

**Title:** **Enhancing the First Year Experience: responsive curriculum change as a tool to create and sustain student motivation to learn**

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Session Learning Outcomes**

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

- Critically evaluate current perceptions of the meaning of student centred learning.
- Reflect on aspects of academic practice that can impact on student engagement in the critical early weeks of their HE experience.
- Consider the impact of ALT strategies and curricula designs from the point of view of students at the start of their HE studies through the use of role play and case studies based on real student experiences collected through focus group and interviews.
- Suggest innovative solutions that could enhance motivation and engagement
- Share the experience of the implementation of the delivery of two key first year first semester modules on the Biomedical Sciences degree course at Leeds Met as an intensive 5 week study block .

#### **Session Outline**

Key issues to be addressed are:

- Student Centred Learning – Motivation, Engagement, Retention and Achievement
- Academic practices and processes as barriers to student engagement and learning
- Designing Curricula that are truly responsive to student needs.

Student centredness is considered to be at the heart of academic practices at FE and HE Institutions and the phrase ‘student centred learning’ prolifically appears in documentation ranging from University Mission statements to course and module handbooks explaining the rationale for ALT approaches and curricula design. In all of this there is an assumption that there is a shared meaning of what the phrase ‘Student centred learning’ means both conceptually and in practice. (O’Neill,G. and McMahon, T. 2005, Lea, S.J et al 2003). Student focus groups and formative tasks on Personal and Professional development modules carried out at Leeds met and elsewhere (Sander P et al 2000) have provided interesting data on students perception of the concept. Workshop participants will be asked to test the validity of this assumption of the shared understanding of meaning by discussing their definitions of student centred learning and will be asked to compare their views with the views of different student cohorts – particularly students new to HE.

Case studies based on research on the first year student experience will be used to stimulate discussion of just how student centred common academic practices are from the student perspective. Participants will be invited to suggest changes to both ALT strategies and academic processes that may help to make the HE experience more user friendly therefore enhancing student engagement and achievement. Barriers to change and the implications for staff development will also be considered.

The session will finish with a report of the implementation of a radical curriculum change on the first year of the Biomedical Sciences course at Leeds Met, predominantly in response to student views.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

- Introduction to the session – **5minutes**
- Group activity - Discuss and agree on a definition of student centred learning – **15 minutes**
- Consideration of students views of student centred learning – **5mins**
- Discussion around the implications of different definitions of student centred learning from both a staff and student perspective **15 mins**
- Group activity – consideration of case study Scenarios on the first year student experience - **10 mins**
- Feedback on each case study and swap shop on strategies and changes that participants have used ( or think could be used) to enhance student engagement and motivation to learn **20 mins**
- Report on Foundation module block delivery on Leedsmet Biomed Sciences degree – **10 mins**
- Closing Comments from participants

### **References**

**Lea, Susan J., Stephenson, David and Troy, Juliette (2003)** 'Higher Education Students' Attitudes to Student-centred Learning: beyond 'educational bulimia?', *Studies in Higher Education*, 28:3, 321 – 334

**Sander, P., Stevenson, K, King, M. & Coates, D. (2000)** University students' expectations of teaching, *Studies in Higher Education*, 25, pp. 309–323.

**O'Neill Geraldine and McMahon Tim ,( 2005)** Student centred learning: what does it mean for students and lecturers? In: *Emerging Issues in the Practice of University Learning and Teaching*. O'Neill, G., Moore, S., McMullin, B. (Eds). Dublin:AISHE.