Evaluating partnership and impact in the first year of the Student Fellows Scheme

Yassein El-Hakim
RefMe

Savannah King,
Winchester Student Union

Tom Lowe,
University of Winchester

Stuart Sims,
University of Winchester

Introduction

The Student Fellows Scheme (SFS) is an initiative that recruits, trains and develops students to work in partnership with academics and professional staff on educational development projects. These projects take a number of forms, including conducting research, undertaking evaluations and developing new initiatives that address barriers to the student experience, whether on a specific module or across the whole institution. Within this paper, we focus on educational development as an activity in which all participants in Higher Education (HE) can engage. Implicit to this view is the mutually-collaborative nature of student-staff partnerships, irrespective of status, discipline or position in the institution.

The Student Fellows Scheme

Background

Astin (1999) describes a highly-involved student as one who "devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organisations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (1999). The SFS is an attempt to increase the opportunity for students to reach this level of involvement.

The SFS is an initiative developed, funded and managed in partnership between the University's Learning and Teaching Development (LTD) and the Student Union (SU). It was primarily developed from the SU side as a way to achieve greater student engagement in pedagogic processes. Some opportunities to gain student voice existed through Student Academic Representatives (StARs), Programme Committee Meetings and other committees (e.g. Student Academic Council). However, it was beyond the scope of the representative system for the students involved to become active participants in making changes happen.

These voluntary StARs were restricted to collating the concerns of their peers and reporting them to academic staff, with no guarantees that these issues would be addressed. The SU's response was to suggest the creation of a student role with the time and resources to allow such concerns to be dealt with directly. While this was occurring, LTD was conducting a small project which partnered students with staff to use technology for improving assessment. After discussions about the various priorities of LTD and the SU, a new

expanded model was developed that could be applied across the institution to address topics relevant to students.

Organisation

Representing our Institution-SU partnership, a member of the SU and a member of the LTD organised and implemented the SFS in September 2013. Had either organisation attempted this without the collaboration of the other, the scheme would likely have had little success. The SU contributed experience of working with and for the student body and LTD provided pedagogic expertise, so a complementary partnership developed (see Figure 1 for further information). During the stage of recruiting students and staff for the scheme, the variety of both partners' networks and expertise was integral to the success of communications and publicity. The recruitment process saw a high number of applications from students from all faculties of the institution, followed by individual interviews with potential Fellows who often demonstrated a rich understanding of HE and a high level of enthusiasm for engaging with processes to improve their experience.

Staff members were recruited to work with Student Fellows across the institution by means both of an open call for interest and by drawing on the pool of staff already involved in collaborative work with students. Partners were then paired and groups established of those with over-lapping interests in areas of academic development. Projects were finalised by the end of 2013.
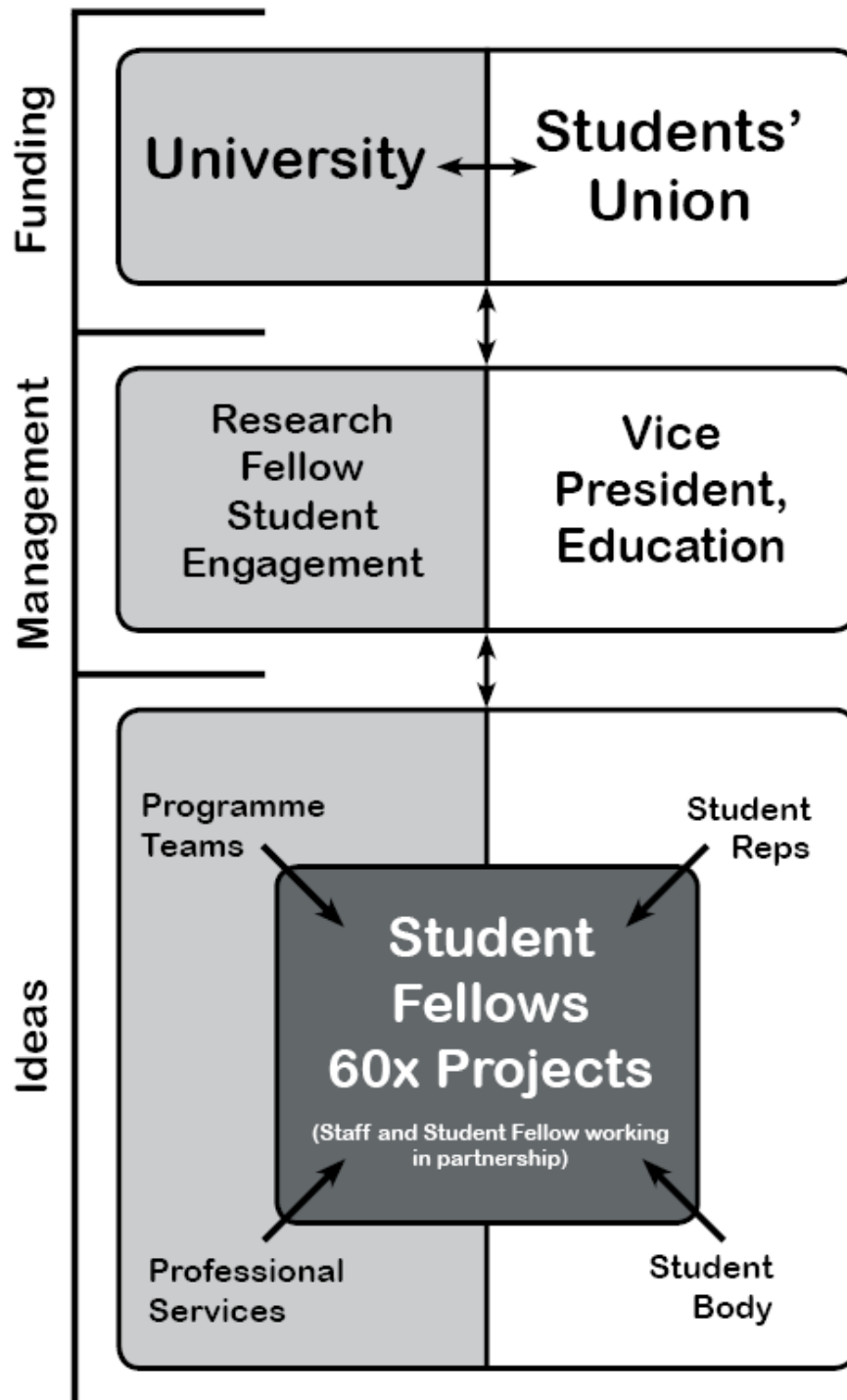
Figure 1: Layers of Partnership and Process in the Student Fellows Scheme

