Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

Small Development Project 2010

Combined Interim Report 2 & 3:

September 2010 – February 2011

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Background

Aberystwyth and Bangor universities have a long-standing relationship in collaboration on educational, research and professional development. More recent political pressures are urging these institutions to work even closer together. When either institution is exploring new provision or reviewing existing provision, they will attempt to do so collaboratively, where this is feasible.

In 2010, Aberystwyth University began introducing a performance and development review mechanisms, with a view to supporting these mechanisms with an online system. Bangor University already has an institution-wide performance review process, but was at a point where they wished to review this. This formed the basis of discussion which led to the application for funding from the Leadership Foundation.

Aberystwyth University

The People Led Change Project began in July 2010. As laid out in the project application, 7 pilot groups were identified so as to represent a range of staff roles and cultures. These were:

Academic

1. Geography and Earth Sciences (Social Geographer academics)
2. Theatre Film and Television (whole department)
3. Education and Lifelong Learning – SELL (whole department)
4. Mid Wales Welsh for Adults (part of SELL*)

* chosen as a separate pilot to explore Welsh language implementation

Non-Academic

5. Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS)
6. Human Resources (whole department, including the Centre for the Development of Staff and Academic Practice)
7. Information Services (Academic Services group)

Context

The approach attempts to give a sense of ownership to groups of staff, by encouraging them to contribute to the design of a performance review method that fits their local needs (see bid document for an expansion on this rationale).

Methodology

1. An initial meeting was arranged between the Co-ordinator of CDSAP and the Head of each pilot group (in most cases the Head of Department or Service). While the principle is to create a 'bottom-up' process for which staff will feel a sense of ownership, the managers also need to feel that they have had a part in the creation of the system and that it addresses management issues. This was followed by
2. A second meeting, where the Co-ordinator of CDSAP worked with a larger group, in some cases, the entire pilot group, to brainstorm an approach that was tailored to the
needs of that group. The leaders of the pilot groups were also present. In both meetings, development and support needs were identified.

3. The pilot groups agreed on a timescale to develop and implement a process.

Overall Progress

Steps 1-3 completed with all original 7 pilots and all pilots plan to begin their first round of performance review interviews in spring 2011. This is in accordance with the timescales laid out in the project proposal. Only one member of service staff, at Aberystwyth (the Coordinator of CDSAP), is currently involved in the project, although other members of staff are becoming involved in the larger institutional roll-out. While one round of interviews will take place, within the project timescale, this will not be a true test of the system, as planned targets, in individual reviews, cannot be revisited. Evaluation will therefore be heavily reliant on perceptions of the effectiveness of the systems, rather than actual effectiveness. An online system, linked to the HR database system, and to a staff self-service interface, has been developed, with the initial interface modelled (with permission) on the Q6 performance review paper form developed at the University of St. Andrews. This is now being offered to the pilots and other groups as a starting point for their local designs. Other interfaces to the same underlying system are possible.

The leaders of the pilot groups have also met twice, as a group to share experience and development.

Progress for Each Pilot Group

1. **School of Education and Lifelong Learning (SELL) and Welsh for Adults (part of SELL)**

   Initially two separate pilots, the Department decided and to introduce one process for all staff. The requirements of the external inspection process drive the need to ensure that there is a robust and consistent process. One pro forma was used, and this is available bi-lingually. The process is embedded in the team performance process and linked to the financial management system. A paper-based system was used and this proved very effective. Although this could be translated in to an on-line form, this was not seen as necessary or useful at this stage. Over 50 staff had participated, full-time and part-time. Casual staff had not been included. Reviewer training has been provided, in Welsh, for the Welsh for Adults group, using an external trainer. Training for the main department is scheduled for May 2011

   The department is not typical of academic departments and has taken, a top-down approach, somewhat at odds with the original rationale of the project. However, the clarity of documentation and efficiency of process offer some useful lessons to other departments and groups.

2. **Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences (IGES)**

   After meeting with the Head of Department and also with a wider group, it was decided to pilot the University on-line questionnaire and staff review meetings with a team of 9 staff are scheduled for June 2011. Setting of team objectives to underpin the departmental objectives proved problematic and there is a clear development need in this respect. The revised questionnaire being used in SELL will be compared and contrasted with the University on-line form at this stage.
The principles developed here were to focus the design of the performance review on the elements not addressed in existing appraisal processes - the REF addresses research performance and teaching performance is, to some extent, addressed through course feedback and peer observation of teaching (a developmental, other than judgemental process at Aberystwyth). However, there was a lack of any process that supported long-term career planning for individual academics or the connection of individual to team and institutional goals.

