

## Partner Colleges Learning and Teaching Project

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background to the project**

The Institute of Sport & Exercise Science (ISES) at the University of Worcester (UW) works in partnership with Stourbridge College, Worcester College of Technology and Herefordshire College of Technology (Holme Lacy campus) to provide Higher National Diploma (HND) and degree level sport-related courses. These programmes are valuable to the ISES in relation to widening participation, working with the wider community and progression onto the institute's degree and Masters programmes. Two of the key strategic aims of the University of Worcester (UW) are to provide an outstanding student experience and inclusive higher education: these are demanding remits since courses that are provided in collaboration with partner colleges may face greater challenges, as the student experience involves two distinct institutions in different locations, each with their own facilities, resources and staffing. Students on these courses are taught in dual locations by staff from both institutions, and whilst the diversity of this dual provision is attractive and positive in many respects, it can also provide challenges, for example with respect to facilities, resources and transport.

This project sought to explore how partner college students perceive their overall experience in relation to the following broad themes:

- a) facilities and resources;
- b) learning and teaching (including assessment);
- c) employability;
- d) personal development;
- e) recommendations for enhancing the student experience.

It was envisaged that the involvement of the three partner colleges would not only allow a wider consideration of partner college collaborations to be made, but also enable the sharing of good practice and those aspects of provision that students identify as leading to a positive experience. The project also sought the views of partner college staff in relation to how they felt they provided an outstanding student experience, in order to provide an indication of the congruence of staff and student views. It was anticipated that the project findings would have valuable benefits for the future development and enhancement of

partner college courses, with the aim of maximising student retention, satisfaction and recruitment.

Funding was sought and successfully obtained from two sources:

- the University of Worcester, through an ISES Learning and Teaching grant;
- Herefordshire & Worcestershire Lifelong Learning Network.

## **1.2 Background to Higher Education (HE) provision in Further Education Colleges (FECs) in England**

Most investigative activity into HE in FECs to date has tended to focus on the institutional (Trim, 2001, 2003), policy (Lewis, 2002), resourcing (Elliot & Gamble, 2001; Pickles, 1996) and teaching aspects (Connolly, Jones & Jones, 2007; Harwood & Harwood, 2004) rather than the views and experiences of students. A particular catalyst for research activity was the £9.4m fund aimed at raising the quality and standards of HE provision at FECs, made available in 2000 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). This sought to ensure that the student experience was equal to that provided at an HE institution. Further funds were provided in the following years (Weatherald & Moseley, 2003).

The reasons why Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and FECs might want to collaborate might not be immediately clear; Trim (2003), exploring the reasons why institutions might enter into a partnership arrangement, noted "... both types of educational institution can extend their reach, provide opportunities for access and progression, identify new opportunities for income generation, and establish a means for maintaining the institution's independence in the marketplace."

A significant document concerning HE provision in FECs was the White Paper "The Future of Higher Education" (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003). In particular, it outlined the government's intention to:

- strengthen the "... links between further and higher education ... creating better pathways for progression" (p. 7)
- improve equality of access to HE, noting "The social class gap in entry to higher education remains unacceptably wide" and "Raising participation and standards in our reforms of secondary and further education will be the most important step in improving access." (p. 8)
- envision an HE sector which - "builds strong and purposeful collaborations, including with one another and with further education, to support the best teaching, research management and knowledge transfer;" (p. 22)
- maintain the high quality expected of HE in future expanded provision, noting that "... structured partnerships between colleges and universities – franchise or consortium arrangements with colleges funded through partner HEIs – will be the primary vehicles to meet these aims and will deliver the best benefits for learners" (p. 62).

In particular it was noted that "... delivery through further education will be especially important as we reshape the pattern of expansion" (p. 62).

Confirming the government's intention to link the provision of HE in FECs to widening participation in HE, Lewis (2004) writing from a Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) perspective, noted that "the sector faces a new challenge in broadening as well as expanding its social base" with HE courses provided in Further Education (FE) institutions having a major part to play in this (p. 205).

The differences between HE and FE institutions can sometimes be significant; two examples are provided here. Firstly, the relationships between HE and FE institutions can sometimes result in collaborative tensions (Connolly et al., 2007, pp. 159-160), and secondly, lecturers in the two institutions can have different views of their roles regarding research; one of these is reported by Harwood & Harwood (2004, p. 154) where it is suggested FE lecturers see themselves as "interpreters rather than originators of subject matter."

Much formal documentation has been produced to help shape good practice in collaborative programmes, for example "Learning from higher education in further education colleges in England: Sharing good practice" (QAA, 2004) and "Supporting higher education in further education colleges: Policy, practice and prospects" (HEFCE, 2009). Other initiatives include the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Enhancement Programme<sup>1</sup>, which has been initiated to support FECs providing HE programmes. One particular output from this has been the monthly term-time "HE in FE briefing" paper principally aimed at managers of HE programmes in FE colleges, produced since May 2007.

