all' module evaluations that satisfaction with feedback is less than satisfaction with other areas of teaching does not give individual lecturers, or schools, much useful guidance on how to improve. This was why a different approach to collecting student views was adopted here. A three part process was employed with students participating in all stages. The first stage was the organisation of a school conference around the themes of assessment and feedback, with an open invitation to student representatives to attend which would lead to an action plan. Stage two was to conduct a 'big conversation' on feedback through identifying a week during which student views would be canvassed across courses and years on the issue of feedback. Finally the implementation of the school action plan focusing on the provision of examples and exemplars formed stage three.

Contact: Mark Huxham, Edinburgh Napier University

“In their own words”: using student voices to design effective pre-arrival induction for international students

This case study is based on an initiative that has been partly funded by the TESEP (Transforming and Enhancing the Student Experience through Pedagogy) project. It focuses on addressing the needs of international students joining study programmes at Edinburgh Napier University through early awareness-raising and practical skills development. The pilot project SPICE (Student Pre-arrival Induction to Continuing Education) has involved 3rd year direct entry students from India to the University's BA Hospitality Management programme. The aim is to develop an interactive resource that addresses a subset of skills required by this student group whilst also integrating students with the Edinburgh Napier student community. SPICE is available to students pre-arrival and during study at Edinburgh Napier.

Contact: Monika Foster, Edinburgh Napier University

The CILASS Student Ambassador Network

This case study reports on the work of the CILASS Student Ambassador Network (SAN) which has the purpose of working with staff and students in partnership to facilitate inquiry-based learning at the University of Sheffield. The network began in March 2006 with 10 student ambassadors, growing to 29 plus one student co-ordinator by the

academic year 2008/09. The network is co-facilitated by a full-time undergraduate student and one member of staff.

Contact: Sabine Little, University of Sheffield

Using an online survey at course level to hear the student voice in Computer Science and Social Sciences

Two big modular courses undergoing the normal 5-year review process sought feedback from students through an online questionnaire; previously feedback had only related specifically to modules through paper-based questionnaires. These courses were located in Computer Sciences and in Social Sciences, and it was expected that this would be a useful comparison of these two different subject areas. The work was undertaken by a partnership between a member of academic staff from the University Educational Initiative Centre, a central educational development unit, and a Head of Department in each of the relevant subject areas. The online questionnaire involved both quantitative and qualitative questions, and was designed to be appropriate for both courses. The intention was to use this as a way of identifying issues and then asking students who expressed an interest in this to subsequent focus groups for a more in-depth discussion.

Contact: Tim Taylor, University of Westminster

Using a student voice approach to develop more inclusive and diverse ways of assessing coursework

This case study focused on using a student voice approach to develop equivalency guidelines for the assessment of multi-format coursework, so more inclusive / diverse assessment opportunities can be offered as students come to university with very different academic backgrounds. The study also considered the impact that new technologies are having on the teaching and learning experience for students, and how this can be reflected in the arrangements for assessed coursework. Different non text-based coursework formats (such as presentations, e-portfolios or audio recordings) were explored to ascertain how they might be fairly judged in terms of their equivalency with more traditional formats, such as text-based projects and essays.

Contact: Bridget Middlemas, Roehampton University

Approaches

The overarching aim of the project was to discover effective ways of enabling students to have some control over their learning and their curriculum. The approaches chosen therefore were selected by each institution as being the most appropriate to their purpose and target groups and as such have provided a variety and depth to the project.

The use of web-based approaches to gathering the student voice was very successful:

- In the large first year undergraduate module on Physiology and Anatomy (Westminster, “Biosciences”) the lecturer wanted to achieve a forum where students could comment on their learning, discuss the module and link external interests and reading to the content of the module. This was done by creating a discussion board on the VLE for each assessment for general module entries and one called “Let’s talk science”.
- In Leeds Metropolitan’s “Assessing the Masses” online discussion groups were used to enhance the assessment of a large group of students.
- At Westminster, an online questionnaire was used as a way of identifying issues and then asking students who expressed an interest in this to subsequent focus groups for a more in-depth discussion. (Westminster, “Online questionnaire”)
- At Edinburgh Napier an online questionnaire allowed students who were not onsite to be included. It also confirmed findings resulting from the focus groups with small numbers of students (Edinburgh Napier, “Our week 1”).

However concerns remain about ensuring student anonymity and about the fragility of technology at a vital point (Leeds Metropolitan, “Assessing the Masses”).

A different approach to using technology was to film the students as they commented on the assessment processes (Leeds Metropolitan, “Closing the loop”; Roehampton, “Inclusive approaches to assessing coursework”). Filming a live student discussion ensured that the full veracity of the comments was ‘captured’, a concern from the previous project, and avoided the artificiality of previous work when actors had been used. It also meant that this video could be shown to a wider group of staff than were able to attend the initial discussion. As the team involved in Leeds Metropolitan’s “Closing the loop” noted, written feedback can be static and misinterpreted and does not pick up on the tone or how a person expresses their comments. In filming the group all aspects of communication can be seen and heard. The data was then transcribed onto a grid which not only looked at *what* was said, but *how* it was said.

In other cases, more low-tech approaches were successfully used. In one of the University of Westminster’s case studies (Westminster, “Biosciences”), the leader of a small postgraduate module made a conscious attempt to explain the learning and teaching approaches he was using in the module. He then sought direct feedback from the students, using anonymous Post it[®] notes, on the learning activities and for suggestions on improvements. The module also included a period of guided independent study and when the students returned to present the outcomes of this in

seminars they were asked to fill in an anonymous questionnaire on this learning experience.

Face-to-face methods were a popular means of enabling students to contribute their views:

- In the Westminster case study “Think tanks”, students with Specific Learning Difficulties studying art and design were able to discuss their learning needs in relation to assessment in small groups and to feedback to the module lecturers their views on the content and delivery of the curriculum; these sessions were labelled ‘Think tanks’ and were based on the concept of student-led discussions, and topics of value to them, although they were guided in the areas of discussion.
- In the Edinburgh Napier case study “Our Week 1”, focus groups were central to the elicitation of views of different groups of students at different levels of study and from each faculty. The outcomes from these discussions were then triangulated with a large scale online questionnaire.
- In the Leeds Metropolitan case study “Closing the Loop” a focus group approach was also employed feeding student comments into curriculum and assessment changes.
- In the Birmingham City University case study “Not another bloomin’ essay”, groups of students designed their own form of assessment and in one case also the content and delivery. Before choosing the formats the students discussed types of assessment and looked at aligning that with the outcomes.

As with any new approach to gathering student voices there is the sense that “the novelty factor”, may be coming into play. This was indicated by the need for variety in the in-class activities used (Westminster, “Biosciences”) and this may also relate to the greater input gained through the electronic rather than paper-based questionnaires (Westminster, “Online Questionnaire”). Clearly variety of approaches are important to ensure that we develop effective means of engaging in dialogue with our students.

Themes: a reflective commentary

In conducting the case studies a number of themes emerged.

Enabling dialogue

In all the case studies, real dialogue with students was engendered which enabled student voices to be heard clearly. Staff and students discussed and considered issues relevant to their learning experiences and, by entering into these conversations, constructive and positive suggestions for enhancing the curriculum were made.

It was clear that the more the interchange between staff and students became a conversation, the more effective it became in gathering useful student input. Rather than merely asking students to react to staff's current views on provision, the more open and proactive the discussion, the more informative and valuable it becomes. However trust between the staff and the students was essential when less formal methods of interchange are used (Edinburgh Napier, "In their own words"; Birmingham, "Not another bloomin' essay"). Such dialogue enhanced student motivation and enthusiasm (Westminster, "Biosciences"; Birmingham "Not another bloomin' essay"), helped staff understand their students better by having an improved awareness of students' perceptions (Westminster, "Biosciences" and "Art and Design"), and find out 'how the other half lives' (Sheffield CILASS; Edinburgh Napier, "In their own words").

It was evident that the students had useful and intelligent things to say
(Colleague, Westminster University)

The students' informed and articulate contribution provided convincing arguments for the continuity of week 1, and where appropriate, for changes to be made for future iterations

(Colleague, Edinburgh Napier University)

An issue that has clearly emerged from this work is the need to create an ongoing dialogue between students and staff, rather than relying solely on "one-off" interventions to gain student views. The strength of a genuine ongoing conversational approach to gaining students' views has emerged in a number of the case studies (Edinburgh Napier, "A Big conversation"; Westminster "Biosciences" and "Art and Design"; Sheffield "CILASS"). Perhaps our general teaching needs to focus on this, as it is part of breaking down barriers created by high student numbers (Leeds Metropolitan, "Assessing the Masses") and heavy workloads for staff and for students (many of whom undertake high levels of paid work).

Impacting

...on students

An emerging theme for this work is that of using student voices to influence other students. It was noted, in the previous project, the evidence of the power of the student voice to influence staff. In this work it is the strong impact of the student voice on fellow students that is notable (Edinburgh Napier, “In their own words”; Westminster, “Biosciences”). Indeed the opportunity for students to hear each others’ views is in itself a valuable reflective, formative learning tool (Roehampton, “Inclusive approaches to assessing coursework”). Tapping into the cultural aspects of student groups is also important, as in the case of Indian students who have a preference for ‘hearing from their peers’ (Edinburgh Napier, “In their own words”).

I was happy that my views were being considered and that I could use my learning style to maximum advantage

(Student, Birmingham City University: “Not another bloomin’ essay”)

This positive focus on the contribution that students can make, the active involvement of students, through inviting them to “drive” their resources and contributing their own ideas, the use of peer engagement of students (Edinburgh Napier, “In their own words”; Westminster, “Biosciences”) may resolve some of the difficulties in engaging students, if they can see that the outcomes are built into course provision and will directly benefit themselves or the students that follow them. This resonates with the QAA finding that when students perceive that their views are valued by their institution and, particularly, when they see a direct benefit of their contribution there is increased engagement with their courses.¹⁰

The importance remains of developing a culture within the sector as a whole where active student comment on the content and delivery of the curriculum is seen as a normal, and valuable, part of learning. Students surveyed for the National Student Forum Report of 2009 have also emphasised that they support the

move towards valuing the student voice in improving the teaching and learning experience¹¹

...on the curriculum

The project sought to enable students to develop as co-creators of the learning experience and all of the case studies reflected on the value of the student input, in terms of curriculum content, design and delivery.

Staff noted how this had affected the curriculum:

it pushed the module team into thinking “out of the box” in assessment terms. Yes, there were risks but, overall, this has taken a step in a good direction which can inform teaching across the whole course

(Stephen Henderson, Leeds Metropolitan, “Assessing the masses”)

this was an excellent way of meeting the different needs of different cohorts, with the possibility of immediate feedback on their comments.

(Colleague, Westminster: "Art and Design")

In the Edinburgh Napier "Big conversation" staff and student discussions fed back directly into the planning cycle to good effect.

Students also commented on the value of the activity in terms of their experiences:

we were able to direct lessons and bring our own experiences to class, matching it to relevant theories... because we planned the sessions we knew what was coming and looked forward to them.

(Student, Birmingham City University: "Not another bloomin' essay")

In this case study the students clearly appreciated the opportunity to take control of their learning and when given this they did not choose the easy options but could challenge themselves:

I quite liked the idea of being asked to design our own assessment even though I was really shocked. The thought of being able to decide what I was going to do was great.

(Student, Birmingham City University: "Not another bloomin' essay")

Initially I felt oh just tell me what to do so I can get on with it! After a while I felt motivated to do something pertinent to me and my setting.

(Student, Birmingham City University: "Not another bloomin' essay")

Interestingly one comment showed how the significant the change in perception regarding the importance of the student voice has become:

anything new that is implemented should be reviewed from the viewpoint of the student.

(Leeds Metropolitan: "Assessing the masses")

These developments fit with ongoing activities in higher education to involve students more centrally in curriculum development. In Scotland such developments would build on the work of sparqs (www.sparqs.ac.uk) which has enhanced the impact of student voices within university committees by delivering training and support for student representatives and are advising institutions on how to engage students and enable them to contribute effectively to university fora. These developments also fit with the Quality Assurance Agency (Scotland) which innovatively involved students as early reviewers in external quality reviews and the Scottish Funding Council Joint Quality Review Group (JQRG)¹² which proposed that students should be supported:

in becoming actively engaged in delivery and management of their own learning experience, as full partners with institutions.

and

in decision-making about their curricula, teaching and learning, and all aspects of the student experience.

In England, the 2009 National Student Forum report indicated that students felt that it would be both motivating and powerful if there were more opportunities

for students to co-design and collaborate in their own learning

and that they would

like to see universities and colleges developing and implementing a cross-institutional strategy for collaborative and co-designed learning.¹³

...on staff

One of the intentions of this project was to engage a wider body of staff from within the institutions than the educational development staff who had primarily been involved in the first project. We achieved some success in this by engaging staff in:

- developing case studies
- contributing at the project national conference
- participating in internal sessions run for colleagues at the project team members' universities
- hosting a dinner with student to discuss issues (see below).

Those involved responded enthusiastically as to the benefits of the experience:

Definitely going to include student negotiation in next semester.

When I next run a module I will seriously develop this approach.

I feel empowered to encourage others to rethink.

Hearing positive comments from students also acted as a boost to staff morale (Edinburgh Napier, "In their own words" and "A Big conversation")

However while we have involved some enthusiasts very successfully we have not managed to involve as many staff as we had hoped, despite trying! However we recognise that colleagues are very busy with a range of other concerns, pressing issues and demands on their time. Further, many were preoccupied with work associated with institutional developments including significant restructuring, changes to the academic year and new modular structures which were ongoing at our institutions during the lifetime of this project.

It is clearly helpful to build on the local knowledge and enthusiasm of staff in the teaching departments, and to support them in creating a dialogue between them and their own students (Westminster, "Biosciences" and "Art and Design"; Leeds Metropolitan, "Assessing the Masses"). This was very beneficial with the input from the

students feeding directly into the immediate curriculum development interests of the staff.

The merit of including a wider range of staff than academics in the focus groups such as e-learning staff, registry colleagues and student support staff is also something to be considered (Roehampton, "Inclusive approaches to assessing coursework"). This was not a significant feature of the case studies and is an important issue for consideration in future work.

The level of trust between centrally-based professional service colleagues instigating the work and academic staff in schools or departments may also be important. Staff involved in embedding dialogue with students within the learning and teaching in the modules in Westminster's case studies had successfully passed through the Pg Cert in HE at Westminster; this was run by the central unit driving the project work, and this established level of trust was significant (Westminster, "Biosciences" and "Art and Design"). However this still needed ongoing attention to support these staff and to formulate the written case studies.

A different approach to engaging a wider body of staff is to do this through the students (CILASS). In this work, students took the roles of Ambassadors into the departments, to collaborate with staff and to inform the debate about how best to obtain the student voices. The fact that, for this project as a whole, the lead was taken by a member of staff and a student working together may also have had a significant impact.

An issue which has remained through the previous and current project is that of the staff time involved in developing these initiatives. Although many of the mechanisms for engaging students in dialogue were otherwise resource 'light', in all case studies comment was made on the demands on staff time. Again the resolution to this might be to make this dialogue an integral part of the curriculum delivery such that it is not seen as 'extra' by either colleagues or students and hence possibly an imposition.

Another possibility is to use approaches which are not complex to plan and implement. One activity at Edinburgh Napier University involved a member of staff taking a range of students (including an alumni, a third year student together with new students) out for a meal at the start of the new academic year. With the students' permission the conversation, which covered the students' experiences of learning and teaching, was recorded. The conviviality of the situation and the length of time available to take part in discussion meant there was an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue and for all to benefit from the experience.

However the future for most student voice work which would both more easily involve students and staff is at the place and point of need: the programme team level. This level has also been noted as significant in the Scottish Funding Council Joint Quality Review Group (JQRG) report:

it is here that most of the things that most directly affect students can be influenced.

The report recommends:

*that institutions, particularly at course team level, engage with students to obtain feedback, perspectives and insights that will help them learn how to serve their students better in the future.*¹⁴

The involvement of staff across the board in listening to students in the ways our project suggests as part of the development of the curriculum is dependent on a change of the culture in higher education, so that this is accepted rather than different practice. This would put the student involvement with their learning and with the design of their learning, much closer to the heart of the provision. The role of colleagues in central development units would thus be to provide appropriate support, resources and models for gathering students' views but ultimately this level and nature of engagement with students would simply be routine. Such activity will certainly be enabled by the significant change in culture in higher education which, even in the six years since the first project started, has seen greater and explicit centrality given to the importance of student engagement. We do hope this project will also contribute by providing to colleagues exemplars of practice, practical advice and by raising the profile of hearing the student voice within higher education.

Wider issues

Student representation

The question as to whether the student voices are representative of the student body as a whole, has not been as much of an issue as in first project; there was a greater acceptance that the student voices are only one of the sources of evidence for reflection. This may in part have been due to the fact that a number of the cases studies focused on narrow groups of students, for instance at the module level (Leeds Metropolitan, "Assessing the Masses"; Westminster, "Biosciences" and "Art and Design"), at the course level (Edinburgh Napier, "A Big conversation") or with a selected groups of students such as Indian international students (Edinburgh Napier, "In their own words"). There was also the recognition that the student voices can be gathered and are valuable at a range of levels – depending on the intended purposes and outcomes - as demonstrated by the case study where Student Ambassadors were used both within departments and across the University (Sheffield: CILASS).

Student recruitment

The recruitment of students, as in the previous project, has remained an issue of difficulty. Volunteering was not always found to be successful and even when students did volunteer they did not always attend the planned sessions (Edinburgh Napier, "In their own words"). However a number of different solutions to student recruitment emerged:

- students can be paid and as a result regard this as serious 'work' (CILASS), students will also respond to other 'rewards' such as book tokens, prize draws and print credits (Edinburgh Napier, "In their own words" and "Our Week 1"), supermarket vouchers (Roehampton, "Inclusive approaches to assessing

coursework”) or refreshments and a record voucher (Leeds Metropolitan, “Closing the loop”).

- existing student representatives (Edinburgh Napier “A Big conversation”) can be used and the students involved are then those with whom a relationship has already been built, through taught activities etc. (Edinburgh Napier, “In their own words”).

Another clear solution to engaging student with the work was to seek information from students within the taught class time (Edinburgh Napier, “A Big conversation”) and particularly to build gathering the student comment into the students’ learning activities (Edinburgh Napier, “A Big conversation”; Westminster, “Biosciences” and “Art and Design”; Birmingham, “Another bloomin’ essay”); this proved very successful, relying in particular in a high level of trust between the member of staff and the students. In one case study (Birmingham, “Another bloomin’ essay”) the change to the curriculum was proposed by a group of students facilitating their own discussion, without a tutor present. The use of Student Ambassadors to recruit further students was also found to be very effective (CILASS) and could be built into the curriculum provision.

Essentially though it is clarifying to students what they will gain tangibly from their involvement which can positively influence their willingness to engage in the work (Edinburgh Napier, “A Big conversation”). The challenge with regards to any student feedback is to ensure that what has been said by students is used in a considered manner and that the students can see any changes that have taken place as a result. Even if they themselves may not have received direct benefit, students in our case studies were pleased to have been responsible for enhancing the experience of students who followed them.

Dissemination of outcomes

Dissemination has been a key part of the project with the aim of sharing the outcomes of the project to facilitate the building of a community of practice interested and equipped to use the student voice to inform curriculum design and development. Dissemination strategies have included events and the project website.

Events

National conference

The project held a national conference: *Enabling students' voices to shape the curriculum* at Leeds Metropolitan University's iconic new conference venue, The Rose Bowl on 14 May 2009.¹⁵ The day attracted 62 participants representing 25 institutions (see *Appendix 1: National conference: Institutions and organisations represented*) and provided an opportunity for participants to explore how universities can meaningfully involve students in shaping the content and delivery of the curriculum. Participants were introduced to current work investigating the student voice in curriculum development; were able to share their own experiences in this area; contributed relevant work-in-progress or tools and techniques; and had opportunities to explore the potential of using the student voice in the development of the curriculum within their own contexts (see *Appendix 2: National conference Programme details*).

The day included:

- a keynote¹⁶ from Ann Rumpus (project team member from the University of Westminster) outlining issues and outcomes arising from the project
- a discussion between Sally Brown, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and the Student Union President together with the Education and Representation Officer from Leeds Metropolitan University
- parallel workshops (listed in *Appendix 2: National conference Programme details*) showcasing relevant activities at different institutions throughout the country
- interactive opportunities for participants including a try-it-out in 10 minutes session (detailed in *Appendix 2: National conference Programme details*) over lunch and a plenary discussion session
- a student voices panel.

The day was well-evaluated by participants (see details in *Appendix 3: National conference: Evaluation Analysis*). All of the sessions were seen as valuable and people particularly mentioned as useful the keynote from Ann Rumpus and the student voices panel. The opportunities and space to share ideas with enthusiastic others, to learn what other universities were doing and to develop contacts were particularly appreciated. Appropriately, participants enjoyed hearing student voices and engaging in

dialogue with students. The organisation of the day and the efficiency of the organisers were also praised. The welcoming and friendly atmosphere was also mentioned as with the tasty lunch and the attractive venue.

