Contents

Evaluation of the Supporting and Leading Educational Change SEDA Fellowship course

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Supporting and Leading Educational Change (SLEC) is a twelve-week online course designed to accredit and advance participants' work in supporting and leading educational change in further or higher education. Successful completion leads to Fellowship of SEDA (FSEDA). SLEC is delivered over two six-week blocks during which participants are supported by a team of experienced educational developers and by their peers on the course. The course recruits individuals who are actively involved in educational development and have been for at least three years. In this context, educational development involves supporting and developing staff (colleagues, teachers, teaching assistants) to improve professional practice and student learning (https://www.seda.ac.uk/supporting-leading-educational-change-course).

Penny Sweasey: I took part in SLEC and gained my SEDA fellowship in 2012, and two years later became a course tutor, alongside Elaine Fisher and John-Paul Foxe. When Celia Popovic stepped down in 2018, the leadership of the course passed to me and I was delighted that Elaine and John-Paul remained as co-tutors. I am now planning for the second cohort in this capacity and keen to explore whether the course continues to reflect the SEDA Values and Specialist Outcomes that were originally intended and if there is a need to review structure or approaches to gaining Fellowship.

In a 2016 case study, Celia Popovic and Elaine Fisher reflected on their experience of two very different cohorts; this article builds on that and considers how the course has been evaluated in the three years since their article.

Ruth Pilkington: I have been the external examiner (EE) for SLEC for four years and have witnessed considerable change over the years:

> 'There have been improvements to online platforms, a tightening of recruitment, and diversity of the cohort; it was interesting this year to see one example of an educational developer from the private/international supply sector. There appears to be a considerable emphasis and interest in wider markets, IT and evaluation emerging. The course is well "bedded-in" and has addressed issues raised positively over the years. The systems and process of moderation and assessment have matured and show careful planning, thoroughness and are of a high quality.'
>
> (EE Report, 2019)

SEDA Supporting and Leading Educational Change

Reason for review now

We have monitored and reviewed SLEC over the last few years; we feel that the course is essentially sound, and receives consistently positive feedback, but needs to be carefully evaluated to ensure it is doing what it sets out to do, namely engaging educational developers in a community of practice in which they support each other in the demonstration of the SEDA Values and the Specialist SLEC Outcomes (Table 1). For the majority of participants, the journey through SLEC is a positive experience that culminates in SEDA Fellowship and for this reason we have a duty to periodically review and reflect on its fitness for purpose in conferring an internationally recognised professional status. This review will, between this article and a workshop at the November SEDA Conference, ensure that it is consistent in achieving a standard that reflects the standing of current Fellowship holders, transparent in evaluation, and responsive to emerging issues in the sector.

SEDA Values	*Core and Specialist SLEC Outcomes*
1) Developing understanding of how people learn 2) Practising in ways that are scholarly, professional and ethical 3) Working with and developing learning communities 4) Valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity 5) Continually reflecting on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes.	CO1 Identify their own professional development goals, directions or priorities CO2 Plan for their initial and/or continuing professional development CO3 Undertake appropriate development activities CO4 Review their development and their practice, and the relations between them SO1 Identified goals for staff and for academic development processes and activities SO2 Planned and led academic development processes and activities towards achievement of these goals SO3 Facilitated and led processes and activities to achieve agreed goals SO4 Monitored and evaluated the effectiveness and the acceptability of the development processes and activities SO5 Identified any appropriate follow-up development process or activity CO = SEDA PDF Core Outcomes; SO = SLEC Specialist Outcomes

Table 1   SLEC Outcomes

Enrolments and engagement

This year, the SLEC programme recruited 22, of whom 13 successfully submitted a portfolio and were awarded FSEDA, with five intending to repeat in 2019. The previous 2017 cohort recruited 29, with 19 awards (after extensions and re-submissions), and nine withdrawals (of which three returned to the 2018 cohort). In both years, non-completion was due to participants who stepped off the course or postponed their involvement with the course (ill-health and workload being the two most common reasons).

RP: in my 2018 EE Report, I commented that it was 'unfortunate and disappointing that completion rates continue to be low. This appears to be a challenge for both Fellowship awards.' (Note – refers also to the Online Introduction to Educational Change course that did not run this year).

Discussion with participants who withdrew indicates the extent to which all academics and, in this instance educational developers, are often pressurised: whilst benefiting from the award's online structure, they still struggle with time and deadlines. There is an inevitable tension between the individual demands of time to complete the course, and reasonable expectations of rigour that underpins a professional recognition of FSEDA.

Feedback from participants

At the end of the course, the participants are asked to complete an online evaluation. The responses below are drawn mainly from this year, but also identify any similarities or changes year to year.

When asked to reflect on the 'Best things about the course', many participants appreciated that the course structures their time and affords a space to focus that they would not otherwise have created or managed: 'By taking the course, I was made to take time to reflect and review my academic development practices'. Others comment that, 'the course provided excellent opportunities for interaction between Fellows and supportive learning environment for self-reflection' and to 'meet others online who have similar concerns to me'. They recognised, however, the requirement for self-management as, 'it seems most of us are completing the course in the evenings after work.'

The course is designed to accommodate a variety of roles and feedback indicated that participants enjoyed the 'diversity of considerations in respect to educational development, from the reading to the tasks' and 'opportunities for connecting internationally'. Another said, 'I appreciated the variety of materials and the links provided, both from the participants and the tutors' and 'the readings and course topics were closely related to my job role. The access to both the book, and additional readings that were shared by PDF expanded the breadth of literature and were really helpful.'

The tutors have a wider range of experience in different contexts and this is vital to make the course run smoothly and reflects the diversity of the cohort; fortunately, participants agree this is achieved: 'We are provided with an excellent book, supportive and experienced tutors. The course is well structured and in the main the activities are clear to follow. When enough peers engage with the activities and post constructive comments then the peer learning works well'.

SLEC structure

The course is a mix of synchronous and (primarily) asynchronous online activities over 12 weeks in two blocks. We asked, 'Did the structure of the course enable you to learn effectively?' Most feedback was positive about the delivery, timing and structure:

- *'The format was very clear. The resources and structure were absolutely spot on.'*
- *'I really enjoyed the format of the course and the tasks to complete on a weekly basis. Although this required a high degree of self-management it really helped my planning, learning and reflections.'*

A comment typical of many was:

- *'This is the first time I have undertaken an online course that required such a high degree of self-management on a weekly basis. Although sometimes quite difficult to manage on top of a busy full-time role I ensured that I "kept up" with the tasks required on a weekly basis. The ability to engage with the course at any time during the week was hugely valuable and I enjoyed the feedback from participants as it fed through during the week and beyond.'*
- *'Meeting "virtually" was great, but I particularly liked the podcasts and webinar.'*
- *'The timing worked well for me, with the break over the holidays to catch up.'*

However, some participants found the structure less intuitive or easy to manage alongside the 'day job':

- *'I didn't always succeed in navigating the online resources efficiently. I did appreciate the week by week approach for the initial sessions. Personally, I may have benefited from a more scaffolded approach to the case study; sometimes I missed the point.'*
- *'I would have liked for the content to have been spread over a longer period. It felt at times that it was too much reading to do and so little time to do it all. However, on the other hand, the fact that the course was offered in such a short period of time, was an important factor for applying.'*
- *'The timetable was fine, but some commitments with my full-time job and some trips overseas did not allow me to participate in online conversations.'*
- *'The timetable I feel could be more inclusive in nature if publicised in its entirety at the start as this would allow people to get ahead of the set work where time permitted.'*

Participant engagement

There are clearly time pressures on all staff in HE, and this was reflected in responses about engagement:

- *'The course is well structured and, in the main, the activities are clear to follow. When enough peers engage with the activities and post constructive comments then the peer learning works well. The facilitators are supportive and respond quickly to queries. The structure is perfect as you can dip in and out throughout the week.'*
- *'Having smaller tutorial groups with a tutor helped to make the course feel more personal. I would have liked to start the personal discussions right away. More encouragement to thread responses, replying and building on each other may have enriched this more, rather than the tendency we showed to each post a separate message.'*

However, one comment reflected the experience of several participants over the last two years, who, in common with the tutors and external, felt that more emphasis should be placed on expectations for active engagement:

> *'I'm afraid I lost my motivation after a few weeks when others in my group were not posting. I then stopped posting as I didn't want to look like the swot, nor did I want to pressure others. But this had a negative impact on my motivation because once I got out of the habit of allocating weekly time for the tasks, I quickly allowed other work to take over and fell behind…Whilst I gained from reading many of my peers' postings, I would have preferred to work more closely with two or three peers in a learning group and to develop a collaborative approach on our chosen case studies. This would also have increased my sense of peer responsibility. I teach about collaborative learning and it was interesting from a meta perspective to reflect on my learning experience from this course. I would like to recommend that the course pilots a more collaborative approach.'*

What this feedback highlights is the importance of building an active community for the cohort online. This means encouraging participants to see the value of exchange and sharing, and to accommodate that need in how online discussion evolves. Given the need for external contact among educational developers, this aspect reflects SEDA Value 3 and emphasises that safe space for community on the programme.

Impact of SLEC

We asked participants, 'In what ways did you benefit from your experience of being on the SLEC course, and how is undertaking the course likely to have an impact on you and your role?':

- *'It encouraged me to search out and document some practices that I had not explicitly documented. It encouraged me to more intentionally reflect on my work within a framework [of] connection and sharing with colleagues, e.g. one task asked us to nominate our most influential texts (and) helped to expand the literature and the ideas I was considering.'*
- *'Highlighted a number of issues very usefully. I found some of the readings particularly enlightening and I enjoyed the many examples and suggestions from classmates.'*
- *'Although this required a high degree of self-management it really helped my planning, learning and reflections.'*
- *'It provided references and information on other areas of educational development I had not considered and encouraged reflection on all areas.'*
- *'I enjoyed the opportunity to share good practice, learn from the course tutors and discuss challenges*

- *with colleagues. I appreciated the links to resources particularly where I was not always aware of the material.'*
- *'As a relatively new academic developer it helped me to become more confident. All aspects of the course relate to practice which is really useful.'*
- *'I learnt about myself as a learner on an online course. It's not my favourite mode but pragmatically it was the only option. I have reflected on my learning challenges and on alternative ways to design an online course which includes collaborative learning. I found it helpful to focus on the case study, and to have to move on with my thinking and plans for addressing bias in teaching and learning. I extended my awareness of relevant readings and resources. I appreciated feedback and giving feedback. I have achieved SEDA Fellowship!'*
- *'I had opportunities to reflect and plan my career as an educational developer.'*
- *'I am now more confident in my knowledge, more aware that I am not alone.'*
- *'I can now give greater consideration of how the interventions I am involved with can influence policy and strategy and how this might be extended beyond the institutional context.'*
- *'I feel more equipped and professional in my role and at least now am more aware of what I need to do and where I can search in support of any identified gaps in my own knowledge and skills and that of others.'*
- *'I am conscious of being more assertive having completed the course.'*
- *'I would feel more confident as a professional to know that I have participated and evidenced aspects of my work and role and would apply parts of my learning into my everyday role.'*

RP: in my recent report, I suggest the course might spend more time explicitly exploring the concept of what it means to be an educational developer, exploring development evaluation with participants and looking at the Spowart *et al*. (2017) Toolkit, which is relevant to the context and issues of impact: how do they/we know something has the effect they/we believe it has? The course has the benefit of offering entry into a formal, accredited professional community, hence it is important that participants are encouraged to reflect on their identity and practice as educational developers.

Finally, we asked 'What advice would you give to a potential participant about to start SLEC?' There was a remarkable similarity of response:

- *'Ensure that you set aside time each week as though taking a course, block it in your schedule. Seek out and interact with your tutorial group to get the most you can from the experience of connecting internationally (perhaps even invite your own virtual group to meet synchronously as an option for those interested and in similar time zones). Set some personal goals and check in to see how you are moving forward on them over the course.'*
- *'Be armed with a suitable case study which has sufficient quotable evidence.'*

- *'Discuss with your manager in advance with regards [to] the workload during the 6 weeks of the course in each semester and make sure that you use the mid-course break effectively. Collate evidence as you go along.'*
- *'Schedule or block out at least a day a week to enable you to work on the tasks, look at the examples given and source current evidence of impact on policy and practice early in the course.'*
- *'Develop a connection with your learning group, feel committed to them and develop a strategy to co-support each other through the course.'*

Assessment

Each year, there is an interesting range and variety of portfolios presented, as simple Word or PDF documents, as online blogs, using a variety of social media and video-based platforms; the team recognise the need to explore alternative ways of providing explicit feedback to stimulate reflection and provide clearly directed formative feedback. This might also support participants to be more critical in their ongoing development and reflection. We want participants to feel confident in challenging their own assumptions about their practice and to engage more critically with the 'why?' and 'so what?' questions.

