'Aligning staff development – is it constructive?'

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Abstract
Over the past decade, the emergence of the 'new' universities and a substantial growth in student numbers has meant a changing environment which requires a new approach to teaching and learning and it is debatable whether those directly responsible for delivery to students have adapted to the changes at the same pace as management. Concentration on research as the main objective with the facilitation of learning as a by-product remains a strategy for many universities. Indeed, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and the way in which research funding is distributed has almost forced this agenda through.

Were we still blessed with the luxury of only accepting the top 6% of academic achievers this would not be an issue worthy of further discussion. This is not the case. Government aims for 50% inclusion at Higher Education (HE) level of those aged between 18 – 24 years mean that those responsible for delivery at the "chalk face" must be responsive to increasingly diverse needs of students, and adapt. This is easier said than done, for the *greatest* challenge facing universities today is how to bring about the required change in staff attitudes towards the learning and teaching process. How do we get staff to move away from a traditional model of learning and teaching to one that is suitable to meet the needs of this diverse student group whilst addressing the quality enhancement agenda and maintaining a quality product?

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has devised a 'hub and spoke' model in an approach to staff development, which it hopes will address the above issues. This paper aims to describe this model and its applicability to the current HE climate, thus demonstrating one way in which those directly responsible for learning and teaching can be encouraged to take ownership of the changing agenda.

The past decade has seen many changes taking place in HE with, amongst other things, the emergence of 'new' universities and increasing pressure from successive governments to increase participation, particularly from geographical areas not traditionally considered as recruiting grounds for students.

What are the changes?
- The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 paved the way for many institutions to gain university status and this led to the formation of the 'new university' sector. This in turn led to an increase in competition for student numbers and of course funding.
- During this period social inclusion, widening participation and lifelong learning were central to most government papers on education (EC 1994, Beattie 1999, Scottish Office 1999, Cabinet Office 2002). This resulted in the UK Government setting a target for 50% inclusion within HE (Department of Education and Skills, 2003). Their commitment to this has been emphasised through the recent changes to the funding mechanism, which provides additional funding to institutions embracing this agenda.

- Social inclusion has resulted in the recruitment of students from non-traditional backgrounds (for a list of those at risk, or potentially at risk of exclusion, see Doyle and Cumberford 2002). This in turn has meant that institutions have had to adjust their institutional style to cope with the diverse needs of these students.
- Funding for institutions has declined severely in real terms. Additionally, student loans have been introduced, as has student fees, and grants have been replaced by a students graduation tax all of which place students under greater financial strain.
- Emphasis on Quality Assurance has changed with increasing emphasis being placed on enhancement of teaching and learning.

Therefore, today's educators face a changing agenda; increasing student numbers, larger classes, inadequate funding, the social inclusion agenda, students who have to work, students with a poor basic skills base, and poor progression and retention levels. All of these require an educational system that can meet these challenges by adapting and changing the learning environment appropriately.

How do these changes affect Higher Education?
The establishment of 'new universities' meant an immediate increase in levels of competition both between the 'established' institutions and the Further Education sector. Whilst competition can be a good thing it must be closely monitored or it could lead to a fall in quality; for example, there have been suggestions that some institutions have lowered entry qualifications.

Widening participation, social inclusion and lifelong learning again may lead to an overall improvement of the social well being of an economy, but if this is to be achieved through education then it needs to be coupled with an adaptation of the educational system to meet the needs of these often diverse groupings. For example, facilities for flexible modes of delivery, childcare facilities, access provision and greater overall learning support.

A reduction in funding at institutional level will require adjustments to be made to off-set the fall in income. This has been achieved in many institutions by simply increasing class sizes, and reducing, in real terms, staff numbers. There is a danger that this approach if not linked with changes to teaching styles and student support, may result in lowering progression and retention rates particularly where the institution is committed to a socially inclusion programme.

Changes to student funding have impacted greatly on many institutions, particularly the 'new universities' who traditionally recruit from the lower income sectors. Students often take on part time work and commit themselves to longer hours than their studies can afford. Additionally, larger class sizes often result in student absences going unnoticed. The result of this is may be that students are lost needlessly. Again the system could be adjusted slightly to identify these students and prevent them from becoming at risk.

Finally, the quality assurance agenda in Scotland places emphasis on improvements, or enhancements, to the learning and teaching environment much of which may assist in overcoming some of the problems currently facing higher education today. The

primary focus of this paper is to concentrate on this aspect of change, for the authors would argue that unless quality enhancement is embraced then attempts to cope with the other elements of change may not be fully met.

What is Quality Enhancement?