Internal

Project members have each run staff development sessions in their own institutions exploring how the student voice can contribute to curriculum development. These included stand-alone workshops, contributions to a thematic series of workshops and to an annual Learning and Teaching Symposium. (See *Themes: Impacting on staff.*)

Conferences

Project team members have also contributed to national, international and other events:

- **Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) Conference: *Engaging with Student Expectations* (London, 8-9 May 2008)¹⁷**
Ann Rumpus and Fiona Campbell presented *Whose curriculum is it anyway? Involving students in curriculum design and development* (See Appendix 4: *Discussion paper at SEDA conference 08/05/08*).
- **Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA): *Engaging Communities* (New Zealand, 1-4 July 2008)¹⁸**
Fiona Campbell presented *Hearing the student voice: enabling students to contribute to the development of their learning communities*.

Presentations have been given at other events including the University of Portsmouth (April 2008).

Website

A project website has been developed at:

www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices/curriculum/index.htm

The site is structured around a number of sections to inform visitors about the project aims, case studies, the national conference and other events. It has enabled the speedy and effective dissemination of information about the project.

The website also allows the opportunity to download and adapt as required templates¹⁹ devised by the project to facilitate the development of case studies.

Generic information about hearing the student voice remains on the website for the first project²⁰ such as the survey form and guidance for staff in developing a case study.

Project achievements

The project has promoted and encouraged the use of the student voice to inform curriculum design and development by:

- raising the profile of using the student voice for this purpose through case study development, dissemination activities and particularly the national conference
- providing exemplars and models of practice within 11 case studies with each providing detailed accounts of the purpose and context of the case study, its operation, and analyses of the impact, learning points and resources required
- developing a community of practice of staff interested in using the student voice through developing contacts at internal and external events and contributing case studies of practice. However this aspect of the work was not as successful as intended as institutional and individual commitments limited the involvement of significant numbers of academic staff in the project.

It is hoped that the foundation laid during the project will be built on in succeeding years as commitments permit and appropriate opportunities present themselves to enable the use of the student voice to inform curriculum design and development.

Conclusions

- Using the student voice to contribute to curriculum design and development can lead to significant enhancements which benefit staff, students and the curriculum
- There is benefit in capitalising on the significant interest in the project by developing, supporting and extending student voice work.
- Although there have been important changes in recent years in the value put on the student voice and the recognition that hearing it contributes to student engagement, there needs to be further changes particularly at institutional level to enable the use of the student voice to become routine. This can probably be best achieved by academic colleagues working at programme level using existing structures and discussions so that this process becomes an embedded part of existing activity and closer to the heart of provision.
- If enabling student involvement with the design of their learning is to permeate higher education to a significant degree, cultural changes are needed so that this is regarded as an accepted rather than different practice. We hope this project will contribute to change by providing colleagues with exemplars of practice, practical advice and by raising the profile of the value of hearing the student voice.
- A key outcome from this and the previous project, as far as the project team is concerned, is that the process of participation in the project activity has in itself provided valuable time and opportunity for us to exchange of ideas and for reflection; this could be mirrored by the extension of the work within institutions.

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Appendix 1

National conference: institutions and organisations represented

The University of Sheffield

Leeds Metropolitan University

University of Westminster

Birmingham City University

University of Chichester

Sheffield Hallam University

Heriot-Watt University Edinburgh

Cardiff University

The University of Hertfordshire

University of Glasgow

Edinburgh Napier University

Nottingham Trent University

The University of Manchester

The Royal Veterinary College

University of Leeds

University of Plymouth

Liverpool Guild of Students

The University of Sunderland

University of Wolverhampton

University of Exeter

University of the Creative Arts

Bradford University

University of Teesside

Roehampton University

Lancaster University

Appendix 2

National conference: programme details

- 09.00am **Registration and coffee**
- 10.15am **Welcome to the conference**
Fiona Campbell, Head of Professional Development, Edinburgh Napier University
- 10.20am **Welcome to Leeds Metropolitan University**
Sally Brown, Pro-Vice Chancellor (ALT) Office, Leeds Metropolitan University
- 10.30am **Hearing the student voice: involving students in curriculum design and development**
Ann Rumpus, Head, Educational Initiative Centre, University of Westminster
- 11.00am **Coffee**
- 11.30am **Parallel workshops** (see below)
- 12.30pm **Lunch**
- 1.15pm **Try it out in 10 minutes!** (see below)
- 2.00pm **Listening to students: and doing something useful with what they tell us!**
A discussion between Sally Brown, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and the Student Union President and the Education and Representation Officer from Leeds Metropolitan University
- 2.45pm **Afternoon tea**
- 3.00pm **Student panel: let's see what the students have to say** (see below)
- 3.30pm **Plenary session: feedback and discussion**
- 4.00pm **Close**

Parallel workshops

Student online discussions: assessing the masses

Steve Henderson, UK Centre for Events Management, Leeds Metropolitan University

Large cohorts of students present a variety of challenges for academic staff in terms of both teaching and assessment. This workshop will look at the opportunities offered by the innovative use of online discussions for the assessment of large cohorts. How the students work as groups whilst being marked as individuals will be explored together with the opportunity provided for them to develop critical analysis and to be engaged throughout the period of teaching. Finally, overcoming the hurdles to achieve a happy group of students and a successful learning experience with this style of assessment is discussed based on student feedback.

This presents an innovative use of discussion groups highlighting how it helps to manage large numbers of students in a situation that allows group working but, listening to the student voice, allows for individual learning, assessment and reflection on process.

Listening to the student voices in biosciences modules

Mark Clements and Mark Kerrigan, School of Biosciences, University of Westminster

Two staff investigated getting students to comment directly on the curriculum design and delivery within Biosciences modules. They have done this in the context of stimulating a dialogue with the students about the learning and teaching approaches they are using, and seeking specific comments which they can use to develop their modules. They have done this on both large and small modules at different levels and through a range of approaches to 'capturing' students' comments, both directly in the classroom and through discussion boards on the Virtual Learning Environment. The outcomes have been both revealing and beneficial and included valuable comments on both the content and the delivery of the modules.

The workshop will invite participants to share their ideas of experiences on how to gain specific feedback at the module level, in light of the presenters' findings. It will encourage a discussion of some of the surrounding aspects of gaining and using this information, in particular in relation to issues of whether feedback is representative of 'whole class' views, the authenticity of the voice, the relevance of the students' views to module development and concern about protecting the students' interests. The workshop will also examine the value of this work to future areas of curriculum development.

Working together: student ambassadors for inquiry-based learning

Sabine Little and Natalie Whelan, CILASS: Centre for Inquiry-based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences, University of Sheffield

CILASS (Centre for Inquiry-based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences) is a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, based at the University of Sheffield. Since 2006, students from each department involved in the CETL have worked together, co-facilitated by a member of staff and a student, to facilitate learning and teaching

enhancement at the institution. The Student Ambassador Network (SAN) functions across several working groups, as well as individually in departments and as a whole network, all with the remit to create a university environment as described by Brew

Places where academics work collaboratively in partnership with students as members of inclusive scholarly knowledge-building communities; where teaching and research are integrated, and where both students and academics are engaged in the challenging process of coming to understand the world through systematic investigation and collaborative decision-making in the light of evidence (p.3).²¹

The workshop will focus on the student ambassadors' input into curriculum development through the facilitation of module evaluation with student focus groups, participation in departmental away days to feed their ideas into department-wide planning, and working one-to-one with staff on the development of new modules. As well as concentrating on the network itself, the workshop will outline in brief how the network's activities in the area of curriculum development are being carried forward at institutional level, such as via the introduction of a group of trained students to work with staff to offer student-focused and development-aimed evaluation of learning activities.

Following a brief introduction to the work of CILASS SAN, participants will be invited to consider how this compares to staff-student partnership for learning and teaching enhancement in their own institutions, and to discuss the enabling factors and barriers relating to such a partnership at a cross-departmental level, finding ways in which students can take the lead in educational development. The workshop will be co-facilitated by staff and students involved in the SAN.

Using a student voice approach to design innovative, multi-format assessments
Bridget Middlemas, Roehampton University, London

Roehampton University is currently involved in a JISC TechDis HEAT Project, entitled "What's it Worth? Developing Equivalency Guidelines for the Assessment of Multi-Format Coursework". This project is using a student voice approach to encourage disabled undergraduates to consider ways in which a traditional essay-based assignment might be constructed in an alternative format such as a DVD documentary, live presentation or an e-portfolio.

In other words, what might an assessment look like when it's *not* an essay? How long should a DVD be if it is to replace a 5000-word essay? How will we ensure that the students are fully meeting the programme learning outcomes, and how will we attempt to grade such multi-format coursework? What technical or learning support will students require when tackling unfamiliar assessment formats?

The workshop will explore some of the learning and teaching issues that have arisen with our student participants, and feedback on our draft guidelines for academic staff who wish to broaden their assessment approaches. A short DVD of student and staff experiences will also be shared with the group.

Try it out in 10 minutes

These 10 minute sessions were designed for individuals to trial and receive feedback on ALT 'work in progress' or ALT tools and techniques that participants would be interested. Conference attendees had the opportunity to go from table to table to find out about the initiatives and to ask questions in an informal environment. Seven presenters took the opportunity to show case their initiatives.

“Not another bloomin' essay”: students taking control of their own assessment **Jenny Eland, Birmingham City University**

If, as Brown and Knight (1994) tell us, assessment is at the heart of the student experience and if we agree with Ramsden (1992) that from our students' point of view assessment *always* defines the actual curriculum; how can we motivate them to take a deeper approach and take more control? The answer may lie in letting them decide their own method of assessment. This workshop is built on an 'experiment' carried out with higher education in further education students who did just that. Now it's your turn. Together we will explore how in designing the assessment we also design the module with the students firmly in the centre.

The Leeds Met First level assessment and feedback project (FLAP) audit tool **Mandy Asghar, Leeds Metropolitan University**

As we approach the end of the academic year this session will give you an opportunity to explore the use of FLAP audit tool. Designed to help tutors consider how well their first year modules are aligned with the 10 principles of successful first level learning it may prompt you to review your practice for the new academic year.

“Our Week 1”: using new and continuing students' voices evaluating their induction and orientation experiences to inform the curriculum

Fiona Campbell, Edinburgh Napier University

This session will provide an opportunity for participants to discuss:

- Students' views on induction and orientation processes
- How to involve and engage students to enable their views to be articulated and heard
- How students' voices can be used to inform changes to the curriculum.

Closing the loop on Student Feedback

Julia Tum and Rai Shacklock, Leeds Metropolitan University

This session will demonstrate the value of using a logical process to close the loop following student feedback.

“Think Tank” Meetings: Inclusive Learning Through Discourse

Katie Hayes, University of Westminster

Think Tank Meetings are aimed at exploring with the students their approaches to and understanding of the teaching and learning experiences offered to them. The aims are

to bridge the gap between staff expectation and student experience and emphasise the diverse approaches of different learners.

Using the 'One minute paper'

Ruth Dowson, Leeds Metropolitan University

The 'one minute paper' has been described as an effective immediate feedback tool; however there have been criticisms of its long-term use, and response rates fall when over-used. This ten minute session explores its use and examines the results for one lecturer.

From student consultation to action research

Vivienne Caruana, Leeds Metropolitan University

The evaluative questionnaire remains the most popular method of obtaining feedback from students on their learning experience. However, there are issues. This 10 minute session is about student consultation meetings showing how they can provide the precursor to action research for collaborative curriculum design.

Student Panel

The student panel represented a cross section of students at both the University of Sheffield and Leeds Metropolitan University. Delegates were asked to split into groups and were then asked to discuss a given question with their student. Feedback was then received and recorded. The session was facilitated by Fiona Campbell. Participants were:

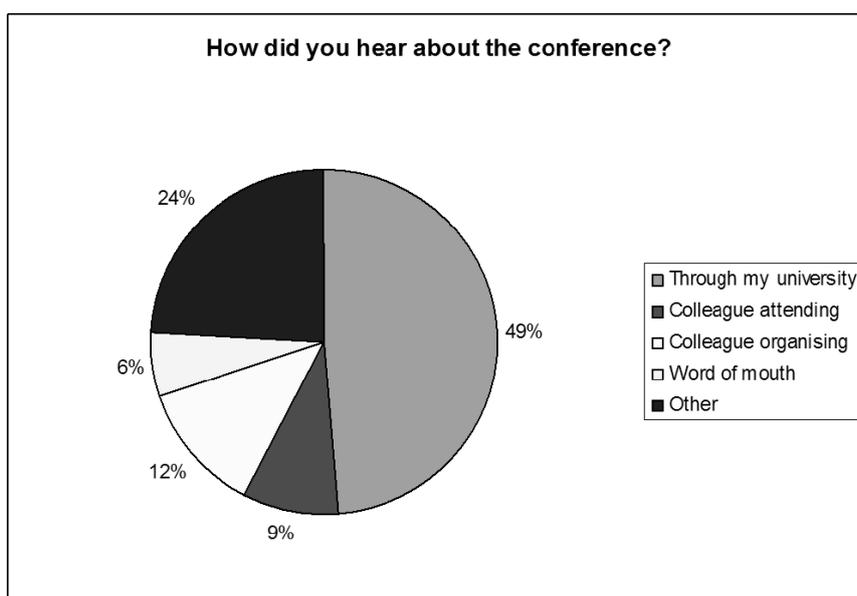
Su Arnall	The University of Sheffield
Louise Conyard	Leeds Metropolitan University
Ali Jaffer	Leeds Metropolitan University
Sophie Jewett	Leeds Metropolitan University
Lucy McCann	Leeds Metropolitan University
Natalie Whelan	The University of Sheffield

Appendix 3

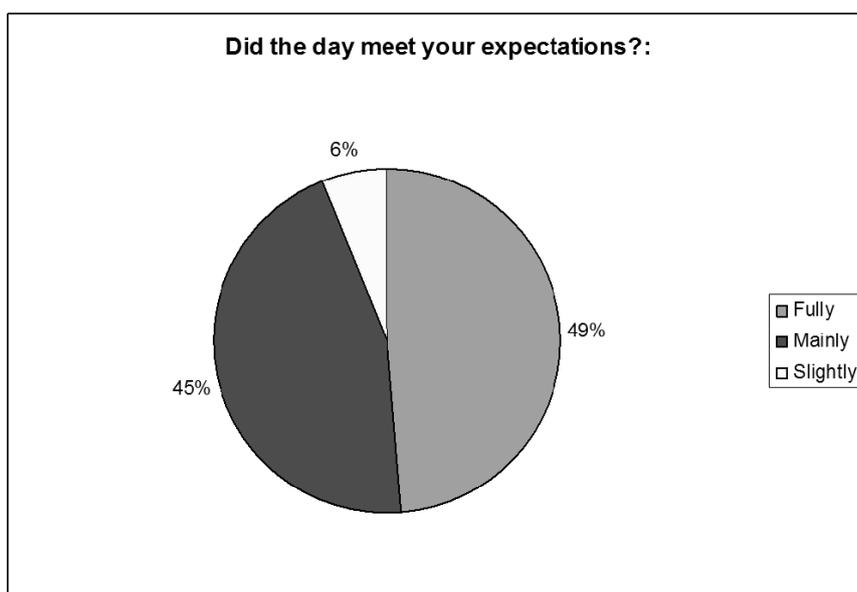
National conference: Evaluation Analysis

62 delegates attended this conference representing 25 institutions. 35 delegates completed an evaluation questionnaire which represented a 62% response rate.

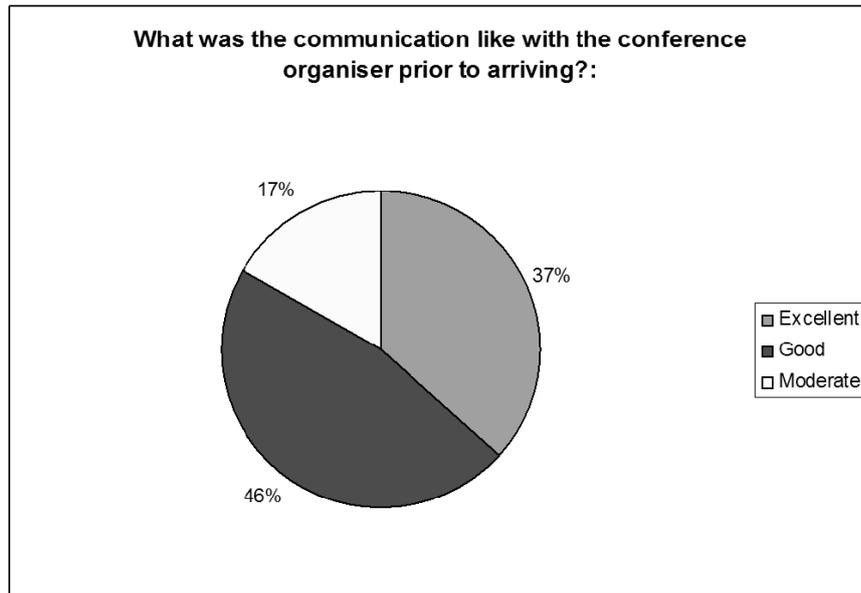
(1) How did you hear about the conference?



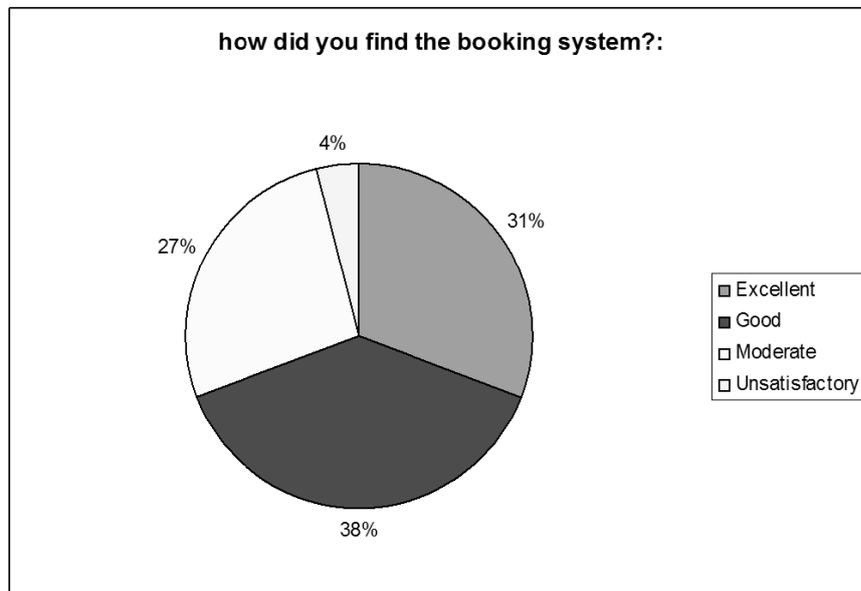
(2) Did the day meet your expectations?



(3) What was the communication like with the conference organiser prior to arriving?

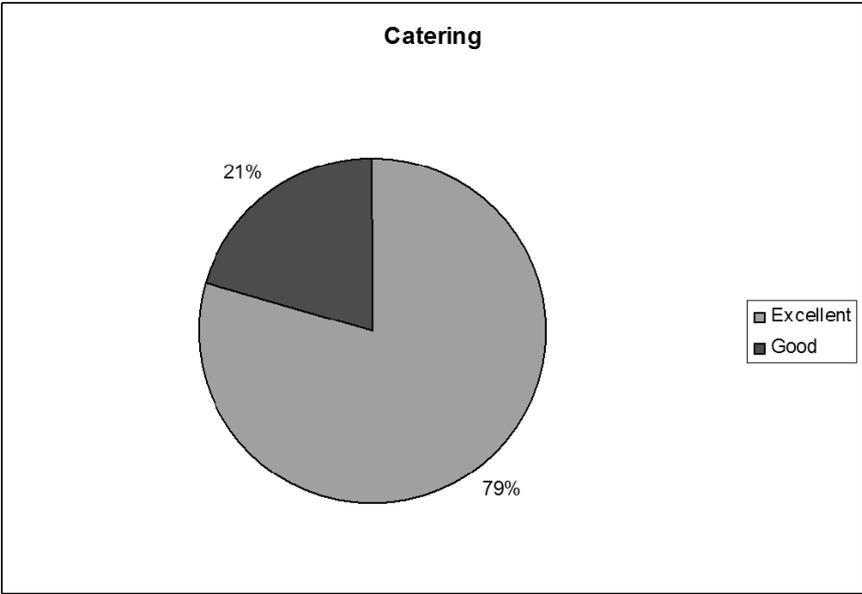


(4) How did you find the booking system?