Student Fellows received a bursary of £600 paid in three instalments across the academic year. This bursary reflected the time commitment that students had to make to these projects when they already faced a number of conflicting demands on their time. What an individual did on the SFS differed by project, but the following gives a picture of a typical Fellow's activities:

- Organising meetings with staff
- Collecting and analysing data
- Developing, piloting and campaigning for new initiatives
- Reporting about the project
- Attending SFS events

In terms of the workload of a Student Fellow, these projects constituted a significant investment of time. Fellows spent approximately 100 hours working on a project across the academic year (see Figure 2 for further information). Since academic studies remained the priority, the SFS was flexible to accommodate students' needs. In terms of other time commitments, Student Fellows were expected throughout the year to attend such events as were necessary for the effective completion and dissemination of projects. The first of these events was a day-long, in-depth workshop on research design, organised by senior research staff who also developed handbooks for students to use when undertaking academic development projects.
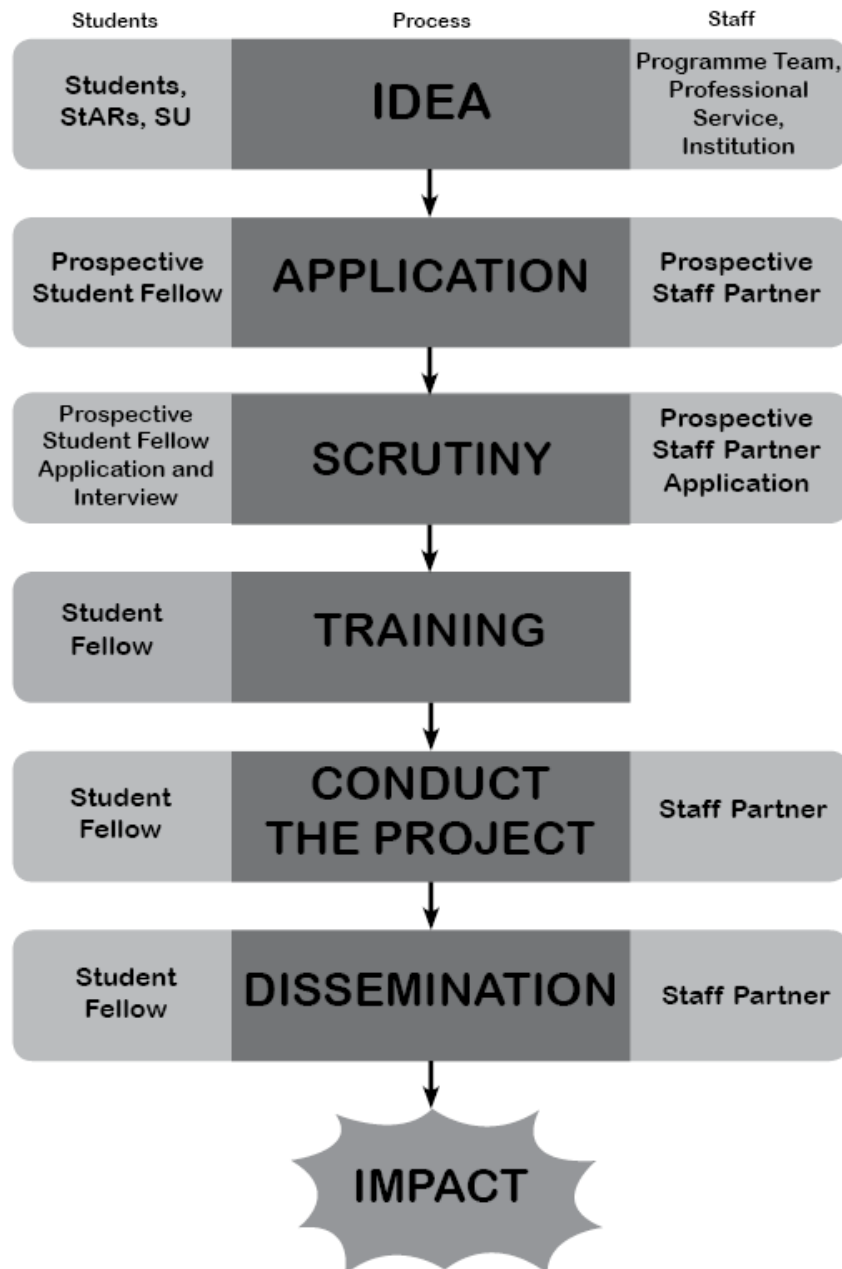
Figure 2: Process of Developing and Conducting a Student Fellows Project

