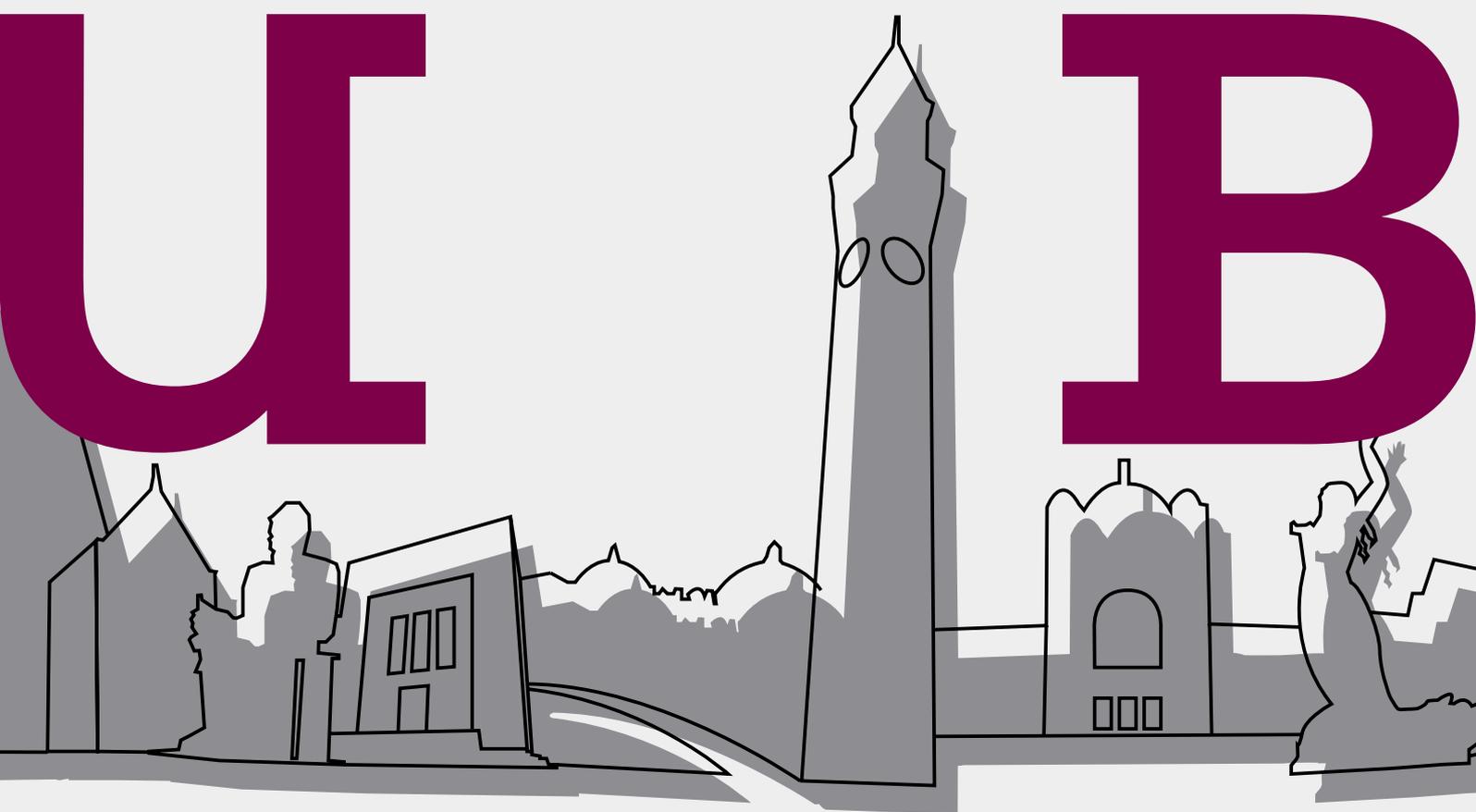


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Education in Practice



Edited by Jon Green and Michael Grove

Education in Practice

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Editorial

We are delighted to welcome you to this inaugural issue of *Education in Practice*, a journal developed and hosted by the University of Birmingham with the aim of sharing effective practice in teaching and learning and educational enhancement. *Education in Practice* has been designed for all University staff working in support of enhancing the student learning experience, be they academic members of staff or staff from professional or support services. Contributions are also welcomed from both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The journal provides an accessible publication route for those looking to disseminate teaching and learning practices, ideas and developments or outcomes from education-related projects and will help encourage a scholarly and evidence-based approach to teaching and learning across the University.

Education in Practice has been designed as a publication route that 'bridges' the interface between newsletters and journals of educational research; as such, it is an ideal first publication route for those new to publishing on teaching and learning, and an opportunity for those who are more experienced to share and test their ideas with other colleagues from across the University. All submissions are reviewed and edited by a cross-University editorial board to whom we are very grateful for their advice, support and expertise. Although intended as an institutional journal, it will also be available electronically through the world wide web.

In this first issue of *Education in Practice* there are papers by academic staff from all five Colleges, from staff in Library Services and from undergraduate students. The topics cover the concepts and ideas

around an approach to provide rapid personalised feedback to students and how to make use of online resources to make the curriculum more inclusive, in particular for international students. There are accounts of how a library 'roadshow' can be used to showcase the range of resources available to students, how a student-rep workshop was used to share good practice and how a new system of mini-interviews met the challenge of dealing with large numbers of applicants in medicine. A paper describing a framework for evaluating the success of policies linked to work on developing an inclusive curriculum shows how an evidence-based approach can be used to monitor change.

If you have any comments or suggestions relating to the journal please contact either of us; equally we warmly welcome contributions from anyone working at the University of Birmingham. We would be delighted to hear from you.

Jon Green and Michael Grove
November 2014

Case Study

Sharing Good Practice at a Grassroots Level: A Student Rep Workshop for the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences

Helen Ansell¹, Adam Greenhill¹, Ryan Dickinson¹ & Nicola Wilkin²

¹ School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Birmingham (Student)

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Abstract

The School of Physics and Astronomy has a well-established Student Rep system, numbering around 25 Student Reps in total, composed of Reps from all undergraduate years and postgraduate taught programmes. Students in the School actively engage with the scheme, which is so popular that it has been necessary to run elections this year. The School runs weekly informal meetings in addition to the compulsory SSC (Staff-Student Committee) meetings. We were aware of the existence of Student Rep systems in other schools but we knew little of how they operated. The aim of this project was to share good practice across the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS) with the intention of making recommendations on how to improve the Student Rep system at the University.

Introduction

The primary motivation for organising this event was to understand how other Student Rep systems operate within their School. It became apparent from talking to friends in other schools that different Rep systems each had a set of tried and tested ideas with which to engage students. We felt that these ideas could be shared between Schools in order to increase the number of Reps, raise the level of responsibility and improve the efficiency of the Student Rep system as a whole.

We were also keen for the School of Physics and Astronomy to participate in this exchange. We felt that we could advise other Schools on how to encourage more students to become Reps. Becoming a Student Rep allows the student to enhance their personal skills, but with limited responsibility this becomes difficult and may not seem worth the effort to potential candidates. In addition it can be difficult to obtain a suitable number of Reps from each year group. We hoped that, by running a College-wide workshop, we could collectively discover new ideas regarding effective recruitment by articulating the personal benefits of becoming a Student Rep. We also wished to raise the profile of the role of a Student Rep within the College.

Furthermore, we wanted to consider the best ways to represent different groups of students and to make sure all voices, not just the loudest, are heard. We had tried some ideas within our School but we wanted to know what other Reps had tried and how successful they were.

From the beginning the intention was that the workshop should be an informal, student-led event, where honest feedback could be given in the absence of academic staff. As students we felt that we could best relate to the topics being discussed, as we have experienced at first hand the challenges faced when working as a Student Rep and understand the ways in which students engage most effectively.

Running the workshop

Having identified the points to be addressed, we decided the best way to do the above was to hold a workshop in which Student Reps from all Schools within EPS were invited to participate. We decided to apply to CLAD (Centre for Learning and Academic Development) for Educational Enhancement Project Funding. This process involved completing an application form outlining the aims of the project, the intended outcomes and impact, how we intended to achieve these and the costs involved. This was a challenging process (requiring significant staff advice) because we had never submitted a project proposal before. It was a very good experience for us, especially because we had to ensure that we knew what we were aiming to do with the project.

After successfully securing the funding, our next step was to plan the workshop day. This involved organisation from two different sides: identifying the Student Reps to attend and publicising and organising the actual event.

Identifying the Student Reps and contacting them posed challenges due to it being hard to know who to contact in each of the Schools. Once identified, Reps were then added to a page on the University's VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) that was specifically set up for the Reps and is maintained by us. This allowed us to open discussions for all Reps to participate in and to share information about the upcoming workshop.

We wanted to ensure that Reps in all Schools were aware that this event was being run *by students for students*. We therefore tried to visit as many Rep meetings as possible in the weeks leading up to the workshop. Finding out when and where these were being held was much more difficult than anticipated. We also discovered that some Schools do not in fact have frequent meetings with Student Reps. This would therefore be an important discussion point at the upcoming workshop.

