SCEPTrE CONFERENCE: Enabling A More Complete Education
Institutional Leaders' Forum and Breakout Discussion 13 April 2010

To view a recording of the session, please go to: http://lifewidelearningconference.pbworks.com/

Institutional Leaders' Forum:

Professor Norman Jackson, University of Surrey, Chair
Professor Elaine Thomas, VC, University for the Creative Arts
Professor Stephen Hill, Director of Teaching and Learning Innovation, University of Gloucestershire
Dr Jane Grenville, PVC (Students), University of York (via videoconference)
Recorder: Dr Jenny Willis, SCEPTrE Fellow

Points made in introduction and three presentations

- Responsibility of leaders to question and lead change
- Leadership present at different levels

- Feeling that much of what is entailed in life-wide learning is already taking place
- Opportunities to apply academic learning in practice
- Characteristics correspond with Barnett's 'dispositions' e.g. being motivated, competitive, having potential
- Programmes develop values, beliefs, stance, individual style (University of the Creative Arts)
- Development of analytical and reflective skills
- Need to be able to articulate own achievements and competences

- How to raise awareness of life-wide competences?
- Are we developing the skills, knowledge etc. that are relevant for future needs?
- Are we developing the capacity to transfer and adapt?
- Are we enabling development of insight?
- Are we developing resilience/providing transformative learning?
- Do we nurture responsibility for our own learning?

- York Award attempts to draw on existing student involvement e.g. wide range of sports and societies, work experience, part-time/vacation work
- Award must have institutional distinctiveness
- Must be attractive to students and employers
- Skills developed through the curriculum; supplementary training; extra-curricular activities; work experience
- Must be holistic
- Award should be impelling
- York Award assessed through portfolio
- Expect evidence of what can give to the community as well as what student gains him/herself: proactive citizenship

- Need to involve students in planning process
- Student as learner; student as active partner; student as mature citizen (University of Gloucester)
- (University of Gloucester) L&T Strategy comprised 5 elements (active engagement, learner empowerment, learning communities, learning for sustainable development, learning for equality, diversity and intercultural understanding). Student have requested that 'employability' be added
- Distinction between elements verified and those verified and accredited

- HE Achievement Record pilot: section 6.1 is critical section – additional information put forward by institution
- Keele gives institutional protocols; Birmingham, extension of additional award; Gloucester, student-led approach to verification

Question and answer session

Q: Learning is context bound: is there a conflict between maintaining one's self-identity and become what is desired by the discipline?
A: Need to believe in what you produce, as an artist, and self-worth, but also need to understand accountability. Hence underlying tension.

Q: Who would say their courses don't engender these life-wide characteristics?
A: The questions aim to assist our own understanding, and to raise issue of whether they are the correct questions to be asking. Things may be more evident in some subject areas.

Q: Scalability is crucial.
A: Possible means of supporting large scale: extend number of evaluation panels; hold more than one period of assessment/evaluation in the year. Interview felt to be essential means of assessing reflection (York).
Q: How to increase student engagement?
A: (1) Degree to which students are aware and understand the process. (2) Engage academic community more, reduce fear of taking academics away from their primary role. (3) More students involved in volunteering (York) than actually engage in the award scheme.

Q: Any follow-up research on impact?
A: (York) not yet formally, though is some anecdotal evidence to suggest 5% improvement in chance of success in employment market.

Q: Cost of running a scheme?
A: (Gloucester) As long as a piece of string! Experience at Warwick was c. £300 per head. Current pilot has used most of £10,000 grant on setting up systems. Would expect c. £200 per head.
(University of Creative Arts) Has to be a matter of priorities: if sufficiently important, funds must be made available. Concern for fairness.
(York) Will come back with information on wiki.

Q: Discussion focused on UGs: what about postgraduates?
A: (Gloucester) PG Taught are involved and very enthusiastic, but not PGR. Pilot not intended for PGs.
(York) 1-year taught PGs highly focused on academic programme so little time for additional award. Roberts money being used to support other similar activities.

Q: Always same students who become involved in things.
(York) Still need to prompt those involved in SU activities to go for award. Conversely, award activities do encourage some students to take on political activities.

Breakout discussion

Chaired by Dr Simon Usherwood

- Where in the institution is developmental work on the award being led? Appears to be variability, but feeling that it must be embedded in the University structure and properly funded – at present, relies to large extent on enthusiasts, often without proper resourcing.
- Support Services e.g. Careers not best placed to embed in academic programmes.
- Recognition that academics may have other priorities and career aspirations. One suggestion is that their support of the award be sought, but that delivery of the activities should lie with e.g. Careers.

- Should there be a light touch or a full award system?
- It is the process that counts, not award of a certificate.
- Some preference for 'recognition' rather than 'award'.
- Legitimacy of assessing portfolios and 'fuzzy' competences questioned.

- Tension because of delayed benefits – impact of process not instant, whereas league tables etc assume it is.

- Agreement on focus being development of the individual as opposed to preparation for employment.
- Students need to be able to articulate what they have done and learnt.
- USA perception of academic family – we need to support students beyond graduation and celebrate those who have been successful in their careers.

- Need for top-down support, commitment, and coordinated strategy e.g. staff development, staff recognition through promotion.
- Some evidence (John Moores) that demand for award from employers as well as from students, squeezing academics.

In sum, there was general support for a process that supports holistic development, but actual award/certification is contentious. The group appeared to be moving to a position where the process would be managed and delivered by a discrete unit e.g. in careers. Academic (philosophical) support would be required but they would not have to be involved in the process beyond their programmes of study. Embedding and clear resourcing are essential.

JW
14.04.10