The Student Fellows projects:

Identifying topics for projects

Ideas for projects to be addressed on the SFS might come from a number of different sources:

- *Student Fellows* - students are often motivated to participate in the scheme because they/their peers have encountered problems or deficiencies they would like to see addressed.

- *Staff* - staff will often identify an area of practice which can be improved either by considering feedback from students and other colleagues or by applying their own reflections.
- *Staff and students* - sometimes a student and a staff member who have an existing working relationship will apply to the scheme together in order to address a mutually-agreed issue.
- *StARs* - issues regularly being raised about a particular course by StARs can be addressed by Student Fellows.

Because all Student Fellow projects are staff-student partnerships, negotiation between the Fellow and the staff partner is essential, to ensure that the project being undertaken is appropriate and addresses the interests of all stakeholders.

The role of staff partners

The role of the staff partner is negotiated between the Student Fellow and the member of staff. The extent of the staff partner's involvement will be determined by the size and scope of the project being undertaken and the amount of time that the staff member is able to give. In general terms, the following activities are typical for a staff partner:

- refining the project's direction;
    - e.g. providing supporting evidence
- providing advice about effective strategies;
    - e.g. giving examples of previous practices
- supporting dissemination;
    - e.g. organising meetings with colleagues for Student Fellows to give presentations
- answering discipline specific questions.

Staff are paired with students based on the relevance of their areas of interest. In some cases, this is specific to a particular module and therefore the staff member and Fellow will have an existing relationship; other projects will require the pairing of staff and students with no prior relationship.

The role of the management team

The management team facilitates the running of the scheme as whole. This includes:

- providing skills training;
- organising events;
    - e.g. working groups for related projects
- providing relevant documentation;
    - e.g. ethical approval forms
- conducting progress assessments;
- creating opportunities for external dissemination;
- overcoming issues within partnerships;
- providing further support on an individual basis.

At three different points throughout the year, Student Fellows are expected to update the management team on the progress of their projects. The day-to-day progress of projects is the responsibility of the Student Fellow as agreed with the staff partner. However, because

of the investment by the SU and LTD, updates are required in order both to ensure that the work being undertaken is appropriate and to identify problems. Updates include presentations to their peers and a final report. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the SFS and the associated projects, following the first full cycle of the scheme. It will achieve this by analysing the outputs of each of the projects where a tangible project report has been submitted.

Example Projects

The following is just a brief selection of project outlines which demonstrate the kind of activities that Student Fellows engage in:

Developing a study buddy scheme for Fashion, Media and Marketing

This project established a scheme in which every first-year student was assigned a second-year student as a point of contact. These contacts were used for educational / social reasons (including assistance on assignments, time management, work experience) or for advice about university life. There were also group sessions at least once a month, providing an opportunity for the students and mentors to meet and discuss common issues.

Including the body in Higher Education pedagogy

This project developed a new module open to all students that united core liberal arts texts with a kinaesthetic exploration of them. The module offered a practical and philosophical education in the body, while also exploring education's relationship to the body.

Module introduction videos

In response to questions developed for module feedback forms, this project produced accessible video module guides in collaboration with programme leaders within the English, Creative Writing and American Studies department.

