

PEDAGOGY AND GOVERNANCE: A PERFECT MATCH

Ann Gow¹, & Jenny Hutcheson
School of Humanities, University of Glasgow (Scotland)
¹*Professor*

Abstract

It is a truth universally acknowledged that scholars argue that standards and performance measurements are instruments of control that have a profound influence on the day-to-day lives of individual academics, students, professional services staff, as well as organizations, causing the education environment damage. However, the authors argue in this paper that a strategy that triangulates the perspective of the teacher, the learner and the administration can and does result in an improved experience for the students. It also enables raised standards of good practice; opens up space for innovation in learning and teaching; drives progressive policies such as inclusion, access and equalities, and recognizes civic and international opportunities. The authors of this paper hold two different roles in the School of Humanities at the University of Glasgow, that of Deputy Head of the School of Humanities and Head of School Professional Services. The experience of jointly developing and delivering a School L&T strategy across six subject areas has had an effect on our student feedback and that of our staff. Developing a professional Services team that is engaged in the strategy is a key to successful delivery. However, it is not simply team building that delivers success, it is taking a student experience based approach. Ensuring our L&T strategy is built to enhance and deliver an excellence in the entire experience of a student while at university has brought about engagement from teaching staff, professional services team and students. Together, we explore the methods used to develop our strategy and the tools we use to monitor, reflect, adapt and enhance as necessary. We debate methods of measuring success, using not only the standard sector tools but also in terms of sustainability, health and wellbeing of the staff and students. We are committed to excellent learning, teaching and assessment; we seek to re-ignite passion for, curiosity about and commitment to advanced enquiry; rooted in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of all staff and students. Our partnership supports our core focus on developing students who are connected, civic-minded citizens and graduates who are well prepared for their chosen professions and future success.

Our team approach ensures an excellent student learning experience through a commitment to enhancement. We review, reflect on and develop our teaching practice, processes and facilities to engage our students in innovative, relevant and challenging curricula. Central to this is partnership working with our diverse learning community to understand their needs and to provide them with flexibility in what, how, when and where they learn. Combined with ethical and social awareness to engender positive behaviours free from discrimination, harassment and unfair treatment. Our approach develops, supports and encourages our staff, who in partnership with our students, create a learning experience, and a student support and engagement culture that reflects the ethos of the professional services and academic staff.

Keywords: *Strategy, governance, educational policy and leadership, environment, student experience.*

1. Introduction

The role of professional services is integral to our core sector missions of learning, teaching and research. Professional support services are crucial to the overall quality of the student learning experience and can impact significantly on student and staff well-being. Within this paper we will discuss the model we have developed at the University of Glasgow, and specifically in the School of Humanities. The two authors of this paper are based in an academic role and a professional services role. Prior to the two authors taking up these roles, there was a division in expectation about how the roles both complimented and enhanced the other. While we have not developed a research project as such, it is our experiences of working together and around existing structures that led to a greater understanding of the roles and how with a more integrated approach to policy and strategy, particularly in the area of learning and teaching, that we developed a sounder base for decision making and implementing strategy.

With an increasing emphasis on student satisfaction, student retention and success, and more recently student resilience, the contribution of professional staff to these issues has been overlooked. Our experience and activities were developed more thoroughly due to the pandemic, as the response to Covid-19, removed many artificial walls and brought together staff determined to ensure quality of education, assessment and awards for students with the pivot to online. We also are engaging with student retention and progression issues, again a project not possible without an integrated approach across role.

2. Context

The University of Glasgow (UofG) like other Scottish Universities is quality assured by the QAA Scotland (Quality Assurance Agency). This agency has a variety of streams for enhancing and measuring quality in Scottish HEIs, one path is the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) an evidence-based method of peer review, meaning that staff and students from other institutions join a team of reviewers to assess what each higher education institution does. ELIR results in a judgement and a set of commendations and recommendations relating to the way the institution is securing academic standards and improving the student experience.

Based on work from the QAA, UofG enhances quality within the four Colleges and their Schools, through standard committees and projects. College and School strategies for Learning and Teaching derive from the overall UofG strategy, and we have taken deliberate steps taken to enhance the student experience.

The University of Glasgow has developed a new Learning and Teaching strategy that seeks to develop and support our students through an excellent University experience so that they fulfil their academic potential and contribute in the fullest way possible to culture, society, and the economy throughout their lives.