The practical side of event organisation was something that we all had almost no experience in and we were grateful for assistance from staff in this process. It was difficult for us to completely lead this stage of the project as the procedure for releasing funds meant many other people had to be involved to allow any spending to take place. However, we successfully provided refreshments, delegate packs and other equipment for the workshop.

The workshop itself ran for an afternoon with a total of around 30 Student Reps from across the majority of Schools within the College. The afternoon began with a talk from Michael Grove (STEM Education Centre), who spoke about different types of student and made us think about the people that we are actually representing. This was received positively by the Reps¹ and led on very well to the discussions for the afternoon. These were held in the form of a series of questions that were each discussed in small groups. During the discussion, groups were invited to take notes on the ideas they had come up with on large flipcharts placed in the centre of each table. This meant that all attendees were able to contribute to the notes as they were being made. Groups were then invited to share their key findings with all present.

The discussion questions were based around two key areas:

1. Finding out how the Student Rep system currently runs in each School. Having found out what happens in other Schools, Reps were asked to think about areas of improvement they could take back to their own Schools.
2. Identifying the current methods used by Reps to make sure that the views of all students they represent are taken into account as much as possible. From this they were then asked to think of any other methods that could be used in addition to current practice.

Following on from the main discussions, the afternoon ended with the chance for all Reps to continue discussion informally over a buffet meal. Before leaving, all participants were asked to complete an evaluation form for the workshop.

The feedback from the evaluation forms was very positive throughout with all participants saying that they had found the workshop useful² and many suggesting that similar events should be held in the future³.

Results

Our findings are concentrated in two areas: an appraisal of the means of passing feedback from students and Student Reps to the School, and points of action which Reps suggested would improve the current system.

The Student Rep system

All Student Reps are invited to attend their School/Department's Staff-Student Committee (SSC). These were agreed to be useful in resolving long-term issues. They also make Reps feel that their voices are being heard as they have the opportunity to speak to many key members of staff. Attendees valued the SSCs but thought that more frequent Student Rep meetings are also necessary to find short-term resolutions to less serious problems.

We learned that most Schools/Departments have informal Rep meetings weekly or fortnightly. These informal meetings are usually overseen by a member of administrative staff, or sometimes a member of academic staff. Most attendees who don't currently have this arrangement thought it was a good idea.

There was much discussion as to whether it is better to have the meetings run by a member of academic or administrative staff, with no clear conclusion drawn. The advantage of using administrative staff is that they are impartial. However, they are often less aware of some specifics of certain courses or procedures, which can make difficult resolving issues raised at Rep meetings. Academic staff will have a deeper understanding of the workings of the School/Department, but it may be harder for Reps to bring up issues relating to that member of staff.

Some attendees raised concern that weekly informal meetings might make Reps unlikely to talk directly to the relevant member of staff to sort out minor issues. It was agreed that we as Reps should make more effort to resolve these small issues ourselves where possible.

We learned that some Student Reps are unable to attend their School's/Department's informal meetings due to time conflicts with classes or sports activities. Some Schools resolve this issue by timetabling the meetings such that no lectures run at the same time.

Other feedback channels

All students have other means of passing feedback to their School/Department in parallel with the Student Rep system. Schools are required to give a module evaluation form to each student partway through the running of the module. Attendees approved of the forms as they allow for anonymous feedback from all students. Some Schools give out paper forms, while others use online forms.

With regard to paper forms, attendees were concerned that students are not always given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire if it is given out during class (particularly if it is given out at the start of a lecture). It was also suggested that students should be given notice in the previous class that the forms are due to be given out, so they have more time to gather their thoughts on the module.

Many attendees were in favour of the online form, which has a longer window for completion. Some attendees were concerned that using an online form would result in a lower number of responses than a paper form. This problem has been dealt with in some Schools by setting up the online form in such a way that each response is anonymous, but staff can still see who has completed the form and exert appropriate pressure on reticent students.

Some Schools have a number of other methods for direct student engagement. We learned that some lecturers directly ask students for module feedback during a lecture, with Student Reps being expected to make opening comments if necessary. Some teaching staff make a regular appointment to be present at a student social area, with the aim of being approachable to all students to listen to feedback on their teaching. Attendees suggested using 'clickers' to give quick, anonymous feedback during lectures.

At the time of the workshop, the University had recently switched to a new VLE. Attendees thought it useful to give lecturers training in the new platform with respect to how it can best be used to channel feedback. It was suggested that Schools/Departments create a discussion page on the VLE to give students a common forum in which to give feedback to their School/Department. We learned that the new service does not allow for anonymous comments, which students felt might discourage some students from commenting.

Representing all students

Student Reps have many channels that it is necessary to monitor to ensure that all students' views are heard. We learned that Facebook is used by many students in many schools to communicate with each other on an academic level. Attendees noted that certain groups of students, such as international students and mature students, are less likely to use Facebook. Other social networks such as Twitter are also used by some students.

¹ 'Michael was excellent and really got us thinking in different ways.'

'The speech by Michael Grove was excellent.'

² 'Extremely useful.'

'Really good to be able to see how other schools were dealing with similar problems and how they run.'

³ 'An annual sharing of best practices across the [College] is a must.'

'Great, do it again!!!!'

It was discussed that some Reps conducted online surveys for their year group, though participation was low. It was agreed that we need to find better ways of engaging with the year group.

Attendees believed it is important for Student Reps to know many of the other students across their year group. It was suggested that Student Reps should do more to increase awareness of the nature of their role, and should be able to pick up on implicit issues rather than waiting to be approached by a student directly. The importance of anonymity in passing on feedback was stressed.

Attendees believed that it should be ensured that all courses and minority groups are represented fairly at Student Rep meetings. Some attendees were MSc Student Reps, and some of these felt that they were not given the same level of support as first year students, even though many of the problems they face are the same.

A number of immediate points of action were suggested by attendees with regard to increasing engagement with, and improving representation by, Student Reps.

Student Reps should:

- Make students aware of upcoming meetings (for example, by making an announcement at the start of a lecture), as well as keeping them informed of the outcomes of past meetings by distributing the minutes to all students.
- Ensure students know who their Reps are and how the Student Rep system works. For example, some Schools have posters with the name and photograph of each Rep, to enable recognition.
- Hold an 'open forum', where all students are invited to hear the issues the Reps have raised and the progress they have made since the last meeting.

Recommendations

Recommendations for best practice

On the basis of our findings, we, the authors, put forward a number of recommendations regarding best practice for a Student Rep system at the University:

1. All schools should run informal weekly or fortnightly Student Rep meetings, overseen by a member of academic or administrative staff (in addition to the SSCs).
2. All students should have a clear understanding of how the Student Rep system works in their School.
3. All Rep meetings should be given a timetabled slot with no other lectures so that any student who wishes to be a Rep may attend.
4. All students should be made aware of who their representatives are and the methods by which they can be contacted.
5. Special efforts should be made to ensure that minority groups (for example, mature students and international students) are adequately represented.
6. Staff should ensure that, where appropriate, changes are implemented as a result of Rep feedback.
7. A database of Student Reps' names and contact details should be maintained by the College, to allow for easier organisation of future workshops.

Recommendations for a future event

As detailed in an earlier section, the workshop ran smoothly and was well-attended. Feedback gathered from attendees indicated that they found it a positive and useful experience. Most attendees said they would like to attend similar events in the future. Though this workshop provided a cursory overview of the nature of Student Rep systems within the

College of EPS, there are still many other issues surrounding the system to be explored. On this basis, we propose that this workshop become an annual event within the College. Furthermore, we encourage other colleges to consider running a similar scheme.

The next time this event is run, it should be scheduled earlier in the academic year. This would allow attendees to take ideas for good practice back to their school and have them implemented in the same academic year. For Schools with very few Student Reps, this workshop could be useful in helping the Reps from that School to improve the awareness of their system. Discussion topics may differ in each event. Some suggested areas to cover are:

- The effect of block timetabling on EPS students, who often have a higher number of contact hours.
- The suitability of module evaluation forms in accurately reflecting the opinions of students.

We would propose the project to have more staff responsibility: Student Reps would be responsible for contacting all other Reps, running the discussions on the day and summarising the findings, while staff would be responsible for the organisation and administration of the workshop.

A mentor's note

This event was planned and organised by an extremely motivated and effective team of second Year Reps from within the School of Physics and Astronomy. The efforts that they went to in particular in publicising the event in person to other Schools showed extraordinary commitment to the project. Staff mentoring guided the students through University systems, indicating at all stages what might be possible, and how it might be achieved.

A future EPS forum will again need this 'student run, staff facilitated model', with a motivated team of students who would probably find it logistically easier to work together if they are all from the same School.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank CLAD for providing the funding for the project. We would like to thank Daryl Davies and Carolyn Fox for their help in organising the event, and Michael Grove for his advice and for giving an excellent talk to set the tone of the workshop. We would especially like to thank Nicola Wilkin for giving us the idea for the workshop, as well as keeping us motivated and giving us advice and support throughout the project.



