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## **The Centre for Learning and Teaching Associates Scheme: building a learning community for collaboration and impact**

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### ***Abstract***

This paper presents the outcomes of a small research project that sought to explore the value of a Staff Associate Scheme linked to the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) in a post-92 university. The Associates are a group of academic and professional service staff seconded from their Schools and services for one day a week, usually for a year, to work collaboratively with the core full time Centre for Learning and Teaching team on projects of interest which relate to learning development and align with the strategic aims of the university's Education Plan. This paper reflects on the findings from narratives provided from autoethnographic Associate reflective diaries and survey responses that sought to explore the participants' practice experiences, learning journeys, and perceptions of the value of their membership of the Associate Scheme. The discussion is widened by the consideration of findings from the participants, which contributed to the iterative development and enhancement of the Scheme. Findings showed a positive impact of the Scheme on the Associate participants and their practice. They viewed the scheme as beneficial to their collaborative skills, the building of unusual synergies, and in the supporting of innovation and impact as cross-university learning developers. The paper concludes by drawing together themes from the research, lessons learnt, transferability of findings to other universities, and consideration of the requirements for a successful future Scheme.

**Keywords:** staff learning community; collaboration; qualitative research; learning development; impact.

## ***Introduction***

This qualitative project explored the value of a staff Associate scheme linked to the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) in a post-92 university. The Associates are a group of academic and professional service staff seconded from Schools and Services, for one day a week, usually for a year, to work collaboratively with the core CLT team on projects, relating to teaching and learning, which align with the strategic aims of the university's Education Plan.

## **Rationale for the Associate scheme**

Developing Excellent Academic Practice (DEAP) was established in 2016 as a whole-institution, evidence-based approach to develop the organisational knowledge, attributes, and capabilities which would maximise our students' success (Pickford, 2018a). It is a practical framework for course design and teaching excellence that underpins a strategic, integrated approach to developing excellent academic practice. This focus on excellence drives our collaborative approach to building community and networks of excellent practitioners in the separate university Schools. This, in turn, impacts on our institutional learning development, practice sharing and ultimately benefits our students, colleagues, and the wider community. The next step was for the CLT staff to then identify what was needed from a team of new change agents (the potential Associates) to bring this approach to life. To that end, all applicants for the Associate roles needed to i) show a commitment to working with and learning from others, ii) have prior experience in learning development to sustain the DEAP framework, iii) demonstrate evidence of how that learning can be used to best effect for students, and iv) have expertise in using evidence for best practice and in supporting our institutional outcomes relating to progression, completion, and continuation.

## Summary of the Scheme

Each year seven Associates were recruited from a wide and varied applicant pool. Most were experienced teachers, all were HEA Fellows, three were National Teaching Fellows and four had teaching roles in the professional services. This study covered Associates in the 2019 and 2020 entry group, a total of 14 different staff with two of the Associates spanning both years. The Associates worked alongside the full-time, core CLT staff, a mixed team of academics, educational developers, digital experts, and a project manager who coordinated pan-university teaching related projects.

## The project

This study aimed to provide an initial exploration of the Associates' experience and to ascertain the degree to which they valued their role, their development, and their project activities. In reporting the process and outcomes we seek to contribute to the scholarship of learning development and identify features of effective practice for other HEIs who may be interested in establishing similar schemes or refining existing ones.

The project was ethically approved, and we explored the qualitative evidence derived from Associates' experiences. The exploration initially focused on how the Associates valued participating in the scheme. The term *value* was assigned the meaning *positive benefit* or *positive effect*, this being clarified to participants at the outset. The notion of value could apply to either the participant themselves or to others, as they wished.

We adopted a qualitative approach (Creswell and Poth, 2017) to exploring this initiative which amplified Associates' voices. Two questions were explored. Firstly, what was the reality of the Associates' working practices and did these have impact and reach? Secondly, with a focus on their learning journeys, what was the impact of their own learning on their emergent role? To answer these questions, we used i) longitudinal qualitative surveys (pre-, middle-, and post-Associate role) sent to seven Associates each year, over two years, and combined this with ii) an autoethnographic approach which incorporated five submitted reflective diaries from seven of the Associates over the period of a year.

## ***Contextual literature***

Literature relating to communities of practice, academic identity, the scholarship of learning development, and social capital informed the initial rationale, framing, design, and implementation of the Scheme. This literature, summarised below, also informed the analysis and discussion of the surveys and diaries.