There are three main pillars to this strategy:

Evolving Approach to Student-Centred Active Learning

- Redesigning teaching to support interaction
- Maximising, and supporting engagement with, blended learning opportunities
- Developing team approaches to design and delivery of teaching
- Redesigning formative and summative assessment to connect to real world challenges
- Developing students' independent learning and groupworking skills
- Enabling relationship building to support wellbeing and retention

Transforming curricula and assessment

- Connecting with real-world challenges
- Programmes and assessment that foster creativity and problem solving
- Programmatic and inclusive curriculum design and assessment
- Work-related learning, employer engagement and student-led practice engagement
- Flexibility to support relevant course combinations and multidisciplinary
- Easier transition through routes to study

Students' Professional & Skills Development

- Short, stand-alone academic courses focusing on insights and skills and refreshed in light of employer feedback
- Professional and academic development focusing on integrity and behaviours
- Enhanced focus on graduate attributes

In order for the University to achieve these goals, this strategy will be enabled by:

- New approach to articulate and demonstrate skills development
- Investments in SMART campus, technology and analytics
- Improved learning environments and infrastructure
- Increased Staff Support and Development
- Consolidation of Online and Blended Learning Support & Expertise
- Enhanced Support for Enterprise and Student-Led Activities

It is the implementation of this strategy that gives the context to our model in the School of Humanities, engaging professional services staff with academic staff.

Professional services staff can imply a range of roles within a University, for our purposes we are focusing on those staff who deliver the administration for teaching and learning activities; student support

experiences and overall quality of delivery. The School of Humanities, is the largest in the College of Arts, is at the forefront of research, teaching, and civic engagement. The School has six Subject Areas, a dedicated Professional Services team, and over 140 academic and professional staff. We teach around 1500 undergraduate students, over 250 taught postgrads, over 100 postgrad researchers, and are in addition home to a number of postdoctoral researchers, visiting staff, and students from all over the world. As well as the subject base, the School of Humanities are committed to developing, maintaining and supporting a culture of diversity and inclusion for all staff and students within our School, including the promotion of our discipline to women and other minority groups.

We aim to create an environment where all staff and students - regardless of any protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 - are welcome and included. and where discriminatory attitudes and behaviour are not tolerated.

The two authors of this paper are the Deputy Head of School & Learning & Teaching Convenor (2017-2021) and the Head of Professional Services. The model they have built was developed to ensure that all staff who have any engagement with teaching and learning, were explicitly identified in strategic and action plans.

3. Method and model

3.1. Pre-Pandemic

It would be remiss of any discussion concerning HE to avoid the impact the pandemic has made on work and working practices. Like all other universities, UofG pivoted to online from 23rd March 2020.

It is useful to discuss the approach of the authors and the model they sought to implement prior to the pandemic and lockdown.

The basis of our model of partnership was that we agree that the notion that successful student outcomes are not the result of a hierarchical activity involving academics merely being supported by professional staff. It also recognises that the activities and behaviours of professional staff often outwith the academic hierarchy lead directly, or indirectly, to building student focused activity for successful outcome. This is achieved by all higher education staff, working in a collegial and collaborative way, with the student as a co-contributor to that outcome.

School L&T strategy is developed across the existing silos of roles and each action that is crafted, is done so including routes through academic, professional services and collaborative practices to delivery. We meet with all staff and look at how we can implement UofG KPIs within the School setting and engage all staff in how they can contribute to the implementation.

Table 1 gives one example of action plan with collaboration with PS and academic staff. It may not seem revolutionary but was the first action plan that explicitly referred to PS staff. This was in response to meetings with PS staff who felt that as academic roles changed, much of the knowledge remained in the PS roles and was not used in a way that would enhance the strategy. The strategy action plan had over 40 items, with all of them referring to and engaging PS staff.

Table 1. Example of Action plan – academic staff in BOLD and PS Staff in Underline.

Timely and transparent feedback	Each subject will identify potential block upload assessments and implement.	This will be undertaken by <u>HoSA</u> , <u>TSSA</u> and <u>L&T/PGT</u> convenor to agree roles in the process – to be trailed and completed in terms of developing the expertise of the <u>admin team</u> by DATE
---------------------------------	--	--

3.2. Pandemic

Like all HEI across the globe, UofG had to pivot to online delivery from mid-March 2020. The sense of urgency and response ensured that the academic hierarchical system was disrupted completely. We developed an emergency group at School and College level to address the issues of online teaching and the huge challenges to assessment. To ensure fairness to students, UofG developed a No Detriment Policy that required complex tools and guidelines to be created within a very short framework. This would not have been possible without a team approach across all roles. Our model was adopted as Good Practice and enabled us to deliver the complexities of online teaching and assessment in a way that did not disadvantage students and in fact, had their well being and support at the core.