Case Study

Library Services Roadshow: Taking 'The Library' to the Students

Lisa Anderson¹, Stephen Bull¹ & Helen Cooper¹

¹ Library Services, University of Birmingham

Abstract

In February 2014, Library Services piloted a 'Library Services Roadshow' in the Birmingham Business School. The 3-hour event, which saw Library Services set up a temporary, staffed, stall in the School, aimed to increase awareness of the many ways that Library Services can support the School's students. This case study provides details on the pilot event, its impact and results from a survey conducted during the event along with some recommendations for anyone wishing to trial a similar event.

Introduction

Library Services at the University of Birmingham offers an extensive range of resources, services and facilities to support students and staff with their learning and research needs. The available support is marketed in numerous ways and many students receive library induction and/or tailored academic and research skills sessions from Subject Advisors (University of Birmingham, 2014a) and/or the Academic Skills Centre (University of Birmingham, 2014b). However, there are still students unaware of the range of ways that Library Services can help them with their studies.

In order to increase student awareness of library support available, a 'Library Services Roadshow' event was piloted. The roadshow would allow Library Services to set-up a stall in one of the University's Schools and take 'the Library' to the students.

The pilot

The Birmingham Business School was chosen for the pilot due to its large cohort of students and the wide variety of journal, company/financial, market research, statistics and newspaper databases that are available, and are needed, for students to successfully complete a degree in this subject area.

Location

University House was chosen as the location as a significant amount of the School's teaching takes place within this building. The School building also has a large, airy, atrium space located next to its lecture theatre and seminar rooms, making it a prominent and ideal space for such an event.

Timing

The 3-hour roadshow event took place mid-way through the second semester. This time was chosen to coincide with the first year undergraduate Transition Review (University of Birmingham, 2014c) as well as the third year undergraduate and taught postgraduate dissertation sessions. The day was chosen as one which optimised the number of students who were timetabled to be in the School.

The stall

The stall consisted of a Library Services branded table, flanked by a pop-up banner promoting general information about the service. Relevant Library Services leaflets were used on the stall as well as two key documents produced for the event: '*Key Sources of Information for the*

Birmingham Business School' and '*Tips for researching and writing an assignment or extended essay*'. The former document provided brief details on 17 key business electronic databases. The latter gave information on getting started with finding business literature, data and referencing as well as provided information about Subject Advisors and the Academic Skills Centre.

Prior to the event, the companies providing the databases being promoted on the '*Key Sources of Information for the Birmingham Business School*' leaflet were approached. They were informed of the event and asked if they would like to donate any promotional material for display on the stall. Many of the suppliers responded positively to the initiative and kindly provided an array of attractive promotional material (leaflets, pens, pencils, notebooks, post-it notes, USB sticks, etc.).

Whilst it was hoped that an eye-catching stall would attract students to visit the stall, a short survey with a £10 Amazon voucher prize draw was also used, along with a selection of chocolates.

The final element to the stall was three members of staff from Library Services: the two Subject Advisors for the School and a Writing Skills Advisor from the Academic Skills Centre. All three members of staff were present on the stall for the duration of the roadshow. The staff had access to two iPads in order to help with answering queries.

Figure 1 shows the roadshow stall, set-up in the atrium area of the Birmingham Business School.



Figure 1: The Library Services Roadshow: Set-up and open for business.

Impact

It was estimated that during the period of the roadshow, 110 students engaged with the Library Services staff, with more students picking up the literature produced and supplier promotional material. Peak times were the ten minutes either side of each hour, as lectures finished and new ones began, with a steady flow of interest in the periods in between.

Interactions with students ranged from giving out information and contact details, answering specific queries, recommending relevant

resources for specific topics and/or programmes of study, demonstrating how to use FindIt@Bham (the gateway to library resources) and individual resources as well as promoting relevant training sessions. Figure 2 shows students visiting the roadshow.



Figure 2: Students visiting the roadshow.

The survey

The survey proved effective in three ways: firstly it encouraged students to come and talk to the staff at the stall, secondly it provided useful information about who visited the stall and thirdly, it provided a gauge on current awareness amongst students about some of the support available to them. In total 85 responses to the survey were received.

The survey revealed that most students who visited the stall were 1st year undergraduates or taught postgraduates from either the Accounting and Finance or Management departments.

Survey participants were asked whether or not they knew that Library Services had (i) a Subject Advisor for the Business School (every School has their own 'named' Subject Advisor) and (ii) an Academic Skills Centre. Table 1 shows awareness amongst the two biggest cohorts of respondents: First year undergraduates and taught postgraduates. It can be seen that, whilst awareness is slightly greater for subject advisors amongst undergraduates than taught postgraduates, over a third of first year undergraduates who are aware are unsure how subject advisors can help. Almost 90% of first year undergraduates are aware of the Academic Skills Centre which is very encouraging given that undergraduates are the cohort that the Academic Skills Centre is designed to support.

Before today, did you know that Library Services has (a) a Subject Advisor for the Birmingham Business School, (b) an Academic Skills Centre?

	Subject Advisors		Academic Skills Centre	
	UG1	PGT	UG1	PGT
Yes	40%	42%	80%	38%
Yes, but unsure how they can help me	24%	10%	12%	52%
No	36%	48%	8%	10%

Table 1: Level of awareness amongst first year undergraduates and taught postgraduates of Subject Advisors and the Academic Skills Centre.

When asked about the databases that respondents had used, the business journal databases were the most utilised. This is perhaps unsurprising given that these resources are relevant to all parts of the School. Low use was identified for some of the other databases, for example some of the company/financial and market research databases, which is of some concern. In these cases, further analysis of usage statistics will be useful along with additional promotion of these resources.

The final question from the survey was a free-text question asking respondents: *'What one thing could Library Services do to help you more with your learning and/or research?'* Thirty-nine suggestions were received, all of which could be classified into one of four themes: Books, Skills and Training, Online Resources and Other. There was insufficient data to interpret these results in a statistically significant way, but the continued support in raising awareness of, as well as help in using, the resources is important throughout programmes of study as is the provision of more generic academic skills training. The importance of an accessible, up-to-date, relevant book collection is also emphasised.

Summary and recommendations

In summary, the pilot roadshow event was very successful and provided Library Services staff with an opportunity to engage with a lot of students in a short space of time, some of whom may not otherwise have visited the Library for help and/or contacted a library subject specialist or the Academic Skills Centre.

Library Services are keen to build on the success of this roadshow type event in the future. Whilst there are both time and cost implications in preparing for, and delivering, such an event, it is felt that this is a relatively small investment for the potential gain in increasing awareness and visibility of the service.

For anyone wishing to trial a similar roadshow event we would recommend:

- Consider the key messages to convey and the cohort(s) of students to target.
- Use timetabling information to help assess when and where to locate a stall.
- Tailor information to the cohort being targeted.
- An attractive stall, relevant promotional material, chocolates and survey (with small incentive) are all useful in encouraging student engagement.
- A survey allows the service to learn something from the students.
- Having one or more tablet devices on the stall provides an easy way to answer some queries.

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Case Study

Multiple Mini-Interviews for Selection of Medicine Students

Austen Spruce¹ & Celia Taylor¹¹ School of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Birmingham**Abstract**

In 2012/13 The University of Birmingham Medicine courses (5-year and graduate-entry) successfully introduced a multiple mini-interview (MMI) process for selecting students. This report describes why our interview process was changed and a preliminary analysis of the impact of this interview format.

A need for change?

Selection for medicine typically involves an interview following short-listing using UCAS applications. Interviews are high-stakes, involving intense applicant preparation and significant resource implications for universities. For health professions programmes, a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of selection interviews demonstrated only a modest ability to predict clinical performance, with almost no benefit for predicting academic success (Goho & Blackman, 2006). Additional reported concerns with interviews are a lack of reliability (inconsistent scoring among interviewers) and even unfairness (interviewers preferring applicants who are like themselves) (reviewed in Prideaux et al., 2011).

Multiple mini-interviews

The reliability of an interview process is correlated with its structure. The interview format used by the Birmingham medicine programme before 2012/13 was moderately structured (panel interviews with predetermined discussion topics and score guidance). MMIs are a series of 5-10 minute interviews. Each interview setting (station) is commonly a one-to-one interaction, involving defined questions and scenarios designed to assess specific characteristics, scored with reference to detailed interviewer guidance. MMIs were introduced at Canada's McMaster University and have been shown to have better reliability and also significant correlation with performance in clinical medical school examinations (Prideaux et al., 2011). A number of UK Medical Schools have started to use MMIs.

Having decided to introduce MMIs, our first task was to define the qualities and characteristics (domains) to be assessed, which had to be measurable in a fair, effective, efficient and accurate manner. Medicine is a diverse profession requiring a variety of qualities (Cleland, Dowell, McLachlan, Nicholson, & Patterson, 2012), so we chose a diverse range of domains, including self-insight and an ability to interpret data. Each station was trialled at least twice with current students.