The establishment of the Associate Scheme was informed and contextualised by a range of literature. Lave and Wenger's (1998) original work on communities of practice (CoP) was influential, specifically how the community itself creates the social structure that facilitates learning through interactions and relationships with others. Their thinking that interacting with peers and networks in the workplace fosters learning and information sharing informed our approach to designing the Associate scheme. In addition, MacKenzie et al. (2010) and Cox (2004; 2007) informed the scheme design, particularly their work relating to the benefits of communities of learning as a way of creating impact through a focus on scholarly activity, partnerships, and collaborative projects. MacKenzie et al. (2010) also outlines how university staff in different learning communities felt a sense of belonging to the institution, valued the community itself for the learning it brought the members, and noted the enhanced student learning that resulted from the practice sharing. Many of these ideas contributed to our emergent thinking about how to maximise the potential of our own Associate scheme. Literature on the scholarship of learning development also informed our planning and design stages. For example, Fanghanel et al.'s 2016 work explored different institutions' successful models of building excellence in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Their examples of successful collaborative project working, learning communities which informed and influenced institutional teaching and learning policy, and noted enhanced career development for excellent teachers were all felt to be potentially beneficial for informing our own scheme. Trigwell and Shale's 2004 work on the scholarship of teaching as a reflective and informed act engaging students and teachers in learning was also influential.

As the scheme progressed and staff moved forward with their careers, we considered how engaging in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1998) become core to developing academic and scholarly identities (Ching, 2021). These are the core attitudes that determine how individuals approach the concept of work and continuing self-improvement and development through shared work and passions (Ching, 2021). In addition, Clegg's

(2008) useful work contributed to the thinking that underpinned the scheme design as it explored how individual scholarly identities, although all different, can be supported by participating in educational learning communities like an Associates scheme.

Exploration of the literature on social capital, created when ‘the structure of relations among persons facilitates actions’ (Sampson, 2008, p.168), deepened our understanding that trusting relationships between CLT core staff and the Associates were essential. As developers we were focused on creating relationships that facilitated action, progress, and opportunities for transformative learning. This has been described as ‘learning that transforms fixed assumptions and expectations . . . to make [learners] more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change’ (Mezirow, 2003, p.58).

## ***The methods***

### **Surveys**

Surveys are a useful way of capturing rich, qualitative data (Braun et al., 2020). All Associates were invited to complete three surveys (see Figure 1) which used open, reflective questions which focused on exploring the benefits and challenges of their working practice and personal journey through the Scheme. These were issued to all before, during, and after the Scheme for two cohort entries, to fourteen individual Associates in total. The survey feedback was also used for iterative enhancement of the Associate Scheme.

### **Autoethnography**

In addition, reflective written diary entries were sought from both Associate cohorts. Autoethnography, a method that engages the individual in self-analysis and self-exploration (Starr, 2010) underpinned the approach to the writing. This approach has gained traction in recent years, as it enables researchers to generate insights about a phenomenon by drawing from personal situated experiences (Sparkes, 2002; Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011; Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2013). However, considering the critiques of solo autoethnography noting that ‘memory is flawed, experience is subjective’ (Stanley, 2014, pp.148-149), we felt that the research was best undertaken using a mixed approach.

Participants were initially invited to a briefing meeting which explained the reflective writing style required. They were invited to submit three pieces of writing to track their involvement in the Associate programme. They were encouraged to write freely and shape their own pieces. All the Associate participants had previous knowledge of reflective writing skills, and many had taught reflective writing and theory to their own students too. Five out of seven respondents completed the written pieces. Two chose not to participate in the diaries due to their workloads. Each participant focused on their critical learning points, using reflection on action (Schon, 1991) to investigate new insights about themselves and their practice as a CLTA. They were guided at the briefing meeting and in explanatory guidance, to focus on experiences of listening to their students' feedback and the realities of academia, research, and service delivery as an Associate.

The initial analysis, of the reflective diaries and surveys, was undertaken by an Associate, (who did not write a diary and had no association with the leadership and operational management of the Associate scheme) and one of the authors who also, had no connection to the management of the scheme. The unit of analysis focused on the participants' written words to identify on experiential/emotional themes.