The numbers of HE students studying in FECs have been the subject of political debate (Newman, 2008). The current official number (2008/09 academic year) has been given by David Lammy (currently Minister for Higher Education and Intellectual Property in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills) as 172,160 (Lammy, 2009). This number is made up of those students funded through HEFCE, via a University and by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC); the number funded directly by HEFCE is 52, 775 (30.7% of the total). In 2006, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) collected data in order to ascertain the "... extent of higher education (HE) provision within further education (FE) colleges in England."<sup>2</sup> Their results indicated that during the 2005/06 academic year, "... almost 94,900 students were enrolled on around 4,800 HE programmes at 260 FE colleges. An equal number undertook full-time and part-time study. The total student full-time equivalent (FTE) reported by FE colleges was around 72,500." This would seem to indicate a rise in the number of such students in line with the government's plans (DfES, 2003).

Student satisfaction with their experience of higher education has been measured since 2005 through the National Student Survey. In the 2008 survey<sup>3</sup>, in noting their level of agreement with the statement presented in question 22, "Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my course", HE students studying in FE colleges in England were less satisfied (74.9%) than students in English HE institutions (82.31%) (see appendices 1 and 2). However, although HE students reported being less happy with their courses overall in the 2009 survey<sup>4</sup> than they had been the previous year (81.56%), FE students reported they were

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/institutions/heinfe>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/files/docs/publications/he0019.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/data/2008/NSS\\_08.xls](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/data/2008/NSS_08.xls)

<sup>4</sup> See [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/data/2009/NSS\\_2009\\_summary.xls](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/data/2009/NSS_2009_summary.xls)

happier overall in 2009 (76.09%), although still lagging behind the level of satisfaction of HE students. Notably, the decline in reported course satisfaction by HE students was the first in the history of the survey (Shepherd, 2009). However, these overall percentages for question 22 do not portray the whole picture; those following HE courses in English FECs reported in the 2008 survey that they were, on average, happier than their HE institution counterparts with the assessment and feedback they had received, although they did not rate "intellectual stimulation" as well (Attwood, 2009).

## **2. Objectives of the Project**

- To explore partner college students' views on their experience;
- To explore partner college and ISES staff views on the partner college student experience;
- To share good practice across the three partner colleges in order to further enhance the partner college student experience;
- To identify areas for development that will further enhance the partner college student experience;
- To disseminate findings with other institutes at UW who work with partner colleges.

## **3. Methods**

### **3.1 Participants**

All of the 185 partner college students from three institutions participated in the study. Fifteen partner college and ISES staff teaching on partner college programmes also took part in the research.

### **3.2 Research design**

A cross-sectional research design was used to qualitatively assess:

- student perceptions of their experiences in relation to the 5 identified broad themes (see section 1) at different time points within the course (i.e. semester 1 and semester 2);
- staff perceptions of how they provide an outstanding student experience in relation to the 5 identified broad themes (see section 1).

### **3.3 Preliminary procedures**

Ethical approval was granted following the established ISES ethical procedures and informed consent was gained from all participants. Project staff developed the student and staff focus group questions based on literature and key internal and external documentation relating to the "outstanding student experience".

### 3.4 Procedure

All partner college students were invited to attend a group interview to talk about their course experience under the 5 previously identified broad themes (see section 1); all students accepted this invitation and the interviews took place in their usual classroom settings. These interviews took place at the end of semester 1 during February 2009. At the end of semester 2 (May 2009), students were invited to participate in an online survey which asked them about similarities and differences between their two institutions with regard to teaching and assessment and asked to list their top three institutional similarities and differences. Staff were also invited to participate in a group interview at a single time point (April 2009) to talk about how they provided an outstanding student experience under the same broad headings as listed in section 1. In practice, the interviews took place when staff were able to attend; some subsequently took the form of individual interviews, others were undertaken in pairs and one took the form of a group interview.

### 3.5 Project timetable

Date	Action
December 2008 - January 2009	Discuss and refine project with key partner college staff; Seek ethical approval; Develop focus group questions; Letters of invitation to students re focus group 1.
February 2009	Student focus group 1 to take place.
February – March 2009	Thematic analysis of student focus group 1 data
April 2009	Staff focus groups take place; Letters of invitation to students re focus group 2.
May 2009	Student focus group 2 to take place.
June – July 2009	Thematic analysis of staff and student focus group 2 data.
August 2009	Report writing.
September 2009	Share key findings with partner college and ISES staff to consider ways to further enhance the student experience.
Beyond September 2009	Project dissemination internally at UW and preparation of external outputs (see below).

### 3.6 Key products

1. Report for LLN and ISES of key findings from the project;
2. Conference presentation at the UW Learning & Teaching Conference;
3. Guide for enhancing the partner college student experience, through highlighting the considerations for the development and delivery of courses;
4. LLN seminar;
5. UW Academic Practice and Development Unit (ADPU) seminar.

