



Change Academy Case Study

University of Westminster
A Long-term Commitment to Capacity for Change

WHY CHANGE ACADEMY AT WESTMINSTER?

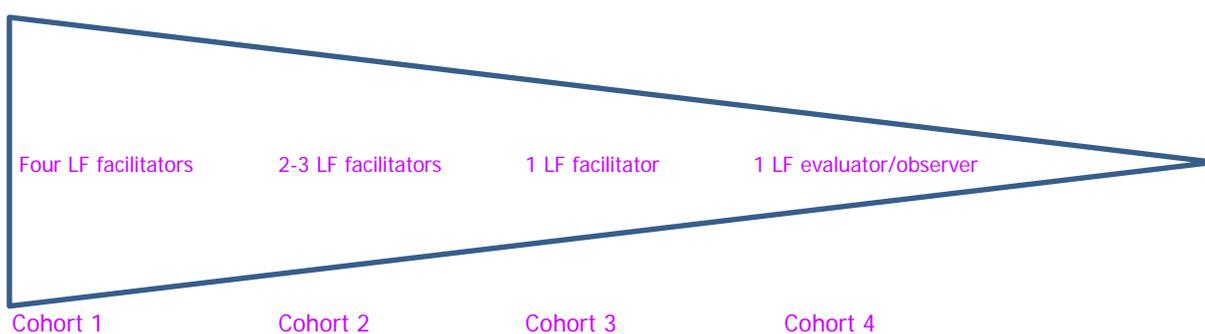
In 2011-12, the significant changes on the higher education horizon were clear, and the University recognised the need for effective collaborative working between academic and professional staff to improve flexibility and ability to adapt to change. The Change Academy process was intended to: facilitate improvements in the student and staff experience; enable a rolling cycle of ideas generation and implementation to encourage innovation and create or enhance sustainable practice; facilitate an opportunity for all staff groups to shape changes in behaviours; challenge the status quo and enhance emergent cultural change.

WHO CHAMPIONED CHANGE ACADEMY AT WESTMINSTER?

The initiative was led by the director of Human Resources, Strategy and Development, Jean Harrison, (now Director, Organisation Development and Wellbeing) with the full support of the senior team. Vice-chancellor, Professor Geoff Petts, said: "There is 120% commitment from senior staff. We need your input if we are to be able to drive forward and sponsor ideas that improve the student and staff experience." The then deputy vice-chancellor Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas added: "the senior team see Change Academy as essential in finding out what we can do to make this place work better. It's a bit scary, a completely different way of doing things; use the process to work through ideas, demonstrate they can make a real difference."

WHAT DID CHANGE ACADEMY AT WESTMINSTER LOOK LIKE?

The commission was for 'tapered' design and delivery of up to four Change Academy cohorts over 2-3 years, with four Leadership Foundation facilitators leading the first cohort. By the fourth cohort, as planned, the process was fully owned and delivered by the University of Westminster Change Academy team. A fifth cohort with no Leadership Foundation involvement is in preparation.



The first cohort featured dedicated sessions for team leaders and members of the organisational development team, and a residential retreat run over three days with significant time for team-working interspersed with plenary contributions on creativity, visioning, models of change, communication and influence and business case development. The University undertook all administrative support, in-house communications and booked accommodation and catering directly with their suppliers.

Supporters attached to each team were drawn from the University's organisational development team and worked closely with team leaders throughout the year. Professor Richard Harding of the University's



Change Academy Case Study

University of Westminster
A Long-term Commitment to Capacity for Change

Business School led a longitudinal study of the institution's readiness for change and change capability as an integral part of the Westminster Change Academy experience and delivered plenary sessions on approaches to change. Other senior staff, including the finance director and registrar, led context-setting plenaries and participated in other elements of the process.

The first cohort comprised change project ideas that had already been identified, as well as proposals put forward following a call for suggestions and a selection process. Project champions were nominated from amongst the senior team to support presentations of proposals for funding through the University's executive board, which at that time was the expected route for outcomes.

The same broad principles applied to the format of subsequent cohorts, with some minor adjustments. By the third cohort, the process for calls for ideas and volunteers for teams, and the considerable engagement of the OD team with projects, were well-established (see right).



A central support team was put in place for the second and third cohorts, as the OD team began to have a greater role in the design and delivery of the whole process. It was recognised that some projects do not need business cases to be taken to the executive board and that there can be other 'routes to success', so parts of the residential programme around planning and business case development saw a shift in emphasis and teams were encouraged to think creatively about how to take their ideas forward, with or without the need for additional dedicated resource.

For the fourth cohort, the senior team – including the vice-chancellor - engaged in far more of the creativity and planning activities with teams during the residential, contributions that participants found really valuable. Senior staff acknowledged that "Change Academy's success [is] just as much about bringing people together from across the institution to hear each other's perspectives and discuss the nature of change, as it is about successful project outputs and outcomes". Students were also more strongly encouraged to participate, with several student officers joining teams by the fourth cohort.

