

Evaluation proforma

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| Faculty/Directorate | HWB |
| Department/area | Bioscience and Chemistry |
| Project title | Enhancing the postgraduate taught student curriculum through strengthen links between creating knowledge and shaping futures |
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| Abstract including action research (or other project), working hypothesis, info from theory of change, change which is anticipated etc. (Around 250 words) | Postgraduate taught (PGRT) education at SHU should be at the forefront of knowledge, ensuring students are equipped to meet the needs of employers or further study. The research reputation of the institution was found to be an influencing factor when conducting research for staff and for the research aspirations of the students. This was less important if the student had alternative goals and in which case the skill base of the academics was key. A strong feeling that research informed teaching improves career prospects of the student and that conducting it builds a strong skills base in the staff. Together, these aspects enhance the students' learning experience. However, the communication of staff research activities to students could be more effective as students do not always feel part of the research community. Future learning from this work would be to become more vocal about the research conducted at a local level. |
| How students are being involved | Yes, throughout the project. We had a Student researcher to support the project and evaluations from students. |
| How project is being evaluated | <p>On-line questionnaire targeted towards students and staff were created to gain understanding of the research experience. Responses from staff and students from across HWB, ACES and D&S were obtained. Focus groups were conducted with staff and postgraduate students in order to further explore some of the issues raised within the online questionnaires. Three focus groups were conducted in two departments as part of this project. Two focus groups were conducted in the Biosciences department, one with staff and one with students studying for Masters degrees. A further focus group was conducted with students in Sport</p> <p>Thematic analysis was used in order to identify and report on patterns within the focus group transcripts whilst maintaining the rich detail of the qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This involved 'the identification of emerging patterns and categories from iterative reviews of the dataset' (Mabry, 2008: 218). The researcher used a process of inductive coding to analyse the data, producing thematic categories which are reported on in the section below. Analysing of the focus group transcripts to identify themes pertinent to each group, drafts of the analysis were circulated to other researchers on this project to try and ensure validity.</p> |

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| <p>Key things What's worked well? Have you achieved what you set out to do? If not why not? What have been the Highlights?</p> | <p>Five key themes were elicited from the surveys and focus group data:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The research reputation of the institution is important for conducting research and for students with research aspirations. Academics perceived that research reputation of the institution has an impact on students. This impact was indirect, though in terms of the ability to undertake funded research, and therefore to engage in research-informed teaching. Around 40% of students were aware of the research/consultancy units within their department and the areas with a research/consultancy reputation. Students displayed mixed views with those whose aspirations were for PhD study placing importance on reputation whereas others valued skills and expertise of the staff. 2. Research informed teaching improves career prospects. The research/consultancy work carried out by teaching staff has motivated over 60% of students to pursue a career in research. Staff generally felt that research-informed teaching improved students' career prospects, as well as facilitating any existing career goals that they might have, especially for those interested in pursuing an academic career. This was echoed by those students whose aspirations were for PhD study, however those wishing to progress to alternative careers placed more value on the technical expertise obtained during study. 3. Conducting research builds a strong skills base that enhances the students' learning experience. Academics perceived that engaging in research and using this to inform their teaching was vital in ensuring a positive learning experience for students. Students noted how the new skills and competencies that they developed as a result of their teaching was something that they valued. They also thought that carrying out their own research was very important in learning practical/subject specific skills and providing a fulfilling learning experience. As well as this, personal student research was considered very important with regards to student's future career goals. 4. Communication of staff research activities to students could be more effective. . Communication of staff research activities to students could be more effective. Academics indicated that they talked through research with students in lectures and in practical settings and that this was important in making the learning real. The use of the papers in teaching was also brought out. 78% of students were aware of the research/consultancy output produced by departmental staff, including books and journal articles. Over 50% of students were aware that teaching staff were undertaking funded research/consultancy. However, the origins of the research may not be clear to the student whom felt under-informed about current research activities and might not be aware the research is the staff's own. 5. Students place high value on being part of a research community, but always feel it. There was no explicit mention of the extent to which academics in the focus groups perceived postgraduate students to be part of the research community. This suggests that there may be a lack of recognition of Masters students as contributors to research communities. Over half of students were aware of research seminars and meetings being held in their department and less than 20% of students had attended a departmental research meeting and even fewer had attended a research conference. The students themselves often feel that they were too inexperienced to contribute to the research in a meaningful way but placed high value on being part of an established research program and recognition of the part they have played. |
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| | <p>The ability to perform research was felt to be key part of the learning experience. Research involvement gives authenticity and was felt to build skills and technical knowledge critical to the delivery of a quality program.</p> |
| <p>Barriers</p> | <p>The program of research conducted here was timed in response to a Hallam guild call with start and end dates between June and September. A major barrier in the collection of data was access to both staff and students. Given the timing of the the project within semester three many students had completed their studies and so were not available, staff were either on leave or engaged in their own research.</p> <p>Face to face contact with staff and students is critical to the data collection. This requires an active commitment to interaction. It will be critical going forward to have clarity on the level of commitment required to gain broad meaningful data.</p> <p>Identifying student researchers with the skills needed within the the time frame was challenging. A significant proportion of the time was taken up with this task.</p> <p>The provision of admin support was requested, however the guild due to HR implications were not able to fund this aspect. Although the admin staff did engage with the project of her own goodwill, this meant the organisation of focus groups and coordination fell to the study lead.</p> <p>Had the funding given to the project been able to be used over a longer time frame deeper and wider data sets could have been obtained for no extra cost to the guild. Interim reports could have been generated to demonstrate progress.</p> |
| <p>Enablers</p> | <p>Student researchers were critical to the outcomes of this project within the time frame. The option to work with students skilled in the data analysis has meant meaningful information has been obtained. It should be noted that were staff and students were available engagement in the work was high. (last sentence doesn't make sense)</p> <p>Incentives to attend focus groups were critical to gaining engagement.</p> |
| <p>Replicability, transferability, scalability</p> | <p>The study has developed both online questionnaires and focus group materials that are suitable for use at an institutional level. Given access to staff and students the study can without any changes in ethics or approach be enlarged to incorporate other areas of the University.</p> <p>The study can be rolled out with only minor modification to undergraduate programs. This would require a larger team and active engagement of a staff group.</p> |
| <p>Any other comments</p> | <p>A database of skills within the guild could be created. This would allow study organisers to connect with people more quickly. The ability to use admin staff to coordinate meetings and administration would free researchers to undertake data collection.</p> <p>Gaining contact to other guild members was not easy, however as the guild develops this will become accessible.</p> |