This report has been produced in response to the first of these key products and the work was disseminated in a 40-minute presentation at the University of Worcester “Supporting Student Learning” annual learning and teaching conference held on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2009. The remaining items at the time of writing are in the planning stages.

## 4. Data analysis

### 4.1 Data outputs

The group interviews with students and the interviews with staff were recorded using a handheld digital dictation machine, the resulting audio files being then uploaded to a PC and transcribed into MS Word. The online survey was hosted by Bristol Online Surveys and the results were downloaded in the form of a comma separated values (csv) file and imported into MS Excel. Before analysis began, it was decided that owing to differences in the interview questions asked at the student and staff interviews (see section 3.4) that they would be analysed differently.

### 4.2 Analysis of student interview data

After many readings of the data by the project team, it was decided to focus the investigation onto the similarities and differences perceived by the students between their college and the University with regard to the five themes (see section 1). Furthermore, many of these comparative comments were expressed in terms of positive and negative observations. In the light of the emergence of these two “domains”, the following analytical tool was developed (see figure 1):

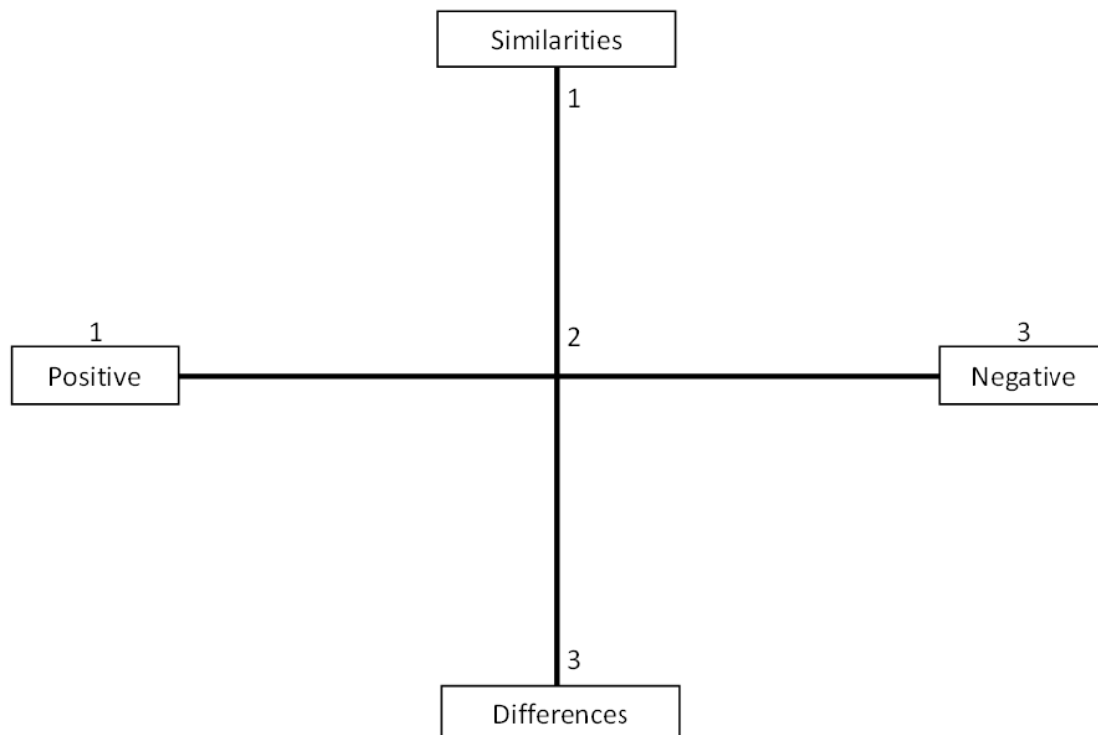


Figure 1 – Analytical tool

The similarities and difference domain (vertical) was referred to as “SD” followed by a number, “1” indicating similar, “2” indicating neutral and “3” indicating different. Therefore, “SD1” would denote a comment about a similarity. The positive and negative domain (horizontal) was referred to as “PN” followed by a number, “1” indicating positive, “2”

indicating neutral and “3” indicating negative. Therefore, “PN3” would denote a negative comment.

Coding was then carried out independently on two of the student interview transcriptions by two members of the project team. The team members then met to compare results and the inter-rater agreement level was calculated using Cohen’s unweighted kappa. This was initially found to be too low (0.2) and so following discussion, the members repeated their coding until there was an acceptable level of agreement. When this had been established, it was realised that the positive and negative comments generally applied to the partner college or to the University. As a result, a further level of coding was added to some comments using the following model and the indicated codes (see figure 2):

