

Enabling Student Success Case Study

Inclusive cultures driving transformational change

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University of Salford



University of
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MANCHESTER

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1. Executive overview

At the University of Salford (UoS), as with many HEIs at present, we are ‘on a journey’ of rapid (and sometimes disruptive) adaptive change. This institutional change is itself set within a wider change landscape –we are in the midst of seismic shifts in higher education (HE) policy in England and the wider UK, whilst accelerating technological innovation is rapidly changing the way we work and the ways in which we prepare our students for life. Meanwhile, universities (and wider society) are questioning and revisiting previously stable ‘normals’ in light of a global pandemic.

For the last two years, alongside, and intertwined with, the changes made to learning, teaching, assessment which were enacted in response to the pandemic, UoS has been focused on a strategic institutional priority called Enabling Student Success (ESS). ESS is driving significant cultural change aimed at achieving consistency in sustainable outcomes for students and positioning UoS to effectively respond to the emerging governmental agenda around value for money in HE. ESS seeks to systematically foster a culture of evidence-based, data-led continuous improvement across teaching and learning, infrastructure, systems, processes and people, effectively joining up professional services, academic colleagues and our students’ union across key touchpoints throughout the student learning journey.

Within this context, an Inclusive Institutions project was designed to aid understanding of the key cultural institutional enablers that drove the transformational change required to facilitate ESS. A range of outputs developed for the Advance HE Collaborative Development Project provides a narrative for how Salford culture provided the enablers for transformational change to deliver ESS.

The key objectives of the project were threefold:

- + to examine how an institution can encourage a new culture to evolve.
- + to investigate the differences in the facilitation of culture transformation between four diverse Academic Schools.
- + to measure the impact of benefits to staff in terms of wellbeing, a sense of belonging, value, and career development.

This report unpacks the key learning points for UoS from enacting transformational change which leans on and learns from pre-existing models, and the cultural tools we already have in place at UoS.

Our research has established that a more inclusive culture grounded in a sense of belonging and value led to more impactful transformation when ingrained at the heart of large scale HE change projects. From the analysis, ten enablers emerged from the strength and barrier themes. These are brought together in a working model for promoting inclusive cultures. The

enablers provide guidance for senior leaders in relation to drivers to achieving a true inclusive culture.

Given our wider environment and operating context, perhaps the most pertinent reminder arising from this work is recognition of the need to focus on and embrace the nuance within the individual and collective 'lived experience' of institutional cultural change –a process in which acknowledgement of time and of journey are crucial in order to positively harness 'The feeling of what happens' (Damasio, 2000).

We are delighted to present Salford's ESS instructional case study which forms part of the Advance HE "inclusive institutions strand" of the Collaborative Development Fund 2021: New challenges, new solutions. At Salford we are now using the learning from this experience and actively drawing upon these enablers and the working model from this study as we use the foundations provided by ESS to cocreate, devise and implement the next institutional learning and teaching strategy –a future-facing guide for a post-pandemic learning journey which delivers an excellent experience and sustainable outcomes for our students.

Professor Jess Power, Director, Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre, University of Salford

Dr Sam Grogan, Pro Vice Chancellor Student Experience, University of Salford

2. Introduction

The work presented explores cultural enablers that drive transformational change within our institution. Our project evidenced, that a more inclusive culture grounded in a sense of belonging and value, leads to more impactful transformation when ingrained at the heart of large scale HE change projects. The model for promoting inclusive cultures highlighted ten enablers which are drawn from the strength and barrier analysis of the research.

Success was identified through tapping into shared motivations and personal drivers to craft an inclusive vision which enabled the development of a culture of trust and belonging. We showcase our findings through a range of digital assets providing an evidence base for Advance HE members seeking to explore and embed inclusive culture transformation.

The sticky culture at the heart of the institution provides an inclusive environment for impactful transformation based on strong foundations and organisational cohesion. A 'sticky' culture translates as a positive workplace culture that leads to employees wanting to 'stick around' (Gilbert, 2019) and is key to achieving a successful organisational culture and driving transformational change (Dyer, 2018). Many elements drawn from the primary research evidenced a positive 'sticky' culture at Salford, particularly in the more established Schools, where staff worked together towards a shared, strategic vision driven primarily by a motivation to improve student outcomes. A primary factor for transformational success was strongly related to how change feels to staff at all levels. It was established that through consideration of the lived experience and the understanding of pre-existing local cultures, more effective communication and a more connected inclusive approach was evident in driving the transformational change. This resulted in the change journey feeling more positive within all levels of the organisation.

At the University of Salford, our vision is to deliver an excellent student experience, focused on student success, so that every single student we recruit has equality of opportunity. Enabling Student Success (ESS) is our single institutional priority (Figure 1), and the work, which touches all aspects of the student experience, is led by Dr Sam Grogan, Pro Vice Chancellor Student Experience. Since spring 2020 professional services and academic colleagues across the institution have come together to make targeted, focused changes to practice and operations through a number of parallel and related pieces of work to deliver a step change in the students' University journey. As a programme of work, ESS brings together all areas of the University Community, across both academic and professional service areas, to improve the outcomes for our students in terms of retention, progression and employability.

Figure 1. ESS Background



For a full size version of this image is [available here](#).

The university has fundamental moral and ethical reasons to do everything possible to help all students succeed. To underpin our vision and strategy Salford has a set of core values evidenced through The Salford Behaviours. The 10 Behaviours (connecting, inspiring, evolving, achieving, enabling, learning, deciding, co-creating, aligning, daring) are designed to underpin cultural transformation, talent recognition and career enhancement across our institution. Therefore, exploring the impact of the Behaviours 'in action' and the dynamic interplay during implementation of ESS was crucial to our understanding of inclusive cultural change. The ESS programme is also important for two reasons. First, this is our response to the government's 2019 value for money agenda, where universities are being challenged to better demonstrate value for money, as evidenced through key metrics such as: progression and employability. There is a need for us continually to improve our portfolio of programmes with respect to student outcomes, and the ESS programme of work aims to make improvements in the university's performance across quality metrics around progression and graduate outcomes data. Second, ESS is a structural approach to work together to achieve consistency in our ambition to become a top 50 UK university.

