Changing the Learning Landscape: year - end report 2012-13

Professor Patsy Cullen, CLL External Evaluator

1. Background

Changing the Learning Landscape (CLL) engaged with 147 English higher education institutions to enhance students' learning and life prospects, institutional and systemic practice, and collaboration and partnership across and between universities and colleges through more effective use of digital technologies. From its inception, CLL's strategy was one of 'whole-institution' engagement: working with students as partners and participants, with academic and learning support staff and with institutional leaders of teaching and learning who can act as champions for change. The three delivery strands focused on achieving strategic change, sustainable innovation through targeted projects and developing the skills of individual staff. In order to review progress and inform processes, CLL took an active approach to formative evaluation, which has contributed to the development of the programme as a whole. This report describes CLL's position at the end of a year of intense activity, illustrated with examples of lessons learnt and some emerging indicators of its impact on the English higher education community. Its conclusions are drawn from a series of reports presented to the Programme Operations Board during the year, each of which provides supporting evidence from participants. (Appendix 1)

2. The CLL Programme 2012/13

The CLL programme consisted of three strands: the Strategic Change Programme (SCP), Consultancy and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). SCP brought together the people responsible for the strategic leadership of teaching to develop their skills in managing change in a digital environment. They were supported by a second element called SIP (Strategic Implementation Projects) in which they worked with staff and students to bring about – or at least initiate – strategic changes such as 'whole university conversations' to develop new strategies for Technology Enhanced Learning, alternative VLE solutions (and alternative solutions to VLEs), implementing BYOD (Bring Your Own Devices) and developing mobile learning. Where these worked well, they engaged teams, including students, in an institution-wide change programme. However, not all participating institutions were able to develop a successful Strategic Implementation Project; this was mainly due to problems of timing, resources and conflicting institutional priorities. It is fair to say that not all SCP participants fully understood t he SIP requirements at the start of the programme.

Those on the Strategic Change Programme have identified a range of benefits from their participation: they valued the opportunity to share common experiences and challenges, to see examples of cutting edge technology in practice and, in particular, the access to a 'safe space' where they could think and debate. For some, SCP has changed the way in which they think about TEL and how it is implemented in their institutions. Practical examples of this include redesigning buildings to enable different approaches to learning and teaching, restructuring teams to break down silos and rethinking change processes.

In the second strand, institutions were invited to bid for six days of consultancy support to help them implement Technology Enhanced Learning projects. Some fifty projects, identified through two separate calls, were supported, the majority of which focused on various aspects of e-assessment and digital literacy. The contributions made by the consultants were greatly valued and there is good evidence from many projects that their involvement had a positive impact, providing validation for the project activities and acting as a catalyst for change. The second cohort of projects found it difficult to complete within the time available, and also found it a challenge to involve students at the end of the academic year, when SU officers were changing and students were taking exams and leaving for the summer vacation. As a result, these projects are likely to come to full fruition in the next academic year. Overall this strand was successful despite the logistical difficulties, and in several cases the projects have had a transformative impact on the institution.

The third strand addressed the professional development needs of academic staff and those who provide support services. It consisted of 'a series of discipline-led events, focused on practical applications of digital technology (and particularly on the use of social media and mobile devices) to enhance student learning.' One set of events was targeted at those working in four discipline groups: STEM, Social Sciences, Medicine and Health, Arts and Humanities, while the other was for staff from educational development and learning technology. Feedback from these events provides numerous examples of immediate and planned change to participants' use of TEL, especially in the use of social media and mobile technology to promote collaborative learning. It was notable that many of those attending the discipline events described themselves as new to TEL and that their responses to their experiences were highly enthusiastic.

3. Learning points

3.1 Working in partnership

Changing the Learning Landscape is the first initiative in which the five organisations, which represent different interest groups across the higher education sector, have come together with a common purpose.   CLL appears to provide a cross- cutting theme in which all the partners have a significant interest and which complements their individual missions but which is 'owned' by no one individual organisation. Notwithstanding the initial challenge of developing effective relationships, this model of partnership working has brought considerable value to CLL, derived from pooling and sharing each organisation's specific areas of expertise, of influence and their range of contacts. The role of the NUS as equal partners in the programme has been critical to its success and provides a model for novel approaches to student engagement: shaping, and often instigating, activity at institutional and project levels.

