

QAA Good Practice Knowledgebase case study

University of Lincoln: Student as Producer

Theme

Teaching and learning experience

Sub-themes

Research-informed teaching

Feature of good practice as identified by Institutional Review November 2012 (quoted directly from the [review report](#))

The impact of the 'Student as Producer' initiative on the enhancement of student engagement at all levels and on learning and teaching practice across the University.

Context

The University of Lincoln was established in 2001, and now has nearly 12,000 students, 1,500 of whom are post-graduates. The University employs 1,200 academic and support staff. The University is structured around three academic colleges: of science, social science, and the arts. Working in a new and ambitious University gives academics and higher education professionals the opportunity to create a progressive and dynamic environment for student learning and research.

Student as Producer emerged out of work that was already ongoing at the University in the area of research-engaged teaching. Academic staff and colleagues supporting teaching and learning as well as students were, from the outset, involved in the development and design of Student as Producer, ensuring a high degree of ownership across the University. This work evolved over a period of time, beginning in 2007, before being adopted as the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy in 2010. The project was given further impetus from a Higher Education Academy (HEA) grant of £200,000, to cover the period 2010-13, supporting the development of an institutional framework for research-engaged teaching at Lincoln (and for other Universities).

One of the strengths of Student as Producer is that the University of Lincoln has worked closely with other universities, nationally and internationally, to develop the concept of research-engaged teaching. The pedagogical ideas that lie behind Student as Producer have been adopted and adapted by other higher education providers in different forms.

Description of good practice

A key feature of Student as Producer is that it is a whole institutional strategy for teaching and learning, designed around the University of Lincoln's academic research culture. The project has been established across the University by the creation of a range of infrastructural platforms. These platforms include: bureaucracy, student

engagement, teacher education, learning landscapes, - and by working to generate opportunities for collective intellectual debate around the meaning and purpose of higher education - 'the idea of the University'.

Bureaucracy

The principles of Student as Producer have been written into the quality assurance protocols and procedures at Lincoln. Using the quality assurance protocols in this way creates an organic process through which to engage administrative staff, academics and students in debates about Student as Producer. These bureaucratic procedures include External Examiner Reports, Annual Monitoring Reports, Subject Committees, Periodic Academic Reviews and the protocols and processes associated with new programme validations and revalidations. During the process of programme (re)validation academics are asked to engage with Student as Producer principles: these include showing how new courses will include research-engaged teaching, how academics will consider issues of space and spatiality in their teaching practice, how they will write up their teaching as a scholarly research project, and the ways in which they will use appropriate web technologies. Academics are also asked to demonstrate the extent to which students are involved in the design and delivery of programmes and courses, and show how the course enables students to see themselves having a role in creating their own future, in terms of employment, and to make a progressive contribution to society. External examiners are asked a series of questions relating to Student as Producer on the External Examiner Report form, for example, what is the impact of research-engaged teaching on the student learning experience. Periodic Academic Reviews offer a planned cyclical process whereby Student as Producer is considered by staff and academics on all programmes across the University. Each year programme staff are asked to set out as part of their Annual Monitoring Report the extent to which Student as Producer is active across all courses and subject areas. These reports are reviewed by central University committees, creating a sense of collective intellectual endeavour.

Student engagement

Student as Producer underpins all aspects of student engagement at the University of Lincoln. There is a very clear acknowledgement that student engagement should go beyond just involvement and consultation, so that students have a direct input into decision-making processes, recognising that students are 'experts' in teaching and learning. Students at Lincoln are indeed producers of the whole University.

These student engagement activities are supported by the University through the appointment of a Student Engagement Officer, working out of the Vice-Chancellor's Office and with strong links to the Students' Union. The appointment of this Officer in 2012 has allowed for the development of systematic schemes to embed this model of student engagement. These include input into student induction; a comprehensive student representation system; the creation of, and support for, a team of student advisers (including training); student-led committees; students as full panel members on quality committees; and students on staff appointments panels. The University has been successfully experimenting with new committee structures, based on a workshop model, to promote and support student involvement.