The portfolios are generally written from a personal, practice perspective and, in some cases, can be somewhat 'isolated', perhaps reflecting how the participant feels in their own context. There is some evidence in summative 'end-of-course' reflections that participants do not see the 'course' itself as a meta-learning experience and there is disparity in how different participants view the benefit to be gained from the on-course interactions. Therefore, we believe this should be more explicitly flagged as an element of Value 5 and the Core Development Outcomes and might be a required element of evidence within case studies as well as in the isolated parts.

RP reported:

> *'The issue was addressed to some extent in the CPD activities, but the portfolios sometimes convey a disconnect between [how participants view] the various elements of the SEDA programme outcomes and values. As professionals these should be an integrated concept. Whilst some of the issues highlighted were being addressed in the online discussions, they are not emerging within the reflective portfolios; therefore, we need to look at how the two elements, the weekly formative activities, and final summative submission work together.'*

The course team aim to create an environment in which participants feel confident to give feedback on their experience in time for us to make changes whilst they are still on the course, and we also ask for suggestions on how to improve the course in the final evaluations:

Activities and timing

- *'I think timing will always be problematic, when a course includes weekly deadlines. One way round this would be to do away with weekly tasks, and to set the expectation that the participants collaborate on achieving the outcomes, using recommended and further resources and checking in with the facilitators as and when required.'*
- *'Advertise the weekly tasks ahead of the programme to be more inclusive.'*
- *'An advance bibliography or pre-reading would be welcome.'*
- *'More webinars please!'*
- *'I'd love to see the length of the course to be extended to a bit longer, so probably more interesting topics could be covered and more interaction we could have.'*
- *'Maybe offer the flexibility as a short course or a longer course for participants to choose from or to organise them into appropriate groups.'*

Engagement

- *It would be helpful to connect in the small group discussions early and frequently, and to have maybe one additional synchronous option early to enhance the sense of connection and commitment.'*

(Note – the course team took this approach in previous years but found some groups were depleted and others remained large – so decided to wait until the cohort had reached a point of stability before splitting into smaller tutor groups).

Assessment

- *'Maybe the assessment could be streamlined, I found the case study the most useful element and one I'll use. I can see the role of the diagnostic tool but a peer review for the second version would be helpful, like the triad feedback discussion SEDA arranges on an annual basis, it would also introduce SLEC participants to this SEDA task.'*

Other

- *'It would be helpful to have a little more explanation and perhaps a visual of the course overview, e.g. why certain topics, in the order they occur.'*

- *'It would be interesting and helpful to have a leadership project that we planned to use the concepts learned, that we gained feedback from our peers and our tutors. It would be helpful (although I know that time is an issue, so this is not easy) to have more feedback on the final assignment before submitting.'*

- *'Keep it as it is.'*

A course that suits one person may be problematic for another. These comments demonstrate the challenge of designing an online experience that works equally for all participants. It is important to separate out the issues that the tutor team can resolve – at the design or delivery stages, and

those that will be part of the management and support of a cohort. This will be something we will engage in ourselves at the forthcoming SEDA Conference in November, and we would encourage past, present and future participants to contribute to and share in our reflections at that event. It is essential that a course that supports accreditation of SEDA Fellowship involves the community in partnership to shape a course with such an important role to play in serving the SEDA community.

Scope of review and proposals for change

Our sense is that whilst the course is broadly operating within well-designed and well-received parameters, some further consideration might be given to the following seven areas:

1) Review communication of course structure overview, workload, advance schedule of tasks *etc*.

2) Review content to ensure SLEC is reflecting the most recent issues across the sector

3) Communication of expectations for modelling the SEDA Values whilst on the course; this might include:
   a) Use some form of collaborative tool to encourage groups
   b) Use Mentimeter or similar to gather rapid, in-course feedback
   c) Use pre-recorded videos of experienced Fellows talking about their roles

4) Make more explicit the expectation that participants will engage in critical reflection (through tutor role, activity design, and readings that reflect this aspect of the educational developer role)

5) Review of the final portfolio to incorporate:
   a) Recent participants' suggestions
   b) Opportunities for greater variety in format in both submissions and feedback/assessment
   c) Opportunities for participants to actively challenge their assumptions and professional identity

6) Incorporating further synchronous activity at key points in the programme

7) Explore with Fellows how the course can continue to effectively and successfully shape and support the evolution of SEDA as a Community for Educational Developers.

Evidence suggests that an additional week in each block, and some space within the block for review and consolidation, might be useful, and so revised timings have already been published for the coming year which is now recruiting for an October 2019 start.

Course evaluations do not indicate the need for major review and, as we have said before, the course represents a rewarding professional experience for most participants who progress to full Fellowship of SEDA. We welcome the wider involvement of the SEDA Community to consider what, if any, changes to SLEC are consistent with the SEDA Values, Core and Specialist Outcomes for this cornerstone of its professional development framework.

Next steps

There will be an opportunity to discuss the issues raised in this review, and opinions on the future of SLEC, at the SEDA Autumn Conference (look out for the discussion forum on the Conference Programme).

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Identifying the educational development needs of elected sabbatical officers with a remit for supporting teaching and learning

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Students' unions are an established feature of the HE landscape. Collectively, they have a long history of political activism, community engagement and organising social and sporting activities (Brookes *et al*., 2015). They are usually comprised of a combination of sabbatical officers elected to lead the union and represent the student body, and permanent staff who provide day-to-day delivery and strategic support. Most students' unions are charities, with trustee boards that provide strategic direction and accountability; and most of these trustee boards include the unions' elected sabbatical officers as members. Traditionally, students' unions operated alongside, or in parallel to, the HE provider; however, following moves to enhance student engagement in HE, and the greater emphasis on student voice, closer working relationships are emerging between HE providers and their students' unions (Brookes *et al*., 2015). On matters relating to teaching and learning, often this collaborative working is centred on the Education Officer, the elected sabbatical officer who has the remit for academic representation, education and/or student experience.

Being an Education Officer can be challenging. They are current or recent (under) graduates and expected to represent a diverse student body on an array of agenda. This commonly involves engagement with all aspects of an institution from prospective and current students to vice-chancellors and governors. Sabbatical officers are involved in decision-making that can impact upon institutional ways of working and the student experience (Turner *et al*., 2016).

Given the integral role students' unions play in activities such as student representation, advocacy, quality assurance and enhancement, there is a need for research which documents the representative function of students' unions. In 2014, attention was paid to leadership within students' unions (e.g. NUS, 2010); however, as Guan *et al*. (2015) and Turner *et al*. (2016) observe, research beyond this has been limited. Interviews undertaken with Education Officers indicated that they often did not feel in a position to promote or enact long-term or meaningful change in teaching and learning, and therefore tended to concentrate their efforts on academic rather than enhancement work (Turner *et al*., 2016). This apparent gap provided the impetus for this current study.

Aims of the study

The purpose of this study was to gain contemporary insights into the roles and responsibilities of education sabbatical officers in order to identify their educational development needs. To achieve this, the project aimed to:

- Identify the current roles and responsibilities of Education Officers
- Examine the current training and development provided to Education Officers.

Methods

Data were collected using two online surveys that were distributed via the mailing lists of the National Union of Students (NUS) and The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP). Online surveys are an effective mechanism to collect data from geographically dispersed populations (Nulty, 2008). The surveys were informed by extant literature and expert knowledge gained from colleagues working in TSEP/NUS. The survey was piloted on a sabbatical officer team working within one UK university, with feedback used to finalise the survey. Survey 1 targeted at outgoing sabbatical officers was administered in May 2017, and captured data around roles and responsibilities, prior experience, training and support, methods of communication, campaigning and project work. Survey 2 was targeted at permanent students' union staff and was disseminated in October 2017. Survey 2 captured data around the same themes as Survey 1, however, additional data was also captured around the NSS and models of partnership working with institutions. Surveys 1 and 2 generated primarily quantitative data from which descriptive analyses were undertaken, followed by comparative work once both data sets were obtained. Qualitative data obtained from open questions was coded and thematically analysed.

Findings

Here we focus on data obtained from the sabbatical officers (Survey 1) which pertains to their roles and responsibilities and training and development needs, as we identify this as of greatest relevance to the SEDA community.

In total 78 sabbatical officers responded to Survey 1. 87% of respondents were based in universities, of which 92% were affiliated to the NUS. This meant the respondent profile was fairly conservative as it was drawn primarily from universities, with minimal representation from college-based or alternative providers. Most respondents (96%) worked full-time as sabbatical officers, however, of this, 59% were responsible from a wider portfolio of activities in addition to serving as the Education Officer (or equivalent role).

Roles and responsibilities

The data demonstrates that Education Officers undertake a broad portfolio of activities working with a range of stakeholders across an institution. Their main areas of responsibility were representation and advocacy on behalf of the student body. This is not unanticipated as Education Officers tend to have responsibility for school/faculty and course representative work (Carey, 2013; NUS, 2010). Consequently, engagement with academic representatives often constitutes one of the primary mechanisms Education Officers use to communicate with the student body. Representation tends to follow a pyramidal structure, through which the voices of students are fed up to the sabbatical officer. They subsequently represent students by presenting their views and experiences obtained through this, and other mechanisms, to senior leaders. Membership of institutional-level committees is likely to have provided an important platform through which they can advocate on behalf of the student body.

Representation and advocacy would require Education Officers to employ a diverse range of skills, which depending on their prior experience and the training received they may, or may not, be in full possession of. The data indicated that most respondents had some relevant prior experience of students' union work, often in another elected position such as a course representative (Table 1).

Prior experience	% (n=71)
I previously served in another elected role in my institution	33.80
I previously served as a course rep	19.72
I previously served as a school rep	16.90
I held a relevant external role	09.86
I was previously involved in other NUS/SU activity	08.45
Other	11.27

Table 1   What experience did you bring to your role?

In subsequent open responses it was suggested these experiences provided them with some understanding of university systems and processes, gave insights into students' issues and meant they had some experience of leadership, representation and lobbying work:

'I knew first-hand the challenges and positive aspects of being a course rep. I built an understanding of how my [department] and the wider University worked and made some key contacts – this really helped me start with an idea of the range of academic challenges and how I could make a difference in my role.'

'It gave me an insight to issues student face and allowed me to base my future actions around those issues.'

However, this was often at course or programme level, whereas institutional and strategic-level work was a new area of activity for them on becoming a sabbatical officer.

Support available for sabbatical officers

High levels of support in undertaking their work were reported by respondents with 82% either strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement 'I have been supported in my role'. This support came from a variety of sources, of which permanent student union staff, senior institutional staff and meetings with other sabbatical officers were identified as the most frequently used source of support.

It is not surprising that permanent student union staff are highlighted as important; a key aspect of their work is to provide strategic leadership and continuity in the face of the annual or bi-annual changes in elected officers (Brookes *et al.*, 2015). The other sources of support identified, e.g. senior university staff and school representatives, are indicative of how the Education Sabbatical Officer role is constructed. As highlighted above, working to support student representatives and collaborating with senior leaders are integral to their work. The shared experience of being a sabbatical officer is clearly important, highlighted as a source of support drawn on by 82% of respondents. Interestingly, support from academics and educational developers, who some may perceive as potentially providing on-the-ground experience of teaching and learning, is only reported by 47% and 34% of respondents. However, given the multiple groups sabbatical officers are expected to work with, not accessing support from these groups may not be unanticipated; rather the attention of sabbatical officers is focused on those associated with representation and advocacy of the student voice.