There have been several definitions of what constitutes quality enhancement (QE). For example, the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) defines QE as 'a process in higher education that leads to improvement' (LTSN 2003:1), whereas Hannan and Silver (2002) suggest that 'enhancement is a process of planned deliberate change directed towards some notion of improvement, but it does not necessarily result in this' (Hannan and Silver 2002:2). Finally, Jackson suggests that enhancement 'is about knowing which direction to move in and devising and implementing a strategy to move in that direction' (Jackson 2002:5).

Universities Scotland (Ross and Mathew 2002) point out however that the university sector faces considerable challenges in getting staff to embrace the concept of QE and embed its benefits in the teaching and learning environment. They go on to stress that staff will, in general, welcome the ethos of QE, but may resist change that comes so soon after previous change models that brought with them little additional benefits for the considerable extra workload (Ross and Mathew 2002). As Jackson (2002) points out, enhancement is simple within a stable, static environment but difficult within a changing diverse one. No matter what definition of QE is agreed upon it is important that it is embedded within the learning environment, it is inclusive in that it involves all who have an impact on the learning and teaching environment, and that it is seen as quite separate and additional to quality assurance.

Why quality enhancement?

The quality assurance system within any institution aims to ensure that procedures are followed through; in other words documentation is up-to-date and accurate and that there is an audit trail that identifies how a process was undertaken, by whom, and for what purpose. It does not assure that these procedures are carried out in the most effective manner, or that they are undertaken in the best interest of the 'client'. Within education such a system can only be acceptable as a mechanism for ensuring procedural accuracy. To change an environment requires more than procedures, it requires a change in attitude. Quality enhancement on the other hand, is all about improving the student learning experience. But, as the LTSN Generic website points out 'to achieve this purpose we need to continually improve our own understanding of how students learn in different contexts' (LTSN 2003:5). Therefore, in education today we need more than mere procedures to cope with these changes; we need guidance, coping strategies, innovation, encouragement, but most of all we need training on how best to address the changes and meet the needs of the diverse client group entering HE today. A quality enhancement system could and should provide the solutions to most of the problems facing staff within HE today.

How can we achieve Quality Enhancement in Higher Education?

Engaging staff in any new approach to teaching and learning is difficult, but it is not impossible. Biggs (1999) argues that 'the institution must provide incentives and support structures for teachers to enhance their teaching, and most importantly, to involve individuals through their normal departmental teaching' (Biggs 1999:7). He adds that, 'quality enhancement cannot be left to the sense of responsibility or to the

priorities of individual teachers' (Biggs 1999:7). However, one of the greatest problems facing HE education trainers is that there is almost arrogance amongst staff (particularly those with many years experience) that whilst there is an acceptance of the need for training there is also the view that the training is needed by others and not themselves. In part this is due to the fact that little or no importance is placed upon teaching in some institutions. Research, publications and consultancy are given a higher priority than with teaching in many institutions. The emphasis will depend very much on current funding mechanisms. Until recently this was very much focused on research output. Biggs (1999) argues that this lack of recognition for teaching is reinforced by the fact that staff development is only given cursory mention in most of the literature on education research. He goes on to recommends that staff development units should have a formal relationship with teaching departments and that staff development activities should be aligned within the whole teaching and learning structure.

Glasgow Caledonian University
Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) is one of three universities within Glasgow and is situated within the city centre. It is the only 'new university' in Glasgow and was formed in a merger in 1993 between Glasgow Polytechnic and Queens College of Higher Education Glasgow, gaining university status shortly afterwards

The university currently hosts some 14,500 students and is one of the largest universities in Scotland. Whilst full time education is the mainstay of the institution the university has one of the highest levels of part-time students with 26.2% of its students registered on part-time courses. The university is committed to widening participation, social inclusion and lifelong learning. The government has recently acknowledged this through its funding mechanism as the GCU currently recruits more students from socially disadvantage groups than any other Scottish university. Whilst this is good news from a funding perspective it places the institution, and its staff, under considerable strain in ensuring these students get the best education possible and that they are capable of progressing through the system.

Since its formation the institution has faced all of the changes identified in the earlier section of this paper. The results have been increased student numbers in seminar and lectures, reduction in class contact time, a fall in progression and retention rates and increasing pressure from the University Executive to reverse these trends.

A strategy for change
In recognising the need for, and encouraging, an increasingly diverse student body GCU has acknowledged that this brings with it the need for change. As such the institution has developed a 'Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy' (LTAS), to tackle many of these new challenges facing HE today. The plan is split into too distinct section; section 'A' addresses student based issues, and section 'B' aimed at addressing those issues directly affecting staff involved in learning and teaching.