A process that involves simultaneous interviews for a number of applicants requires extensive organisation and planning. We have the second largest medical student intake in the UK, and we interview around 1100 applicants annually. Therefore, for our first year (2012/13), we started 'small' with only four interview stations: Interactive task (a role play station involving a discussion with fourth year medical students); Data Interpretation (candidates presented with data from a published study); Motivation and Insight (evaluation of what has been gained from work experience); Resilience & Probity (how candidates cope with challenges and how they will deal with a hypothetical ethical problem). We increased the number of stations to six in 2013/14 (Debate topic; Clinical ethical scenario) but we recognise that reliability would be greater with even more stations (eight is considered to be the minimum).

Analysis of MMIs

We have taken advantage of the introduction of MMIs as a research opportunity. Ethical approval was granted for a research study that involved a detailed questionnaire provided to applicants and interviewers, as well as an analysis of applicants' scores.

Acceptability by station

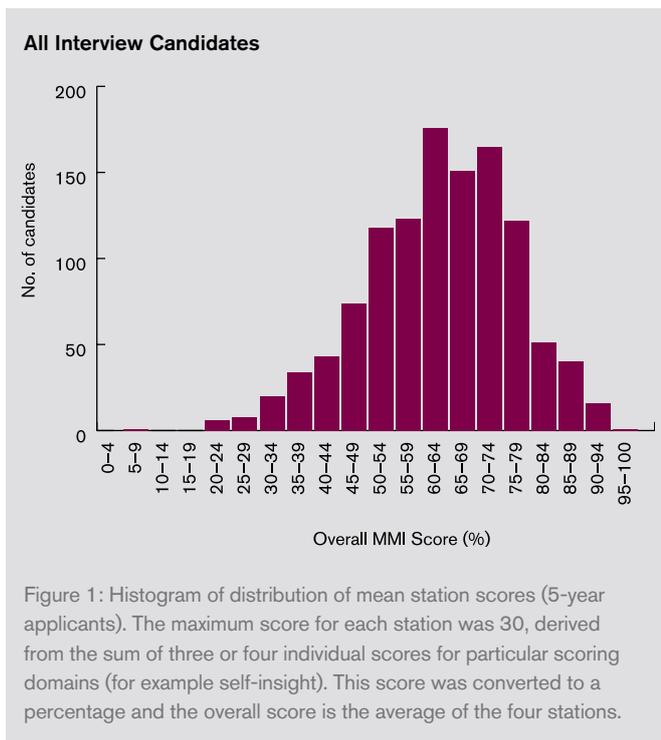
	Applicants		Interviewers	
	Relevant % Agree	Fair % Agree	Relevant % Agree	Fair % Agree
Data Interpretation	76.4	77.0	96.6	93.1
Interactive Task	73.2	88.2	87.1	96.8
Motivation and Work Experience	98.4	92.6	97.8	95.6
Coping and Resilience	93.8	91.6	95.7	97.8

Table 1: Questionnaire analysis (5-year applicants). Participants were asked to rate the acceptability of each station. Applicants (n = 1072) and interviewers (n = 79) indicated whether they agreed with statements that each of the stations were relevant to a selection process for medicine and were a fair means of judging suitability for studying medicine.

Table 1 addresses the issue of face validity (i.e. appearing relevant) and shows good overall appreciation by participants. Lower scores given by applicants for Data Interpretation and Interactive Task (as well as free text comments) led to us re-designing the scenarios for 2013/14. Reliability was estimated at 0.66 (below the optimal range of 0.7-0.9) although we expect this to improve with more stations. We have yet to analyse predictive validity (does the MMI score statistically correlate with measures of student performance?), and, in particular, incremental validity (how much additional value does it provide over other selection measures). This will be possible when first year examination results are available in summer 2014.

There is concern over a lack of social diversity in medicine and some view attempts by medical schools to address this issue as insufficient (Medical Schools Council, 2013). Therefore, it is important to demonstrate that widening access applicants are not unfairly discriminated against in the MMIs. In our analysis, two measures of socioeconomic status were used: school type (whether selective and/or fee-paying or neither) and POLAR3 quintile (based on proportion of young people who progress into Higher Education in the Census Areas Statistics Wards). We were reassured by the finding that neither school type nor POLAR3 quintile were significantly correlated with MMI scores (Taylor, Green, & Spruce, 2014).

On a practical level, any criterion used for decision-making in a selective admissions process must be sufficiently discriminatory. Following interview, an offer was based primarily on the overall score (average of the four stations). Figure 1 shows this distribution for all applicants.



We identified a cut-off score to determine who received an offer. Even though we used a threshold score for an individual station (16.7%), we did not attempt to define an acceptable overall score. Even without the constraint to make a certain number of offers, we would still be unable to identify what score predicts success.

In summary, we have successfully introduced a complex but fair interview process for selecting medicine students. The School of Dentistry at the University of Birmingham have introduced an 11-station MMI this year.

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Literature Review

Developing E- and Blended Learning Approaches for International Students

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Abstract

International students represent a large and increasing proportion of the undergraduate cohort, but tend to achieve lower grades than UK home students in many disciplines. This appears to reflect the challenge(s) of studying with lower level English skills, and acclimatising to an unfamiliar academic culture. Here we discuss the experience of designing supplementary e-learning materials and/or blended learning environments aimed at supporting these students, and outline how we evaluated their effectiveness.

Background

International students constitute a large, and increasing proportion of the undergraduate cohort in UK higher education (17.4%; HESA, 2012), with the vast majority from *Non-English Speaking Backgrounds* (NESB). This makes an important financial contribution to the sector, but also brings intangible benefits – notably by increasing diversity, and expanding the horizons of students and staff. However, despite these economic and cultural gains, analysis of UK undergraduate academic performance finds international students attain a lower proportion of 2(i)/1st class degrees than home students (termed an '*achievement gap*'; Morrison, Merrick, Higgs, & Le Métails, 2005). This varies with nationality and the discipline studied, but similar issues are also found in Australia (Salamonson, Everett, Koch, Andrew & Davidson, 2008), suggesting this is a systemic issue in international higher education.

A cause for concern is that courses with a high proportion of international students are associated with unexpected increases in grades for domestic students, suggesting that faculty may be reducing educational standards in response to the issue (Foster, 2012). This relative under-performance is particularly striking given a large, US-based study found international students engage more with their academic work, and socialise less than their domestic counterparts (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). This dedication does not appear to compensate for the reduced English language skills of many NESB students, as poor comprehension (Mulligan & Kirkpatrick, 2000), and weaker academic skills (for example lecture-based note-taking; Lebcir, Wells & Bond, 2008) contribute to lower performance. These difficulties can be prolonged: many Chinese students still experience problems with academic writing after two years of higher education, despite making progress in their receptive language skills of reading and listening (Zhang & Mi, 2010).

Developing approaches to resolve these difficulties (one aspect of the 'internationalisation' of curricula) has received sustained attention, with several institutions developing best practice (for example HEA/UKCISA's '*Teaching International Students*' project). Recommendations tend to be applicable to all disciplinary areas, for example, to '*deconstruct*', or give explicit advice on academic conventions (for example referencing rules or plagiarism), to provide a choice of source materials, and explicit guidance on academic skills (for example the scientific essay format; Marshall & Garry, 2006). Likewise, new approaches to supporting international student's academic skills can be widely applied (for example facilitating interaction in groupwork; Dales, McLaren, & Steiner, 2011), though

academic skills training can also be tailored to discipline-specific contexts (for example communication in medicine; Hawthorne, Minas, & Singh, 2004).

Discussion of the barriers faced by international students (Omeri, Malcolm, Ahern & Wellington, 2003) often focuses on the difficulties raised by the lecture format. For example, it has long been acknowledged that the language challenges posed to NESB students are exacerbated by the '*real-time*' format of lectures (Flowerdew, 1994). In addition, while all students face the challenges of interpreting information given in lectures using their previous knowledge to make conceptual connections (i.e. top-down listening skills, Vandergrift, 2004), NESB students have the added challenge of decoding sounds and words ('bottom-up' listening skills), as well as adapting to the cultural differences of the lecture format such as use of humour and metaphor (Littlemore, 2001).

The use of technology is often advocated to help NESB students cope with these demands on listening skills (Vandergrift, 1997; O'Brien & Hegelheimer, 2007; Dudeney & Hockly 2012), with many authors recommending supplementary e-learning, or blended learning approaches. This allows students to: (i), choose from a variety of learning materials to determine what is relevant for their needs and (ii), work independently at a pace and place of their choice. A wide range of topics for supplementary e-material resources are suggested, including international students' 'Frequently asked questions', 'How to' guides on areas of assessment, or glossaries of discipline-specific vocabulary and specialist terms. Likewise, examples of marked and graded students work, or exams with model answers, can give students an indication of the standard and level of understanding expected (Carroll & Ryan, 2005). Several studies also recommend providing copies of course materials, including handouts and PowerPoint presentations prior to teaching sessions, to accommodate students with slower reading speeds, and allow them to reflect and prepare questions for the sessions that follow (Lord & Dawson, 2002). Many of these approaches are in line with the adjustments made for students with learning difficulties, and are known to be effective. However, it is interesting to note that a significant proportion of undergraduates experience academic difficulties (for example approximately 15% of medicine cohorts; Yates & James, 2006), and these support mechanisms may be an inclusive form of support for *all* students.

