



SDF – sponsored by the Leadership Foundation

SaHOOTS Final Report November 2013

1. Introduction

In 2012 the Staff Development Forum (SDF) agreed to commission a sector wide project about putting Students at the centre of everything we do in Higher Education called 'Students at the Heart Of Our and Their System' (SaHOOTS). The student experience has become a priority for HE/OD staff following the 2011 Government White Paper 'Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System' and the reports coming out of the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) rising up the Higher Education agenda as the reality of large tuition fees and the expectations of all stakeholders, particularly students and parents is altered from the old grant funded relationship. Staff developers as one result are increasingly being asked to provide a wide range of support to different groups. The concept of 'service ethos' in HE is moving beyond provision of 'Customer Skills' training to consideration of cultural change, structural adjustment, incentivisation and other developments to bring about systemic attitudinal and behavioural change within HEIs. The language as well as behaviours is changing, with students in many cases being referred to as 'partners'.

The SDF are uniquely placed to lead on producing a holistic programme with supporting resources, information and networks with an approach that can be adopted by the Regional Staff Development Groups as well as individual HEIs and others.

Original terms of reference

- To review current good practice in staff and organisation development in HEIs aimed at supporting the student experience and compile an inventory of good practice;
- To identify any current gaps in development support in the sector and consider ways to fill these

- To explore ways in which Organisation Development philosophy, thinking and practice can be utilised to develop an holistic approach to enhancing the student experience
- To inform the SDF community regarding the issues and equip the community with the relevant tools to advance the student agenda in their HEIs
- To produce a good practice resource guide for the sector on supporting the student experience through staff and organisational development approaches
- The project itself will demonstrate best use of collaborative working at a distance
- To disseminate the project findings and outcomes to our affiliates and networks

2. Summary

The project set out to try and achieve several things including running and testing events to learn and build from them, collating and posting resources on the SDF web site, exploring best practice and developing a template with guidance for distribution to the Regional Groups. A lot has been learned throughout the duration of this short project but in particular that there is no central focus or commonality around responsibility for staff development in the small number of the HEIs that we came into contact with relating directly to staff and the student experience. The activities engage staff with some responsibility for the development process in different areas of HEI structures. Attendees on the mini-conferences came from a wide range of internal disciplines from Academic, Careers, OD, Staff Development and other dedicated posts.

High level posts have been created to oversee Student Experience but in terms of responsibility for translating high level strategies into development opportunities for HE staff it is far less clear.

It is only when more events have been run locally and regionally that we will begin to get a better and bigger picture. In the meantime involvement in moving the development agenda forward in partnership with our students is a role that the SDF can successfully undertake with a platform of experience, expertise and resources. This has been a start on something potentially quite big for Staff Development and the roles within it. The community could become a conduit for professional development across the whole student experience agenda. SaHOOTS should be taken as a launching pad for further development and a chance to draw together

various professional strands and encourage engagement with teams that do not normally come together, as a brokerage or facilitation role.

Regional Groups now have the opportunity to tap into this resource and help grow it. There are SDF grants available for Regional events and consultancy from the project team where advice would be provided freely.

3. Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this final report and contents therein is to act as a stimulus and provide support for HEIs wanting to become more coherent with this strand of their work. It seeks to address the original terms of reference, focus on areas that are not given sufficient attention currently in HEIs Student Support development strategies, include examples discovered of good practice in this area, signpost resources which will be available to the Regional Groups via the SDF web site as well as summarising what has been achieved to date with recommendations for future developments and strategies.

4. Project Team

The Project Team included the following people and we would like to express our gratitude to everyone (including contributors not mentioned here) for their time, energy and expertise:

- **Matt Levi**, FSDF, HE Consultant, Matt Levi Development and SaHOOTS project facilitator (matt.levibrookside@gmail.com)
- **Meriel Box**, Head of Staff Development at Liverpool John Moores University, FSDF (m.box@ljmu.ac.uk)
- **Jill Lees**, HR Manager – Development at the University of Hertfordshire (j.e.lees@herts.ac.uk)
- **Sally Wilson**, FSDF, HE Consultant, Sally Wilson Associates (sally.wilson@gmx.co.uk)
- **Pam Fitzsimmons**, Learning and Development Manager, University of the West of England (Pam.Fitzsimmons@uwe.ac.uk)

5. Review of Terms of Reference

To review current good practice in staff and organisation development in HEIs aimed at supporting the student experience and compile an inventory of good practice

At the beginning of the project requests were sent out to the SDF community to send examples of good practice and resources. A lot of material was gathered and is available on the SDF web site.