The ESS work was developed to initiate rapid change in institutional culture and to drive transformation in practice across a large, complex and diverse organisation. The ESS framework synthesises internal policy and processes under a single initiative to support or enable? an institution-wide strategic plan. The strategic plan is organised around four key distinct domains: academic success, customer service, leadership and assurance environment.

3. Methodology

Four focus groups were held with members of each Academic School Leadership team. As the locus of responsibility for delivery of ESS, the leadership teams have a detailed understanding of their respective School's experience of the changes required and their approach to implementation. Consequently, engagement in the focus groups was high, enabling in depth exploration of three key questions:

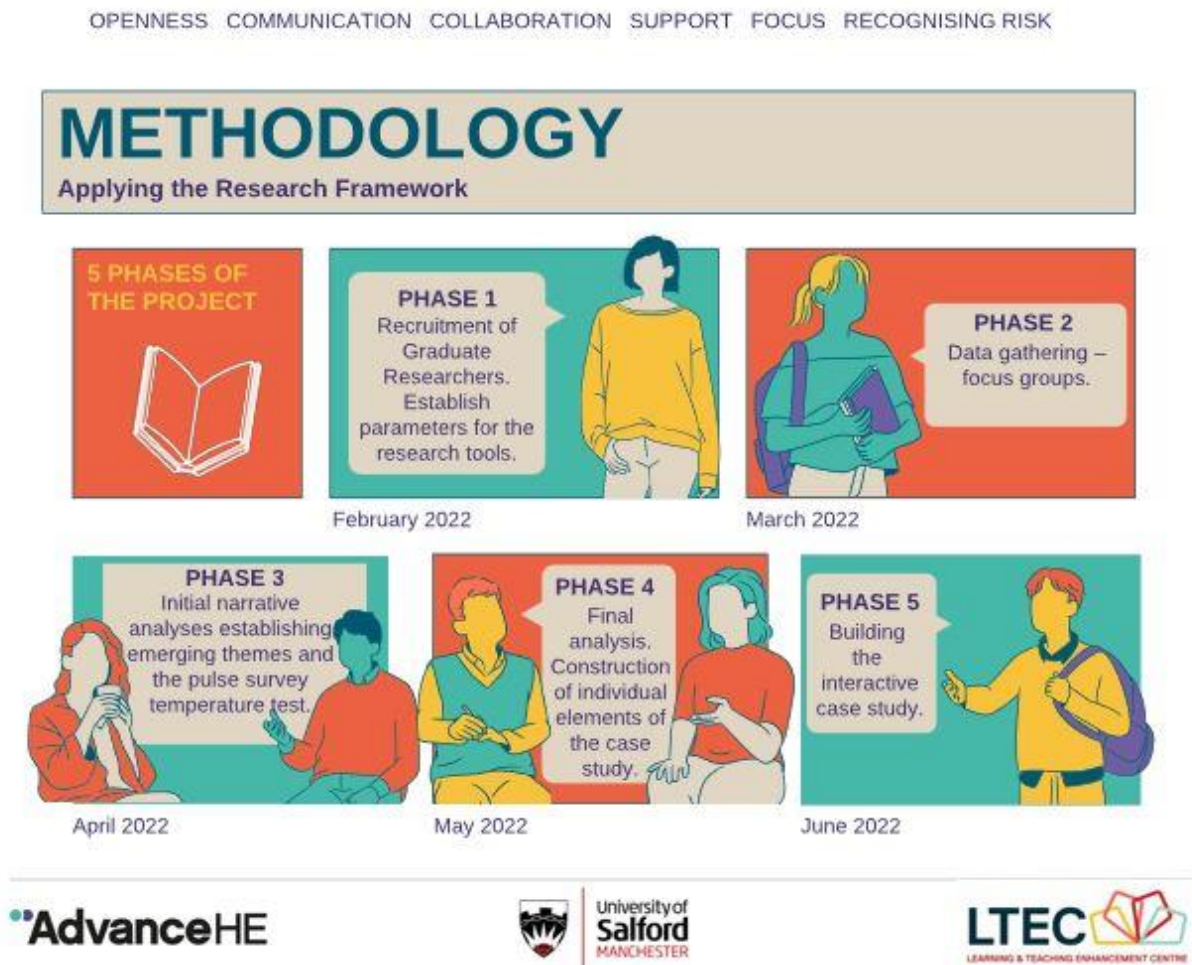
1. What culture changes in your Academic School were needed to facilitate the ESS framework?

ESS is delivering improvements in key KPIs...

2. What positive impact has this had on academic staff in your school in terms of: sense of belonging, valued contribution, professional development, and well-being?
3. Have there been any challenges in achieving the culture required to facilitate this rapid transformational change, and how has this been managed/responded to by the School Leadership Team?

The focus groups were followed by a short pulse survey that was open to all School-based staff. A total of 108 responses were received, providing a response rate of 13%. The data provides a 9% margin of error at a 95% confidence level. The research framework is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Research framework



For a full size version of this image is [available here](#).

3.1 Phase one - capacity and capability building

Four Post Graduate Researchers (PGR) were formally recruited from the pool of students enrolled on Salford's PGR citizenship programme. This was selected as the recruitment route primarily to draw on a rich pool of skill and secondly to provide the Graduate Teaching Research Assistants (GTAs) with portfolio evidence to construct individual narratives leading to applications for Advance HE Associate Fellow. The development of the research tool for the focus groups and ethical approval for the first stage of the data collection was also constructed in phase 1.

3.2 Phase two - discovery

Four focus groups were undertaken with senior members of each Academic School's Leadership Team. Three core themes were explored: the School's approach to creating the desired culture to facilitate the ESS framework; the management approaches to creating a dynamic environment to empower colleagues; and the impact on staff in relation to: sense of belonging, valued contribution, professional development, and general wellbeing. During the analysis a set of 12 keywords were established based on frequency of use in the discussion. The pulse survey participants were asked to select which of the 12 keywords they associated with the cultural change specific to their area.

