

HEA & NUS

Scoping the Landscape: An audit of Student led teaching awards project provision across the UK

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Introduction

The UK-wide Student led teaching awards (SLTA) project, run in partnership between the Higher Education Academy and National union of students, has been successful across the past 3 years. SLTA schemes have been very well received amongst students, Students' unions, academic staff and institutional management alike and each of the Students' unions who carry out the project, have reported it to be a positive experience with the ability to shape the learning and teaching agenda being the most popular piece of feedback.

The UK Learning and teaching landscape

As many Students' unions enter their fourth SLTA project cycle, an audit has been carried out of the project provision to help all stakeholders gauge a sense of the project landscape. Each year, more and more Students' unions carry out an SLTA scheme and this brief will cover the SLTA project status as of May 2014 which will include an audit of 140 Higher Education institutions with SLTA provision alongside 160 Further Education institutions in some cases with Higher Education provision. Further statistics surrounding the number of years the projects have been running; average category numbers, popular choice of categories and a breakdown of SLTA provision across the regions of the UK will be explored. Gaps in the project, points of interest and recommendations for future SLTA work will be drawn upon.

Methodology

A list was compiled of the NUS affiliated Higher Education institutions and Further Education institutions and research was carried out to investigate the SLTA provision of each. When looking at small and specialist further education institutions, the accrediting body was noted for each and any other additional information such as extra awards programmes.

Contents

Breakdown by region

Pages 1-9

-
- Scotland
 - Wales
 - Northern Ireland
 - England
-

Gaps in the project and recommendations

Pages 10 - 15

Conclusion

Pages 16 - 18

Scotland

A brief history...

In 2010, 8 Students' associations in Scotland carried out a project to address low National Student Survey (NSS) scores for academic feedback and assessment, and an overall low satisfaction score.

Through getting students to nominate staff members, across different categories, Students' unions were able to get a real insight into what students thought good teaching looked like as well as celebrating the work of those worthy staff members.

“Student led teaching awards have become powerful campaigns that epitomise an approach based on partnership and co-production. Herriot Watt University Students' Union, the NUS, the HEA and hundreds of students' unions across the UK have a lot to be proud of”.

Liam Burns, NUS UK President, 2011-2013.

What now?

When looking at the SLTA landscape in Scotland currently, all 8 NUS affiliated Students' associations have continued to carry out the project, as well as 2 extra Students' associations. On average, the scheme has been running for 4 years and the average number of categories is 6. Due to their wealth of experience and expertise, Students associations in Scotland have received anywhere between 500-1000 nominations in their SLTA project cycles. The Students associations in Scotland have recently focussed on teaching, postgraduate provision and the experiences of international students and overall are highly experienced in carrying out the SLTA project.

As the project was piloted in Scotland first, the future of the project in Scotland is promising with a wealth of knowledge on how to run a successful SLTA scheme being readily available. Sustainability of the project isn't a problem in Scotland and Scottish associations are now at the point of not only collaborating with their institutions but also with each other.

Wales

The current landscape...

NUS Wales officers and staff have supported Students' unions in the country to run SLTA schemes and in total, 6 unions are now running the project. On average, the Students' unions have been running the project since the 2011/2012 academic year and so there is a wealth of best practice to be shared here.

The Students' unions that have run the SLTA schemes in the past have been excellent examples of how to carry out successful and impactful post project activities to enhance the learning and teaching agenda.

For example, Bangor Students' unions have 10 categories and each winner is awarded an hour lecture slot in the following academic year to celebrate the scheme. Over 2 weeks, Bangor Students' union welcome students, staff and members of the local community to attend these showcasing lectures and this also kick-starts the next SLTA cycle.

“SLTAs are a great chance for students to really acknowledge the dedication and hard work of staff at Bangor University to improve their student experience. It is a chance to say thankyou. We have nominations from every single school as well as most service departments, and the student panel has a really tough time picking some of the winners from the shortlist”.

Shon Prebble, Bangor Students' Union President, 2012-2013.

