

The 3E's project – student expectations, experiences and encounters with HE and staff perceptions.

Report 4

Methodology

This report focuses on music students from a university and an HE in FE partner college. The methodology adopted encouraged an open discussion based on the questionnaire, with the same approach being taken in discussions with staff across both institutions.

Each student group consisted of first and second year learners, allowing a wider response to the student experiences explored. There was a positive and engaging attitude taken throughout the discussions, with a final analysis encouraging acknowledgment of the agreed points to take forward. All students and staff were assured anonymity, and any of the learners featured on the photographs during the sessions signed release forms. The three key areas of pre-entry, induction and the environment and retention have been addressed with both students and staff. A total of 40 students and 4 staff were interviewed across both institutions.

Foundation Degree @ FE College

Students: (15)

Pre-entry

Students were aware of the mission statement as this had been introduced from the outset. The learners felt that tutors and staff maintained an approachable attitude encouraging the less secure learners to feel at ease. The student body are totally regional, and it was established that many of the mature students chose the facility because of accessibility and the financial implications of travelling.

All potential students had course and bursary interviews. Some students were unhappy about effectively having to enrol twice, firstly with the college and then with the university. They felt this should be incorporated into one process.

Induction

Students integrate with other learners throughout the induction process encouraging team working and intrinsically laying the foundations for future projects. The learners were given details of the course content and expectations for the year. All learners were made to feel welcome and were encouraged to take a professional approach to the tasks ahead from the outset.

Environment and Retention

Students' felt that they enjoy and individual approach to learning, and have separate HE facilities available for booking throughout the week at the college. The general response was that students felt the atmosphere to be vibrant, with plenty of cross-disciplinary projects encouraging a feel for

professional industrial practice. Learners are encouraged to be self-critical and question their artistic development through evaluative content

One useful aspect of the course was felt to be the timetabled sessions being delivered within two days. The full two-year lesson programme had also been issued from the outset, allowing those working part time to fully arrange the first year, and then to alternate smoothly to the second over the same two days.

Student comments included:

"The college staff were welcoming and helpful"

"The book-able studio is a good idea, but it should be open nights."

"I enjoyed meeting new people"

"The enrolment has been a pain, we should have one simple system"

Staff @ FE College: (2)

Pre-entry

The staff employ a relaxed but informative approach during the initial interviews. There are a series of advice evenings and open events allowing potential students to visit the facilities and talk to the staff. These have proved invaluable to students allowing them to gain insight into the forthcoming requirements on the course. Only 50% of the staff teaching on the programme are full time, this limits the access to everyone during the summer interviews and open events.

Induction

The staff encourage a friendly relationship with the students, allowing regular 1 to 1 support, where learners are asked to integrate various media and professional aspects into their initial projects. They are helped towards the development of commercial projects allowing them to deal with clients and to promote employability. Staff are aware of the mission statement, and include reference to this within the induction week.

Environment and Retention:

Team working is encouraged integrating projects with other students to help in further promoting industrial practices. The learning takes place between the main campus and two external facilities.

Tutors have concerns that the college environment clashes with HE because of the shared facilities when using specialist equipment. This is something being addressed at the moment, looking into the prospect within the new facility of more independent facilities. Tutors encourage individual approaches to learning allowing some independence when using the equipment. There are positive expanding links with other associate colleges and these are helping staff in various ways to improve the delivery to students, including recognition of technology development, bench marking, and creative links.

Staff commented on this:

"It's difficult sometimes to keep an HE environment when students have to share specialist equipment."

BA Honours @ University

Students: (25)

Pre-entry

Students found the staff helpful and friendly, expressing positive views about the information given. During the initial presentation the students were guided through their chosen course, and introduced to the other performing art areas looking at the relevant links. This immediately gave the learners the feeling of potentially belonging to a larger structure, with all this being backed up by a campus tour.

Induction

Students receive good overall information about the working practices within the campus, with a variety of projects encouraging them to explore the facility. Learners are aware of the mission statement through the induction processes, and are immediately encouraged to interact and work with other students through a variety of exercises. The learners can feel part of an adult learning environment from the outset, although some felt a little lost initially. There is good access to libraries, clubs, and to student union support. The students show a genuine excitement being part of a wider university culture, and the expectations of the forthcoming nightlife plays a part in this.

Environment and facilities.

Students felt that there is a positive atmosphere evolving from the creatively designed media complex allowing them to gain experience working alongside other specialities. They felt that there is a good relationship with the tutors, and that the staff are approachable and helpful when issues arise.

One useful aspect of the facilities is the 24 hour booking system, allowing them to secure production facilities when it suits them.

Student commented positively on:

“The 24 hour booking system is useful”

“ I enjoyed the induction because we could see all the different areas”

“ Tutors are approachable”

“ I get a buzz from meeting new people and going out”

“ I felt a bit awkward at first but soon got to know everyone”

Staff: (2)

Pre-entry

There is a helpful and informative system intrinsically in place allowing students to gain access to the information and relevant staff from the outset. Interviews and auditions establish the standards required by the learners, and these are presented in a friendly and approachable way.

Induction

Staff are aware of the mission statement, and use this within the initial address to the students. All members of the team have industrial/professional links, allowing them to encourage professional practice from the outset

During the initial presentation the students are guided through their chosen course, and introduced to other performing art areas looking at the various links. This gives the learners a feeling of belonging to a larger structure, and is further backed up by a campus tour.

Environment and facilities.

To make the students feel included in the learning environment. they are given induction exercises and icebreakers involving various areas of the campus, the library and the theatres etc.

Students are also given mini-disc recorders and sent around the building to collate sounds, allowing them to get into a working pattern early.

The staff encourage the students to expand their arts outside the institution, developing bands, creative gigs and performances. The environment is excellent within the new media centre, and this should help develop further integrated projects with dance, performance and art.

“Students are encouraged to develop working practices with venues outside of the University”

Overview.

The creative courses at times have not been taken seriously as an important contributor to the curriculum within FE colleges. This could be part of a wider problem exposing the differences between purely academically driven institutions and specialist creative learning environments.

There is an important issue regarding shared facilities within the college environment, this has a detrimental effect on some HE students who feel a lack of independence from FE.

Reflection on the collaborative research

The opportunity to research student views and thoughts from the two learning environments has been a rewarding experience throughout. The agreement was for the partners to visit each establishment with an informal approach, and encourage the students to talk freely in a relaxed atmosphere.

Both visits started with some trepidation as the learners held back a little seeing a new face at the table, but this was soon overcome and the sessions were a great success with open and frank discussions. The outcomes were then analysed by the partners, before completing the report. This in itself became a useful process, allowing insights into potential problem areas and success stories within the different institutions.

The project has been a great success and we look forward to further collaborations.