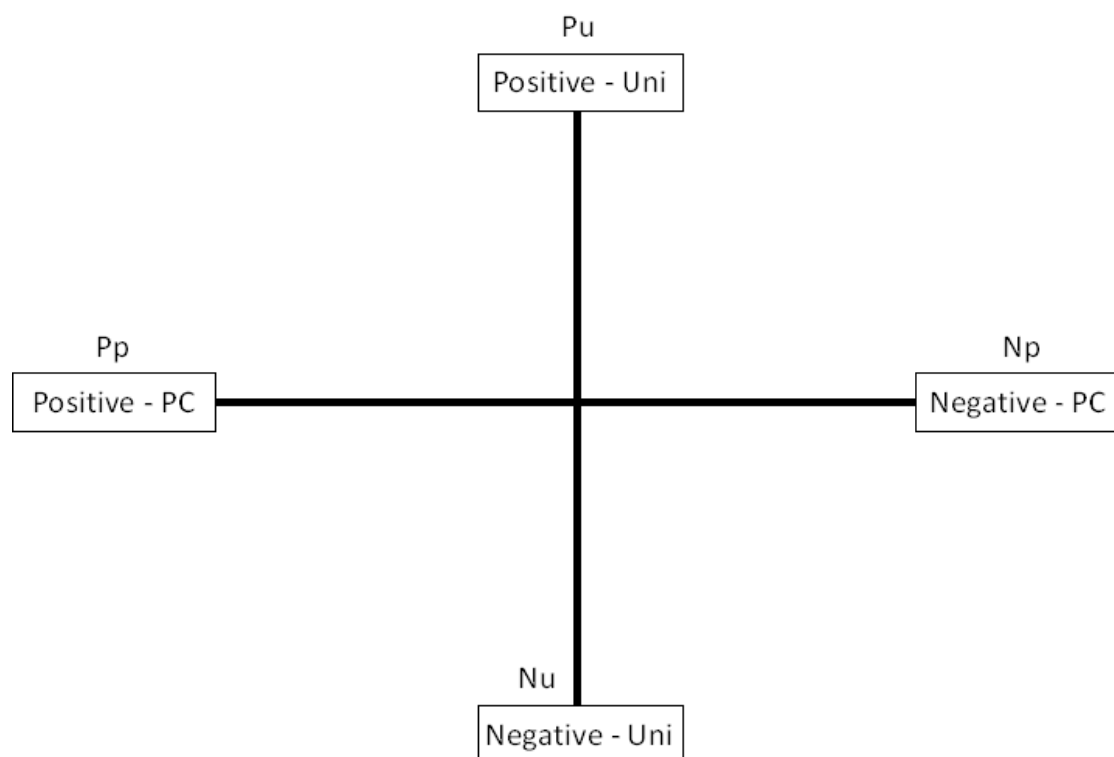


Figure 2 – Further level of coding

The whole dataset was then recoded by both research team members using the two models.

### 4.3 Data collation and analysis of staff interview data

The coded data was then entered into an Excel workbook, using a separate worksheet for each of the ten categories (PN1, PN2, PN3, SD1, SD2, SD3, Pp, Pu, Np and Nu) all linked together through a top level master worksheet. The data pertinent to each category was arranged in relation to each of the five broad themes (see section 1). Each occurrence was listed using a thematic reference, for example, “good rooms for lectures / discussions” and “variety of teaching styles”, and the data from each interview was also referenced to the original interview number to facilitate the location of the source data if required.

After all the student interview data had been entered, attention was focused on the staff data. It was decided by the team that as the staff had been asked to provide only positive examples of how they provided an outstanding experience for partner college students, the analytical models as described in section 4.2 would not be applicable. Instead, it was decided to link every occurrence of a staff comment to the previously collated student interview themes by listing them alongside the relevant thematic reference in the worksheet and hyperlinking them to the original transcription. In this way it was possible to see at a glance the number of occurrences of a theme in terms of student comments and also see the related staff data pertaining to this theme in its original form on the transcription. Using the worksheet in this way allowed it to become a central “hub” for the data, thereby enabling analyses to be made in each of the original five areas (see section 1).

#### **4.4 Online survey data**

The online survey data focused on similarities and differences between the partner college and University; this data would therefore either be in the SD1 (similarity) or SD3 (difference) categories. The first two sections of student comments were added to their relevant categories on their respective worksheets (teaching and assessment – see section 3.4) and the third section (top three similarities and differences) added in the “Facilities and resources” section. In this way, the online data could be viewed alongside the related data from the student and staff interviews.

#### **4.5 Interpreting the data**

With the data collated into a single central point of reference, it was possible to view all the data pertinent to a particular theme together in one place. The findings presented in section 5 are distilled from this range of information and are arranged in the original five broad themes (see section 1) apart from assessment, which, owing to the depth and breadth of student discussion surrounding this issue, is presented below as a distinct category.

## **5. Findings**

### **5.1 Facilities & Resources**

Generally, students and staff were positive about the facilities and resources available to them at both the partner colleges and the university. The issues arising are presented here grouped into the following themes; library, rooming, external links, technical issues, outdoor education, NGB and other awards and other comments.

#### **5.1.1 Library**

There were many aspects that the student focus groups reported liking regarding the university library; these included:

- The help available in the library;
- That it was a good communal and social space;
- The Information & Learning Services (ILS) workshops;

- The 24-hr computer rooms;
- That there were many copies of the main books;
- Both the hard-copy and online journals;
- The downloadable books;
- The search engine.