The data were analysed inductively using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013), a process which involved data familiarisation, coding, theme development, and review. The initial survey and diary analyses were undertaken separately, then the emergent sub themes were shared, separately read again, and the emergent sub themes and overall main collated themes discussed by the two staff (the authors) who completed the analysis. Reflexivity is integral to qualitative research (Corlett and Mavin, 2018) and the researchers reflected on how their formal roles and knowledge of the individual Associates impacted on the process of doing the research and how that might shape the outcomes and trustworthiness of the work.

## **Data limitations**

It is important to note the limitations of our surveys and the reflective pieces despite the integrated reflexivity on the trustworthiness of our data (Tracy, 2010). Firstly, all the data were self-reported from a small sample (seven Associates per year over two years, which resulted in 11 different Associates in total) representing recollections of their emotions,

rather than direct observation of their responses in real time. Such measures suffer from potential weaknesses such as misunderstanding questions or only drawing on one, rather than a range of experiences. Secondly, although their own words were used to convey the meanings they ascribed to their experiences, these words were then interpreted by the researchers doing the analysis adding an additional layer of subjective filtering. Overall, generalisation of the findings beyond this study should be made with these caveats in mind.

## Analysis and generation of the themes

Sub themes from each data source were identified as follows:

- i) Diary sub themes: eight reflective diary (D) sub themes were generated from the content analysis: (D1) professional and personal development; (D2) role juggling; (D3) opportunity & inspiration; (D4) the future growth and development of the CLT; (D5) community; (D6) collaboration; (D7) inspiration and opportunity; (D8) innovation.
- ii) Survey sub themes: seven survey (S) sub themes were generated from the content analysis. These were showing the value, the Associates attached to teamwork and collaboration (S1); unusual synergies and new practice (S2); their sense of belonging to a learning community (S3); how they engaged student and staff voices in partnership to create change (S4); linking to senior management and other Schools (S5) and their personal development (S6). One theme (S7) showed that sometimes some Associates struggled with the duality of role – i.e., managing their substantive role and Associate role together.

All the subthemes were grouped to form three main thematic outcomes (C1-3) (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Diary (D) and survey (S) sub themes derived from findings mapped to the main three collated (C) themes.**

Collated themes (C) Diary (D) and Survey (S) sub themes

Collated themes (C)	Diary (D) and Survey (S) sub themes
	D3 Opportunity and inspiration



C1 The collaborative work of the Associate and its impact	D6 Opportunities for collaborative work
	S1 Teamwork and collaboration
	S2 Unusual synergies and new practice
	S4 Engaging student and staff voices in partnership to create change
C2 The Associate role as an opportunity for personal development and innovation	D1 Personal and professional development
	D5 Belonging to a learning community
	D7 New opportunities emanating from the Associate Scheme
	D8 Opportunities for innovation and change
	S3 An enhanced sense of belonging to a learning community
	S6 Their personal development and journeys
C3 The wider strategic development of the CLT	D2 Role juggling /balancing
	D4 The future growth and development of the CLT
	S7 Struggled with the duality of role

## Discussion

The three main themes (C1-C3) are now explored with supporting evidence from the survey and diary findings. Theme 1 focuses on the first research question relating to the CLTA working practice. Theme 2 explores the second research question about the Associates' personal journeys and experience. Theme 3 encompasses both practice and personal experience but explores emergent issues that were regarded as having 'bigger' implications for the scheme, its sustainability, and its impact. The literature which informed the development of the CLTA scheme initially, informed the researchers' analysis and discussion.

### Theme 1 (C1): The Collaborative work of the Associates and its impact.

Collaboration and practice sharing across the CLT core team and the Associates as a learning community was fundamental to making this Scheme work.

**A culture to enhance relationships and social capital:**

A collegiate culture, introduced as an expectation of behaviour prior to application, was strengthened by bi-monthly team meetings, and regular working lunches (in person and online) to build trust, work on projects, and generate and share ideas for new work streams. These were chaired by the Associate scheme leader (a core member of the CLT staff) with discussion points submitted in advance. These meetings were often free ranging and stimulated creative ideas and debate. The social capital that emerged from this structure as relationships strengthened (Larsen and Tascón, 2018) led to a shared approach to leadership developing across the whole team as the Associates became increasingly confident in their specific project roles and built new links with other colleagues.