Training and development

All sabbatical officers participated in training for the role (Table 2). Induction and training activities hosted by respondents' students' union, the NUS Lead and Change programme and other NUS training development and conferences (75%) were completed by most respondents. However, these were not in every case the training and development opportunities that respondents found most useful. These were other NUS training development and conferences (71%), having a mentor or coach (75%) and other SU-delivered training (64%). There was a clear disconnect between the routine introductory offer and perceived utility. The training appears to be led primarily by the students' union with NUS activities also playing a significant role. However, increasingly, the Educational Officer is working in partnership with their university, and considerable time is dedicated to university-led committees. Likewise, with growing expectations for the representation of student voice in processes such as the TEF, it is reasonable to question the contribution made by the university to the training of sabbatical officers, and whether this should be increasing, and indeed may be of benefit to the officer. Sabbatical officers report attending teaching and learning conferences, and they are reported as useful (Table 2). Engagement with training in support of teaching and learning is limited, though the perceived utility is high (Table 2).

Training activity	% (n=71)	% Very useful/ useful
SU hosted induction	90	56 (n=64)
NUS lead and change	75	47 (n=53)
Other NUS training development and conferences	75	72 (n=53)
SU delivered training	69	64 (n=47)
Training by other external organisations	65	56 (n=45)
Shadow previous officer	61	40 (n=43)
Attend teaching and learning conferences	45	50 (n=32)
I had a mentor or coach	39	75 (n=28)
In house training on teaching and learning	24	47 (n=17)
Other	3	50 (n=2)

Table 2   What training and development opportunities were available to you? Perceived usefulness

In open comments respondents identified unmet need in training for university processes, dealing with stakeholders, leadership and other issues (Table 3). Arguably, this need cannot be solely met by training and instead requires experience gained over time. The data may, however, highlight a need for differentiated support with greater use of mentors and dispersed training and development opportunities as the role develops.

What other training may have been useful?	Count
University processes	13
Dealing with stakeholders	7
Leadership	4
Time management	2
Stress and conflict	2
Skills (public speaking/budgets)	2

Table 3   Reflecting on your experiences, what other training and development may have been useful? (open response question)

Further unmet training needs were identified in the open comments to the questions 'what three things do you wish you had known?' and 'what three things would you advise your successor?'. Of note are the comments about self-confidence, engaging students, trust, power and politics and political awareness, which suggest that during their service sabbatical officers' initial idealism meets the realism of politics in a large and complex organisation and that they are unprepared for this. The unmet training needs and advice to future sabbatical officers offer potentially valuable insights in the gaps in current provision. There is a consensus in the data regarding the roles and responsibilities of Education sabbatical

officers, and there is evidence of a network of support on which they can draw.

Though most respondents indicated they had prior experience (Table 1), it is worth considering the level at which this experience was focused. As course or school representatives they would be working with students and academics connected to a specific level of study, programme or school. This would mean they had a defined pool of students and academics with which they were expected to engage with over a specific series of activities (e.g. student-staff liaison committees, programme committees). Engagement with university-level committees and processes would have been limited, and engagement with course and academic peers may have potentially represented a relatively safe and familiar environment in which to operate.

Election as a sabbatical officer requires new ways of working, which would involve regular engagement with institutional-level staff, decision-making and a diverse array of university processes. This may be daunting and the data indicate that further preparation would be beneficial. Encouraging sabbatical officers to recognise this change in working practice and supporting them to gain confidence in their role, knowledge and position seems to be essential. Though shadowing practices appears to be in use, their perceived utility is mixed (Table 2). Instead, shadowing a senior academic, who can also provide an introduction to key university processes and practice, may ease the transition and build confidence.

Developing so-called soft skills such as time management, stress and conflict management seems to be an outstanding challenge for sabbatical officers. Again, these are skills that develop over time, but integrating workshops around activities such as time management into the induction of sabbatical officers, and non-elected staff working with them at key 'crunch points' in the year to support them in managing their workload, may be valuable. It is not clear from our data the extent to which training around activities such as conflict resolution is used, but perhaps integrating role-play activities with incoming sabbatical offices may provide insights of how to deal with challenging situations. Indeed, outgoing sabbatical officers could be encouraged to reflect on and capture highs and lows of their year to be used in such circumstances with new officers.

Mentoring and coaching appear to have been the most valuable source of training and support used. We may infer that permanent or university staff provided such support; however, this detail was not captured in the current work. Ensuring such provision is maintained, and even extended, is a clear recommendation of this work, and identifying key players to undertake such work, who are also adequately prepared, is essential.

Concluding comments

In this article we have reported the outcomes of a national survey designed to examine the roles and responsibilities of Education sabbatical officers, gain insights into training and make recommendations for future training provision.

This study begins to address current gaps in our knowledge surrounding students' unions, and as the work extends to include data from the permanent students' union staff we shall be able to provide firm recommendations around future practice and support. However, the data presented here is drawn primarily from the university sector, with respondents based in students' unions affiliated with the NUS. Extending the work to include other HE providers is clearly required as the working practices of students' unions may vary according to institution size.

Increasingly, the Education sabbatical officer is working at the heart of institutions. Given this, it is hoped these data can form the basis of a conversation between Educational Development and sabbatical officers to identify areas of mutual interest, and also areas of support. In our work at Plymouth, we work in collaboration with our students' union, which is allowing us, as Educational Developers, a direct route into the student body. For the student body we have been able to share our skills as researchers to support an evaluation of academic representation processes. We have also worked to co-develop and deliver resources to promote the student voice. We view this as a mutually beneficial relationship which we aim to build upon with future sabbatical officers.

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Designing curricula with Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

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Introduction

In the September 2018 edition of *Educational Developments*, the first phase of the De Montfort University (DMU) Universal Design for Learning (UDL) staff development journey was described in relation to the embedding of UDL as an institution-wide approach to learning, teaching and assessment (Merry, 2018). The emphasis of the first phase was on supporting colleagues in developing classroom-based teaching practices that espouse the UDL principles. The principles are: 1) multiple means of representation, providing learners with a variety of ways of acquiring information via learning resources; 2) multiple means of engagement, taking into account learners' interests and learning preferences ensuring that they are appropriately challenged and thus motivated to learn; and 3) multiple means of action and expression, allowing learners with alternative ways to demonstrate their understanding (Rose and Meyer, 2002; Davies *et al*., 2013). Since 2016, >2000 academic colleagues have participated in workshops supporting the development of UDL teaching practices, transforming the way in which learners are supported in the classroom.

Recently, the emphasis of UDL staff development activities has moved away from the development of classroom-based teaching practices that espouse the UDL principles, towards focusing on the challenges posed by embedding UDL into the design of curricula. Hence, the second phase of DMU's UDL staff development journey has concentrated on providing a model for designing UDL into the curriculum as a key consideration at the point at which courses are created, rather than including UDL as a 'bolt-on' option when delivering individual teaching sessions. A separate but nonetheless important endeavour has been the consideration of how institutional capability for UDL curriculum design can be best supported, ensuring that teaching staff can be efficiently and effectively developed to possess the skills and confidence to design UDL into courses for themselves.

Designing UDL into the curriculum

Following several months of sector-wide consultation and support, DMU has developed a curriculum design process known as CUTLAS (Creating Universal Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategies). The purpose of CUTLAS is to support the development of modules and programmes with the UDL

principles designed into them from the outset.

What is CUTLAS?

CUTLAS is a team-based approach to curriculum design. A transformational process, CUTLAS can support the development of constructively aligned (Biggs, 1996) courses underpinned by the UDL principles, via a structured, facilitated process. Essentially, CUTLAS is delivered through a workshop, during which a programme team breaks down a module or programme to its constituent parts so that it can be redesigned from a UDL perspective. Entirely new modules or programmes can be designed from scratch using CUTLAS. Alternatively, CUTLAS can be used to redesign or refresh existing modules or programmes. In either case, programme teams, in collaboration with other key stakeholders, are taken through a structured face-to-face process by a trained CUTLAS facilitator. Other key stakeholders may include Enhancing Learning through Technology (ELT) staff, academic librarians, learners, and external stakeholders such as employers.

Background

CUTLAS is not an entirely new concept. The process has been developed from two similar learning design processes. The first is the Carpe Diem course design methodology, the original team-based approach to designing constructively aligned, technology-enhanced courses (Armellini and Jones, 2008). The idea behind Carpe Diem is that every moment of time during the learning design process is spent on designing a curriculum that can be put into immediate use with learners (Armellini and Jones, 2008). Since its introduction in 2002, Carpe Diem has been through several modifications (Armellini and Jones, 2008; Salmon *et al.*, 2008; UoL, 2011), which eventually led to the CAIeRO course design process, the second learning design process upon which CUTLAS is based. CAIeRO was created in 2008 to suit the specific requirements of the University of Northampton (Usher *et al.*, 2018) and stands for Creating Aligned Interactive Educational Resource Opportunities. The University of Northampton has been successfully delivering CAIeRO in support of curriculum design for more than ten years and has provided strong evidence for the inclusion of active learning in the design of courses as a means of supporting effective learning in undergraduates (Freeman *et al.*, 2014). As such, CAIeRO can provide many insights into how to build UDL-friendly courses, and has been chosen by DMU as the basis from which to develop CUTLAS.

CUTLAS represents a modification of the CAIeRO process to match the specific needs of DMU. Specifically, CUTLAS embeds UDL into the learning design process, ensuring that the principles of UDL− Representation, Engagement, and Action and Expression − are given extensive consideration at the point at which modules and programmes are designed, and as such become staple pillars of the curriculum, rather than bolt-on 'tips and tricks' to support the delivery of single teaching sessions.

The CUTLAS process

Essentially, CUTLAS follows a similar design process as CAIeRO, encompassing four key stages: 1) Defining; 2) Designing; 3) Building; and 4) Reviewing. However, much greater consideration is given to the embedding of the UDL principles during Part 2 of the Designing stage, the 'storyboard'. The broad steps of the CUTLAS process are presented in Table 1.

Pre-CUTLAS – Defining
• Programme team complete CUTLAS request document, describing learners, providing feedback and defining purpose and agreeing aims of the CUTLAS
CUTLAS Workshop – Designing
• *Part 1*: Blueprint – includes mission, look and feel, learning outcomes, assessments constructive alignment and end in mind • *Part 2:* Storyboard – create a visual representation of the module or programme paying particular attention to Engagement, Representation • Assigning building tasks from storyboard to each team member
Creating CUTLAS − Building
• Building the module or programme – programme team commits to creating activities from the storyboard, testing, modifying as required • Review of build by CUTLAS facilitators, training needs identified, modification of activities/resources following feedback, reflection on process
Post-CUTLAS – Reviewing
• Testing on learners and colleagues not involved in the module or programme

Table 1   The four broad steps in the CUTLAS process

Embedding UDL and the storyboard

The storyboard represents the visual plan of the module or programme being designed from start to finish. Following on from Part 1 of the CUTLAS workshop, the blueprint, the storyboard helps programme teams discover how to deliver the practical elements of their blueprint. Storyboarding can be the most challenging part of the learning design process, but it can also be the most fun and most rewarding – where a new vision for the module or programme starts to become a reality (Usher, 2015).

The key aims of the storyboard focus on the three key aspects of sequencing, alignment and coherence. These critical aspects are accomplished through mapping out the topics to be studied, the learning activities and the assessments (formative and summative) – what learners are required to know, how they will learn it, and how they will demonstrate that they understand it (Usher, 2015). It is at this point that programme teams give strong consideration to embedding the UDL principles in their design. A first step in this process is to consider the 'cheese sandwich' approach to supporting learning. The cheese sandwich emphasises the Learning for Mastery (LFM) approach to teaching (Bloom, 1968), and is based on the idea that all teaching sessions, should be composed of three distinct parts: 1) pre-session learning; 2) in-session learning; and 3) post-session learning. When using the cheese sandwich, contact time or the 'cheese' in the sandwich (in-session learning) is used to develop learner mastery of content rather than information transmission. Content is mastered through the development of cognitive skills via active learning techniques, interspersed with knowledge checks and regular in-session feedback (Petty, 2009). Hence, each block of learning, theme or topic is delivered via a cheese

sandwich approach that embeds each of the UDL principles. The cheese sandwich approach is summarised in Table 2. Part of a hypothetical CUTLAS storyboard, showing how the cheese sandwich approach can be designed into the learning process, supporting the embedding of the UDL principles into modules and programmes, is shown in Figure 1.