Teacher education

Through its teacher education programmes, the University has developed ways to engage with academics (and those supporting teaching and learning) in critical discussion and debate about Student as Producer.

The University now requires that all teachers and those involved with supporting teachers will have PGCE Higher Education Teaching Qualifications or HEA fellowship recognition. This policy was decided on following extensive consultation with staff and was agreed before the recommendations of the Browne Review and Report (2010). It is expected that 100 per cent of academic staff at Lincoln will have or be working towards a teaching qualification or HEA recognition by 2016. This programme is led by the Dean of Teaching and Learning, working closely with colleagues in the Centre for Educational Research and Development, as well as with academic staff who have responsibility for teaching and learning within the colleges of science, of social science and of the arts.

Other forms of institutional support at Lincoln to promote teacher education include the Teaching Academy. This was established in 2011 to create an informal, critical and experimental space for teaching and learning within the institution, but outside formal university structures such as the University's Education Committee. This space has been particularly productive in generating teaching and learning projects across subject areas.

Learning landscapes: real and virtual

The practices and principles for Student as Producer are embedded within the University Estates strategy, as a framework for the design and development of teaching and learning spaces. The Estates strategy is based on research done across the sector during 2008-10, led by University of Lincoln and funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and the Funding Councils for Scotland and Wales. This research found that learning spaces designed to encourage research-engaged activity had a high impact on student achievement and success. The implementation of Student as Producer through the Estates strategy is facilitated by regular meetings of the Learning Landscapes Working Group, chaired by the Dean of Teaching, with members from across the university, including students. The Estates strategy is enhanced by setting up workshops with academics and students to generate innovative thinking for classroom design. This is sustained by an ongoing cycle of review of existing facilities.

Student as Producer is the principle around which the University's Digital Education strategy is currently being designed, with a specific emphasis on using digital devices and online facilities to foster research and teaching collaborations between academics and students.

Intellectual framework for critical debate: 'the idea of the University'

Student as Producer challenges and invites academics to get involved in debates around the complexity of links between teaching, learning and research in higher education. These debates are contextualised around the meaning and purpose of higher education: 'the idea of the University'.

To promote the re-engineering of the relationship between teaching and research, Student as Producer returns to the radical history of the modern university, with reference to Willhelm von Humboldt's University of Berlin in 1810 and to the student protests of 1968. Humboldt's plan was to establish 'the idea of the university' as a progressive political, liberal humanist project, and the basis of civilising the population as part of the process of building the emerging nation-state. This would be done by connecting teaching and research in a programme to promote the expansive creation of new knowledge, so that the university becomes the highest level of consciousness of liberal society.

1968 was a powerful example of student engagement, with students at the heart of a major political event. This had significant consequences for the future of higher education, including the democratization of university life and the impact on curriculum development; for example, the idea that students are capable of carrying out research through their own independent projects. An important aspect of 1968 was the demystification by students of the elite practice of the production of knowledge with 'research becoming something that anyone can do'.

The radical nature of Student as Producer is further underlined by its affinity with the writings of Walter Benjamin, notably 'Author as Producer' (1934). Benjamin presented this paper to the Society into the Study of Fascism in Paris, asking the question 'how do radical intellectuals act in a moment of crisis?' Following Brecht and the Russian Constructivists, Benjamin's response was to transform the social relations of production so that students become collaborators in the production of knowledge. He argues that by doing this students would come to see themselves as subjects rather than objects of history - as teachers, writers and performers, rather than recipients of knowledge - and to be able to recognise themselves in a social world of their own design.

Management

Student as Producer is a key area of responsibility for the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching Quality and the Student Experience. Student as Producer is operationalised by the Dean for Teaching and Learning, who chairs the Education Committee and who has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the project. Each of the university colleges manages Student as Producer within the context of their own subject areas (of science, of social science and of the arts). Through working with student representatives and maintaining relationships with the Students Union, the University works hard to ensure that students have a strong input into both managerial and operational aspects of Student as Producer.