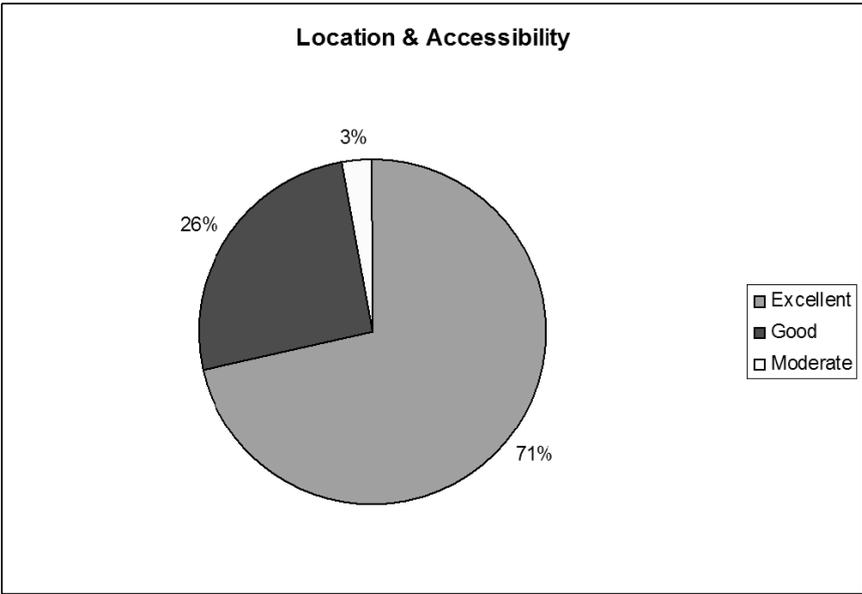


(5) How were your needs met in terms of:

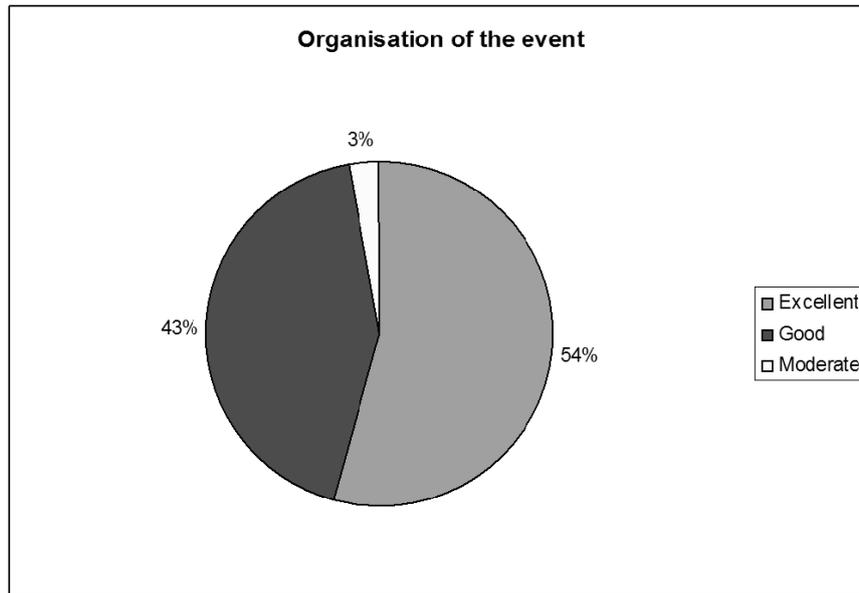
Catering



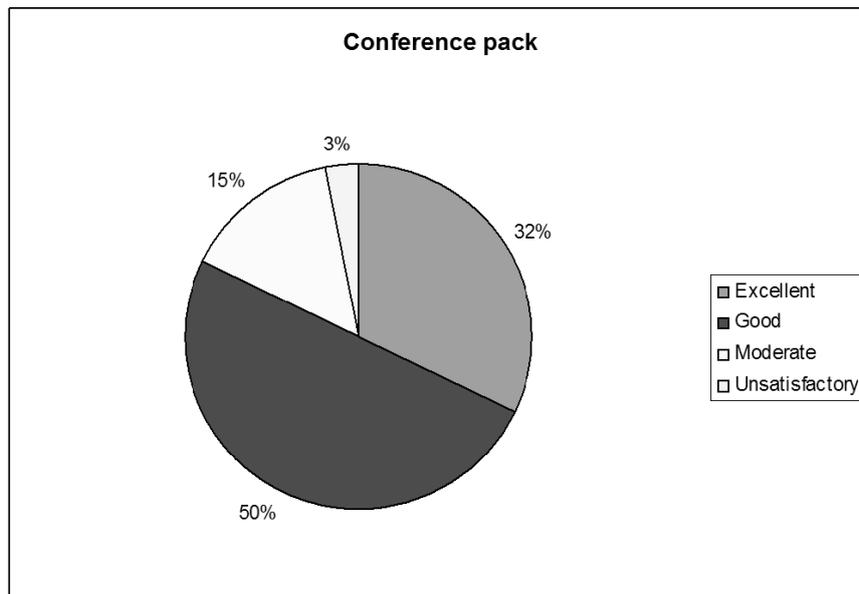
Location and accessibility



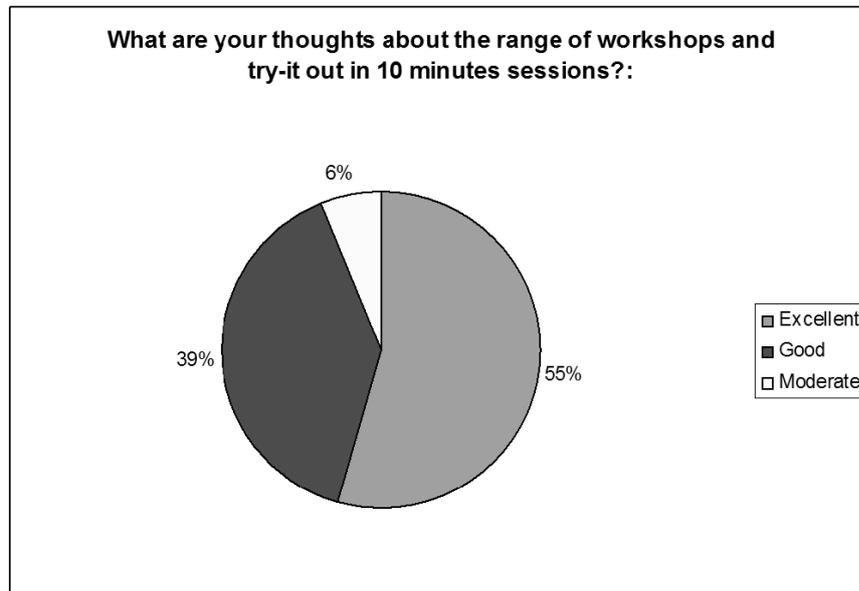
Organisation of the event



The conference pack



- (6) What are your thoughts about the range of workshops and Try-it out in the 10 minutes sessions?



- (7) Which workshop did you attend (of those that responded)

- Student online discussions: assessing the masses – 15 respondents
- Listening to the student voices in biosciences modules – 9 respondents
- Working together: student ambassadors for inquiry-based learning – 3 respondents
- Using a student voice approach to design innovative, multi-format assessments – 2 respondents

These responses do not necessarily indicate the interest shown in the workshop as they relate only to the delegates who responded to the questionnaire.

How useful did you find the workshop you attended:

- 52% extremely useful
- 31% generally useful
- 17% not that useful.

Comments included:

- Marvellous
- Misleading title
- Engaging & relevant
- Though “innovative” was unusable
- Student ambassadors
- Although the model is not something I could implement, there are excellent aspects that I can take away
- Good to hear student voices

- My own session, well attended and I think people enjoyed
- Really enjoyed running this session
- Well delivered, some good ideas shared
- Was the organiser
- Part of running the session
- Amazed that there isn't more crossover between Sheffield University and Sheffield University Union.

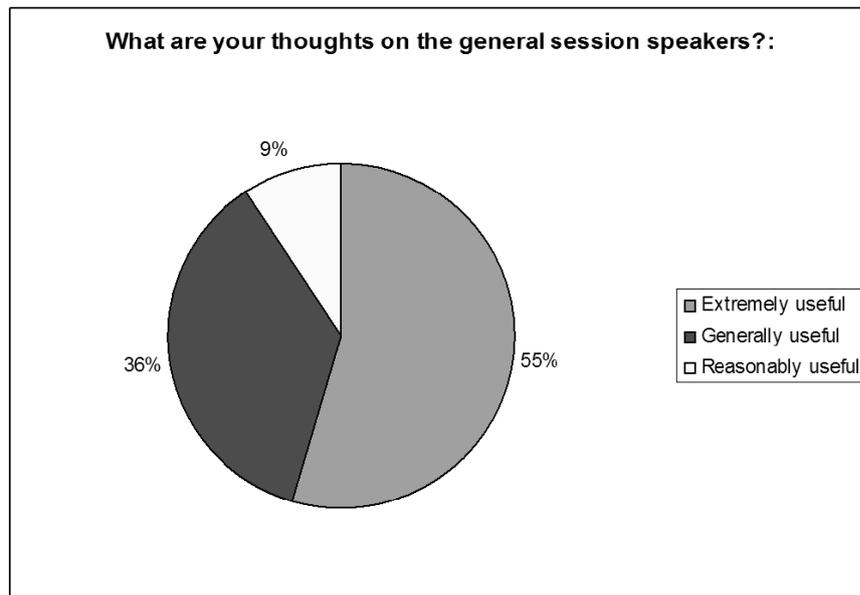
It was difficult within a one day conference to allow too much choice to delegates because of time constraints. It was unfortunate if the workshop delegates attended was not as relevant as they first thought. The increased choice reflects better in the 'Try it Out in 10 minute' sessions where delegates could choose up to three.

(8) Which *Try-it out in 10 minute sessions* did you attend? (of those that responded)

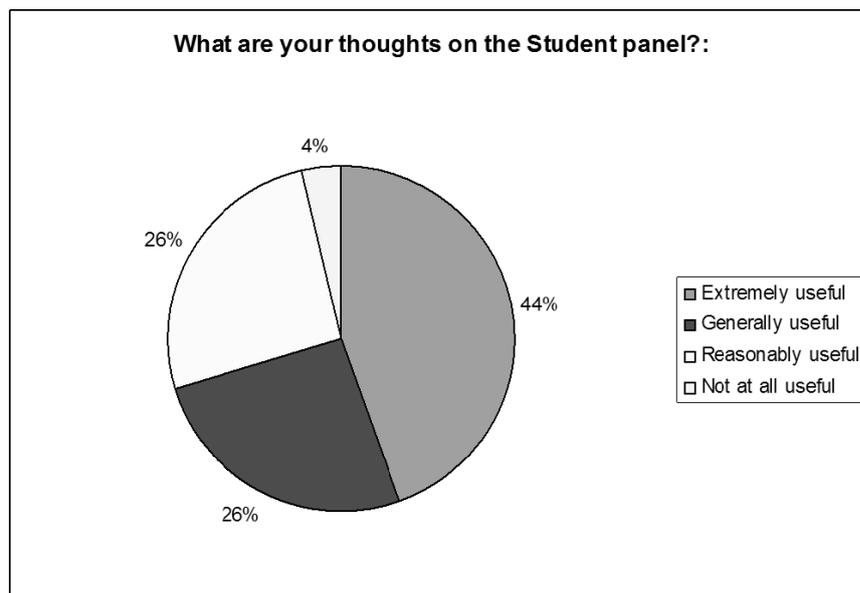
- "Not another bloomin' essay": students designing their own assessment
– 12 people attended
- The Leeds Met First level assessment and feedback project (FLAP) audit tool
– 9 people attended
- "Our Week 1": using new and continuing students' voices evaluating their induction and orientation experiences to inform the curriculum
– 15 people attended
- Closing the loop on Student Feedback
– 12 people attended
- "Think Tank" Meetings: Inclusive Learning Through Discourse
– 10 people attended
- Using the 'One minute paper'
– 8 people attended
- From student consultation to action research
– 14 people attended

These responses do not necessarily indicate the interest shown in the session as they relate only to the delegates who responded to the questionnaire. However all respondents found that these sessions were useful or extremely useful. Generally there was some very positive feedback on this concept.

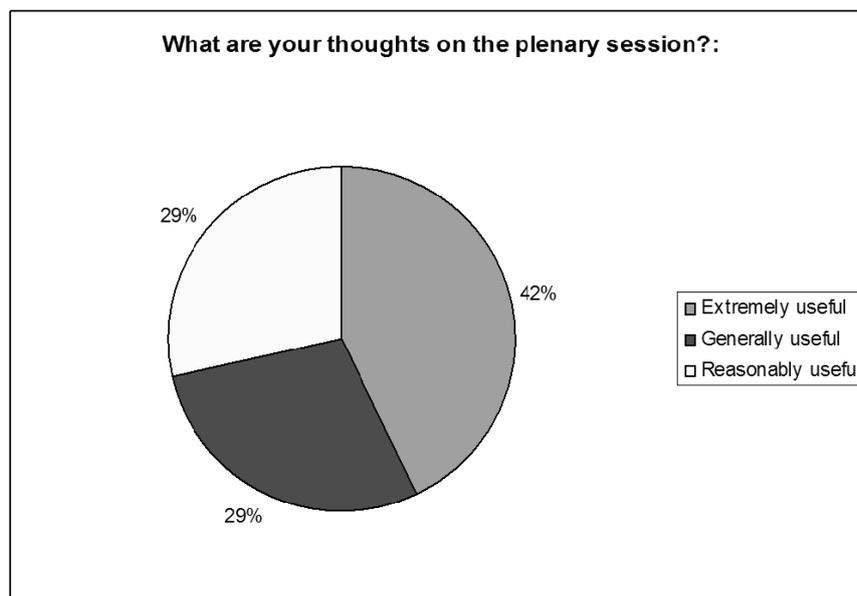
(9) What are your thoughts on the general session speakers?



(10) What are your thoughts on the Student panel?



(11) What are your thoughts on the plenary session?



(12) The thing I liked **most** about the day

These comments were extremely encouraging and support some of the areas above. The strength of variety and innovation came over strongly in these responses.

- Informal day
- Range of practical innovations
- Networking
- Pleasant, efficient, most enjoyable
- Concentrated focus on the student voice
- Creative ideas, sharing ideas with colleagues
- Good location, excellent facilities, near the station, good discussion topics
- Staff, student dialogue & partnerships, so many enthusiastic people in one place
- Introductory session
- Handouts – a good general premise
- Representatives, how much say a student should have
- AMAZING workshops & 10 minute sessions
- Discussions with colleagues & learning what other universities are doing
- Lots of ideas
- The morning sessions were of most use to me
- Try-it out sessions
- Making contact with colleagues
- The varied discussions, questions generated, keynote & 10 min discussions
- Lots of ideas to take away
- Lots of interesting ideas for us to take back
- Many varied sessions
- Student Panel
- Variety
- Sharing ideas, hearing students & SU people

- Finding out about the way other people get feedback & using feedback (Closing the loop)
- Talking to like minded individuals, learning new ideas & networking
- Welcoming, friendly, lots of choice in sessions - would liked to have to attend all sessions, workshops
- Interesting sessions, space & time to network between sessions
- Answered lots of questions for me about what I am doing and student responses
- Networking and 10 minute session
- New knowledge, meeting relevant.

(13) The thing I did ***not like*** about the day

Even some of these comments were offered in a positive manner and reinforce many of the remarks above. The 'Try it out in 10 minute' sessions received some comments relating to how to improve them. However the basic rationale for these sessions was just 10 minutes so that attendees could just get a flavour of what people were doing. Any longer and you would cut down the number that delegates could attend. A compromise in the future may be 15 minutes. However the concept did prove to be popular. Other comments below will be taken into account in any future event.

- Extra time in try it out
- Parallel workshops, 1 out of 4!
- Too much stuff to get to grips with
- Thoroughly enjoyed the day – learned a lot
- Rooms all over the place
- Afternoon keynote V Good but didn't address the title or abstract
- Would have liked titles for Student panel
- Stumbled upon it & wanted time to exchange ideas before the day
- The workshops were too general, more specific examples needed
- Student session – having a student there = not much, did not understand student session at all
- No 4 Workshop
- More signs needed to direct to locations (Arrows), more paper needed for taking notes
- Could have been asked if we could bring students
- Leaders seemed to understand the try it out in 10 mins sessions and didn't make the most of the time
- Lack of students at the start of the event! (Student & staff keynote would have been nice!)
- More discussion time needed especially in 10 min sessions
- It was hard to focus in some 10 min sessions as 2 groups going at the same time in a room
- 2pm workshop needed to be more structured
- Would have liked to go to all 10 min sessions
- Was all good!
- 1 day too short
- Very short, so much to say!
- Was all good!
- Nothing

- Shortage of time
- No chair for the student panel and not enough students.

(14) Any other **comments** about the day?

Many of these comments can be seen as positive and where not note will be taken for any future events

- Better area to eat/drink/socialise
- Useful to see other approaches, professional “Vet” staff
- Try it out in 10 minutes could be longer
- A great day. Thank you
- Really useful, thanks a lot
- Good format & good to have tasty food
- More please
- Useful to know that the issues facing all institutions are similar & are being approached in a broader similar way
- Leeds useful than expected but not sure why! Some good example of stuff being done but all very patchy
- Went away with some useful ideas, The SU should do a lecture ranking questionnaire each semester
- Shorter coffee/lunch breaks, more time for sessions, Wish more time to attend ALL, really inspirational
- Very well organised event on the day
- The event should be promoted to student unions as they need to be working with institutions as partners on this issue
- Session by Ann Rumpus was great
- 2pm session was confusing: Didn’t see the relevance & would have liked more discussion time
- Great as students were able to participate
- 10 min sessions too short for questions
- Excellent in all aspects
- Nice to have mobility & short sessions to keep us awake in the middle & discussion at the end
- Great! Need more people to join in and engage
- Very well organised
- A very informative day & really well looked after. Rose Bowl a lovely setting
- Very useful event, interesting ideas & good contacts
- The events management girl was really helpful
- Great setting, fantastic building
- More student input needed.

(15) As a result of your participation would you be interested in contributing to the project – through institutional activities or by providing a case study? If so, please provide brief details and contact information:

- Possibly – depends on what opportunities there are
- Yes – Happy to reappear once project is complete

- Definitely
- Yes
- Would be interested in getting involved around student understanding of language
- Interested in ongoing into about the project & will follow on the website
- Yes
- Yes – a student ambassador at CILASS would be useful
- Yes – could do a case study of using “Student” voice in re-write
- Already doing so through Ann Rumpus
- Yes
- Maybe
- Yes not sure how though
- Yes
- Yes.

Contact details have been removed but there was a keen interest in the project.

Overall comments on the event were extremely positive and delegates appeared to have gained from the day. Areas that may need attention, at any similar event, will be to allow more students to attend and to structure and facilitate their sessions better. Attendees still enjoy workshops and perhaps time could be given to attending 2 workshops, each being 40 minutes rather than an hour. The ‘try it out’ in 10 minute sessions were well received and comments appeared to relate to the length of time. A compromise in the future would be to better brief presenters and to make them 15 minutes.

Appendix 4

Discussion paper at SEDA conference *Engaging with Student Expectations*. 8 May 2008

Whose curriculum is it anyway? Involving students in curriculum design and development

Presenters

Ann Rumpus and Fiona Campbell, University of Westminster and Edinburgh Napier University

Session learning outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- discuss how students can be meaningfully involved in the design and development of the curriculum
- consider the transferability of the exemplars of practice showcased to their own contexts
- explore wider issues involved in this process

Session outline

This session will explore involving students meaningfully in shaping the curriculum. James Alexander (current President of NUS Scotland), in recently discussing what makes for inspirational learning, stated “we must engage with students in a richer, more deliberate way at the course level that acknowledges their right...to participate in the development and design of their own curriculum.²² Participation at this level can both enhance the curriculum (which benefits from the fresh ideas and profound insights which students bring) and motivate students (with evidence showing that there is a direct correlation between students perceiving that their contribution is valued by their institution and engaging with their courses).²³

Drawing on their work within the Hearing the Student Voice project²⁴ which investigated effective means to capture and use the student voice to inform and enhance academic professional development, the presenters will discuss ways in which they have begun to use the same principles and methods to enable the student voice to inform curriculum development and design. The session will showcase initial work they have undertaken which is involving students in this activity and will discuss how to equip students to contribute, encourage staff to facilitate student participation and the impact of this process. In the ensuing discussion participants will have an opportunity to share their experiences of involving students in the development and design of curricula and debate wider issues relating to this activity such as:

- do staff know best what the curriculum should be?
- what if students don't like what staff think is better for them in the long term?
- are we in danger of giving students unrealistic expectations from their involvement in curriculum development?
- are students and staff equal partners in the learning and teaching process?

- and, ultimately, who owns the curriculum?

Group activity

Each group considered the following areas and recorded their views on a flipchart:

1. Encouraging participation
2. Ensuring representation
3. Protecting students' interests
4. Enabling meaningful discussion
5. Preserving the authenticity of the student voice
6. Encouraging students to be creative, not reactive.

Group members then circulated and used Post-it[®] notes to add their comments on each area.

A summary of contributions for each area follows.

1. Encouraging participation

Work to date in several institutions has indicated that it is difficult to recruit students to partake in projects seeking their opinion. Although students who have participated have never found their involvement a waste of time. What ideas, or experience, do you have about how we can encourage their participation?

