

Summary of interim report survey findings – HEFCE Catalyst Fund Programme Strand A

1. Introduction

This report summarises the findings to date of our evaluation work of the 67 small-scale pedagogic innovation projects funded through the HEFCE Catalyst Fund Programme Strand A. It draws on the longer interim report submitted to HEFCE in November 2017.

The key questions we have been exploring as part of this evaluation work are as follows:

1. What are the enablers and inhibitors for pedagogic innovation at the institutional and sector levels?
2. What role do students play in the development and uptake of innovation in learning and teaching? What role might they play?
3. What examples of good practice can be identified and shared? What challenges have been presented?

This briefing focuses on:

- Enablers of innovation
- Approaches to overcoming challenges
- Student engagement
- Practice sharing/dissemination
- Lessons learned to date/ toolkit ideas

We have also added an appendix of links to project websites and dissemination materials (papers, presentations) that were contributed to the survey.

The bulk of this work is based on a programme-wide survey (conducted in September-October 2017) comprising student and staff question pathways. The survey was completed by 28 students and 102 staff representing 56 out of the 67 projects (84 per cent of the total.) The report has also been informed by our review of the project business cases and interim reports, a literature review on pedagogical innovation and two sets of webinars.

2. Enablers of innovation

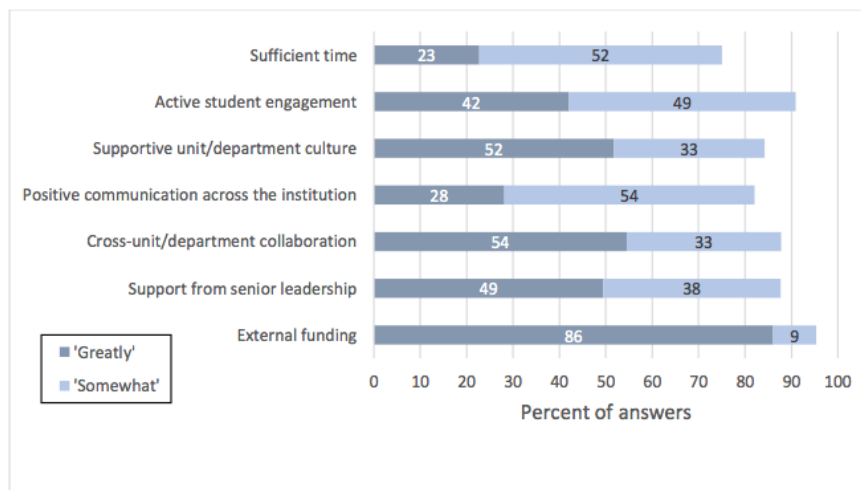
Research into factors which enable and conversely hinder the process of pedagogical innovation has been a central focus of our work. It is evident from the responses to our survey that in many cases enablers and inhibitors to innovation are two sides of the same coin – the presence of time, funding, and institutional support. In this section, we focus on our findings on the enablers of innovation.

95 per cent of responses to our survey stated that **external funding** 'greatly' or 'somewhat' enabled their pedagogic innovation, with one respondent explaining that '*Money = time to do something different!*' In addition, 91 per cent of respondents highlighted **active student**

engagement as an important dimension of the innovation process with strong appreciation for 'input from our project student advisors' voiced by one of the project. **Time** was also a key enabling factor with 75 per cent of respondents stating that time was 'greatly' or 'somewhat' responsible for their projects' success with most of the comments focussing on the importance of having time to make changes. *'[I]t is always the case that we could achieve more if we had more time'* and *'Time is a key enabler – we probably underestimated the learning curves around emerging mobile technologies'*.

Several respondents highlighted the significant validation role that external funding from HEFCE brought to their projects: *'The Catalyst funding is essential for overcoming the risk-averse culture that often exists in HEIs, i.e. 'If HEFCE are willing to fund it, it must be ok.'* Others focused on **partnership and support**, factors found to be commonly rated as 'greatly' important enablers (see Figure 1). 'Excellent industry links', 'cross-institutional collaboration' and 'strong partnership between academics and technical support and development' were cited alongside 'enthusiasm of the steering group', 'project management support' and 'the expertise of project leads/researchers' as examples of internal and external supportive networks that enabled the projects. The importance of **communication** was also noted: *'Where there is awareness of the project, interest is high... the challenge is to raise awareness and support across the whole campus.'* While **support from senior leadership** was also valued highly, it is striking that this is seen to be a more important factor for projects which aimed to instigate change at a higher level (such as across an entire institution) compared to those seeking to bring about change within a single department or programme.

