
Jisc Change agents' network

Case study

Scaling-up and embedding the student fellowship scheme at the University of Winchester

The University of Winchester has 6878 students, 78 per cent of whom are full-time, approximately 18 per cent are postgraduate students and 6 per cent international students (Source: 2013/4 HESA records).

The university has four faculties:

- » Arts
- » Business, law and sport
- » Education, health and social care
- » Humanities and social sciences

The university is ranked in the top four universities in England for overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey 2015 (National Student Survey results).

Student Fellowship Scheme

The Student Fellowship Scheme (SFS) recruits and trains students to work on targeted educational development projects alongside academics and professional staff. The SFS evolved from the Jisc-funded **FASTECH** project, a collaborative project involving staff and students at **The University of Winchester** and **Bath Spa University** that advanced understanding of assessment-for-learning with technology at both universities and showed the potential for engaging students as active partners in educational development projects. It is now run as a partnership between the university and the Winchester Student Union.

How the Student Fellowship Scheme works in practice

Management

The scheme is jointly funded and managed by the student union and staff in the learning and teaching development unit at the university. By working together, the SFS team supporting the initiative benefit from a broad skill set and both parties are assured that their differing perspectives and expectations are represented.

Recruiting students and staff

Students

The SFS is widely advertised across the institution, particularly via the Intranet and social media channels drawing on the valuable experience and expertise of the student union to engage students.

The selection process is rigorous and is designed to ensure that students are supported and prepared for the role, understand the commitment required and are participating for 'the right reasons'.

Potential Student Fellows are asked to submit a Curriculum Vitae together with a supporting statement outlining their interest in the scheme and indicating areas of research that are of interest to them. Applications are reviewed by the co-directors of the scheme and selected participants are invited to attend interview panels comprised of staff from the Student Union and Learning and Teaching Development.

Successful Student Fellows are then paired with staff and allocated projects.

Staff

Staff interested in participating in the scheme are likely to be recruited through one of two routes:

- » An open call inviting staff interested in working on educational development projects likely to benefit from student input.
- » Student Fellows recruited to the scheme may identify members of staff that they would like to work with or that they feel have the relevant knowledge, expertise or experience necessary for a given project.
- » The SFS managers approach staff to pair them with like-minded students through their existing networks and awareness of the institutional structure.

Both staff and students are encouraged to work closely on issues that are important to them.

Training and development

Successful Student Fellow recruits receive training and support in how to conduct social science and educational research. Like the scheme, the support model has evolved from one long initial training session to a staged approach with different activities and support offered throughout the academic year. An initial induction session gives a broad overview of the scheme, outlines the expectations of students and staff and helps to establish an informal network. This is followed a week or so later by training in social science and educational research. A series of workshops are offered to Student Fellows on topics such as project management, interviewing techniques, running focus groups, quantitative data analysis, presentation skills, and writing skills. Student Fellows are required to attend at least two of these workshops.

"I've gained some really interesting and useful experiences – from collecting my own data and learning how to use some new technology (for recording interviews/focus groups) to analysing and writing up my findings. Also, the information I discovered about my topic is hopefully something I'll be able to use in the future. Finally, I've really developed in confidence over the course of the project. "

Student Fellow, University of Winchester

Diverse projects

There are now approximately 60 Student Fellows at the university working on a diverse range of research projects that are goal or target driven. The projects are all designed to have impact on one or more aspects of the students' learning experience by increasing the level of student engagement with teaching and learning and empowering students to address any issues, problems or barriers to achieving a satisfying learning, teaching and social experience.

SFS projects fall into one of three pathways:

- » **Enhancement aimed projects** that focus on researching issues identified from key performance indicators.
- » **Evidence-led projects** that focus on researching evidence-based issues.
- » **Institutionally strategic projects** where issues of importance to the whole university are researched.

Student Fellows engage with a wide range of topics which have so far included:

- » Access to resources
- » Addressing issues identified from National Student Survey feedback
- » Addressing issues identified from feedback from module evaluations
- » Assessment and feedback
- » Curriculum design
- » Employability
- » Increasing student engagement
- » Innovative use of technology
- » Innovative ways of learning and teaching

Student Fellows receive a bursary of £600 to support their project activities and to recognise the time they commit to their work (typically around 100 hours spread across the academic year). Additional costs incurred throughout the projects may also be funded.

Scaling-up and embedding

The SFS is now a mature and accepted model that is making real change at programme level and across the institution. The model has been refined over three iterations to provide an adaptable model capable of accommodating a variety of different approaches to partnership and ways of working.

