**Sheffield Hallam University**

**Project overview (the ‘what’)**

The project, entitled ***Whose flexibility? Being, belonging and becoming***  will help us to scope a range of diverse voices in order to help us in beginning to understand what flexible learning might mean to Sheffield Hallam in both systems and pedagogy across the student lifecycle. This should challenge some assumptions underpinning whose voices get heard, why and how. Given SHU's strategic commitment to inclusivity, the approach resonates with Tinto’s (2008) recognition that access without support is not opportunity. We will explore how our own 'conditions of flexibility' might need to be structured in aiming to meet this agenda.

**How**

By participating in this SEP we are developing a critical understanding of our approach to flexible learning by exploring institutional assumptions at all levels enabling us to begin to scope needs, infrastructure and pedagogical shifts. We are doing this by identifying a range of key informants and asking them by email survey to give an institutional assessment against Barnett’s 12 Conditions of Flexibility. In addition to Barnett’s 12 questions to explore, we are also asking for opinions on the questions, per se. We are using a snowballing technique in which we ask respondents to identify 3 further key informants whom will then receive the same set of questions in the second wave of surveys, including students. Our involvement will initiate a move towards defining an evidence-based flexibility profile and help determine further developments needed in pursuit of relevant conditions of flexibility. Longer-term, this will help us build some competing scenarios of what institutional flexibility could look like at Sheffield Hallam.

**Achievements to date**

The first wave of questionnaires has been sent out and these are being analysed now by a sub-group of the larger steering group. The second set – gleaned from the snowballing technique – has also just been sent out. Once these have been analysed in May, the evidence gathered will be used to construct a summary that will be circulated to key decision-makers in the University and we will also be constructing skeleton scenarios to help envision our possible future direction as a flexible learning institute. At this stage many of the achievements – other than the analyses already described – are about raising awareness. We have already reported the project at the University Learning and Teaching forum and have been asked to go back there to report key findings in June. We will also be running a workshop at the University Learning and Teaching Conference in the same month about the Flexible Learning project.

**Challenges, barriers and solutions**

* Time to undertake this work properly within the specified timeframe which is probably a tension for many projects. *Possible solution – be realistic with what is achievable within allotted timeframe but also plan for sustainability, post-project.*
* Snowballing techniques – although we gained an initial 50% response rate – many respondents appeared reluctant to name colleagues and / or students as key informants. Additionally, the use of an email survey doesn’t always encourage fulsome responses. *Possible solution – not sure one is needed as this was only ever going to be a very embryonic snapshot of the less heard voices within the Institution. It does give us something to build upon for future work.*
* Gaining wider buy-in. We do have the support of a Pro Vice Chancellor championing this project but need to consider something juicy to emerge as a consequence to avoid it becoming an academic exercise. *Possible solution –* *consult with key decision-makers by offering some tangible ways forward rather than only being about reportage.*

**Feedback requested from other groups**

We think that even hearing about others’ efforts to address flexibility will be helpful in any event but also any further ideas to help with some of the identified challenges as listed would be welcome.

Sheffield Hallam Flexible Learning SEP Project Team – April 2015