Allowing international students access to supplemental resources during the pre-session period can be an effective way to facilitate transition, particularly at a time when many students are concerned about the upheaval and challenge of studying in the UK. However, e-learning resources can also be effective when integrated into modules, by maximising student's exposure to concepts and ideas, and exploiting the flexibility and interactivity allowed by technology (Laurillard, 2008). In the STEM disciplines, this can be achieved using sophisticated simulations and/or 'virtual laboratory' environments (for example chemistry; Dalgarno, Bishop, Adlong & Bedgood, 2009), but these often require a level of programming skill beyond typical faculty members. In contrast, generating audio-visual recordings (i.e. lecturer's voice + PowerPoint slides) or quizzes is straightforward with current software (for example, echo360, Panopto, Camtasia, Xerte), as is making them available – typically by internal distribution via a virtual learning environment, or even publicly

through YouTube. Blended learning approaches which use a combination of e-learning materials (for example interactive simulations, on-line multimedia recordings, and quizzes) and traditional 'face-to-face' sessions (i.e. lectures, practicals) are an established approach in many disciplines, and similar e-materials are also known to be effective in different distance learning contexts (Gooley & Lockwood, 2012; Simpson, 2013). Here, we describe how e-learning and blended learning approaches can be used to support international students' learning as part of their on-site learning experience in the UK.

Design considerations I: Selecting an appropriate learning environment

Ideally, learning environments should be designed with a specific target audience in mind. Thus, in the case of international students, both: (i) the range of students' abilities (for example diversity of cohort, educational background, level of English and academic skills etc.), and (ii) the complexity of the desired learning outcomes (i.e. Level in Bloom's taxonomy), should guide the design of e-learning materials and the environment in which they are to be used.

Our experience in developing learning support approaches is in the context of the *Birmingham Foundation Academy*, a foundation programme which prepares international students for entry to undergraduate courses. This is a diverse cohort (currently around 140 students), with a wide variety of nationalities, educational backgrounds, and language levels. For example, some students begin the programme with near-native language skills but require support with academic study skills, while others enter with relatively low academic English skills (IELTS 5.0-5.5). These issues, combined with the students' recent arrival in the UK, and their relative youth (i.e. typically 17-18 years of age) present a number of linguistic, cultural and academic challenges. With this in mind, in this project we sought to develop learning environments and multimedia materials that could accommodate the diversity of the cohort with four main aims:

1. To introduce unfamiliar (often culturally-determined) aspects of academic practice.
2. To reinforce material introduced in face-to-face sessions.
3. To introduce material to build on in subsequent face-to-face sessions.
4. To give students confidence that their level of understanding is appropriate.

We primarily adopted a supplementary e-learning support approach, as this provides opportunities for the 'self-paced' and 'tailored' blended learning experience advocated by Fox (2002), where the availability of optional learning objects encourages students to recognise their personal areas of weakness, and access materials on topics where and when they need support. Furthermore, podcasts are known to be engaging for international students (for example to introduce pre-arrival materials; Watson, 2007), as are other e-learning resource formats (i.e. lecture recordings, quizzes, etc.; Pearce & Scutter, 2010), though web-based communication presents both challenges and benefits for these students (Smith, Coldwell, Smith & Murphy, 2005b). Multimedia (i.e. video and/or audio) recordings are particularly valued because (i) they facilitate accessing (or revisiting) material outside of sessions (i.e. with minimal distractions), and (ii) they allow students to 'pause' and review material while working at their own pace. As these factors are important for students with reduced English comprehension, multimedia recordings appeared to be the best design option for our purposes. We also speculated that on-line recordings can facilitate a more 'active learning' style, by encouraging parallel access to web-based glossaries, dictionaries or alternative sources of information, and that this may be particularly valuable for NESB student learning.

When designing our multimedia learning objects, we were also guided by the 3C-model for blended learning (Kerres & De Witt, 2003) which

suggests the balance of 'Content' (i.e. learning materials), 'Communication' between learners and faculty, and 'Constructive' components, where students focus on learning; these should be determined by the complexity of the learning outcomes. For example, in some Foundation Academy modules, our focus was on reinforcing knowledge acquisition. In this case the use of optional, or supplementary, learning resources is appropriate. In other modules, we used a more explicit approach, directing students to specific e-resources during, or after face-to-face sessions, to reinforce concepts, introduce academic skills, or to explain aspects of an assessment. Finally, in modules where the application of concepts was important, we explored 'lecture flipping' – where students view a short on-line recording on a topic prior to addressing it in a subsequent face-to-face session (Crouch & Mazur, 2001). This approach is widely used in a range of disciplinary contexts to introduce students to material prior to an interactive session where this material is applied and where student questions can be addressed more fully. This is a more active learning approach than traditional lectures, and appears to be more engaging for students (Smith, Sheppard, Johnson & Johnson, 2005a). The impact of lecture flipping on international students' learning remains unexplored, but by giving students access to learning materials before sessions and allowing them to prepare (Lord & Dawson, 2002), could be an effective way to support those that need more time to engage with, and understand material.

Design considerations II: Learning resource format

Our project focuses on developing support materials using e-learning formats that are known to engage students and facilitate their learning. As such, our primary focus is on audio-visual recordings ('podcasts'), as these are widely used as supplementary materials to introduce topics, revisit lecture material, or as structured components of distance or blended learning environments. Our recent evaluation of supplementary lecture recording (Leadbeater, Shuttleworth, Couperthwaite & Nightingale, 2013), was consistent with studies suggesting these are engaging, and primarily used for revisiting difficult concepts, revision, or for catching up with missed lectures (Bassili & Joordens, 2008; Pearce & Scutter, 2010). Multimedia recordings can be used to introduce topics or skills (termed *Reusable Learning Objects*), and are effective learning materials, particularly in content-rich disciplines (i.e. anatomy, pharmacology). They have also been found to be a useful way of introducing the culturally-specific aspects of a discipline to international students (for example the UK healthcare system; Evans, 2012). Finally, we also explored the utility of on-line formative quizzes as support materials, as a number of studies show these are an engaging component of e-learning. These are associated with increased academic performance (Angus & Watson, 2009), perhaps because they identify areas of weakness, and may increase student confidence in their level of learning by providing instant feedback.

Design considerations III: Optimising student involvement

Judging where and how e-learning materials are incorporated in learning environments is central to their effectiveness (Clark & Mayer, 2011). However, another aspect of the development process is also crucial – how to ensure the resources meet student's expectations. This is not straightforward in diverse international cohorts, but is absolutely essential to address the main criteria (for example 'usefulness' and 'ease of use'), that students use to evaluate learning materials (Arbaugh, 2000). Cultural factors (i.e. nationality, educational background) are known to impact on e-resource use in distance learning (Uzuner, 2009), and are likely to affect engagement with e-materials and/or blended learning environments.

One approach to address the issue of meeting learner expectations is to use student input. Clinical disciplines have successfully used *peer-to-peer*, or *near-peer* teaching for a number of years (Evans & Cuffe, 2009), while *learner-generated* e-materials have been seen to be effective in capturing students' creativity and conceptual frameworks (Lee,

McLoughlin & Chan, 2008). This is an under-researched area, but we speculate that using *near-peer* international students to identify key topics and/or contribute to the design of learning materials will have similar benefits, and may help to reduce any cultural or linguistic barriers to using the materials. A final issue in using students to develop learning resources is how to balance faculty and student involvement in the process. This will vary with the level of student experience, the topic(s), and learning outcomes to be addressed, but should ideally be a partnership where faculty contribute disciplinary understanding and pedagogic insight (for example identify frequently encountered problems, threshold concepts, illuminating examples, etc.), and students bring a culturally-informed, 'insider' view to learning the topic.

Evaluation strategies

The development of learning environments should be an ongoing, iterative and incremental process, from initially identifying and analysing a problem, to one or more cycles of design, roll-out and subsequent evaluation (Phillips, Kennedy & McNaught, 2012). Central to this is the evaluation of the materials and/or the chosen learning environment in terms of effectiveness for learning. In short, we need to ask the questions: *do students engage with these materials, and do they learn?* Understanding the underlying drivers and use(s) of e-learning resources is as important as knowing how much they are used, as this can inform how to refine the design of the learning objects themselves, or identify ways to improve the learning environment in which the objects are situated. Ideally, evaluations of this type are embedded in a controlled study, for example, by comparing an e-learning approach with traditional 'face-to-face' sessions (Ringsted, Hodges & Scherpbier, 2011). In practice, logistical and ethical factors often preclude this, and the evidence gathered to evaluate interventions is often incomplete, or open to interpretation.