The university recognises the need for staff development to ensure the success of each element of the strategy. The responsibility for providing the mechanism for this staff development falls to the Academic Practice Unit (APU). The immediate difficulty facing the APU is in convincing staff of their development needs, particularly where they see no direct relevance to their teaching, or where they believe that those

responsible for the provision of this training are not experts in *their* field and therefore cannot possibly inform them of best practice in their area of specialism. This is not a situation unique to GCU, indeed Hannan and Silver (2002) found that even those members of staff who were considered to be innovative in teaching and learning were resistant to staff developers for this reason. Their finding suggest that 'those initiatives to improve teaching and learning that were located in departments or drew respected representatives from departments into schemes run at the centre were most likely to succeed' (Hannan and Silver 2002:8).

The GCU Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
Glasgow Caledonian University was no different in this respect and in June 2000 its Learning and Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS) implementation plan was presented to Senate. The responsibility for the implementation of the plan rested with the APU who already had an established role as the centre for academic staff development, responsible to the academic departments that formed the three faculties.

Since then the university has been developing a coherent and carefully thought through approach to staff development. This has resulted in the formation of a model that has since become known as the "hub and spokes" model. To achieve the successful implementation of the LTAS, and recognising staff resistance to staff development 'experts', the original small number of APU core staff were supplemented by three one-third secondments (one to represent each school). It was a feature of the model, and perceived strength of the approach, that the secondees (later renamed Academic Development Tutors) would remain within their departments and schools for the remainder of their contract undertaking an active teaching role. The secondments started in January 2001. The small numbers of secondees (the LTAS team) were given the task of working along side the core team to provide materials and workshops directly related to the activities of the LTAS plan. Wherever possible this material was to be directly related to the school or division requiring the development.

As one of the strategic goals of the mission of GCU is to widen access, and additional funds were given to the University in support of this mission, it was decided to 'ring fence' this money to strengthen the LTAS team. As a result a further small number of new secondees were appointed together with 20 department-based co-ordinators. The role of the co-ordinator was to act as a link between the secondees, the APU provision and their departments. The overall aim of this project was to facilitate the implementation and support of the LTAS activities across the university and specifically within the departments. By August 2002 the LTAS team consisted of 6 academics working half time within their departments undertaking normal departmental duties, and the other half of their time on developing and implementing the LTAS plan. This was supplemented by the continuation of the LTAS coordinators within each academic division working a minimum of half a day (larger divisions required a full day) on LTAS related maters with the remainder of their time undertaking normal teaching duties.

Additionally, the university established a new structure for ensuring academic quality and enhancement. Three Directors of Quality were established with overall responsibility for quality related issues with a university wide remit. Their roles were to liase between the LTAS team, the coordinators and senior management.

Implementing the model
The new team faced a number of issues not least of which were the complexity of the LTAS plan in dealing with university-wide issues. The team examined the structure and potential implementation strategies of the LTAS and agreed on the need to simplify the approach.

It was finally accepted that the LTAS plan should be implemented under three main headings:-

1. GCU Student Experience
2. Staff Support for teaching and learning
3. Academic Staff Development (CPD)

At this point the work of the team was slowed down by the restructuring of the University from 3 faculties and 19 departments, into 8 schools of varying size. Each school appointed an Associate Dean of Quality (ADQ). Restructuring increased the size of the LTAS team quite significantly. The team now consisted of: the Director of Quality (university-wide), 8 Associate Deans of Quality, 20 learning and teaching co-ordinators, the LTAS team of six secondees and the APU core team (3 members of staff).

The inclusion of the ADQ in the model has meant that the impetus for ensuring that the LTAS plan is implemented in divisions and schools has moved from the LTAS team to the ADQs. In most of the schools the ADQ has formed a LTAS Quality Enhancement Committee whose members are the LTAS co-ordinators.

Two-way communication was now firmly established between departments and the LTAS team through the coordinators. The pivotal role of the ADQ's was in establishing and maintaining this communication by gathering and disseminating information relating to the LTAS plan between the departments and the LTAS team. This was achieved through regular meetings with the LTAS team and feeding back into divisions through the coordinator. Additionally, frequent meetings with the coordinators and the ADQ are used to establish school wide staff development needs relating to the implementation of the LTAS. The role of the co-ordinator is to collect and collate information on staff development needs in relation to the LTAS plan and to ensure that the information is fed back to the ADQ and to the LTAS team. A success story in the making, but not quite refined yet.

