

Response to the White Paper: The Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)

The Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) is the professional association for staff and educational developers in the UK, promoting innovation and good practice in higher education. It represents many of those tasked with enhancing learning and teaching in universities in the UK. SEDA is seen by many as the shaper of thought and initiator of action in staff and educational development, not only in the UK but also in the international domain. This response has been drafted by the SEDA Executive Committees having sought views from its general membership.

For many years SEDA has been concerned to support the development of a professional teaching force to enhance the student experience. An untrained teacher is more likely to reproduce models of teaching based on their own experiences of learning in the past and SEDAs concern has been and continues to be to modernise approaches to teaching HE and ensure high quality relevant and effective teaching.

It is the second of the three 'challenges' that the White Paper recognises, therefore – that 'institutions must deliver a better student experience; improving teaching, assessment, feedback and preparation for the world of work' that is the principal focus of SEDA's response.

SEDA welcomes the White Paper for endorsing the need for universities to improve the quality of teaching and for stating that the student experience is 'at the heart of the system'. SEDA has continually supported institutions in their need to devote attention to how they can most efficiently manage limited resources and maintain and enhance the quality of teaching.

The Quality of Student Information

SEDA fully endorses the aim in the White Paper to introduce reforms to *restore teaching to its proper position, at the centre of every higher education institution's mission (para 2.7 p27)*. SEDA agrees that this '*depends on access to high quality information about different courses and institutions*' but, of course, the improvement of teaching quality cannot be entirely dependent on such information.

The White Paper stresses that the Government '*will empower prospective students by ensuring much better information on different courses*' and that:

We encourage higher education institutions to publish anonymised information for prospective and existing students about the teaching qualifications, fellowships and expertise of their teaching staff at all levels.

SEDA has already responded to the QAA 'Consultation on Changes to the Academic Infrastructure' and has stated that it believes that detailed information should be provided concerning the development and enhancement of teaching through the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and that universities and departments should declare how many of their staff (including managers of learning) have

achieved levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the UKPSF. SEDA also believes that courses should declare what proportion of their teaching is being conducted by staff who have achieved levels 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the UKPSF. Data should also include details about those *managing* the teaching experience.

SEDA believes strongly that this information will indicate to what extent universities have established robust measures for the quality enhancement of learning and the provision of effective learning opportunities for students including the opportunity for students to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience. SEDA believes that unless we are clear about what data will prevent obfuscation, any 'broad' requirements required of universities will be likely to be defeated by a lack of comparability. Other evidence of quality in this area is whether a University has a Learning and Teaching Strategy and a unit dedicated to enhancing student learning.

SEDA does not believe that survey data of student satisfaction at module level is sufficiently robust or comparable at present and therefore would be against providing such information for students.

Qualifying remarks

The White Paper states that *'Student charters and student feedback will take on a new importance to empower students whilst at university. Universities will be expected to publish online summary reports of student surveys of lecture courses, aiding choice and stimulating competition between the best academics'*

SEDA does not believe student survey mechanisms are currently robust enough to provide meaningful information or comparative data on the quality of modules. SEDA also believes that quality improvement in teaching arises not from competition but that improvement and enhancement happens through co-operation, collaboration and partnership. SEDA does not believe that teaching staff are, or will be, motivated by the values of the marketplace.

The White paper is somewhat ambiguous on this matter as elsewhere the need for partnership is clearly valued acknowledging the limitations of the market. For example, it is stated that Student Charters:

'should emphasise that to pursue higher education is to belong to a learning community and that the experience will be most enriching when it is based on a partnership between staff and students'

Similarly, in discussion of Student Feedback the White Paper states that the:

NUS and the Higher Education Academy play an important role in supporting institutions to respond to student feedback, at national and institutional levels. We welcome the joint NUS/Higher Education Academy student engagement project and its outputs, particularly the toolkit for students' unions and higher education institutions to work together in improving students' academic engagement. The Higher Education Academy will be piloting a UK-wide student-led awards scheme for excellent teaching, based on an educational partnership between students, their tutors, and institutions.

Student Workloads and the Quality of Teaching

SEDA would not disagree with the premise that a key goal for Higher Education is *to improve the quality of students' academic experience and to increase their*

educational gain (para 2.1 p28). In improving that experience the White Paper states that:

There are also legitimate concerns about the variation in student workload between different subjects, and the status of teaching at some institutions (para2.2 p25).

Whilst SEDA would agree that there may be unacceptable variations in the status of teaching (and is itself working to change these), SEDA believes that universities need to ensure promotion routes that reflect expertise in teaching as well as research. This could be something which the QAA could look for in Institutional Quality Reviews as evidence of a commitment to the enhancement of teaching and learning. Without such a simple lever in place universities are likely to revert to the traditional focus on research expertise as the key evidence for promotion and those who are committed to enhancing teaching may be condemned to low status roles while others pay less attention to teaching than students require. While we support the fact that HEI's have the autonomy to determine their own promotion criteria, SEDA believes that levers will need to be put in place to request evidence that measures are in place to promote teaching.

SEDA believes that an uncritical acceptance of popular concerns about variations in student workloads is unhelpful and that this needs/requires further research. As Gibbs (2011) has noted:

The number of class contact hours has very little to do with educational quality, independently of what happens in those hours, what the pedagogical model is, and what the consequences are for the quantity and quality of independent study hours. Independent study hours, to a large extent, reflect class contact hours: if there is less teaching then students study more and if there is more teaching students study less (Gibbs 2011:21)

Whilst Gibbs acknowledges in the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) research (2006,2007) mentioned in the White Paper (para 2.3 p25) he also states, however, that:

What seems to matter is the nature of the class contact. 'Close contact' that involves at least some interaction between teachers and students on a personal basis is associated with greater educational gains (Pascarella, 1980) independently of the total number of class contact hours (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005) (Gibbs 2011:21)

SEDA Response: Summary

1. SEDA welcomes this student engagement agenda as an opportunity to further involve students in areas such as quality assurance, and the enhancement of teaching and learning.
2. SEDA welcomes references to the improvement of teaching quality. The introduction of professional pedagogic development programmes for new academic staff was important and has been successfully implemented across most of the sector. The sector now needs to maintain the professional development of those new staff, and support the professional pedagogic development of established staff. This is an urgent priority. Much of the

- success of the task of improving teaching quality will depend on the quality of the process for accrediting approaches which meet the objectives of the UKPSF. The HE Academy will need to maintain an appropriate and rigorous accreditation process.
3. SEDA welcomes direct references to those measures of the quality enhancement of teaching which should be managed and transparently declared by institutions in an appropriate format. In particular, SEDA reiterates that it believes universities and departments should declare how many of their staff (including managers of learning) have achieved levels 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the (soon to be re-launched) UKPSF and for courses to declare what proportion of their teaching is being conducted by staff who have achieved UKPSF levels.
 4. SEDA has been engaged in supporting educational development in UK HEIs for many years and believes that it has made a major contribution to universities becoming much more skilful and flexible as a consequence. SEDA believes that the 'health' of centres for educational development in universities is critical.
 5. SEDA further believes that the professional pedagogic development of middle and senior managers (those who manage and lead the main teaching programmes and the innovation and enhancement work) has been neglected and that this needs addressing and has to change. This can be achieved we suggest through reference to the UKPSF.

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