Pre-session	In-session	Post-session
Session summary provided including learning outcomes Cognitive load of session provided Teaching materials provided to support learning including: • Screencast/video • Slides • Notes • Readings • Task(s) Signposting of additional/further content	Focused on cognitive skills development Alignment of teaching activities with session outcomes Teaching activities include: • Active learning • Knowledge checks • Formative assessment • Tutor feedback • Peer feedback • Self-reflection	Learners able to replay, review or revisit learning via: • Screencast • Notes • Summaries • Wiki • Blog • Pictures Formative assessment task reflecting learning outcomes and aligned with teaching activities set – completed for next session

Table 2 Cheese sandwich approach to supporting learning
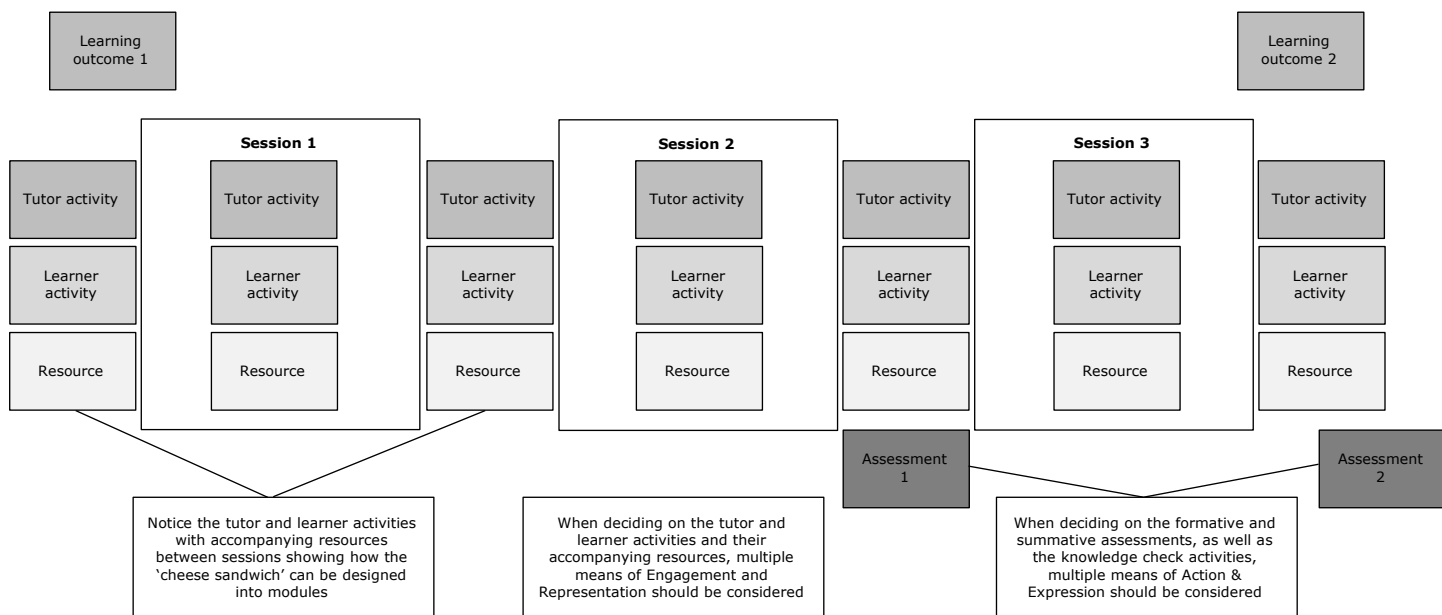

Figure 1 Part of an example CUTLAS storyboard showing the cheese sandwich and the embedding of the UDL principles

As described in Figure 1, the cheese sandwich is used as a vehicle to embed the UDL principles into the design of modules and programmes. Some possible ways to demonstrate each of the UDL principles within a CUTLAS storyboard are shown in Table 3.

Engagement	Representation	Action & Expression
360o engagement with learning (before, during and after sessions). Learning presented in multiple ways: • Screencast • Face to face • Didactic elements • Active learning • Group discussion • Problem solving • Individual tasks • Reflective work • Peer teaching • Peer feedback • Knowledge checks	Wide variety of study resources including: • DMU Replay • Video • Websites • Notes • Summaries • Tables • Figures • Pictures Materials uploaded 48 hours in advance as well as sent via email to learners in modifiable and PDF format.	Mix of formative/summative assessment. Flexible formative assessment (completed in format chosen by the learner). Feedback and feedforward (tutor and peer) linked to formative assessment. Self-assessment opportunities. Variety of summative assessment. Aligned to outcomes.

Table 3 Possible ways to demonstrate each of the UDL principles within a CUTLAS storyboard

Importance of CUTLAS to UDL

CUTLAS provides a critical missing step in the embedding of UDL teaching practices within DMU. For example, before CUTLAS, no single UDL-informed curriculum design process existed within the University. As such, there was no structured means by which UDL was considered as part of curriculum design, at the point when individual modules and programmes were created, modified or refreshed. CUTLAS addresses such gaps in the design of curricula by firmly embedding UDL into modules and programmes as part of their design process. As well as embedding UDL firmly into the design of curricula, CUTLAS also safeguards the constructive alignment of modules and programmes, ensuring that intended learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities, and assessments of and for learning are all clearly aligned.

CUTLAS and the Programme Leader Development Framework

With more than 2000 academic staff members employed by the University, a key challenge for DMU's Academic Professional Development Unit (APDU) is possessing the capacity to deliver CUTLAS workshops to all programmes and modules that may require support. Subsequently, it was decided that a more sustainable means of delivering CUTLAS on a large scale would be to identify a critical community of colleagues that could be trained in the CUTLAS process, thus increasing institutional capability in UDL curriculum design.

Through a combination of research and reflections on practice in relation to programme leadership in higher education (Quinlan, 2014), and information derived from consultation with colleagues across the University, a DMU Programme Leader Development Framework (PLDF) was created to support and develop Programme Leaders. The framework is composed of four key elements: 1) Operational Management; 2) Personal Effectiveness; 3) Leadership of Academic Practice; and 4) Programme Team Development.

Part of the role of the DMU programme leader is to lead programme teams in designing and developing curricula that support effective learning. Central to this endeavour is the interpretation of a rapidly shifting disciplinary, institutional, and sector-wide context, within which programme leaders must influence their programme teams and other important stakeholders. A specific sphere of influence for the programme leader is to act upon learner feedback and implement subsequent quality enhancement activities, ensuring an excellent learning experience. CUTLAS has become a key mechanism for the enhancement of quality in learning and teaching for programme leaders, since training in how to facilitate the CUTLAS process is embedded into the Programme Team Development aspect of the PLDF. Due to the criticality of the programme leader role, DMU aspires to have a community of programme leaders that possess the knowledge, skills and confidence to be leaders in academic practice, capable of designing high quality modules and programmes that contribute largely to an excellent learning experience. Making CUTLAS a key part of the PLDF provides programme leaders with the knowledge and skills to work with their programme teams, learners, employers and many

more key stakeholders, to develop team-based, constructively aligned, UDL-enhanced courses in an autonomous way. As such, the inclusion of CUTLAS is helping to redefine what it means to lead an academic programme at DMU, adding a stronger pedagogic element to the role. Subsequently, the way in which programme leaders perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others has begun to shift, with much greater emphasis placed on the role programme leaders play in leading academic practice and furthering pedagogic knowledge among the academic community.

Conclusion

Universal Design for Learning has been a key pillar in DMU's strategic approach to the development of learning and teaching practice for more than three years. From an academic development perspective, UDL has become a 'golden thread' running through the University's staff development framework, which has experienced high levels of staff engagement and has had a transformative effect on classroom-based teaching practices. Despite such success, two important gaps in the academic development offer that have emerged in recent years are the need to better support the design of curricula underpinned by the UDL principles, and the need to provide a focused framework of support and development initiatives specifically for programme leaders. The CUTLAS curriculum design methodology is helping to address each of those aforementioned gaps, better connecting the role of the programme leader with the advancement of sound pedagogy, whilst ensuring that UDL is more than just a 'bolt-on' option that is added to classroom-based teaching sessions as an afterthought.

Acknowledgements

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Managing the competing pressures of curriculum design in HE: The sector, the institution, the discipline, and the student experience

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Fundamental changes to degree curricula are typically managed via a process of curriculum redesign, also called curriculum reform, curriculum transformation, or curriculum update, usually every five years as a core part of teaching practice. Curriculum redesign can be in response to the teaching 'drift' that happens over the years as lecturers and other teaching staff join or leave a department (Fowler *et al.*, 2015, p. 59), or to shifts in a department's teaching philosophy (Melville *et al.*, 2013; Corbo *et al.*, 2016), or sometimes as a way of addressing new marketplace demands and student interests (Carey, 2013; Theander *et al.*, 2016). Whatever the precursors might be, the process offers academic staff and students the opportunity to re-articulate their offering, their underpinning teaching strategy, and their contribution to their university's portfolio of subjects.

In this article, we set out the process of redesigning the undergraduate English curriculum (covering literature, language, drama, and creative writing) in the School of English at Birmingham City University (BCU), as part of an institution-wide project known as Transforming the Curriculum (TtC hereafter). In doing so, we discuss the different pressures and constraints at play during this project and how the community of staff and students in the School managed these pressures during the design process. Our aim was to translate these pressures into an English curriculum which was meaningful to both staff and students, embedding new initiatives to increase retention, progression and attainment, and enhancing students' overall experience during their degree.

To begin, we briefly describe the three contexts underpinning the TtC project within the School of English – the higher education context in the UK; the institutional context of BCU; and finally, the subject-specific context of English studies

(see also Millar, 2016; Cleaver *et al.*, 2018). By placing the School's approach to curriculum design within a wider social and academic setting, we are better able to understand how each context brings with it its own demands, prerogatives, and agenda, all of which have to be navigated in the process of curriculum design and implementation.

In the next part, we outline how academic staff and students collaboratively planned a new curriculum that addressed these three contexts, building on staff research expertise, integrating interdisciplinary and employability opportunities for students, and retaining the distinctive culture of the School. As Course Director for the BA English degrees and as Head of School, we both had central roles to play in mediating these contexts between relevant stakeholders and ensuring that the core aim of implementing a coherent and innovative curriculum was achieved.

We finish with some brief reflections on the process of curriculum redesign and the lessons that have been learned in the consultation, design, implementation, and evaluation stages of the new degree programme. Ultimately, we hope that by outlining the practicalities, pitfalls and opportunities of curriculum redesign, our own experience might be instructive to a range of readers, especially those who may be embarking on their own curriculum refresh projects.

Context I: The higher education sector

Subject-specific benchmarks, innovation in research, and pedagogical development should be the foundation of any thorough curriculum review. As Ball and Lacey (1995, p. 95) point out, however, 'subjects are not monolithic…but contextually realised'. In 2015, BCU announced an institution-

wide curriculum refresh. This decision was the outcome of a strategic portfolio review by the University's Executive Group, which was itself informed by the increasingly shifting landscape of higher education reform. While the Office for Students, like HEFCE before it, aims to ensure that HEIs have the autonomy to develop their learning, teaching and research free from government intervention, they retain responsibility for data management, quality (via the QAA), and the graduate labour market. Competition, innovation and addressing the 'skills gap' are high on the priority list of the sector's regulator, as are student satisfaction, progression and attainment, and graduate outcomes. The latter three areas form the basis of the core TEF metrics and aim to measure the 'value' of higher education both in terms of return on students' investment (usually measured in crude economic metrics) and also in terms of ranking in various annual league tables.

This emphasis on 'value' has deeper roots which Belfiore (2013) traces back to the publication of the Browne Report in 2010 and the context of austerity following the financial collapse in 2009. Focusing on the consequences this has had for research funding in Arts and Humanities subjects, Belfiore's examination of the necessity for academics to demonstrate the 'impact' of their scholarship and its relevance to industry and society, can also be translated into curriculum reform, especially for non-vocational subjects like English (see also Lawson and Sayers, 2016). The idea of rarefied academic disciplines (if it ever existed at all) can no longer be sustained in a political environment principally concerned with the immediate economic value of higher education. Subjects must articulate their relevance both to society at large and to the individual applicant for whose custom the university now competes.