Literature Review

Overview to student engagement

There has been an increased emphasis on student engagement (Kuh, 2005) arguably owing to the introduction of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), thirteen years ago. In 2014, NSSE was offered to more than two million students in North America, with sections on academic advising, civic engagement, diverse perspectives, technology, global perspectives, and writing (http://nsse.iub.edu). NSSE showed that a poor student experience and a lack of student engagement opportunities led to low retention. However, when institutions emphasise specific activities, students are more likely to engage in them (Kuh, 2007). When staff emphasise educational practices which assist the students in relevant skill development, students become more engaged (Kuh, Nelson, and Umbach, 2004).

Student engagement in educational development

In terms of educational development, rarely will students be consulted, invited to critique their experience or reflect on how it could be better. Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felten (2011) claimed that when students become active learners they develop a meta-cognitive

awareness about the process. The SFS seeks to encourage amongst students awareness of their own learning *and* the processes that occur behind it.

This concept of student engagement draws on the work of Finn (1989), who posits that students who build up positive dispositions for engagement in their early educational experiences will continue such an identity throughout their education and beyond. Such students are likely to engage in additional school activities. Lawson and Lawson (2013) allude to the importance of context in affording opportunities and describe 'Conditions for Engagement' as central to creating such drivers and dispositions (Finn, 1989). Students with high levels of motivation thrive when given appropriate conditions for engagement, leading to other benefits throughout their student experience.

Partnership

The UK HE sector is leading a global movement to maximise student potential by means of engaging them in activities beyond their studies. The Higher Education Academy's (HEA) recent report (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014) has taken a lead in stating the ways of creating *engagement through partnership* and makes a case for sector and institutional motivations for engaging in partnership in learning and teaching. Healey *et al* (2014) expressed principles that should underpin such activities: authenticity, inclusivity, reciprocity, empowerment, trust, challenge, community, responsibility. The conceptual areas in which partnership can occur were cited as:

- learning, teaching assessment
- subject-based research and inquiry
- curriculum design
- pedagogic consultancy

Arguably, focusing on these areas means that a community of practice around the engagement of students has a reduced focus. In developing the SFS, it was important that the students would not simply be recipients of the opportunities, but central to the running and supporting of the scheme (Streeting and Wise, 2009) as valued partners.

The sector has wide, sometimes conflicting views on what 'student engagement and partnership' actually means (Trowler & Trowler, 2010; The Student Engagement Partnership, 2014). Reflection on the institutional view of partnership suggests that it has been built largely on the foundation laid by the National Union of Students. Their definition centres on 'shared responsibility - for identifying the problem or opportunity for improvement, for devising a solution, and - importantly - for co-delivery of that solution.*'* (NUS Manifesto for Partnership, 2012). The view of the SFS developers was similar in that both foresaw that responsible student partners could work institutionally to determine, together with interested parties, what needs doing, why and how. This was ideologically consistent with the 'Manifesto for Partnership', which, in essence, argues that an effective partnership must involve distributed power and not only avoid but also attempt to overcome or ameliorate hierarchical relationships between staff and students.

The principle of distributed leadership theory was first formalised by Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) in the proposition that activity is distributed and completed by multiple people, not just one or two at the top. Gronn (2002, p. 444) stated that the distributed model

viewed leadership as "less the property of individuals and more as the contextualized outcome of interactive, rather than unidirectional, causal process". Elmore (2003) also added that improvements require multiple sources of expertise, which will be best achieved with multiple individuals working collaboratively around common problems. As such, Elmore suggested distributed expertise leads to distributed leadership. This was a vision shared by the team which built up the SFS and intended the scheme to empower working partnerships.

Methodology

To evaluate the first year of the SFS, a systematic analysis of the projects was developed. This analysis was designed to identify shareable good practice, map effective project strategies and then assess partnerships.

Reports

After finishing their projects, Fellows prepared a final report, which outlined key achievements and recommendations. Emphasis was placed upon having meaningful outcomes, but the nature of these reports was left to the discretion of Fellows and staff partners. This diversity of final reporting can create difficulties in assessing the scheme's institution-wide impact, with some project outputs not necessarily designed for broader consumption (e.g. Programme Committee presentations). Therefore, this analysis focuses on reports which have some assessable output.

Reviewing Panel

To reflect the variety of stakeholders in the scheme, a panel was recruited to analyse the research outputs, including:

- Undergraduate English Literature Student (Student Fellow)
- SU Executive Elected Officer (SFS co-director)
- LTD Research Fellow (SFS co-director)
- University Director of Student Engagement

The reports assessed (n=26, representing the work of 34 Student Fellows from a cohort of 60) were divided between the panel for review. This allocation was randomised to reduce potential biases. To accommodate the different priorities of the SU and University, each assessed report was re-checked by another member of the panel representing the partner organisation. Whilst this assessment process may be subjective, it was felt that having each report assessed twice made such judgements more representative. Any disparities in reviewing were assessed by the whole panel.

