

## **Student-Led Teaching Awards 2011-12 Final Summary and Report**

### **Executive Summary**

This report looks at the achievements of year one, brings in additional data from participating unions and maps the implications of this for the second iteration of the project.

The UK-wide student-led teaching awards project, run in partnership between NUS and the Higher Education Academy, has been successful in its first year.

Initial benchmarking found roughly equal provision across larger institution, but more patchy teaching awards provision on small and specialist campuses. The project has created several examples of how awards work equally well at small and specialist institutions as they do on larger campuses.

All of the pilot group participants reported that being part of the project was a positive experience, with 95% of participating unions reporting that the scheme itself was either important or very important to their success.

Where the project has identified room for improvement is where established schemes need to adjust their approach and/or devote more resource for them to have an impact on teaching and learning at an institution. It will take more than one academic year of support for these schemes to work towards using their awards as a catalyst for institutional change, so the continuation of the project is crucial to the embedding of such practice.

SLTA schemes have been very well received by academic staff, students and institutional management alike. They have proven to be a great addition to union calendars, and have been an effective way to raise the profile of teaching. However, we believe that SLTAs can be (and do) much more than this, and this is reflected in our approach to the project's second year.

### **Success Criteria**

As articulated in original project plan:

- *20 universities are supported in developing and enhancing SLTA schemes in 2011/12 and at least 15 implement those schemes during the year.*

21 students' unions were selected to receive support at the beginning of the year. Only one of those had to withdraw from the project, citing capacity reasons. Thus 20 schemes have been created this year. All of the participating students' unions reported that being part of the SLTA project was a positive experience, with 95% of participants naming the project as either important or very important to the success of their awards.

- *Collection of 10 case studies from unions on concrete improvements on teaching practice as a result of learning and teaching awards which will be showcased at the National Event and online.*

Analysis of current provision found that, apart from maybe two notable exceptions in Scotland, students' unions were not directly using their awards to trigger changes to teaching practices. (Although it could be argued that SLTAs had indirect impact by raising the profile of teaching and celebrating success). So, whilst students' unions outside of the scheme were supported to improve their

awards over the course of the year (through events, individual advice and online discussion), these improvements have mostly been process-related.

This highlights the need to do more work in this area in year two of the project (see below).

- *At least 110 people at national event for students' unions and institutions on excellent teaching*

The national event, held in conjunction with the student engagement project over two days in Nottingham, attract 145 delegates. They were a mix of student officers, SU staff, academics and professional services staff. Delegates gave an average event satisfaction score of 8.1 out of 10; one of the highest scoring NUS events of the year.

- *Online video tutorial accessed by at least 40% of unions*

During the benchmarking study, students' unions without SLTA provision told us that the resource that they would most like to see from the project was a printed guide to creating and developing SLTAs. In response to this, we created 'A Guide to Recognising your Teachers,' a short guide containing advice, information and case studies of successful awards from a wide range of unions.

- *Development of [www.studentledteachingawards.org.uk](http://www.studentledteachingawards.org.uk) including UK wide case studies.*

The SLTA project website has been evolved throughout the year with briefings, articles and case studies from a wide range of students' unions. However, a second year SLTA project would place more emphasis on unions generating content for the site, perhaps being incentivised to do so as it has been challenging to obtain suitable content for the website this year.

- *National debate within sector around L&T award schemes informed by a discussion paper.*

By engaging student officers, SU staff, academics and professional services staff alike in the project (see below), we have successfully started a debate around student views of teacher excellence in the HE sector. The HEA-led analysis of student nomination data will further this, and hopefully create a pedagogical case for SLTAs that can inform a comprehensive discussion paper.

## **Pilot Group (Group one)**

### *Modes of Delivery*

It was interesting to see how different unions approached the task of setting up SLTAs. Their approaches are reflective, I think, of the ways in which the union and institution have previously operated. This suggests we would not be able to convince unions to take similar approaches to delivering awards (important if we are to consider national SLTAs).

BCU used student learning and teaching champions (paid for by the university) to deliver their Extra Mile awards. Newport used their grant to appoint and pay three student interns to deliver their awards. Sunderland appointed a working group of events management students to deliver their awards.

### *Setting of Categories and Criteria*

The group was split almost equally between those who simply took categories and criteria developed in Scotland, and those that took a more reflective approach and developed their own categories and criteria based on their own priorities and experiences.

Examples: Oxford linked their two categories to the university's teaching review so that nomination data could be linked to institutional priorities. Staffs Union took some of their categories from their priority campaigns in education and beyond (e.g. green teaching practices, accessibility considerations).

### *Publicity*

Unions tended to employ traditional methods of publicity, with roadshows, lecture 'shout-outs', posters and website takeovers all being used. There does not seem to be much correlation between method or volume of publicity and the number of nominations received, suggesting that the traditional barriers to student engagement might also be a factor with SLTAs. However, unions that reported being disappointed with the quantity of nominations received tend to resolve to increase the volume of publicity and begin the campaign earlier.

Examples: Brunel carried out a viral campaign, placing penguins (or 'Benguins') around campus to create a buzz before officially launching their awards. SU Arts organised a roadshow across its 15 campuses to allow students to create prints visualising great teaching. These were used to form an exhibition at which the awards were presented.

### *Shortlisting and Judging*

Participants reported that judging and shortlisting were both much more time-consuming than they had expected and planned for. However, those who had discerned (and made public) criteria from the outset found the process easier than those that had not.

### *Awards*

Most (in fact, all but one) of the participating unions opted to present their awards at a formal ceremony, which was by far the most cost intensive aspect of the project. However, unions reported that one of the most valuable aspects of the awards was having the opportunity to bring staff and students together to celebrate success. Thus, unions should not be discouraged from having formal ceremonies/ events, but we must be clear that this is not the only model of successful awards and that SLTAs need not be as cost intensive.

## **Additional Successes/ Impact**

### *a) Recognition of professional services*

In response to union discussion on the merits of recognising professional services staff alongside academics in awards, we worked with the AUA (Association of University Administrators) to develop a model award using AUA's professional behaviours framework. Details of this were disseminated to students' unions both within and outside of the project with a briefing and an article in AUA magazine.

### *b) Support to create SLTAs on a Shoestring*

One particularly interesting finding from the benchmarking study was that, of the unions who did not currently have teaching awards, the vast majority were deterred by the perceived cost of running schemes.

This could be due to the fact that, early in the project, the schemes highlighted were quite well developed and costly. This perhaps suggested to those considering such awards that it is only possible to deliver them with a large budget and staff support.

This research finding inspired us to produce a briefing entitled 'SLTAs on a Shoestring,' containing advice and guidance for SUs to create SLTAs that are no more resource intensive than strictly necessary, but can still have a real positive impact on campus. This briefing was well received; made available at NUS and HEA events and for download from the NUS and SLTA project websites.

*c) National coverage of SLTAs*

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/oct/17/lecturers-win-student-awards?INTCMP=SRCH>

*d) Other instances of practice sharing and embedding in wider work*

- Highlighting the student role in recognising teacher excellence and how course reps can be engaged with the discourse at NUS' Course Rep Conference (December 2011)
- Workshop on how SLTAs fit with Quality Enhancement and Assurance at Quality Still Matters event (March 2012)
- Workshop on the power of student-led teaching awards at NUS Higher Education Zone conference (October 2011)
- Roundtable discussion on students' perceptions of teacher excellence at SLTN conference (February 2012)
- Presenting at AUA Annual Conference to highlight the value of recognising professional services staff alongside academics in student-led awards (April 2012)
- Presenting a poster and facilitating a discussion on SLTAs at HEA Wales Annual Conference (April 2012)

### **Additional Participant Feedback/ Impact Examples**

- As a result of the campaign planning activity at the final SLTA training session (8 May, Birmingham), BCUSU successfully secured funding from Birmingham City University to create an online hub of good teaching practice based on students' views
- University of Glamorgan are now to discontinue their own staff-led awards in favour of SLTAs (which they have agreed to fund)
- The University of Gloucestershire has now written SLTAs into their new 5 year strategic plan for teaching and learning.
- Brighton SU increased their SLTA nominations by 168% on the previous year
- University of Kent SU prepared a report for each faculty highlighting the characteristics and techniques of good teachers as mentioned by students
- Manchester Metropolitan SU made their judging and shortlisting significantly more student-led, using external parties as advisors on methodology
- Over 10 students' unions (that we know about) added in categories or criteria to recognise professional services staff alongside teachers in their SLTAs after seeing the joint NUS/AUA briefing on this.
- Brunel's awards were used as an example of engaging students in shaping their learning by the Leadership Foundation

### **Investigating the Impact of Student-Led Teaching Awards**

During the first iteration of the project, it became apparent that students' unions had different motivations for creating SLTAs, and that there was some difference in the impact that they saw SLTAs having.

#### *SLTAs Embedded in Core Union Work*

To investigate this further, three workshop-style focus groups were conducted in July 2012. Participants were asked to map where they saw their SLTAs sitting with other education work and show the links between the different projects and campaigns. Happily, all participants showed strong links with existing structures (such as representation) and policy formation. However, unions (especially those outside of the NUS/HEA scheme) were not always able to articulate the link to campaigns and evidence bases. This suggests that more work needs to be done to show how SLTAs can be used in this way.

#### *Important Impacts Mainly Process-Related*

When participants were asked what they thought the most important impact of SLTAs was, around 50% said that it was the strengthening of the relationship between the union and institution, 25% said it was the increased focus on teaching quality and the rest were equally split between 'staff appreciation,' support of other campaigns' and 'engaging students in education.' This suggests that schemes need to embed further before the focus can be shifted onto making concrete improvements on teaching and learning.

#### *National Student-Led Teaching Awards not a Priority*

Whilst focus group participants liked the idea of giving teacher excellence a national profile, they also recognised that a national approach would require some adaptations to local initiatives, which they were largely against. They were largely in agreement that national SLTAs would have to be carefully and closely managed, and should not be a project priority (at least until there is more local provision).

#### *Mentoring a Possibility for Year Two*

Participants from unions with newly-created SLTAs were keen to emphasise the importance of NUS and the HEA continuing their support. However, they were open to the idea of offering some support to students' unions developing SLTAs for the first time, perhaps in some sort of mentoring scheme. However, it is recognised that this would be quite a time-consuming process, but it is useful and good to know that the willingness is there amongst a wide range of unions.

#### *Scoping Possibility for involving HE in FE Students*

Upon conducting some research into whether SLTAs would be i) possible and ii) successful in FE colleges with HE provision, it was found that some award schemes already exist at this level (e.g. Mid-Kent College), but these are ostensibly carbon-copies of awards at HEIs (i.e. Vision West Notts have adhered to the model Nottingham Students' Union's awards; Mid-Kent College to Kent Union's). What became apparent through discussions with them (and others) was that resource (in particular staff time) was the biggest perceived barrier to running awards. Also to be considered is the notable differences in students' union provision between FE Colleges, so some would be in no position to create and implement award schemes.

Therefore, if we are to work with HE in FE students and unions next year, we must consider how the awards can be run in such a way as to still have impact but without being too costly (perhaps building on the 'SLTAs on a Shoestring' work from this year). We must also demonstrate how SLTAs can reflect the identity of any campus on which they are run; smaller providers need not use carbon copies of bigger award schemes.

## **Conclusions**

- With the right support, students' unions could use their student-led teaching awards to trigger concrete improvements in teaching and learning. However, innovation will need support as they will not necessarily have thought about SLTAs in this way before.
- The support of NUS was integral to the success of pilot unions this year, and should continue for a second iteration.
- Financial support is important, but not as important as capacity. In terms of 'pump-priming' and not breeding reliance on grants from NUS/ HEA, it is important to get the level and model of support for unions who now have teaching awards right.
- It is important to develop new student-led teaching award schemes (especially as the interest is now there from a large number of unions). This will ensure that running SLTAs is normalised and increases the likelihood that such schemes will be sustained.
- National student-led teaching awards would be well received for their role in giving teacher excellence a national profile, but need not be a project priority
- HE in FE unions should be involved (and indeed will be willing to be) in the coming year, but differences in capacity will have to be recognised and supported to overcome.
- Pilot unions from 2011/12 want to stay engaged with the NUS/HEA project, but this is sometimes because of reliance on grant funding. We must clearly state the benefits of being involved next year beyond the financial. We have to articulate the benefits of taking SLTAs forward and using the results and outcomes to achieve improvements to teaching and learning practices, and the pivotal role of unions in this.