NMMLGP evaluation & student engagement

NMMLGP Evaluation Research Team

Directorate of Student Engagement, Evaluation and Research

Sheffield Hallam University

Context

* An overview of the evaluation: aim, objectives and methodology
* Key findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2
* Policy recommendations

Evaluation Aim

* To understand the logistical requirements of administering a sector-wide learning gain questionnaire across multiple higher education providers in England

Objectives

* Understand plans & processes put in place by the ten NMMLGP institutions to recruit students to participate in the test/questionnaire &, where appropriate, to support students, particularly those who may have concerns with their test outcomes
* Identify approaches & practices that worked well, & those that were less effective
* Identify opportunities & challenges, & how these were utilised / overcome
* Understand students' experiences & opinions of the NMMLGP
* Identify issues & considerations for scaling up the NMMLGP to a sector-wide approach

Methodology: Phase 1

* Interviews with each HE Provider (HEP) lead for the NMMLGP (reality 9/10)
* Survey Research Design Checklist (SRDC): draws upon systematic reviews of factors affecting survey response rates
* Annotated bibliography of recent learning gain literature
* Documentary analysis, using SRDC criteria

Discussion Point

Consider the SRDC exemplar, applied to the NMMLGP:

* Something you could use, when considering survey use and design?

Methodology: Phase 2

* Student researcher-led student focus groups, with originally participating HEPs, using own student voice mechanisms for recruitment of sample (10 focus groups held in 5 participating HEPs)
* Purpose: exploring student perceptions of learning gain
* Counterfactual process of 6 additional focus groups in HEP not involved in NMMLGP
* Purpose: exploring student perceptions of learning gain, in absence of NMMLGP involvement

Key Findings: Phase 1 (1)

* **Understand plans & processes:** Phase 1 limitations of initial research design were challenging for HEPs trying to promote NMMLGP

* **Identify approaches & practices that worked well / were less effective:** significant challenges for HEPs in operationalising NMMLGP. Recruitment, participation and support were problematic due to data protection aspects

* **Identify opportunities and challenges, & how these were utilised / overcome:** curtailed further rollout of the learning gain questionnaire, based on evidence that participating HEPs were disinclined to continue

Key Findings: Phase 1 (2)

* **Understand students' experiences & opinions of the NMMLGP:** due to very low response rates from students participating in NMMLGP, obtaining participant perspectives proved impossible

* **Identify issues & considerations for scaling up the NMMLGP to a sector-wide approach:** Phase 1 feedback and evidence indicated that, in proposed guise, a national mixed methods survey is not a productive approach

Change of Direction!

* Interim findings of Phase 1 reported to HEFCE in March 2018

* Consequently, newly-formed OfS discontinued administration and evaluation of learning gain questionnaire with HEPs within the NMMLGP

* Replaced by more student-centred, qualitative focus concerning perceptions and conceptualisations of learning gain

Key Findings: Phase 2 (1)

* Majority of participants demonstrated low to moderate awareness of the term 'learning gain' with many reporting they were unaware of the concept. A small minority had discussed learning gain within a subject-specific context

* Students were able to define and identify ways of measuring their progress despite low levels of awareness of learning gain concept

* Participants agreed that learning gain measure would be beneficial if flexible enough to meet individual circumstances. Many students stressed that a learning gain measure must have a clear purpose to enable progress and development to be tracked. Should also be embedded within a subject

Key Findings: Phase 2 (2)

* There were a range of factors, including metrics, that students drew upon when choosing a course but a national measure of learning gain was not pivotal in decision-making. Some students raised potential for using a learning gain toolkit or framework

* There were mixed perceptions of influence of incentives on participation some related effectiveness of an incentive to extent to which the activity is personally salient and internally motivating

* Participants favoured guaranteed, instant incentives and more productive if introduced by trusted source (e.g. course leader)

Counterfactual Analysis

* Aim of counterfactual analysis concerned looking for corresponding and diverging opinions so that impact of the NMMLGP on students' perceptions could be identified

* Counterfactual evidence corresponded with data gathered from the 5 participating HEPs across all analytical themes: awareness of learning gain; defining and measuring learning gain; perceived characteristics of an effective learning gain measure; incentives

* Analysis indicates that NMMLGP had little impact on student perceptions of learning gain within main sample. Counterfactual sample participants placed greater emphasis on application of knowledge for their employability and transferable skills

Discussion Points

Consider the quotes from student respondents:

* Anything that surprises you?

* Does this evidence resonate with your own HEP and how your students' view learning gain?

Policy Recommendations

* A one-size fits all NMMLGP-type measure of learning gain should not be pursued. It holds minimal value for students

* Students' perceptions of learning gain need further exploration to move beyond these impressionistic findings

* The sector needs to consider whose interests are best served by measurement of learning gain as evidence here indicates a dichotomous view: as a marker of institutional positioning within a market-oriented system OR as a process of progression throughout the student journey

* Learning gain needs to be related to students' own contexts and clearly embedded at local level within subject / disciplinary areas and engagement is highly dependent on whether initiatives are promoted by trusted sources

Any Questions?

Thanks for listening!

John Adesola, Liz Austen, Alan Donnelly, Stella Jones-Devitt, Nathaniel Pickering and Adam Weston

Web: https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-us/our-services/steer

Blog: https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/steer/

Email: steer@shu.ac.uk Twitter: @SHU_StEER