3. **Theatre Film and Television Studies (TFTS)**

Issues here included the split between 'academic' teaching staff and 'practitioner' teaching staff. Again, a space for individual career development and focusing on team goals was seen to be an important factor. The intention is to use the on-line University form and the approach and timescale will be broadly in line with IGES. Reviewers training to take place on 13 May.

4. **Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS)**

A comprehensive process had been piloted in the Hospitality section of RHS including staff on zero hours contracts and casual staff. The meetings with over 65 staff were held in February and March 2011. Six monthly reviews are to take place in August 2011. Setting the team aim and objectives was a key first step and provided the context for the individual meetings. A clear process was developed and communicated to the staff involved and training of reviewers took place within the department. Clarification of job role and job description was undertaken as part of the process.

The process was paper-based but this did not detract from the implementation. For this group of staff paper-based was more practicable in view of the fact that not all staff has access to a computer.

The Department views this process as beneficial for both the Department as a whole and the staff, the use of the tool allowing long-term issues to be addressed. The Department is keen to retain the momentum that has built up and feels that the continued re-assessment of progress made is essential.

5. **Information Services - Academic Services**

This was one of a small number of groups, within the University, with an existing (paper-based) performance review process. The Co-ordinator of CDSAP worked with the managers as well as the group a whole to explore the effectiveness of the existing system, which was agreed to be essentially sound and fit for purpose. Changes will revolve around the use of an online system and other processes to run alongside the review.

The main change, during the pilot, has been the use of the on-line form which was seen as an important new development which added value to the existing process. Changes to the six questions have been suggested, e.g. making it easier to write SMART targets, and the intention is to review the form again. The meetings with over 50 staff have gone very well.

6. **Human Resources (whole department, including CDSAP)**

The team used the university on-line pro forma developed from the St Andrew’s Q6 model.
The team considered the purpose of performance management and clarified what it was intended to achieve and what would not be covered in the meetings. A short briefing note outlined the process. Meetings commenced in March 2011.

The on-line form proved beneficial for two main reasons. Firstly, it enabled staff to complete the questions on the pro forma in their own time and at their own pace and could revise the text on-line before it was submitted electronically to their reviewer and second reviewer. Secondly, the reviewer was able to consider the information on the completed pro forma, prior to the face to face performance review meeting. The second reviewer could feed in comments or questions prior to the meeting which could then be factored in to the performance review meeting.

The meetings were well received by staff and were clearly seen by the reviewers as an opportunity to reflect which staff on progress made, to highlight successes and to look forward to the next 12 months. As a motivational tool the process worked well. The only drawback identified at this stage is the timing of the meetings. The HR team objectives have in previous years been set in June each year. It would be more sensible to hold the individual review meetings immediately after the team objectives have been confirmed. That way the discussions about individual objectives can be informed by the team objectives. The timing of these two events will be revised in 2012.

Overall Initial Impressions

While we have made progress and are on schedule, this ‘bottom-up’ approach has proven to be challenging, primarily in that:

1. Without an existing system to act as a reference, staff are making a 'cold start';
2. In some of the pilots, particularly those in the service departments, managers can find it difficult to relinquish any decision making to their staff and may have good reasons for this reluctance. All of this, in an environment where there is some distrust of performance management mechanisms.

Heads of pilot groups, being volunteers, were, not surprisingly, very supportive of the implementation of a performance review process and conscious of the benefits that such a process could have, not only in individual performance and development, but also as a vehicle for addressing a raft of team-building and interpersonal issues that department leaders confront. The current, high pressure financial environment has made them particularly aware of tensions within their departments and services. This makes departments both reluctant to take on implementing performance review as yet another task, but also more receptive to arguments of the value of such mechanisms. We have adopted a very gentle and persuasive approach, rather than a heavy-handed top-down attitude, and this seems to be working as it has taken some time for the groups to appreciate the advantages of implementing this effectively, rather than simply complying. In all cases, we see this as an iterative process of development and wish to avoid the systems ‘freezing’ in their initial forms.

The University has now decided that performance review will be rolled out to all departments and services, starting in October 2011. This means that we are now bringing all other
departments on-board while most of the pilots are in an early stage. It will, therefore be a challenge to inform the overall roll-out from the pilot studies that represent this project.

