University of Wales Student Engagement Conference

The Icelandic volcanic ash-cloud did little to deter the fifty or so delegates who made the journey to Cardiff for the University’s Student Engagement Conference - indeed, many put considerable effort into ensuring that they arrived, and still managed to do so with their enthusiasm for the event intact.

The two-day conference provided an opportunity for staff and students from the University’s collaborative centres and Alliance partners to meet and participate in sessions relating to student engagement issues.

Professor Nigel Palastanga, the University’s Pro Vice-Chancellor for Learning, Teaching and Enhancement, chaired the event, with Student Liaison Officer Ben Gray as organiser. Drawing on his experience as former NUS President, Ben delivered a Staff Student Liaison Support workshop, which was well received by all in attendance.

The presentation given by keynote speaker Derfel Owen, Development Officer at the QAA, outlined the QAA’s approach to student involvement. This was followed by a short film showing the pressures experienced by students and highlighting their expectations of higher education. This led to a lively debate, and a question and answer session with the speaker.

Alex Bols, Head of Education and Quality at the NUS, examined ways of making appeals and complaints procedures more student-focused, and other sessions centred on further issues regarding effective engagement with students. Of particular interest were the different slants on student induction provided by contributors from UWIC, Glyndŵr University, Holborn College and Resource Development International.

The event was a great chance for constructive discussions about common concerns on student engagement, and we hope that its success will be repeated at the “reprised” conference taking place in Singapore on May 26th, where ten institutions from Singapore, India, China and Malaysia, together with the British Council in Singapore, will be represented.

Tom Barrett

Forthcoming events....
26 May: University of Wales Student Engagement Conference; Singapore
27 May: QAA Institutional Liaison Conference Focus Group; Birmingham

For your diary:
2 June: QAA Annual Subscribers’ Meeting: Future Directions; Cardiff
3-5 June: First residential course for PoWIS scholars; Gregynog
2 July: QAA Institutional Liaison Scheme Annual Conference: The changing nature of HE: implications for quality assurance; London
Student Mobility: conference report

On the 18th March I attended a student mobility conference, organised by NUS Scotland to highlight the work they have been doing in conjunction with the Bologna process in Scotland. I turned out to be the only non-Scottish university delegate in the room, which was a shame because it was a fascinating conference and I feel that many universities would have gained from the discussions held during the course of the day.

One particularly interesting session was a panel debate on the subject of mobility versus employability. This served as a useful reminder that the Bologna process is built on a foundation of academic enlightenment and other principles aligned to broadening the student’s understanding of Europe. In contrast, the Lisbon strategy centres on mobility and the impact which it can have on the employability agenda within nation states. This reminder was useful as, all too frequently, people justify employability strategies on the basis of the Bologna process. Although employability is a strand within the European agenda, we must never forget the value to the student’s learning experience of an exchange visit to another country.

During the day I was able to obtain copies of NUS Scotland’s European mobility promotion brochure. This has been styled rather like a holiday brochure and clearly displays the benefits of choosing to study in particular countries! There may well be some ‘best practice’ being produced in the coming months ... watch this space!

Ben Gray

The European Standards and Guidelines

ESG – full title “The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)” – so, what is it?

Well, if you have a UK degree, you’d want it recognised in other countries in Europe (and ideally elsewhere). But that assumes that UK universities have good quality assurance systems for their degrees – for example, they should have mechanisms for the approval and monitoring of their programmes; their students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures, which are consistently applied; universities should have ways of ensuring that teaching staff are qualified and competent, and so on.

A full list of criteria for quality assurance is set out in the ESG, as part of what is called the Bologna process. This is a process to create the European Higher Education Area by 2010, launched in 1999 with the Bologna Declaration signed by 29 European countries (now 46 – wider than the EU!). The Bologna process aims to facilitate student and staff mobility in Europe and to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education in a global market.

So your UK degree is recognised in the 46 Bologna countries – or is it?! Well that’s another story!