Figure 1: Enablers



3. Overcoming challenges

Time, financial resources and fund management, insufficient institutional support, limited student engagement, technical issues and project management-related matters were among the key issues identified as inhibitors to progress on the projects. In this section, we explore some of the approaches adopted by different projects to overcome these challenges focusing in particular on time management, relationship-building, awareness raising and the importance of support networks in the process of change. Challenges associated with student engagement are

explored in section 4. The qualitative responses to our survey underlined the resourcefulness of project teams in finding ways to overcome the challenges they have faced.

Project teams have sought to overcome the **time challenges** in a number of ways:

- i. Securing additional resources to enable more time for the project
- ii. Time management techniques – such as setting clear deadlines, prioritising the main activities in the project and mapping these to current team capacity and reallocating resources as necessary
- iii. Increased personal time commitment to the project – working longer hours, using personal time and/or allocated research time to make progress on their projects, and
- iv. Regular, consistent and creative approaches to communication.

'Regular reviews (weekly agile sprint meetings, monthly management group meetings and termly steering group meetings) [allows] regular review of issues and risks and planning of mitigation or alternative activities.'

Challenges in terms of **building relationships within diverse project teams** across as well as within institutions were addressed by devoting time and energy to relationship-building, and making time to share experiences and good practice. In some cases, this involved the development of virtual spaces to update and share information: *'Building relationships: consistent discussion, encouragement etc. with the department and its director... networking with sector colleagues, and encouraging departments to do this also. Regular communication and virtual sites for sharing resources.'*

Project teams have sought to **raise awareness** about their projects internally and across the sector in a number of different ways. Internally this involved 'show and TEL' events, articles in internal publications, freshers' week activities as well as networking with staff across the institution and promoting the project at School-level meetings, events and away days. In terms of external promotion and dissemination, respondents mentioned hosting sector-wide linked events as well as the planning and delivery of workshops with high profile bodies in the university. Links to some of these events and initiatives are included in the appendix at the end of this report.

'Extending the focus of the project to beyond the institution to a sector-wide discussion on next generation digital learning environments (working with Jisc).'

Finally, several respondents highlighted the importance of **building support networks** involving senior leadership and professional and technical support services. As one respondent noted: *'I have found myself needing to develop a network of people who would support me with this activity'*. Others stressed the value of being able to draw on the leverage of senior management to enable working across departmental and unit boundaries: *'Working directly with senior managers to get their buy-in. E-mails from the Head of Institution asking staff to engage at key points'*.

One project had established a *'multi-agency group involving external partners, students and academics to facilitate progress on the project. They have ensured proper governance, planning, risk assessment and mitigation and good internal and external communications leading to high levels of awareness and buy-in.'*

4. Student engagement

Both the staff and student surveys explored ways in which students were involved in the projects and their perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with their engagement. Both groups suggested that students were most frequently involved as participants followed by a project advisory or development role. Three-quarters of projects reported having students involved in evaluation and just over half suggested that students were involved in project design and implementation. Of those who participated in the student survey (n=28), around 40 per cent of respondents described their role as piloting and evaluation and just over a fifth suggested they were involved in design.

Perceived benefits of involving students

Reported benefits of involving students were wide-ranging. Amongst the most commonly cited were:

- The insight and contextual understanding that students bring to the project (which often differs from and complements staff perspectives)
- Student creativity
- Increased buy-in of the innovation among students
- Ensuring the relevance of the innovation to students
- The enhancement of the innovation that student participation enabled
- Students as 'real participants'; this was noted in relation to students who were seen to occupy full project roles – such as sitting on a steering group
- Co-creators of resources
- Breadth of perspectives that students introduce – especially disciplinary ones
- Enhanced capacity for outreach – particularly in relation to school students
- Students as inspirational partners
- Authentic opportunity for student-staff collaboration

Benefits of student involvement

'It is an assignment approach that has students at the centre and they are essential in being able to highlight the challenges faced from their perspective. A top-down approach would not work and would only reinforce the distance between knowledge and demonstration. Students have found where the gaps lie practically, as well as how these are felt holistically. The changes in assignment layout are more than pedagogical. Students highlight the affective impact and how this might be addressed and designed to reduce any negative impact.'