WHAT DID PARTICIPANTS SAY ABOUT CHANGE ACADEMY AT WESTMINSTER?

A celebration event was held to mark completion of the first cohort, report on project progress and stimulate ideas and volunteers for the second cohort. Comments from team leaders at that event included:

<p>"The open and honest debate changed the nature of the project for the better"</p>	<p>"Be prepared to be challenged and for your project to morph into something else. It's a great way to make a real step-change"</p>	<p>"The most energising and pleasurable thing about CA is working with others across the University"</p>
--	--	--



Change Academy Case Study

University of Westminster
A Long-term Commitment to Capacity for Change

The third and fourth cohorts were asked for their reflections on the Change Academy process on film, and their various presentations and perspectives are available on the Westminster intranet to inspire and inform others.

Participants clearly valued the presence of various members of the senior team, including the vice-chancellor, although other commitments prevented some from hearing feedback from teams at key points in the process. Participants' comments from the third cohort included:

<p>"Really useful over last few days to talk to people from different parts of the University. The biggest barrier is really the internal stuff that we need to sort out."</p>	<p>"Through our discussions we've identified that really all these projects are working on different aspects of the same theme – We really need to think about how we join these up, it's an over-arching thing."</p>	<p>"The residential was a very rare opportunity to explore fundamental ideas ... we took the original idea apart and put it back together. It was a really productive process."</p>
<p>"We had a great brainstorm, set the ground rules, so people could be critical without it being personal."</p>		

What was clear from the fourth cohort was a real shift in how the Westminster Change Academy experience was becoming embedded in peoples' thinking and language. The maturity and continuing relevance of the process is evidenced in participants' comments from the fourth cohort:

<p>"This is a great example of academics and practitioners sharing knowledge"</p>	<p>"There's been quite a bit of emotion on some topics, as you might expect, but that's been really good in airing differences and helping us work through them"</p>	<p>"It's been so powerful, we're 'walking in each other's shoes' and learning from that"</p>
<p>"The whole process has been really useful; we've expanded our ideas so much ... We'd never have got this far on our own"</p>	<p>"We have had a good spread of roles in the team, taking on different responsibilities, and that's worked really well"</p>	<p>"We've learned how important it is to speak each other's language: if we're trying to persuade someone to do something, we need to put it in their terms"</p>
<p>"There's been a lot of myth-busting in discussions, it's great"</p>	<p>"It's more polished this time, some really good people coming together, thoroughly enjoyable and useful" [previously participated in an earlier cohort]</p>	



Change Academy Case Study

University of Westminster
A Long-term Commitment to Capacity for Change

WHAT VALUE HAS THE WESTMINSTER CHANGE ACADEMY PROCESS DELIVERED?

While the Westminster Change Academy process can be seen to have generated ideas to enhance the staff and student experience, and has certainly brought together staff and student officers in cross-institutional working, the institutional and wider sector contexts have inevitably shifted over time. Other change activity focused on innovation in teaching and learning has taken place in parallel or sometimes as part of the Change Academy process and the institution is now looking ahead to new opportunities and challenges.

Sophie Lovejoy, OD Adviser and Nick Kapoutzis, Head of Leadership and OD at Westminster, in a recent presentation to the ODHE Group commented:

"The Westminster Change Academy exists primarily to:

- Support staff engagement generally: promoting the senior managers' empowerment of, and trust in, staff creativity and their ability to be responsive to change.
- Build the Westminster community: actively encouraging staff to get together that wouldn't normally mix, thereby facilitating cross-University conversations and exploration of what is already happening.
- Facilitate greater awareness of what everyone does: seeks to avoid duplication of resource and ideas, and helps integrate with existing work through a process of staff finding out what others are doing.
- Promote the importance of people having their own ideas about how things need to change and taking responsibility for their own views and actions: 'bottom up' ideas generated by staff and explored through team working.
- Provide rare 'space' for staff to build relationships within the University community.

In terms of the above, the evidence gathered as part of our impact evaluation framework is the clearest yet that the above aims are being achieved and that the Westminster Change Academy is becoming an established and respected part of the day-to-day life of the University".

LESSONS LEARNED: THE CHANGE ACADEMY PROCESS DESIGN

While the national Change Academy design is a useful starting point particularly for key principles, the design of the process in-house needs to be embedded in local structures and contexts. There is a tension there with not reinforcing unhelpful 'ways of doing things' which the creative thinking and cross-institutional working elements of the process are designed to disrupt; the co-design of the process between external and internal facilitators is an important factor for success at the start. The acknowledgement that the Change Academy process is as much about cross-institutional working and understanding, as it is about the success of particular change projects, is an important message to deliver to senior teams and others involved in design and delivery and communication around the process. Participation of senior team members and the institution's own academics are much valued, demonstrating both commitment and internal expertise.