

Introduction:

In the UK, Foundation Degrees were established as part of a widening participation agenda providing opportunities for non-traditional learners to access higher education qualifications (QAA 2015). These degrees integrate academic theory and work-based experiences enabling students to apply complex concepts through reflection on practice throughout their 2 years of study (QAA 2015). Over the past 5 years, students' characteristics have become significantly more diverse.

The Department has a student focused approach and wanted to support students' diverse learning needs effectively. The Department's academic team of 18 staff, teaching on a variety of Health and Well Being courses, continues to review and adapt traditional learning and teaching approaches in line with the changes to cohort demographics and student expectations (Rao & Meo 2016; Kieran & Anderson 2018). The response has included:

- Supporting staff with knowledge, skills and capacity to embark on a journey of inclusive practice through Universal Design of Learning (UDL) (Mason 2018);
- Recognising staffs' perspectives and potential emotional impact related to the change process (Dasborough, Lamb, & Suseno, 2015); and
- Creating enthusiasm for the new approach.

The anticipated benefit of a responsive and inclusive approach is positive student engagement in the learning and teaching processes. This will assist students achieving their aspirations such as access to professional courses and promotion in their employment setting (Mason 2018).

What is UDL? How can we use it?
It sounds like a way forward!
(Staff Comments 2018)

Initial Reflection and Action:

In the first instance, I was tasked with reviewing data related to student engagement, experiences achievement and retention. The data highlighted a need to create opportunities for staff and students to work differently.

Prior to cultivating the 'new' inclusive culture, the UDL approach was introduced to the team and assessed in terms of supporting student learning. To that end, a year ago as Academic Group Lead (now Head of Department), I incorporated UDL and inclusive approaches into planning and development activities. Any challenges to implementing the change in pedagogical approach is assessed through my on-going reflection and evaluation activities with the team.

As a whole Department we participated in workshops about UDL, inclusive assessment policy, better understanding of courses and student learning needs. Opportunities for the team to assess and reflect on what was working, where we needed to improve and to identify solutions together are included in regular meetings. We continue to be mindful of learner variability and aim to design learning approaches that are relevant for all students respecting individual learners' styles, differences and development (Kieran & Anderson 2018).

Initial Outcomes:

Effective community of professional practitioners.

The learning experience crosses course boundaries and allows the ideal of inclusivity to become a reality. Staff are working closely across a variety of departments sharing practice experiences. Several are incorporating action research into the process to identify effectiveness of change.

Student engagement and confidence

Students are providing regular feedback and feed forward to staff regarding changes. Confidence to speak with staff and offer suggestions regarding changes is growing.

Case study

Alison*, a student with SpLD has accessed the UDL assessment offering and has achieved A+ in the modules that have trialled this. Research will continue by exploring her lived experience of these new forms of assessments

Methodology:

A reflective narrative providing insight into the phases and activities associated with the team's journey, began over 18 months ago. The methodology focuses on the idea that effective change management should be reviewed in light of experience, reflection and further change (Keesing-Styles et al 2014).

Method:

Use of self-reflection, maintaining a learning journal and regular feedback/review of activities being implemented with staff. Activities have included organising workshops to support learning; facilitating discussions within team meetings which continue to occur as part of planning and undertaking an audit of modules/course development activities inclusive of student input (CAST 2018).

AIMS and Objectives

Aims:

To improve student engagement, strengthen learning and increase success in assessment by incorporating UDL principles into curriculum/pedagogical developments.

Objectives:

- To support staffs' professional development in UDL as an inclusive pedagogical approach.
- To reflect on current practice and inform further developments of the learning and teaching curriculum
- To ensure the student voice is included in development/change.
- To review impact of inclusive/UDL changes made.

- Being able to choose assessment type reduced anxiety.
- New ways of providing support makes it easier to ask for help
- Student input changed direction of teaching; satisfaction increased

Further steps taken and On-going Developments:

- Audit and review current curriculum and assessment practices across all learning sites, led by Head of Department inclusive of partner colleges in line with UDL Guidelines (CAST 2018; Moriarty & Scarffe 2019)
- Focus on praxis: observing, reflecting, questioning, and collaborating with others to realise new ways of teaching (Entwistle 2009).
- New approaches to supporting students and personalised learning; changes to seminar sessions to enable scaffolding around academic skills development.
- Meetings and on-line consultations with students to identify how students learn, ideas to action and what is working well .
- Inclusive assessment providing alternative options for all students; monitoring achievement and learning outcomes to occur (UoW 2017).
- Research projects established as part of module changes inclusive of student participation; currently being analysed.
- Developing new courses with student and employer input.

References

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