Generally library facilities were reported as being better at the university than at partner colleges. There were also several caveats:

- Sometimes course books were all out;
- Some course books were considered too expensive to buy;
- Some students reported that they did not use the university computers and some reported having trouble finding a free computer at times;
- Several students reported that the library search engine was quicker on university systems than at partner colleges;
- All the comments relating to journals said that the university was better supplied with journals, both in hard copy and online, although a member of partner college staff pointed out that in some cases the college had access to journals in domains not used at the university, for example law;
- One student said they didn't like having to look at books on a computer screen;
- One student said that it takes time to find what you want using the university library search engine.

Staff members from both the university and partner colleges backed up the students' positive comments about the library, especially noting the online facilities offered by the university library.

### **5.1.2 Rooming**

Some students commented positively upon allocated rooms being "warm" and "good" but there were also negative comments relating to:

- Lack of furniture;
- Overcrowding;
- Many different rooms being allocated session to session;
- No windows, resulting in rooms becoming too warm and "smelly";

A particular comment from a member of partner college staff noted the classroom facilities within the college, which were considered of a good size with smart boards and access to the internet, thus facilitating interactive learning.

### **5.1.3 External links**

Both students and partner college staff reported enthusiastically the wealth of external links that had been developed by colleges in order to provide activity opportunities as well as work and coaching experiences. For example, in the first year at one college, students went into a number of local primary and secondary schools to coach pupils, benefit from the facilities, such as astro turf, as well as undertake residential at outdoor education centres.

They could also take advantage of well-established links with local council leisure centres, commercial leisure clubs as well as sports and athletics clubs. Staff commented that these links enhanced the “real world” aspect of courses, providing vocational grounding and industry experience. It was clear from the students that they valued these links where they were available and there were no negative comments relating to them.

#### **5.1.4 Technical issues**

Technical issues were in the main related to computer and sports testing equipment issues. On the positive side, students found the provision of wireless computer connectivity throughout the university useful, valued the facilities for physiological testing and thought that the Motion Analysis Research and Rehabilitation Centre (MARRC) building was good. However, they voiced concerns about the existence of two different virtual learning environments (VLEs) currently in use, Moodle<sup>5</sup> at the partner college and Blackboard<sup>6</sup> at the university. Some students found this confusing whereas others experienced problems with passwords, either remembering them or trying to change them from off-campus locations. Several students said that they thought one single VLE should be adopted by the university and partner colleges and one student suggested that all the university and college course materials should be on one web site. With regard to sports-specific equipment, students valued the labs and physiological testing facilities but were concerned that they had not had the opportunity to use the MARRC building. To help them with their studies, one institution gave laptops to their students.

#### **5.1.5 Outdoor education**

Outdoor Adventure Leadership and Management (OALM) students had specific concerns, primarily concerning equipment. The course is based at the university and accesses the practical facilities at Herefordshire College of Technology Holme Lacy campus; however, students from all three years of the BSc course said that although they found the facilities at Holme Lacy good, they would like to see more practical facilities at the university and suggested a climbing wall might be appropriate. It was appreciated by students that buying course equipment was necessary but it was found to be expensive; however, only one student suggested that it should be provided by the university. Because most students were in accommodation in halls at the university’s St. Johns campus, they had found it necessary to keep their equipment in their rooms; however, they reported that there was not enough room and there was a lack of drying facilities. In particular, their ability to keep their equipment at their accommodation was dependent upon the goodwill of other students in the hall. Because students needed to travel for the course and they needed to buy equipment, some had wanted to apply to the university Hardship Fund (Access to Learning Fund). However, not all students were eligible for this and those that had successfully applied had found that they had not necessarily received all the funding that they had required.

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://moodle.org/>

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.blackboard.com/>

### ***5.1.6 National Governing Body (NGB) and other awards***

NGB awards were offered as part of some courses and were taken by others outside the formal structure of the course. At one partner college, level one football and basketball coaching qualifications had been taken as well as a first aid course; the opportunity to take these was generally offered at other institutions as well. NGB awards were considered essential by OALM students to make them employable and as with the purchase of equipment, they found them expensive.

### ***5.1.7 Other comments***

Owing to the arrangements by which rooms and facilities are timetabled (for example, the onus on a member of staff to ensure that the practical facilities they need are booked in advance), late timetable changes can be difficult to implement and module facilities may be timetabled according to how they have been used by other staff in the past. This can make it difficult for a new member of staff to have access to all the facilities that they may need. One member of staff reported that owing to these circumstances, the system sometimes undermined the institute's ability to offer the resources and facilities to ensure an outstanding student experience.