3.3 Phase three - more discovery

Constituted a short pulse survey open to staff from each Academic School. This enabled wider perspectives to be collated in relation to an understanding of the drivers behind the ESS framework, cultural change and the impact of the lived experience. The response rate was 13% representing a 9% margin of error for a 95% confidence level. The pulse survey used a Likert scale for 15 questions (formed from the initial analysis of the focus groups) and four open text options for further commentary and was administered using the JISC survey tool for a three-week period in April 2022.

3.4 Phase four - analysis

The focus groups were recorded and transcribed and subsequently utilised for analysis. Due to the short timescales of the project and the agreed deliverables, the analytical approach was designed accordingly. Initially a two-stage coding process occurred, followed by a final Thematic Analysis, (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Guest et al. 2011; Stringer, 2013). The first stage utilised In-Vivo coding to scrutinise the data overall; this was followed by the second stage which utilised Pattern Coding to understand the patterns emerging from the data. The final process involved a written Thematic Analysis. NVIVO software was used for all qualitative analysis. The thematic analysis identified several values for cultural change, the six most prioritised values were identified and mapped to the Salford Behaviours.

3.5 Phase five - creatively sharing the findings

The thematic analysis of the focus group narratives and pulse survey data enabled various outputs to be co-produced including flipbooks and PowerPoints. The data collection was underpinned by the SPICED approach (Whitnall, 2020) and resulted in a poem (Appendix 7.3). Using the advanced skills and creative attributes of the GTAs, under the mentorship of the Project Management Group an interactive case study was constructed using the institutional licence for Spatial (Spatial, 2022), this formed a resource which will lead to further dissemination. A video walkthrough was created from Spatial which will feature as part of the Advance HE inclusive institutions case study (Appendix 7.4).

4. Findings

4.1 Analysis

The analysis of the focus groups and pulse survey established the strengths and barriers which enabled the large-scale cultural transformation. The data revealed three primary strength themes, “inclusive solutions”; “the student experience” and “openness”; underpinned by four secondary strength themes, “being heard and valued”, “focus and direction”, “future proofing” and “common focus”. The analysis also surfaced some obstacles which formed two primary barriers “impact on staff” and “divisions” and a secondary barrier theme of “objective evidence”.

4.1.1 Successful inclusive change involves space for individuals

The first highly positive theme “inclusive solutions” drew together the need and success of the organisation in creating a collaborative approach that saw all levels within Academic Schools working together. This inclusive approach enabled the ESS framework to be embedded firmly within the organisation. The importance of a collaborative approach based on effective communication is also reflected in the fact that communication and collaboration were top choices in the proposed keywords. Creating a genuinely thriving collaborative culture which understood the foundation of ESS and everyone’s contribution with agreed priorities removed the feeling of cascading down, Senior Leadership Teams embedded and embraced this joined-up collaboration culture which felt inclusive, fair and transparent to all colleagues.

“ESS ... brought staff a common purpose with everyone pulling in the same direction”

Anonymous academic staff member (pulse survey)

“working on the ESS framework has given me more connection to central parts of the university and allowed me to develop stronger networks across the university”

Anonymous (pulse survey)

It was important for School Leadership Teams to ensure that their staff felt there was an open culture to discuss what was important to them. This included difficult conversations; therefore, open communication needed to be honest and transparent. This was seen as a critical element in planning and moving forward; even if all issues couldn’t be wholly resolved, exploring those challenges was central to ensuring staff felt heard and valued. This links to the secondary theme of “being heard and valued”. It brought out a culture that sought to be not only inclusive but also innovative and open to novel and new ideas. This

was found to be truly realised when staff were fully empowered to develop solutions themselves. This drew on the skills and experience of individuals and teams to ensure that they felt part of ESS but also the institution valued their contributions and placed them within solutions to foster a sense of belonging. Giving staff permission to innovate and think creatively was a key element to how staff could develop a sense of belonging within their School. Therefore, the exact change could feel differently within different Schools, dependent on the openness of their culture. This was clearly evident from the pulse survey individuals indicated being able to determine their own contribution to the ESS framework was central to how it felt culturally. Being able to harness ESS as a common purpose and working together to create more inclusive responses to change fostered stronger feelings of workplace belonging. On a practical level it was clearly more effective when everyone was pulling in the same direction and working through shared aims and visions.

4.1.2 We're all in it together: for our students

The “student experience” theme underpinned the key motivations not only behind achieving ESS but an essential driver for many staff. The primary motivator for a high degree of what staff were striving to achieve was directly driven by a genuine commitment to deliver a high-quality higher education experience for students that can provide a wide range of outcomes. Harnessing the passion and motivation to improve the opportunities for students to reach their potential was a key enabler and a fundamental underpinning of a driver to success. Improving student outcomes was also directly linked to the secondary themes of “Focus and Direction” and “Future Proofing”. Utilising ESS to place student outcomes at the institution's heart enabled colleagues to buy into a shared vision that drew upon their personal motivations to enable collective focus and direction. This demonstrates how workplace culture and staff motivations play a significant role in both student outcomes and the overall viability of the University. 58.9% of respondents agreed that ‘evidence suggests that the ESS has impacted on student success’. Therefore, we concluded that the majority of staff feel ESS is a success in terms of student outcomes, as suggested by the institutional KPIs. It was commented that a particular achievement of ESS was the ability of the framework to enable more diverse approaches that were more reflective of the wider variety of student needs. It had not just improved student outcomes but embraced the diverse range of students at Salford and enabled a more inclusive university experience. Improving student success, retention and employability, which was important to staff and often viewed as a positive outcome of ESS.

4.1.3 Appreciation of pre-existing culture

The final primary strength theme “openness” is based on an open culture that is honest and inclusive, where everyone can speak freely and be heard. It was found that being open and responsive to change was dependent on pre-existing culture and the ability to weather change. Narrative referred to personal experience or preparedness, which supported the findings from the focus groups that pre-existing culture influenced how this was perceived or experienced as a lived reality by staff. It was important to staff that they felt empowered and

encouraged to be innovative in their own responses. This connected to the importance of “inclusive solutions”; to involve staff to help create a more bottom-up feel to how they respond to challenge and change. Involvement and influence of how change was dealt with increased staff feelings of wellbeing. When staff felt excluded by this process of change, it created the opposite to an open culture, fostering feelings of resistance.

