



***ALD in HE***

A joint conference

**“Teaching Enhancement and Student Success” the proposed new funding model for Teaching Enhancement and Widening Participation: implications and strategies for the future”**

4th December 2008

### **Conference Report**

This lively one-day conference organised jointly by SEDA and the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE)<sup>1</sup> was held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008 at the University of Reading. The event was entitled, “Teaching Enhancement and Student Success, the proposed new funding model for Teaching Enhancement and Widening Participation: implications and strategies for the future”. The day was well attended, with over 75 delegates from universities around the UK and from organisations such as Aimhigher, Higher Futures and Volunteering England. Attendees were keen to hear how HEFCE envisages the funding model will work from keynote speaker, Heather Fry, newly appointed Director of Learning and Teaching at HEFCE.

HE consultant David Gosling then spoke about how he sees the potential impact of TESS on Educational Development in both its specific and more general senses, referring to the work of those in learning development, widening participation and related fields.

Andrea Rannard, Senior Student Volunteer Manager with Volunteering England made an eloquent plea for consideration of the unintended consequences of changes to funding in relation to continuing the growth in student volunteering and community engagement.

The fourth presenter, Peter’s Hartley considered the implications for Student Support and Learning Development. Peter is Head of Teaching and Quality Enhancement University of Bradford and is in a good position to comment on the interface between ED and LD.

The morning concluded with all the morning presenters, along with Alan Palmer from HEFCE joining in an engaging discussion responding to questions and comments from the floor. The afternoon gave delegates an opportunity to hear relevant case studies and join discussions with a number of additional presenters, including Mark Stone, Director of the Higher Education Learning Partnerships CETL at the University of Plymouth.

At a final plenary, the key issues arising from the day were summarised and these were later written up and communicated to HEFCE in a joint report:

### **A Summary of Responses from the Conference 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008**

- 1) A general lack of clarity remains as to the future funding of retention and WP initiatives. It is not particularly clear and the messages felt somewhat mixed. There is a question of whether funding for retention will be lost at the expense of initiatives for WP – e.g. the push for work in schools and Colleges. A comment suggested that the definition of WP should NOT just refer to work targeted at schools and colleges, but should be used to support non-traditional students progressing through their HE programmes. In this respect there needs to be more clarity and a broader definition of what might constitute WP activity would be helpful. If we take this a step further it may be that a different term needs to be used as we enter a new period of funding and activity.
- 2) There is potential for unhelpful competition between overlapping groupings within HE institutions, e.g. constituted as learning or educational development, learning support, WP etc. This has the potential to be highly destructive to what are in many institutions fragile activities and which have taken a long time to establish and gain credibility. It is clear that HEFCE wants to allow institutions the freedom to choose their approach - but greater clarity about what it is intended that the funding should achieve could help avoid this potential for conflict.
- 3) There are currently a number of different strands of activity in institutions: Learning development, WP, Learning and teaching development, volunteering and staff development. In many institutions the relationship between these activities is characterised by levels of tension, competing agendas and 'power struggles'. It was felt that the consultation has been framed in a way that almost strengthens these divides by creating an artificial split between volunteering, community engagement, access and retention. The conference supported the need for all practitioners with professional interests in these areas to be encouraged to work synergistically, cooperatively and strategically across the areas. This may be helped by a call for our institutions make clear what their retention, WP and T&L targets are, and where possible to integrate these at the level of strategy indicating how they are to be achieved. This would build a coherent package for the enhancement of the student experience and aid institutions, and teams within them, in contributing effectively to the process by which the TESS funding is appropriately distributed. HEFCE should encourage such joined-up-ness by explicitly articulating a relationship between student learning experiences and teaching enhancement and to recognise that volunteering is not a separate entity but should become part of an institutional learning and teaching culture.
- 4) It is clear that some institutions place a high value on the reporting requirement previously asked of institutions by HEFCE. The move away from this creates anxiety for these institutions as they see this open to interpretation in a way that could potentially undermine the value of the

activity within their institutional context. It was felt by many that reporting on something gives it status and the requirement to report provides signals to institutions about what they should be doing. However, there is equally some agreement that the reduction in accountability is the way forward and that these issues need to be addressed within the individual institutions through working collaboratively and strategically. It may be timely to acknowledge these anxieties and link into proposals for new ways of working as mentioned above and a suggestion that internal monitoring is an expectation or for there to be a series of key questions for institutions to respond to in a light touch manner.

- 5) With regard to HE in FE and schools liaison a number of issues arose from the conference:
- a. There are scale issues for building and delivering student support for the HE in FE student as the numbers grow in any one location e.g. Truro College is growing from six to 600 HE students in ten years.
  - b. There is a need for HE in FE link staff to assist with curriculum design and student progression through ongoing funding and investment, especially in the area of development as there has been a tendency for the QA aspects of these roles to drive the development work e.g. support for HE in FE staff to connect with colleagues in partnership network communities of practice and to support individual HE in FE staff to engage in scholarly activity. This role is considered vital to support WP, retention and progression and the advocacy role of these staff cannot be underestimated.
  - c. He in FE staff development should be supported as a two way street e.g. College based staff guiding HEI staff in work based learning
  - d. While we consider the development of WP and funds, we should not forget that some work in HEIs and FECs should stop and the money be redeployed. A good question for HEFCEs annual monitoring would be to ask for details of what institutions have stopped doing as superfluous!
  - e. As the shift of funding from TOE to outreach occurs there is a concern that the WP Strategic assessment reporting will ask for details of outreach activity but not be explicit about the ways in which this is focused on targeted NS-SEC groups or other underrepresented groups. There is a danger that funds could be subverted into general schools liaison and recruitment as senior management teams focus on student numbers and the calibre of students.

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