To identify any current gaps in development support in the sector and consider ways to fill these

Feedback from participants attending the Hertfordshire and Manchester workshops suggests that local provision would be popular and stimulate a big response regarding attendance. Attendees were from a range of disciplines and so a possible 'developing the developers' workshop to support the delivery both regionally and locally of the template provided as an accompaniment to this report would be beneficial. If programmes are delivered locally as we anticipate they will gain a much wider understanding of current development needs.

To explore ways in which Organisation Development philosophy, thinking and practice can be utilised to develop a holistic approach to enhancing the student experience

A pilot BOS 'pulse survey' was conducted with the NWHESDG members and results informed the content of a 24 hrs CPD retreat ran by and for the North West Higher Education Staff Development Group in January 2013: 'Enhancing the Student Experience' with all outcomes posted on the SDF web site. A key outcome from the survey, exercises and discussion at the retreat was that Staff Developers shared a perception that they did not recognise their own role as directly contributing towards enhancing the Student Experience. This enabled colleagues to rethink their practice and find new ways to add more value to the student experience by making the connection explicit through their development of all staff.

The NW Regional retreat and the mini-conferences at Hertfordshire and Manchester provided ideas in the evaluations which have been integrated into the design of a template for use by regional groups.

(The OD in HE Group had a discussion about the project at their meeting in February 2013 at which support for the project was agreed.)

To inform the SDF community regarding the issues and equip the community with the relevant tools to advance the student agenda in their HEIs

This report and accompanying documents will be discussed by SDF Executive, SDF Council and disseminated via the SDF to Regional groups.

To produce a good practice resource guide for the sector on supporting the student experience through staff and organisational development approaches

A model workshop, facilitators guide and a delegate pack have been produced. These may require revisions once local events have run. This is only one approach and other examples of good practice and approaches can be

added to the SDF SaHOOTS web site of examples, resources and online materials. These are signposted in the model workshop, facilitators guide and delegate pack.

The project itself will demonstrate best use of collaborative working at a distance

The project team were widely dispersed geographically and met only once on a face to face basis, in Birmingham, where Andy Wilson was able to join in discussions around the technology for part of the agenda via Skype. The programme organisation was organised by phone, a Skype conference and e-mails. Delivery can be dispersed via the Regional Groups to suit local needs and advice centrally can be given using the technologies. No mini-conference took place using such technology, nor podcasts produced.

To disseminate the project findings and outcomes to our affiliates and networks

A dissemination strategy will see information going out to interested parties and be available on the SDF web site.

- The report and associated documents will go to the SDF Council Regional Groups
- This should include the UK ODHE, QAA, UHR, Leadership Foundation for HE, AUA, HEDG & HEaTED

6. Deliverables

1. Project team established (above) with expertise in advising and/or running an event
2. Hertfordshire event successfully run and evaluated
3. Manchester event successfully run and evaluated
4. Resources freely available on SDF web site
5. Interim progress report to SDF Council
6. Birmingham event organised but postponed due to low take up (4 delegates)
7. Final draft report written
8. Templates for a programme, facilitator guide and delegate pack drafts written

7. Recommendations

The first six recommendations can be implemented immediately; the next six require further discussion.

1. To circulate an agreed final report to all Regional Groups and place on the SDF web site.
2. To issue the workshop template and accompanying resources for all of the regional groups so that SaHOOTS workshops can be delivered 'locally' and to offer support for these workshops where required.
3. To encourage Regional Groups to take up the challenge of not only roll out but responsibility for the continuation of professional development in this area. This might include pro-active encouragement to use their SDF grant for this purpose.
4. To enhance, promote and continue to develop the resources library by immediately inviting contributors to the SDF SaHOOTS resources web page.
5. Explore a wider platform and promote to try and engage more Staff Developers/OD professionals/Careers Advisers in the process.
6. Integrate into SDF marketing strategy and activities.
7. Offer a SaHOOTS facilitators workshop.
8. The project recommends the use of e-learning systems as support for student experience. The SDF's Fellow and e-learning expert Dr Andrew Wilson has offered advice and suggestions on how this might progress. This would mean considering linking the roll out phase more firmly in the JISC digital literacies agenda and might involve 2 or more different digital approaches integrated into events, Dr Andrew Wilson to advise.
9. To consider producing podcasts from previous keynote speakers as a key resource.
10. Look at roll out funding issues and see if SDF groups might be interested in using their grant to support local activities. There is no further central SDF funding for this activity.
11. Institutional colleagues prepare for QAA audit fully aware of the emphasis placed on the student experience and ensure that appropriate metrics (for their institutions) are evidenced. Staff Development/OD/HR to help support this process.
12. Send a copy of the report to key stakeholders, in particular to Graeme Osborn, HEFCE Board Member with portfolio responsibility for the student interest who should be invited to comment and invited to address the SDF