Flip chart notes

- Incentives to participate (money, lunch, vouchers)
- Offer a wage (contract to deliver a product) – Student Guide to Assessment
- C.V. enhancement
- Accreditation (within a course)
- Skills development
- Networking (industry contacts)

Post it® notes

- Keep students' interests in mind; don't let the 'process' of research obliterate this.
- Develop sense of community – shared interests and objectives.
- Focus on individual differences and remember one size doesn't fit all.
- 'Hijack' a teaching session (needs a sympathetic colleague!)
- Hijack sessions
- Act on what they say and feed it back to them. That's the only motivation they need.
- Give them time to think, pair them, ask them to share their views.
- EBL project at Glasgow University (Students as Ed-Dev colleagues).
- Develop professionalism – help students to see that participation is a duty as well as a right – make links with democratic process (should vote even if spoil ballot paper).
- Job-shop rates for doing specific project.
- You need to be flexible.
- Make it part of their development – skills for employability?
- On-line.
- Involve them again in the actions that ensue from their input, close the feedback loop.
- Effective feedback and timely.
- Assess participation by on-line blogs. Involve different levels eg. level 3 to tutor/train level 1 students.

2. Ensuring representation

Students who participate in contributing their views and ideas may not be fully representative of the student group as a whole, and particular groups may be less likely to volunteer. In your view does this matter? And if so, how can better representation be achieved?

Flip chart notes

Does representation matter? Yes

Can do this by making sure that access is open and inviting to all. Consider time, place, access, advertising.

Very useful to have informal mechanisms for feedback eg. 10 mins at the end of a lecture.

Ongoing feedback – not just at the end of a programme.

Individuals in a minority can't represent the views of all in that group.

Post it® notes

- Need to train reps to be able to do it well.
- Lead by example: respect, interests and dignified engagement.
- Have sufficient reps and then have a 'rep of the reps' finally.
- Need to be better at getting good reps in the first place.
- Not representative but depth and difference in a diverse student population.
- Unless a student is given role of being representative can only express own view. Is this a problem? I would investigate point raised by individual to find out whether or not it affected others and respond accordingly.
- Build it in to formal programmes eg. PPD.
- Ensure future audiences know that feedback isn't necessarily representative. Don't make false claims!
- Need to balance yes to representation against different student motivations for HE/course etc.
- Yes it matters. Need particular strategies for mature and DL students for example.
- Do some of it in teaching time.
- Need to involve students at scale if you want true representation.
- Don't expect a single student to represent all. Their views are individual.

3. Protecting students' interests

Previous work suggest that students are less likely to come forward and volunteer their views in a face to face setting with staff who teach them, as they have the perception that if their views are unpopular they may be penalised. However this face-to-face interaction has the greatest impact on staff. How can this dilemma be resolved so that the students can feel confident that in contributing their views their interests are protected?

Flip chart notes

- Show by example is safe to give views – student from previous year reassuring current year.
- Get someone else to get the views – not involved in teaching or assessing them.
- Student groups – give joint response.
- Audio booth – somehow disguise voice.
- Explain consequences of giving views.
- Develop trust between teacher and student so not afraid to contribute.
- Develop students' ability to give constructive feedback – less likely to cause offence and, therefore, retribution.
- Use feedback to make a change at early stage (eg. week 4) so can see effect is positive.
- On-line discussion forum or wiki – safe environment.
- Suggestion box.

Post it® notes

- Show students how their views have made a difference or helped implement change.
- Practice “real” feedback in staff meetings/workshops – so staff understand what it feels like.
- Be aware of their values, attitudes and welfare.
- Link and guide students to the value of their views.
- Don't use student feedback to threaten staff. Use it to constructively challenge.
- Hold meetings outside dept. in neutral place.
- Need to change institutional culture to facilitate free speech – this is a big problem!

4. Enabling meaningful discussion

The things which occupy students most and which they want to talk about may not be the things which will help us in shaping the curriculum. However if we lead the interaction by asking questions we risk losing some valuable input and perspectives. How do we achieve the balance between asking what we want and listening to what the students want? How do we avoid raising unrealistic expectations?

Flip chart notes

- Consider the scope and purpose.
- Create a listening climate.
- Create a sense of belonging including ownership.
- Student ideas of what constitutes threshold concept.

DANGER

- Is there a danger of over consultation that may suggest it could be meaningless.
- Ethical – can you deliver what is requested.

Post it® notes

- Issue of power and control over learning environment and items.
- Avoid using academic language to scope and purpose.
- Bottom-up discussions – ask student to devise their own approaches to feedback.
- Start with examples of effective questions and responses and respond gladly and enthusiastically.
- Make it clear how their comments will be acted on and close the feedback loop by letting them know the outcomes.
- Have a plan (fluid if prefer) re: objective and keep to it.
- Listen.
- Listen and show action from listening.
- To be non-judgemental.
- Show/illustrate actions from listening, more likely to engage them.
- Give clear instructions and be prepared to listen to their views.
- Divert leadership of sessions to students.
- Be honest about scope of influence and set expectations.
- Involve them at the outset with creating the questions.
- ?or troublesome knowledge.

5. Preserving the authenticity of the student voice

Protecting the identity of the students, so that they feel that can make any comment without any fear of an adverse response, can be via mediation through a third party. However this can lead to their views being summarised and hence can lose the 'real' student comment. What methods can we use to ensure that we capture the force of their 'real words'?

Flip chart notes

- Real-time capture: audio (can protect identity) or video.
- Transcript – exactly the words used.
- Through 3rd party – unedited.
- Live (in lectures) questionnaire collection (anonymous) re: thoughts on feedback.
- Pyramid model (see James Wisdom) re: collection of views by a member of staff who doesn't know the students.
- Anonymous blogging.
- Discussion boards.
- Capturing the 'feeling'/emotion behind the comments.
- Reflective review within modules.
- Anonymity not necessarily an issue – as long as students know their voice will be listened to/acted on.

Post it® notes

- Use clickers in lectures to gather feedback – quick.
- Use Post-it® notes!
- Importance of inflection and para-linguistic features.
- Use audio recording – encourage them to use accents/dialect.
- Use 'Delphi technique' to gather individual views, and feedback as a group.
- Use the 'my friend says...' method, work in small groups.
- Use SMS text messaging – instant and quick.
- Highlight the value, role and respect of authenticity.
- Speak/write in own first language or visually.

6. Encouraging students to be creative, not reactive

Students become very familiar (through questionnaires etc) with responding on their current provision. How do we get students to be more creative in suggesting what they would like of the curriculum? Do they have the language to express this? How do we avoid raising unrealistic expectations?

Flip chart notes

- Relate to their culture – use of metaphors – Carling don't do curricula but if they did?
- Questioning for change.
- 'blue skies' thinking – not how to change what is now but now there is nothing what are you going to put there.
- S.I.D. – Student Imagination Day.

Post it® notes

- Agree – visualising 'making' drawing etc. their 'journey/s'.
- Invite no wrong answer – use Post it® notes and 'trees and branches' for different ideas.
- Don't over consult them eg. too many end of module questionnaires.
- Out of the box – pictorial, musical, sculptural etc.
- Who decides what is an unrealistic expectation?
- Support students in developing their understanding (!) of learning and teaching – students pedagogy awareness.
- Use strength based approaches like appreciative writing.
- Do an exercise like this in a staff-student liaison meeting.
- Lead by example – be creative with student.
- Allow students time alone to discuss issues.
- Phrase the interactions in an aspirational way – don't ask them about the past – ask what they think about the future.
- Involve them in curriculum design at early stage – so realise what is possible and not possible.
- Use photos and cartoons instead of words and texts.
- Design in to an assessment.
- Give them tools eg. six thinking hats and show them how to use them.
- Visualising their future as well as future students.

Plenary discussion

Student involvement in the curriculum

There can be institutional barriers to involving students eg

- Academic year
- Academic quality and standards: 'Tail wagging the academic dog'. Good to involve these staff in academic decisions so they can better understand and accommodate reasons for changes in practice.

Also need to upskill external examiners: one participant has involved students in a course resulting in a lively discussion at the panel but panel members didn't know what to make of it or how to deal with it.

Increased student involvement in the curriculum can lead to increased academic ability and engagement and motivation with the course.

At an enquiry-based learning course at the University of Glasgow, the students know more from the staff. One student said: 'For the first time I feel like I'm a grown-up in the room'.

In problem-based courses students are involved through:

- Negotiating the curriculum
- Agreeing learning outcomes.

What if students don't like what staff think is better for them in the long term?

Consultation with first year students can be problematic. One participant commented on how students had found learning core concepts difficult and painful. Only in retrospect could they see why they had to go through the process.

Student participation

Encouraging participation should be made part of students' courses routinely. Such participation teaches:

- Critical thinking
- Reasoning
- Writing skills.

Appendix 5

Project case studies

The case studies below are detailed on the following pages.

Using a “Think Tank” to hear students' voices in an Art and Design module

Contact: Katie Hayes, University of Westminster

Listening to students in Biosciences modules

Contact: Mark Clements and Mark Kerrigan, University of Westminster

Using an online survey at course level to hear the student voice in Computer Science and Social Sciences

Contact: Tim Taylor, University of Westminster

The CILASS Student Ambassador Network

Contact: Sabine Little, University of Sheffield

Student online discussion: assessing the masses

Contact: Stephen Henderson, Leeds Metropolitan University

Closing the loop on student feedback

Contact: Rai Shacklock and Julia Tim, Leeds Metropolitan University

“Our Week 1”: using new and continuing students' voices to evaluate their induction and orientation experiences

Contact: Fiona Campbell, Edinburgh Napier University

“A Big conversation” on feedback

Contact: Mark Huxham, Edinburgh Napier University

“In their own words”: using student voices to design effective pre-arrival induction for international students

Contact: Monika Foster, Edinburgh Napier University

Using a student voice approach to develop more inclusive and diverse ways of assessing coursework

Contact: Bridget Middlemas, Roehampton University

“Not another bloomin' essay”: students taking control of their assessment

Student evaluation: ICT module students

Student evaluation: CLLC module students

Contact: Jenny Eland, Birmingham City University

Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

Using a “Think Tank” to hear Students’ Voices in an Art and Design module

Institution

University of Westminster

Background

This case study was initiated as part of the *InCurriculum* project, an NTFS Fellowship project, run in conjunction with Norwich University College of the Arts and Bedfordshire University. This aims to analyse the factors which enable students with Specific Learning difficulties (dyslexia, dyspraxia etc.) to be successful in higher education when studying art and design and to examine how these approaches (and in particular attributes of assessment) could be transferred to other subjects. An analysis of the factors that supported the learning of such students was undertaken by a detailed examination of learning on art and design modules in the three institutions. This work within the University of Westminster incorporated hearing the students’ voice into the project and it has generously been offered as a contribution to the Student Voice project. The details of the *InCurriculum* project can be found at www.incurriculum.org.uk

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to involving students?
Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

The University’s Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy promotes student-centred, active learning, and we are aware that this should involve the use of student views on the design and delivery of the curriculum. As part of the *InCurriculum* project two modules in Art and Design were being examined in terms of determining what students with dyslexia found supportive in the teaching and learning activities they experienced. This led to the approach used in this case study of asking students to comment on their experiences through sessions inbuilt into the module. This had the advantage of being embedded into the learning so demanding no additional time from the students and also to ensure a direct emphasis on the module itself; we were aware that much feedback from the students is generic, relating to their courses and their experiences as a whole and not to a specific module.

Solution

Describe in some detail how the students were involved
How were students recruited?
In what way is the student voice employed?

Two separate modules “Preparation for Dissertation “ (level 5) and “Final Major Project” (level 6) of the BA Graphic Information Design were utilised in this study, the facilitator, a member of the Art and Design staff, was the Module Leader for one module and a member of the module team for the other. At three points during the delivery of the two separate modules the students were divided into small groups (3 groups in all) where activities were designed to align with key points of assessment, to help the students understand what they were addressing in the work, and to feedback to the module lecturers their views on the content and delivery of the curriculum; these sessions were labelled “Think Tanks”.

Particular issues the students were guided to were their strategies for approaching assessment, their processes of learning, how they helped each other, and how they understood the assessment criteria. Each of the sessions was 45 minutes long, and the facilitator sat in, to guide them if necessary to keep to the topic, and primarily to listen. The work started with all the students participating in a learning styles questionnaire, to get them thinking about learning, and then they addressed issues of delivery and assessment and their role in this. This was part of their normal taught time in the studio.

The facilitator supported these discussions and took notes on the salient features of the discussions. During these sessions students made comments indicating what they found helpful, or less so, in terms of teaching, eg “We need more feedback on our oral presentations”, it was also evident that the students clearly expected feedback on their comments; it was easy to provide this directly by oral feedback in a subsequent class. The outcomes were sufficiently valuable that the process was repeated in the following year.

Results

What have the results been?
What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits?
In what ways, if any, did employing the student voice make a difference?

The students participated in the discussion within the module and made useful observations, which the module leader/facilitator was able to act on directly. It was evident that the students had useful and intelligent things to say and that in these sessions it was possible to enter into a real dialogue with the students, for example about what feedback on their assessments they would find most useful. It was evident that students did see this process as an embedded part of the teaching on the modules, rather than as a separate activity to elicit feedback from them.

Other outcomes of this work were:

A better understanding by the Module Leader of the students’ motivation to study.

In particular the Module Leader gained a better understanding of the students' perceptions of the assessment processes and their understanding of the assessment criteria.

That it was evident that there were marked differences between the staff and students' understanding of the assessment criteria.

The view that the "think tank" processes could be delivered effectively at the course level rather than concentrating it on a single module. In this way it would be beneficial as it would involve more staff, but would not have the immediacy of being a direct part of the module delivery.

The view the students were less inhibited in talking freely to the lecturer facilitating the sessions (who did this on both modules) when she was not the Module Leader, it appeared that they felt less able to be critical when in the module where she was the Module Leader.

An insight (as this was undertaken in two consecutive years) that this was an excellent way of meeting the different needs of different cohorts, with the possibly of immediate feedback on their comments.

The possibility that the approach might also have an impact on supporting student socialisation within the HE context, and help them to learn to use their 'Voice' effectively and to see this as part of their education.

Learning points

What were the key points for success?

What were the things you would do differently if starting again?

What were/are the main risks?

The approach was clearly successful in that in the discussion of the learning and assessment in the module within the teaching time the students not only gained a better understanding of their own learning and approaches to assessment but also provided the facilitator with the authentic 'student voice'. It is essential that the discussions (which were student led) are established in such a way that the students perceive them as helpful and relevant to their learning.

The facilitator was aware that of the value of the comments to her when heard directly from the student discussion, but when reporting to the other Module Leader, who was not present at the 'think tanks', it was more onerous to adequately translate the richness of the students' comments. Hence by the time the comments have been transferred to other staff teaching on the module they are somewhat 'diluted' – in future it might be useful to capture key words and phrases and the use 'word cloud' software to express these, or this could be met by using a tape recorder, but then resources would be required for the transcription.

The main risk was that the students would be inhibited in discussion given the presence of the facilitator, using a member of staff in whom the students had a high level of trust in was a key element of this work. This could have been met by using an independent

facilitator but then some of the immediate learning insights from the students might have been lost, and this would dilute the sense that this was an embedded part of the module. There was also a risk that the sessions could drift into a 'complaints' session rather than being with constructive comments and positive suggestions.

This was undertaken with two practically based Art and Design modules with small student numbers; it would have been much more difficult to achieve in a large module.

As the project ran over two years, students who participated in the second year had been exposed to it previously in the other module. These students were not so forthcoming at this second 'exposure', this might have been due to the novelty having worn off, or it might have been anxiety about their project (a triple module) and hence looking for more direction from the staff to 'get it right'.

Resources

What resources did the development take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

The resources required to undertake this approach were very low and consisted of a small amount of time of the staff facilitator in designing the sessions.

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for continued student involvement?

This approach can be continued with minimum support and is adaptable to a far wider range of modules.

Further information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?

Useful literature/weblinks

Are there any publications in the literature relevant to this development that you would recommend?

Are there any publications describing this development?

Are there any relevant weblinks to follow up?

Details of the *InCurriculum* project can be found at the website
www.incurriculum.org.uk

Contact

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Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

Listening to Students in Biosciences modules

Institution

University of Westminster

Background

In about 100 words describe the background to this development

Many criticisms of work on gathering the students' voices, where this information has been gathered at the institution or course level, is that the comments are generic and difficult to apply to particular modules, and hence less useful in curriculum development. In this work the issue has been addressed in two modules in Biosciences where comment has been directly sought from the students studying the modules, so that the feedback can directly influence the teaching, learning and assessment environment. An important element of this work was the attempt to create a dialogue with the students about their learning and this was addressed in two ways, by direct face-to-face interaction in one module and through simple web technologies in the second.

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to involving students?
Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy emphasises student-centred learning so it was also seen as important to create a method for students to have an input into their learning and to stimulate an increased dialogue with academic staff. The project team were keen to explore a means of gaining feedback which was specific to any given module, which would occur during the delivery of the module (formal feedback questionnaires are used at the end of the module) and which could result in immediate feedback and action.

Solution

Describe in some detail how the students were involved
How were students recruited?
In what way is the student voice employed?

In a small postgraduate module on Medical Microbiology the module leader made a conscious attempt to explain the learning and teaching approaches he was using in the module. He then sought direct feedback from the students, using anonymous Post-it[®] notes, on two occasions in the module (one early in the delivery), asking for feedback

on the learning activities and for suggestions on improvement. He received some useful comments on both the content and the delivery of the module. The module also included a period of guided independent study and when the students returned to present the outcomes of this in seminars they were asked to fill in an anonymous open-ended questionnaire on this learning experience and leave this in his pigeon hole. Again he found a high level of useful responses. This was repeated with another postgraduate module, on Industrial Biotechnology, using a wider range of methods of asking for feedback; he experimented with using a flip camera for the students to record their comments, but although they enjoyed this experience, he felt that the very obvious lack of anonymity might have been an inhibiting factor.

For a large first year undergraduate module on Physiology and Anatomy the lecturer wanted to achieve a forum where students could comment on their learning, discuss the module and link external interests and reading to the content of the module. This was done by creating multiple discussion boards on the VLE for each assessment for general module entries and one called 'Let's talk science'. This was presented to the students in the following way

"I am rather excited about the 'Let's talk Science' board. I would like to use this to talk about lectures, practicals and tutorials. Not the logistics of these, but instead content, ideas, press articles, questions and anything else relevant. I am interested to hear your views, your ideas and hopefully we can generate some interesting discussions; not just with me but with each other. I hope by sharing, commenting and developing thoughts, we can relate the module to degree pathways and excitingly, the broader community of science."

By the mid-point of the module there was a mixture of responses, with some students posting significant amounts of material while others did not actively engage with the discussion. This has given the module leader a valuable insight into the students' motivation and interests, and in particular has indicated a range of topics which the students are interested in and wish to pursue. This will have a direct impact on both the current and future content of the module as well as feeding into related modules thus supporting cross-module development.

Results

What have the results been?

What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits?

In what ways, if any, did employing the student voice make a difference?

The engagement and comment from the students was valuable on both modules. In both cases the students made helpful suggestions about both the content and the delivery of the curriculum, which the Module Leaders found useful, and were able to put into operation, both within the current delivery of the module and for future curriculum development. It was clear that the students had perceptive and constructive insights on their learning and teaching experiences.

On the small postgraduate module it was observed that the process of engaging in the feedback was initially surprising to the some of the students but they quickly actively engaged with the process. This had the apparent effect of making the entire group more

interactive in the discussion elements of the module delivery, and this may have been particularly helpful for students from overseas who are less used to such an interactive approach. Students initially only gave positive feedback at the start of the process however more constructive feedback was obtained when students were encouraged to give both a negative and positive comment. It was also important to vary the ways in which students were asked to provide the input, too much reliance on one method (eg “Post it[®]” notes) meant that an important novelty factor was lost.

In the large undergraduate module (~300 students) about a third of the students interacted with the web discussion boards. They made some really useful comments about the content of the module and engaged in an active debate, including reference to some additional literature sources on some of the academic content of the module. They demonstrated a strong need to relate the content of the module to the outside world. The discussion boards relating to the assessments had a lower range of responses. Specific outcomes were: that the students expressed a desire to set up a scientific society to discuss topics of current general scientific interest; including particular topics to be included in the module, suggesting outside speakers and offering to help with the organisation; that students have an ongoing online forum for the discussion of science. These students have now gone on to create an official Bioscience Society, the first in the School to further their interests and get more staff and students involved. They are holding their first freshers’ event this year.

From these experiences it was concluded that:

For both Module Leaders the direct engagement with the students’ views was helpful in developing the curriculum, content and delivery, both in the short and longer term. The Module Leaders also felt that they gained the benefit of knowing their students better as a result of the interaction, and having a greater understanding of their motivation and interests. That the engagement of the students had a wider benefit to them in terms of their active involvement with the module and the learning acquired. Both Module Leaders will continue with this work as an embedded part of the modules.

Learning points

What were the key points for success?

What were the things you would do differently if starting again?

What were/are the main risks?

A key element of the success of this approach to gaining the students’ voices was that the Module Leaders concerned have a good relationship with the students and engendered a high level of trust. The risk was that students would be hesitant in expressing their views when their input was not anonymous. However this risk was ameliorated by the openness with which the Module Leaders discussed their approaches to learning and teaching and shared with the students what they were trying to achieve with the module delivery.

Resources

What resources did the development take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

The work with the small postgraduate module involved very little in terms of the resources required.