Context II: The institution

The decision to undertake a University-wide curriculum review must, therefore, be understood in the wider context of sector reform. BCU's Strategic Plan sought to re-define the identity of the University and create a coherent institutional offer which would help to position it, and the value of its courses, in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

In its *Strategic Plan*, BCU defined its mission as 'transform[ing] the prospects of individuals, organisations, and society through excellence in practice-based education, research and knowledge-exchange'. Explicating the terms of how this 'excellence in practice-based education' was to be achieved was the province of the Academic Plan. The overriding philosophy of the Academic Plan was that '[BCU] will pursue excellence by providing practice-led, knowledge-applied education that is interdisciplinary, employability-driven, and internationalised'. While the Academic Plan sought to provide coherent provision across a diverse portfolio of subjects, the Strategic Plan allowed BCU to articulate its mission to staff and enabled it to frame the currency of its offer to prospective students.

Mission statements and academic philosophies are useful for establishing institutional priorities, maintaining consistent standards and creating a distinctive identity for the University. For specific disciplines within the University, however, they

can be interpreted as a threat to subject autonomy. Aligning subject identity with institutional identity, engineering parity of student experience across diverse academic disciplines, and standardising the principles informing the delivery of learning and teaching, potentially foregrounds the distinctiveness of the institution to the detriment of the distinctiveness of the discipline.

Context III: The subject sector

Disciplines tend to have their own 'attitudes, activities and cognitive styles [which] represent the discipline [and] which are bound up with the characteristics and structures of the knowledge domain with which such groups are professionally concerned' (Becher and Trowler, 2001, p. 42). Indeed, we might conceive of a mature discipline, such as English, as having a clear identity which has particular characteristics which may cross institutions and cultures. It is this subject-level identity and culture which is referenced in the QAA benchmarks. They describe the nature and scope of a discipline, articulate its defining characteristics in terms of subject knowledge and skills, as well as more generic graduate level and transferable skills, alongside the forms of teaching, learning and assessment students might encounter. The subject benchmarks are explicitly positioned as 'reference points in the design, delivery, and review of academic programmes'. Subject-level benchmarks form the basis of cross-institutional subject identity and can account for the similarities in the curriculum of HE providers.

While English has the advantage of being a mature subject with a secure sense of its cross-institutional identity, a curriculum refresh presents the opportunity to differentiate a particular university's offer in that area. For a discipline facing the challenge of declining applications across the sector, particularly in the wake of GCSE and A Level reforms, plus the seemingly opaque 'value' of English to wider socioeconomic concerns, the QAA benchmarks need to become a 'reference point' for innovation. Preserving the integrity of these subject-specific concerns while acknowledging and integrating the priorities made manifest through institutional strategy and external frameworks, is the challenge for curriculum design in the modern university.

The practicalities of translating pressures: What we did

Two questions emerge from the contextual environment of the TtC project — how should academics respond to the competing (and changing) demands set out by different stakeholders? And what balance should be sought between external, institutional and subject-specific expectations? These expectations are multiple — the need to author a current, authentic and discipline-specific programme; to embed opportunities for interdisciplinary and collaborative working; for students to practise employability or transferable skills; to ensure the high standards of delivery and engagement; to effectively transition students into higher education; and to articulate the value of the discipline. Immersed in this labyrinth of priorities, it is easy to lose sight of that which matters most: the student.

Perhaps the most important concern for the School when tackling TtC was, therefore, to consult with current students and alumni. Carey (2013, p. 251) encourages universities to rely less on post-degree consultations with students about programme efficacy and more on approaches which give students a greater say in curriculum design. We also felt it necessary to engage with external businesses and local employers, given the sector-wide focus on employability and graduate-level attributes. While there are issues with full delegation to students or employers in terms of curriculum content, assessment strategies, and course literature (cf. Bovill *et al*., 2011), there are other models which are aligned with the development of a more co-operative curriculum. Adopting a more collaborative/co-operative perspective allowed us to gain a better insight into what these two groups of stakeholders found valuable, useful, and important in any new curriculum, consequently informing our decisions of what to include and how to include it.

To that end, we organised a series of meetings with two groups of stakeholders: i) current students and ii) alumni and local businesses and employers, utilising our existing professional and personal networks. While recruiting students for these meetings via email, student forums, and informal discussions was relatively straightforward, coordinating with alumni and employers was more difficult. In part, this difficulty arose because of the non-vocational nature of English studies. Our graduates can, and do, find themselves in a wide variety of careers. There is no clearly defined end point for students of English. This is borne out by the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey which shows that, year on year, the highest recruiting sector for students from our School of English is the rather nebulously titled 'Management and Administration' category. As a consequence, employers were sought from a variety of sectors, including business, the creative industries, teaching, and the third sector.

The main focus in these meetings was for the School to set out the proposed degree structure, alongside information on programme aims and learning objectives, the introduction of new modules, indicative module content, set reading, assessment methods, embedded employability strategy, and our plans for transferable skill development. Both groups were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the planned changes and to suggest additions or alterations, all of which was circulated to academic staff for consideration during individual module development. These comments highlighted several areas of good practice that we wanted to maintain and informed a great deal of our overall approach to our curriculum redesign:

- Students valued academic support, the expert knowledge of academic staff, module choice at level 5 and development of graduate attributes

- They wanted to see changes in programme structure, more module choice at level 4, and more embedded employability opportunities

- Employers valued 'work-ready' graduates, flexibility of skills, curiosity and willingness to learn, and problem-solving abilities.

In conjunction with student and employer consultation, we also reviewed the outcomes from previous incarnations of the undergraduate programme. This process identified a number of areas for potential improvement, including transition arrangements, attainment at level 4, progression from level 4 to level 5, cohort identity and community, the structure of the first year of the programme, and increasing opportunities for practice-based learning and teaching. The important issue of assessment also emerged from this review, which identified that previous versions of the programme had too many assessment points; too many similar assessments (e.g. essay based); lacked cohesion across and within modules; and that assessments failed to account for different learning styles and approaches.

On the basis of this investigation, and in response to the contextual environment, the steps identified in Table 1 were implemented. In the interests of space, our discussion here focuses on what we believe to be the most significant developments to the programme, rather than the totality of our curriculum review.

Lessons learned

Balancing the competing demands set out above was a difficult task and it wasn't possible to accommodate everything that we initially set out to do. But by focusing on what we identified as our main priorities (primarily the student experience and learning and teaching), we were able to put together a curriculum which reconciles the value of English studies with the influence of institutional and wider external factors.

Perhaps the most important lesson learnt was the value in adopting a bottom-up evaluation process. Engaging current students, alumni, and employers at an early stage of course design allowed us to make sense of the various factors competing for our attention in the process of this curriculum review. It also allowed us to rationalise the 'value' of degree-level education in English from those whom it directly benefits. While it confirmed many of the things we felt we implicitly knew, it also enabled us to understand the value students, graduates, and employers place on the development of the core skills of English studies, and the necessity of embedding more opportunities to practise and test them throughout the course. It also emphasised the importance of establishing strong cohort identities, extending the transition process, and facilitating student choice and therefore ownership of learning.

That said, we have concerns about how forward-thinking and 'future proof' the new curriculum is. While HE has a responsibility to respond to changes in demand and subject interests, it is no longer sufficient for this response to be tailored solely to the demands of the discipline. Instead, student, alumni and employer feedback, institutional prerogatives, and wider socioeconomic concerns should all inform the process of curriculum design and implementation. The process of curriculum design, therefore, should evaluate all of these contexts, ensuring that students are at the heart of any decisions made. This is made all the more relevant in light of recent developments in HE, including the Augar Review, the role of TEF5, and the newly inaugurated Office for Students, alongside increasing concerns surrounding student mental health.

Subject knowledge and skills	*Transition, progression, and attainment*
• Developed an integrated curriculum which embeds opportunities for students to acquire core skills in English studies – research, evaluation and analysis, verbal and written communication, reflection. • Introduced subject modules at every level of the programmes to facilitate continuity of knowledge and cohort identity. • Redesigned assessments at all levels, integrating a variety of assessment strategies (essays, presentations, posters, reflective accounts, portfolios, collaborative opportunities, practice- and employability-based assessments), fewer assessment points, and more formative assessment tasks. • Aligned assessment rationales to module-level learning outcomes, which in turn were aligned to programme-level outcomes and QAA benchmarks.	• Built on the School's contribution to the HEA *What Works?* initiative by introducing a long transition period from pre-enrolment to the end of level 4 to set expectations and inspire community. • Embedded transition activities into the first semester taught programme to provide a continuity of experience and stagger skills acquisition. • Introduced assessment workshops as part of timetabled teaching at all levels to facilitate student understanding of the assessment task. • Introduced inclusive assessment briefs at all levels to avoid making assumptions about students' pre-existing knowledge and to equip them with the necessary assessment vocabulary for success in HE.
Graduate outcomes	*Student engagement*
• Introduced core modules at level 5 and level 6 (Work Placement, Collaborative Practice, and Major Project) to increase student confidence in their application of English-specific and transferable skills. • Developed practice-based modules such as Applied Sociolinguistics, TEFL, Audio Drama, and Undergraduate Conference, to provide students with opportunities to master industry competencies and standards. • Provided a range of assessment methods to build core proficiencies and explicate the skills that students acquire through practice and completion. • Involved alumni in curricular and extra-curricular activities to showcase graduate journeys.	• Integrated sessions on academic skills, study approaches, mindfulness and well-being, into Welcome Week to promote the core values of the School among students. • Introduced Module Representative scheme to provide student-level and real-time feedback on ongoing teaching provision. • Offered increased module optionality in semester 2 of level 4 to increase student engagement, ownership and commitment. • Through dialogue with students, established an inclusive curriculum which recognises the global reach of English studies and speaks to the diversity of our undergraduate cohort.

Table 1   The main curriculum review developments

Conclusions

In the changeable context of UK higher education, responding to the various demands set out by the range of HE stakeholders and agents can be a difficult task, especially when those demands seem contradictory or conflicting. Not only are undergraduate curricula expected to offer value for money, improve students' skillsets, prepare them for life after graduation, make departments and institutions competitive and relevant in an ever-crowded marketplace, respond to ongoing research trends, integrate new advances in teaching, learning, and pedagogy, and develop innovative programmes of assessment - these demands are set against a context of regulatory pressures, the marketisation of UK higher education, ongoing debates about fee reform, increasing internal and external evaluations (e.g. module evaluations and the National Student Survey), and uncertainty about student numbers and recruitment.

Nevertheless, we believe that a dynamic and ongoing process of curriculum design lies at the heart of the student experience, one which takes into account the competing contextual demands to produce a meaningful and coherent curriculum, re-invigorating the value of the discipline. Universities have a key social responsibility to develop curricula which equip students for life after graduation, an agenda noted in BCU's strategic and academic plans (as discussed above). Making sense of how this is enacted on the ground is the task of authentic curriculum reform and one which has ramifications for the individual student.

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Purpose, process and perception: Rethinking PGCert HE teaching observations

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Introduction

Teaching observations in many forms are a staple of most PGCerts HE. Who does them, how they are organised and what happens as a consequence can mirror institutional cultures, the ethos of educational development units/teams or the whims, values and interests of the individuals running the programmes. I was (and remain) delighted to work on what I consider to be an excellent PGCert HE but was surprised that the observations, though characterised as developmental, were called Teaching Practice Assessments (TPAs), and I struggled to embrace the pass/fail element in them. I found when talking to colleagues in the Educational Development Unit (EDU) that there were competing views as to their principal purpose and this was mirrored in the ways the programme participants perceived them. In my mind it raised a number of questions:

- Do we know why we do observations?
- Do the participants?
- To what extent (if at all) are they gatekeeping tools designed to root out 'bad' lecturers?
- Can they simultaneously serve the two masters of evaluation and development?
- How far can they facilitate development with the spectre of assessment looming so large?

In this article, I will report on one aspect of the research that I conducted at my own institution which focused on the participant perceptions of the TPAs. The study generated data from 41 survey responses and 12 in-depth interviews. Here I explore some of the responses and show how I was able to inform changes to the PGCert HE observations that removed the assessment element and reframed them completely within the developmental paradigm.