Framework

The reports were assessed via a framework designed to evaluate the nature, format and impact of the SFS projects and consisting of eight different criteria that reflected the key areas for evaluation identified by the reviewing panel in line with the aims of the scheme. To quantify the content of the project outputs, various descriptions were decided upon; the initial four of these criteria were basic descriptions of the nature of the report:

- *Format of the report* (e.g. Academic Article, Poster)

- *Area of Focus* (e.g. Module, Programme)
- *Topic* (e.g. Assessment, Internationalisation)
- *Research Method* (e.g. Surveys, Focus Groups)

The fifth criterion, '*Purpose',* was used to assess the type of project undertaken, as explained in Table 1.

Criteria	Explanation	Categories	Explanation
Purpose	*The broad aim of the project*	**Research**	*Addresses the aim of the project by empirically collecting data (e.g. student surveys)*
		Evaluation	*Evaluating the topic of the project to measure its effectiveness (e.g. website analytical data)*
		Intervention	*Designing a new addition or alteration that addresses the topic (e.g. new technology in teaching)*
		Exploration	*Broad-ranging projects addressing larger issues that have been difficult to engage with empirically (e.g. 'student experience')*

Table 1. Purpose

The final three criteria were all ranked by the panel on a scale of 0-10. The reports were assessed by the panel according to how well the projects satisfied these criteria. The reviewing panel developed broad indicators that would warrant a particular score for each element (see Tables 2, 3 and 4).

Indicator	Ranking
No mention of method undertaken	**0**
Method mentioned briefly	**1-2**
Method mentioned clearly and in depth	**3-4**
Justification made of method	**5-8**
Output states clear impact with demonstrable link to choice of method	**9-10**

Table 2. Ranking appropriateness of method

Appropriateness of Method allows us to make inferences about the projects, particularly when compared to the level of impact. To be of high quality, a project is largely contingent on the method chosen for the project, so, if many projects are judged to have selected an inappropriate method, alterations to the organisation of the scheme may be necessary.

Indicator	Ranking
No mention of staff partner	**0**
Staff partner mentioned (i.e. named)	**1-2**
Role of staff partner mentioned briefly	**3-4**
Role of staff partner mentioned in depth	**5-6**
Staff partner took an active role in the project, which is clearly described	**7-8**
Project output co-produced representing a co-produced project	**9-10**

Table 3. Extent of partnership

The panel measured the level of staff-student partnership to assess the potential impact of this on individual projects and to assess the level of 'awareness' of partnerships during the first cross-institution roll out of the SFS.

Indicator	Ranking
No mention of project impact	**0**
Brief mention of the low project impact	**1-2**
Clear mention of the low project impact	**3-5**
Clear outline of moderate project impact	**6-7**
Significant changes made through the project that is clearly outlined (including the process)	**8-10**

Table 4. Project Impact

Arguably, *Impact* is the most important; however, with the projects concluding at the end of the academic year, many recommendations would not be implemented until the following year. It would not, therefore, be possible to assess the full impact of many projects, particularly the sustainability of any changes. In all these areas, no external knowledge or awareness of the projects was taken into account during this assessment and the focus was purely on the outputs' content.

Results

Format of report

Over half of the final reports came in the format of an academic report (54%). Within this figure, there is quite a bit of variance in the length and content of the reports themselves. This style may have been the most popular amongst Fellows in this inaugural year of the scheme, when opportunities for alternative formats of dissemination (such as presentations)

were more limited and unfamiliar. Alternative forms of dissemination were seen by the SFS team as having greater potential for wider impact and accessibility.

Level of focus

Most of the projects were focused at the programme level (69%). A possible explanation for this is student self-identification, with their programme as a main focus of their identity (e.g. 'I'm a Business student') within the higher education environment. As Kandiko and Mawer (2013) demonstrate, when defining their student experience, students will focus largely on their programme in spite of how otherwise 'engaged' they may be.

Substantive area

Given that a key aim of the SFS is to address any barriers to a fulfilling student experience, it is both heartening and discouraging that the substantive area of projects was spread widely across various topics. Student experience garnered 31% of the Fellows' attention, making it the most popular substantive area over areas such as feedback (19%), resources (15%) and technology-enhanced learning (15%). The breadth and flexibility of the term 'student experience' may account for its regular recurrence in the categorisation of the projects, since it is as applicable to projects relating to student feelings about the transition from further to higher education as to opinions on, say, the accessibility of the content of a Business Management module. The fact that 'feedback' has been the focus for a greater percentage of the projects than has 'assessment' (its normally inseparable companion!) may be attributed to the nature of the research projects themselves, namely that they were student-led: from a student-as-learner perspective, feedback may well seem to have more personal impact when it comes to matters of academic success and progression.