“...many novel ideas with subject specific impact were generated from a bottom-up method rather than the usual “top-down process”

Anonymous (pulse survey)

4.1.4 ESS as a common purpose

A further secondary theme of “common purpose”, emerged from the pulse survey that was not evident in the focus groups. In terms of effectiveness, over 60% of respondents felt that ESS had brought student outcome delivery under a single, strategic framework. Furthermore, over 70% felt that it was an appropriate approach for Salford to adopt in addressing external Higher Education policy change. This suggested that most staff saw the value in utilising ESS as the single framework to deliver student outcomes and viewed it as a positive step in responding to the shifts in the wider HE landscape. It was evident that the benefits of ESS were seen as having a singular, clear and defined framework for delivering key student outcomes. Furthermore, it was important to staff to have clarity in both communications but also in terms of direction and focus. It, therefore, can be noted that more effective approaches improved efficiency, by streamlining work and reducing the unnecessary impact of already busy workloads.

Communication is central to this, but also by sharing a “common purpose” or vision that helps deliver strategic goals:

“Giving staff a common purpose and allowing them to see how they contribute to key strategic goals”

Anonymous (pulse survey)

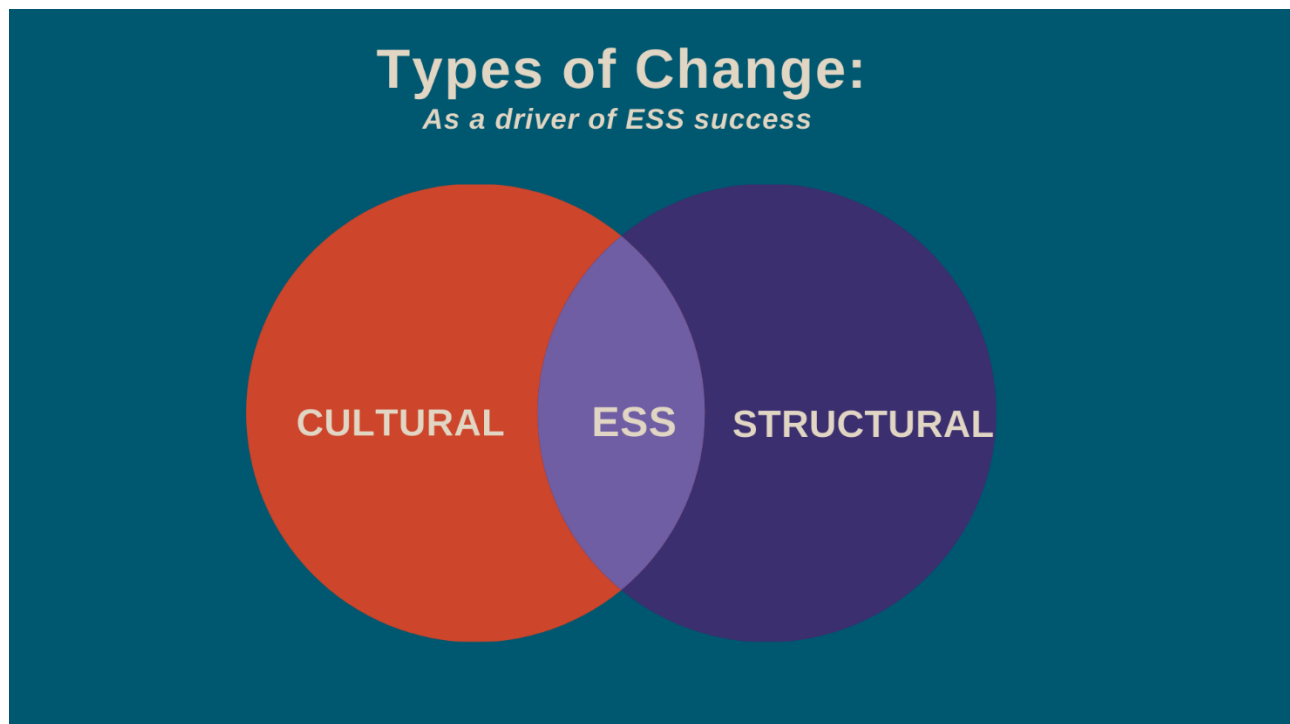
“...the work-based learning new framework and processing is making a change in addressing graduate level outcomes long term and creating a shift in how placements are perceived / how better planning and matching can bring greater satisfaction and skills building to the student”

Anonymous (pulse survey)

4.1.5 Thematic overview: values, behaviour and change

ESS aimed to foster a positive workplace culture to deliver key student outcomes through a collaborative approach. This project sought to provide a narrative for how University of Salford culture provided foundations for the transformational change to deliver the ESS. The thematic overview is one of several key outputs that forms an interactive case study. During the analysis, key themes (strengths and barriers) and values arising from the data were mapped against both the project aims and that of the Salford Behaviours framework. It was found that the more positive the overall culture and the closer it was to the Salford Behaviours, the more positive ESS felt to staff. The data revealed two distinct types of change as drivers of ESS success, cultural change, and structural change (Figure 3). It was where these two came together that the ESS could be fully realised and feel more positive to staff.