In the work with the large undergraduate module the initial development of the discussion board took a significant amount of the Module Leader's time, and then additional time to engage with the outcomes of the discussions. However, he considered that this was time well spent given the academic engagement of the students.

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for continued student involvement?

None in relation to the interactivity in the small postgraduate module. Ongoing technical support and time to maintain and develop the discussion board for the large undergraduate module. The Bioscience Society required initial funding and this has been provided by the Students' Union and by the School. Both have pledged ongoing support to help promote activities.

Further information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?

Useful literature/weblinks

Are there any publications in the literature relevant to this development that you would recommend?

Are there any publications describing this development?

Are there any relevant weblinks to follow up?

Contact

Contact name and details

Mark Clements M.O.Clements@westminster.ac.uk for small postgraduate module

Mark Kerrigan M.J.Kerrigan@westminster.ac.uk for large undergraduate module

Both:

School of Life Sciences

University of Westminster

Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

Using an online survey at course level to hear the student voice in Computer Science and Social Sciences

Institution

University of Westminster

Background

Two big modular courses undergoing the normal 5-year review process sought feedback from students through an online questionnaire; previously feedback had only related specifically to modules through paper-based questionnaires. These courses were located in Computer Sciences and in Social Sciences, and it was expected that this would be a useful comparison of these two different subject areas. The work was undertaken by a partnership between a member of academic staff from the University Educational Initiative Centre, a central educational development unit, and a Head of Department in each of the relevant subject areas. The online questionnaire involved both quantitative and qualitative questions, and was designed to be appropriate for both courses. The intention was to use this as a way of identifying issues and then asking students who expressed an interest in this to subsequent focus groups for a more in-depth discussion.

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to involving students?
Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

The University is increasingly aware of the need to engage students in course design and development, to ensure that the needs of a diverse and changing student population are taken into account in course development. This aligns with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy of the University which promotes student-centred, active learning. The very large modular courses have large classes and opportunities for informal staff/student contact are restricted. Previously the courses have gained feedback from small groups of students through course committee meetings and small groups meeting for annual quality monitoring and with validation panels, but in this instance the course teams wanted to elicit a wider representation of the students' views, and one which was proactive, feeding into course development, rather than reactive. Other feedback had been gathered through annual module feedback questionnaires, but these only related to specific modules, not to course issues at large and it had been noted that very few students added qualitative comments; it is the opinions of students contributed through such comments that were deemed most valuable. It was thus determined to use an online questionnaire, followed by in-depth focus groups with selected volunteer students.

Solution

Describe in some detail how the students were involved

How were students recruited?

In what way is the student voice employed?

Two modular degree schemes were selected, both of which were preparing to go through review in the following year. The questionnaires were designed by the Educational Initiative Centre in partnership with staff from the subject areas. Both quantitative and open-ended qualitative questions were included, there being a good balance between the types of question. It was delivered to the students online, in such a way that their answers were anonymous, and with a flexible timescale for the response. The questionnaire was delivered late in the summer term, when most of the students had completed their assessments, but nevertheless were still sufficiently engaged with the University.

Results

What have the results been?

What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits?

In what ways, if any, did employing the student voice make a difference?

It was found that high number of students responded from both discipline areas, there was no notable difference in the way the questionnaire operated between computer sciences and social sciences, equally responses of male and female students were representative. Students of all years, ages and ethnic groupings responded, with no notable preponderances or exceptions in these. The students responded very much their own voice, using very colloquial terminology (see appendix 1), and with a much greater level of response to the qualitative questions (both in number of responses and length of the comments) than has been previously seen with the paper-based questionnaire.

Because of the extremely good level of constructive comment it was decided that it was not necessary to run the focus groups. This decision was also influenced by the fact that this came at a time of great change within University; in both areas of delivery the University had decided to restructure to a significant level. This resulted in the course reviews being delayed for a year, and understandably the staff in the Departments were concerned with other issues than potential focus groups. The comment gained from the students was very useful to inform staff thinking generally for the re-writing of the courses, although in a different environment the data might have been put to a wider range of uses. It also had to be acknowledged that the input from the students was on the whole generic to the course, although individual modules were mentioned sometimes; it did not have the fine grain of detail about individual modules.

Useful comments were obtained from students on both the content and aspects of the delivery of the curriculum, and these without doubt influenced the staff's consideration of the re-development of the curriculum. Due to the delay in the validation and the other pre-occupations of staff due to the re-structuring, it is less easy to point to direct issues of cause and effect in the outcomes.

Questions were also put to students about the “student voice” and they responded that they feel that they should have a say in what they learn and how they learn and are taught. They also indicated that they would be willing to discuss their experiences at Westminster in more detail.

Learning points

What were the key points for success?
What were the things you would do differently if starting again?
What were/are the main risks?

Successful aspects included:

Thoughtful design of the questionnaire, so that students felt able to relate to the questions.

Ensuring the anonymity for the students who answered the questionnaires

Dual working with staff from the central educational development unit and the academic departments ensured the appropriateness of the work and its relevance to staff.

The value of the richness of the students’ responses.

The value of targeting information at the course level, where responses were different from those at module level, or about the wider student experience.

The fact that students commented on both the content and the delivery of the curriculum and that most of the comments were positive and constructive.

In retrospect it was unfortunate that the structural changes had an impact on the use of the data, it lost its immediate relevance as the course developments were delayed, and hence some of the potential impact of the work was lost; however, we recognise that it would have been difficult to militate against this. This also prevented any follow up work with the students about the impact of the questionnaire or the outcomes for students through the redesign of the course.

The main risk was the concern that few students would return the questionnaire or that the answers to the qualitative questions would be trivial or irrelevant. In the event these fears proved completely unfounded, the work yielded a wealth of useful information.

Resources

What resources did the development take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

Time for staff in both the central unit and the Departments in developing the questionnaire and setting it up online

Staff time in the analysis of the results.

The students will also have given time to answering the questionnaire, but there is no evidence that this was in any way a problem for them.

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for continued student involvement?

If this were to be followed up in future there would be a need for technical and staff resources. The University has now developed an online student experience questionnaire, which was in a small part informed by the work in this project.

Further information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?

A sample of the students' qualitative comments is attached in appendix 1.

Useful literature/weblinks

Are there any publications in the literature relevant to this development that you would recommend?

Are there any publications describing this development?

Are there any relevant weblinks to follow up?

Contact

Contact name and details

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Working with:

Sue Black (Harrow School of Computer Sciences) and Maggie Summer (School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Languages)

Appendix 1

Selected example comments from students in response to qualitative questions (NB all quotes are verbatim)

Q8. Which elements of the course content (if any) have you found particularly interesting and/or motivating?

- I enjoy the technical side of IT. Tell us more about what's under the hood. Confidence grows from understanding and not just using IT (computing).
- Those involving projects we did on our own, and could ask for advice or help from the tutor (eg. java, flash, hci) (computing).
- The style of teaching by X and Y and interaction between the teachers and student was so mind enriching that I was motivated in learning and researching the module in advance. The academic atmosphere filled with happiness and mind enriching experiences (computing).
- I really found the modules Self & Society and Sociological Classics interesting modules to study as they approached topics/subjects that were not only relevant in the past but also relevant in today's society (social sciences).
- Presentations were particularly motivating, since I had to stand in front of many people which made me even more prepared and I could improve skills how to communicate well in front of a crowd (social sciences).

Q9. Which elements of the course content have been the least interesting and/or motivating?

- The group work done during some module weeks. Particularly the compulsory group coursework in some instances. I enrolled to achieve personal success not to be potentially hindered by other students (computing).
- The business side is quite a strain and I'm not sure project management should be core. Also, is it necessary to teach so much programming to students who want to learn networking? (computing).
- I found Structure Culture & Change and Work Production & Class particularly hard modules as there was a lot of content to know and remember and so when trying to apply these theories etcetera to current scenarios, I found to be quite difficult (social sciences).

Q10. If you were able to add one thing to the content of your course what would it be?

- An animation module was introduced in the second year, as a choice module, this should have been a core as it was very interesting, but needs to focus on the animation itself rather than the content (computing).
- Everyone in our year who designs websites wants to know this as it is the basis and basic element of dynamic web design and we will not be learning it, or learning it too late. It should be brought forward to Year 2 and be a Module on its own (computing).
- Getting more industrial training in each module that would have enhanced the more professional exposure and give a feel of outside world (computing).
- Case analysis. We could analyze political issues and situations, how the decisions are made, and why they are/were made like that, what were the reasons in the background and what pressures force leaders to make decisions.

For example why the major economic powers did not sign the Kyoto agreement? (social sciences).

- Something that helps me to concentrate on career opportunities or a way of opening up doors to lead me to a teaching route. Some form of extra social/childwork experience would be useful-especially if it results in some form of small qualification gained alongside the degree (social sciences).

Q11. If you were able to get rid of one thing within the content of your course what would it be?

- EXAMS, Exams do not prepare the students for a real world situation. When have you known someone to go into a job and the employer give them an exam to sit every 6 months? (computing).
- Nothing, people don't like HCI and find it boring, but it is essential for design (computing).
- Wireless modules as they are only theoretical and there are no practical exercises. This does not really help students. (computing).
- I don't feel that I gained anything from Politics Research Methods. Except another deadline (social sciences).

Q12. Do you have anything else to say about what you have learnt/what you have been taught on your course?

- Some modules for example Java, and Digital data Communications are more practical and therefore the marks should be split better to reflect this (computing).
- I feel that I only have a theoretical knowledge of networking, and I really hope the second year will be more practical in terms of setting up wires, designing networks using the appropriate hardware and software (computing).
- I think that more time needs to be spent on the foundations of programming especially C++. A more fundamental and wide ranging approach to the subject would be very beneficial providing students with a good grounding in programming before moving on to more advanced areas (computing).
- I am very sad to see women's studies disappearing as an undergraduate degree as I have found it highly stimulating and interesting (social sciences).
- All modules should make full use of Blackboard. No exceptions (social sciences).

Q14. What (if anything) have you found particularly interesting and/or motivating about the ways you have been learning/have been taught?

- I enjoyed the on-line resources. The ability to sit in the comfort of my own home and have all I needed, even if I didn't know what I needed in advance (computing).
- The programming modules had weekly assignments, which allowed us to gauge our progress, and also put our skills into practice (computing).
- Tutorials focusing on practical projects have been the most useful and intriguing. Leaving us to think about a challenging question at the end is very inspiring (computing).
- Certain lecturers propose multiple ways of thinking about practical situations, which have motivated me to read more on varying theoretical perspectives. Furthermore, certain lectures have made use of varying multimedia to deliver material which is of more interest (social sciences).

Q15. Which (if any) have been the least motivating aspects of the ways you have been learning/have been taught?

- When the results of coursework comes in at the last stage where nothing can be done for improving, that is the end of all motivation (computing).
- Lectures where the lecturer insists on not taking a break and finishing a bit early. It s difficult to concentrate for such a long period of time without a break (computing).
- Within the tutorial sessions, there were particular times in which I felt like a complete idiot if I asked a question or did not fully understand a particular topic within the module (social sciences).

Q16. If you were able to change one thing about the ways you have been learning/have been taught what would it be?

- I would cut down the amount of time in lectures and add them to the tutorials. This may also help the lecturers get more involved in the student and may see how they can improve the lectures (computing).
- The order of the modules. It would make sense for topics such as research methods to be in the very forst semester, rather than the second (computing).
- The focus on exams. I seem to struggle with exams and it is disproportionate that they should weigh twice as much as my coursework (in which I do remarkably well) (social sciences).

Q17. If you were able to change one other thing about the ways you have been learning/have been taught what would it be?

- All lectures should include sources of information which we could follow up to learn more about what was taught in the lectures (computing).
- Less paper handouts, more use of such information available online. Most students use or have access to PCs yet many lecture notes and slide shows were given out as printed material rather than made available through Blackboard (computing).
- If the tutorial sessions be more practical and hands-on. For example, one of the tutorial leaders ensured there was variety between the different tutorial sessions like one week we just had discussions, the next week different groups spoke out about different topics and so forth. This certainly made the tutorial sessions go faster and learning a lot easier and enjoyable (social sciences).

Q18. Do you have anything else to say about how you have been learning/how you have been taught on your course?

- Focus to be placed on a hierarchical learning process, much like the structure of a computer – to be taught each subject beginning with the basic outline or layer. And then moving on to the next layer and learning how the first relates to the second and so on. Building on the complexity of the subject as you progress. More time on certain core modules so that they can be learnt thoroughly before moving on to more complex aspects (computing).

Q19. What have been your good experiences of being a student on this course?

- Meeting with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to demonstrate to myself that I do have the capability to research something new

and make use of different learning methods. This has been the most use (computing).

- I extended and improved my knowledge of programming languages, learned how to proceed with research and been introduced some new technologies (computing).
- Have met with a wide range of students who are taking the course but aim to go into totally different careers to me. Has opened up my views on what the subjects i am taking can lead to (social sciences).

Q20. What have been the not so good experiences of being a student on this course?

- Forever balancing personal, social, work, voluntary and study commitments. This has often ment letting others down in order to complete ssignments (computing).
- No social life and no orgained events for mature students (computing).
- Did not enjoy some of the tutorial sessions as felt a complete idiot for asking a question when wanting to gain a better understanding of what was being taught in the lectures. ! (social sciences).
- So much pressure when having all the final exams within one month as I hav not studied for a couple of years and as well because English is not my native language but I guess it will be easier second year when I am more used to it (social sciences).

Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

The CILASS Student Ambassador Network

Institution

University of Sheffield, Centre for Inquiry-based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences (CILASS)

Background

In about 100 words describe the background to this development

The CILASS Student Ambassador Network (SAN) has the purpose of working with staff and students in partnership to facilitate inquiry-based learning at the University of Sheffield. The network began in March 2006 with 10 student ambassadors, growing to 29 plus one student co-ordinator by the academic year 2008/09. The network is co-facilitated by a full-time undergraduate student and one member of staff.

The SAN operates at three levels:

- **Departmental level:** help with departmental evaluation, feeding into away days, running departmental sessions where staff & students come together, help with introducing students to concept of IBL (going into lectures/seminars)
- **Working groups:** Five working groups (Evaluation, Journal, Dissemination, Technology, Film) – each balancing the remit given by CILASS with own ideas. Some groups are involved in consultancy and research activity, presenting at conferences)
- **As a network and in cross-cutting groups:** Staff-student conference, external presentations/workshops, LTEA conference, research, IBL Cafés.

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to involving students?

CILASS, a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, had planned on involving students from the start, and has done so, inviting students at various levels of the bid process to feed into developments. The challenge was to create a fertile ground for prolonged student involvement in learning and teaching enhancement, including curriculum development.

Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

Facilitating educational change without collaboration with students was inconceivable. We decided to go down the route of having one ambassador per department – rather than, say, a sabbatical officer – because we wanted to ensure students felt confident as part of a network, and to provide a large enough body of individuals to generate ideas, feed off each other, and bring these ideas to fruition.

Solution

Describe in some detail how the students were involved
How were students recruited?

Students are appointed in a number of ways, normally decided upon by the department. Some departments choose to run a full application process, others send out an email on a 'first come, first served' basis, with a range of other recruitment options in-between. Usually, current student ambassadors help with the recruitment of their successors.

In what way is the student voice employed?

Students participate actively at the three levels mentioned above – as a whole network, in working groups, and individually at departmental level. Taking these three levels in turn, student voice was employed as follows:

Departmental level

Students work with staff in departments to decide how to use best the hours available. Work might then involve any of the following:

- Feeding into module evaluation: student ambassadors help staff to devise questions for evaluation and/or conduct this evaluation with students;
- Planning for modules: staff run plans for new modules or intended changes past the student ambassador, who comments from a student perspective;
- Generating discussion: student ambassadors plan and organise events for staff and students to discuss aspects of inquiry-based learning, such as assessment, support needs, or integrating IBL into the curriculum. The point of these events is to break down barriers between staff and students and create a departmental learning community;
- Teaching support: student ambassadors 'sit in' on new IBL modules, giving feedback to the member of staff afterwards;
- Induction support: student ambassadors work with new students to introduce them to the concept of inquiry-based learning.

For all these activities, student ambassadors feed back to the larger network, allowing for cross-fertilisation of ideas and expertise across departments. Where necessary (such as with events and induction), student ambassadors from other departments will help out.

Working groups:

Each student ambassador works in one of five working groups, and as such work on different projects, as follows (not all of these are directly linked to curriculum design, but are included to provide the full picture of activity):

Evaluation group – this group is trained in evaluation and is essentially ‘for hire’ to staff members interested in evaluating inquiry-based learning from the student perspective. They also help other student ambassadors with evaluation in departments, where necessary.

Journal group – this group designed and now maintains an online, student-led journal on inquiry-based learning at the institution, and is responsible for all activities, such as finding articles, editing them, and publishing them online.

Technology group – this group works with staff and student to find ways to use technology innovatively for inquiry-based learning. They hold workshops and create user guides, both in written and video format. Members of the Technology group also maintain the student ambassador website (cilass-students.group.shef.ac.uk) and the CILASS Student Ambassador Network YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/thecilasssan)

Dissemination group – this group works on materials around inquiry-based learning and ensures they are student-friendly. They also help with the production of the CILASS newsletter, and produce help guides for incoming student ambassadors.

Film group: this group’s work varies from year to year, either producing films on a consultancy basis (such as an overview of IBL in a particular department) for curriculum review purposes, or by producing films based on CILASS activity (such as illustrating the work of the student ambassador network).

Whole Network:

The network as a whole (or smaller, cross-sectional groups of student ambassadors) are involved in a number of relevant activities:

Staff-Student Conference – an annual event organised and run by the student ambassadors, this one-day conference features students and staff jointly presenting their experience of inquiry-based learning. The day also includes workshops and round-table discussions. Student ambassadors decide on a theme, invite and choose contributions, and put the day together, as well as facilitating sessions on the day to ensure discussion takes place between staff and students

Research – student ambassadors are involved in a number of research projects on student participation in curriculum design, the role of the student voice, the scholarship of teaching and learning, etc., several of which are culminating in journal articles and book chapters for publication.

External events – student ambassadors get invited to external events to share their expertise – who is going will depend on the topic and availability. Those students going will collaborate on the session they will be holding.

All of the activities above are part of staff-student collaboration, and the network is co-facilitated by a member of staff and a student co-ordinator, a full-time student who is working approximately twice the hours of a ‘standard’ student ambassador.

Results

What have the results been?

Ongoing feedback is available from both student ambassadors and other students who have been in contact with them. The activities are too many to comment on each in turn, but student ambassadors feedback that they feel useful, and in a true position of power when it comes to shaping their educational experience. Other students (especially from student-led evaluations and the staff-student conference) feedback similar stories. Staff comment on the benefits of having student input into curriculum planning and evaluation, and both students and staff comment that knowing 'how the other half lives' is a very important aspect of successful collaboration.

What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits?

- Changes in modules on the back of student ambassador input
- Changes in departments, incorporating more staff-student discussion
- Planned to continue student input beyond 2010 (the end of CILASS)

Learning points

What were the key points for success?

- The joint facilitation of the network from a staff-student pair.
- Allowing the network input into its activities – these are managed on a system of give and take – some are initiated by CILASS, others by the students themselves

What were the things you would do differently if starting again?

None, really, apart from being aware in advance of the time needed for staff input.

What were/are the main risks?

Sustainability beyond CILASS-funded period.

Resources

What resources did the development take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

Funds to pay student ambassadors, time resource from member of staff (and members of staff in departments who are working with student ambassadors).

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for continued student involvement?

Serious: the network is currently part of two faculties, but funded entirely by CILASS. This funding will end in July 2010.

Further information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?

We are very happy to talk to any individuals or institutions interested in setting up a similar network.

Useful literature/weblinks

Links see above

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Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

Student Online Discussions: Assessing The Masses

Institution

Leeds Metropolitan University

Background

Large cohorts of students present a variety of difficulties for academic staff in terms of both teaching and assessment. This work looks at the opportunities offered by the innovative use of online discussions for the assessment of large cohorts. It highlights how the students work as groups whilst being marked as individuals, have the opportunity to develop critical analysis and can be engaged throughout the period of teaching.

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to involving students?

The UK Centre for Events Management (UKCEM) has been very successful in attracting students to study within the department. With this success, the arrival of over 400 students each year brings with it a series of logistical problems that can affect the student experience. At the forefront of these is the desire to turn around assessments and feedback to the students within a three week period. Inevitably, this pressure can shape the design of assessments and lead to ignoring the student voice in a drive to make assessment efficient but not necessarily effective. Within the assessment of final year undergraduates, this had led to two problematic assessments within the marketing module; some undesirable group work and simplification of the exam via a seen question.

Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

Quite simply, there is no point in an efficient turnaround of marks if the student feels that this occurs within an ineffective learning environment. Equally well, anything new that is implemented should be reviewed from the viewpoint of the student.

Solution

Describe in some detail how the students were involved
How were students recruited?

In the final year, many students are eager to pursue careers and attempting to measure their levels of satisfaction at the end of the course are neither practical for the student, nor helpful to the staff in terms of development. Consequently, student opinion on the

group work (which assessed a particular event market) was gathered within the tutorials and feedback noted for later discussion within the module team. Similarly, post exam discussions with students took place around the time of graduation to gain a view of their opinions about the exam.

In what way is the student voice employed?