Purpose

Interestingly, the classification of the purpose of the different SFS projects has led to an almost equal quarterly division of the projects into the categories of research (27%), intervention (27%), exploration (23%) and evaluation (23%). This relatively equal engagement with the differing purposes of the projects may be argued to be evidence of the malleability of the SFS in supporting students to investigate or resolve issues that matter to them. In looking at the purpose of the project in relation to outcome, it can be seen that interventions tended to have better overall outcomes. Conversely, explorations were seen as having the least successful outcomes, overall. Perhaps this is to be expected given that by its aims, an exploratory study would be merely scoping an area rather than necessarily attempting to change it.

Research Method

The most preferred strategy adopted by Student Fellows was the multiple-method approach, with 42% of projects deploying more than one strategy. Those projects using multiple methods also tended to be evaluated as having a higher overall outcome, with 53.85% of the projects using more than one strategy being rated by the panel with an overall outcome of six or greater. The level of use of different research techniques (e.g. mixed surveys - 19%, focus groups -15%) was also noteworthy: the use of these differing techniques may suggest the need for increased support for students in conducting a variety of research methods.

This would improve not only the projects' outcomes and impacts, but also the skillsets of the students themselves.

Appropriateness of method

Unsurprisingly, the data indicated that the more appropriate the method was deemed to be, the more likely it was that the outcome of the project would receive a higher ranking. This highlights the importance of appropriate training, support and guidance provided by the staff partner, as well as by the LTD and SU staff, to ensure the choice of a suitable method to achieve the desired outcome of the project. This should be borne in mind for the continuous process of evaluation and revision of the SFS in years to come. That said, it is positive that only relatively few projects (15%) were rated as having a methodological appropriateness of five or less.

Beneficiaries

As to who benefits from the projects, over half of the projects (54%) were seen to be primarily benefiting students. This may be seen as a particularly valuable example of how the partnership between university and union is powerful in the generation of positive change for students. Programmes were identified as the next most prevalent beneficiary (23%), arguably showing the virtue of students' having agency for change within their own educational experience.

Impact

Excitingly for the inaugural year of the SFS, the majority of the projects (69%) were appraised as attaining an impact of 6 or higher, with 31% of all projects achieving a rating of 9 or 10. The large proportion of high-rated impacts indicates the success of the first year of the scheme. This is a testament to the efforts of the Student Fellows and their staff partners in bringing about measurable institutional change through effective projects. Obviously, this data leaves room for improvement in subsequent years of the scheme, with an upward trend in successful project outcomes being a realistic goal. It is worth stating that the outcome of each project was assessed relative to its specific size and scope and its aims: many of these high-impact projects may have made a difference to only a small aspect of the university.

Extent of partnership

Notably, a high percentage of projects (38%) received a score of zero for the category of extent of partnership. Whilst this number appears odd for such a partnership-based programme, this statistic masks several further useful truths. First and most significant is the fact that the extent of partnership was evaluated on the report alone. Therefore, if the Student Fellow did not mention the staff partner or partnership at all, the report was ranked at zero. That score may therefore represent not so much an ineffective partnership as a lack of specified references to partnership in the reports. Since the Fellows were not explicitly asked to mention or assess partnership within their reports, they communicated the content of the project rather than its execution. Of the reports which did discuss the role of the staff partner or the function of the partnerships, 34.5% (56.6% of valid responses) were rated six or higher, indicating a strong, equal commitment from the staff and student partners to their project and its outcome.

Discussion

Impacts

From an examination of the project outputs, it is clear that the main impact of the scheme has been the large number of small institution-wide changes which have genuinely made a difference to students. Such changes include:

- staff-student co-developed and implemented online learning resource, in Politics and Global Studies, which formed the core basis of a module for second-year students;
- production of video module guides, for the English Language Studies programme, which have been viewed a comparable number of times to the associated paper version;
- student-led re-development of module feedback processes in Performing Arts, Psychology, Sports Studies, Modern Liberal Arts and Childhood, Youth & Community Studies, ensuring that student priorities are valued when providing feedback;
- improvement of lighting and safety on campus.

These changes and many other similar outcomes have had a direct impact on the academic and social experience of students and staff at the university. One of the key foci of the SFS is to create positive change that has impact across the institution and, based on this assessment, it would appear that this aim has been achieved in many areas.

One of the most important benefits of the scheme is that the Student Fellows themselves gain skills and experience empowerment. To gauge longer-term benefits to the Fellows, we are currently developing a strategy to track those entering the labour market. Widening participation data collected by the University has already shown that participating in the scheme potentially provides educational and career advantages. In this first year, 35% of Student Fellows are defined as coming from postcodes that are high in the indicators of deprivation (above the institutional average). Whilst we are not claiming any causal relationship, of those who graduated last year, 100% received the two highest possible degree classifications. The role of scheme participation in contributing to attainment will be explored in future evaluations to understand this further. Anecdotal and actual evidence suggests that the outputs of the projects themselves are of both direct and indirect benefit to other students across the university.