We are assessing the value of this approach and the tools, techniques and working practices which can inform our next steps.

Commitment to the strategy at the start of 2021, is built on the fact that the University has already made substantial changes in approach to learning and teaching in our response to the pandemic. From April 2020, University guidance on approaches to learning design for blended and online learning has been created with these strategy pillars in mind. As such, the response made by staff and students across the University community has accelerated engagement with this strategy even before it was fully articulated, and these efforts have served as a huge catalyst for change already. The considerable gains in creating online resources, and in developing engaging online teaching, place us in a strong position to realise much of what follows and to continue to benefit from the considerable investments that staff have made in changing teaching practice to respond to the impact of the pandemic

4. Implementing strategy as a team

We seek to create an inclusive environment where students develop meaningful relationships with one another and with staff, and through those encounters, create new knowledge, challenge received wisdom, build inter-cultural and leadership capabilities, and develop disciplinary excellence and an appetite for lifelong learning and enquiry. Rapid and seismic impacts on societies and economies around the world from the Coronavirus pandemic, combined with the fast pace of change resulting from the impact of technology, require flexible and adaptable graduates who can integrate knowledge across disciplines to bring creative solutions to complex world problems.

Using this model of implementation of the UofG Strategy, we are in the process of engaging all staff in the School and College around these key stages.

1. Set Clear Goals and Define Key Variables
2. Determine Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships
3. Delegate the Work
4. Execute the Plan, Monitor Progress and Performance, and Provide Continued Support
5. Take Corrective Action (Adjust or Revise, as Necessary)
6. Get Closure on the Project, and Agreement on the Output
7. Conduct a Retrospective or Review of How the Process Went

With our model of shared PS and academic governance over the strategy we are intending to focus on these areas.

- Redesigning teaching so that students can engage more deeply in their learning of the discipline during contact time, through interacting with their peers and with staff and focusing on developing understanding.
- Maximising the benefits of learning technologies to create blended approaches that focus students more fully on understanding and engagement with material during class time for example, through exploring areas of uncertainty in the topic, engaging with feedback and identifying and creating learning resources.
- Taking a team approach to course design and delivery, involving more diverse staff inputs. This may include disciplinary, technical, and skills development expertise to support active learning and increased student self- and peer-assessment.
- Creating interdisciplinary teaching teams that can support team-based learning where appropriate.
- Redesigning summative and formative assessment with both more readily taking place during classes and connecting to real world challenges as we transform the curriculum.
- Designing in opportunities for students to develop both responsibility for their own learning and the collaborative skills that are essential in group work and team learning and in extra-curricular activities such as volunteering, societies, employment and competitions.
- Enabling students to connect with their peers and develop the relationships that are essential to enabling wellbeing and retention.

5. Measures of Success and going forward

We will be using standard UK HEI metrics for measurement as set out in the QAA. We will also ensure regular student focus groups internally as well as the NSS and other student quality measures. This work is ongoing and we will ensure we monitor and reflect on the model of partnership in the success of our implementation. As well as student focus groups, we will run staff focus groups to engage the experience and impact of our model and refine more closely with staff input.

We are planning on engaging with a QAA initiative to review professional services. At present this is focussed on central professional services as the view is that school PS are reviewed as part of Periodic Subject Review. We intend to use our model to cascade this to School level and integrate policy and practice going forward.

References

- Graham, C & Regan, JA (2016) *Exploring the contribution of professional staff to student outcomes: a comparative study of Australian and UK case studies*, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 38:6, 595-609, DOI: 10.1080/1360080X.2016.1211935
- QAA Scotland (2022) *FOCUS ON: Professional Services Review*.
<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/focus-on/professional-services-partnerships>
- Parkes, S. (2018) Academic and professional services in partnership to enhance the 'student experience'
10.13140/RG.2.2.28229.35041
- University of Glasgow, (2021) *Learning and Teaching Strategy*
<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/learningandteaching/strategy/>