

41st AEC Annual Congress

Changing Perspectives: Students as Partners

The Student Shadowing Project at the
Royal Northern College of Music (Manchester)

Amy Webber – Student Union President (2012-14)

Martin Harlow – Vice-Principal (Academic)

Colin Beeson – Project Manager

Students as Partners



Student/staff engagement in UK context (and at RNCM)

Student involvement in Quality Assurance and in decision-making at RNCM

Students as 'partners' – staff and student collaborations and the benefits

Conservatoire Network - CUK for staff and Students' Unions

What is 'shadowing'?

The context for the shadowing projects



The 'student experience'

The 'staff experience'

Shadowing projects in other UK institutions

At the RNCM: the pilot, 'A Day in the Life'

Higher Education Academy Teaching Development Grant (www.hea.ac.uk)

Key theme: Students as Partners

A Day in the Life ...



February – May 2013

Participants (18): volunteers from students and academic and non-academic staff

Pairings: drawn up by President of SU and Project Manager

Intended outcomes:

- * improve staff understanding of life as an RNCM student
- * enable students to gain insight into the working life of staff (academic and non-academic)
- * help foster culture of students and staff as partners in learning
- * help staff understand day-to-day pressures on students
- * offer insights to students into roles played by academic and non-academic staff in supporting their education and training needs

A Day in the Life ...



Actual outcomes (1)

Awareness and Understanding:

- * dramatically enhanced awareness – and appreciation – of the busy and intense working lives of students and their need to balance competing demands on their time
- * dramatically enhanced awareness of the busy and complex lives of staff and huge range of activities undertaken beyond the immediately apparent
- * significant acknowledgement by students that their broader concerns were an ever-present driver in course development
- * enhanced understanding by students of the range and complexity of ‘behind the scenes’ activities, both academic and non-academic

A Day in the Life ...



Actual outcomes (2)

Creative Reflection:

- * emerging awareness of potential for further and deeper integration between 'practical' and 'academic' aspects of the curriculum
- * reinforcement of the need to retain students' attention and interest through an engaging teaching style and relevance of content, especially in larger academic classes
- * the immense value of 'reflecting on practice' that was engendered among all participants (staff and student) through the experience of being shadowed

Student-Staff Shadowing 'Assignments' for Teaching and Learning Enhancement



September 2013 – June 2014

Participants (48): volunteers from students and academic staff

Pairings: drawn up by President of SU and Project Manager

Intended outcomes:

- * develop shadowing as a tool for instigating interventions to learning and teaching activity and strategy to enhance student learning experience and enrich staff working
- * to embed shadowing activity within the College's quality assurance and enhancement procedures
- * to target shadowing assignments for specific interventions
- * to explore efficacy of shadowing as a means for eliciting feedback, including its relation to other 'retrospective' feedback procedures
- * sharing methods and outcomes within the RNCM and beyond

'Assignments' – Scheme 1

The International Student Experience



Pairings involving international students new to the College (Canada, China, Norway, Romania) and full-time members of academic staff

One-to-one pairings, linear approach (2-3 meetings)

Aims: to see how quickly and effectively international students were able to adjust to RNCM life

Lessons learned:

- * specific support for international students is strong and appreciated, both at induction stage and ongoing
- * students felt welcomed
- * language issues not problematic for this group, but awareness of some difficulties among some students (who did not volunteer!)
- * College could develop more awareness of particular musical 'cultural' issues (e.g. sight-reading abilities, knowledge of some repertoires (Latin), and limitations in understanding of 'music theory')
- * induction arrangements for direct entry beyond Year 1

'Assignments' – Scheme 2

Fairness and Equality in Decision-Making



Aims: to gather information on students' perceptions of the fairness and equitability of decision-making in a range of settings

Chosen Areas:

- * essay-marking
- * orchestral seating auditions (Strings)
- * preliminary Concerto Auditions (Wind, Brass)
- * preliminary Concerto Auditions (Piano)
- * selection for participation in *Cantiere Internazionale d'Arte di Montepulciano* as member of resident orchestra (summer 2014)

Varied shadowing approaches gave variety of feedback, enabling triangulation of outcomes:

- * staff participant
- * student shadow
- * student participant (auditionee)
- * further 'neutral' staff shadow of auditionee

'Assignments' – Scheme 2

Fairness and Equality in Decision-Making



Lessons learned:

- * high level of confidence on part of students regarding the fairness and equitability of the decision-making processes
- * deepened student understanding of methods of assessment, including use of published criteria, etc.
- * enhanced staff understanding of value to student of clear and focused feedback
- * huge staff enthusiasm for inclusion of students on assessment panels
- * deeper student understanding of what audition panels are seeking, and of the level of preparation needed
- * some concerns that reports from audition panels were too 'encouraging' and insufficiently constructive with regard to how to improve performance
- * some concerns over comparability and consistency of practice across different disciplines

'Assignments' – Scheme 3

The Professional Development of Students

RNCM



Focus on Year 3 and Year 4 work in developing 'professional' (i.e. 'workplace') skills

Two strands:

1 – staff / staff shadowing of professional studies classes

2 – staff shadowing of students' work-related 'placements'

Aims:

Gaining an insight into processes and effectiveness of a range of professional development activities, enabling all participants to gain a more 'holistic' view of the College's broader provision in this area.

Outcomes:

General satisfaction with the provision and the relevance of the work undertaken in relation to graduates' employability in a broader sense

Conclusions and Next Steps



Using the project outcomes

Feedback from staff and students on the outcomes

The value of incorporating shadowing alongside other QA&E processes

Staff / Student Shadowing at the RNCM



Questions and observations

Amy.Webber@rncm.ac.uk

Martin.Harlow@rncm.ac.uk

Colin.Beeson@rncm.ac.uk