'A clear perceived benefit is the hope that by having more agency in the creation of the curriculum, students feel more engaged in their learning and that the quality of work and their satisfaction with the educational experience is enhanced. Involving students has also been a process of ensuring we reflect the wide demographic of students we seek to engage, it brings fresh perspectives to the processes, models and content of curricula and requires academic and professional staff to be more reflective on their work and decision making, leading to significant enhancements.'

'The student voice is powerful in inspiring and initiating change within the institution.'

'Our project puts students and staff at the heart of HE L&T. It is improved by the premise that in order to improve the student learning experience, we need to create the conditions in which staff and students can collaborate and openly engage in focused discussions around their experiences of learning and teaching on a selection of HE undergraduate programmes. As part of our mid-project evaluation, students have been involved in conference presentations with staff, discussing the data collected in each case study to date and have developed greater insights and empathy into the complex relationships between teaching and learning.'

'Their enthusiasm, creativity and engagement has been fantastic and the tool we have developed would not be anywhere near as good as it is without their input. We are also seeing strong buy-in from other students because the resource is seen as 'owned' by the students.'

Perceived challenges of engaging students

In terms of engagement, two types of challenges were reported by survey respondents – those of involving students on project teams and those of engaging the general student population in the innovation.

The most prominent challenge mentioned in the survey in engaging students was time, in terms of

- a. ensuring that students' time spent on the project did not have an adverse impact on their studies and
- b. finding ways of scheduling the project work that coincided with the time that students were available, both during the term and during the course of study. (There are reports of students moving on from the university during the project life-cycle.)

Issues around student identity arose in the second round of webinars, where it was reported that students did not like being framed in a deficit relationship in which the innovation was perceived to be remedial. An additional challenge voiced here was that students were unlikely to engage voluntarily with innovations that do not relate directly to summative assessment or other required elements of their degree.

Among the other most commonly cited challenges were:

- Ensuring buy-in and meaningful engagement from students
- Supporting students to overcome lack of confidence and experience in relation to working on the project
- Helping students make up for a lack of organisational knowledge to meaningfully engage as a project team member
- Persuading students of the value of the project
- Ensuring representation from diverse groups
- Working with students in cross-disciplinary teams
- Managing the robustness of technical innovations and systems that would be used by large numbers of students
- Power dynamics
- Staying alert to the ethical issues associated with working with students.

Challenges with student involvement

'Our students have very busy timetables and a heavy workload. So their involvement has to be voluntary. This does mean that we have the risk of certain student groups not being represented. Expectation management is also an issue. We need to give realistic messages to the students about what can be achieved within the project lifetime.'

'Involving students in curriculum design requires time, resources and space to be able develop thinking and activity. It means slowing down and even breaking long held institutional processes without a guarantee of success which can feel quite risky and uncomfortable for some within the university.'

Students' accounts and perceptions of their involvement

Students suggested that the projects have had an impact on their learning in a variety of ways:

- Increased research skills
- Understanding the needs of other learners and explicitly reflecting on their own experiences as learners
- Becoming better listeners
- Team-working
- Enhanced real world perspective on the subject
- Better understanding of the educational potential of technology in HE/FE.

Student participants suggested the following ways of increasing involvement amongst their peers:

- Financial incentives
- Increased accessibility of the project (simplify language/acronyms, topics, ability to use platform across multiple digital devices)
- Better promotion
- Inclusion of students in the recruitment phase
- Wider and more diverse student input at the market research stage
- Ensuring the project is adaptable to students' strengths.

Significantly, 68 per cent of student respondents said their sense of belonging to the institution had been enhanced through participating in the project.

Students' views on benefits of involvement

It's given me a real-world perspective on the subject I'm learning. It's given me an insight into the knowledge I need to utilise the things I've learned [to] create a product or service.

