

Partner Colleges Learning and Teaching Project (Summary Report)

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Background to the Project

The Institute of Sport & Exercise Science (ISES) at the University of Worcester (UW) works in partnership with Stourbridge College, Worcester College of Technology and Herefordshire College of Technology (Holme Lacy campus) to provide Higher National Diploma (HND) and degree level sport-related courses. These programmes are valuable to the ISES in relation to widening participation, working with the wider community and progression onto the institute's degree and Masters programmes. Two of the key strategic aims of the University of Worcester are to provide an outstanding student experience and inclusive higher education: these are demanding remits since courses that are provided in collaboration with partner colleges may face greater challenges, as the student experience involves two distinct institutions in different locations, each with their own facilities, resources and staffing. Students on these courses are taught in dual locations by staff from both institutions, and whilst the diversity of this dual provision is attractive and positive in many respects, it can also provide challenges, for example with respect to facilities, resources and transport.

This project sought to explore how partner college students perceive their overall experience in relation to the following broad themes:

- a) facilities and resources;
- b) learning and teaching (including assessment);
- c) employability;
- d) personal development;
- e) recommendations for enhancing the student experience.

It was envisaged that the involvement of the three partner colleges would not only allow a wider consideration of partner college collaborations to be made, but also enable the sharing of good practice and those aspects of provision that students identify as leading to a positive experience. The project also sought the views of partner college staff in relation to how they felt they provided an outstanding student experience, in order to provide an indication of the congruence of staff and student views. It was anticipated that the project findings would have valuable benefits for the future development and enhancement of partner college courses, with the aim of maximising student retention, satisfaction and recruitment.

Funding was sought and successfully obtained from two sources:

- the University of Worcester, through an ISES Learning and Teaching grant;
- Herefordshire & Worcestershire Lifelong Learning Network.

Objectives of the Project

- To explore partner college students' views on their experience;
- To explore partner college and ISES staff views on the partner college student experience;
- To share good practice across the three partner colleges in order to further enhance the partner college student experience;
- To identify areas for development that will further enhance the partner college student experience;
- To disseminate findings with other institutes at UW who work with partner colleges.

Project Timetable

Date	Action
Dec '08 – Jan '09	Discuss and refine project with key partner college staff; Seek ethical approval; Develop focus group questions; Letters of invitation to students re focus group 1.
Feb '09	Student focus group 1 to take place.
Feb '09 – Mar '09	Thematic analysis of student focus group 1 data
April '09	Staff focus groups take place; Letters of invitation to students re focus group 2.
May '09	Student focus group 2 to take place.
Jun '09 – July '09	Thematic analysis of staff and student focus group 2 data.
Aug '09	Report writing.
Sept '09	Share key findings with partner college and ISES staff to consider ways to further enhance the student experience.
Sept '09 -	Project dissemination internally at UW and preparation of external outputs (see below).

Executive Summary of Project Findings

- I. The facilities and resources were generally considered to be good although there had been pressures on resource availability at busy times. Accommodation was generally reported to be suitable apart from some specific reservations regarding room size and the presence of windows. External links with clubs and schools were valued although students reported they would have liked greater access to the University's technical facilities. Where partner college and University VLE platforms had been different, students reported that they would have preferred these to be harmonized. Some specific Outdoor Adventure Leadership and Management (OALM) needs had not yet been met. Opportunities to take NGB awards were valued by students.
- II. The range of teaching styles used by staff and the provision of resources on VLEs were appreciated by students. OALM students preferred specialist staff, but in general, the systems in place for matching the curriculum to students' needs and for monitoring their progress were considered good. Regular tutorials were valued, although it was not considered acceptable to visit the University solely for the purpose of signing up for these.
- III. Most students found their tutors approachable and found support was available when required, although others indicated that they had found making contact difficult. Some students noted they had been able to drop in to see their University tutor for support whereas it had been necessary to send their college

- tutor an email in order to make an appointment; however, they appreciated that college staff might have had a greater number of timetabled commitments. There was a tendency noted for partner college assessments to be more vocational in nature; this was considered to be well-balanced by the more theoretical University assessments. Students considered that the wide range of assessment types suited them, although an issue was raised of course content, where it did not appear to be well-linked to the assessment. There were also some reported inconsistencies, for example, whether a draft assignment could be submitted or not; however, it was appreciated that these could have been due to differences in students' perceptions.
- IV. Staff commented that general employability and personal skills, such as team work, leadership, communication and problem solving, were well-embedded into course designs. The vocational aspects of courses, especially work placements, were emphasised by staff and appreciated by students, although the need to take additional NGB qualifications in order to gain employment was also realised. The principal issue regarding students' personal development was the progression following the end of their HND course to the second or third year of a degree course. There was some confusion surrounding this issue and perhaps the grading requirements need to be reiterated and clarified. In general though, students thought the course was preparing them well for further study.
 - V. There were a range of views on the induction process, perhaps owing to the distinct experiences of students. Some parts of the induction at the University were organised by the institute and were common to all students, whereas others were organised independently by course teams; furthermore, there were separate induction events at partner colleges. Students reported appreciating ice-breaker activities, but considered that the unnecessary repetition of information should be avoided; the corollary of this is that staff may have considered that significant information needed repeating. Some students commented that the student help team at the University was not available at times during the induction week, perhaps owing to being over-stretched; furthermore, the larger size of the University may have added to problems regarding room location. Students agreed that they appreciated library inductions that had been held in the library.