## **5.2 Learning & Teaching**

### ***5.2.1 Balance, range, variety of teaching methods and styles***

Students reported that the balance and range of teaching styles had suited them. The variety of teaching styles employed was noted by staff, specifically how the methods used mirrored the particular teaching situation, whether in the lab, lecture theatre or seminar room. Some of the teaching methods mentioned were the use of PowerPoint, videos, reviews of journal articles, analysis of sporting performance and class discussions. Reinforcing learning through presenting the same material in different ways was also mentioned by staff, thereby differentiating learning opportunities, and hence giving students who might pick up more from the lecture, perhaps from the seminar, or maybe the practical session the opportunity to learn in the way that best suited them. It was also noted that resources used in sessions are generally available on the institution's VLE, allowing students to access the material at a time and place to suit them. Staff commented that peer learning gave them the opportunity to gain new and novel ideas from other lecturers that they had observed, and that in turn had stimulated their own thinking and practice.

### ***5.2.2 Range and specialisms of staff***

There was a general feeling amongst OALM students and staff that a staff member should have a specialism within that field and would be better grounded in their particular discipline and be able to offer more appropriate learning opportunities if they were. For some courses, students felt that the college staff were more specialist and that they came to the university to take the "less important" sport modules. University staff felt they were well-qualified with regard to teaching, citing SEDA, PGCE qualifications and the award by the HEA of a National Teaching Fellowship to a member of institute staff.

### ***5.2.3 Tutorials***

Partner colleges reported that they held weekly tutorials for students. Some university tutors ask students to sign up on a list on their office door to indicate their choice of tutorial time. Although this system seemed to be generally accepted by students, a few commented that they had found it necessary to make a special trip to the university solely to undertake task.

### ***5.2.4 Matching students' needs and responding to student feedback***

One partner college member of staff explained how their assessment of students upon entry allowed them to match their needs and the on-going tutorials allowed them to monitor the student's progress in detail. A member of partner college staff reported that session and mid-module evaluations enabled lecturers to gain feedback from students and enabled them to react appropriately to their comments.

### ***5.2.5 Quality of teaching***

Staff at one partner college reported that the quality of teaching at their institution was good, current observation evidence suggesting that the sports department are delivering lessons at either grade 1 (outstanding) or 2 (good). One member of partner college staff summed up their approach to learning and teaching:

“Excellent staff who are constantly developing their skills, prepare and deliver engaging activities to cater for a range of learning styles.”

## **5.3 Assessment**

### ***5.3.1 Availability and helpfulness of tutor assistance***

Most students appeared to find tutors approachable and were able to see them for support when required but others indicated that they had struggled to make contact. Some students reported being able to drop in to see university tutors for support whereas they needed to send their college tutor an email in order to make an appointment. Although many students reported that they found it more difficult to book tutorial times at partner colleges, they appreciated that college staff might have a greater number of timetabled commitments. Furthermore, some reported that they found the support from college staff better.

### ***5.3.2 Mix of assessment types***

There was a general feeling amongst partner college staff that the assessments set by them were vocationally-led whereas university staff felt they had to cover a wider range in assessments set by them. A member of university staff commented:

“... I know, for example [name of partner college] they have the opportunity to go to organise an event and go in to a school, to go to a leisure centre and take part, get the students to organise some kind of leisure centre activity, so it's a little bit more real-world experience, whereas the assessments here cover the whole range from

presentations to group work to lab-based assessments, exams, lab reports so [...] there's a, the widest range there is possible ..."

However, staff aimed to make these as relevant as possible; another member of university staff said:

"... assessments have got to achieve the learning outcomes, but still within that we've got quite a degree of flexibility in how we structure and approach the assessments and so [...] you can make the assessments relevant to the students so hopefully they can see why they're doing them and the benefits of doing them, they've got real world application, you know, you've got the opportunities for them to work with, hypothetical clients and the kind of thing that they may well be doing when they leave here, so they're not just kind of academic exercises perhaps in isolation ..."

The OALM course offered a particularly wide range of assessments, including Individual presentations, group presentations, poster presentations, case studies and work placements.

A member of partner college staff provided examples of various assessment methods employed at their college:

"Within performance analysis students complete a group presentation which reviews elite sporting performance and complete a written report which analyses student's performance completing badminton and basketball, with the students using different observation methods to establish results. Within Sports development students complete a written report, a presentation of a current development programme which they have observed and an interview role play where students have to produce a sports development plan."

### ***5.3.3 Validation of assessments***

One partner college member of staff commented upon the validation of assignments, saying that every year before assessments were given out to the students, there was an internal verification process where a cross-college / university examination of the assessments took place, that aimed to ensure consistency in student marking across the university and the college.

### ***5.3.4 Context of assessment***

Some students voiced concerns about the course content not linking well to the assessment but didn't provide any further details.

### ***5.3.5 Inconsistencies***

Some inconsistencies were reported by students, for example,

- Differences between university staff concerning whether a student is able to submit a draft or not;
- Different opinions on referencing, and how many there should be;
- Different opinions on word counts.