It has been great to get involved in something like this, something that could have an impact on the way that courses are managed and run. It has been fairly obvious from the start of the module that it was drawing the most work from us as students. Hopefully the work and feedback that this project has gathered can be put to use, and other courses and students can get the benefits.

5. Approaches to sharing practice and impact

Respondents reported ways of sharing practice both internally and externally. Colleagues indicated that the chief means of **dissemination within institutions** was via informal interactions with colleagues followed by departmental or committee meetings and workshops. Project teams also used websites and blogs, social media, newsletters and internal conferences.

Findings were shared with external audiences via conference presentations, talks to disciplinary and regional networks, national meetings, such as the Heads of eLearning forum, websites, articles, publication of a Green Paper and social media. At least two books are planned – one outlining methods and case studies and the other analysing interventions along disciplinary lines.

Respondents spoke of their preference for tapping into existing networks, events and publications rather than starting new publicity initiatives. Projects would value further opportunities to share practice across the Catalyst Fund programme, especially within their thematic groups.

6. Lessons learned on implementing small-scale innovation

As part of the evaluation survey, participants were invited to share the most valuable lesson that they have learned so far about implementing innovation. This generated a particularly rich seam of answers (67 in total). It is striking that the theme cited most frequently by respondents concerned different **aspects of engagement with students**.

This was followed quite closely by colleagues who foregrounded the importance of **communication and consultation with internal and external stakeholders**. (For some, this was critical for ensuring buy-in and for others this related to ensuring good project outcomes.) Another group of respondents stressed the **complexity of cross-institutional relationships**, with several pointing to challenges associated with working with central units. Issues relating to **time, timing and timetabling** were also identified as being key in understanding and planning for processes of innovation. Here respondents noted the need for more time at the design and development phase, more time to be spent on promoting and motivating staff/student engagement, sufficient lead-in time to complete the necessary ethics procedures and at a more fundamental level that innovation cannot be created overnight but it builds and involves evolution rather than revolution most of the time.

Other points included:

- the link between small-scale innovation projects and broader cultural institutional change
- the importance of review and reflection as an integral part of the process of innovation
- the importance of innovation projects being underpinned by a strong pedagogical and scholarly rationale
- having the freedom to take risks
- the recognition that projects might evolve along the way
- the value of external funding from HEFCE as providing an external validation for innovation projects.

'It's important to have a good pedagogical and scholarly rationale for your innovation and for it to be framed in an action research methodology – this ensures that a good pedagogical question is identified from the outset and that the innovation has an inductive quality (not just 'it seems like a good idea').'

'Be prepared for things to happen haphazardly: change is organic and can thus feel messy creating anxiety. This is normal.'

'It is key that the users (in this case the learners) be involved in the design, pilot and implementation of the innovation. Where this has happened, they have taken ownership and been very engaged.'

7. Toolkit on pedagogical innovation

Participants offered a range of suggestions about possible elements for inclusion in the proposed Toolkit and suggested that it should be produced as a digital resource. Requested categories include:

- Getting started/project management
- Innovation (What does it look like in practice? How is it achieved?)
- Managing change
- Involving students (preparing, encouraging, maximising impact)
- Exemplars/case studies
- Dissemination
- Community building
- Evaluation
- Research

8. Conclusion

The varied range of interactions and data that we have drawn on as part of this report have yielded a set of rich insights into pedagogical innovation enablers as well as inhibitors. Though the Catalyst A projects are still underway, and it would be premature to draw firm conclusions, a set of contextual factors is emerging as important in facilitating innovation (including strategic support, institutional relationships, communication, resourcing) beyond the specific content of the particular intervention or innovation.

In addition, the findings to date foreground the value, opportunities and challenges involved in partnering and engaging with students in the innovation process. There has also been a high level of interest amongst participants to learn from other Catalyst A projects' broader lessons about:

- the enhancement of the student educational experience in the HE and FE sector
- processes of pedagogical innovation and
- developing new approaches to student engagement.

In all our interactions with the Catalyst A project teams, we have been struck by the enthusiasm and energy that have characterised the projects with whom we have come into contact and the resourcefulness which they have demonstrated in developing and implementing their projects.