Brent Stephens

More on ESG may be found at: http://www.eqar.eu/application/requirements/european-standards-and-guidelines.html

Everything in Moderation

The postponement of the Annual Moderators conference, owing to January’s unrelenting snowfall, did nothing to deter a record attendance of moderators who recently rescheduled to convene at Cardiff’s City Hall.

The event, chaired by Professor Nigel Palastanga, PVC (Learning, Teaching and Enhancement) at the University of Wales, began with a lively induction session for recently appointed moderators, which presented an opportunity for more seasoned moderators to share their own experiences. Those present, experienced or new in their roles, were also able to discuss common issues and hear about the University of Wales’s initiatives and developments.

A series of interactive workshops led by Moderator champions provided a platform to discuss and share issues of good practice and concern in the development of a research culture; student engagement; the Global Campus, and the respective roles of Moderator and External Examiner and how they differ.

The day, punctuated with refreshments and regular interludes for networking, was praised as a great success by both organisers and attendees, who offered plenty of positive feedback. One newly-appointed Moderator commented: ‘The conference provided relevant and useful presentations with lively and interactive break-out sessions. I am now equipped with greater knowledge and confidence to perform the functions that are required of me in my new role. There is much I have learned from hearing the more experienced Moderators and academic staff speaking today.’

Moderators are appointed by the University of Wales on the basis of their expertise, which needs to be relevant to their respective validated programme. They are selected from a pool of academic staff within the University’s Accredited institutions and are charged with a quality enhancement and programme development role. A key responsibility of the role is to provide academic support to institutions wishing to improve the student learning experience.

It is hoped that next year’s conference will be brimming with the same boundless levels of enthusiasm and innovation that we saw at this year’s event.

Tom Barrett
Wales Higher Education Administrators Conference 2010

A dozen members of the University’s staff “followed the yellow brick road” to Llandrindod’s emerald Metropole Hotel last month to attend the Wales Higher Education Administrators Conference (usually held in January, but postponed this year due to the heavy snowfall).

Dylan Jones-Evans, University of Wales Director of Enterprise and Innovation, presented the first key-note speech, exploring an intriguing premise and a new term for many of us, the ‘intrepreneur’, which means a person with entrepreneurial flair who prefers to work within an organisation. We looked at using these skills in our work and also explored our own character traits. We discovered that even the great inventor, Edison, was occasionally narrow-minded when he suggested that his young protégé, Henry Ford, a keen ‘intrepreneur’ go it alone with his ‘new-fangled’ motor car concept!

Dylan also entertained us with interesting stories about process – for example, did you know that a café owner has to undertake 50 procedures to ‘dress’ a chicken correctly ready for consumption? This struck a chord with some of our delegates!

There were various break-out sessions which covered a broad variety of interesting topics. Are we passive aggressive at work? How do we manage our time correctly? How can we be more confident? Great fun was had learning more about ‘The Lean University’ with Christine Stewart of Cardiff University.

Christine organised us into two groups and gave us the task of making a ‘paper plane’ by committee! Some of us were fork lift drivers (the worst role, as they had to run around frantically delivering paper to the ‘folders’), others were managers and the only ones allowed to communicate with their teams and I was a lowly ‘first folder’! It was an interesting exercise as we learnt how to trim our work processes, work together better and also more effectively. By the end of the session we are all advocates of ‘Lean’.

Then the icing on the cake: a general knowledge quiz which bought out my highly competitive streak! I’m pleased to say that my team romped home with 52 points! Poring over the celebrity news has finally paid off!

Professor Dylan Jones-Evans

Celebrating our first University of Wales Teaching Fellows

The University held a dinner and award ceremony recently to celebrate the achievements of its first group of University of Wales Teaching Fellows. The new programme, developed by the University in partnership with its Alliance Academic Quality group, aims to raise the profile of learning and teaching and to encourage good practice in those institutions awarding University of Wales degrees, through recognising and celebrating individuals who make an outstanding contribution to the student learning experience.

The awards may be used for personal and/or professional development in aspects of learning and teaching, which must be broadly within the theme of Enhancement and/or sharing good practice.

