

Title: Innovation and Collaboration in the development of cross-disciplinary elective modules at the University of Westminster

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Session Learning Outcomes

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

- Engage with issues that occur when developing curricula through collaboration
- Identify potential solutions to these issues that may be applicable to one's own context

Session Outline

This 45 minute discussion paper explores some of the issues that occur when developing curricula through cross-faculty collaboration. These issues will be explored by sharing our experience developing new cross-disciplinary elective modules, and by leading a discussion directed towards some of the challenges we encountered.

Our developments were inspired by a singular innovation: an interdisciplinary Art/Science collaboration module, developed through the 'Broad Vision' project (Barnett & Smith, 2011, see also: <http://broad-vision.info/>). They were then driven by an institutional strategy that aspires to enhance learning through interdisciplinary provision, in common with many other universities (Lyall et al., 2015). Development of the cross-disciplinary modules was led by a task group working under the auspices of a 5-year change programme ('Learning Futures').

The new modules are inherently innovative and collaborative. They are ground breaking for the university, requiring modification to broader structures such as the timetable, assessment boards, and workload allocation. They demand collaboration between academics situated in multiple faculties, and were guided by a diverse task group comprising academics, student co-creators, and project managers.

This presentation describes the process the task group undertook leading, managing, and facilitating the development of these new cross-disciplinary elective modules. It spans the developmental journey from conception to validation.

Preliminary evaluation of the success of our ongoing work will be provided in the form of module registration data, and an analysis of a survey of over 1000 student respondents.

To prompt small group discussion, I will offer reflection on how we tackled the challenges we encountered. Themes explored include: diffusion of responsibility within task groups (Petty et al., 1977), staff- vs. demand- led innovation, and the use of residential events to facilitate collaboration of geographically dispersed staff, kick starting the development of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

- A) Presentation, as outlined above (15 minutes)
- B) Group discussion (15 minutes):

Working in small groups, delegates will be invited to consider solutions to the issues outlined in the presentation. Prompt questions are:

what leadership and project management arrangements would you put in place to develop a similar initiative in your own context?

how would you determine the number and nature of the modules being developed?

- C) Feedback from groups (10 minutes)
- D) Summing up, and lessons learned from our experience at the University of Westminster (5 minutes)

References

Barnett, H. & Smith, J. (Eds.) 2011, *Broad Vision: The Art & Science of looking*. London: University of Westminster. ISBN: 978-0-9550951-5-3.

Lyall, C, Meagher, L, Bandola, J, & Kettle, A 2015, *Interdisciplinary provision in higher education. Current context and future challenges*. HEA / University of Edinburgh

Petty, R., Harkins, S., Williams, K., & Latane, B., 1977. The effects of group size on cognitive effort and evaluation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 3(4), 579-582.

Wenger, E., 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-0-521-66363-2.