

## **Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching: Frameworks and Practice conference, Open University, Milton Keynes, 6 April 2017**

### **Summary of Session 4 Theory into Practice – Option 4**

#### **CHANGING GEARS – EXPEDITING ORGANISATIONAL REORIENTATION TOWARDS A SUCCESSFUL INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENT**

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This facilitated workshop aimed to enable the group to surface and explore issues linked to creating organisations in which interdisciplinary learning and teaching can flourish. It sought to gather the collective perceptions and experiences of the group in relation to the key components of an ideal interdisciplinary learning and teaching community and how these can be built. Lastly, it aimed to give the group the opportunity to identify key actions back at their institution.

#### ***Planned Learning Outcomes:***

That by the end of this session participants would have:

- Considered the perceptions of different key stakeholders (students, colleagues, institution) in relation to interdisciplinary teaching and learning.
- Explored the components of an environment which encourages interdisciplinary learning and teaching.
- Discussed which factors may hamper or impede interdisciplinary working and how may these be overcome.
- Considered actions they can take back to their respective institutions designed at achieving closer orientation towards the ideal interdisciplinary environment.

The following is a summary of the key ideas created by each syndicate group:

*(Many thanks to all those who were involved for their invaluable contributions and enthusiasm!)*

## **Group A. BARRIERS**

*The questions set were:*

What kind of barriers might get in the way of the creation and maintenance of effective IT&L programmes? How might these be overcome? What actions could you take back at your institution?

For example;

- Academic allegiances or workload models
- Time needed to create and set up new programmes of learning
- Confidence of academic/support staff in relation to IT&L
- Student credit models

### **Key Points Discussed:**

#### **1. Funding Model**

Where?

Who working with?

Conflict

#### **Solutions**

Top slice

Balance needed

#### **2. Individual staff for good and bad**

Person initiative rather than institution

Solutions

Needs top recognising value

ID Writing into promotion criteria

Encouragement

Funding

#### **3. Access on systems/Technical restraints**

#### **Solutions**

Investment

Design

Workarounds

#### **4. Institutional corporate jargon not true interest**

#### **Solutions**

Managing expectations

Culture change

Blending

#### **5. Pragmatics, timetabling, logistics**

#### **Solutions**

Online

Investment

Compromise

### **Group B. STAKEHOLDERS**

*The questions set were:*

What are the perceptions of these key stakeholders about interdisciplinary learning and teaching? What does that tell us about how we should create successful IL&T partnerships? What action do you therefore need to take back at your institution?

- Students
- Colleagues
- Our Institution
- Other?

#### ***Key Points Discussed:***

Concepts of ID...Skills of ID

Well engaged.....Poorly engaged

Have a 10% 'community charge' that would allow staff to contribute to cross-faculty schemes, such as interdisciplinarity, public engagement, graduate employment, communities of learning, etc. The idea is that it would allow for staff development.

All staff to do ID teaching?

Stakeholders: Employers, QA processes, Year Tutors, Faculty, Accountant

What is the "Institution" anyway?... The university is US – if you want something ASK!

Different students

'What the hell were you doing?' – the ambiguity which can arise from colleagues doing ID work and uncertainties about what they are working on.

Pragmatic skills

ID Knowledge, Integration, Adaptability, Self-learning skills, Team skills

Money – accounting paths (budget codes)

### **Group C. ENVIRONMENT**

*The questions set were:*

What kind of environment allows/promotes interdisciplinary learning and teaching? What actions do you therefore need to take back at your institution?

- Leadership?
- Resource allocation model?
- Collegial relationships?
- Other?

#### ***Key Points Discussed:***

Physical space for staff to collaborate. Space and time to think! Break-out thinking space.

Recognition! Workload/Promotion

ID Research to ID Teaching – chain/pathways

Professional development!

Language

Coherent central support

Clear purpose

Evidence base – case studies – Employability

Room for Failure!

Not resist change!

Commitment

Learning to gain perspective! Prestige! Value

Incubate innovation

Social justice – link to broader themes

Funding driven

## **RESULTS**

Themes which emerge from all three group discussions:

- FUNDING – AND HOW FINANCE MAY DISCOURAGE ID T&L FROM TAKING PLACE
- THE NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH ENCOURAGES AND ENABLES STAFF TO PARTICIPATE IN ID T&L
- INHERENT STRUCTURAL ‘HAMPERINGS’ (E.G. SYSTEMS, SOFTWARE, PROCESSES)
- THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO BUILD INDIVIDUAL CAPABILITY TO UNDERTAKE ID T&L

## **Potential Solutions**

- Top slice which pays for ID work/Systems which ‘buy out’ staff or allow them the time to develop ID programmes
- ID T&L capabilities writing into academic promotions criteria
- Undergo a proactive process of culture change within the organisation to move towards systems/processes/structures which allow for an encourage ID T&L
- ID academic staff pressing for the kinds of structures they need to make ID T&L work
- Physical collaborative spaces where ID T&L ideas may be explored
- Leadership recognising the importance of ID T&L and recognising the work done
- Undertake research to demonstrate value of ID T&L and use it to promote programme development
- Unified institution-wide definitions of ID T&L language and models of delivery
- Professional development for those involved with ID T&L

***Marcus Hill 10<sup>th</sup> April 2017***