Listening to their voice, it was clear that the group work was seen as detrimental to the better students. Though events management involves team working skills, it was felt that group work in the earlier years of the course, placement activities and general proactive work at events had built this into the student experience. From a slightly different perspective, the external examiner was also suggesting that group work in the final year was inappropriate and that the assessment needed to allow students to demonstrate critical thinking. Furthermore, the better students felt insulted that the exam could be done by rehearsing an answer prior to regurgitating this in the exam. So, both assessments were seen as restricting the ability of students to demonstrate their own individual learning to an advantage.

To counter these concerns, the two assessments were altered. The exam became a mixture of questions based around a seen case study and questions geared to the practical application of marketing theory. Preceding this, an online discussion was used to provide an opportunity to apply the marketing theory being taught to an actual event.

The following occurred within an online discussion created in X-Stream, the Leeds Metropolitan University version of Web-CT:

- Discussions based on particular events were set up to allow a group of ten students to join the discussion.
- As discussions filled, new ones were added using the same events e.g. if Clothes Show Live was full, a new one was added.
- When lectures started, students were encouraged to post their thoughts about how the theory in the lecture might be applied to the event in their discussion.
- This assessment lasted across the first ten weeks of lectures (leaving the final lectures for revision and a guest speaker from the industry).

Each student was expected to work to the following protocols:

- Provide a minimum of three posts.
- Provide a minimum of 500 words.
- No need for formal referencing but use of web links welcomed.
- All discussions were to be moderated for unacceptable posts e.g. abusing another student.

The assessment of the postings was done on the basis of the use of theory, the introduction of relevant information, the integration of both theory and information, the quality of the writing.

Results

What have the results been?

From a student point of view and keeping in mind that these students had no familiarity with the previous assessment, their feedback suggests:

- Enjoyed having a different sort of assessment.
- Pleased that always able to join a group with an event of interest.
- Some concerns arose over lack of anonymity.
- Some struggled to think in a critical manner and, typically, thought that ‘it had all been said in other posts’.
- Some could not get out of the thinking around other assessments and posted in an essay style despite having been encouraged to enter into a more discursive approach. Similarly, some made all their posts in the last hour despite having ten weeks to contribute their work!
- Some feedback that they would have liked to try out this new style of assessment earlier.

What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits?

From a teaching point of view:

- Students work as groups but are marked as individuals.
- Introduces a potential for continuous engagement seen in the more active groups.
- Developmental in terms of critical thinking.
- Has raised questions about how students develop into critical thinkers.

In what ways, if any, did employing the student voice make a difference?

It pushed the module team into thinking ‘out of the box’ in assessment terms. Yes, there were risks but, overall, this has taken a step in a good direction which can inform teaching across the whole course.

Learning points

What were the key points for success?

Given the inventive nature of this approach, it was pleasing to get good feedback from the students. Particularly, as this was a movement away from group working towards individual critical thinking.

What were the things you would do differently if starting again?

There were three elements that have been reviewed and changed since the initial work. Firstly, the protocols for posting have been reviewed and a minimum word count on individual posts set to avoid students posting essay style responses. Secondly, an open discussion has been introduced for students to practice their skills and receive feedback on their approach before the summative assessment starts. Thirdly, anonymous discussions have been considered though the software was found to be restrictive in that tutors cannot see who has posted either!

What were/are the main risks?

Unforeseen technical failures might occur within the IT environment.

Resources

What resources did the development take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

The module leader, myself, spent time setting up the discussions and testing that the software met the needs of the assessment.

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for continued student involvement?

None.

Further information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?

There is a potential to modify the software to allow anonymity which would open up an interesting opportunity for peer review of the discussions as well as meet the needs of the 'shy' student.

Useful literature/weblinks

Are there any publications in the literature relevant to this development that you would recommend?

Materials that helped shape the thinking behind this project are set out below:

Baglione, S.L and Nastanski, M. (2007). The superiority of online discussion. The Quarterly review of Distance Education Vol 8 (2) pp: 139-150

Karns, G.L. (2005). An update of marketing student perceptions of learning activities: Structure, preferences and effectiveness. Journal of Marketing Education, Vol 27(2): 163 - 171

Palmer, S., Holt, D. and Bray, S. (2008). Does the discussion help? The impact of a formally assessed online discussion on final student results. British Journal of Educational Technology. Vol. 39 (5) pp: 847-858

Lewinson, J. (2005) Asynchronous discussion forums in the changing landscape of the online learning environment. Campus-Wide Information Systems. Vol. 22(3). pp:162-167

Mazzolini, M. and Maddison, S. (2003). Sage, guide or ghost? The effect of instructor intervention on student participation in online discussion forums. *Computers & Education*, Volume 40, Issue 3, Pages 237-253.

Swan, K., Schenker, J., Arnold, S. and Kuo, C. (2007) Shaping online discussion: Assessment matters. *World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia and Telecommunications*. Vancouver, Canada June 25th.

Thomas M.J.W, (2002) Learning within incoherent structures: the space of online discussion forums. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, Volume 18, Number 3, pp. 351-366(16).

Vonderwell, S. and Liang, X. and Alderman, K. (2007). Asynchronous discussions and assessment in online learning. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*. Vol 39 (3) pp.309-328.

Are there any publications describing this development?

A paper will be submitted for publication following this workshop and presentation of the work at the Academy of Marketing Conference, 2009.

Are there any relevant weblinks to follow up?

Not yet.

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Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

Closing the Loop on Student Feedback.

Institution

Leeds Metropolitan University

Background

This study contributes to a wider project that had previously been funded by the HE Academy. It was a progression with regards using feedback from students, in a focus group, to make changes to the curriculum and to assessment. For this case study it was decided to replace the original method of collecting data via a transcript to using a filmed session with the students and then transcribing the comments. This allowed the viewer to determine if the comments were delivered in a positive or negative manner. This method of data collection allowed for all points that were raised to be picked up, recorded, considered and then appropriate changes made where necessary. This case study is the outcome of this approach of closing the loop on feedback.

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to involving students?

Written feedback can be static and misinterpreted and may not consider the tone and way that a person expresses their comments. Transcribing data collection from a focus group may also miss aspects such as body language and inflections in the voice of a positive or negative nature. So filming is an ideal medium to assess speech tone, understand comments more fully, to look at body language and to allow other staff to be involved. This filmed data can then be transcribed, without a rush, into a grid and if required reordered but more importantly it acts as a record to ensure that actions or no action is recorded.

Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

The challenge with regards any student feedback is to ensure that what has been said by students is used in a considered manner and that the students can see any changes that have taken place from one time to another. Although feedback may be too late for a particular year group, briefing students in the following year and highlighting changes and recommendations that have been implemented from the previous year demonstrates to the student that their voice counts. This way of giving feedback then helps to ensure that the strengths, weaknesses and recommendations have been given consideration and therefore closes the loop on student feedback. This can shown to students and any other interested parties.

Solution

Describe in some detail how the students were involved
How were students recruited?

There were approximately 160 students involved in the practical assessment (PASS) and students were asked if a few could attend a focus group session 2 days later to offer some feedback. The students were aware that they were going to be filmed. As a reward they were going to be given a £10 record voucher and light refreshments at the hour long session. 6 turned up on the day together with some members of staff. They were not told what the questions would be in advance but they knew that they would be related to the assessment. One member of staff facilitated the session and led the discussions as required. Media services filmed and recorded the event and then put the material onto a DVD for us to view.

In what way is the student voice employed?

All students were asked to introduce themselves and to agree to the film and sound being used for academic purposes. The students were given a question and then were allowed to express their views on different aspects of their preparation for the assessment process and the tasks on the day. From time to time the member of staff summarised the discussions and moved the group on to explore other areas. There was some structure to the discussions but the chair tried to allow the students voices to flow in the direction that they wanted

Afterwards a grid was set up to record the student comments from the DVD and whether they were said in a negative or positive way. The comments were then given a value as to whether negative comments required urgent, moderate or slight attention and positive comments expressed as high, medium or low areas to highlight good practice. There was then a column for interpretation and the final column for actions taken, thus closing the loop on feedback. This process was used in academic year 2007/8 and then repeated in session 2008/9.

Results

What have the results been?

The grid was developed and the comments from the DVD recorded. These results can be found in Appendix A.

To see an excerpt of the web streaming

video-2.leedsmet.ac.uk/Asx/?mswmext=.asx&id=2002%7C4e%7CctnoKUqU*

What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits?

The results and actions were shown to students in the second focus group and it was evident that changes had been made from the year before. The problems that existed from the first focus group were highlighted and we identified how the changes had been incorporated into this year's assessment. For instance students were shown an edited DVD on what to expect on the day from the assessment. Another major change was that actors were not used but a recording was shown to students in the assessment

room. This took away that element of surprise that disrupted some of the students previously. In addition marks given on the same day previously were now given the following day. Students appreciated that changes had been made and they, in general, reinforced the value of those changes by agreeing that the process had been improved.

In what ways, if any, did employing the student voice make a difference?

Listening to what the students had to say in a conducive environment and on film allowed staff the time to analyse the data collected. It also gave the opportunity to consider if the comments were said in a positive or negative way. For instance many students felt that a lot of their revision had not been used when in the assessment room. From a learning point of view this is seen as a positive aspect from staff and indicated that deep learning had taken place rather than only surface learning as the students were asked to apply their knowledge to real situations, whereas a student may feel that revision had been wasted. Another student said that it was good to work in groups. Although said positively staff need to check that there are sufficient individual elements to the assessments to ensure that students have the opportunity to work on their own and not allow some students to be 'free loaders'. We also issued an evaluation questionnaire to the students after the second focus group for them to record the perceived value of their contribution and involvement in the process. This data will need to be analysed at a later date when they are all returned.

Learning Points

What were the key points for success?

- The opportunity to view the DVD over and over again to ensure that comments were not missed;
- All staff could view the focus group and take away their own points for action and feed them back to the assessment overall;
- A structure for the following year's focus group;
- Listening and watching the students as to whether the comments were said in a positive or negative way;
- Rating the action points not only as a negative but also highlighting good practice and thinking about how we can replicate and improve the positives in the future

What were the things you would do differently if starting again?

Nothing really, worked well.

Issue the grid from the previous year in advance to the focus group but after the assessment.

What were/are the main risks?

- If the filming went wrong notes were not taken as a back up;
- If we do not respond to the comments or do not report back to students.

Resources

What resources did the development take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

- Payment for the students to attend £10 – will that be sufficient in the future
- Tea and coffee and cakes for the focus group
- Staff attending to conduct the focus group
- Film crew

Support Implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for continued student involvement?

As above

Further Information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?

We ran a 10 minute workshop at the Student Voices Conference on 14th May 2009 and spoke to three groups of delegates who felt that the process was worthy of this new approach. Comments from delegates will be incorporated into any ongoing project developments.

This will be an ongoing project and the results from the format could be applied to other modules

Useful literature/weblinks

Are there any publications in the literature relevant to this development that you would recommend?

Biggs, J. (2003) *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does*. 2nd Ed

Brown, S., & Race, P. (1997) *500 tips for quality enhancement in universities and colleges*. London: Kogan Page

Gibbs, Graham. (1999) Improving teaching, learning and assessment. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. Vol. 23 Issue 2, 147-155

McKeachie, W. J. & Gibbs G. (1999) *Teaching tips: strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Moon, J (2002) *The module and programme development handbook: a practical guide to linking levels, learning outcomes and assessment*. London: Kogan Page

Rust, C., O'Donovan, B., Price, M. (2005) A social constructivist assessment process model: how the research literature shows us this could be best practice. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. Vol. 30 Issue 3, 231-240.
video-2.leedsmet.ac.uk/Asx/?mswmext=.asx&id=2002%7C4e%7CctnoKUqU*

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Appendix A

Closing the Loop on Student Feedback - Organising verbal student feedback to inform change and highlight good practice.

Julia Tum and Rai Shacklock

Student Voices	Expressed as a Negative: Slight 1 Moderate 2 Urgent 3	Expressed as a Positive: Low 1 Average 2 High 3	Consequences and tutor comments	Action
Not just an exam		1		No action to be taken
I am a 'doing person'		1	Need to make sure that all the activities support the students' different learning style	To keep an eye on balance of assessment activities
Nothing to worry about as only 30 minutes		1	Good point as indicates that there is time to do better if necessary	To ensure that students try their best in all activities and do not become complacent. To stress this in the pre-briefing.
Interactive		2	May be a good thing for some students and a disadvantage for those who do not like to work in groups	To keep an eye on balance of assessment activities in relation to both individual and group activities
Rushed not enough time for activities	2		Better briefing about time constraints	To double check timings required for each activity and to create better and more explicit briefing notes
Did more revision than I needed	2		Although expressed negatively this is something that we wanted to encourage the students to do i.e. broad revision and not selective	To ensure that students understand the depth of work that may be required in order to arrive at apparently simple solutions
Getting grades straight away was a bad thing	3		Could have a negative impact on students and demotivate them for the next task	To advise students of their grades on the following day, and not immediately.

Couldn't put all of my knowledge to the test	2		Although expressed negatively this is something that we wanted to encourage the students to do. Students need to see it as a good thing	To ensure that students understand the depth of work that may be required in order to arrive at apparently simple solutions
Stresses people out	3		In a real situation, to think on your feet is stressful. Needs to be explained to students	To give students better briefings and practice in class. To show DVD of a previous year's PASS exercise.
Moving around from one area to another stressed us out	3		In a real situation, to think on your feet is stressful. Needs to be explained to students	To give students better briefings and practice in class. To show DVD of a previous year's PASS exercise.
As time went on got used to moving around		1	Good point	No action to be taken
Got stressed as too much going on as soon as you walked in	2		In a real situation, to think on your feet is stressful.	To give students better briefings and practice in class. To show DVD of a previous year's PASS exercise.
Kind of knew what to expect		1	Briefing sessions were obviously useful	No action to be taken
Could have been given a better briefing	1		Better briefing sessions	To give students better briefings and practice in class. To show DVD of a previous year's PASS exercise.
Nice to hear what is going to happen in advance		2	Briefing sessions were obviously useful	No action but continue to give good briefings etc
Too many instructions when you went into the room; then had to start virtually straight away	3		Better briefing sessions	To give students better briefings and practice in class. To show DVD of a previous year's PASS exercise so that they know what to expect. To make certain that instructions in all rooms are consistent.

You needed to know it	1		Although expressed negatively this is something that we wanted to encourage the students to do. Broad revision and not selective	To ensure that students understand the depth of work that may be required in order to arrive at apparently simple solutions
Clocks in rooms were helpful		2		No action to be taken
Signage OK		3		No action to be taken
Good working in groups		3	Need to ensure that we have a balance for those students that do not like group work	To keep an eye on balance of activities in relation to both individual and group activities
Team had different skills		3	Good acknowledgment	To keep an eye on balance of activities in relation to both individual and group activities
Nice that you could talk in the groups outside of the room felt more relaxed		2	Good acknowledgment, but need to ensure that it is not too free and easy	To check that this does not become too casual and noisy and then disadvantage students
Stressful but enjoyed it		2	Good acknowledgment of real situations in the events industry	To check that we do not over stress some of the more introverted students
Women who shouted on the role play was distracting	3		Upset students but a reality	To give students better briefings and practice in class. To show DVD of a previous year's PASS exercise so that they know what to expect.
Knowledge of working on an event		3	Good acknowledgment of real situations in the events industry	No Action to be taken
Feel that it is real, essays difficult to apply		2	Good acknowledgment of real situations in the events industry	No action to be taken
Models were not a true test of your knowledge, more memory test	2		Perception of the students and needs attention	To make changes in the activity to address this comment

Time should start after the brief is given	2		Students need time to absorb information	To give students better briefings and practice in class. To show DVD of a previous year's PASS exercise so that they know what to expect.
Enjoyed it at the end of the day		1	Good acknowledgment of real situations in the events industry	No action to be taken but necessary to keep the scenarios realistic
Cannot cheat		1	Helpful comment and demonstrates the effort that the staff put in to keep the students apart during the event	No action to be taken
Can't say if better but certainly different		1	Good comment	No action to be taken
Did not like the break	1		Dependent on the number of groups	To try to avoid the break in the future unless unavoidable. In this case to make sure that we tell students in advance of what will happen.

Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

“Our Week 1”: using new and continuing students' voices to evaluate their induction and orientation experiences

Institution

Edinburgh Napier University

Background

'Week 1' was developed as a significant element within Edinburgh Napier University's move to a 20-credit structure in the 2008/9 academic year. The first week of each trimester now aims to provide a beneficial and valuable experience for new and continuing students through a range of administrative, academic and social activities tailored to the level of study and precise point in the academic year. In order to gather initial reactions of students and key staff an evaluation was carried out immediately after the first Week 1 in order to use the outcomes to inform plans for future iterations of Week 1.

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to involving students?
Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

As Week 1 was developed to enhance the student experience it was important to find out what students felt they gained from it, what type of activities they most valued and what changes they felt would extend the value of future Week 1s.

Solution

Describe in some detail how the students were involved
How were students recruited?
In what way is the student voice employed?

The evaluation sought primarily to collect information about the students' experience of Week 1 through:

- focus groups which were held with new students (one meeting with each faculty) and continuing students (one meeting with each faculty). The discussions used agreed question sets and were independently facilitated. Notes of meetings were made and all discussions audio-recorded and transcribed to enable verbatim student views to be preserved and used to inform the evaluation report.

- an online questionnaire with questions which closely matched those used in the focus groups.

Students were recruited through a series of email invitations sent to those who had agreed to market research at matriculation. All students were incentivised for their participation (see Resources section below) and were also provided with a sandwich lunch at the focus group meetings.

Results

What have the results been?

The new and continuing student input enabled feedback on:

- how they valued Week 1 (see Appendix 1 below)
- what aspects of Week 1 they found most valuable and how they ranked these (see Appendix 2)
- their concerns about Week 1 and suggested changes

What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits?

The student voice informed the evaluation report's recommendations regarding the future of Week 1 and as a result some changes regarding the future conduct and operation of Week 1 have been implemented. A further evaluation of week 1 is planned for academic year 2009/10.

Students described activities which they found relevant, useful and interesting and, in order to facilitate the sharing of good practice in developing and implementing innovative Week 1 activities by staff, an online Week 1 activities database has been developed. This resource enables staff to learn about a range of Week 1 activities and the perceived benefit to students.

In what ways, if any, did employing the student voice make a difference?

Students were able to provide clearly their views of Week 1 and evidence their contributions with examples from their experience. They were also able to rank what aspects they found most useful based on the extent to which they were able (or not) to engage meaningfully in these aspects. The students' informed and articulate contribution provided convincing arguments for the continuity of Week 1 and, where appropriate, changes to be made for future iterations.

Learning points

What were the key points for success?

Confirming the outcomes of the focus groups which involved small numbers (but elicited much rich information) with those of the online questionnaire which involved significantly larger numbers (but more quantitative data).

What were the things you would do differently if starting again?

Would also hold focus groups with class reps who often have formed useful views which they are willing to share and also represent the views of their peers.

What were/are the main risks?

The evaluation was carried out over a very short space of time to enable outcomes to be made available quickly. However this timescale involved making strategic decisions about the evaluation (eg only on-campus students were invited to participate), asking extensive arrangements to enable student input within a limited timeframe and analysing the outcomes over a very short period of time.

Resources

What resources did the development take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

The student element described here formed part of a wider evaluation of Week 1 which also included discussions with key staff.

The time involved for students involved them participating in a one hour meeting (at which lunch was provided).

The money expended included:

Incentivisation for students:

- All students who took part in the focus groups received £20 in print credits (and a free lunch).
- All students who took part in the online questionnaire were put into a prize draw for 3 prizes of £50 Amazon vouchers.

Additionally, the focus groups required good quality and unobtrusive audio recording equipment and audio transcription equipment.

The human resources involved included staff involved in the following activities:

- Leading the evaluation project (planning project, interviewing students, analysing the results overall, writing the report etc)
- interviewing, recording and transcribing the focus group interviews
- developing and analysing the online questionnaire
- identifying target students and inviting them to contribute, organising meetings, lunches and student incentives

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for continued student involvement?

Not applicable as this was for a specific evaluation project. However we have used these methods in subsequent evaluations and have found they require support in terms of:

- staff involvement in conducting interviews and analysing results
- admin support in identifying and inviting students, transcribing results, organising meetings
- technical support to record discussions and develop online questionnaires

Further information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?

See Appendix 1 and 2 below

Useful literature/weblinks

Are there any publications in the literature relevant to this development that you would recommend?

No

Are there any publications describing this development?

Internal publications:

Evaluation of Week 1 Report. Campbell, F (Edinburgh Napier University, 2008)

The 20-Credit Handbook (Edinburgh Napier University, 2007)

Are there any relevant weblinks to follow up?

The evaluation was covered in a session at the conference on 14 May 2009 – PowerPoint presentation available at:

www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices/curriculum/conference/10mins.htm

The Week 1 Activities database is available at:

staff.napier.ac.uk/Services/Academic+Development/LTAresources/Week1Activities.htm

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Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

A “Big conversation” on feedback

Institution

School of Life Sciences, Edinburgh Napier University

Background

Good feedback is essential to good learning, but students routinely express dissatisfaction with the feedback that they receive; this is true at a national level (see results from the National Student Survey 2008) and at Edinburgh Napier University. The reasons for this are very varied, and despite the voluminous literature on feedback may be surprising and specific to particular modules and lecturers. Hence learning from generic ‘one size fits all’ module evaluations that satisfaction with feedback is less than satisfaction with other areas of teaching does not give individual lecturers, or schools, much useful guidance on how to improve. This was why a different approach to collecting student views was adopted here.