Aligning the LTAS within the planning process
The next stage in the development of the university's strategy for teaching and learning has been to ensure that the LTAS plan is aligned to the overall planning process. In reality this means that in addition to the normal planning targets each school now has to include elements of the LTAS plan in their annual planning process. Each school therefore must define the activities that explicitly link the strategic aims of the LTAS (such as introducing e-learning) to what is actually happening at School, Division, Programme and module level. In doing so it is anticipated that within each School, Division, Programme and module, gaps in staff development needs will be identified and an action plan produced. More importantly, by developing this 'hub and spokes' model and establishing clear lines of

communication it is hoped that individual members of staff will see clearly where they fit into the overall strategy of the university and identify their own needs rather than as in the past these needs being identified (often inaccurately) by a central, usually distanced and detached, unit. The aim is to ensure that learning and teaching issues are aligned at programme level through the involvement of all members of teaching staff (not just those who chose to attend an occasional staff development workshop). This should be achieved by ensuring that the LTAS Action Plan for the following year reflects, and is reflected, by the School (and indeed divisions) plans.

The emphasis of the action plan is correctly on staff development (Mayes 2002). The current plan signals the need for each school to take ownership of its own staff development plan in learning and teaching. For as the LTSN generic site points out 'Quality Enhancement has to be connected to the values and beliefs that motivates people to change their own behaviour and practice in order to improve the learning experience of the student' (LTSN 2003:7) i.e. we must encourage staff to take ownership. The LTAS team should contribute to this and should indicate how far the School's plan can be integrated into the overall quality enhancement activity.

The model in action
Having described how the model was developed and why the next stage is to describe the model as it applied in reality. For the purpose of this paper, and simplicity, the Caledonian Business School (CBS) will be used as an example of the model in action.

The CBS represents the largest school within the university and accounts for approximately 40% of all student numbers. It was vital that progress in this school was monitored, as acceptance of the model would indicate a positive shift towards the new strategy

The current quality enhancement communication structure of the CBS is that at each of the 8 division levels there is a coordinator (committed to a full day equivalent on LTAS related activities). Each coordinator reports directly to the ADQ, who in turn reports to the Dean of Quality. One of the coordinators is also a secondee. The monthly meetings between the ADQ and the coordinators (known as the Quality Enhancement Group) are used to prioritise the schools and divisions CPD needs in relation to the LTAS plan. Each coordinator is tasked with the job of liaising with staff within their divisions and ascertaining their individual staff needs and that of the overall department. The gathered information is then fed back to the Quality Enhancement Group and an action plan formulated. At this stage the group can decide whether the required needs must be tailored to the specific needs of each academic group, or if the needs are generic. The requirements are then fed back to the LTAS team. For example; peer support has been widely discussed across the university. The need is acknowledged and accepted at all levels. However, whilst the LTAS team has offered overall training and information sessions on a wide variety of support mechanisms it was finally decided that each school would adapt the generic information and specifically tailor it to the needs of the school.

An additional change has occurred within CBS this academic session brought about in part by the overall restructuring of the university. The newly appointed ADQ argued successfully that as the CBS was so large one of the secondees should be dedicated to this school to assist in the implementation of the LTAS. It was decided that the

secondee who was also a coordinator within CBS should fill this role. This has resulted in an unexpected advantage. As the coordinator is already familiar with the workings of CBS and is a well-established member of the quality enhancement group the role has expanded to be one that not only supports the ADQ but also the new coordinators. This has resulted in an overall link between the LTAS group and the coordinators, a link that was less firmly established in the earlier model but one that was originally envisaged.

The success of this model is clear to see within the CBS. Over a very short period of time (in reality one semester) a unified action plan has evolved, dedicated CPD sessions have been set up and more importantly at this stage individuals within divisions (through the work of the coordinators) are discussing and debating the merits of the university LTAS plan, a plan that few would have been aware of let alone discussing two years ago.

Conclusions
With an ever-changing educational environment it is no longer possible for individuals within universities to ignore their own staff development needs. Engaging staff in this however, can seem an impossible task particularly where staff believe that those responsible for the delivery of this training do not understand the needs of their discipline. This paper has put forward a model of quality enhancement that places emphasis on the individuals needs whilst aligning these to the needs of the division, school, and university. The model is based on the view expressed by Biggs (1999:13) that 'what people construct from a learning encounter depends on their motives and intention, on what they know already and on how they use their prior knowledge.'

By devising a system that involves a communications structure that gathers information on training and development needs from source (in this case the staff involved in teaching and learning) and relates this to the universities LTAS plan, it is possible to not only engage staff in their own development, but to get them to accept ownership of this at the same time.

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