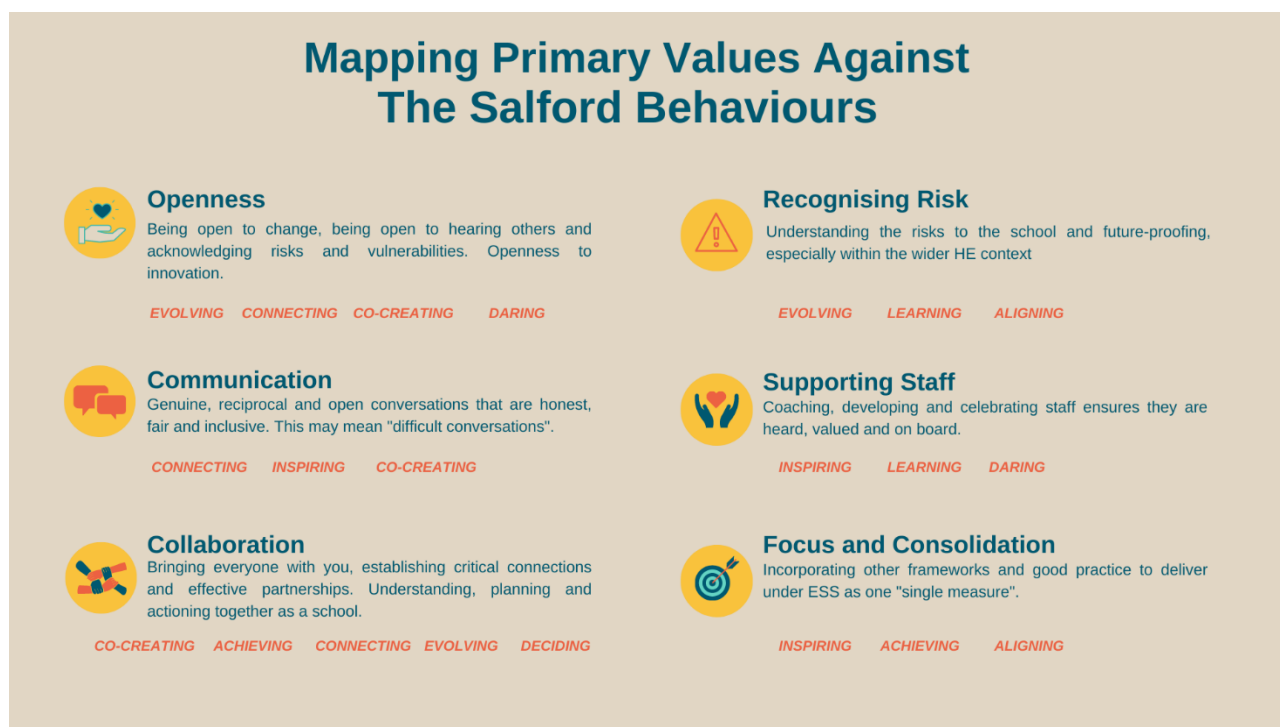
Figure 3. Drivers for success



For the thematic overview video [click here](#).

Across the whole data set, there were several values for cultural change that were found to be positive drivers that enabled the ESS. The six most prioritised values were identified and mapped to the Salford Behaviours (Figure 4). These primary values were: openness, communication, collaboration, recognising risk, supporting staff and focus and consolidation. It was found that all of the values did directly align to the full Salford Behaviours Framework. Further the analysis revealed that the closer the values and transformational change were to the Salford Behaviours, the more positive it will have felt to staff, highlighting its importance.

Figure 4. Thematic values V behaviours



For the thematic overview video [click here](#).

4.1.6 Barriers to cultural change

Two overarching themes were identified as potential obstacles to cultural change: “impact on staff” and “division”. It was important to consider when ESS did not feel positive to staff and explore the underlining factors which created this feeling. Where the values were present in positive terms, the workplace culture was more positive. However, when those primary values were lacking or perceived to be lacking, it resulted in a negative cultural experience. A primary source of feedback on negative staff experiences was centred on workload, demand, and resource, which left staff feeling stressed and overwhelmed. It was felt that the external pressures of a wider HE landscape could also add to feelings of overload due to the use of sticks, not carrots that lead to staff feeling judged. There were also discussions around acknowledging a degree of vulnerability and risk that stemmed from a name and shame culture. We conclude that where there were either existing cultural complexities or a lack of openness to change, ESS could be framed negatively, even blamed as a creator of problems. It may also be those difficulties in embedding ESS into the culture that indicates pre-existing cultural issues or wider divisions being felt across the institution.

It has already been established that a collaborative approach based on open and honest dialogue that is inclusive was essential to how ESS ‘felt’ to staff. Therefore, it followed that gaps in communication or relationships created divisions and confusion. When the key messages of ESS were sanitised or altered, this hindered its ability to impact staff culture positively. This may have come from a place of protection, trying to simplify the message

and reduce the workload for staff already feeling overwhelmed, but quite simply, it may be that something here was lost in translation. The message was key to enabling staff to see their own place and value within the framework. When staff could not see how ESS related to their own day job, this created tension and frustration.

Value recognition was also reciprocal, in that staff could see how they contributed to ESS and when this contribution was valued it contributed to a positive culture. However, it was also important to understand how ESS could add value to staff through demonstrating and experiencing mutual benefits. If this was absent, it fractured the connection between ESS and the student-focused approach. This appears to be a cyclical process; the more a School and individual felt included in ESS, the more positive it felt and the more embedded within the culture it became. However, it should be recognised that all Schools referenced issues with workload, demand and external pressures. These challenges were discussed regardless of the 'feel' of a School's culture. This indicated the impact on staff in relation to the challenges and changes from external contexts. This is not necessarily reflective of ESS or culture within Salford itself, it is more likely to indicate the wider impact of the shifts and pressure across the HE landscape.

A new secondary barrier theme emerged from the pulse survey "objective evidence". In many ways "division" acts as a direct contrast to the strength themes, where the key positive values recognised through those themes were absent it created feelings of disconnection and division; rather than the evidence the KPIs provided. This theme reveals the impact of how ESS had felt to staff, and importantly if they were able to connect themselves and value their contribution to the framework. It further strengthened the importance of communication that reaches all parts of the institution forming inclusive culture as the blood of the organisation. Communication, being heard and involvement were clearly valued by staff even when this resulted in difficult conversations to air frustrations and challenges. When there was a communication gap it created a lack of clarity about the purpose and direction, resulting in uncertainty about exactly what ESS was and how it related to the 'academic coal-face'. Only 38.3% of respondents agreed that ESS enhanced their individual personal development. This indicated a detached feel in that ESS became separate from other working approaches and day to day delivery, which resulted in some staff being unable to place themselves, their work and their own contribution within the framework, generating the feeling that something was simply; thrown at us. As with the focus group data, there was some us and them language. Here 'us' often refers to academic and professional staff more directly involved with students and 'them' was more central and higher levels of management.