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to involving students?

Although there is much variation between modules in student evaluation and feedback, the formal evaluation mechanisms available to staff in the School of Life Sciences suggested a problem with feedback; this is in common with other schools in the university and with the UK HE sector as a whole. Apparent student dissatisfaction with feedback was matched with frustration amongst lecturers that students often appeared to ignore the feedback given (and in the worst cases did not even pick up marked assignments). Although the literature provides many useful suggestions for improving feedback, some of the more obvious ones (‘giving more feedback, more quickly’) are usually impossible to implement given resource constraints. So staff in the school were eager to understand the issue better and to explore innovative ways of improving matters.

Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

Collecting student views on this issue was imperative; after all, we were attempting to respond to perceived student dissatisfaction, but without really understanding the causes of this feeling. Simply using the methods – such as end of module questionnaires – that identified the problem in the first place would not take us further. In general such questionnaires are blunt instruments, often failing to provide information that is useful for practitioners and sometimes distorting student views and attitudes (Huxham et al., 2008). In addition, there is considerable cynicism about much of the

evaluation of student views that occurs, with students complaining that there is little evidence it leads to change. We wanted to make sure we used easy and accessible methods to capture students' genuine and nuanced views, and did so in a way that was very public and transparent.

Solution

Describe in some detail how the students were involved

We envisage a three part process. Students have been involved in the first two stages, and will be involved in the final one too. The first stage was the organisation of a school conference around the themes of assessment and feedback, with an open invitation to student representatives (students who are elected to represent their peers at boards of studies etc) to attend. This conference ran workshops collecting staff and student views on the causes of frustration with feedback and options for improvement, and led to the development of a school action plan on feedback. The first part of this plan (and the second stage of our process) was to conduct a 'big conversation' on feedback. This identified a week during which student views would be canvassed across courses and years on the issue of feedback. The rationale was to make this as public and as obvious as possible – to try to create a 'buzz' amongst students that their views were being collected during this time. Hence all staff and students in the school were emailed about the week and invited to participate.

The initial conference group identified three simple questions for the 'conversation': 1) 'Give one example of really useful feedback you have received, saying why it was useful'. 2) 'What single thing would most improve the usefulness of the feedback on your work?' 3) 'How could you improve the way you use and respond to feedback on your work?' Although all collected responses were to address these questions, there was deliberately no attempt to impose a single methodology on how the evaluation was conducted. Rather staff were encouraged to use methods suited to their experience and situation – perhaps simple questionnaires in large first year cohorts, discussions with individuals in laboratories or focus groups with smaller honours level groups.

How were students recruited?

Students were recruited for the school conference through the student representatives system. For the second phase, the initial focus was on recruitment of staff teaching in a range of subjects and at different levels. These staff then asked students in their classes to volunteer to participate; because there were only three, focused questions conducting the evaluations was usually rapid and student participation was good.

In what way is the student voice employed?

Student views were considered in the design of the 'big conversation' evaluation questions. Then in most cases verbatim responses to the three questions were recorded by staff to give detailed and 'rich' information of use to individual module leaders and also to the school as a whole.

Results

What have the results been?

More than 300 students, drawn from three different years and numerous different subject groups, were involved in the concentrated evaluation during the 'big conversation'. Given such a wide diversity of respondents it is not surprising that there were many different views collected. Often these were very specific to individual modules, which provided focused information for the academics concerned. However, there were also more general themes to emerge, in particular:

- Make feedback more legible
- Give us more feedback
- Make it more specific (i.e. give guidance on how to improve)
- Use examples and exemplars
- Give positive as well as negative points

Although some of the specific and more general comments were to be expected given the literature on feedback (for example, the request to make it specific on how to improve and simply asking for more), other comments came as a surprise. For example, we did not expect legibility to be such a major theme, but all year groups raised it. Previous work in the school had shown the potential benefits of model answers, but had also revealed some ambiguity amongst students as to their usefulness (Huxham, 2007). These new results were helpful in showing a widespread desire for model answers and exemplars.

What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits?

We are now entering the third phase of this project, which is the implementation of the school action plan. This is focusing on the provision of examples and exemplars, since this was a major theme emerging from the 'big conversation' that can be addressed without necessarily increasing the workload on staff. Hence we intend to provide exemplars for most modules in the school and evaluate the effects of this next year. The action plan will also encourage students to make 'feedback prompts' on their work; requests for feedback on specific parts of the work. This is partly in response to the theme of requesting specific guidance on improvement in feedback. Such guidance can be difficult for the lecturer to provide, simply because he or she does not always know the areas of work that are proving difficult. Again, it is too early to give evidence for benefits at this stage, but the project will be fully evaluated over the next year.

In what ways, if any, did employing the student voice make a difference?

First, this process has allowed us to identify some relatively simple issues that can be dealt with quickly, such as improving the legibility of feedback. Second, the positive comments from students were greatly appreciated by particular staff. For example, students praised feedback on a large, work intensive third year module involving a dissertation. This was very encouraging for the staff involved who dedicate considerable time to the module but often are only aware of possible problems. Third, the initial workshops then broader consultation has allowed us to pinpoint two specific areas in this complex field that we believe can be substantially improved through focused effort over the next year. Finally, student responses to the third question, about their own

contribution, often stressed the importance of following up on feedback and establishing a conversation with their tutors:

“ask more questions and interpret the feedback and apply it to my next piece of work”

“ask more questions when not clear on how you could do better”

“arrange to speak to the lecturer to go over areas I am not certain about”

This theme reminds us of the key point about feedback – that it should be an on-going dialogue about learning. It is valuable for staff to be reminded of this and for us to know that students take this view too.

Learning points

What were the key points for success?

Involving students throughout the process, including during the initial design stage, and keeping the consultation process very open and flexible to allow individual tutors to adapt it to their circumstances

What were the things you would do differently if starting again?

Start a little earlier and make greater efforts to recruit all the teaching staff in the process

What were/are the main risks?

Because we have made this a very public process, there is a greater danger of disappointment if we fail to improve feedback practices. Many students and staff have now been involved and if the feedback action plan, focusing on exemplars and feedback prompts, does not increase student satisfaction there will be general disappointment.

Resources

What resources did the development take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

The main costs were involved in organising and running a day long workshop/conference – hiring a room and buying catering etc. Time and goodwill were required to organise the big conversation, although one of the advantages of this kind of evaluation is that analysing the results was relatively fast compared with using standard questionnaires.

The final phase of the action plan will be helped through employing a part time secretary/research assistant, who will type up exemplars and conduct evaluations on the results. This will cost ~£5000 and will be paid from a teaching development grant awarded to assist this project

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for continued student involvement?

A key part of the process will be proper evaluation of the third stage; the use of exemplars and prompts. This will involve focus groups and other consultations with students. Provided the interventions are successful, then they will become normal school procedure with little additional support implications

Useful literature/weblinks

Huxham M., Laybourn, P., Cairncross, S., Gray, M., Brown, N., Goldfinch J. and Earl, S. (2008). Collecting student feedback: a comparison of questionnaire and other methods. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* (DOI: 10.1080/02602930701773000).

Huxham M., (2007) Fast and effective feedback: are model answers the answer? *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 32, 601 – 611

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Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

“In their own words”: using student voices to design effective pre-arrival induction for international students

Institution

Edinburgh Napier University

Background

In about 100 words describe the background to this development...

This initiative has been partly funded by the TESEP (Transforming and Enhancing the Student Experience through Pedagogy). It focuses on addressing the needs of international students joining study programmes at Edinburgh Napier University through early awareness raising and practical skills development. The pilot project SPICE (Student Pre-arrival Induction to Continuing Education) has involved 3rd year direct entry students from India to the University’s BA Hospitality Management programme. The aim is to develop an interactive resource that addresses a subset of skills required by this student group whilst also integrating students with Edinburgh Napier student community. SPICE is available to students pre-arrival and during study at Edinburgh Napier.

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to involving students?

BA Hospitality Management has been very popular with international students, especially Indian students. Students on the programme come from colleges in India as 3rd year direct entrants. They encounter a number of challenges related to the differences in academic cultures, the higher level of expectations of students at higher education level in the UK as well as living and studying in a new country, and social integration. The standard induction to the university life seems to happen too late for these students and cannot address the breadth of the new skills and awareness that need to be addressed. Another challenge is a cultural preference to rely on fellow students who already study in the UK to provide information as well as pastoral and academic support rather than utilising information and support available during induction and throughout study in the UK.

Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

A study with the Indian students, using qualitative and quantitative methods, at the start of the project, revealed that the students from the Indian sub-continent prefer to rely on peers for information, advice and support in academic as well as social aspects of studying in the UK. Unfortunately, this may lead to misconceptions and using the same, less effective study skills and attitudes. It was decided to try to include this preference

for peer support in the new pre-arrival resource in the form of student voices to provide a powerful but controlled account of the experience of living and studying in Edinburgh and pre-arrival advice.

Solution

Describe in some detail how the students were involved

There were two ways we engaged the students in the project: through interviews with students already studying at Edinburgh Napier and through participation of students in India preparing to arrive to the UK.

We used the results of the qualitative and quantitative study to underpin the interview questions. The study at the start of the project identified key areas of challenge for Indian students coming to the 3rd year which were explored with the students on BA Hospitality Management through a series of short interviews. We then prepared sound bites and extracts from the interviews to be used in the resource in order to exemplify how fellow students dealt with the challenge.

We also piloted the resource with students in India who were preparing to come to Edinburgh Napier in the following year. We asked them about their hopes and fears, how they prepare themselves for the challenge of studying abroad, what they think may be useful for them. We also shared the interview results with them and asked if they'd find the sound bites / extracts useful. The feedback was very positive. The students noticed that the student voices were more detailed in their account of studying and living in Edinburgh, and more focused on the academic skills than the advice they tend to get from their peers.

How were students recruited?

We asked students at Edinburgh Napier to volunteer which was not a success. We then approached students individually stressing the value of sharing their experience which seemed to work much better. We offered incentives such as book tokens and print credits.

Students in India were keen to participate as they wished to know more about life and study in Edinburgh, so no problems with participation were encountered there.

In what way is the student voice employed?

The sound bites and extracts from the interviews with Indian students on BA Hospitality Management are now a key part of SPICE. They emphasise the value of effective study skills and awareness rather than it coming from the authors or the University.

The feedback from students in India about their preparations for life and study in the UK informed the writing of the tasks. Students in India have been using the pilot resource and their feedback on arrival to Edinburgh in Sept 09 will be sought to further include student voice in the resource.

Results

What have the results been?

The result is a pre-arrival induction resource SPICE which is driven by students sharing their experiences. It includes tasks and information based on the feedback from the students, so 'by students and for students' is very much the motto of the resource. It needs to be stressed that the pre-arrival induction resource described here is work in progress. Currently, the resource is at pilot stage, awaiting feedback from the cohort of students due to arrive in Edinburgh in Sept 09. Based on the feedback, further student-led input may be added.

The resource will be shortly developed into an interactive induction pack which will include social networking aspect.

Following an official launch of the resource for Indian students on BA Hospitality Management in May 2010, it is planned to further develop the package including a wider range of students voices so that it addresses the needs of all international students (and probably changes its name to a more generic title). It is hoped the resource will eventually be a universal induction resource available to all international students wishing to study at Edinburgh Napier University.

What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits?

The SPICE pilot was launched in May 2009 at partner colleges in India. Since then we gathered feedback from the tutors and students in the form of questionnaires. The feedback has been very honest and positive. The tutors noted that using student voices in the resource taps into the student preferences to 'hear it from their peers'. The tutors and the students commented on the resource being very hands-on, practical induction material which can be used as early as one year before arrival to Edinburgh in order to slowly develop the skills and awareness for effective study in the UK.

In what ways, if any, did employing the student voice make a difference?

It made the team working on SPICE more sensitive to the students' perspective. Many of the concepts and ways in which the tasks were initially going to be presented were changed to accommodate students' preference. It made us re-think the way we approach induction and look at it through students' own words.

Learning points

What were the key points for success?

Working very closely with students and tutors here in Edinburgh and in India. Letting them 'drive' the resource rather than simply asking if they like it or not, giving them an opportunity to contribute their own ideas, even as simple as the pictures they'd like to choose, etc.

What were the things you would do differently if starting again?

Approaching students for interviews needs to be thought through as many students tend to agree to come to an appointment and then don't turn up. The challenge is in forming a relationship first before asking them to come to the interview.

What were/are the main risks?

Students and staff welcome the resource so there were no major risks when developing the resource.

A risk at present is to try to establish the resource as a timetabled class in partner colleges to ensure students use it for educational purposes as well use the social network feature to chat with friends at Edinburgh Napier.

Resources

What resources did the development take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

Initial funding from TESEP (£20,000), followed by more resource from the faculty enabled an employment of a research assistant. The research assistant set up the study at the start of the project, analysed the results, set up the interviews, etc.

Time to prepare the resource materials, pilot them and include feedback. Visits to India to engage students and staff there were essential for the success of the pilot.

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for continued student involvement?

The main support implication is an agreement between the Programme Leader from Edinburgh Napier and colleges in India to have the SPICE pre-arrival induction resource timetabled as a regular class to ensure effective use of the resource, as well as further support to ensure this is in place.

Further information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?

It is hoped that once a fully interactive platform is built into the resource, it will be even more attractive to the students in India and elsewhere.

As a long term plan, the resource is going to be developed into a generic induction resource. It is hoped that the social networking feature may be further developed to engage students in Edinburgh Napier (international and home) in a dialogue with the pre-arrival students.

Useful literature/weblinks

Are there any relevant weblinks to follow up?

The weblink will be available soon.

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Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

Using a student voice approach to develop more inclusive and diverse ways of assessing coursework

Institution

Roehampton University, London

Background

This case study has focused on using a student voice approach to develop equivalency guidelines for the assessment of multi-format coursework, so that we can offer more inclusive / diverse assessment opportunities at Roehampton. For some time, we have been aware that students are coming to university with very different academic backgrounds – for example, students from further education or overseas settings will have very different assessment experiences to students who have recently left school or sixth form college, or those who are joining higher education after working in industry or commerce. We are also very aware of the impact that new technologies are having on the teaching and learning experience for students, and wished to reflect this fact in our arrangements for assessed coursework.

We therefore set out to explore how different non text-based coursework formats (such as presentations, e-portfolios or audio recordings) might be fairly judged in terms of their equivalency with more traditional formats, such as text-based projects and essays. In other words, what would a 5000 word essay look like if it wasn't an essay?

We were fortunate to receive funding support from the *JISC Techdis HEAT3* scheme, as well as TQEF funding from Roehampton University.

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to involving students?

We have become increasingly aware that some students would like to be offered a wider range of assessment formats on their taught programmes, but we had no documented evidence base to back up this belief. From tutorials and informal conversations, we were also particularly aware that some students with disabilities would really like a wider choice of assessment options, rather than having to apply for “reasonable adjustments” on such a regular basis. On further investigation, we realised that many other students would also like a wider choice of assessments, so that they could demonstrate their learning in a more personalised and holistic way. We wanted to use a student voice approach to look beyond text-based assessment formats, whilst striving to maintain high academic standards and meet programme learning outcomes. We also wanted to acknowledge the range of learning styles and preferences in our

groups, as it could be argued that the traditional essay has always favoured a particular type of student.

Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

Using a student voice approach, we initially offered six undergraduate students with disabilities the opportunity to present some of their assessed coursework in a different format, namely an audio presentation or DVD footage to accompany a short piece of text-based coursework. This initial case study enabled us to identify the many administrative, technical and support issues involved with this type of initiative, and proved to be an excellent starting point for further study. The work was funded by JISC under the HEAT3 scheme (see references for a weblink).

We then extended this case study to a wider range of students and staff, and set up focus groups which included:

- o Postgraduate students (MA and PhD students)
- o Representatives from the Student Union (including the Disability Officer and the Mature Students representative)
- o Academic and academic-related staff (including the Head of Learning and Teaching, the Academic Registrar, and a member of our E-learning Team)

Solution

Describe in some detail how the students were involved

How were students recruited?

In what way is the student voice employed?

Our initial group of disabled students was recruited via the university's Disability Service. Our additional students and staff were then recruited via personal approaches and staff suggestions. We tried to ensure that a range of disciplinary areas was represented, as well as a range of ages, backgrounds and IT skills.

The students were video - interviewed (individually and in small groups) about their experiences of text-based coursework as well as their thoughts on non-text based assessments such as presentations, building a group wiki, or making an e-portfolio. Comments from groups were fed back to participants via email and face to face discussion, and also forwarded to staff for further reflection and comment.

Using a modified version of the Delphi technique to inform this process, we felt that the idea of "reflecting on reflections" in an attempt to reach a consensus added to the depth of our findings (Gupta & Clarke, 1996). We gathered a wide range of viewpoints from different stakeholders, which has enabled us to start work on our "Equivalency guidelines for the assessment of multi-format coursework". We have also recorded interviews and focus groups with staff, and are now compiling a DVD and training materials which we will use for staff development purposes. (LTEU, 2009)

We found that using a student voice approach was a very powerful way to engage academic staff in discussions about reviewing their traditional assessment formats, and provided a strong discussion platform for further development of good practice in this complex area.

Results

What have the results been?

What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits?

In what ways, if any, did employing the student voice make a difference?

What has come through most strongly in our investigation is that students enjoy hearing about each other's project ideas, working collaboratively, and sharing good practice – they do not always get this opportunity when assessments are simply handed in to the tutor at the end of term. Using a range of assessment formats also enables them to see the assessment process as a fully integrated learning experience, rather than a bolt-on activity after their module has ended.

We also encouraged staff to try out different assessment formats on their own programmes, which enabled us to gather first hand views during and immediately after the assessment process. One group received TQEF funding to make a group wiki of their field trip to Poland and Germany, which proved to be an invaluable source of innovative ideas and enabled us to make informed recommendations to other programmes wishing to try out this new way of assessing learning. (HIHR, 2009). Another group agreed to be interviewed directly after their student presentations, and were generally positive about the activity:

Very interesting and enjoyable to see, hear and learn from the other students

I am a practical person and I found it this way of assessment useful, as we could listen to one another and share our views

The oral presentation has really helped me to prepare for my written assignment, which I always find particularly painful!

Another student made a 20 minute DVD instead of the 3,500 word essay which she had originally been set, and felt that this really enabled her to engage with the subject material:

It's fantastic to take learning into the 21st century, and encompass all learner types, because aural and visual learners have had it their way for too long I say! Let the kinaesthetic learners show their true colours.....

Learning points

What were the key points for success?
 What were the things you would do differently if starting again?
 What were/are the main risks?

For academic and academic-related staff

Decide what percentage of the total assessment will be made up by different formats (e.g. you might have 50% of the total grade for a traditional essay, supplemented by 25% for student presentations and 25% for contributions to a group wiki.) Staff may need support and encouragement to move outside of their usual “comfort zones”

Investigate fully what technical or e-learning support the students and staff might need, especially for first attempts at a new assessment format

Check with all stakeholders (including outside bodies) when changing or reviewing traditional assessment formats

Give staff time to discuss marking / grading issues, and to listen to what the students are saying about new ways of working

Make sure that external examiners receive adequate briefings and marking guidance where necessary

Clear institutional guidelines need to be developed for staff to mark new types of e-assignments such as WIKIS, e-portfolios and DVD documentaries

For students

There needs to be adequate room for innovation and creativity when moving away from traditional text-based coursework

Think about time management and setting boundaries

Programme learning outcomes must be fully evidenced, whatever the assessment format.

Ensure that you have some good quality exemplars to demonstrate unfamiliar ways of working

Resources

What resources did the development take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

We were very fortunate to receive a JISC HEAT3 grant of £1,400, which enabled us to begin our work in this area. We were able to buy flip video cameras and audio recording equipment with this funding.

We also received £1,000 TQEF funding from Roehampton University, which enabled us to fund 3 PhD students to film student and staff focus groups. Our TV unit provided video camera equipment and an editing suite.

The university also provided vital support in terms of administrative time and technical back-up from the e-learning team.

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for continued student involvement?

We have been paying student participants a small fee for participating (in the form of £10 supermarket vouchers), which has been very well received. This acknowledges the fact that they have given up their free time to help us with the project, and to contribute to the focus groups.

The Student Union have now become involved, and have kindly committed some time to supporting our project in 2009-10. They fully recognise the need to incorporate a wider range of assessment formats into programmes, and are pleased to offer us their advice and suggestions.

We believe that it is vital to have good links with our student colleagues, and wish to incorporate their views as we move forward with our draft equivalency guidelines.

We have also been working closely with colleagues from our E-learning team, who are able to provide essential technical expertise and advice.

Further information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?

