When Quality Assurance Meets Innovation in Higher Education

A QAA collaborative enhancement project undertaken in order to investigate the relationship between quality assurance (QA) and innovation in UK Higher Education (HE).

QAA Case Study of Practice 1: University of Wales Trinity St David

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Alumni-informed Programme Development and Education for Innovation

1. Context

This case study shares an innovation that commenced in the School of Visual Communication, Art and Design, UWTSD. Alumni feedback became integral to the design and delivery of programmes suited to dynamic work environments. Opportunities for alumni engagement came to the fore when their feedback provided evidence of a demand for a new-to-the-UK 'Brand and Advertising' course that responded to industry needs.

The advertising industry demands creative ideas generation every day, and a high degree of flexibility and adaptability when dealing with clients and current trends. This challenged many educational norms, and alumni persuaded the University's QA team that pedagogical styles and assessment strategies needed to change to reflect this requirement. Subsequently, the model has informed the QAA Quality Code in Learning and Teaching and many international initiatives.

2. The innovation

We used intelligence from alumni to inform curriculum development as well as day-to-day teaching and learning, as they are uniquely placed to reflect and comment on their own learning experiences, arguably, much more so than current students. A focus on developing more innovative learners drove the approach, as it aligned with the needs of the creative industries, offering up-to-date insights and clarity as to what past students felt in regard to the merits and demerits of their course of study.

Through enhanced engagement with past students who had studied in the department, it was anticipated that:

   a) New provision could be better mapped to current industry needs and shortfalls
   b) Current students could obtain advice and thoughts from past students on a regular basis, both formally and informally
   c) Arguments for updates and change could be fed up to department heads and QA teams, based on these insights.

The notion of using alumni to inform developments was rooted in an informal approach developed in the 1980s, which became formalised in 2004-05 following a successful HEA (now AdvanceHE) review of creative enterprise in the creative industries (Kellet, 2006). Known and published as the 'Continual Conceptual Review Model' (Penaluna and Penaluna 2006, 2015), it subsequently informed University of Wales Trinity Saint David's (UWTSD)

enterprise and entrepreneurship team, and was used as a research model by the International Institute for Creative Entrepreneurial Development (UWTSD IICED).

A watershed event in 2005 illustrates the potential, as alumni intelligence helped to drive significant change in the way that learning and teaching moved towards andragogy and heutagogy, and assessment of learning incorporated abilities such as being adaptive and flexible, and multi-solution, directed problem-solvers.

In 2012 the Director of UWTSD IICED chaired the QAA's first guidance documentation for all UK HEIs and contributed to a Government review of university-business collaboration, where business owners applauded the initiative (BEIS/Wilson Review, 2012). Subsequently, the EU-Joint Research Centre and the OECD drew upon the approach and QAA's (2018) updated Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Guidance clarified the opportunities it brings.

3. Outcomes

The intervention featured in research relating to the development of the EU Joint Research Centre's EntreComp (Entrepreneurial Competencies) Framework. Here, future orientated visioning abilities, opportunity-spotting (a precursor to problem-solving), and coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk feature as distinct areas of competence. In UK terms, QAA's Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Guidance references alumni engagement in six of its 27 descriptions of best practice, and the 2018 QAA Quality Code Guidance on Learning and Teaching references it in two of its eight pages of guidance.

UWTSD's International Institute for Creative Entrepreneurial Development attributes the approach to its UK-leading success in graduate start-ups and business survival rates, due to the connectivity of staff with alumni, as HEBCIS data is more readily captured, and longitudinal insights more easily gained. Flash surveys offer insights to what alumni university experience has supported (or not) in their careers. Whilst only been undertaken through the context of a peer reviewed paper once, the findings are notable. Here, 49 responses to questions designed to elicit feedback over the value of their education highlighted three important areas:

- Lecturers should ensure that students keep a time record of working hours, to better facilitate costing and estimating exercise in their future careers.

- Lecturers should discuss and debate value metrics, to gain insights into how different clients or customers would value their contribution.

- Lectures should simulate the realities of workplaces as much as possible, including shifting information as data becomes available, taking into account forces of change.

