

Case Study for Academic Advising

Title - Establishing the Academic Advisor as a key learning tool

Overview - By embedding the Academic Advisor as a seminar tutor within the core skills module at level 4, we signpost them as a key contact from induction. This relationship building is central to the first year as each student learns the generic skills required for academic success, and begins to plan their personal and professional development. The focus on skills and development is then central to level 5 & 6, but provided as an 'added extra'. The AA continues to be involved with the student on a 1:1 basis at key points over each academic year, as well as providing workshops focusing on personal and professional development tasks which are embedded in core modules. The AA is responsible for marking these tasks, which in turn encourages students' engagement with the role, and the learning and teaching resources associated with both academic and personal success. In addition we provide a range of activities for students to take part in, as well as a central BB site. Engagement with these on-line resources is encouraged, with links made to formative tasks as outlined above.

Benefits -

1. Embedding the Academic Advisor within the core study skills module at level 4 offers an opportunity to begin relationship building from induction, with a focus on success at University and on graduation
2. By developing the curriculum in collaboration across each level, students can see the benefits of engaging with their AA to utilise the resources provided to improve their marks across a range of modules at each level
3. Encouraging the use of a key contact at each level - particularly in large programmes - provides opportunities for regular support and guidance, as well as embedding the student voice through regular feedback opportunities
4. Dedicated skills modules at level 4 encourage students to focus on getting the basics of academic study 'right' through the use of both formative and summative assessment tasks which are linked directly to their core programme of study
5. Providing a schedule of opportunities, along with a key resources, across level 5 & 6 encourages independent learning, but ties key aspects into core modules thus prompting engagement with those opportunities and resources

Aim - Traditionally students have not been engaged with core skills modules - feedback suggests that the benefits associated with engagement are not clear and seen as un-useful. The aim then was to tie key skills learning into modules across each programme of study. At Level 4 this involved a dedicated core module which focused on generic skills and

development, but related directly to the specific programme of study. At Level 5 & 6 the Academic Advisor provides support, as well as learning and teaching, around specific tasks within core summative assessments which relate to personal and professional development. Students are also encouraged to engage with a range of resources, events and opportunities which are independent in nature, but tie in directly to those summative tasks across both levels

Approach

Course/ Subject Level - 4, 5 & 6

Size of Cohort

Very Large (200+)

Credit Bearing at level 4 in core modules as a whole. Non-credit bearing at both level 5 & 6 with summative assessments embedded in core credit-bearing modules.

Student contact hours

		Seminars / small groups	one to one student tutor meetings
Level 4	Sem1	18	2
	Sem2	18	2
Level 5	Sem1	5	2
	Sem2	5	2
Level 6	Sem1	5	2
	Sem2	5	2

The role of the AA is continually being developed as a result of feedback from staff and students. Essentially it is the Academic Advisor - as a central character throughout the 3 year degree - who guides students across all aspects of their generic skills learning, and encourages them to reflect objectively on those skills, as they plan for the year ahead, and for success on graduation

In order to encourage continuity we have developed a 'checklist' for both staff and students alike. For each calendar week a prompt is provided so that each tutor - and their group - know where they should be and what they should be doing throughout the course of the year. In addition, the teaching team engages in regular feedback and discussion to continually evaluate provision and embed the student voice as central to that provision.

The collaborative nature of the module has involved input from staff within QESS, Professional Services, LiTs and the E-Learning Team. We embedded the 'my study toolkit', into the teaching schedule and 'checklist' but are in the process of changing over to the skills4study resource. We use training materials from professional services for experiential learning workshops around the completion of 'extenuating circumstances' forms. Our information advisor provided us with a range of podcasts to assist students in finding key readings, and developed an interactive quiz for students to test their own knowledge. We are working with the E-Learning Team to develop the range of scheduled activities for students at level 5 & 6, and they also provide staff teaching in relation to BB Collaborate, the use of E-Portfolio's and new technologies to monitor attendance.

At level 4 we register attendance within the module. At level 5 & 6 we monitor engagement with BB resources and there is an expectation that timetabled sessions and 1:1's will be attended. Lack of engagement will lead to contact being made through professional services staff.

Outcomes:

This is a new module rolling out in September 2015, which has been developed as a result of substantial changes to previous provision.

Initially when changes were made to that provision, staff resisted efforts to move away from 'talking at' students, to 'working with' students. However, once those changes had taken place, and staff had experienced the module in its entirety, there has been a noticeable change in staff engagement and interest in further collaborations.

There is no doubt that the level of engagement exhibited by the AA had a marked effect on the engagement of students across the year. AAs who were keen on the changes tended to have higher attendance levels throughout the year. Less engaged AAs had fewer students attending which points to a lower level of engagement and some indeed chose not to teach on the module for the following year.

However, now that we are in our second year of that provision, staff have become more engaged with evaluating and developing materials for the new module roll out in September. This increased level of engagement by the staff does suggest that students are more likely to continue to engage and attend, and hopefully this impetus will continue as we begin the new module in September.

Another key factor is the collaboration that takes place on the module. By using staff from across the University to embed key skills into the module, internal staff can learn from good practice across other areas, and use that to develop their own knowledge and understanding of key issues.

The decision to remove the dedicated module at level 5 was partly taken as a result of the improvements in relationship between AA and student. It makes sense that the student has one key contact over the course of the three years, because the skills around personal and professional development are generic, and a solid relationship will encourage objective reflection and support throughout the student's learning journey.

The move towards providing a shell of activities which are both face to face and provided through the VLE will encourage students to attend and engage with resources which suit their own specific needs, and the development of summative tasks within other core modules will ensure some level of engagement amongst all students.

Recommendations

A good starting point would be to outline your overall aims and then seek buy in from staff that are likely to be a part of the teaching team. Without this level of engagement, it follows that students will be less engaged with the programme of activities. Once a team has been established, links across the University are very helpful to guide and support the development of teaching materials, and the transference of good practice from one area of the organisation to another.

Once a solid outline for the teaching schedule is under development, buy in of the wider staff group is important on several levels. Firstly, it should be the case that collaboration can take place across each level of study. This should mean that key texts and learning tools from across each level can be embedded within the skills modules to give students the time and space to engage with them, which in turn should impact on learning within those academic modules.; Secondly, in terms of preparing the students for onward progression, it should also be possible to embed learning tools and resources which will prepare students for what is to come in the year ahead.

When providing resources outside of credit bearing modules, it is important to maintain the level of collaboration between the teaching team and the wider subject group, to ensure that students can see the link between the extra-curricular resources and success within the credit-bearing modules, which in turn will prompt engagement.

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