Mastersness Toolkit

**Learning from International Practice:
Postgraduate Taught Student Experience**

Contents

Summary

Welcome to the Mastersness handbook which has been produced to support the use of the Mastersness toolkit .

The Mastersness toolkit has been developed as part of the work of the Learning from International Practice: the postgraduate student experience project. The toolkit has been designed to support staff and students teams to consider the following two questions:

- What does it mean to be a Master's level student?

- How are Master's level students supported in making the transition to Master's level study?

The toolkit uses a methodology based on the University of Ulster's Viewpoints framework for curriculum enhancement (http://wiki.ulster.ac.uk/display/VPR/Home) and this handbook is modelled on the original Viewpoints handbook and the handbook written for the Flexible Curriculum Toolkit by Peter Chatterton.

The guidance provided in the toolkit builds on the concept of Mastersness explored in the project paper 'What is Mastersness?. The toolkit also builds upon the practice articulated through the 25 case studies collected from Scotland and beyond during the project. These can be found at (http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/sheec/learning-from-international-practice/taught-postgraduate-student-experience/case-studies)

Section 1 provides a brief summary of the Mastersness project and its outputs

Section 2 provides a brief summary of the Viewpoints approach, its purpose and benefits and how it has been customised to fit the needs of this project.

Section 3 The Mastersness Toolkit: who can use the toolkit, the resources available and provides a recommended flow-diagram for using it, including options for customising the toolkit.

Section 4 outlines some workshop models that people can use and/or adapt if they wish.

Section 5 outlines some other suggestions of how to use the toolkit that others have provided. We recognize that this section is very incomplete, but we hope that as you use the toolkit you will let us know if you develop new models and we can include these here in a revised handbook.

1   Introduction to Mastersness

The Learning from International Practice project on the Taught Postgraduate Student Experience aimed to use practice gathered from international and Scottish sources to inform debates and discussions around these two questions:

- **What does it mean to be a Master's level student?**

- **How are Master's level students supported in making the transition to Master's level study?**

The work concentrated on the Taught Postgraduate Student experience as opposed to the postgraduate research student experience. As noted in the discussion paper 'What is Mastersness?', although students were largely satisfied with their PGT experiences, some felt ill-prepared for postgraduate study, lacking understanding about what is expected of them. The project aimed to highlight this important transition point and help improve support by providing guidance and examples of how institutions prepare and support their students for and through Master's level work.

The project has produced its final outputs. These are:

- A discussion paper on 'Mastersness' - **What is Masterness?**
- This **toolkit** based on the Viewpoints methodology used to facilitate discussion in a series of workshops held throughout the Scottish higher education sector from December 2013 to March 2014.
- **25 international, UK and Scottish case studies**
- A synthesis providing a thematic overview of the case studies - **Pointers for Practice**

The project was managed by a working group, which was chaired by Professor Roni Bamber, Queen Margaret University.

The project aimed to facilitate discussion and debate about what it means to be a Master's level student and how they are supported in making that transition. In order to help make sense of this, the working group developed a framework called the 'Facets of Mastersness'. This framework was adapted from work carried out by Susan Warring's analysis of learning levels between qualifications[i]. From her work she distilled a series of categories that the Working Group thought could be adapted and developed for considering the attributes of Master's level study. After much discussion and debate the working group decided that there were 7 facets of Mastersness.

The seven facets of Mastersness are represented in Figure 1 below:

Each 'facet' is an aspect that the Postgraduate Taught Student Experience Working Group thinks underpins the concept of 'mastersness'. Of course, not all facets will be represented equally or to the same extent in a module or programme - they will be blended as appropriate.

Figure 1

Short definitions of each facet are given in table 1 below. More detail about these can be found in the 'What is Mastersness?' paper online.

The working group do not consider these facets to be a definitive statement of what comprises Master's level study, but rather a tool for facilitating discussion of studying at M level. The toolkit reflects this by including scope for users to come up with their own facets.