4.2 Lessons learned

There was not a single theme cutting across the analysis, rather, the concept of time, communication and how they related to change and the cultural journey. It was acknowledged that transformational change, particularly concerning culture, does not happen overnight but instead develops over a period of years. This was seen as a process often achieved through incremental improvements, thus, evolution rather than revolution. The seeds need to be sown and the soil fertile before the crops can grow and a sustainable yield can be obtained.

4.2.1 Concepts of ‘time’ and ‘being on a journey’

There were some challenges across Academic Schools regarding whether the transformational change could be achieved in a short space of time. It was felt that transformational change could be viewed as a journey, and indeed some Schools and staff felt that ESS was part of their own journey. Time had relevance as a golden thread, the responses appeared to reveal a connection between their own evolution and their cultural adoption of ESS. Schools that had already gone through transformational change, particularly over a longer period, seemed to report a more positive cultural response to ESS. There was a view that it takes time for the key relationships to form that enable Schools to develop collaborative and inclusive cultures. Therefore, indicating that trust, confidence, and response develop with time and experience, enables Schools to come together. Experiences of previous challenges, even adversity, had enabled Schools to respond collectively and enable a sense of community and belonging to prevail. This also appeared to contribute to their ability to think more creatively and openly about their responses to change, therefore, empowering staff with more autonomy and freedom. This highlighted the impact of pre-existing culture and historical responses to transformation, not in the success of ESS as this had been evidenced in the KPIs, but the impact on workplace culture and the ‘feel’ of ESS upon staff wellbeing.

4.2.2 Communication underpins cultural change

Communication underpinned many of the themes established from both data sets; where it was effective, it drew out positive values and strengths. Communication, challenge and collaboration were the top three keywords respondents associated with the cultural change in their area. If communication was felt or seen to be lacking, it created barriers. The Salford Behaviours, particularly; connecting, inspiring and co-creating were deemed to be central to developing strong working relationships to build effective networks across the organisation.

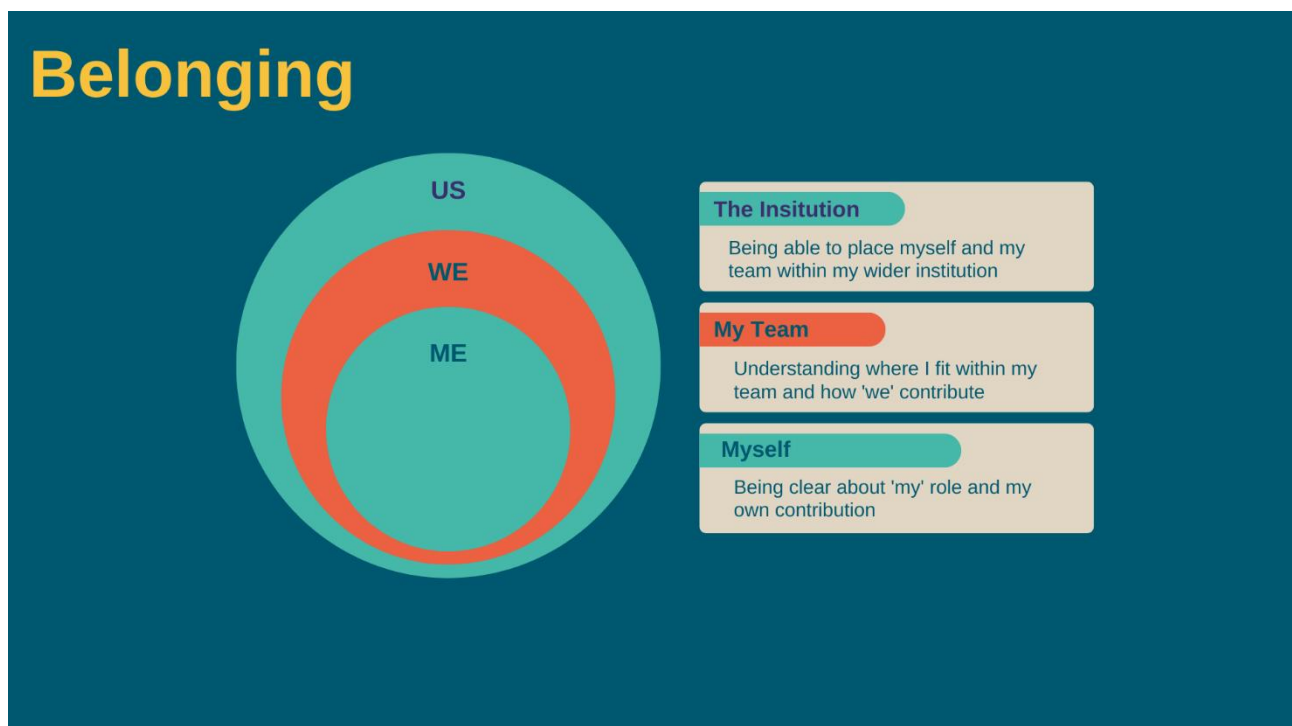
These networks and collaborations were essential in delivering effective communication that drives a “common purpose”. Thus, fostering inclusion and collaboration so staff could work creatively to respond to differing needs and issues. Inclusive, open, and honest communication was particularly important to enable staff at all levels to be heard. Part of this was not just to have more equality in creating solutions together but also to air frustrations and work collaboratively regarding sustainable solutions.

4.3 Creating a 'sticky' culture

A 'sticky' culture translates as a positive workplace culture that leads to employees wanting to 'stick around' (Gilbert, 2019). The concept was found in articles and reports about achieving a successful organisational culture and driving transformational change (Dyer, 2018). Many elements discussed across the focus groups would evidence a positive 'sticky' culture at Salford. Particularly in the more established Schools, a collaborative, inclusive environment where the staff worked together towards a shared, strategic vision driven by a motivation to improve student outcomes was evident. The impact of such a culture on the outcomes and staff has also been discussed throughout the report.