NUS Wales have now recruited a WISE Wales development officer and this staff member is focussing on supporting Welsh Students' unions with their partnership and student engagement remit. This support will be of real significance in enhancing the Wales SLTA schemes even further and this is a promising direction for Wales.

Northern Ireland

A background...

NUS USI (Union of students Ireland) have 10 affiliated institutions overall and of those, 5 Students' unions carry out the SLTA schemes. This is an excellent turnout allowing for the capacity and resources available at these Students' unions.

The Students' unions are on the whole small and specialist institutions and so the work done here only adds to the argument that SLTA schemes can just as successful when carried out on a 'shoestring'.

There is much scope for NUS England and NUS USI to work together more closely in future SLTA cycles and there is already a foundation of promising work to build on.

A case study; Belfast Metropolitan College

Having been to a NUS introductory meeting once we were awarded funding in 2012, we set up a committee which consisted of our student council and Students' union staff to discuss what awards to have, criteria and timescales. The awards which were eventually decided on were;

- **The Student Experience Impact Award**
- **The Academic Personal Tutor Award**
- **The Inspiration Award**
- **The Assessment and Feedback Award**

For this being our first year of the awards I think they were very successful and we can see it definitely growing much bigger in years to come. Next year will be much easier to get established and allow the nominations to run longer as everything is now in place!

The information that came from the nominations gave a very positive reflection of the hard work and commitment of our staff and the recurring theme was how they went above and beyond their roles to ensure our students received the best possible outcome to their courses as well as helping them secure their futures.

Declan Crummey, Student Liaison Officer.

England

So far in England...

A staggering 93 Higher Education Students' unions out of a possible 140 which affiliate to NUS England carry out an SLTA scheme. Additionally, some of these students' unions are college based higher education institutions. Of the 93 students' unions who carry out the scheme, 54 have been awarded funding and bespoke support from NUS & the Higher Education Academy.

The majority of SLTA schemes started in the 2011/12 academic year with further group of students' unions piloting the scheme in the 2012/2013 academic year. So far, 6 further Students' unions have contacted NUS for SLTA help in setting up the scheme and so it is clear that there is an appetite amongst those that don't currently run the SLTA scheme to do so.

Due to the high volume of SLTA schemes in England, it is difficult to establish a general landscape as each scheme is so different as Students' unions can receive anywhere between 200-500 nominations and sometimes even more, and include from 1 to even 14 award categories.

Additionally, the breadth of award categories is insightful from an England perspective. These can include traditional categories such as: Assessment & feedback, Best Supervisor, Best Central support/Professional staff member and so on. However, interesting categories such as the ones listed below are becoming a frequent feature in SLTA schemes across England:

- Positive impact from distance learning
- Teaching in the international classroom
- Teaching with technology
- Innovative teaching methods
- Thinkers award for most challenging lecture experience
- Excellence in learning and teaching supported by a team

“Student led teaching awards are a powerful tool in empowering students to define what quality feel like in their institution. SLTAs should be recognised as a key measure of real quality in our institution – a qualitative measure of the relationship between students and their tutors”.

Rachel Wenstone, NUS UK Vice president Higher Education.

Gaps in the project & recommendations

I. 35% of Higher Education (HE) Institutions do not have any form of Student led teaching awards (SLTA) provision compared to 84% of Further Education (FE) institutions.

Further information:

When looking at a solution to this problem, particularly across the Further Education (FE) sector, many FE Institutions courses are accredited by Higher Education (HE) institutions. In most cases, these HE institutions already have an established SLTA scheme. For example, Barnfield College Students' Union are accredited by university of Bedfordshire who have an SLTA scheme for the past

3 years and have were funded by NUS and the Higher Education Academy in 2011-2012.

Recommendation

Lots of FE colleges accredited by Universities/partner colleges who run SLTAs or are close locally and could share resources. For example, Teesside University accredit Darlington College higher education degrees. An exciting development to deal with this gap in the project would be for Students' unions with established SLTA projects to share resources and provide help to their local FE institutions. Creating hubs of staff that are happy to help smaller institutions would add to the sustainability of the project also.