Dialogic feedback from staff on the value of the opportunity has confirmed their belief in the broader capabilities of their students. Staff hope that future projects are shared more widely, with a particular view to the identification of generalisable and transferable outcomes.

Beyond institutional context, the pioneering nature of the SFS received interest from numerous other HEIs and national bodies. Four informal inquiries progressed to in-depth consultation concerning similar initiatives externally and several Student Fellows have participated in key events about student engagement, including the Change Agent Network (CAN), Researching, Advancing & Inspiring Student Engagement (RAISE) and Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA).

Changes for the future

Student Fellow projects that employed multiple methodologies resulted in higher outcomes and, similarly, where the method of the project was evaluated as more appropriate, those outcomes too were higher. This speaks to the importance of ensuring that Fellows conduct projects with a valid methodology and that they will collect the desired data. This may appear a commonsense observation, yet some methods in this review did not align with the project aims. Greater guidance for students about appropriate methods and advice for staff partners on how to guide students in their choice of methodology may both help to overcome this perceived challenge. In evaluating the projects against their aims and outcomes, there is also an inherent difficulty in the panel's measurement of the actual impacts on individuals directly and indirectly engaged in the projects (staff, students or Fellows), rather than its simply recommending changes on the basis of the outcomes. The measurement of these impacts could be significantly strengthened in the future, through continuous evaluation throughout the year, something not an option in the SFS scheme's first year, on account of its developmental nature. In response to the clear effectiveness of a multiple-method approach, we have introduced a greater number of training sessions in a larger number of research methods. Importantly, these training sessions are designed to be taken holistically, with a view to promoting greater interaction among Student Fellows for the conduct of more methodologically-triangulated projects.

In order to promote a more engaging form of dissemination, a Student Fellows Conference has been organised for 2014-15. All of the Fellows, in partnership with their staff partners, will be invited to make presentations about their projects to an audience of staff and students. It is hoped this more interactive event will allow greater sharing of good practice across the institution rather would written reports, which reach only a small number of already interested people.

Limitations

Problems with Perceiving Partnership

One of the key findings that emerged from this analysis was the difficulty of measuring the extent of partnerships between staff members and Student Fellows in terms of the direction and execution of their projects. Successful partnerships are supposed to be the cornerstone of the SFS, with both staff and students bringing different experiences and perspectives to achieve more than they could individually. When reviewing the outputs of the projects 38.5% were rated as having no evidence of a partnership. Clearly, this did not always indicate that partnership was not present, but rather that it had not been documented. To remedy this, more in-depth and continuing research upon the progress of the scheme is being undertaken. This research will be conducted in partnership with a Student Fellow, with the aim of collecting student perspectives on partnerships, motivations and impacts. For those reports that did engage with the issue of partnership, it is unlikely that this forum would be used to discuss any issues that were experienced between staff and students and a more anonymous format must obviously be developed to address this further.

There were some projects that had weak partnerships and this will be addressed by increasing staff engagement and continuing to match as well as possible students and staff with similar research interests. In the first year of the SFS, much more effort was expended

on engaging students rather than staff members and this neglect has led to an uneven experience across the scheme that we have struggled to measure. Feedback collected from staff and students about the SFS indicated that many staff felt that their role was poorly defined and this led to confusion for staff and students. In response, we have developed a detailed handbook outlining all roles and responsibilities for stakeholders on the scheme. Additional events are planned where staff can interact with students whether they are involved in the scheme or not. In the future, it may be worth asking Fellows to adopt a greater level of self-reflection to assess the extent of partnership at work to give a better picture of the scheme's interworking, and therefore the degree of success at a student and staff level.

Method

In spite of our attempts to analyse these reports rigorously and systematically, one of the main methodological weaknesses of this review is the investment of the various reviewers of the SFS. The panel was established to represent a broad range of stakeholders in the scheme. This allowed us the opportunity to reflect student, staff and SU priorities when examining content and making subjective judgments. However, this does not give us any guaranteed distance or critical detachment, allowing for the possibility of generous assessments of the reports and their impacts. One potential avenue for overcoming this in future years would be to recruit students and members of staff with no direct affiliation to review the outputs of the scheme. This could be both internal and external, but there is challenge in achieving fair selection and recruitment of participants. The decision was taken to try to measure the impact as objectively as possible and therefore we restricted our judgements purely to the assessment of the reports. Given the difficulties of measuring partnership in this way, this assessment may have benefited from our taking a more holistic approach that drew on the panels' experiences and knowledge of the scheme.

Another issue is that this review accounted for only just over half of the projects under-taken by Student Fellows (including six students who withdrew from the scheme), because only the projects that had 'tangible' outputs were evaluated. To improve the reach of the evaluation, a more flexible, continuous process may be required, which can accommodate other forms of reporting. Additionally, the Student Fellows never knew that their reports would be examined in this way and that many of the outputs would serve very different purposes.