Appendix A: links to project work contributed in the October survey

<p>Aston University</p> <p>Analytics Plus: Enhancing retention and progression of undergraduate students through effective and Co-ordinated advancement of institutional learning analytics</p>	<p>http://learning-analytics.tlc.aston.ac.uk/</p>
<p>Birmingham City University</p> <p>Improving learning and teaching through collaborative observation</p>	<p>http://blogs.bcu.ac.uk/collaborativeobservation/</p>
<p>Birmingham City University</p> <p>Improving learning and teaching through collaborative observation</p>	<p>http://blogs.bcu.ac.uk/collaborativeobservation/</p>
<p>Blackburn College</p> <p>Interactive Essays</p>	<p>http://catalyst.blackburn.ac.uk/</p>
<p>Brunel University London</p> <p>Digital Examinations</p>	<p>http://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/education-innovation/Digital-Assessment-Brunel</p>
<p>Buckinghamshire New University</p> <p>Traversing digital-creative perspectives: preparing design and technology students for interdisciplinary work</p>	<p>https://bucks.ac.uk/news/2017/november/heritage-trail-website-brings-first-world-war-to-life</p> <p>Exeter Change Agents Network Conference https://can.jiscinvolve.org/wp/files/2017/04/RRochon-Bucks-New-U.pdf</p> <p>Heritage Trail App developed by participating students https://www.wycombetrails.org/#home</p>
<p>Canterbury Christ Church University</p> <p>Evaluating the 'Traffic Light Tool'; a potential high impact pedagogy</p>	<p>https://blogs.canterbury.ac.uk/trafficlightstool/</p>
<p>Coventry University</p> <p>GameChangers</p>	<p>http://gamify.org.uk</p> <p>Twitter hashtag - #GChangers</p>
<p>Goldsmiths' College</p> <p>CodeCircle: browser-based creative coding leading to deeper learning and wider skills acquisition</p>	<p>Goldsmith's http://live.codecircle.com (the system itself) http://research.gold.ac.uk/20752/</p>
<p>Leeds Beckett University</p> <p>PULSE - Personalised User Learning & Social Environment</p>	<p>https://pulse.withknown.com/</p>

<p>St Mary's University and UCLan</p> <p>Collaborative reflection in practice: a cross-institutional project in sports coaching</p>	<p>https://jpaap.napier.ac.uk/index.php/JPAAP/article/view/289/pdf</p> <p>https://jpaap.napier.ac.uk/index.php/JPAAP/article/view/289</p>
<p>Teesside University</p> <p>Enhancing employability outcomes through an immersive learning environment</p>	<p>https://blogs.tees.ac.uk/teonline/projects/hefce/</p>
<p>University of Hull</p> <p>Developing the use of learning analytics across the STEM disciplines to increase student engagement and improve student outcomes.</p>	<p>https://hullstemeducation.wordpress.com/</p>
<p>University of Cambridge</p> <p>ZEIT-GEIST: an immersive simulator for teaching of radiation oncology</p>	<p>www.comprt.org</p>
<p>University of Keele</p> <p>Unmaking Single Perspectives (USP): A listening project</p>	<p>https://www.keele.ac.uk/listeningproject/</p> <p>Blog - https://usplistingproject.wordpress.com/</p> <p>Twitter - @USPListenProj Facebook page - https://www.facebook.com/USPListingproj/</p>
<p>University of Leeds</p> <p>myPAL@work: Learning Analytics for Reflective Learning and Professional Development</p>	<p>http://mypalinfo.leeds.ac.uk/</p>
<p>University of Sheffield</p> <p>Developing Design Consultants of the Future; Embedding Augmented Reality in Learning & Teaching</p>	<p>@ddcfsheffield (Twitter)</p> <p>https://twitter.com/ddcfsheffield?lang=en</p>
<p>University of Sussex</p> <p>ePortfolio Analytics</p>	<p>https://aaimproject.com/</p>
<p>University of the West of England, Bristol</p> <p>Children as Engineers</p>	<p>https://curiositybristol.net/about/</p> <p>http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/research/sciencecommunicationunit/projecthighlights/childrenasengineers</p>
<p>University of Warwick</p> <p>Developing a student-driven educational model between, beyond and across disciplines</p>	<p>https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/eng/research/grouplist/eerg/whec/funding/hefce_catalyst_a/</p>