Key features ensuring success

The project has been developed over a sustained period and involving staff at all levels and students, leading to a strong sense of collective ownership across the institution. The project emerged from work that was already ongoing within the University. This was not a change-management project; rather, Student as Producer has sought to enhance a way of working with students to which many staff were already committed. Student as Producer provides a critical, challenging and coherent framework through which to conceptualise research-engaged teaching in a language and format that academics appreciate and understand.

Student as Producer is grounded in research literature on effective ways of teaching and learning in higher education for student achievement and success. Student as Producer has generated its own publications during the recent period, adding to its credibility among academics inside and outside of the institution.

Student as Producer has been developed through a strong association with other universities, nationally and internationally. Student as Producer has learned from work being done by other universities in this area, as well as working to support other higher education providers in designing and developing their own versions of research-engaged teaching and learning. This sector-wide engagement involves a strong working relationship with the HEA, who have now created their own theme in this area: Students as Partners. Academics at Lincoln involved with Student as Producer are founding members of the British Conference for Undergraduate Research, an annual conference set up to celebrate undergraduate research.

Student as Producer has maintained a high profile within the national higher education press. This profile assists greatly in developing a strong cultural identity within the University, where staff can see how their work is appreciated across the sector. These regular features in the national education press means that Student as Producer maintains a high profile across the sector, both nationally and internationally.

Student as Producer has built on advice and support from a QAA visit in 2008, which encouraged the University to develop this work. This support from QAA gave the staff involved confidence and motivation to carry on with further developing research-engaged teaching.

Evaluation

Evaluation of Student as Producer at the University of Lincoln takes place at a number of levels, described below.

One level is self assessment: each year, schools and departments across the University review their own practice in relation to research-engaged teaching, set against Student as Producer principles. These include the extent to which research and research-like teaching activities are embedded in the curriculum, as well as the ways in which students are involved in the design and development of their programmes. Academics and students are asked, through the self-evaluation mechanism, to consider the extent to which they have built on previous years' work and what legacy they will be leaving for incoming students. These reports are reviewed by the relevant University committees, including the Education Committee and Student Experience Committee.

The project is currently undertaking an internal evaluation, to be reported in July 2013. This report is linked to the HEA funding, 2010-13, that was granted as part of the National Teacher Fellowship Fund. The methodology adopted by this evaluation is participatory action research. Participatory action research is particularly appropriate as it provides a way for staff implementing Student as Producer to evaluate their own work without jeopardising the rigour of the research process. The evaluation will consider written documentation associated with Student as Producer, with a particular emphasis on QAA protocols and processes, as well as on interviews with key individuals at all levels. This evaluation is set against funding objectives agreed with the HEA,

which are: to provide an institutional framework for research-engaged teaching at the University of Lincoln; to create a framework to embed research-engaged teaching across an institution that can be used by other universities; and to develop a national network to support undergraduate research. The evaluation will include other internal performance indicators, including measures of student achievement and success as well as gains for the student experience. The review process is facilitated by an external reviewer or 'critical friend', Professor Mick Healey, who is a world-leading authority in this area of work.

A key issue for the evaluation is the extent to which Student as Producer has had an impact across the higher education sector. We already know from evaluation work done, and from interest generated by the recent Student as Producer international conference held at the University of Lincoln in June 2013, that this influence has been considerable. A key feature of the project is the amount of ongoing critical reflection as well as theoretical development work around the concept of Student as Producer. This is reflected in the large number of publications, including book chapters and peer-reviewed articles, that have been written by academics at Lincoln since 2008.

The issue now is how to maintain and develop Student as Producer so that it does not become another managerial initiative. This is being done through the ongoing critical review of practice as well as establishing new, related programmes in this field. Currently there is a focus on developing work with postgraduate research students from all subject areas at Lincoln, and on working with colleagues in the Graduate School at Lincoln, in order to discover the real nature or 'spirit of research'.

Further information

<http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk>

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www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Reports/Pages/IRENI-Lincoln-12.aspx