Other avenues need to be explored to ensure that evaluation can take place in all forms of reporting and with greater transparency of the reporting process throughout the scheme. Students involved in the scheme will be aware that they can report in a variety of formats, but with their added understanding of the need to provide information consistent with the purposes of the SFS. The SFS co-directors need to provide appropriate support and guidance for a variety of reporting formats, while maintaining consistency of quality and content. The flexibility of reporting options does, however, limit the extent to which external parties can be involved in assessing individual projects (e.g. arranging presentations). The SFS has already been restructured in order to help reduce the number of students who fail to report on their projects, by tying the final payment of the bursary to final submission.

Conclusion

The crux of the institutional SFS was to create conditions for engagement and to allow those with the appropriate dispositions and drivers to engage to do so. Their 'acts of engagement' (Lawson and Lawson, 2013) have led to benefits for the institution. This includes the opportunity for students to lead on enhancements that better the student experience.

The primary focus of the SFS is to create a large number of changes to the pedagogy, learning experience and environment across the institution. This analysis attempts to gauge the extent to which the scheme has achieved this, by evaluating the individual outputs of the individual projects. While some of the findings are illuminating and speak to the effectiveness of the scheme, in many ways this framework has been unable to assess some of the more important issues, such as the level of partnership and the reach of the projects. The issues will be taken into account when planning future evaluations of the scheme.

This analysis has led to scheme enhancements, in terms of structure, training and progress points. Additionally, a great focus on the role of the staff partners of each project will be evaluated more closely next year, as the scheme and its impacts become more embedded institutionally. As the scheme becomes more sought after (internally and externally) as an annual means of working in sustained and powerful partnerships, a more detailed analysis of new data regarding the direct impacts of the role on the students involved will be carried out.

Reference list

Astin, A. (1999) 'Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education.' *Journal of College Student Development*, *40(5),* 518-529.

Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A. and Felten, P. (2011) 'Students as co-creators of teaching approaches, course design and curricula: implications for academic developers.' *International Journal for Academic Development*, *16(2),* 133-145. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360144x.2011.568690 (Accessed: 28 November 2014).

Deci, E. L. and Ryan, R. M. (1985) 'The general causality orientations scale: Self-determination in personality.' *Journal of research in personality*, *19(2),* 109-134. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0092-6566(85)90023-6 (Accessed: 13 February 2015).

Elmore, R. F. (2003) 'A plea for strong practice.' *Educational Leadership*, *62(3),* 6-10.

Finn, J. D. (1989) 'Withdrawing from school.' *Review of Educational Research*, *59*, 117-142.

Gronn, P. (2002) 'Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis.' *The leadership quarterly*, *13(4),* 423-451. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s1048-9843(02)00120-0 (Accessed: 15 February 2015).

Healey, M., Flint, A. and Harrington, K. (2014) *Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education*. York: Higher Education Academy.

Kandiko, C. B. and Mawer, M. (2013) *Student Expectations and Perceptions of Higher Education*. London: King's Learning Institute.

Articles

Kuh, G. D. (2005) 'Student engagement in the first year of college.' In: L. M. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner and B. O. Barefoot, *Challenging and supporting the first-year student,* 86-107. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D. (2007) 'What student engagement data tell us about college readiness.' *peerReview, 9(1).* Available at: https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/what-student-engagement-data-tell-us-about-college-readiness (Accessed: 13 February 2015).

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H. and Whitt, E. J. (2005) *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D., Nelson Laird, T. F. and Umbach, P. D. (2004) 'Aligning faculty and student behavior: Realizing the promise of Greater Expectations.' *Liberal Education, 90(4),* 24-31.

Lawson, M. A. and Lawson, H. A. (2013) 'New conceptual frameworks for student engagement research, policy, and practice.' *Review of Educational Research, 83*, 432-479. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0034654313480891 (Accessed: 13 February 2015).

National Union of Students [NUS] (2012) *A manifesto for partnership*, p.8. Available at: http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/a-manifesto-for-partnership/ (Accessed: 13 January 2016).

National Union of Students [NUS/HSBC] (2011) *Student Experience Full Report.* London: NUS.

Ryan, R. M. and Deci, E. L. (2000) 'Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being.' *American Psychologist, 55(1),* 68-78. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.55.1.68 (Accessed: 13 February 2015).

Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R. and Diamond, J. B. (2001) 'Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective.' *Educational researcher*, *30(3),* 23-28. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189x030003023 (Accessed: 13 February 2015).

Streeting, W. and Wise, G. (2009) *Rethinking the values of higher education - consumption, partnership, community?* Gloucester: QAA.

The Student Engagement Partnership (2014) *The Principles of Student Engagement:*

The Student Engagement Conversation. London: TSEP.

Trowler, V. and Trowler, P. (2010) *Student engagement evidence summary*. York: HEA.