**Project title:**

**Evaluation of the learning, teaching and assessment orientation events**

**Why did you choose the project?**

This project built on previous areas of work into Associate Lecturer development needs, interviews with staff with less than 5 years experience in Higher Education and a university wide workshop to develop Faculty specific orientation for new members of academic and learning support staff. An orientation event had been held within the Faculty of ACES since 2006. Whilst the results of short feedback sheets had been collated and helped to inform developments to the event, little information was known regarding how new staff found out about institutional culture and processes.

**Why was this significant?**

Not all new staff at Sheffield Hallam University undertake the PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (aka the “new staff” course); some teaching is provided by Associate Lecturers whose primary role is in other areas of the university; and we also have some transfer between local Higher Education Institutions where there is a significant cultural difference and learning and teaching ethos. This raises the following questions:

* How do new staff learn about the language and culture of learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) at Sheffield Hallam University?
* How do staff find out what they need to know and what “we” think “they” ought to know?

Since starting the research supported by the SEDA Grant there has been considerable institutional change in both recipients areas of work. As a consequence a temporary administrative appointment has been made to look at resources for new staff. They are holding conversations with new staff on Certificate in Learning and Teaching in HE to establish an electronic resource base for new staff which is outside this project but our findings will contribute to the development of this resource

**So what is an LTA Orientation event?**

The aim was for a light touch, interactive day without PowerPoint *overload*. An emphasis on providing networking opportunities with both peers at the event and key members of staff that could help them in their role was considered an important aspect and built in to the programme. The events have evolved over time and are created to meet the needs of the specific groups of staff in attendance. Below is a generic structure of the activities that have been included:

* Welcome and introduction from Head of Learning, Teaching and Assessment
* “On the Spot” 15 minute conversations with – Technician Manager, Timetabling, Quality, Learning Centre, Student Support Manager. This is an opportunity for staff to ask questions and find out how staff in support roles contribute to the student experience and support academic staff in their teaching
* LTA treasure hunt – using the staff intranet, New Lecturers' Handbook, hard copy resources, HEA materials etc. attendees search of key information required to support learning and teaching.
* Lunch: Making connections – senior staff and student support representatives present. Conversations are held with staff in leadership roles and key areas of student support relevant to the attendees present
* Introduction to Inclusive Practice: what is meant by inclusive practice, diversity within Sheffield Hallam University, key information about disabled student learning contracts and who to contact plus case study discussions.
* Introduction to Faculty Blackboard (VLE) support. Outlining the availability of at elbow support and training available
* IT Support: Useful Microsoft tools which are available such as OneNote and how to get help and training on IT packages such as Microsoft Office.

**What you did and how it was carried out?**

Groups of staff were surveyed using Survey Monkey which is an online survey tool.

* An evaluation was made of attendees at two orientation events using the attendance list from the events.
* A survey of staff who were invited but did not attend the orientation events were also surveyed over two orientation events.
* Non attendees from the Faculty of ACES were identified from lists subsequently provided by HR and surveyed to identify if and how they may have found out the information covered in the orientation events. This group of staff were predominantly new members of staff who hadn’t previously been identified.
* A survey of new staff from across all four Faculties regarding their perception of orientation to learning, teaching and assessment.

The survey was voluntary and staff were advised that we were undertaking the evaluation through a grant and would be sharing the findings.

**What have you learnt from doing this work?**

There were 24 responses from attendees at the orientation events over the last 2 years, all from the Faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and Sciences. The staff type consisted of:

* 50% Full time staff
* 50% Associate Lecturers.

Eleven had more than 5 years experience in HE (although some of it was “occasional”) making them unlikely to be asked to undertake the PGCert Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. The respondents who **attended** were generally very positive:

* (I’m) new so general overview was very informative
* Pretty much everything
* Vital particularly for people like me who are not from HE
* Key contacts and points of reference
* Library services and internet tools
* The information pack

Some respondents felt there was *too* much information to take in during one session. On reflection we recognised the events had developed in to information giving rather than information finding. However, this had been in response to feedback suggesting these additional aspects.