Furthermore, these links facilitated positive action as Associates shared knowledge, offered support, and undertook collaborative projects. Overall, as emphasised by other literature on learning communities (MacKenzie et al, 2010; Bell, 2006), membership of the scheme afforded valuable social capital to the individual members involved. Furthermore, this did not end when they stopped being Associates, but was valued and sustained, resulting in further collaborative endeavours in their own Schools and disciplines.

Indeed, rooted in the findings, the Associates wrote about how they 'feel engaged and relaxed' on CLT days (survey) and how the social element bore fruit in terms of sustained productive working. Each Associate had explicit aims for the year which aligned with their School/Service educational priorities. As reported later, projects became more successfully aligned as the Scheme matured. Prior to this Scheme, there had been no allocated time for academic and professional service staff to undertake this type of work. It created two-way communication between disciplines to deliver and disseminate practice rooted in pedagogy. Articulated by one Associate, the Scheme provides 'opportunities to share ideas and best practice with colleagues at different stages in their careers and with different roles within the university, working together rather than separately and learning from each other' (survey).

## **Practice sharing in a learning community**

The Scheme provided the umbrella for separate Schools and services to come together across all levels to share perspectives, practice, and context. One reflected on this CLTA learning environment, 'it gave me an overwhelming sense of belonging and community . . . . I have been able to develop my ideas on pedagogy and have benefited from hearing the ideas from the working practices of the team' (survey).

All reported through their final survey how belonging to their learning community itself, with regular planned opportunities for meeting (whether online or in person) and the building of new relationships, had enhanced their knowledge, influenced their perspectives, positioned their work in a wider context, and allowed them to explore new areas and learn from each other.

## **Diverse, atypical, and productive collaborations**

Associates had one day a week (usually Fridays) to provide space and opportunity to collaborate. Associates pre-planned their projects and group meetings for Fridays. The impact of Associates from different departments working intensively as a team immediately became apparent. Four examples of specific collaborative project work are cited in Appendix 1: these include collaborative projects focused on Redesign of pre-arrival induction resources, Inclusivity in Student support in Sport, Podcasts to Assess Student work in History, and Collaboration Music and Business to re-design the student online context. These diverse examples demonstrate how innovative practice can unite different subject areas, create novel courses, and scale up digital innovation to influence students.

## **Theme 2 (C2): The Associate role as an opportunity for personal development, and innovation**

### **Personal transformation and learning**

Associates reflected on how they have developed personally and grown in confidence. They explored how their teamwork and CLTA collaborations had developed over time and what strategies worked well for them. They explored how leading specific projects and having safe space to discuss and resolve challenges helped both their own professional learning and their dealings with students.

Associates explained how they had gained ‘confidence in speaking to wider audiences out of my normal comfort zone’ (diary), and ‘a feeling of renewed energy for my L&T and supporting others in that role’ (diary). They mentioned their personal learning and how this then allowed them to become change agents themselves.

Another explained how being an Associate had ‘raised my status within the subject group’ and ‘inspired (*them*) to do things differently’ (surveys). This aligns with the findings of Christie et al. (2015), who explored how academics experiencing transformational learning themselves are then in a better position to act as change agents, influencing others to engage in similar experiences, which then have wider cyclical impact on all participants’ thinking.

### **Practice sharing for innovation and knowledge**

The ethos of transparent, evidence-based practice sharing opened colleagues’ eyes to the importance of being critical about pedagogy and the need for evidence informed practice. As a direct result of the scheme a member of CLT core staff and one of the Associates established an online network of critical pedagogues to share practice and research ideas. Ideas from the online discussion are collated and curated by the Associates for a regular workshop for network members. A growing understanding of evidence-based pedagogy is evident. The work of this group has had direct impact on the time available for authoring an Associate-led publication (Smith and Seal, 2021), and a CLT visiting professor whose work on elements of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1997; Freire 1998), especially student decision making, co-creation and active learning, dovetailed usefully with our own work (Smith and Seal, 2021).

### **Theme 3 (C3): Beyond the Associates:**

#### **Impact on wider activity**

Through coordinated strands of activity that simultaneously target engagement of our university communities, the Associate scheme catalysed cultural change and further embedded the development of the DEAP culture across the University. As time has passed, Associate projects have become less focused on nurturing individual interests and more focused on alignment with strategy (or aligning their interests and research with our Education strategy). Other wider university projects to develop staff learning in pedagogic

research and an internal project to address perceptions of grade inflation, were made richer by the Associates' interdisciplinary contributions.