Background

I worked for more than twenty years in further education (FE) and HE in FE contexts before shifting full-time to a university. For most of the last ten of those years I ran teacher development programmes (primary, secondary and further). Teaching observations were central to all the programmes I worked on and I have always seen them as holding great development potential; a catalyst for transformation even. A major impediment was often the wider perception of observation as a punitive surveillance tool used in Ofsted-obsessed, managerialist cultures, particularly within schools and FE (O'Leary, 2013).

In line with similar practices in many equivalent Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), my own requires all newly appointed lecturing staff at 0.4 or above or with less than three years' teaching experience to have or gain a teaching qualification. As part of the PGCert HE programme, the lecturers were required to be observed on at least four occasions with one of these conducted by an EDU member and the other three by a mentor from within their own faculties. Two of these mentor TPAs were supposed to be more akin to typical peer observations, but the other simultaneously sought to assess competence as they required a pass/fail grade like the EDU-mediated one. This mixed system often led to mentors grading all three observations. A 'fail' required a re-observation.

The weighting of one EDU and three mentor TPAs was a deliberate attempt to counterbalance the theoretical and generic nature of taught elements. All the TPAs had three overt functions:

1)	To enable participants to apply pedagogic principles and experiment with teaching, learning and assessment strategies in the company of a critical eye

2)	To develop self-efficacy and teaching practices with the assumption being that everyone with a teaching role has room to reflect and to grow

3)	To afford an opportunity to assess practical competence, either summatively or formatively.

It is the latter point that troubled me most and led to one of the aspects of my research into the PGCert HE TPAs reported here.

Observations in HE

They are very often cited by trainee teachers as the most effective or rewarding part of the teacher training programmes (Fullerton, 2006), offering or providing room for insights that help develop teacher self-efficacy and leading to improvements in the quality of teaching (Bell and Cooper, 2014). In a TEF-alert context, systematic and/or graded observation is being mooted in parts of the HE sector and I have heard, anecdotally, of explicit grading being introduced in some HEIs for annual observations and 'RAG' (red, amber, green) or Ofsted-parallel grading options being used on PGCert HE-type programmes.

Gosling (2002) distinguishes three broad types of 'peer' observation in HE. First, there is the 'evaluation' model, conducted by senior staff for appraisal purposes. The second is 'the developmental model' where highly experienced teachers or educational developers observe within a framework of development or teacher education. The third is the 'purest' peer observation model, classed as 'peer review'. Each comes with conditions and risks. Gosling's models make clear distinctions between types and their purposes. The 'evaluation' is designed to identify frailties and monitor performance; the 'developmental' is about either (or both) the demonstration or improvement of teaching competence; the 'peer review' about dialogue leading to reflection. Where there is an overt or even perceived dual purpose, tensions and confusions can arise. If development can be seen broadly as Quality Enhancement (QE) and evaluation as Quality Assurance (QA), any observation can be located somewhere on a matrix (Figure 1):
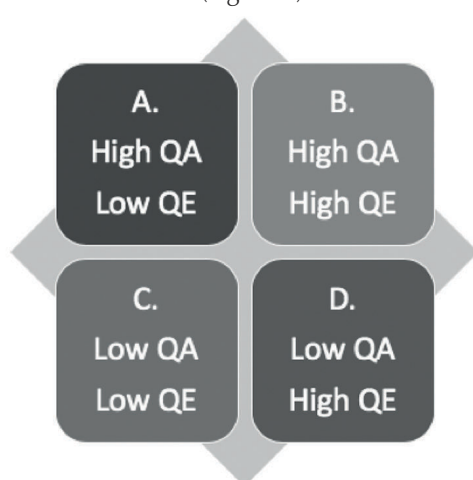

Figure 1   Matrix of Teaching Observation QA/QE tensions

In this matrix it is possible to locate observation types within one of the quadrants. 'A' would likely include observation used in interviews or as part of a probationary review. 'B' could include extra-faculty observation systems by external experts where reporting forms a central part of the process. 'C' could include observation for research purposes, and 'D', most 'genuine' peer observation systems. I found that though we as a team would have located the TPAs in D, many of the participants and their mentors would have seen them as B.

What is good teaching?

Subordinate to competing objectives is the question of subjectivity in relation to what can be seen as good teaching. Ramsden (2003) refers to myths about teaching in HE. He says that it is frequently referred to as an indefinable phenomenon and that the heart of the learning rests with students, not academics. These arguments, he suggests, form the basis for resistance to mechanisms deemed to be designed to measure the quality of teaching, and classroom observation is part of that, in any guise. He also draws on research data to define qualities of good teaching and this suggests that to foster an appropriate climate for classroom observations to be accepted, collective acknowledgement of the weight of evidence and rejection of mythologised notions of HE teaching must be the first hurdle to overcome. The extent to which there are shared understandings and values amongst all involved in observation processes as well as within the core teams organising, facilitating and conducting them, is therefore paramount (Yiend et al., 2014).

However, and worthy of acknowledgement here, is the incongruous leap that can be made by observers when they accept without question received wisdom of what constitutes effective practice. Coe (2013) calls these 'poor proxies' for learning and suggests that student busyness, for example, is often mistaken for genuine engagement. The other side of the same coin is teaching practice that is superficially or apparently effective but masks inappropriate content: 'One can teach rubbish well,' as Peel puts it (2005, p. 501).

The practicalities of delivering adequate observation and feedback guidance or training to the mentor observers (Yiend et al., 2014) means that observers may have little or no training in either conducting the observations themselves or of giving feedback. If observers are relative novices, they may depend on an assumed schema or pre-defined competencies but actually need to move from a deductive to an inductive position (Cockburn, 2005). The challenge is whether they get there through experiential increments or via more formal developmental processes. A lack of training can have a significant impact on reliability:

>	'The evidence shows that when untrained observers are asked to judge the quality of a lesson, there is likely to be only modest agreement among them. Worse still, even if they do agree that what they see is good practice, it often actually isn't.' (Coe, 2014)

Participant perceptions of purpose

My research found that these issues of competing perceptions of the purpose of teaching observations and of what constituted competence by both observers and observees were common and had an impact on how the PGCert HE participants felt and the value they took from them.

Whilst all respondents to the survey agreed that the TPAs were designed to 'help me improve my teaching', most also saw them as a means to 'fulfil quality assurance requirements' and to 'ensure my practice conforms to institutional expectations'. This clearly denoted a widely held perception of the quality functions of TPAs even though this was not reflected in the programme documentation, the ways in which the TPAs were presented in taught sessions or in tutorial discussions at group or individual level. Pseudonyms have been used in this article for the respondents' quotations.

This tension did not prevent some from risk-taking but others were more pragmatic in their approach:

> 'I feel that the expectation of being assessed/
> observed hampered my willingness to experiment
> with teaching...It is easier to "play it safe".'
> [Anonymous survey response]

Purposes identified amongst interviewees ranged from those related directly to the lecturer and to institutional drivers. Many suggested quality monitoring as their notion of the TPA purpose:

> 'I think the main reason is quality control…I don't
> think it's meant to pick holes in people's teaching
> but it is the practical side of the course…You have
> to have some kind of measurement of how that
> person is in practice.' [Helena]

Whilst performance in TPAs was not passed on by the PGCert HE team to line managers or to the University Human Resources or anyone in a senior management position, the assumption that this is somehow central to quality monitoring was strong in a number of responses:

> 'They're very valid; they're very useful…if you
> have somebody who's doing something so awful
> in the TPA that actually could be detrimental to
> their department, their students, all sorts of things.
> It's almost like you have a duty to the university to
> say, "Hold on a second. This isn't a pass and this is
> why. This person really needs some development".'
> [Gina]

Here we see the underlying assumption that the observer's judgements are valid, that observation itself provides a valid mechanism to make such judgements and that there is a responsibility on the observer to act on perceived bad practices. This is likewise reflected in the assumption that TPA observers on the PGCert HE are able to 'allow' people to continue to be employed:

> 'It's about seeing how people conduct themselves
> in the classroom...I think that there probably
> are some very tacit bases on which you allow
> people to proceed as professional educators.'
> [Idris]

The practice-based aspect (in contrast to the theoretical emphasis of the rest of the programme) was highlighted by several interviewees:

> 'It's a bit like a driving test in a sense, isn't it? You
> do all the theory but actually if you can't drive a
> car, then you can't really progress in that.' [Helena]

The assessment/judgement aspect was clearly still at the forefront of many minds. Others highlighted the practical aspect but from a personal development viewpoint rather than a judgmental one:

> '[It's a] practical way of challenging and you tend
> to spot the problems that we are facing where we
> have no answers, you can't find it in books, you've
> got to do it practically before you will be pointed
> on how to go about it when you are confronted
> with such situations.' [Francis]

Astutely, some were concerned with the evidential basis of what 'good pedagogy' is and whether it is possible to frame TPAs in terms of 'good teaching':

> 'I don't think it's all explicitly clear what is being
> observed…I think there's lots of different ideas
> about what teaching involves. There's very little by
> way of a science of teaching…I think it's more that
> kind of a thing, a sense, a professional judgement,
> a discretionary thing.' [Idris]

Although broad criteria were given to programme participants, a lack of awareness of these or a sense of their inadequacy suggests that the assessment function was too likely to be subjective and therefore unfair:

> 'Their conclusion is completely up to the person
> grading it whether somebody does well in what
> they perceive as the main areas. If two people
> were viewing your lessons one could fail you and
> one could pass you because there's literally no
> guidance in the form itself on what you're being
> assessed on.' [Bea]

More positively, all interviewees cited lecturer improvement as one of the key purposes. Their examples included: confidence building; validating existing effective practice and combating a human inclination to only see one's own faults when reflecting; experimenting with modern pedagogies;

internalising theory from the programme; providing a baseline from which development could be measured ipsatively; offering ideas or questions for conversations about how to apply theory to practice; providing tips and tricks on teaching practices.

Mentor observations

Whilst the majority did not question EDU observers' abilities to make fair judgements about what they were observing pedagogically, this did arise in terms of mentor experience and focus. A few of the interviewees were keen to point out that mentors did (either unknowingly or cynically) develop their own agenda, seeing the TPAs as simply a box-ticking exercise or as an opportunity to discuss curriculum content rather than pedagogy and learning. The sense that a close colleague as mentor was 'too polite' (Helena) or 'kind of lax' (Bea), 'too cosy' (Idris) or 'unable to pick up on the negatives' (Delia), was common.

The fundamental tension across these perspectives and amongst all stakeholders was whether the TPA process was seen as an instrument of assessment of competence or a means through which lecturers in training could develop. There are those that saw them first and foremost as gatekeeping tools and others that saw them as developmental tools, even whilst acknowledging their assessment function on the programme at least. The misconception of them as institutional tools potentially used for judging a lecturer's fitness to continue in employment and the frailties in some mentor-led TPAs, suggested changes were needed to this in the way they were framed.

Observation redesign

What was clear overall was that there was not only a sense of value in the existing observation system but that many were able to point to specific adaptations, improvements and even transformations in practice that they attribute directly to the process. This is frequently despite limitations and barriers. It meant that consideration of logistical management, training and design of the system and its component parts was a worthwhile endeavour. As a consequence, we discussed the implications of these findings against our own conceptualisations of purpose and implemented the following actions and changes:

1) We started with a discursive CPD session in the EDU with a view to agreeing shared goals, challenging competing perceptions and to enable the writing of explicit guidance on purpose for both participants and mentors. This has been followed each year with a discussion and standardisation activity built around shared watching of a recorded teaching session.

2) Given the issues of validity and reliability evident from the literature and some of the interview data, we removed the assessment element completely from the TPA process. This included rebranding them as 'third party observations' (TPOs) as suggested by McMahon *et al*. (2007).

3) A recurring theme was a sense of individualised understanding of purpose, particularly amongst mentors. The blurred perceptions enabled foci to be shifted according to whim, preference, current interest or other factors. Whilst flexibility and freedom might be perceived as liberating, this can also frustrate observees and devalue the process. With this in mind, we re-designed the observation forms, aligning the sections with the UKPSF dimensions and removing the pass/fail box. We now include space for deliberate recording of prior action points to aid the feed-forward processes, spaces and prompts designed to ensure a focus on pedagogy over content and prompts (rather than criteria) to guide observers away from assumptions and an individualised direction.