It is about encouraging a positive culture that enables staff to stick around and future proof, as opposed to negative culture that can leave people and processes stuck. In terms of staff belonging, it was important that belonging mirrored the Me, We and Us elements of the Salford framework (Figure 5). It was important for each individual to be clear about their own role and contribution and be able to place where they fitted within their team and Academic School and how these together contribute within the wider institution.

Figure 5. Us, me, we culture



For the thematic overview video [click here](#).

The 'stickiness' of the culture at Salford was also apparent in the choice of language used to describe workplace culture in the groups, words such as embed, permeate, filter, and drag. That last word reflects another side to the sticky nature of culture, the impact of negative or unhelpful workplace culture. This type of culture may be seen to drag people down, this was discussed in terms of the legacy of entrenched negative culture. It was felt that this legacy

could outlive individuals and continue long after its creators had left the institution. It was felt that this legacy had the power to affect even the most enthusiastic of new staff by living on in barriers embedded into processes and systems. This would be described as limiting in the Salford Behaviours, behaviour or culture that get in the way of doing our best work. Both the positive and adverse elements of sticky culture highlight that the success of ESS was not simply realised through key KPIs but in the cultural impacts across departments and staff which was a key success factor in enabling ESS.

4.4 Summary of findings

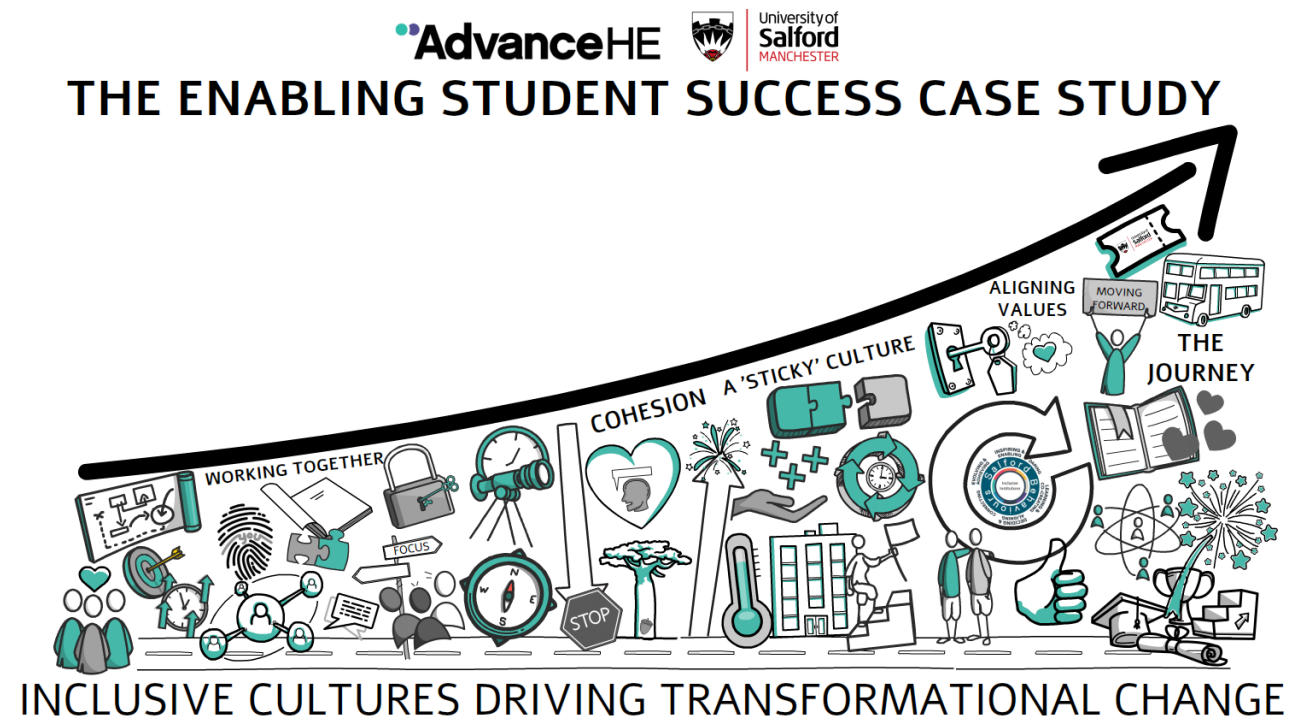
The research presented as part of the Advance HE Collaborative Development fund established that: a more inclusive culture grounded in a sense of belonging and value, led to more impactful transformation when ingrained at the heart of large scale HE change projects. Ten enablers were formed from the strength and barrier themes from the analysis which are featured in the model presented in Figure 6. The enablers provide guidance for senior leaders in relation to drivers to achieving a truly inclusive culture; they sit at either side of what is the ideal transformational model. It was important to acknowledge that whilst the metrics indicate a positive transformational picture, real success was more apparent in empowering and supporting people and Senior Leadership Teams taking incremental steps based on individual cultures and recognising the need to create local environments to nurture and inspire the institution's desired behaviours. The "sticky culture" promoted the inclusive environment for transformational change and was found to be dependent upon several considerations including understanding of the historic context of change to temperature test how change felt in relation to the lived experience. This required significant relationship building to empower and develop confidence at all levels of the organisation's infrastructure. Thus, tapping into shared motivations and personal drivers to craft an inclusive vision through a culture of trust and belonging - "we are in this together". Furthermore, the sensitivity of pre-existing cultures and the need to collaborate were paramount to promoting environments to empower people and drive sustainable change where people felt valued and heard.

The research finding alluded to foundations which needed grounding in a transparent inclusive approach with a co-constructed language built on trust and value. It was felt this must be collaboratively formed to ensure individuals were empowered to develop subject nuances and novel approaches to harness and nurture the talented staff around them. It is thus recommended that the ten enablers must be used: to harness positive drivers (to pull up) and to mitigate negative drivers (which push down). How change felt was key to promoting inclusive organisations.