2. A very small number of HE & FE institutions who do not have SLTA provision, have an institutional teaching awards project equivalent.

Further information:

When looking at the statistics, many HE & FE teaching awards projects or similar, are carried out by staff in the institution and in some cases are not fully student led. Therefore, despite the project being successful and rewarding, a crucial element of the project is missing.

Recommendations

In most cases, Students' unions and institution strive for the same outcome from the teaching awards scheme. It would be crucial to bring together staff from the institution and students' union to work in partnership to create a fully student led and equally successful teaching awards project. An example of this

was at Birmingham City who led a Students' union only SLTA project in their first two years. However, in 2013-2014 they merged the project with the institution and this project became a partnership endeavour. The students' union were able to engage the student body as they do in many other ways throughout the academic year in order to get as many nominations as possible whilst the university were able to help with marketing and promotion as well as data analysis once the nomination period has closed. The Students' union and institution were able to put together a team of staff and students from both areas of the university and create a highly successful SLTA project delivered in partnership.

Create an array of case studies where Students' unions have successfully worked in partnership with their institution and publish these on the SLTA website for Students' unions to access when needed. Ensure the staff members involved in the buddy scheme is from Students' unions who have experienced this predicament and are able to give tailored and solid advice to staff members or officers from Students' unions who are motivated to make this change.

3. 35% of the HE institutions that do not have SLTA provision and are small and specialist and in some cases have a very small student population.

Further information:

However 33% of these institutions have their degrees accredited by a University with a Students' union that has SLTA provision. When carrying out research into SLTA provision, it was very clear that the only HE institutions that did not carry out SLTA projects were small and/or specialist institutions. For example the British College of Osteopathic Medicine SU, Heythrop College (specialising in theology/religious education courses) or The Royal academy of Dance SU who have a student body of just 52 students.

Recommendation

There are a number of recommended actions for this

finding. On the one hand, it would be an excellent idea to link small HE institutions with larger HE institutions who have an existing relationship to offer support and resource. For example, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) has two further colleges at sites within 30 miles. UCLAN expanded their SLTA provision this year to involve Runshaw and Myerscough College who have UCLAN accredited degrees. Students at Runshaw and Myerscough were able to nominate staff for awards. UCLAN Students' Union staff members trained staff at these two colleges in the organisation and administration of the project so that their students were able to take part. Not only did this mean that all students were involved in the project but also, the Students' union was then able to analyse the learning experiences of the students at the two other campuses, something that they hadn't explored until this year. As Myerscough college focus mainly on agricultural and animal based studies, it was eye opening to see what the students on these courses valued from their educational experience.

However, another idea would be to look into why the group of 48 institutions have decided against delivering an SLTA programme. The majority of the institutions deliver very specialist degrees such as art or music courses.

It is worth exploring the reasons behind why they have not chosen to engage in the scheme as it may be that students from these disciplines would not reward and recognise staff in the same way that non arts based students would which is what the research suggests.

After investigating this theory with a focus group of students from these disciplines, it was noted that students studying at arts or music based institutions have smaller classes and so have a closer relationship with their peers and academic staff meaning they wouldn't feel the need to reward staff in the way the public and high profile way that an SLTA project would do. After speaking to this group of students, it is crucial that staff or officers at these institutions are informed correctly about the adaptable nature of SLTA projects.

Ensuring that staff and students understand that they can tailor the project to reflect the nature and ethos of their institution, is crucial is ensuring this final group deliver an SLTA project.

4. When looking at the FE statistics, out of the 135 institutions that do not deliver SLTA projects, 22% have an external teaching awards scheme.

