

SCEPTRe CONFERENCE: Enabling A More Complete Education Award Leaders' Panel and Breakout Discussion 14 April 2010

For a recording of the panel session, please go to:
<http://lifewidelearningconference.pbworks.com/>

Panel:

Norman Jackson, University of Surrey, Chair
Francine Lindley, University of Sheffield
Terry Dray, Liverpool John Moores University
Vicky Mann, Nottingham University

Context

Life-wide learning poses significant challenges for the assurance of educational quality and standards. Learning occurs in diverse environments which cannot be controlled by institutions. Learning is very personal and highly situated. Unlike formal education where learning is the primary goal, in the life-wide learning context most of the learning is a by-product of doing things like working, traveling, volunteering, playing sport, caring for others, mentoring or something else.

Personal development in these contexts is difficult to articulate it often involves the development of qualities and dispositions as well as new knowledge and skills. Furthermore, learning often emerges in a seemingly haphazard way through the process of doing things. We often only recognise what we have learnt when we look back on the experience. But interestingly, these contexts are sights for realtime application of learning.. an advantage over much formal education which separates theory from practice.. Perhaps this is one of the added value dimensions of lifewide learning.

Higher education is a major player in the business of quality assuring learningthe value of its products educated and transformed people depend on the standards it sets and maintains for its educational processes, practices and outcomes.

So how do we assure the quality and standards of our processes, our practices and our outcomes from co-curricular and extra-curricular awards? And how do we share standards between institutions so that our individual standards making processes are informed?

These are fundamental questions that have to be addressed but are the solutions the same as those we apply to academic programmes where learning is controlled and we base our assessments on outcomes that we predict and value.

Some discussion points:

Vicky Mann

Nottingham's Award based on academic module accreditation pattern – adds credibility.

Developed in 2008.

Involves academic and non-academic staff.

Makes explicit what is already going on.

Focus on academic credibility, quality, evidence of learning, academic reach, departmental and employer engagement, formal recognition and award.

Terry Dray

Employability is at centre of university mission.

World of Work (WoW) supported throughout from VC down.

Recognises that graduates need more than a degree.

WoW™ is a national group, developed in partnership with employers in order to meet their needs.

Certificate awarded as endorsement of employers.

All 8 skills mapped over all programmes – VC support essential.

Interviews conducted by employers, filmed to provide a training archive.

Francine Lindley

Employability focus.

Extra-curricular activities of any sort included.

Open to UGs and PGs.

Can register any time up to 1 month before submission.

Pressure of assessment (portfolio) eased by training 2 PhD students.

Developed data bas through Careers.

Employ student supporters.

Ensuring University takes award seriously.

Fail/Pass/Good Pass.

£25 fee to register for award.

Questions/comments:

Q: What do scheme's cost to run?

A: Sheffield scheme p.a.:

- staffing £45,000
- marketing £4,000
- printing £2,000
- assessment £2,000
- database £7,000

£60,000 for 300 students

NB only 2 or 3 schemes charge a fee to students.

Q: How to ensure that the demands of employers are met?

A: LJMU seek market needs. Model works on partnership.

Q: How to scale up?

A: Employers are providing employees to make it work. Interviewing students is CPD for their employees.

Q: Any research on whether the schemes work?

A: LJMU developing KPIs and tracking graduates 1, 3 and 5 years on. Also measuring academics' referrals.

24/25 proof of concept students are in work disciplines of their choice.

Q: 3 very different models, and QA is different for one of them. Is QA an important driver?

A: If section 6.1 of certificate is read, people will be comparing institutions.

Feedback sheets

1) Should we make the distinction between quality and standards of processes and practices and the quality and standards of outcomes (learning, personal/professional development and achievement)?

Yes we should. Outcomes for extra-curricular experiences may be unique if we are inviting students to reflect on their learning and influences. I question the value of academicising the process. Who is it for and who does it benefit?

Yes we should.

I think outcomes for extra-curricular may be unique if we are asking students to reflect on their learning and experiences. I question the value of formally 'academicising' the process (though I agree with having a rigorous process). Who exactly is this for and who does it benefit?

2) What can and should we try to assure in respect of these awards?

The Award needs to be robust and of high quality but I don't feel it is necessary to QA the award. Student experience, qualities, skills can be difficult to measure. Portfolios are subjective. Assessors use their own judgement.

A matter for future discussion

Some inclusion of values and not just skills and activities- e.g. honesty, integrity, fairness.

Evidence of student development and growth is what is key.

Recognition should include a broad range of extra-curricular activity to encourage more students to engage and should be flexible to incorporate individual and unique involvement.

3) What are the key challenges & issues to defining and assuring quality and standards of learning and achievement in co-curricular/extra-curricular awards?

Resources: what can we afford?

Scalability

Students extra/co-curricular activities are all different. Difficult to measure, ensure quality of activities completed outside the University.

Understanding the mission and values of each 'award'.

Further dialogue amongst team/award leaders.