What forms of data are useful for evaluation?

Studies that can demonstrate that an intervention has a statistically significant impact on academic performance are clearly compelling (i.e. Bassili & Joordens, 2008; Abdous, Facer & Yen, 2012). However, data regarding the relative success of e-learning projects in terms of performance can be inconclusive either due to the small cohort and/or because of incomplete engagement with the innovation. Other forms of evidence used to evaluate effectiveness include determining students' engagement with the materials, either as self-reported in a questionnaire, or from download data gathered automatically when students access on-line resources. These *analytics* data, indicating the number of downloads per student and/or the pattern of viewing over the academic year can give insight into the proportion of students using the material(s), and what they are likely to be using it for. Quantitative data can also be used to inform and formulate more directed research hypotheses, or can help to identify areas to be explored in depth in student focus group discussions. These can be a valuable source of qualitative data, particularly if a representative section of the cohort is involved. We found focus groups informed several areas of the design process, notably (i), the diversity of student's responses to the resources, and why this may be the case (ii), the perceived benefits of engagement and (iii), where there were unintended outcomes (Leadbeater et al., 2013). Students can also be a source of ideas for development of resources or the learning environment. For example, learning objects can be designed in response to learner needs as they arise in teaching sessions, to support a 'just-in-time' approach to teaching and learning (Novak, Gavrin, Christian & Patterson, 1999). A more subjective measure of effectiveness is to probe student's views of the intervention, including their perception of whether it contributes to learning (i.e. von Kinsky, Ivins & Gribble, 2009), if it is a preferred learning approach, or if it appears to increase levels of satisfaction (Bassili & Joordens, 2008). These factors influence the level of student engagement with learning materials, but the link between this and student learning and performance is complex.

In summary, the development and evaluation of e-learning materials and blended learning approaches is not a standardised process. In the absence of a controlled study format, the use of a combination of quantitative (for example questionnaires, analytics data, academic performance) and qualitative data (for example focus group discussions) to describe different aspects of the innovation on student learning, and that 'triangulate' to validate each other is the best approach.

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Case Study

Rapid Personalised Feedback (and Feedforward) Using Mail Merge

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Abstract

This article highlights the need for personalised feedback on student work using experiences from the School of Biosciences at the University of Birmingham. It is argued that the value of such feedback is enhanced when it is clear to the student how a particular exercise builds on previous experience, and when it is clear that the developing skills will be used again to further improve performance. Using an example of a practical scientific write up it is suggested that the use of comment banks along with a requirement for students to actively reflect upon their performance promotes active engagement with feedback. Students were required to contribute in the feedforward activity as failure to do so resulted in the percentage mark (but not the grade), being withheld. Provision of personalised feedback was facilitated by use of mail merge. Although this was not essential it increased the efficiency and speed of the marking and feedback process for the staff involved. The high level of student participation and positive comments in the module evaluation questionnaire suggests that the exercise positively reinforced student engagement.

Introduction

As academics we spend a lot of our time marking student assignments. This process has two aspects: firstly the mark, indicating to the students how well they have matched the criteria, and secondly the annotations which aim to indicate to the student where they have gone wrong and what they should be doing to improve their next piece of work. Perhaps because of an assessment-driven culture that is imposed by the A-level exam system, students at university often take the awarded mark as the end point of an exercise. Annotations and feedback are frequently ignored, as evidenced by the piles of marked work that accumulates in the tutors' pigeonholes after online release of marks. Not surprisingly, students score low on the Birmingham Student Survey (BSS) and National Student Survey (NSS) questions when asked if they have had feedback that improves their performance in subsequent assessments. So how can we get the students to engage with the feedback we provide and use it in subsequent assignments? This problem has many aspects, including the siloing of modules by students and the lack of students' reflection on feedback for use in future assignments.

Highlighting feedforward

To address these problems we need make it clear to students about the tasks/assessments that will be coming up in the future and how the current exercise will help them do better in the next one. A partial solution may be to unpick the perception that success in assessment is achieved by absorbing and regurgitating knowledge. While knowledge is important (and much easier to assess), there is an increasing recognition that the outcomes of a degree course are skills-, as well as knowledge-based. If marking criteria appropriately encompass skills in addition to knowledge, and these are transparent to students, then the feedback provided should clearly signpost how the students can improve in subsequent assessments.

Another key aspect is the recognition and use of the feedback that has been provided. I was led to address this aspect of the feedback loop in the School of Biosciences where scientific writing is a key skill. As an example, construction of practical reports is a skill required of all scientists and there is a clear and well accepted format for these. In Biosciences, practical work in the first year introduces some of the components of such reports, which are then developed in skills modules and tutorials through into the second year. This then leads in the final year to a major piece of assessment which is the write up of the research project and requires a full understanding of formal communication of science, both in writing the report but also understanding how 'real' scientific papers are constructed.

A practical example

My attempt to increase recognition and use of feedback by students was trialled on a second year ecology module taken by approximately 70 students. A major component of the continuous assessment in this module was a write up of data collected in the field in the form of a scientific paper. Given the central role of such reports in science it is not surprising that similar reports are required in other modules, both in second and final years. Considerable instruction was given to the group, including reminding them of where they had undertaken some of the required components in their previous year's study, and where the skills they were developing would be used in subsequent modules.

The students submitted their reports to the Canvas VLE via Turnitin. These reports were downloaded and comments were added to scripts using the annotation facility in Microsoft Word. For an assessment such as this, where the criteria are clear and less subjective than a more open-ended essay, comments can often be repetitive. Accordingly scripts were largely annotated with codes referring to a bank of comments, for example T2, T2.M1, M1 and O1, where T refers to 'Title' 'M' is for methods and O is 'overall' etc. T1 might be 'good title', T2 'title is too short, use a question or statement', and O1 could be 'use past tense' for example. A list of the codes was compiled as the marking proceeded, but once constructed these lists of comments can be used in subsequent assessments. More specific annotation was added as required on individual scripts. Each script was saved in a folder with the student ID number.

At the end of the annotation process each script was given a mark appropriate to the marking criteria. The mark was added to the module Microsoft Excel spread sheet (but not on the script). The work was then moderated in the normal way. The 'if' command in Excel was used to set up columns where the percentage mark awarded was converted to a class (first, 2:1, etc.). The spreadsheet also contained a column of students' email addresses. The annotated scripts were returned to students by email-mail merge along with the final list of annotation codes. Note that mail merge will only allow you to email the same document to all recipients; to send each student their own individual script you require a mail merge add-in such as Mapilab¹. Additionally, some generic, exemplar write-ups of work from previous years with extensive annotation indicating good points and areas for improvement were also made available on the Canvas VLE.

¹ <http://www.mapilab.com>

Mail merge or blackmail?

Students were emailed individually using mail merge to send each student their grade (for example first, 2:1, etc.), but not the actual percentage mark. In this email it was outlined that the percentage mark (a favourite type of 'feedback' for students!) would be sent to them when they uploaded a word document of three sentences to the module Canvas site indicating one aspect they thought they had done well and two ways they think they could have improved their write up. These 'student reflection' documents were collected on Canvas by setting up an 'assignment' and the uploads by individual students could then be tracked in 'grade'.

The students who had uploaded a file of reflection could be checked on Canvas and this was recorded each morning on the Excel sheet. Each group of responding students was then contacted using mail merge based on the existing Excel spreadsheet and sent their actual percentage mark. At the same time, using the 'IF' command allowed those who had not yet engaged to be reminded of this.

After three days over 80% of the students had engaged with the process. At this stage the Word documents of individual student reflection were downloaded and merged into a single document. This was then divided into two documents, one with positive comments and one suggesting ways the reports could have been improved. All students who had uploaded their own reflections of the feedback were then emailed these two summary documents.

Did it work?

Yes. The take up (84% of 65 students) showed that simply withholding the percentage mark (but not the grade) was sufficient to get students to engage more closely with the feedback provided. Once the spreadsheet was set up and a familiarity with mail merge was achieved the operation was simple and straightforward to operate. It will be difficult to measure in this ad hoc study whether students' learning has been improved by their reflection on the feedback, but their comments on the module evaluation questionnaire (MEQ) were positive: *'the feedback exercise was really useful'*, *'the documents you sent with everyone's comments give good tips to consider for future assignments'*, and *'we could see the scale of good to bad for each section so we know how to improve next time'*.

The process was easy to operate and it personalises what could be seen as merely generic feedback. The technological expertise required is not large and once set up is straightforward to operate. While the sanction of withholding marks was not great (as the students were told their grade), it would be interesting to see if they would still engage without this encouragement. Finally, it may be that interacting with students in this more technological manner may be more familiar and accessible to them and may result in reduction of the piles of uncollected work in the pigeonholes, with a concomitant increase in appreciation of the feedback we provide.