The Jisc funded **FASTECH** project provided an opportunity to trial models of partnership working and the learning from this project has helped to shape the broader fellowship scheme, enabling both students and staff to generate ideas.

Demonstrating impact is an intrinsic aspect of each project. This helps to promote the direct relevancy of the scheme and sustain engagement from staff and students. Internal dissemination of good practice is prioritised to ensure the benefits of the various projects are communicated beyond programme teams and momentum is maintained by regularly sharing progress and outputs throughout the year.

Internal dissemination activities include an annual Student Fellows conference, presentations to various committees and dedicated project pages on the university's intranet. Staff partners are instrumental in disseminating project outputs, making recommendations and taking initiatives forward through academic committees. Staff are also able to provide continuity for longer-term projects that span more than one year and ensure the learning gains from previous projects feed into future cycles.

External dissemination has included presentations and consultations by both students and staff at events such as the Jisc **Change Agent Network** (CAN), events held by **Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement** network (RAISE) and the **Staff and Educational Development Association** (SEDA).

Embedding the SFS within the Learning and Teaching Development Unit signifies the importance of the initiative to the university and ensures student engagement and partnership working is more widely embedded in the university's culture, policies and strategic planning. Student engagement activities are now a standing item on all faculty academic committees and Annual Programme reporting processes.

Emerging impact

"The scheme was an invaluable experience which allowed us to gain an understanding of how a large-scale research project works within the education environment. We have gained confidence and independence as a result of participating in this scheme."

Student Fellow, University of Winchester

The SFS has seen a bringing together of different perspectives and experiences. Students have gained from carrying out live research and from seeing how this benefits their educational experience, understanding how organisations work and key employability skills. Staff have been impressed by how much has been achieved through the SFS and partnership activities.

"Instead of complaining about something at university I have been able to strive to work hard and ensure the problem is resolved. I have been able to increase my creativity skills and believe I have been able to develop as an organised and dedicated individual."

Student Fellow 2013-14, University of Winchester

Some of the practical benefits arising from the SFS projects include:

- » Promoting the use of tablet computers in learning environments around the campus by providing staff members with devices and assistance in using them effectively.
- » Creating accessible video module guides in collaboration with programme leaders in the English, Creative Writing and American Studies department.
- » Reviewing and improving module feedback forms with student input in Performing Arts, Modern Liberal Arts, Sports Studies, Childhood Youth and Community Studies and English Literature.
- » Developing, enhancing and evaluating a foreign exchange programme across Sports Studies.

- » Developing interactive teaching resources and effective methods of teaching for difficult legal concepts in the Law curriculum.
- » The development and management of a student-led 'study buddy' scheme in Fashion, Media and Marketing.
- » The allocation of a dedicated space for commuter students on campus.

The SFS was shortlisted for the Higher Education Academy and NUS Students' Union and Institution Partnership Award in 2014 (Highly Commended) and the Student Experience Award in the Guardian University Awards 2015 (runner up).

"Students are represented on a wider range of committees and senior managers are enthusiastic about the benefits from increased student engagement and partnership working."

Dr Stuart Sims, Research Fellow for Student Engagement, University of Winchester

Lessons learned

- » The initial training and support offered primarily targeted students but now includes support for staff to ensure they too understand what the scheme is trying to achieve and are better-able to support the Student Fellows and the projects.
- » Timings are important – starting the cycle in May enables students to get ready for September.
- » Promote flexibility and avoid setting rigid boundaries to facilitate as open an approach as is possible and to encourage students and staff to explore things that don't fit anywhere else. Ensure this is backed up with clear, consistent and coherent support and guidance.

"The opportunity to devise and control our own research project (with supervision) was one of the most rewarding things we have ever done."

Student Fellow, University of Winchester

Looking to the future

In collaboration with colleagues at Exeter University and London Metropolitan University, the University of Winchester has embarked on a two-year programme to engage so called 'hard to reach' students funded through the **Higher Education Funding Council for England Catalyst Programme**. Starting in July 2015, the **Realising Engagement through Active Culture Transformation** (REACT) project is investigating the impact of a variety of forms of student engagement on the student experience, including retention and attainment. In-depth case studies of student engagement will allow a greater understanding of what works, how and why. The development and sharing of open source resources will highlight strategies, tools and frameworks that will enable institutions to learn from, and with, each other. These evidence-based models will then be shared and embedded in a further ten universities.

Find out more

- » Student Fellows website www.winchester.ac.uk/studentfellows
- » Student Fellows project profiles <https://studentfellows.wordpress.com/>
- » Visit the blog at <http://seed-research-centre.com>
- » REACT website <http://www.studentengagement.ac.uk/>

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