perhaps at the SDF Spring Conference 8. Outstanding and on-going project tasks and activities

There are a number of things requiring attention before completion of the project (i.e. finalisation of this report with the template and covering letter to Regional Groups). These are

- Mini-conference reports and evaluations to be posted on the SDF web site
- Develop an inventory of good practice after roll out (SDF Professional Co-ordinator)
- Seek further addition of materials around good practice with existing and new developments to SDF website asap for inclusion within the curated materials

9. Questions

- Consider future e-learning approach with a view to offering advice and guidance – who?
- Impetus for roll out – what role will the SDF take if any when left to regions and individual HEI's
- Continued collation and organisation of resources and best practice – who?
- Look at possible funding (a bid) on a much wider scale to enhance roll out and further develop awareness, resources, materials, capacity and delivery competence – who?

10. Other issues raised

- The academic community is addressing student experience in its own way, more often than not without any involvement/support from OD/HE/L&D/SD. This was also reflected in few academic colleagues attending the mini-conferences. It is the academic effort that will be measured the most in various ways.
- It is essential therefore that the supporting role of OD/HE/L&D/SD is to engage proactively and bring their influence, skills, resources and professionalism in a drive together to help bring about cultural change and thinking.
- The project bid referenced the driver of the QAA draft intention to include assessment of OD/HE/L&D/SD involvement in supporting the student experience. This is reflected in the model workshop although there are yet no clear guidelines from QAA on this detail.
- The student experience topic is an important one and our experience over the duration confirms the passion and necessity to address the issues but the engagement levels have been relatively low so far.

- There is perhaps a lack of understanding, involvement and impetus within the SDF membership, with some exceptions, in recognising the need for OD/LD/SD to provide active support for the student experience, whether directly or indirectly, but in measureable form. This is proactively included in the model workshop.
- External levers may help. It was the QAA consultation paper that posited OD/LD/SD being accountable for their input/support for the student experience through Institutional Audit. New guidance (September 2013) has been published on explaining the learning experience and responding to student feedback (see):

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/PressReleases/Pages/knowledge-is-power.aspx>

A report, **Students: clear expectations of HE** has just been published (see):

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/PressReleases/Pages/Students-clear-expectations-of-HE.aspx>

QAA information and guidance

[UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Chapter B5: Student engagement](#)

The QAA has been approached regarding an audit update and they have responded by referring to the QAA website and in particular the references already included above.

Although there are no specific references to audit there are clear indications about the relevance, importance and feedback mechanisms that are in place and which will be enhanced in the future. These findings are now being published on the QAA website specific to individual HEIs. This is ultimately a positive driver going forward. However, the focus is purely on learning and teaching and the project was looking at providing holistic support across HE staff development.

- The Secretary for State for BIS has appointed Graeme Osborn to the HEFCE Board, with specific responsibility for the student interest. Chair of the HEFCE Board, Tim Melville-Ross is quoted as saying:

'I'm delighted to welcome Graeme to the HEFCE Board. His appointment reflects HEFCE's long-term commitment to protecting and promoting the interests of students. Since the 2011 Higher Education white paper 'Students at the Heart of the System' HEFCE has been developing its role to actively consider the student interest perspective in all policy matters and to become involved in related new areas and initiatives'. See recommendation 12.

In addition to the suggestion to invite Graeme Osborn to comment on the project report and engage him as a Keynote Speaker at the SDF Spring Conference 2014; it would be useful to capture his early thoughts via an 'interview' or podcast and post this with the other online project resources on the SDF website.