By multi-format coursework, we mean work which might include elements of any of the following:

- o a high percentage of non-alphabetic texts (e.g. symbols, numbers, music notation, Laban notation, chemical formulae, non-Roman alphabets etc)
- o a range of non-essay text formats (such as poetry, blogs, reflective diaries, wikis, websites etc)
- o photos, images or diagrams
- o live performance, recital or individual / group presentations
- o DVD or video footage
- o graphs, statistical data or technical diagrams (paper based or electronic)
- o mindmaps (paper based or electronic)
- o multi-media presentations (eg using Flash or PowerPoint)
- o audio recordings, sound effects or music

We would love to hear about any other suggestions!

We are still in the process of writing up our work, which will be available on our own Roehampton website in December 2009.

Useful literature/weblinks

Fuller, M; Healey, M et al 2007 *What are disabled students' experiences of learning at university?* in Adams, M. and Brown, S. (eds) 2007 *Inclusive Learning in Higher Education: Improving Provision for Disabled Students* London: Routledge Falmer

Flutter, J & Rudduck, J 2006 *Student Voice and the Architecture of Change: Mapping the Territory* at www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/07_06rudduck1.doc

Gupta, U & Clarke, R 1996, *Theory and applications of the Delphi technique: A bibliography*. Technological forecasting and social change, Vol 53: 185-211

Historical Issues in Human Rights Wiki (HIHR) 2009, *Example of a wiki made by Roehampton students on a TQEF funded field trip to Poland and Germany*, at historicalissuesinhumanrights.pbworks.com

Roehampton University, Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit, at www.roehampton.ac.uk/learningandteaching

University of Plymouth, 2007, *SPACE Project, (Staff-Student Partnership for Assessment Change and Evaluation)* available at: www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=10494

Middlemas, 2009. *Using a student voice approach to develop innovative, multi-format assessments*, at www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices/curriculum/.../middlemas.ppt

What's it Worth? JISC funded project, at JISC HEAT3 Project Overview (scroll to bottom of the JISC page) www.techdis.ac.uk/index.php?p=2_1_7

What's it worth? Discussion wiki at: whatsitworth.wikia.com/wiki/Assessment_of_multi-format_coursework_Wiki

Wisker, G (2006) *Educational development – how do we know it's working? How do we know how well we're doing?* Educational Developments, Vol 7, no 3

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Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Title

“Not another bloomin’ essay”: students taking control of their assessment

Institution

Birmingham City University

Background

The Foundation Degree Early Years (FdA) is a three year part time programme offered at a partner FE College. The participants are all experienced child care workers who are attending the course either to gain promotion or to access the top up degree and then teacher training. The programme requires them to make links between theory and practice and is built up around the (perceived) needs of their employers and is therefore felt to be of relevance to their personal and professional development but also embedding an academic element. Assessments therefore are designed to measure both their skills as a practitioner and their critical thinking and knowledge base. This case study is based on two groups of students one group at level four, but in their second year, and a level five third year group.

The challenge

What were the issues that led to this activity?

The course was originally designed to ensure that the FdA met and achieved sector endorsement to enable the students to secure a government funding package. This meant that some of the modules hit the right buttons for the government body (Surestart) but as time moved on did not necessarily fit the needs of an ever changing sector. This meant that one module in particular (Level 4 Using ICT to Support Children’s Learning) was seen as too narrow and isolated and had a very low first time pass rate (around 40% passed at the first attempt). The assessment was heavy for a 12 credit module with the students having to do a poster with a written rationale and a 15 minute presentation on a proposed ICT policy for their setting. Because of changes to the child care curriculum this was no longer felt to be appropriate.

In regard to the level 5 group the first assessment of the year was a 5000 word essay relating to Supporting Personal, Social, Emotional and Physical Development (PSEPD)- when given out the task they say “Oh no not another bloomin essay” Having set their own task for this they then asked if they could do the same again in the final module (Supporting Communication, Language, Literacy and Creative Development CLLC) but also were asked this time also to determine the content of the module

Why was it decided to employ the student voice?

Because they asked (initially unintentionally) for it.

In both cases the assessment set was felt to be inappropriate to the needs of the groups and therefore it made sense that they be allowed to set their own assessment. It could be said that for all of these changes the impetus came from the student group.

For the final CLLC module it was also deemed appropriate to negotiate the content and design of the module so that it more closely aligned to their needs as practitioners supporting CLLC in the workplace.

Solution

Describe in some detail how the activity works
How were students recruited for this activity?

In a way the students were already on the module so there was no recruitment, they led the innovation.

In what way is the student voice employed?

For the **PSEPD** module after the students had groaned about the assessment they were asked how they wanted to be assessed, they asked if they could think about it and what the were parameters. They were told that the learning outcomes and grading criteria could not be changes but that was all. They then asked if the tutor would leave the room and come back in half an hour. At the end of that time the group had decided on a new assignment which they would all do (see appendix 1). At the end of the session the students were asked to evaluate their learning and to identify any needs for next time.

For the **ICT** module the tutor asked the group if they were happy with the assignment or if they would like to choose their own form of assessment. After the initial shock the group said that they would like to discuss what forms of assessment would be appropriate before making a decision. During the brainstorming session one of the group asked if they all had to do the same assessment. It was decided that they did not. Time was then given to the group on their own to discuss this and the tutor then went round the individuals to see what they wanted to do. A range of assessments was seen (see appendix 2). The tutor then gave a calander for the teaching and asked if there were an amendments that the students wanted to make- the answer was we don't know yet can we play it by ear! As a result the content was decided by the tutor and students a week in advance of the taught sessions! At the end of the sessions students were asked to evaluate their learning to date and to suggest content for future weeks.

CLLC is the last module and having felt "liberated" by choosing their own assessment in the first module of the year asked if they could do so again. After a discussion it was decided that, unlike PSEPD, they would choose their own form of task. It was also decided that we would negotiate the input and together in an activity based on brainstorming and Post it® notes, drew up a scheme of work based strongly on identifying prior knowledge and understanding and addressing the perceived gaps.

Results

Evaluations were completed at the end of each session (for ICT and CLLC) and an overall formal written evaluation at the end of the modules. The end of session evaluations involved red and green Post it® notes:

red = what I have learnt today

green = what I still need to know

Additionally for ICT there was also a piece of flip chart paper where students could note any concerns or other areas to be discussed. The points from the flip chart and Post it® notes were picked up in the following session.

What have the results of this activity been?

In all sessions the level of motivation and interest was increased. It was liberating for both the students and the member of staff as it seemed that assessment although the focus of student attention did not become the focus of the teaching, The students had their own learning journey and so could attend to the sessions to learn rather than gain all the information for the assessment.

As they commented:

I quite liked the idea of being asked to design our own assessment even though I was really shocked. The thought of being able to decide what I was going to do was great.

I really liked the fact that we were able to design our own assessment. It gave us the chance to put our own ideas across to design the assessment

We were able to direct lessons and bring our own experiences to class, matching it to relevant theories

This is a challenging and motivating thing to do please continue with it to benefit all FD students

Was not keen at first as it involved me thinking of how to cover all the learning outcomes. However it did give me a degree of autonomy that I later enjoyed

In outcome terms for the first time the ICT module had a high first time pass rate (only two students failed to submit for personal reasons. Both have subsequently submitted and passed). Grades in this module are significantly higher compared to other modules by this year group. The level of independent, autonomous study increased leading many to achieve a deeper approach to learning, this could be seen both in the sessions and in the final assignments.

For all three modules the range of grades was significantly higher than in other modules taken by these students.

Comments included:

What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits of this activity?

Evidence comes through the student comments in the evaluation which overwhelmingly point to this as a motivating and learning enhancing activity.

As far as the University is concerned evidence as to its effectiveness is found in the pass rate and grades.

When asked what was the best thing that they would take from this experience comments included

Knowing how I work best

My ideas

Confidence in what I do

Knowing I can produce my own assignment having more confidence in myself

My own personal assignment and how this has raised my self-esteem. My Mark!

My first ever distinction for my own work

As we were involved in the way the assignment was delivered it was more interesting and enjoyable to complete and ICT was an enjoyable subject

Confidence that I could do something of my own choice

Being able to complete it the way I feel and the way that I can use my skills to an advantage

Learning points

What were the key points for success?

A tutor prepared to take the risk in interpreting the procedures and regulations.

A student group willing to take more control of their own learning. It is important to establish that this is a feasible activity to undertake with the chosen group.

Maintaining a non-threatening environment in which to develop individual learning and skills. A good support structure both in terms of tutor and peer input.

Finally, there had to be a clear link between the content of the modules and the activities and needs of the students. It is of prime importance to establish the prior learning, awareness and understanding that the group have of the subject,

What were the things you would do differently if starting again?

Spend more time on the initial briefing-establishing what is meant by the learning outcomes, fuller discussion of the types of appropriate assessment, closer scrutiny of the grading criteria.

What were/are the main risks?

That University regulations could not be bent.

Students unwilling or unable to comit to the amout of independent study

Resources

What resources did the activity take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

As this was embedded in the sessions there was little impact on resources other than those normally associated with any learning and teaching activity.

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for this activity to continue?

To have a greater impact other staff need to be aware of this and be willing to implement it in their modules. Support would be needed to those staff to allay andy anxieties.

Further information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?

Useful literature/weblinks

Are there any publications in the literature relevant to this development that you would recommend?

Are there any publications describing this development?
Not yet.

Are there any relevant weblinks to follow up?
No

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Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery



An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster

Case study evaluation – student

Title

“Not another bloomin’ essay”: students taking control of their assessment
(ICT module students)

Institution

Birmingham City University

Reaction

What were your main reactions to BEING ASKED to design your own assessment?

I quite liked the idea of being asked to design our own assessment even though I was really shocked. The thought of being able to decide what I was going to do was great.

Shock, Surprised, also was a little worried that I would do the correct thing

Excitement of being given this opportunity to see how I am able to deliver the assignment.

I was a bit nervous at first as I wasn't sure what to do to meet the learning outcome, as I was used to being told what had to be done to meet the learning outcome

Shocked and a little nervous, I like to be told what is needed so I have a clear guidelines to what I need to do

My initial reaction was panic I was unsure about doing my own assignment but after a couple of lessons I understood more and was very excited to do my own

Fantastic, Exciting, Had lots of Ideas to choose from

Oh my god. Once I was over the initial shock I panicked about what to do. Once I was clear on what to do I was very excited about the challenge

I really liked the fact that we were able to design our own assessment. It gave us the chance to put our own ideas across to design the assessment

I was confused at first but when I got into it I thought it was interesting to do what we wanted to do and how I would manage it

I was pleased I had the chance to extend the skills I had developed in power point presentations and report writing

At first was worried the outcomes wouldn't be clear and was concerned that I may go off the subject. Once it was clear that I was doing and covering I was quite excited. It was nice to have some control over my assignment as I could produce work such as PowerPoint that I enjoy making

Shocked at first then I thought why not try it and see if you can do this

I was quite nervous doing my poster and didn't know how to plan my poster and then evaluate it. Once I started my poster I enjoyed doing my poster and doing my assignment

It was interesting and challenging too as being creative in designing own assessment was going to earn a better grade. Had mixed feelings really

I thought "GREAT!!! I can actually decide what I am good at and do my essay in that format"

Was not keen at first as it involved me thinking of how to cover all the learning outcomes. However it did give me a degree of autonomy that I later enjoyed

Added value

Do you feel student involvement made this activity more valuable for lecturers?
(please circle) Yes/No

If yes, state how

Y. They had a understand of what the students were looking for

Y. Able to share ideas and concerns

Y As it gave lecturers an idea of what students want to do in order to assess their learning

Y. As they get to see the students using their own choices on what they think is needed to achieve the outcomes

Y. Gave them an insight to what we were capable of

Y. As it gave the lecturers a greater understanding of the skills each student has in terms of ICT

Y. Because it helped me understand the task and what needed to be involved

Y. the students were able to give all of their ideas which lecturers could benefit from later on

Y students felt they had more of a choice and by having a choice it made it more interesting to collect data and information

Y. The students voiced opinions and thoughts which the lecturer extended and explained

Y as they could see the areas that people were more strong in and enjoyed completing

Y. Lecturers could find out the students interests; see how different individual students are and how they could perform when involved

Yes: don't know how to put it into words ☺

Y. Allows lecturers to monitor student preferences and perhaps bear this in mind for future assignments

Impact

Do you think that designing your own assessment affected the way the sessions were designed and if so in what way? Yes/No

No I think they went on as normal

Yes the information that was needed was then provided

Everyone worked in different ways but all had good ideas

No-as we were all being taught on the module

No

No we still had learning outcomes to achieve so the lessons were based on these

The sessions were very informative I structured my own learning my choice of project and used the lesson and knowledge which supported me in my understanding to equip me for this task

No because I feel we all got something out of the lessons regardless of how we all used the ICT equipment

Designing our own assessment did not affect our sessions because the information is all the same but it was put down according to the individual

No, as all the learning outcomes were still the same for everyone and it was just the indicative task that was different

Yes

I did not notice any change in the way the sessions were designed

Sessions went on as "normal" and we took that information adapted and used as necessary

No-because at the end of the day the learning outcomes were still the same for everyone it was the indicative task that was different

Do you think the student involvement in this type of activity will make a difference to the way lecturers work with students? Yes/No

If yes, state how

Y. Because students have more input in their assessment, the support that was needed was different

Y. Correct information. What is useful and what is not

Y. Show who needs more/less help

Y. as it would enable them to work together and help with ideas which students can be assessed

Y knowing what is needed and what is not

Y students can be given more opportunities to think for them selves

Y. I would expect it would make a difference, it highlights strengths/weaknesses to enable tutors to adapt and differentiate the learning programme

Y. It made it enjoyable and easy to understand as all had different strengths

Y. it will enable students to be more open in sessions and this will make the lecturer more approachable

Y. Lecturer will know how students work and like to present

Y. The lecturer listened to the students and this affects the way the students learn

Y. Students will be allowed to explore their own learning styles and work to their own pace ensuring that the work is at their best standard

No

Yes the lecturers may plan to deliver the module to meet the individual needs of students

Y. Recognise students strengths and weaknesses and allowing learners to control their learning.

Y. Lecturers can empower students to think for themselves and cover assignments in a way that suits their own learning styles and preferences.

Benefit

What was the best thing that **you** will take away from this experience?

I was able to choose how I wanted to complete my assignment.

?

Knowing how I work best

My ideas

Confidence in what I do

Knowing I can produce my own assignment having more confidence in myself

My own personal assignment and how this has raised my self-esteem. My Mark!

My first ever distinction for my own work

The fact that nobody failed the assignment

Putting in my own information

How to make a tune with different musical/noisy toys How ICT can support children under 3

As we were involved in the way the assignment was delivered it was more interesting and enjoyable to complete and ICT was an enjoyable subject

Confidence that I could do something of my own choice

Learning as a practitioner I experienced and use ICT daily without realising

Exploring and keeping up to date with technology; not fearing to face challenges

Happy memories of working with awkward peers. 😊

Making my own informed choices

Changes

Could and should changes be made to the student involvement to make this type of activity more effective?

Yes/No

No

Yes

No

No

No

Yes

If yes, state how

Y. It should be done for every assignment

Y. Don't really mind, sometimes it maybe useful, but others may put students under more pressure to see if they can carry out all parts of assignment.

Y but only when appropriate

No students worked well

Y more choices

Y probably have more group discussions to enable other who are less confident in helping them to become involved more.

Y. I enjoyed the group discussions as it highlighted new areas of the task and helped us all to achieve end result

Y choosing your own assessment is a great advantage for us as students, however, it could be made more effective by giving this option for more/all assignments

N. the students work well and being able to discuss assignments with each other really helps

Yes, from time to time, students should be given many such opportunities and this will take the students learning curve upwards

I was extremely happy 😊

Y. Ensure that all students are aware that learning outcomes are still important and need to be covered no matter how they choose to meet the outcomes

Involving students in curriculum design

In what other ways could the student voice be used to help lecturers improve their design of courses?

What types of assignment-maybe look at more of the students learning styles to improve the learning

Knowing how student like to learn and show work and supporting in weak areas

Giving students what module topics they would like to do

Open sessions

Listen to students give them the opportunity to have an input

More informed discussions

Yes it helps more understanding

Give students more options on how to complete their assignments

Giving out questionnaires to ask for ideas work around pupils learning styles

Erm...

Perhaps giving out questionnaires to see what types of assignment are preferred e.g. essays, reports, power point presentations, posters group work

Involving students in learning and teaching

In your current experience of learning and teaching, do you feel that your lecturers take account of the student voice in their work? Yes/No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

In what other ways could the student voice be used in learning and teaching?

Y. Learning styles. Group work

Y. Giving students the opportunity on what they want to be taught in the session

Y. We did use the student voice through forums, emails which could be used in assignments

Y. Through Moodle forums and email. Used these forums in the assignment

Y. By giving us more rights on which type of assessment we wish to use

Y. designing own assignments

One to one learning and teaching at times

Y. monitoring marks achieved for various types of learning and teaching and gaining info on overall effectiveness

Further information

Are there any other comments you would like to provide?

I did enjoy the more creative part of the assignment i.e the power point

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to excel.

Enjoyed this activity It was fun and using Moodle more helped with the learning

I enjoyed this assignment but was let down by my results

*The assignment was very interesting I have enjoyed and learnt a lot from this
The assignment was enjoyable and interesting to complete I will hopefully use my
power point within the setting*

Overall I enjoyed the whole assignment

Thank you

*Although I liked choosing my own assignment, I would not like to do this every time-
sometimes it is nice to be told what to do.*

Hearing the student voice

Involving students in curriculum design and delivery

An ESCalate-funded project involving Edinburgh Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University and the University of Westminster



Case study evaluation – student

Title

“Not another bloomin’ essay”: students taking control of their assessment
(CLLC module students)

Institution

Birmingham City University

Reaction

What were your main reactions to BEING ASKED to design your own assessment?

Initially... Oh just tell me what to do so I can get on with it! After a while... Interest and motivated to do something pertinent to me and my setting

My first reaction was “great” but as I started looking at the learning outcomes I was finding it difficult to design my assessment. I was pleased to be given the option and because it was left open during our sessions I started to put my assessment together. I had brainstormed a few different ways of how my assessment was to look like and chose the best from them. I found that it was not that difficult and am currently writing my assignment and using my own ideas

Panic at 1st- then when assignment objectives/criteria was discussed it enable me to decide. It allowed me to use my best skills

Happy that my views were being considered and that I could use my learning style to maximum advantage

Help! After a while calmed down and realised this could be good-I can do something relevant to my work that is useful and can motivate me.

Added value

Do you feel student involvement made this activity more valuable for lecturers?

Yes/ No

(please circle)

If yes, state how

Y. We were able to direct lessons and bring our own experiences to class, matching it to relevant theories

Y. because from our input/discussions, lecturers can then tailor our learning, so that we are benefiting from taught sessions

Y. We were able to bounce the ideas and theory and Jenny was able to plan to support our gaps in knowledge

Y we gave ideas for the lessons and could base it round our experiences and needs- meant we had to do the readings and research

Impact

Do you think that designing your own assessment affected the way the sessions were designed and if so in what way? Yes/No

Because we planned to sessions we knew what was coming and looked forward to them

After discussing our assessment with the tutor, she designed a table of what we would like to be taught over the next few sessions. This was a good idea because in preparation for the session we could bring along any relevant data to help

The sessions were designed appropriately to cover the assessment areas

Yes they were planned by Jenny to facilitate our learning

We planned the sessions from week 1 and looked at what we needed to know not just for the assignment but for work

Do you think the student involvement in this type of activity will make a difference to the way lecturers work with students? Yes/No

If yes, state how

I hope so

Y. because it allows lecturers to focus on students learning more closely, so that students are being challenged and focussed

Y we had more individual input and support

Y. I would like to think so! It worked here but may not with other lecturers who don't like students having any control

Benefit

What was the best thing that **you** will take away from this experience?

Being able to complete it the way I feel and the way that I can use my skills to an advantage

A degree at the end of it

My resource guide and pack!! Belief that I can do stuff when pushed. My achievement

Changes

Could and should changes be made to the student involvement to make this type of activity more effective?

Yes/No

No

No

Sort of

If yes, state how

Depends on students confidence level , third year students are more confident and willing to take risks, not sure I would have been as confident in first year

This worked well for us but may not have been so successful in the first year. Maybe student involvement is built up slowly-you have to trust the lecturer and each other-it was good so should continue in some form.

Involving students in curriculum design

In what other ways could the student voice be used to help lecturers improve their design of courses?

Maybe choose subjects they are interested in to design their own assessment

By giving examples of different type of assignment structures

Use our experiences more, find out what we know not just what the syllabus says we have to learn

Involving students in learning and teaching

In your current experience of learning and teaching, do you feel that your lecturers take account of the student voice in their work?

Yes/No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Some

In what other ways could the student voice be used in learning and teaching?

Our lecturers are really responsive, but being only a class of 10 means we are very lucky

Y. maybe could be more involved in teaching

Let us decide the content with lecturers and perhaps the outcomes

Further information

Are there any other comments you would like to provide?

Always find it challenging to commit time I would like to, to self designed projects-but even so get great amount of knowledge from them and my colleagues and setting benefits from involvement of self-designed assessments

This has been very useful Jenny has worked very hard to keep us fully involved in our learning

This is a challenging and motivating thing to do please continue with it to benefit all FD students

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