When subsequently asked about the importance of the above, the top-ranking reply related to simulating the realities of workplaces; 91.84% agreed with the notion that this ability had helped their careers.

Engaging alumni has had significantly greater success than anticipated, moving from a local to international initiatives.

4. Takeaways

- Alumni can offer insights that relate to curriculum design and pedagogical approaches, and from a longitudinal perspective.

- Current students may not be best placed to offer constructive feedback on their learning
- experiences. Alumni often value things differently once they have engaged with the workplace.

- QA in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship can help to facilitate these approaches and better prepare learners for the challenges beyond graduation.

- Perceived quality issues can change when alumni are engaged and more holistic perspectives gained.

- If used well, alumni can engage with current students and support their learning.

- Teaching learners to be innovative requires learning and assessment strategies that ensure creativity and curiosity are recognised and valued, not predetermined outcomes such as those found in tests and examinations.

5. Additional resources

Understanding the different 'gogies' that can support learning for innovation. See: Jones, C., Penaluna, K., & Penaluna, A. (2019). The Promise of Andragogy, Heutagogy and Academagogy to Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education Pedagogy. Education + Training , 61 (9). pp. 1170-1186. ISSN 0040-0912 Online at: www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ET-10-2018-0211/full/html

An insight into European Research that supports the case / led the development of the EU EntreComp Framework: Komarkova, I., Gagliardi, D., Conrads, J., and Collado A. (2015). Entrepreneurship Competence: An Overview of Existing Concepts, Policies and Initiatives – Final Report . Luxembourg (Luxembourg): Publications Office of the European Union; 2015. JRC96531. Online at: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC96531

A practical user guide into assessing and evaluating entrepreneurial learning, includes creativity, visioning, opportunity recognition and working in situations of ambiguity and risk – as developed by the EU's Joint Research Centre: McCallum, E., Weicht, R., McMullan, L., & Price, A. (2018). EntreComp into Action – Get inspired, make it happen: A user guide to the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework. Bacigalupo, M. & O'Keefe, W. (Eds), EUR 29105 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Online at: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC109128

A paper that moves the entrepreneurial learning agenda from business thinking to developing creative innovative learners, based on creative industries approaches to engaging alumni: Penaluna, A., & Penaluna, K. (2008). Business Paradigms in Einstellung: Harnessing Creative Mindsets: A Creative Industries Perspective. Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship , 21:2, 231-250, Online at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08276331.2008.10593588

Assessment of ideas generation, innovation and opportunity recognition are central to developing and learning entrepreneurial behaviours. This paper highlights clear parallels

between approaches from "design" disciplines, who are tasked to develop creative thinkers who solve other people's problems: Penaluna, A., & Penaluna, K. (2009). Assessing creativity: drawing from the experience of the UK's creative design educators. Education + Training , Vol. 51 No. 8/9, pp. 718-732. https://doi.org/10.1108/00400910911005262

This paper offers insights into a classroom practice where neuroscience informs learning teaching and assessment related to creativity, visioning skills, dealing with ambiguity demonstrating flexibility and adaptability: Penaluna, A., & Penaluna, K. (2021). In search of entrepreneurial competencies: Peripheral vision and multidisciplinary inspiration. Industry and Higher Education , 35(4), 471-484. Online at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422220963796

QA Guidance in learning and teaching that supports those wishing to engage their alumni: QAA (2018). UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Learning and Teaching. Online at: www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/advice-and-guidance/learning-and-teaching

Influential UK Guidance that helps to ensure that all subjects and disciplines can develop enterprising creators who demonstrate the ability to add value to society. This has numerous references to alumni engagement: QAA (2018). Enterprise and Entrepreneurship. Online at: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-education

A seminal report from UK Government that has significantly influenced policy and practice development, based on the needs of UK industry. Page 50 supports the notion that university assessment needs to be fit for purpose – as proposed by alumni in this case study: Wilson, T. (2012). Business University Collaboration: The Wilson Review. Department for Business Innovation and Skills. Online at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-university-collaboration-the-wilson-review