## **5.4 Employability**

### **5.4.1 Preparation for work**

Perhaps the views of most partner college staff in this study could be summed up as follows:

*“... vocational teaching, vocational assessment is about making sure they’ve got that range of skills actually to take out into employment.” (member of partner college staff)*

The work in schools was cited as a successful way of gaining skills needed for the workplace, particularly in providing students with an insight into what the requirements actually were in the outside world. Another example was provided of visiting speakers, where the information provided was described as “from the horse’s mouth”.

The vocational aspect of the OALM course was summed up by a member of staff:

*“... the degree was written very much as a vocational route that aims to prepare people to work in the outdoors, rather than a degree in the outdoors ...”*

However, there was a feeling amongst OALM students that the degree qualification alone would not be enough to make a person employable in the industry, but that additional NGB qualifications would also be required.

### **5.4.2 Work experience**

One partner college had a whole module based on work experience where students were encouraged to go into the area or the field that they want to work in and undertake forty hour’s worth of placement. OALM staff reported on making the most of the overlap between students’ first and the second years through work-based learning. Here, work placements were undertaken where students go and do a three-week residential hands-on placement through the summer. A number of the students reportedly were able to continue this placement into paid employment, getting financial reward whilst also gaining credits towards their modules.

### **5.4.3 Employability skills (team work, leadership, communication, problem solving)**

Generic employability skills were mentioned on several occasions both by staff and students. A universality staff member commented that students needed to communicate with a range of people, both at the university and the partner college and this would be a good way of developing their communication skills. An OALM student reported that team work and

leadership were skills interwoven into the whole course and so were continually being developed. A university tutor commented that the assessments allowed students to solve problems, encouraging them to take theoretical background information and employ it in a practical situation.

#### ***5.4.4 The need for additional professional qualifications***

As mentioned previously, OALM students considered that NGB qualifications were necessary to gain employment in their field; the degree alone would not suffice; this was echoed by the staff team who echoed this sentiment, saying that students needed to think more broadly and creatively than just the degree, also considering technical skills, NGB awards and practical experience. Other vocationally relevant qualification extra to the degree course were a variety of level 1 coaching qualifications and a first aid qualification; a member of staff at a partner college noted that students had taken this latter qualification in order to help them cope with sports injuries in their future roles as coaches.

### **5.5 Personal development**

#### ***5.5.1 Preparation for future study***

Perhaps the most often aspect of the course referred to by students was the ability to progress from the two HND courses run in partnership with Stourbridge College and Worcester College of Technology to the second or third year of a degree course at the university. Although this issue was related to the grades achieved by the student during their HND course, the general feeling articulated by staff seemed to be that they felt students would more likely fulfil their potential if they progressed to the second year. There seemed to be some tension where students indicated that they had thought at the start of their courses that they would progress to the third year of a degree course; consequently, there seemed to be some uncertainty and confusion surrounding this issue.

#### ***5.5.2 Course useful preparation for other professions***

Students indicated that they felt the OALM course was preparing them well for other professions other than the outdoor industry. Examples quoted were the police and armed forces and management in general. Of specific interest to some students was a new outdoor strand that had been added to the existing primary PGCE course at Worcester, which they considered broadened their horizons and opened up new possibilities.

#### ***5.5.3 Links with outside organisations***

Some staff felt that links that students had with outside organisations had aided their personal development; examples given were the opportunities to coach children at a local sports club and the coaching and development of several netball teams at a local school.

#### 5.5.4 Range of personal skills

A particular aspect of the OALM course that the teaching team articulated was that they felt the course was preparing students to have a range of personal skills that employers were seeking, encouraged by various aspects that pervaded the whole course - small group work, student delivery and the development of trust in each other.

“... it’s a very social interactive developmental process over three years and I think, I mean, when you see the third year students, you can see what a distance they’ve moved from being a first year in terms of ability to talk to adults, ability to interact with safety issues, ability to interact with curriculum, just general, you know, responsibility I suppose.”

#### 5.6 Induction

Questions concerning students’ perceptions of induction elicited a range of responses. Students expressing positive views noted that it had been:

- easy to get to know people;
- they had found it supportive;
- it had provided a good launch into lessons;
- they had known where to go for things;
- expectations had been made clear.

However, there were also negative views from students who said they had found it:

- intimidating;
- they had even been scared;
- the inductions at both institutions and lecturers’ introductions had been repetitive;
- not enough time to take notes during presentations;
- student team had not always been there;
- reception help with directions had been confusing at times;
- there had been an ice-breaker activity at the partner college but not at the university.

One student noted that finding rooms at the partner college had been easier, because if a student was lost, there was an established system in place of returning to reception. The residential experience that all new OALM students experienced was particularly praised. An interesting point was raised by a student who said that they had not had an induction because they were later starting the course, but perhaps this opportunity should be in place for similar late-starting students in the future. The library induction was mentioned, with one student commenting that they had had an induction *in* the library at their partner college, but not at the university.

Many aspects of induction discussed here are explored in greater depth in the document “Induction – a report” (Jones G. & Breeze N., 2009) produced for the Institute of Sport and Exercise Science in May 2009.