Paper

Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policy and Practice within the University of Birmingham

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Abstract

The University of Birmingham established an *'Inclusive Curriculum Working Group'* in February 2014 to explore how inclusivity can become more effectively developed and embedded within the curriculum in order to support colleagues in thinking about inclusive curriculum design so as to promote success amongst all students. The main focus of the Working Group is to identify challenges and barriers in order to provide practical solutions and embedded changes to policy and practice. This article describes the innovative data collection methods that will be drawn upon through a process of educational enquiry to monitor change over a given timeframe in relation to agreed goals and success criteria. This includes an organisational change framework (McKinsey 7S) that will be used to enable the impact of the Working Group to be measured and monitored over a given timeframe in relation to agreed goals and success criteria. Future publications will report on progress in relation to the proposed activities, evaluate the methodology and data collection methods and explore the extent to which the project outcomes can be drawn upon more broadly within the higher education sector.

Introduction

As reflected in its Equality and Diversity Scheme (UoB, 2011), the University of Birmingham has a commitment to developing and promoting equality and diversity for all staff and students. As part of this commitment, and building on recent work in the higher education sector (for example May & Bridger, 2010; QAA, 2012), an *'Inclusive Curriculum Working Group'* was established in February 2014 to explore how inclusivity, in its widest possible sense, can be more effectively developed and embedded within the curriculum in order to support colleagues in thinking about *'inclusive curriculum design from a generic as well as subject or disciplinary perspective'* (Morgan & Houghton, 2011:5) so as to promote success amongst all students.

Inclusive curriculum design is described by the Higher Education Academy as an approach that *'takes into account students' educational, cultural and social background and experience as well as the presence of any physical or sensory impairment and their mental well-being. It enables higher education institutions (HEI) to embed quality enhancement processes that ensure an anticipatory response to equality in learning and teaching.'* (Morgan & Houghton, 2011:5).

To reflect this broad perspective, membership of the Working Group has therefore been drawn from across the University. It includes representation from the Guild of Students' sabbatical and non-sabbatical Officers who have activity portfolios in key inclusivity areas including mature and part-time students and female students. The main remit of the Group is to identify issues, challenges and barriers to greater inclusive practice, provide practical solutions to identified issues, and embed changes to teaching and learning approaches. In seeking to develop and embed such practice, the initial activities of the Working Group include:

1. Collating and disseminating resources and materials related to inclusivity.
2. Identifying and disseminating examples of effective practice in inclusive curricula.
3. Enabling wider representation and input, in particular from students, to help better understand and address inclusivity issues and needs.
4. Exploring how inclusivity may be better, and more naturally, embedded with core areas of University activity including, but not limited to:
 - a. Resources and using technology and Canvas to create accessible learning materials
 - b. Teaching delivery
 - c. Assessment and feedback
 - d. Personal tutoring
 - e. Student access.
5. Organising events to raise awareness of good practice in inclusivity and share effective approaches from both within and outside of the University.

The focus and remit of the Working Group demonstrates the commitment of the University towards the description on 'equality, diversity and equality of opportunity' within guidance provided by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) on learning and teaching which notes:

'An inclusive environment for learning anticipates the varied requirements of learners, for example because of a declared disability, specific cultural background, location, or age, and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities.' (QAA, 2012:4)

By drawing upon both University and national policy documents in respect of diversity and inclusion, a series of draft principles have been developed that will serve to guide the activities of the Inclusive Curriculum Working Group (see Box 1).

1. Whilst the nature of students' particular learning experiences may vary according to location of study, mode of study, or academic subject, as well as whether they have any protected characteristics, every student should experience parity in the quality of learning opportunities.
2. Equality of opportunity involves enabling access for students who have differing individual requirements as well as eliminating arbitrary and unnecessary barriers to learning.
3. Disabled students and non-disabled students should be offered learning opportunities that are equally accessible to them, by means of inclusive design wherever possible and by means of reasonable individual adjustments wherever necessary.
4. Offering an equal opportunity to learn is distinguished from offering an equal chance of success.

Box 1: Draft principles guiding the Inclusive Curriculum Working Group (adapted from QAA, 2012; QAA, 2013).

Research design

The role and function of the Inclusive Curriculum Working Group illustrates a strategic approach to enhancement that seeks to bring about desired change in policy and practice through working with a wide range of individuals from across the University. It provides a mechanism to ensure a coordinated and coherent approach at a practitioner level with the ability to engage students directly in the development and delivery of the activities undertaken.

However, in seeking to bring about such change, natural questions regarding how this change may be measured and benchmarked are raised in order that the extent of genuine progress can be determined. Whilst the more robust evaluation of educational activities is becoming increasingly widespread across the sector, this is often in relation to discrete or focused interventions; seeking to explore the progress of interventions and approaches that take place across a large organisation is far more complex, and in addition, further complicated by not only the need to measure changes in policy and practice, but also cultural and attitudinal shifts. This poses an interesting debate that can be explored through a process of educational enquiry in a manner that is reinforced by the disciplinary skills of those involved in the process and as described by Cleaver, Lintern and McLinden (2014).

Given the emphasis upon implementing institutional change at a number of levels and involving a wide range of stakeholders it is proposed that a cyclical process of 'action research for organisational change' will be drawn upon for the Inclusive Curriculum Working Group (Lynch, McLinden, Douglas & McCall, 2012; Zuber-Skerrit, 1996). This incorporates:

1. Strategic planning (Plan)
2. Implementing the plan (Action)
3. Observation, evaluation and self-evaluation (Observe/Monitor)
4. Critical and self-critical reflection on the results and making decisions for the next cycle of research (Reflect).

Initial meetings of the Working Group to date have been predominantly concerned with the 'planning' stage of this cycle. The activities have included determining the scope, remit and membership of the group; agreeing key terminology; identifying key resources and developing suitable methods for data gathering and monitoring institutional change. A recent programme of activity has sought to explore, by involving a wide range of staff and student stakeholders from across the entire University, current issues and challenges relating to inclusivity that can form the basis of a series of activities that the Working Group will oversee during 2014/15.

What constitutes success?

Before an approach to measuring or determining 'success' can be developed, it is necessary to first consider what success might look like and how it may manifest itself across the institution should the Working Group deliver on its identified mission. Such considerations firmly align with the planning stage of the Participatory Action Research Cycle. By having an appreciation of what successful outcomes from the Working Group could be, this makes it possible to identify approaches, including measures, that allow the progress towards these outcomes through a series of indicators to be measured. While not exhaustive, Table 1, provides some examples of success indicators/measures that can be applied to the Working Group:

Indicative measures of success
A visible web presence related to inclusivity, including staff and student internal and external webpages
Availability of a range of resources from within the University that are accessed and utilised by both staff and students
Positive changes to International Student Barometer Data
Positive changes to Birmingham/National Student Survey Data
Student performance, and in particular a narrowing of the attainment gap amongst learners
A reduction in the number of appeals and complaints due to issues associated with inclusivity
Inclusivity explicitly embedded within the University Teaching and Learning Strategy
References to inclusivity with University appointments and staff selection and promotion
Inclusivity is firmly embedded within the values of the University

Table 1: Indicative success measures: Inclusive Curriculum.

Monitoring change

A particular challenge when restructuring multi-level institutional procedures is how to ensure alignment in relation to proposed changes. Given the broad remit of the Working Group, particular methods are required to enable its impact within the institution to be measured and monitored over a given timeframe in relation to agreed goals/success criteria. One model that has been outlined as being applicable to help organisations seek 'harmony' in their activities in order to create more inclusive practice within higher education is the 'McKinsey 7S Framework' (May & Bridger, 2010). The framework is based upon seven interdependent elements that contribute to organisational effectiveness (Figure 1). The seven elements are further broken down into 'hard' (strategy, structure and systems) and 'soft' elements (shared values, skills, style and staff). The authors of the model argue that for an organisation to perform effectively there needs to be alignment and coherence between each of seven elements (Pascale & Athos, 1981). The model also offers the opportunity to gauge the effectiveness of any change made within a particular 'S' in relation to the other elements by considering the various inter-relationships and the impacts it may have upon those.

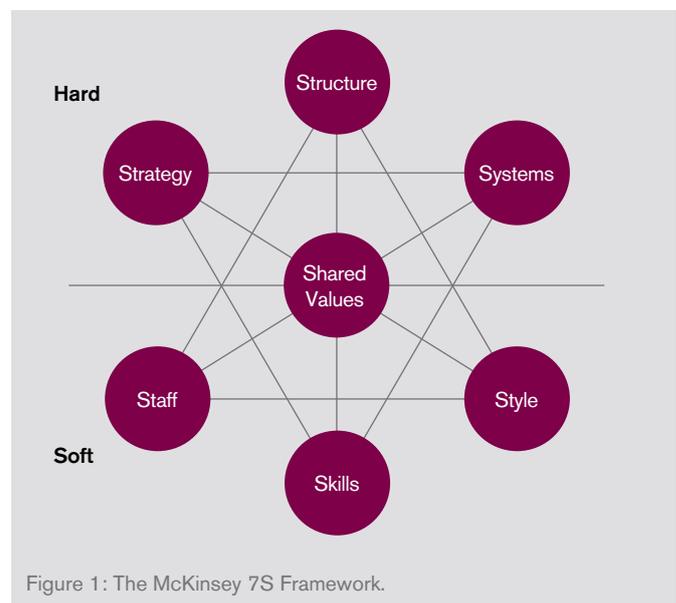


Figure 1: The McKinsey 7S Framework.