4) We re-wrote the guidance for mentors and in the training we offer we suggest questioning and discussion-focused feedback strategies as an alternative to the natural inclination many have to expressing judgements. The centrality of the observations to the PGCert HE is now reiterated as part of wider training and support. Having said this, we still have familiar issues with poor attendance at mentor-training events (even though these are online) so, in my view, this further justifies the removal of the assessment requirement in line with fair assessment practices.

5) We have reduced the overall number of observations from four to three. Whilst some respondents wanted more from the EDU, the consensus was that three from mentors was overkill. In addition, we now suggest all PGCert HE participants take the option of a mutual peer observation in lieu of one of the two mentor observations, further challenging the 'fatigue', enhancing the mutuality of benefit and enabling the participants to get closer to the process from different aspects.

Conclusion

As Davis (2014) argues, perception of purpose is crucial in determining effectiveness; there needs to be a clear demarcation between observation for appraisal and observation for development. Whilst there is undoubtedly a pre-existing tension in the way these observations are designed and used, incongruent perceptions from or amongst key stakeholders diminishes potential utility.

When considering the role of observations, I realised that it leads to the bigger question: What is a PGCert HE for? Is it primarily about assuring a baseline of competence, a mechanism to check those employed by institutions are able to fulfil the teaching aspects of the contracts under which they are employed? Or is it a means to enhance, to develop, to grow, to challenge expectations, assumptions and practices related to teaching, learning and assessment? My thinking pushes me always towards the second camp and I would resist efforts to correlate the purpose of the PGCert HE to any aspect of performance monitoring or management of new lecturers. The observations illustrate an ethos and, whatever that is, we need to think carefully about why we do them and how they are conducted.

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Learning Analytics Cymru: Nationwide collaboration for the benefit of student learning in Wales

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The context for collaboration

In Wales, we have a tradition of collaborative working between universities, and in particular in relation to enhancing learning and teaching through technology. This was demonstrated through the 2007 publication of a ten-year strategy for enhancing learning and teaching through technology by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), which led to the development of the GWELLA programme (Higher Education Academy, 2012). Collaboration has also resulted in the implementation of the shared library management service for Wales (Cook, 2016).

Jisc's evaluation of the HEFCW strategy (Jisc, 2018a) for enhancing learning and teaching through technology found that it had impacted positively on the higher education sector within Wales. The strategy was found to have supported significant improvements in relation to technology-enhanced learning within higher education provision across Wales, and the evaluative report highlighted that this was something to build on further. One of the recommendations from the review was that institutions should work towards adoption of learning analytics at the earliest opportunity, as a means to inform reflection and decision-making as well as to address specific challenge areas such as student retention.

As a result, the latest collaborative activity involves an all-Wales approach to learning analytics. Learning analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners, in order to understand and optimise learning and the environments in which it occurs. This is technology that universities are increasingly adopting to try to improve educational outcomes, by better supporting students throughout their educational journey, and enabling support to be targeted at those who need it the most.

The Jisc Learning Analytics Service

The Jisc Learning Analytics Service was created as an outcome of a four-year research and development project where Higher and Further Education institutions worked collaboratively within a 'co-design framework' to help transition the development from project to service. Three of the Welsh HEIs joined Jisc on the initial journey through alpha and beta stages of the project contributing to the development, evaluation, testing and piloting of the product, and two were active when Jisc moved into live service on 1 August 2018. The service offers a Learning Data Warehouse, Staff Dashboards, a Student App, Attendance Monitoring and both descriptive and predictive information derived from the student data. Information can be viewed and reported on at either a management level, at course or module level or at the individual student level.

Across the UK there now exists an active community of practice formed by Jisc Learning Analytics. This provides opportunities for HE and FE providers to share their experiences and to collaborate on research and the impacts of engagement with learning analytics. Work is being undertaken on case studies where institutions are evaluating the experience of delivering the service and starting to appraise the impacts that meaningful interactions have on the student learning journey. All institutions are able to use a wealth of documentation to support them with a Code of Practice (Jisc, 2018b), research information and legal frameworks, all part of the wider service from Jisc.

Learning Analytics Cymru

From 2018/19, all universities in Wales have been taking part in Learning Analytics Cymru, which aims to improve the educational outcomes for our students. Through the project, providers are being supported to take up and make strategic use of learning analytics on a nationwide basis over three years, with HEFCW funding supporting this engagement for the first two years. We believe that learning analytics will have so much more impact if the insights they produce can be pooled and used strategically to achieve institutional, regional and national goals. This is a unique collaborative opportunity to approach learning analytics from a 'national' perspective, allowing us to discover at both an institutional and national level the impacts of surfacing meaningful data to support the student learning journey. As the community in Wales grows and matures, there is an expectation that institutions will share their experience of implementing and deploying the service and that there will be quicker adoption for late entry institutions as both the product and implementation methodologies have matured.

The project is exploring what works best for learners at our own providers, recognising that different students within the diverse student body have different challenges and needs. This will help to deliver Welsh Government priorities around wellbeing, widening access and retention, as institutions will be able to recognise data patterns to help students to understand their own learning needs and identify areas for improvement. It will also help to address the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015), legislation that is unique to Wales which seeks to improve our social, cultural, environmental and economic wellbeing.

The analysis of learning patterns will provide anonymised nationwide insights into: what causes different educational outcomes for students; the success or otherwise of student support interventions; and tracking improvements in learning and teaching on individual programmes. The anonymised insights will allow providers to identify support measures and improvements in learning and teaching on individual programmes. Overall, the work will enable Welsh universities to share expertise, and become even more flexible, confident and innovative in using technology-enhanced learning in both Welsh and English. The pace of adoption in this pan-Wales project will be accelerated by communities sharing good practice, making us the most advanced UK nation operating in this area. Indeed, we believe there are no other examples of a whole nation working in this way in respect of learning analytics within HE, making Wales a global pioneer.

Across Wales, each institution has a different reason for engagement with learning analytics with differing outcomes. However, because the product is flexible and consists of a number of components, each institution is able to evaluate different solutions for different strategies or drivers and to explore different pilot scenarios before moving into full service. At Wrexham Glyndŵr University, for example, a learning analytics solution has been sought that offers deeper insight for staff so that they can provide individually tailored support and more personalised learning. Alongside this, the University wishes to facilitate deeper engagement from students with their own learning journey through use of the 'study goal' app which will enable students to monitor their activity, set themselves goals and benchmark their progress.

Throughout all of this, the student voice is paramount. Project governance is overseen by a steering group that includes representation from NUS Wales, whilst individual institutions put the student voice centre-stage within their own working groups. In addition, with regular user group meetings on a pan-Wales basis and tailored advice and guidance from Jisc learning analytics staff, each institution is supported as they implement the service and contribute to the shared development across Wales. We look forward to progressing the project further and to sharing in the future with the SEDA community tangible outcomes for student learning and engagement, not only within individual institutions, but also collectively for Wales.

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Recent Publication

SEDA Special 41
Doing a Good Job Well - Being Recognised as an Experienced, Professional Teacher in HE
Edited by Jackie Potter and Rebecca Turner
With eleven contributors
£14 – from the SEDA website

How can we work with exemplars? Collated ideas from an institutional community of practice

Lydia Arnold and **Jane Headley,** Harper Adams University

Background

Over the last three years, 16 Harper Adams University staff have worked as a semi-formal community of practice (CoP) around the use of exemplars in teaching and assessment. The cross-institutional CoP was formed as the academic community grappled with questions about how to support students to succeed in assessment. Founding members were inspired by existing work on exemplars and visiting speakers. Members wanted to explore whether they could achieve the benefits of exemplars as published in relevant literature. Exemplars were perceived as being particularly useful to:

- Clarify assessment requirements, marking criteria and standards (Orsmond *et al*., 2000)
- Surface tacit assumptions about assessment (Scoles *et al*., 2013; Chong, 2018);
- Increase students' self-direction (Grainger *et al*., 2018)
- Prompt activities that generate feedback (Orsmond *et al*., 2000)
- Generate feedforward to impact on performance (Wimshurst and Manning, 2013)
- Bring greater confidence in standards (Bamber, 2015)
- Pro-actively provide feedback in an efficient and timely manner (Scoles *et al*., 2013)
- Improve dialogue around assessment (Blair *et al*., 2014; Carless and Chan, 2017).

The CoP did not actively try to define the term 'exemplar' because the act of exploring what this concept meant was part of the community's conversation and, just like in the literature, it emerged to mean different things to different people. Broadly though, exemplars were perceived as selected examples of assessment used constructively to support students' assessment practices.

Assessment CoPs are not new. They have been advocated as a means of developing and calibrating assessment practices, and have sometimes included the specific consideration of exemplars (Elwood and Klenowski, 2010). Our CoP was rooted solely around the development of exemplars-related practice. The CoP was open to all who were interested. It drew academics from varied disciplines including engineering, business, food and nutrition, and veterinary nursing, and it included some professional services colleagues. The CoP involved regular meetings to share insights, plans and frustrations. It was shaped by questions such as: How are exemplars being used by members? What can we learn from literature? What practices are effective? What can data tell us? And, how is our own thinking about assessment and feedback being developed? Members reported the benefits of participation as building professional networks, having time to reflect, having their thinking challenged and being able to engage in practice in a more scholarly way.

The co-authors of this paper are both members of the CoP, and Jane Headley was its founder.

Practical techniques

One of the main challenges for the CoP was to identify different ways of working with exemplars. Here we share some practical exemplars techniques that were employed. We are not claiming originality on any of these techniques, nor are we advocating one approach over another. This is not intended as a systematic evaluation. We have simply collated approaches that CoP members report as being observably valuable in their day-to-day practice in anticipation that others may wish to try and perhaps further appraise some of these strategies.

Instant visibility: A quick glance exemplar

CoP members observed that students can be anxious when encountering a new type of assessment, particularly when they are not able to conceive what is meant by a specific format such as an ePortfolio or an annotated bibliography. Reportedly by 'just sharing' a past example of the type required, an instant sigh of relief amongst students could almost be heard around the room. This 'quick look' appeared to take away the immediate fear and generated a sense that 'I can do that!' This approach is not a substitute for deeper engagement with assessment dialogue, but it does provide an answer to the immediate concern of 'what do you mean by…?'.

Exemplars workshop to generate assessment dialogue

CoP members observed that their exemplars workshop appeared to help many students to:

- Develop their understanding of published assessment criteria
- Develop confidence to judge good performance
- Improve confidence to make judgements about their own assessment
- Improve engagement with the assessment tasks
- Develop confidence in their ability to perform the required task.

The observations of colleagues who hosted these sessions resonated with the experience reported by To and Carless (2016), wherein a workshop context afforded opportunities for peer engagement, teacher mediation of student views and the encouragement of participation.

Although the precise workshop formats varied amongst members of the CoP, a typical session included the following steps:

i)   Tutor facilitates students to look at a carefully selected

exemplar. This may be done in advance, in the room, or online. The arrangement for engagement should anticipate different reading speeds

ii) Tutor facilitates a structured discussion to tease out the nuances of the assessment task (requirements, content and criteria)

iii) Students rewrite the criteria in their own words to allow any misunderstandings to be surfaced. This is supported with discussion

iv) The group 'mark' and feedback using the criteria

v) Discussions are held with students around their judgements. Probing questions include: Does the work presented answer the question or task? What are the good and bad aspects? (Beginning with this polar language developing into more nuanced judgments)

vi) A shared 'lessons learned' summary is created and shared

vii) Discussion about how students arrived at judgements and how markers arrive at judgements might also follow.