## 5.7 Recommendations for enhancing the student experience

Staff comments related to recommendations tended to focus on concerns at the course level and tended to seek to improve the various programmes:

- ensure that the quality is maintained between institutions;
- student perceptions are important because staff rely on finding out what they are and responding to them;
- the uniqueness of the separate institutions should be preserved;
- there should be a greater student representation at the Student Staff Consultative Committees;
- it is important to maintain a practical cohort size for the OALM course;
- there should be more of a focus upon helping students who want to leave after their 2nd year to progress into employment;
- there should be more of a focus on improving referencing skills;
- it is important to monitor the outside college work environment in order to ensure students are gaining the most appropriate skills and qualifications;
- more tutorial time should be spent helping students with their courses and providing advice on future employment or study;
- there is a need to continually revise modules to ensure students maximise their employability potential;
- partner colleges should consider inaugurating a student higher education forum based at the college.

Student recommendations at the course level were:

- course leaders could consider some work experience for students while they are not at college or university, e.g. between semesters one and two;
- there should be more use made of and more links made with the practical facilities at the university;
- correct the given pre-course impression that students would be spending more time at the university than actually proved to be the case;
- students should only go to the partner college once a week;
- there should be more on-site facilities for OALM students at the university, e.g. a climbing wall;
- there should be greater networking with local clubs & societies in order to gain access to their facilities;
- the transport issues for OALM students should be addressed, especially the moving of equipment.

Student recommendations more at the personal level were:

- there should be no early morning lectures;
- ensure the bus is on time when moving between campuses;
- there was a need for shelters to wait for the bus, especially in bad weather.

## 6. Discussion

The findings will be discussed here under the same headings as presented in the findings. In terms of facilities and resource, the institutions' libraries were considered to complement each other well, although students noted that there was pressure on course books and computer availability at certain times. The online facilities were reportedly valued and used well by students. Although some rooms had been found to be unsuitable, the two chief mitigating factors being size and whether they had windows, the general feeling amongst students were that they were suitable for their needs. Students valued the external links with clubs, schools and other organisations which had been made by institutions, although they would have liked to use the University's technical facilities (such as the MARRC building) more frequently. There seemed to be a divide between FECs and the University on the choice of VLE platform. In general, students didn't like using two systems; there would seem to be some benefit in harmonizing these and perhaps providing all the facilities germane to a particular course on a single site. The OALM students had some particular needs which were not currently being met, namely room for storing their equipment, their travel needs and the provision of more course-specific facilities, such as a climbing wall. The opportunities to take NGB awards were valued by students and appreciated as essential for their future employment prospects.

In terms of learning and teaching, the range of styles employed by staff, the appropriate repetition of learning opportunities and the provision of resources on the VLE were valued. OALM students preferred specialist staff as they felt that their teaching was more grounded in the subject area. The regular tutorials were appreciated, with the door sign-up system adopted by University lecturers being considered acceptable, unless it had been necessary to make a journey solely to perform that task. The systems in place for matching the curriculum to students' needs and monitoring progress were considered very good.

The differences in booking times for assessment support seemed to be appreciated by students, although they noted discrepancies in the times taken to reply to requests; in particular, they liked the ability to be able to drop in to see a member of staff, especially at the University. The tendency for partner college assessments to be more vocational in nature was considered to be well balanced by the more theoretical University assessments. Students considered that the wide range of assessment types suited them, although the issue was raised of course content where it did not appear to be well-linked to the assessment. There were also some reported inconsistencies, for example, whether a draft assignment could be submitted or not; however, it is appreciated that these could be due to differences in student perceptions.

Staff commented that general employability and personal skills, such as team work, leadership, communication and problem solving, were well-embedded into course designs. The vocational aspects of courses, especially work placements, were emphasised by staff and appreciated by students, although the need to take additional NGB qualifications in order to gain employment was also realised. The principal issue regarding students' personal development was the progression following the end of their HND course to the second or third year of a degree course. There was some confusion surrounding this issue and perhaps the grading requirements need to be reiterated and clarified. In general though, students thought the course was preparing them well for further study.

There were a range of views on the induction process, perhaps owing to the distinct experiences of students; some parts of the induction at the University were organised by the institute and would have been common to all students, whereas others were organised independently by course teams; furthermore, there were separate induction events at the partner colleges. Students reported appreciating ice-breaker activities, but considered that the unnecessary repetition of information should be avoided; the corollary of this is that staff may have considered that significant information needed repeating. Some students commented that the student help team at the University was not available at times during the induction week, perhaps owing to being over-stretched; furthermore, the larger size of the University may have added to problems regarding room location. Students agreed that they appreciated library inductions that had been held *in* the library.

Most of the recommendations made by staff and students would seem to be practical with the possible exceptions of those relating to early morning lectures and only attending the partner college once a week. Most of the others are currently ongoing, and relate to good practice.

## 7. References

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