The Associate Scheme leader has become skilled at aligning the Associates' project work and interests to the priorities of our Education Strategy, School specific requirements and the DEAP framework. Core CLT staff work before the start of the academic year with each new Associate cohort to map the projects to the strategic aims and our institutional student outcomes relating to continuation, completion, and progression.

The purpose of the Associate Scheme was to bring about enhancement of students' educational experiences through staff synergies and development. It seems that the CLTA's reach, and impact goes beyond 'business as usual'. Being afforded the time to explore individual interests and create innovative collaborations is enriching for team members. The Scheme has secured a wider value across the institution, externally and in peer-reviewed publications which explore their work (Smith et al., 2021a; Smith et al., 2021b; Smith et al., 2022). The CLTA impact is strategic, inclusive, and mapped to the CLT impact assessment framework (Pickford, 2018b).

### **Senior management links**

The Associate Scheme leader timetabled meetings with the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) every two months. These were regarded positively by the Associates offering them a broader lens into wide institutional strategic issues and an illumination of challenges beyond their own work. The agenda is based around a series of discussion points set by the Associates. It also allowed them to voice issues with their teaching roles and university strategies and direction directly. These discussions also enabled Associates to develop a deeper understanding of the institutional education strategy, approaches and future direction, and many said they 'felt heard' (survey). The DVC also used the Associates as a valuable informal feedback group. Their views (student-centred, borne of experience, and focused on the core business of education) offered unique, alternative perspectives from the ones that DVCs often hear from senior colleagues or Union staff.

## **Struggles with role identity**

Membership of our Associates' scheme had some challenges. Like other institutions, colleagues sometimes struggle with their practice and identity in intentionally designed learning communities (Whitton, Parr and Choate, 2021) but research has shown that over time they can change within it and within the wider institution (Boyd and Smith, 2016; McCune, 2019).

Despite evidence that members valued the experience, it was clear that sometimes, scheme membership contributed to, rather than alleviated anxiety. When involvement in the Associates was perceived as being *additional to* members' normal workload, it became a source of stress. It's been shown that a clear role identity is fundamental to performing effectively (Clegg, 2008). Indeed as time passed, and some School managers failed to confirm hours, some Associates struggled with finding time to juggle their substantive School position with their Associate role and admitted to role identity issues. The CLT Scheme leader has now clarified tight role requirements prior to appointment.

The evolving nature of academic, professional role identity is evident with staff interpreting their given roles more actively and moving laterally across boundaries to create new professional spaces and relationships (Whitchurch, 2008; Baker and Lattuca, 2010). As evidenced in the diaries, Associates contributed when they could and lobbied the Schools for more time as their confidence in their roles grew. This influenced core CLT staff to make Scheme enhancements such as improving the communication with managers, ring-fencing time, communicating with the senior leadership teams, and monitoring project progress carefully.

## ***Lessons learnt and future implications for practice***

It appeared through discussion and consideration of the supporting literature that many of the lessons learnt were not just relevant internally but are potentially useful for other universities.

## **Using research evidence**

Associates said they now better understood how pedagogic research evidence could inform their teaching and this stimulated a growth in activity relating to research and critical

pedagogy with the launching of the institutional Centre for Research in Higher Education which will encompass pedagogic research more formally.

### **Diversity of membership for effective learning communities**

Like Cox (2004; 2007) and Fanghanel (2016), the authors argue that for effective community formation, members should come from different professional backgrounds to ensure the building of a safe space (by minimising direct competition) and to enhance the range and depth of experiences. Central to this, is the proactive formation of the Associate learning developers' community which is crucial to effectiveness but doesn't happen organically. This was prioritised in terms of our selection process, our regular project meetings, our active brokering of partnerships (between Associates themselves and beyond) and the implementation of group forming activities.

### **Reinforcing expectations and requirements to sustain the Scheme**

Significant impacts from such a learning community scheme are only achieved through one that builds authentic research projects and effective communities (Mackenzie et al, 2010). The Scheme leader encourages openness about difficulties, flexibility around workstreams and space for socialising to interpret the new knowledge they are learning. In addition, the CLT Director attended Associate meetings. This provided a channel for responsive action and shows Associates' views are taken seriously.