However, it is primarily the development of individual relationships between the partner representatives, effective team working and a joint commitment to the aims of the project which have enabled CLL to make such progress. All the partners acknowledge the added value that working collaboratively has brought to their individual organisations.

3.2 Programme design and content

Overall, the CLL programme has worked well. During the year CLL responded swiftly to participant feedback and made a number of changes which included strategies to help universities become more agile in their responses to the fast moving technological environment, increasing the opportunities for reflection, ensuring the effective use of technology, providing a 'safe space' to experiment with (or at least see in action) the most innovative technologies and building in greater time and space for institutional teams to get together, away from the distractions of their daily work

In addition, the draft programme for strand 3 (Continuing Professional Development) was extensively modified after collaborative discussion at the Programme Operation Board. This contributed to the creation of a series of discipline-led events which were highly focused on practical applications of digital technology (and particularly on the use of social media and mobile devices) to enhance student learning. The numbers of academic and support staff taking part (and excellent, constructive feedback) show that there is a real interest in, and appetite for, real-life examples of technology in action.

The partners have worked closely together on the development of the proposal to Hefce for a second round of funding, drawing on formative evaluation of the 2012/13 programme and feedback from participants. This second iteration will work more closely with individual institutions and take a more integrated approach to strategic management of TEL based on a collaborative understanding of their specific needs. The strong relationships developed during the course of the programme have also enabled the Programme Operation Board to respond quickly to changes to the proposal required by the funding council.

4. What impact is CLL having?

What difference is CLL making to the experience of students in English higher education? Feedback from CLL participants in the different strands is positive and indicates that *individuals* are changing the way they engage with and use digital technology. However, they all say that it is too early to identify what impact these behaviours will have on *institutional* culture and strategy.

The majority of CLL participants interviewed are, as yet, still at the questioning and information gathering stage of implementing strategic change around the use of digital technology, rather than feeling ready to put change into practice. Many of them have made changes in their own behaviour, particularly in their use of social media and building on the relationships formed through CLL to share their experience and debate possibilities. Members of the SCP strand found themselves 'rearranging knowledge' and changing their approaches to strategic change management. The consultancy strand was frequently cited as having acted as a catalyst for institutional development. Certain themes emerged during the evaluation process, reflecting contextual and cultural issues which participants felt needed to be addressed before successful change could take place. These include: understanding and responding to staff reluctance to engage with technology, the importance of relating the use of technology to appropriate pedagogy, the need to actively make time and space for cultural

change initiatives and the need to break out of institutional ' silos' and support people to work collaboratively. These overarching strategic questions need to be addressed in order to achieve sustainable impacts on student learning and the whole student experience, however, individual participants are starting to consider what 'impact' might mean in specific terms. These examples will inform the development of a set of impact measures for the sector.

5. Measuring impact

The next piece of work, which will be developed during the second phase of CLL, is to define and refine the areas of impact and to identify sources of evidence. If CLL's impact on higher education is as deep and far reaching as planned, it should be visible in existing sources of data and institutional documentation. By developing measures from the responses of participants, who can situate the impacts within the contexts of their individual institutional cultures, they are more likely to be sustainable in the long-term. Impact will be measured in four areas: impacts on students, staff, institutions and the sector as a whole and defined in terms of their characteristics (or 'what it looks like'). We will then identify appropriate evidence bases where impact is likely to register within various time frames, short, medium and long-term.

4. What next?

Although the principal aim of CLL is to help universities and colleges develop innovative applications of digital technologies in support of learning, teaching and the student experience, the main themes arising from the evaluation process so far are concerned with more philosophical issues around the nature of institutional cultures, academic identity and attitudes. To extend the metaphor of the Learning Landscape, individual institutions need to provide fertile environments in which change can flourish. The seeds have now been sown and are starting to take root.

Appendix 1: evidence base

Strand 1 First cohort: analysis of interviews (December 2012)

*Strand 1 Strategic Change Programme Second cohort: analysis of interviews (*February 2013)

*Changing the Learning Landscape, Strategic Change Programme: final report (*June 2013)

Strand 2 Consultancy (First cohort): analysis of interviews (January 2013)

Changing the Learning Landscape: Strand 2: Consultancy round 2 projects first report (June 2013)

Changing the Learning Landscape: Strand 2: Consultancy round 2 projects final report (July 2013)

Changing the Learning Landscape: Strand 2: Consultancy round 1 projects final report (June 2013)

Changing the Learning Landscape Strand 3: Continuing Personal Development (June 2013)