Facet	Definition
Abstraction	Extracting knowledge or meanings from sources and then using these to construct new knowledge or meanings
Depth (of Learning)	Depth of learning, i.e. acquiring more knowledge and using knowledge differently. For example, engaging in a narrow topic in depth, engaging in up-to-date research or taking a multidisciplinary approach and examining something familiar and presenting it in a new innovative way.
Research and enquiry	Developing critical research and enquiry skills & attributes
Complexity	Recognising and dealing with complexity of knowledge - including the integration of knowledge and skills, application of knowledge in practice - conceptual complexity, complexity of learning process
Autonomy	Taking responsibility for own learning in terms of self-organisation, motivation, location and acquisition of knowledge
Unpredictability	Dealing with unpredictability in operational contexts - recognising that 'real world' problems are by their nature 'messy' and complex, being creative with the use of knowledge and experience to solve these problems
Professionalism	Displaying appropriate professional attitudes, behaviour and values in whatever discipline/occupational area chosen (from academic to occupational subjects), including learning ethical behaviours, developing academic integrity, dealing with challenges to professionalism, recognising the need to reflect on practice and becoming part of a discipline/occupational community

2   Viewpoints introduction

Viewpoints was a Jisc-funded curriculum design project at the University of Ulster. It produced a toolkit to aid programme teams in reflecting on, discussing and planning effective curriculum designs based around four themes: (1) Assessment and Feedback; (2) Information Skills; (3) Learner Engagement and (4) Creativity in the Curriculum. Details of the project can be found at the University of Ulster Viewpoints wiki http://wiki.ulster.ac.uk/display/VPR/Home.

The Viewpoints toolkit has subsequently been adopted by a range of institutions and the Jisc Panorama project (part of the Jisc e-Learning Programme) supported a range of pilot projects in different institutions. In addition, the Viewpoints framework has been adapted to other contexts, including this project and the Enhancement Theme-funded Flexible Curriculum toolkit http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/toolkits/flexible-curriculum.
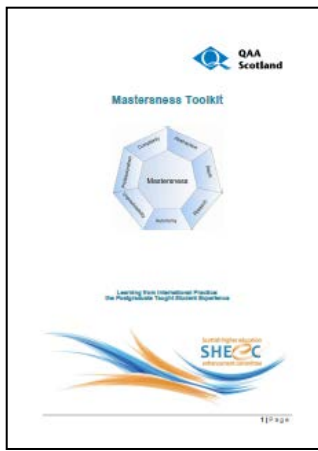
An evaluation of the Viewpoints project was conducted by Prof David Nicol and written up in a report "Transformational Change in Teaching and Learning Recasting the Educational Discourse" (2012). A key quote by David Nicol: "*Workshops succeeded, impressively, in creating change locally but, importantly, in seeding change beyond the immediate participation experience*".
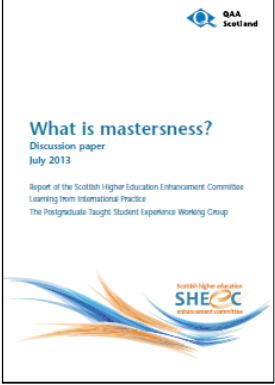
3   The Mastersness Toolkit

The Mastersness toolkit is designed to facilitate discussion and debate between the all of those involved in the postgraduate student experience about the nature of Master's level study.

The toolkit has been designed to be as fluid as possible – there is no 'right way to use it' and indeed we would encourage people to develop and refine it and use it in any way they think would be helpful. We would be very happy to hear about how the toolkit has been used.

The toolkit comprises of the following:

A set of eight 'facet' cards.	Each card describes and defines a 'facet' of Master's level study and gives examples of learning and teaching practices designed to develop that facet. The facets are: • Abstraction • Autonomy • Depth • Complexity • Research and enquiry • Professionalism • Unpredictability • A 'blank' facet	
This handbook	This handbook contains suggestions on how you might use the toolkit	

Leaflet	'What does it mean to be a Master's level student?' The leaflet can be used for dissemination to interested stakeholders to provide an introduction to the project.	
Background paper	'What is Mastersness?' This paper can be circulated to participants before the workshop. It supplies more detail of the thinking behind the Mastersness framework and can act as a good foundation for discussions.	
Synthesis of case studies	Pointers for Practice This paper can help facilitators and workshop participants explore what it is about the pointers for practice that indicates Master's level.	