Pragmatic issues emerged for action. These related to:

- i) Retaining the regular meetings for idea-sharing with senior management and other Associates.
- ii) Realistic ring-fenced time/day allocation from each School.
- iii) Longer secondment periods.
- iv) Clarity of role expectations.
- v) Earlier identification of development interests to optimise aligned workdays and project collaborations.

### **Conclusion**

While definitions of higher education learning developers differ across the sector, at our university the role involves offering expertise, guidance and direction to course teams and professional service staff to ultimately enhance the students' experience. This work is core to teaching and student support. It's vital and transferable to in-person, hybrid, and online settings and focuses on enhancing course design, classroom activities, project work, and behaviours, through pan institutional or tailored staff development activity.

By exploring the impact of Associates' learning journeys, it is clear that they were empowered to develop their teaching and felt a greater sense of belonging to the university. This type of learning community is useful for building creative, interdisciplinary synergies and supporting the development of impactful projects. In addition, they help to strengthen professional identity and enhance individual value and meaning in the participants' professional practice.

The Associates proved more impactful together, as collaborative learning developers, across our university than before, when work was less coherent and less interdisciplinary. They used the opportunities and structures that the Associate Scheme provided as a powerful vehicle for them to develop skills to innovate as an effective coherent group of learning developers. The Associates emphasised that their 'whole is greater than the sum of their parts' and they valued the impact of the Scheme on their working practices. In addition, the Associates evidenced a productive use of time and resources: for example, the production of measurable outcomes (more publications, external links, expansion of the HEA Fellowship scheme, improved student learning experiences, and increased numbers of learning development workshops with larger attendance numbers). The role also provided space for personal reflection which encouraged professional growth and thoughtful practice discussions which led to transformation of teaching practice. Such transformation has led, and will continue to catalyse, benefits for the sector, the university and the students' experience. The 'outward thinking' (survey) Associates also appeared to 'strengthen the bridge to the Schools', and 'stops courses thinking inwardly in silos' (survey).

Community 'must begin by building relationships between community members' and that emergent social capital embedded in those relationships can be used to improve the welfare of community members (Mackenzie et al., 2010). Applying these principles and practical ideas to our Associates' scholarly community, we have shown that by valuing



relationships as a fundamental, and establishing support for joint project work, we were able to positively encourage atypical synergies. Senior leadership support throughout the project proved crucial in creating multiple opportunities for informal discussion and connection which developed the trust between individual Associate members.

In summary, the three themes from the findings are relevant for learning development practice in other universities. Theme 1 which focuses on collaborative working allows for different perspectives and solutions for educational issues. The collaborative work 'doubles up' the extending reach into Schools and Services to enhance practice and thus influence a greater number of colleagues. This translation often occurs through more tailored local development which can directly address student needs. New opportunities for more collaborative research to build the evidence base in terms of the scholarship of teaching and learning development has also occurred.

For Theme 2, individual Associates' own professional development was enhanced through a range of opportunities offered. These included Fellowships funded external development, mentorship, a pipeline, and support for National Teaching Fellow evidence and application.

In relation to Theme 3, despite some issues relating to role identity and deployment, Associates' broader roles as credible learning developers and advisors on School practice and university strategy was valuable. This was particularly evident post-pandemic where new lenses were required to develop innovative approaches to address academic continuity, hybrid, digital and flexible learning.

The central location of the CLT as a hub for the building of learning development activity is important and has multiple functions. It is a locus for the Associates to embrace a broader role as learning developers who, in parallel, work in their Schools and Services. They then translate their own learning into tailored, subject-specific, staff-facing multi-dimensional learning development activities. This subsequently strengthens how colleagues interact with their students (through course design and their teaching approaches) and ultimately the quality of the overall university offer to students.

The Scheme provides leverage to:

- i) Influence both Schools/Professional Services to improve practice, which thus improves their student facing offer and their students' experience.
- ii) Strengthen Associates' collaborative reach and impact, thus improving the critical mass of contributions to institutional good practice.
- iii) Offers a forum for innovative practice sharing and subsequent cross-university reach.
- iv) Supports an individual learning developer's own professional needs and career path (i.e., promotion through our learning and teaching route, support for National Teaching Fellowships).
- v) Helps influence university evidence based strategic direction.
- vi) Helps staff, engaged in learning development in their separate Schools and Services to tailor thinking to their specific disciplinary needs whilst reducing silo thinking and enhancing the consistency of excellent practice (for example, through course and curriculum design).