Certificates and University mementoes as well as £5,000 were presented to the new Fellows: Jacqueline Young, Course Director for the MSc in Nutritional Therapy at the Northern College (NCA) in York; Ruth Matheson, Senior Lecturer in the Learning and Teaching Development Unit at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC); and Ruth Dineen and Annie Grove-White, Principal Lecturers on the BA Graphic Communication Programme at UWIC.

Professor Marc Clement, Vice-Chancellor of the University, welcomed the new Fellows to the first ever award ceremony for the University of Wales Teaching Fellowships, together with guest of honour, Dr Dennis Gunning, Director of the Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning Group of the Welsh Assembly Government.

In presenting the Fellows with their awards, Dr Gunning spoke of his pleasure at being part of an event arranged with the express purpose of recognising and celebrating teaching at its best, and of the importance of raising the profile of the excellent contribution to the student learning experience made by teachers and lecturers.

Jenny Childs

The new Fellows, with Professor Marc Clement and Professor Nigel Palastanga (PVC Learning, Teaching and Enhancement)
Letter to the Editors

Dear All at Quality News,

Congratulations on a successful first year of operation! You asked for feedback so here is some:
I always enjoy reading Quality News and usually read it cover to cover as soon as it arrives. It always contains interesting information and useful links in bite-size chunks that can be rapidly absorbed. It’s just the right length and the colourful, spacious layout and photos makes it easy on the eye. I also like the individual profiles which bring people who have just been a name on an email to life.

My only suggestion would be to make sure that all pieces have a link if possible for where more information on the item can be found. They aren’t always included and I sometimes spend a lot of time hunting for them.

I wish you every success with your next year of operation.

best wishes

Jacqueline Young

We are trying to increase the number of links to information provided within our articles – this is a bit of a challenge to those of us who aren’t technically-minded!

If you have an idea for improving the newsletter, please get in touch with us at qualitynews@wales.ac.uk.

PVC’s Piece

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)’s Academic Infrastructure (AI) will seem obscure to many colleagues in the University, until we list its components as the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), the QAA’s Code of Practice, subject benchmark statements and programme specifications. It may become clear from this that the AI is a key set of reference points for higher education in the UK. It has helped to establish a common standard for degree awards at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; a means for checking that what we do as individual institutions remains in step with the higher education sector. In addition, the AI has sought to demystify the contents of a programme of study for students, employers and other members of the general public. Many of us working in higher education will have used parts of the AI to help describe what higher education looks like in the UK.

Although the QAA undertakes to develop, maintain and publish this set of tools, it does so in partnership with the higher education sector. Earlier this year, the Agency asked Higher Education Institutions to help them evaluate the AI, by responding to a questionnaire and by participating in roundtable discussions held at various locations in the UK. At the event I attended, together with Wing Tsz Chow, Assistant Registrar (Quality) at the University, there seemed to be general consensus that:

- the AI had achieved a great deal in setting up a common language for the sector but remained impenetrable in some respects
- a name change and clearer statements on what the AI is for would be helpful
- there was a need to be clear about who the AI is for.

It is this last point which catches my eye. Certainly, the AI should be for ourselves, as members of the HE community. However, just as higher education is the concern of more than the HE community, the AI must reach further also, to interested members of the public in the UK and even the HE community and the public overseas. The relevance this has for the University of Wales, with its commitment to supporting the development of higher education in Wales, in the UK and globally, is quite evident. Over the coming months, I will write further on the components of the AI and would welcome your views on this as well.

Professor Kate Sullivan
PVC (Quality)

Full details on the AI can be found at http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp. Professor Sullivan can be contacted via the newsletter.

In our June edition:

Investors in People

Thank you for your contributions and feedback.
Keep in touch with us at qualitynews@wales.ac.uk

The text of this publication can be made available in alternative formats: please contact the University.

Quality News is produced by John McInally, Helen Knifton, Wing Tsz Chow and Jenny Childs, and edited by Jenny Childs.