Realising Engagement through Active Culture Transformation (REACT)

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Student Engagement: UK Picture

Student engagement

‘...has come to mean many things to many people, to such an extent that it has perhaps become too diverse to have any clear meaning. It has been linked to student participation, involvement, commitment, effort and motivation; to Student Unions and to academic study; to developing new relationships between staff and students and to students having a ‘voice’; to partnership, co-creation and collaboration; to student satisfaction, retention and completion; to enhancement and quality’. 

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Many initiatives in the UK and across the world:

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<th>Students as Partners</th>
<th>Student Fellows</th>
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<td>Student Partnerships</td>
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<td>Students as Champions</td>
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<td>Students as Researchers</td>
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<td>Students as Co-Researchers</td>
<td>Students as Change Makers</td>
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<td>Students as Learners and Teachers</td>
<td>Students as Co-Producers</td>
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<td>Students as Change Agents</td>
<td>Students as Co-creators</td>
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<td>Students as Co-constructers</td>
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(Dunne, 2016)
Project aims:

- Create an online hub for SE
- Develop tools and resources for the sector
- Research the impact of SE, in particular ‘hard-to-reach’ students.
- Identify good practice and share across the sector

HEFCE Catalyst funded in 2015
July 1st 2015 – Summer 2017...

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REACT Core Institutions

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Student Fellows

- The University of Winchester working in partnership with Winchester’s Student Union
- Students work in partnership with staff
- 60 Students per year
- Student experience enhancement projects
- £600 Bursary
Students as Change Agents

- Student Led change supported by a scheme and staff
- To intervene and run projects that better the student experience, employability & community
- Volunteers
- Unlimited no. of students
- Students empowered to make real change

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Success Coaches (PASS)

- Peer-Assisted Student Success (PASS) scheme – for all first-year students, course (programme)-embedded
- As a means to tackle retention, attainment and transition to Higher Education
- Peer Support and Coaching for success.
- Main themes around building confidence to success in HE
16% of students are active participants in Student Union activities

Strong variations in participation rates occur between:
- Resident and commuting students
- Mature and under-25 year old students
- Those with parental or caring responsibilities
- Those who did not move from home to attend university
- Part-time students

(NUS, 2013)
Hard-to-Reach

• Students from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups represent 20% of NUS members.
• Yet fewer than 4% of elected officers and sabbaticals are from BME groups (Runnymede Trust, 2007).

Other student groups considered ‘hard-to-reach’:
- Mature students
- Postgraduate students,
- Disabled students
- Students with dependants
- International students
Collaborative Development Programme

Sheffield Hallam University

buck University of Brighton

University of Greenwich

Aston University

Canterbury Christ Church University

University of Bristol

University of Southampton

Edinburgh Napier University

Newman University

Newcastle University

The University of Manchester

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Innovative Approaches

Sector leading development programme for Universities in relation to Student Engagement and change.

Collaborative Development Programme:

• Development Days
• Discussion Events
• Consultancy Visits
• Dissemination (RAISE Symposium, Jisc Journal and REACT Conference)

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Research & Evaluation

Researching the impact of student engagement at UoW, UoE, LMU and beyond, in particular ‘hard-to-reach’ students. The key focus is to identify good practice and share across the sector

- Baseline data from core institutions
- Survey exploring demographics, motivations & commitments of ‘active’ students
- Survey exploring barriers
- Video case studies
- Support data collection at partner institutions

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Challenge 1: Student Engagement

- Student Engagement takes multiple forms
- Some institutions are not clear what student engagement means
- Some institutions are just beginning to think about writing strategies or other documentation to cover student engagement
- There is confusion between student engagement and partnership
- There is often a difference between University and Student Union perceptions
- There are marked differences in conception across any one University
- Students do not use/understand the term ‘student engagement’
Challenge 1: Student Engagement

What REACT is doing

- Helping universities to clarify what they mean by Student Engagement/Partnership
- Offering a Mapping Tool to be completed by multiple stakeholders
- Talking to students about what they perceive to be ‘Student Engagement’

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Many people in the collaborative group dislike the term ‘hard-to-reach’

Students in particular dislike this term, and being labelled as such

‘Hard-to-reach’ can be perceived as the students’ fault, rather than that of the institution

Those who might be perceived as ‘hard-to-reach’, or come from such a group, may engage fully in institutional student engagement initiatives
Challenge 2: ‘Hard to Reach’

What REACT is doing?

- Consulting all involved re a more suitable term to use (e.g. marginalised students)
- Ensuring that documents using the term do not encourage the blaming of students/staff
- Encouraging and supporting new initiatives to engage diverse students
- Piloting a survey to look at student motivations for participating in Student Engagement initiatives
Institutions do not really know who their ‘hard-to-reach’ are

Data on possible ‘hard to reach’ students is collected by different offices/groups and not put together

Universities and their Unions rarely work together for this purpose

So-called ‘hard-to-reach’ students are likely to be different according to each institution

It is more complex than current research and literature might suggest
Challenge 3: ‘Hard to Reach’

What REACT is doing

- Helping universities to clarify what they mean by ‘hard-to-reach’
- Reporting on the ‘hard-to-reach’ in the 15 REACT institutions to give a more developed national picture
- Providing contextually-based case studies on ‘hard-to-reach’ students
- Developing a Tool/Protocol for future use to support institutions in recognising their ‘hard-to-reach’

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Institutional Student Engagement champions are/feel hard pushed for **time** for this agenda

Some staff champions do not know how well/if they are supported by senior managers

There are multiple priorities, and possibly new drivers with the TEF

In many institutions there is considerable re-organisation and uncertainty for the future

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**Challenge 4: How much does it matter?**

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Challenge 4: How much does it matter?

What REACT is doing

- Bringing practical expertise to support institutions in the ways that they decide
- Engaging with the collaborating universities at times that are decided by them
- Giving institutions confidence in the rationale and drivers for student engagement/partnership
- Helping universities to collect and analyse data and evaluate projects in regards to ‘hard-to-reach’ students.
- Giving those involved space on the REACT website to tell their success stories

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Case studies from all Universities involved in REACT.

Student Engagement stories from interview staff and students.

Open resources for the sector.

Online blog open for contributions.

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Special Issue of the Journal of Education Innovation, Partnership & Change.

- Research articles and case studies from REACT’s research and wider project.
- Case studies from all 16 Collaborative Development Universities.
- Additional Opinion Pieces from world leading experts in Student Engagement
- **Release date: 1\textsuperscript{st} August 2017**
Thank you for listening

Find out more and get in touch:

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