The McKinsey 7S Framework highlights the fact that, in creating whole organisational change, attention must be paid to different elements of the organisation and is based on the premise that, for an organisation to perform well, each of the seven elements needs to be aligned and mutually reinforcing. For an organisation to perform 'effectively' therefore, there needs to be alignment and coherence between each of the elements. As such the model can be used to help identify what needs to be realigned to improve performance during change. The model could therefore help to demonstrate the inter-relationships between the factors that together support institutional effectiveness and show how changes in one area can have knock-on effects for other areas demonstrating the need for any proposed change to be looked at in relation to the whole (Peters & Waterman, 2004).

Given the Working Group is seeking to bring about changed institutional practice in relation to an inclusive curriculum this framework will be drawn upon to explore different elements of the organisation at various points in the action research cycle to help demonstrate the inter-relationships between the factors that together support institutional effectiveness and show how changes in one area can have knock-on effects for other areas. The framework can be used therefore as an initial audit tool within the planning stage of this cycle and as a means of identifying and reviewing progress towards agreed priorities within later stages. A series of pilot 'measures' are being developed in relation to different sources of evidence and will be used as a means of monitoring change over the selected timeframe. Examples of indicative evidence sources and measures in relation to each element of the framework are presented in Table 2.

'S'	Indicative Evidence Source	Indicative Measures
Strategy	University strategy and policies, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shaping our Future (Birmingham 2015) University Education Strategy The Student Charter Equality Scheme (2011-2015) 	Reference to key words relating to project focus
Structure	Organisational structures, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University structures College and School level structures 	Measures of gender, ethnicity
	Campus or 'hard' structures, For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buildings Campus Teaching rooms 	Measures of type, access, hearing assistance, lecture capture, wheelchair accessibility, etc.
Systems	General access systems, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internet Intranet 	Measures of language and accessibility (for example number of clicks to reach inclusivity issues) for relevant pages
	Student or staff based systems, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VLE Lecture capture 	Measures of language and accessibility; usage statistics (amount, specific needs groups, for example dyslexia or non-English speaking background)
	HR or Admin Systems, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion systems Athena Swan 	Measures drawn from metrics: percentage change in gender and ethnicity in promotion to senior grades
Staff	Reported demographics, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender Ethnicity Other relevant measures drawn from human resources reporting systems 	Measures as a percentage change
Skills	Human capital measures, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online diversity course Staff qualifications Other measures of skills base 	The UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education includes specific links to inclusivity and access, and percentage of staff who subscribe to those links through fellowship of the Higher Education Academy
Style	Current attitudinal measures, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff survey Leaving interview data Complaints statistics (inclusivity related) 	Measures of percentage change; equality and diversity, bullying and reporting processes
Shared Values	Espoused values	Relevant strategies policies and statements
	Derived values	Explore extent to which there is alignment between espoused values and those derived from analysis

Table 2: Indicative evidence sources and measures in relation to the McKinsey 7S Framework.

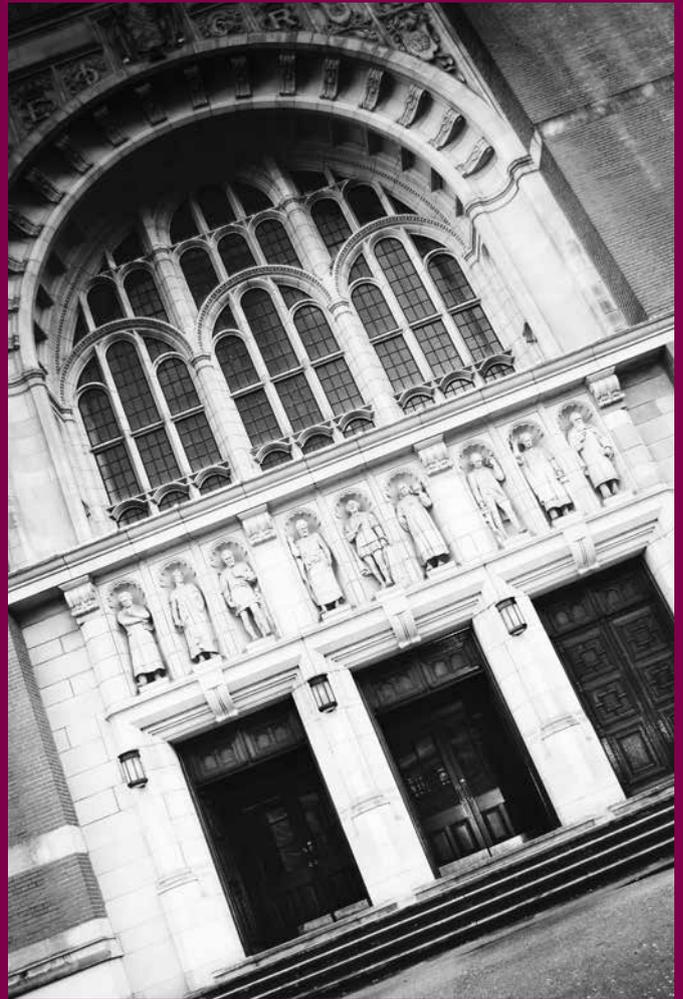
As no literature has yet been found reporting on how the McKinsey 7S framework has been applied in the context of higher education, part of the work of this project will be to develop the model for use within the University. This may then have broader strategic value to other change-oriented initiatives both within the University and the higher education sector more broadly.

Conclusion

The design and remit of the Inclusive Curriculum Working Group aligns with findings by the Higher Education Academy about the need for inclusive learning initiatives to take a multi-pronged approach, be systematic and holistic, take an embedded approach, and target multiple institutional functions (Thomas & May, 2010). By framing the activities of the group within a process of educational enquiry, opportunities are presented to develop and test innovative data collection methods such as the McKinsey 7S that traditionally may not have been used within higher education settings in order to monitor change. Future publications are planned to report on progress in relation to future activities within this project and evaluate the selected methodology and data collection methods.

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Contributions

Education in Practice seeks a range of contributions from staff and students from within the University in relation to any aspect of learning, teaching, assessment and support. Details of the kinds of contribution sought are described below, but to discuss your ideas, please contact either the Editors or a member of the Editorial Board.

Original Articles and Papers

Original articles may include: reports of educational research; evaluations of learning and teaching activity and innovation; summaries of outcomes from learning and teaching projects; or discussion papers. They should contain an appropriate level of data and evidence to support any arguments made or conclusions reached; such evidence may be obtained either by individual work or an analysis of existing educational literature to support the ideas. They should offer a high degree of academic integrity by being evidence informed, reflective and scholarly in nature. Each original paper should typically be around 2,000-3,000 words although exceptions will be made for papers that contain a substantial element of original qualitative data.

Case Studies

Case studies, typically up to 2,000 words in length, are sought that describe examples of current individual and departmental activity and practice and outcomes from learning and teaching projects. They might relate to ongoing activities and projects, or initiatives that have proved particularly successful or insightful. Where case studies describe successful or insightful interventions they should contain a level of data or evidence in support of any claims that are made.

Reviews

Reviews, which may be literature reviews of particular thematic areas, analyses of topical areas of interest, or, 'think pieces' exploring applications of theory to inform practice, should typically be no more than 3,000 words. Their focus should be upon critically analysing the current literature to identify the implications of current or emerging findings to University of Birmingham practices and approaches towards student learning. On occasions, the Editors will commission reviews on topical areas of learning and teaching activity.

Have you seen this?

Such contributions may take a variety of forms, but should typically showcase reports, book reviews, resources, papers and any item that may be of interest to others. They may be up to 250 words and briefly summarise the item of interest including any relevant links or references so that others can find out more.

Getting started in...

Practical contributions outlining a particular approach, for example utilising Canvas for the automated submission of student work, are welcomed. They should be written in an appropriate but practical style (numbered stages are welcome) containing sufficient information and guidance to allow those unfamiliar with the particular idea to implement it successfully for themselves. Contributions should not typically exceed 500 words.

Letters

Letters to the Editors are welcome on any relevant topic, and submissions articulating how ideas contained in previous issues have been applied to practice are particularly sought. They may be up to 250 words in length.

Detailed guidance for preparing submissions is available and should be consulted prior to submission:

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Education in Practice focuses upon educational practices within the University of Birmingham, and a range of contributions are sought: from full scholarly papers; reflective or discursive articles; reviews; short case studies and examples of practice, and 'How to' guides. Contributions are aimed at informing the work of others and at directly influencing practices and approaches to enhance student learning. All submissions are peer reviewed by a cross-University Editorial Board.

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