

Learning Landscape Project

Where does the project fit in?

The University's *Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2006-2009*, has as its first strategic aim to provide excellent student learning opportunities. As part of the implementation of that strategy, the University has committed itself "through the Learning Landscape Project (LLP), [to] investigate the teaching methods which underpin the programmes offered, both undergraduate and graduate, with a view to exploring how students may be offered the best opportunities to learn" (§4.1.2 and Action Plan §4.1.2b). It is part of the University's ongoing programme of quality enhancement. As can be seen from the way in which the Aim is expressed, the LLP serves as a first stage in the review of our existing strategies for supporting student learning.

Aims and Objectives

The Learning Landscape project is creating a descriptive framework that helps in placing learning and teaching initiatives by providers across the university in the wider context of methods by which students go about the process of learning. This framework is being created by mapping how both learning and teaching currently take place at the University of Cambridge, and by surveying key stakeholders' views about the strengths of the current approaches. This will provide a basis for the Education Committee, as well as Colleges, Faculties and Departments, to decide priorities for consolidation, new initiatives and support..

The objectives of the project are to:

- capitalise on the opportunities offered by current HEA development and research agendas and funding to undertake the research collegiate Cambridge finds useful about student learning;
- contribute to a shared understanding within the University and the Colleges about the current range of teaching and learning environments, assessment processes, and applications of new technologies in the university;
- facilitate the identification of the good practice across the university and the colleges of how student learning is supported by teaching and other activities;
- engage widely with staff, students and alumni to identify ways of describing the teaching and learning provision and experiences of different parts of the University in such a way that useful comparisons can be made across different disciplines;
- stimulate discussion on current provision, exploring whether it remains fit for purpose, and contemplating possible changes in provision, with particular emphasis on appropriate use of small group teaching and e-learning;
- create the conditions where engagement in these reflective processes can be sustained over time;
- provide an evidence base for the next phase of the University Learning and Teaching Strategy and other research and development activities.

Approaches

The approaches developed by the project are designed to act as:

- replicable models for future activities
- models of engagement and development with staff and students
- means of generating data and interpretations for inclusion in an evidence base to support future re-use for a range of purposes

As such the approaches are participatory, iterative and multi-method, integrating qualitative data (such as interviews, observations and participant accounts) with quantitative data (including the results of surveys, outcome data and summary data from other sources).

At the core of the evidence base are case records drawing on these data and comprising:

- disciplinary approaches to teaching and learning
- innovations in teaching and learning, including curriculum design, assessment, learning technologies, and pedagogical approaches
- accounts of learner experience ('user' accounts rather than 'provider' accounts) to complement institutional perspectives

Timescale

The project involves three broad phases of data collection and development:

Phase 1: This phase (April 2007 onwards) involves working with key individuals across departments, faculties and colleges – many of these individuals also being members of the project steering group. Interviews with these individuals, and other data collected including quantitative and qualitative data on student experience, provide a basis for subsequent phases, as well as identifying appropriate means of engaging staff and students in Phase 2.

Phase 2: this phase (October 2007 onwards) involves the extension of project activities into faculties, departments and colleges through the organisation of 'group events' - either based within existing structures or through the establishment of new groups. While these will vary across contexts, key activities in this phase will be:

- further engagement with and extension and revision of case records
- comparison across cases and the identification of opportunities for sharing or transfer of knowledge or practices
- identification of ways forward – which might include the prioritisation of specific practices; the organisation of networking and transfer activities; the incorporation of project data into departmental teaching reviews; or the initiation of working groups or other sites for exchange of knowledge or practices

Phase 3: this phase (January 2008 onwards) involves the initiation of the approaches and innovations identified in the group phase. In this phase, the role of the project is to provide support for these activities, to maintain the project evidence base so as to

support departmental, faculty and college activities, and to provide a forum, through its steering group and other events, for higher-level knowledge transfer and synthesis.

Informing Policy and Practice

The project will inform policy and practice by offering a range of issues which can be included within an agenda for teaching and learning development at Cambridge, 'phrasing' key questions from the perspectives of a range of stakeholders. The discussions generate could help the University to draft visions of teaching and learning at Cambridge in 5, 10 or 25 years, based on project data, sector-wide changes, and the changes to teaching and learning environments made possible by new technologies.

The approaches developed and employed by the project will be elaborated and 'embedded' so that it is possible for departments, faculties and colleges to engage in systematic enquiry and evaluation of practice, further extending the evidence base.

The Steering Committee will be asked to advise on how to develop the project approaches and findings, so as to be able to contribute to the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Policy/Strategy workshops will take place during Phase 3 of the project and possibly afterwards; one purpose of these will be to develop synoptic but evidence-informed and grounded policy and strategy recommendations.

Beyond the project

A project report will be presented to the Education Committee in July 2008. This will identify the issues which it wants to take forward and recommend for consideration by Faculties and Departments and also for further funded research.