Apples, pears and oranges- what are the universals, but what can we do to enjoy the differences too?

If the award is going to be on the HEAR, it must have some parity with academic studies, without replicating the time and effort that go into assessing academic achievements.

Levels of resource required to set up and undertake these.

The danger that by focusing on assessment that creativity is compromised and that students participate as 'points mean prizes' rather than the intrinsic value of the learning journey.

4) What approaches to assuring quality and standards does your institution use?

Internal verification

External verifier (ILM)

Moderation panel reviews evidence students submit of activities. Panel made up of career staff, management, career advisors, volunteering office, academics (looking to target academics and some employers?)

Not yet decided but unlikely to be any as for the Award sits outside the QA process by design.

Hard to answer any of these- we are really only looking now at setting up an award.

Choices of activities will validate an individual's participation and achievements. Reflective pieces will be submitted and assessed. 1:1 interviews will also be used.

Award submissions are assessed by a panel including careers staff, SU and academic staff and recruiter, using a checklist to ensure evidence meets criteria. For Global Award also a panel presentation and interview... For both Gold Awards- poster presentation at Awards ceremony.

5) What mechanisms exist already for sharing process and outcome standards between institutions? Please continue on reverse

A PDP group on AGCAS of some Award Leaders- this could be used as a forum for sharing information.

We need a forum outside the existing one which requires members to be member of AGCAS!

AGCAS discussion link on awards and PDP.

Informal ones- e.g. meeting at Nottingham, emails and individual meetings/phone conversations.

Breakout Session following Panel: Quality and Standards, Challenges and Issues raised by Award Leaders

The following themes emerged in a fast-moving discussion, with many questions raised for further consideration:

- How do awards compare? Are there universals? What are the different values?
 - How can we assure quality and standards?
 - How can we maintain a level of honesty, fairness and integrity?
- What is the purpose of assessment?
 - To help the student to articulate their skills?
 - Can there be an objective standard if it is based on personal judgement?
 - Should the award not focus on giving the student the confidence to think on their feet and, through reflection, gain the ability to articulate their abilities?
 - The process is more important than the resulting certificate, as otherwise it makes it more of a “ticking boxes” exercise.
 - However the certificate is the incentive for students (a tangible result) and it also raises the profile for the University to take the award seriously.
- How to assess
 - Rather than giving staff the portfolios to assess, make it more of a student led process. Students comment on their own portfolios, thereby engaging the students more in the process, and then staff assess those comments.
 - Facilitate self reflection and understanding, perhaps by giving students the time to practise articulating to peers.
 - This would have to be embedded within the curriculum as students are time poor and reluctant to take on extra burdens.
- Bureaucratic structure
 - By creating this framework in which certain things are valued or encouraged, the activities themselves may be devalued and opportunities restricted or even written off.
- The issue of accessibility
 - Many minority groups, single parents, etc are not and can not do these awards.
 - They may be engaging in activities that develop life skills (such as parenting, working, etc) but they do not have the time to reflect upon them and thus can not achieve the award.
 - Students are not able to transfer the skills they have acquired through real-life experiences.
 - Currently the outcome is being addressed, but the core issue revolves around transferability.
 - Awards may just be providing further uplift to already capable students.
- Are students aware of what universities are already doing to help them in terms of employability?
 - Students find it hard to link the available resources and opportunities to recruitment and jobs; it needs to be made explicit.

- Does the QAA framework kill the richness of activities and experiences the students engage in?
 - However without that framework, there is an issue of recognition.
- Does it matter whether awards are driven by business or academics, and if so which should it be?
- How do the academic and business world representations differ/compare/relate?
- Employers use degrees and grades as a filter out for applications. If more classifications are introduced (i.e. awards) are we not just providing more filters?

Making sense of diversity

In order to understand diversity in practice it might be helpful to think of a range of situations in which institutional mission – educational designs – administrative and quality systems and resources are connected.

Embedded model: the only totally inclusive model

At one end of the continuum is the institution that has put informal learning at the heart of its educational mission. It adopts an embedded approach. All curricula (programmes) must address relevant educational outcomes and make provision for experiences that will enable outcomes to be achieved. Students have therefore to engage with these forms of education. Delivery, support, assessment and quality assurance procedures are designed into programmes and the resources are distributed throughout the whole system.

Institutional entitlement centrally supported model

In this approach there is strong institutional rhetoric and maybe even a policy level statement to the effect that these forms of learning are important to graduate outcomes. But it is left up to students to find and participate in the opportunity voluntarily. It is an add on and it is fairly marginal in the sense of only very limited resources are provided so there is only capacity to support a small proportion of students. Educational and assessment approaches and QA designs are fashioned according to the available resources.

Local champion model aimed at establishing an entitlement

In this approach a local champion (perhaps an organisational unit) creates the infrastructures to support these forms of informal education in order to promote their agenda or perhaps to try to influence the university so that it becomes part of the institutional offer. Educational and assessment approaches and QA designs are fashioned according to the available resources.