Staff said that they wanted:

* Teaching strategies
* Blackboard tutorials, guide to Blackboard, Blackboard training (VLE)
* Hand-outs
* Real world examples to explain resources and cases
	+ tutor session
* List of useful websites
* Email with information on staff intranet, H&S and Fire Awareness

Staff really valued the orientation event and even requested coverage over two half days as there was too much information to take in one day

The staff responses indicated that there were key strategic messages which they felt they needed to know about which were not necessarily introduced in the earlier orientation event such as:

* Information regarding Key Information Sets (KIS)
* National Student Survey (NSS)

However, from a Developer perspective there were other strategies and policies which were felt to be important which new staff may not have been aware of:

* Learning, teaching and assessment strategy
* Employability, Graduate Attributes
* Professional standards and professional recognition
* QAA – External Examiners
* Inclusive Practice
* Assessment

Some institutional processes and jargon required clarification for instance:

* How timetabling works
* Glossary of terms – acronyms and jargon
* Glossary of terms – roles and responsibilities
* Career development

From a developer perspective, there were other processes and approaches which were unique to the institution which were felt to be important:

* Appraisal and Peer Supported Review (PSR)
* Research and scholarship

Technology enhanced learning required more information and guidance, demonstrating the importance of the face to face interaction, as much of the information requested is available electronically provided you know that it is available:

* Guidance on eLearning
* Innovation guides – “try this”
* Innovative approaches to delivery of modules and assessment
* “How to” manuals for technology enhanced learning

The request for information about assessment and feedback related to practical aspects which would help enhance their practice rather than just information about policies and frameworks which require interpretation.

* Innovative approaches to delivery of modules and assessment
* Top level policies and procedures plus….
* When going to an assessment board you will need ….
* How to get students to use feedback
* Online submission and online feedback
* Guide to practice assessments (specifically in health related courses)

Other aspects involved day to day practice which perhaps only required a signposting:

* How to use the IT system effectively – holiday bookings, searching the intranet
* H&S information
* Guide to the campus and room numbering
* Library induction for academic staff, including researchers

As part of the research, we were interested in why staff had not attended the orientation events:

* 25% work commitments
* 25% unsure if it was relevant to them
* 50% not notified of the event

The responses raise issues about communication with new staff but also with line managers, raising the importance and value of attendance.

Whilst the new staff indicated the information which they felt they needed to help get them started in learning and teaching, there was information which the researchers felt was important, which may not be identified by a colleague in the office. For instance:

* Research and Scholarship – discipline and pedagogy
* Relationship of learning, teaching and assessment to UK PSF and value of HEA recognition
* CPD opportunities – including discipline specific
	+ Such as HEA subject specific events
	+ HEA new staff events with discipline leads
* Theoretical underpinning of learning and teaching
* Course design and planning
* Use of social media in learning and teaching and career development

Whilst these aspects of academic practice are not essential to getting new staff started in their learning and teaching, they are important in the long term particularly in respect of career development and progression and understanding both the sector and the context in which their discipline is located. For those not undertaking the PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education there is no consistent point this information may be communicated.

**How have you told others about your work?**

This was disseminated through a SEDA workshop held at Sheffield Hallam University on 12 April 2012. The workshop was introduced by Sue Beckingham and Sally Bradley where we shared the background for the project and our reasons for evaluating the Learning, Teaching and Assessment orientation events. This was followed by a presentation by Dr Helen Gale, from Wolverhampton, who presented her research findings on early career academics and their identity. The workshop then included an interactive session where delegates considered the resources, information and timing of delivery for new staff to help them get started in their teaching career in Higher Education. Staff from the HEA then gave short presentations relating to the support for learning and teaching which is available generically and discipline specific for new academic staff.

**What effect has it had and where is this activity now heading?**

We are currently reviewing how resources can be presented to new staff consistently across Faculties to ensure that information is appropriate and timely. A temporary member of staff has been appointed to collate the information and we are working with her to develop a comprehensive yet accessible resource pack and web resource.

Sue Beckingham and Sally Bradley are now on an HR convened working group looking at new staff induction across all four Faculties. The findings of this project have been fed into this process.

One orientation event attendee who was on an Associate Lecturer contract had now gained a full-time teaching post. He emailed to acknowledge the value of the orientation event content in the interview process.

**What outputs have resulted from this activity?**

The resource pack will be available for new academic staff in September 2012.