This model is translatable to other universities. There is a current necessity for institutions to update, refine, and improve their offer for students post pandemic. This Scheme can contribute to that direction, as it clearly focuses on building innovative learning approaches, scaling up practice sharing and capitalises on atypical synergies which ultimately benefit student learning. The Scheme is self-sustaining and now moving into a fourth cohort. With collaboration and cocreation at the heart of the Scheme, there is an opportunity for a Student Associate scheme in the future.

This paper invites colleagues managing similar schemes, to contribute to this discussion, become change agents themselves, and 'thicken' the data through analyses of their own experiences of these kinds of schemes to strengthen learning development in higher education.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Some practical examples of Associates' projects**

#### Example 1: Redesign of pre arrival induction resources

An Associate from the Library developed a project collaborating with other Associates, exploring students' pre-arrival information (of particular significance given the months of lockdown which preceded the start of term). The wider statistics and outputs were used to inform the institutional Induction Steering Group, modelling more tailored student-facing information to encourage beneficial early study patterns and support seeking. A further output was the redesign of LBU's online pre-arrival Study Ready and Study Smart study skills modules as open access to all first-year students. Study Ready is now available externally (Leeds Beckett University, 2022). The Study Smart intervention has led to the creation of additional new modules for second-year students, postgraduate researchers, and dissertation development. The range of Associates' expertise (from arts, humanities, science, and professional services) catalysed a holistic and relevant output. This impactful project has been published in an academic journal (Smith et al., 2022) and disseminated to the sector through *WONKHE* (Morgan, 2021).

#### Example 2: Inclusivity in Student support in Sport

Another example was led by an Associate from Sport collaborating with Disability Services. Synthesising the Associate's experience of practice and Disability Services' experience of process led to a more holistic approach to student support. This project gathered pace and ran across two academic years involving several current and former Associates and professional service staff. This approach mainstreams design in inclusive practice and assessment and has resulted in the University moving its focus from *what* students are learning to *how* students are being supported to learn. This catalysed more educational development around inclusive assessment and teaching and a wider pan university development of the university Inclusive Course Design Tool now embedded in quality enhancement for all courses and supporting our institutional objective to narrow our award gap and build greater student belonging (Smith et al, 2021).

#### Example 3: History: Podcasts to Assess Student work

Another Associate, whose work incorporates digital technologies, explored podcasts as alternative assessments to augment students' reflexive thinking. Diary entries evidenced how this approach helped students feel more engaged and empowered as they progress through their course. Her work, disseminated through pan-institutional educational development workshops, discipline specific conferences, and recorded resources, has had a direct effect on course enhancements across the institution. Many other colleagues cite, within their HEA Fellowship applications, a link between improved student progression and their use of these digital technologies for assessments. This ground-breaking work in digital delivery has now also been recognised nationally in the Royal Historical Society Awards. Students praised her innovative work and how it enhanced their digital confidence and she spoke of how 'it broadened our perspectives about the employment opportunities available for History graduates' (survey).

#### Example 4: Collaboration Music and Business: Design of Online context

Other collaborations between two Associates from Music and Business, on the use of different online and physical learning spaces, has directly impacted on the redesign of all first-year business courses, incorporating ambient space and innovative digital photography. Tutors commented on the student-centred nature of this model which was recognised nationally for its impact in the Institute of Student Employers Awards.

### **Figure 1: Surveys to Associates.**

#### **Starting point:**



What made you want to become a CLTA?

What do you anticipate the benefits of the role to be?

What support do you need, what do you hope to have achieved and what impact do you want to have made by the end of this year as a CLTA?

In the longer term (beyond this year) what are your career goals and your interests and how can CLT support you in achieving these?

Anything else you want to add?

### **Mid cycle:**

One thing that you think has worked well.

One thing that hasn't worked so well.

Have there been any unexpected benefits to being a CLT Associate?

In light of Covid-19, what changes might you bring to the role?

Sustainability of the Scheme -with a future focus, what might you change?

### **End of cycle:**

One thing you think has worked well.

One thing that didn't work so well.

Have there been any unexpected benefits to being an Associate?

With a future focus and sustainability of the Scheme, is there anything you would change?

Can you name some project work or collaborations that might not have happened without being part of the Scheme?

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