All resources can be found at http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/sheec/learning-from-international-practice/taught-postgraduate-student-experience.

4   Suggested workshop models

Workshop model 1: Which facets are important to our provision?

This workshop encourages participants to explore the 7 facets of Mastersness using the Mastersness cards. We have developed two variants of this activity. Both encourage groups to think about what facets are developed in their PGT provision. The first variant asks participants to prioritise which facets are most/least important in their provision as a whole. The second variant allows them to examine which facets are more important at different times throughout the lifetime of their PGT course.

There is nothing to stop organisers running both, perhaps running variant 2 after variant 1. However, because of its structure, variant 2 will take more time and organizers should build this into their plans.

Room layout: it is best to run this workshop (and indeed most toolkit workshops) so that participants can sit in groups around tables. Cabaret style is usually a good choice.

Variant 1 - Prioritising facets across our provision

Each group needs at least one set of cards. We recommend a set of cards per three participants.

1. In groups, (maximum 5) ask participants to take the cards and then prioritise these by key facets in the context of their subject discipline.

2. Arrange the cards in a 'diamond' shape with most important at the top apex, and then in descending order as in figure 2.

3. As they arrange the cards, ask participants to articulate the rationale for their choices, in particular:

      a. What was the reason for their top choice?

      b. What was the reason for their bottom choice?

4. Ask participants to compare their card sort with a neighbouring group, articulating their rationale for their choices. Are they the same? What is different? What is the same? Why?

5. Go back to your cards. Would participants now change their priorities? Tell participants to change the cards if they need to.

Figure 2

Variant 2: Prioritising facets at different times in the lifetime of a PGT course

Each group needs large sheets of newsprint-type paper and marker pens.

Each person should have one set of cards

1. Each group takes large pieces of newsprint, and maps out the key stages in their PGT course lifetime, running from top to bottom eg –Pre-entry, Admission, Induction, First assignment, Final assignment

2. For each stage, participants are asked to prioritise the facet cards, most important to the left and decreasing in importance going to the right.

3. As they arrange the cards, participants articulate the rationale for their choices, in particular:

     a. What was the reason for their top choice at each stage?

     b. What was the reason for their bottom choice at each stage?

4. Ask participants to compare their card sort with a neighbouring group, articulating their rationale for their choices. Are they the same? What is different? What is the same?

5. Groups go back to their cards. Would participants now change their priorities? Tell participants to change the cards if they need to, in the light of their dicussions.

Workshop model 2: Working with the pointers for practice

Having identified their top (and bottom) priorities, participants can use the cards in a variety of ways. Some suggestions (and one workshop model) are given below.

Session 2

A second session can be run based on the content of the other side of the facet cards. These contain 'practice points' or examples with which other people have developed learning and teaching activities in each facet area.

This workshop has two aims. The first aim is to encourage staff to reflect on the learning and teaching activities they are using at present to develop a particular facet of their PGT provision. The second aim is to encourage staff to think of new ways in which they might support the development of this facet in their PGT provision. The full workshop model for this is given below.

1. Participants take their top priority card and discuss in their group:

    a. How do you develop this facet through your PGT curriculum?

    b. What learning activities have you designed to develop this facet?

2. Flipping the card over, participants look at the examples of practice on the reverse

    a. What do you do that are similar to these activities?

    b. Are there other examples of practice that you would add?

5 Other Suggestions for Workshop Activities

- Participants use the cards to work with learning outcomes and assessment of PGT provision.– discussing how to design appropriate learning outcomes and assessment for the activities and facets on the cards.

- Participants use the cards with their own students, to help them identify what they have to do to work at Master's level.

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[i] *Susan Warring, (2011) "An analysis of learning levels within and between a degree and a diploma: New Zealand case study", Quality Assurance in Education, Vol. 19 Iss: 4, pp.441 - 450*