**Bangor University**

The outcomes of the first part of the People Led Change project have informed Bangor’s key actions to be undertaken in the next stage of the project.

This includes:

- The development of an electronic PDR system
- Embedding a strategic PDR process
- Ensuring effective alignment with different staff groups needs in relation to the process
- Mentoring and coaching

**Electronic PDR System**

Work has already started on designing an electronic PDR system for the University. Aberystwyth have been very helpful in sharing their experience of their system and we will be able to develop Bangor’s system for launch in September 2011.

This will ensure monitoring the PDR system is easier for HR and improve PDR administration for reviewers and reviewees.

**Strategic PDR Process**

In late 2010 Prof John Hughes joined Bangor as its Vice Chancellor and there have been numerous changes in key positions in the Executive. This has led to a new strategy and a greater sense of strategic direction within the University.

In order to embed the strategy effectively it has now been decided to align the PDR system with the planning schedule during the next academic year. This will allow Colleges and Departments to approach PDR more strategically. The aim of the new schedule will be to ensure that staff are aware of the link between their individual aims and the aims of their College / Department and the University. This will be done in Reviewer meetings at College and Departmental levels before and after the PDR ‘round’.

The meetings before the start of the PDR round is to ensure that all understand the short and long term objectives of the University and the College / Department and following the completion of the PDR round, reviewers will again meet to discuss outcomes and in order to feedback to staff any action points that may have been raised generally in the PDR’s. Also, in the future, it is hoped that College/Departmentally based training and development plans will also be developed.

It has been recognised that in order to ensure a greater alignment between the University’s strategy and PDR that senior managers have to identify how best to achieve this in the University and in their areas to deliver performance improvement and continuous development for the University and personal development for staff.
Therefore, it has been decided that the needs of the University will be best served by utilising the LF funding to support two, one-day Strategic PDR sessions with Alastair Work for Heads of School, Colleges and Directors. Alastair Work has undertaken two Strategic Leadership Programmes in Bangor and is therefore very familiar with the culture of the University.

The specific content of the session will include: revisiting the overall purpose of PDR, considering PDR in context and its link with the University's strategy and making the link between strategy and career development and performance.

The key outcomes from this workshop it is hoped will be a far greater understanding of the strategic benefits of PDR and a greater awareness of the PDR process as a cornerstone of organisational development within the University.

**Effective alignment with Different Staff Groups**

Changes have been undertaken with the policy to reinforce the importance of follow up with staff who have taken time off from work or work part time to ensure that their needs are considered as part of the process.

This will be communicated to managers in the next academic year.

**Mentoring and coaching**

As part of a greater alignment of the PDR system with the broader organisational development initiatives many staff in focus groups (particularly with managers) have highlighted a far greater awareness of the relevance of coaching and mentoring to support staff development.

As a result of this demand the Staff Development Team are currently developing a module on ‘Coaching and PDR’ which will be a supplement to the current PDR training provided.

This will allow Bangor in the next academic year to not only measure the numbers of PDR’s being undertaken but also to develop the quality of the PDR experience that is essential to its continue development and success.

**Project Finance**

See attached document for Aberystwyth University's spending details to date.

Bangor University wishes to claim £2720.00 for work further study carried out and to support the ‘Strategic PDR’ training for senior leaders.
Small Development Project
Quarterly Report

Project title: People Led Change (PLC)
Lead institution: Aberystwyth University
Project leader: Sue Chambers
Period being claimed: September 2010 - February 2011
Payment to be made to: Aberystwyth University

Notes

Submission:
Via e-mail to Stuart Hunt (contact@stuarthunt.org.uk) and to Louise Taylor (louise.taylor@lfhe.ac.uk) along with a copy of the relevant quarterly report.

In hard copy to Louise Taylor at Kingfisher House, 90, Rockingham Street, Sheffield, S1 4EB along with your invoice and documentary evidence for any individual items of expenditure exceeding £1,000

Payment:
Payment will be made when the relevant documentation is received and has been approved by Stuart Hunt

Records:
All financial records, receipts and expenses for the project should be kept and made available to the Leadership Foundation for audit purposes if required

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Small Development Project
Quarterly Report

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<th>Total to date</th>
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* Budget figures are to be inserted from your proposal
** If the total of other costs exceeds £1,000 please document the nature of the costs below: