

WHAT NEXT FOR LEARNING GAIN? THE SEVEN LESSONS FROM LEGACY

PROFESSOR CHRISTINA HUGHES

VILLIERS PARK TRUST

LESSON ONE: THE POWER OF LEARNING GAIN

- ▶ *'I think stuff like this [Strengths Profiling] should be open to every student to do as part of your first and last year, that would be amazing ... if you go to university and get one done then and then you leave and have another one just before you leave, just to show you what university does for you...'* (Student participant, Realise 2 Strengths)

INTRODUCING LEGACY - Learning and Employability Gain Assessment Community

- ▶ HEFCE Pilot Programme
- ▶ 3 Years
 - ▶ Oct 2015 – Sept 2018
- ▶ 4 Work Packages
 - ▶ Measurement of Learning Gain (Cambridge)
 - ▶ Employability (Warwick, Nottingham, Birmingham)
- ▶ 18 Russell Group Universities
 - ▶ Birmingham, Bristol, Durham, Cambridge, Exeter, Imperial, Kings, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Queen Mary, Sheffield, Southampton, UCL, Warwick, York
 - ▶ Sheffield Hallam University from November 2016

LEGACY'S FOUR RESEARCH STREAMS

- ▶ the development of a tool to measure learning gain over time, led by the University of Cambridge (Jan Vermunt, Anna Vignoles and Sonia Illie);
- ▶ assessing the use of positive psychologocial approaches to supporting employability through the Realise 2 Strengths diagnostic, led by the University of Warwick (Anne Wilson and Heike Behle);
- ▶ engaging 'hard to engage' students in employability through career adaptabilities measures, led by the University of Nottingham (Nalayini Thambar and Toni Wright);
- ▶ assessing the impact of international experiences of developing employability skills and capabilities, led by the University of Birmingham (Eluned Jones and Toni Wright).

LEGACY'S CORE RESEARCH QUESTION

- ▶ How might we best measure learning gains through different longitudinal and cross-sectional methodologies?

And so we committed to:

- ▶ pilot and test different methodologies for the measure of learning gain with a view to assessing their validity, transferability and scalability.

LEGACY'S OUTCOMES

- ▶ Engaged with over 7500 students across nineteen universities, delivering four research streams over a three year period.
- ▶ Developed a conceptual framework and a new tool for the measurement of learning gain as it applies to cognitive, meta-cognitive, affective and socio-communicative skills, capabilities and attributes.
- ▶ Developed a conceptual framework for the measurement of learning gain as it applies to employability.
- ▶ Tested and provided evidence of the impact of different interventions for improving learning gain in respect of skills and abilities; awareness; and reflexivity for employability.
- ▶ Developed comparative understandings of the efficacy of different methodologies (qualitative and quantitative) for the measurement of learning gain.
- ▶ Trained careers practitioners in new areas of intervention.
- ▶ Created strong communities of practice across participating institutions, particularly in the area of employability.
- ▶ Made important contributions across the sector to critical understandings of learning gain and teaching excellence.

LESSON 2: METHODOLOGICAL RIGOUR IS IMPORTANT

- ▶ Quantitative Approaches
- ▶ Standardised Tests
- ▶ Data Tracking
- ▶ Qualitative Approaches
- ▶ Mixed Methodologies
- ▶ Control Groups
- ▶ Hawthorne Effect
- ▶ Financial Incentives

LESSON 3: LEARNING IS NON-LINEAR

- ▶ Learning gain is often described as the 'distance travelled' between points A and B. However, our research reinforced how students certainly make progress in their knowledge and understanding. They can also have set-backs and concerns. Accepting the pedagogic staple that learning is non-linear is essential. Otherwise measurements at particular points in time will not accurately reflect a student's final level of development.

LESSON 4: SUBJECT LEVEL IS MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

- ▶ Subject is a more significant differentiator in respect of outcomes than institution. There is a lesson here for Subject TEF in terms of how 'signature pedagogies' produce particular kinds of learning outcomes and how learning gain tools might be designed.

LESSON 5: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IS INCREDIBLY CHALLENGING

- ▶ LEGACY research has involved around 7,500 students over the past three years. Yet getting students to engage has been an enduring theme across the whole of the OfS learning gain programme. This is why it is seriously good to know that OfS have commissioned Stella Devitt-Jones, Liz Austen and colleagues at Sheffield Hallam University to do more work on improving our understanding of students' perceptions of learning gain.

LESSON 6: WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR THE WHAT NEXT?*

- ▶ **Collective vision** - those working on advancing the understanding of learning gain in HE need to pool collective knowledge, have confidence in key findings and outline a vision for the future. We, as professional educators, have to own the policy problem. The role of the Office for Students, in a regulatory capacity, should be to outline the 'rules of the game' in which this vision fits. There is a risk, if the sector does not collectively move to fill this brief, that an enforcement of measures may fill the gap. As an immediate task, learning gain researchers should outline key principles for measurement, which can be contextually defined in a manner which reduces the academic complexity for policy makers.
- ▶ **Sector ownership** - for a fuller consideration of the implications of learning gain measurement, the sector should apply a more inclusive lens. This would include further work with students (how do you understand your own learning gain?) and graduates (how have you demonstrated learning and how could this be developed?). There is also more work to be done to include the perspective of Professional Bodies and importantly, employers, to understand the potential demand for learning gain measurement from HE providers.

(*with thanks for conversations with Liz Austen, Sheffield Hallam University)

LESSON 7: MEANINGFULLY APPLIED, MEASURES OF LEARNING GAIN ARE BETTER THAN THE NSS!

'I think that something like this [Strengths profiling] is actually much more useful than perhaps the student survey. Because I think it's much more holistic.... It's a much more personal way of finding out about you rather than being just a student of the University of x, and what was your experience in that institution' (Student Participant, Realise 2 Strengths)

Find out more... www.legacy.ac.uk

Programme Lead: Professor Christina Hughes christina.hughes@villierspark.org.uk

Project Managers: Dr Liz Austen liz.austen@shu.ac.uk

Sunil Maher (until February 2018)

Research Fellow: Dr. Heike Behle Heike.Behle@warwick.ac.uk

WP Leaders:

Cambridge: Professor Jan Vermunt jdhv@cam.ac.uk

Professor Anna Vignoles av404@cam.ac.uk

Dr. Sonia Ilie isi22@cam.ac.uk

Birmingham: Eluned Jones E.G.Jones@bham.ac.uk

Nottingham: Dr. Nalayini Thambar Nalayini.Thambar@nottingham.ac.uk

Warwick: Anne Wilson A.E.Wilson@warwick.ac.uk