Handley and Williams (2011, p. 105) suggest that exemplars can act, amongst colleagues, as 'mediating objects – focal points which prompt ideas, doubts, questions and suggestions to be articulated and debated'. This point was evident in the CoP when teams ran workshops together and realised there were differences in views about assessment between markers. One CoP member describes how differences within a marking team were not suppressed, but were as actively surfaced and explored as part of the workshop situation to foster confidence in standards and marker judgement:

> *'Workshops such as this shouldn't shy away from the existence of subjectivity – within a team different tutors have different preferences. These can be shown and discussed so that students realise that while the criteria may be clear and used, markers are still human! They should have confidence that the team are aware of each other's preferences and pet issues, but that they will not influence marks because these points have been aired and discussed. This helps everyone to recognise that assessment involves professional judgement and being frank about different marker emphasis allows all markers and students to receive a consistent message.'* (CoP Tutor)

Bring your own work (BYOW)

Literature notes that showing exemplars is not enough and students need to transfer learning to their own assessment practices (To and Carless, 2016). The BYOW workshop was one way in which the CoP aimed to build a bridge between exemplars and individual application; in this format students review exemplars and then turn their attention actively to their own work. Two specific examples of BYOW formats used by the CoP are offered:

i) Following a discussion of the assessment task and criteria, and consideration of a carefully selected exemplar to identify

the features of good performance, students undertook a peer review exercise using their own work. A carousel involved laying out physical copies of draft student work and rotating students to add comments to three pieces of work in a structured manner, using a pro-forma with the criteria set out. In the CoP's experience, students sometimes became frustrated by the limited level of feedback received. Tutors recognised Nicol, Thomson and Breslin's (2014) point that students benefited most from being a reviewer, rather than receiving reviews. On that basis, it was important to explore the question 'what did you learn that you can now apply to improve your own work?', rather than only asking what feedback was received.

ii) Another CoP tutor used an ePortfolio to provide a very structured way of leading students to develop proficiency in judging assessment work, before reviewing their own work in the same manner. In their own words:

> *'I asked students to bring their draft of a specific section of the assignment. After a short discussion on the relevant marking criteria, students wrote feedback for two exemplars (captured in a PebblePad template). This was done individually, allowing students to reflect privately and get into the zone of offering feedback. After considering the exemplar work students read their own work and using the same template, gave feedback on their own draft. This allowed them to step back and review their own work more objectively. About half the group had not brought their work and so used a third exemplar. A short whole group discussion followed, contrasting the exemplars and reflecting on changes students were planning to their own work.'* (CoP Tutor)

Bringing in the author

In this approach students engage with a past example of assessment work, they discuss and evaluate the work, but additionally they take part in a constructive discussion with the original author. The presence of the author, from a previous cohort, allows discussion on the process behind the work under consideration rather than only on the finished product. It allows students to hear the feelings of the author with the aim of reducing assessment anxiety. One colleague in the CoP used this approach on a transnational programme as a specific method of surfacing cross-cultural differences in academic practice. This technique enables the author to highlight the effect that they tried to achieve along with an appraisal of how well this was achieved. It adds a very human dimension to working with exemplars.

A digital commentary

Using screencast technology it is possible to create a voice-over while visibly reviewing an on-screen exemplar (further advice on how to create digital exemplars is available at Arnold (2017)). The product of this process is a video that can be played back by students so that they can both hear

the commentary and see where the points relate to within the work. Students reported this is like getting an insight into the mind of a marker and hearing their internal conversation. The videos linked explicitly to assessment criteria and the assignment task. They highlighted both strengths and limitations in the work. Such a walkthrough was useful to enable anyone who missed an exemplars workshop to support distance courses and to provide supplementary advice for students.

Tutor-created exemplars

Exemplars can be problematic when there is simply no prior student work to draw upon. Tutor-created exemplars can be used instead. The CoP unanimously agreed that using student work is always better on the grounds of authenticity, but tutor-created exemplars have been used with some success when needed. Although there is a considerable investment of time on the part of the tutor, CoP reflections on this approach have highlighted that completing all or some of a student assessment can highlight pitfalls in the design, and can further attune the advice and guidance the tutor is able to provide based on their own initial experience. When technology is involved in the production of assessment, tutor-created exemplars can force staff to use the tools that students will work with. In turn this led to tutors feeling that they could better support students in their use of technology. Students expressed sincere gratitude at the efforts made to provide this type of exemplar.

Time-limited exemplars

One of the practical dilemmas for tutors considering using exemplars related to how and when to introduce exemplars, and for how long to grant access to past examples. Concerns of timing have been noted in published studies on exemplars (see, for example, Scoles *et al.*, 2013; Wimshurst and Manning, 2013). One member of the CoP introduced online exemplars with guidance for engagement but, critically, the exemplars were only available for specific periods of time. This was an attempt to manage the timing of engagement so that students needed to engage early, during the planning stages of their assessment, rather than at the last minute. Students were advised when the online area would be available. In-class survey feedback showed that engagement was high (100% of a class of fifty-seven) and often meaningful. The survey reported students better appreciating what was needed, feeling more able to assess their own work, and having a clearer sense of presentation requirements.

Sharing examination scripts

The use of exemplars for exams is under-explored, though there is some evidence they can be valuable to student learning (Scoles *et al.*, 2013; Blair *et al.*, 2014). Some members of the CoP were drawn to use exemplars to try to alleviate exam stress and to help students understand how they can perform well. During their exam preparation phase, colleagues shared exam responses from a previous cohort to illustrate the level and depth of answer that is possible in a time-limited situation, and to show the presentation and structure which may be produced. Students informally reported value in just seeing exam answers as they had never seen what others produce. They commented on the quality of what was realistically possible in a time-constrained situation in terms of

presentation, neatness, referencing and depth. As an extension of this approach exam answers can be compared to marking schemes in a workshop-style arrangement.

Pass the problem

In an attempt to develop writing quality in exam conditions and familiarise students with marking criteria, an exercise called 'pass the problem' was undertaken by CoP members (this concept was introduced to us by Professor Sally Brown during a development workshop). This exercise works with the formation of 'live' exemplars and is best shown by example (Figure 1):

> *Students answer a short 10-mark question in class in exam conditions using their ID number rather than their name. These are collected and shuffled. Students take one paper back, which must not be their own or that of the person next to them. They each read the work and, as a group, they discuss the marking criteria. Students then mark the work using the criteria and give feedback. Sharing of good answers takes place. Sharing occurs from the reviewer rather than the recipient to protect identities and overcome any reticence amongst students to share their own work. The answers and feedback are then returned to the student who produced the assessment.*

Figure 1   An example of 'Pass the Problem' in use

This approach requires a clear pre-activity discussion, as a form of reviewer training. In a time-limited situation there is a risk that students who usually have extra time in exams, or other reasonable adjustments, may be pressured unduly and this needs careful management. As a variation of this approach students may complete the writing at home, allowing for any extra time, with the completion of the review only taking place in class.

Conclusion

The Harper Adams University Exemplar CoP has been a productive cell of practice. It has generated pragmatic approaches to using exemplars, and it has sustained an ongoing dialogue around what techniques appear to work in practice. Undoubtedly the CoP has triggered wider debates and discussions about assessment literacy, formative support and the use of clear assessment criteria. Individual members of the CoP are involved in more detailed evaluations of their own practice, but this overview has shown that, even amongst a relatively small group of practitioners, exemplars can be used in diverse ways to support assessment practice.

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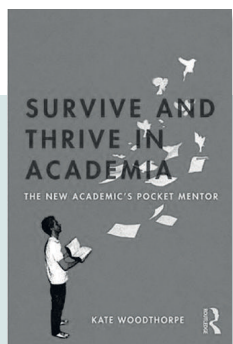
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Book Review

Survive and Thrive in Academia The New Academic's Pocket Mentor

by Kate Woodthorpe, Routledge
238 pages
June 2018

The foreword of these 238 pages of advice to new academics suggests that it can help with the 'at times contrary role' of an early career academic. I have not found the role, with experience, to be any less contrary and the 'at times' suggest that there may be times of non-contrariness which I have still to experience!

The book is organised into three sections (teaching – three chapters, research – three chapters, and administration – two chapters) and is cross-cut with themes such as self-care (running through chapter two which addresses teaching context), imposter syndrome and shaping academic identity. The author notes how the themes apply in different contexts and I thought that some more signposting work might have gone into how these might emerge – for example, self-care applies directly also to research and administration.

The first chapter outlines the book's principal aims:

• To (re)claim areas of work that can be influenced
• To focus on sources of fulfilment
• To identify personal strengths, priorities and areas for development.

It also gives an outline of the contemporary HE context, which is brief and to the point, although if early career academics were in two minds about a career path (and had viable options) it might just steer them from academia. The role, as noted, is contrary and requires self-direction, personal-prioritisation, emotional intelligence and resilience. The final requirement being one that is emphasised throughout the book.

There is much of use within the limited number of pages. The author's reflections (on her own experiences), the tips (actionable advice) and pauses for thought (which do exactly what they set out to do) break up the main text and each chapter ends with additional readings and highly useful lists of chapter-related journals. I have already recommended this to a new academic colleague, and she has rapidly read it and has also recommended it to her peers.

Just to pick one section – 'establishing credibility'. This I have found to be something that new academics particularly worry about and often feel like imposters, especially in respect of teaching. This section is brief but the book itself, I think, will promote confidence in new staff simply because it outlines issues that many experience. It has a strong 'you are not alone' in what you experience message that many will find reassuring. In addition, the author notes the use that her own PGCLTHE was to her teaching practice – music to an academic developer's ears.

One further thing, that I would whole-heartedly endorse, is the idea contained within the 'author reflection' on page 223 – keep a record of 'stuff I've done', things organised, contributed to and such like. On page 224 this is followed up with 'keep plaudits', again something I would endorse. In the final stages of reading this book I was teaching a class and a colleague/PGCLTHE student received some flowers from a grateful student. The teacher had gone the extra mile and the student was thanking them. I suggested taking a photo so that the gesture would always be available on-file. These are the enriching moments within our job.

Peter Gossman is a Principal Lecturer and Course Leader for the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in the Institute of Education at the University of Worcester.

SEDA News

SEDA Awards

SEDA Research and Evaluation Small Grants

SEDA has awarded grants to the people below for the projects listed. Many congratulations to the successful applicants.

- **Joanna Bailey,** *Understanding the factors which support the work of faculty and centrally based academic developers in bringing about positive change*

- **Jennifer Leigh,** *International students who teach: a creative approach to supporting them and evaluating this provision*

- **Jordan Napier,** *Workshops to workplace: the enablers and barriers to implementing learning from educational workshops*

- **Abigail Pearson,** *The lecture from hell: an answer to addressing our inaccessibility demons in higher education delivery?*

- **Edd Pitt,** *Everybody hurts: sharing feedback experiences through 'intellectual candour' to develop staff and student feedback literacy*

New SEDA Senior Fellows

Congratulations to **Silvia Colaiacomo, Catherine O'Mahony** and **Chrissi Nerantzi** who have recently been awarded Senior Fellowship of SEDA.

Forthcoming events

SEDA Autumn Conference 2019

New Frontiers in Educational and Curriculum Development
14-15 November 2019
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, Leeds
Book online at www.seda.ac.uk
Keynote speakers:
Mark Glynn, Head of Teaching Enhancement Unit at Dublin City University
Michelle Morgan, Associate Dean of the Student Experience, Bournemouth University
Phil Race is an independent educational developer and writer, with a particular interest in how people learn best.

Mark Glynn   Michelle Morgan   Phil Race

Networking Workshop

Enabling and Supporting Educational Change
14 October 2019
University of the West of England, Bristol
Book online at www.seda.ac.uk

SEDA Spring Conference

Rethinking the Remit of the University in Uncertain Times
2-3 April 2020
Radisson Blue Hotel, Glasgow
The Conference outline plus call for contributions is on the SEDA website.
Deadline for the call: Monday, 25 November 2019.

ICED Conference 2020

The Future-Ready Graduate
15-18 June 2020
ETH, Zurich, Switzerland
Call for proposals now open: http://iced2020.ch/call/

Courses

We are taking bookings for Supporting and Leading Educational Change (Professional Qualification Course), 21 October 2019 – 21 February 2020.

Latest SEDA Publication

SEDA Special 43: *Ten Ways to Investigate Research Supervision Practice*

Edited by Geof Hill and Sian Vaughan

Available for £14.00 at www.seda.ac.uk

Research supervision is an academic practice that is gaining growing attention. In this publication a number of supervisors share the methods they have used to investigate and reflect on their supervisory practice. The intention in sharing their diverse and creative ways of investigation, and the resulting benefits in their own greater understanding of supervisory practice, is to encourage other supervisors to investigate their own research supervision as a practice in ways that are personally meaningful and beneficial to them. This Special discusses nine different ways research supervisors have investigated their practice and, in an open tenth way, encourages the reader to investigate their own practices.

Geof Hill   Sian Vaughan