Further information:

As these institutions deliver an external scheme, it is clear that they are open to the idea of a reward and recognition programme. The FE institutions run schemes such as Pearson awards, AOC Beacon awards and in 1 institution, the 'Learn direct achievement awards'. For example, Tresham College received the Provider of the Year 2012 Award at the Leading the Learner Voice Awards on Thursday 21st June. The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and the National Union of Students (NUS) host the Leading Learner Voice Awards to recognise staff and providers in the further education and skills sector to embrace best practice in colleges.

Recommendation

When looking at the external schemes that FE institutions engage with, it is clear that funding is a key driver for committing to delivering these projects. In order to engage FE institutions with delivering a student led teaching awards FE staff members who would be tasked with delivering a teaching awards provision are up to date on the SLTA project and the unique student led nature of the project and the benefits that this brings. Additionally, it is essential that staff members from institutions who have secured funding to run their SLTA projects, are sharing this expertise with these FE institutions who are new to the concept of SLTAs.

Conclusion

Moving forward...

When analysing the category choices across the SLTA schemes, a clear shift in motivation has occurred since 2010 and this has been demonstrated through the presence of categories which recognise professional services staff. In previous teaching awards, students have often highlighted the importance of staff fulfilling a pastoral role, recognising this as a valuable function. In 2011, NUS sought advice through creating a partnership relationship with AUA, the professional body that represents all professional services staff working in higher education, and since, over 90% of Students' unions who carry out an SLTA scheme include a category that recognises professional service staff. Furthermore, this has caused some students' unions to change the name of their scheme from student led teaching awards to student led *excellence* awards, to ensure that students are able to recognise any member of staff regardless of their function.

Additionally, an increasing number of students' unions are now widening their 'Best lecturer' award to be broken down into school or faculty sub categories. This not only allows the students' union to reward a staff member from each area across the university, encouraging fairness, but also allows the students' unions to see

what student's value from their educational experience and whether this varies depending on their subject discipline. A key impact has been to use these specific nominations to inform the work of school and course reps which ultimately will enable positive educational change at a grass root level.

When looking at the nature of category choices, the focus has shifted for students' unions since 2010 and this has occurred due to the ever changing educational landscape. In 2010, the main focus was for students' unions to capture an insight particularly in areas such as teaching and assessment and feedback. However, when looking at SLTA schemes now, students' unions through tweaking their categories, not necessarily increasing the number, are now capturing feedback on issues such as innovative teaching, support students receive and in particular what the support package looks like, those who champion employability, internationalisation and the support available for international students, academics who encourage a partnership learning approach, the teaching of postgraduate students and the support PHD/postgraduate students who teach receive and so on.

Moving forward with the project, it is crucial to focus on introducing the schemes into the remaining Students' unions that do not carry out the

project. When looking at the nature of this group, a high proportion are small institutions with little staff resource and in some cases no full time officer or institutions where by an awards scheme is present, but does not involve the students' unions input. It is of critical importance that NUS endeavour to support this group of students' unions through providing bespoke advice and support. Additionally, it is imperative that in this academic year, Students' unions are in a position where by their SLTA schemes are sustainable. This will enable NUS to focus efforts in supporting Students' unions to develop their schemes even further, particularly with using the nomination data in advanced ways.

A key trend which was apparent when carrying out an audit of SLTA schemes was the importance of support for this project in determining its success. It became clear that it was not the size or resource of the union that determined the project's success but the support from Students' union staff and officers and intuitional staff but most importantly that the most successful projects came from a partnership angle with the University and Students' Union.

Further audit work

Having carried out research into the current SLTA landscape, it is clear that

the project is in a sustainable position. However, engaging the final group of HE Students' unions that do not have SLTA provision as well as supporting FE institutions in setting up and delivering the project is the final obstacle and must be a priority.

As well as this, consulting core staff and officers at Students' unions and institutions with SLTA provision, to capture how the project has changed over the period in which they have run the scheme will be of great importance. This will demonstrate the impact that SLTA schemes have had on the educational work remit and the teaching and learning landscape across the UK as a whole. Research found during this audit as well as information found during the proposed consultations visits will help in planning the future activities of the initiative.

For more information or further comments and questions, please contact

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