From the study it could be ascertained that:

The more individuals and Academic Schools were aligned to the 10 Salford Behaviours the more positive and inclusive was the lived experience.

Figure 6. ESS case study



For a full size version of this image [click here](#).

5. Conclusions

It is fair to close by acknowledging that The University of Salford is on a journey and through appreciation of the “feeling of” the lived experience, and the understanding of pre-existing cultures, better communication and a more connected inclusive approach can be adopted to drive transformational change. So, the journey feels positive at all levels within the institution. The findings presented in the main body of the report contribute to understanding different approaches and lessons from Advance HE institutional members to transform, enable and support inclusive cultures which deliver HE strategic institutional priorities. The University of Salford’s case study goes one step further through seeking to identify new forms of evidence of culture transformation and its evaluation expressed through an interactive case study. This strengthens the teaching and research nexus within the newly established Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre at the University of Salford, by bringing the PGR community into the core of a key strategic institutional transformational project. The GTAs’ and cross School management team’s voices have been captured within the case study (Appendix 7.1 and 7.2). Essential experience has been gathered which will contribute directly to wider post graduate studies thus, building and supporting pedagogic enquiry, contributing to academic citizenship and providing further networking opportunities.

6. References

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7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 Reflections: graduate teaching research assistants

7.1.1 Description

All four GTAs are PhD Researchers from the University of Salford. Each researcher has experience from a different School within the University. This unique expertise was of great value with the goal to combine this knowledge in enhancing the research team objectives. The GTAs all mentioned collaboration and teamwork, which was critical to the project, as all GTAs brought different strengths, but when combined, helped to create a holistic integrated project. All GTAs were involved in the focus groups. This was an interactive task, which required all team members to contribute to both a unique and contributory role. Roles ranged from GTAs having the experience of asking questions, assisting School focus group facilitation and notation. Both verbal and non-verbal responses, implicit and direct themes and important statements, background, content, and perspectives were analysed. Roles then deviated with GTAs taking on individual tasks; some were involved with the qualitative NVivo analysis and compiling the executive summary; some contributing on the survey, while others compiled other aspects of the interactive case study material, in the forms of reflections, storyboards, slide-show presentations and various additional content.

7.1.2 Feelings

Common feelings were excitement, interest, and opportunity to be a part of a research team. PhD students generally spend most of their time undertaking research on their own and this was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though students worked remotely at times, there were times when everybody was in the same room. A truly interactive example was when the Senior Leadership Team sat in the same room, with GTAs, while the group was facilitated via Teams. This was integrated with outputs recorded via the Microsoft Teams platform.

There was clear learning with the GTAs experiencing novelty, however, this is the nature of learning, and the team embraced these new experiences and added these to their researcher portfolios.

7.1.3 Evaluation

Due to the brevity of the project, there was a larger need to compile individual pieces of work separately and then bring them together via discussion in a meeting. These tasks seemed at first to be individual, however in the end they all merged, creating a cohesive, partnered, synchronous collaboration.

7.1.4 Analysis

All GTAs shared a similar theme of learning and development. All were grateful to contribute to a project greater than their individual selves creating something meaningful. They were able to work as a team, using different research skills to bring a project with diversity together. There was a focus on common reflection, recommendations and goals and using the shared Enabling Student Success language. This being reflecting an inclusive institution, enabling and supporting cultural change to improve student success, staff well-being, sense of belonging, value and career development.

7.1.5 Conclusion

All GTA team members shared a sense of pride and accomplishment. They grew their own individual skills, communicating, negotiating, delegating, managing themselves and the project, while disseminating these findings to senior management. These are all relevant skills in both academic and non-academic sectors, with the goal to ready themselves for their future career paths. GTAs felt valued members in a multidisciplinary cohesive team, learning and sharing while producing valuable and credible outputs. This project blended both science and creativity to create an inclusive and multi-faceted case-study to investigate inclusive institutions improving and enhancing them.

7.1.6 Action Plan

The GTA team have grown together and all enjoyed working on the final outputs of the project. As with all projects, hindsight indicates how the team could have changed the way they approached the outputs, however, everybody focused on making this short project as successful as possible, aligning to all established outputs. As a successful project experience, all team members embrace opportunities to be involved in future University projects.

7.2 Appendix 2 Reflections: staff

7.2.1 Description

The project was led by Jess Power, the University's Professor of Teaching and Learning, with senior academic representatives from Salford's four Schools (School of Health and Society, Salford School of Arts, Media and Creative Technology, School of Science, Engineering and Environment and Salford Business School), the University's Researcher Development Manager and specialist academic developers from the institution's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre (LTEC).

This formed a staff team with expertise in research, academic practice and technical skills to work with and guide four Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), from the University's PhD research community, to collect the data.

This combination was of great value in providing different knowledge, experience, skills and perspectives in an inclusive and collaborative team-based approach to the project.

Staff roles included guiding the GTAs on the Enabling Student Success (ESS) initiative, research frameworks, ethical approval, research questions and outputs as well as helping to facilitate and inform access to School Senior Leadership teams.

7.2.2 Feelings

Common feelings were excitement and nervousness as the timeframe to collect data was limited and the project would unpick for the first time the lived experiences of colleagues in relation to ESS, a major transformational change in the institution.

It also brought together a diverse range of senior and junior staff from different areas of the University with different skillsets to work together for the first time. This felt bold but also unifying and brought a sense of pride.

Staff also felt it was important to contribute as in many cases, their roles included ensuring delivering improved outcomes through ESS. The project therefore gave a unique opportunity to understand how the change had been perceived across the University, its impact and future benefit.

7.2.3 Evaluation

Undertaking the project has been a rewarding and successful experience, with a key highlight being able to work collectively, bringing together and understanding colleagues' perceptions from different areas across the institution.

This was a journey of discovery as the team went through the research process, overcoming obstacles and discovering how change felt both individually and as a team. Staff also earned from each other as they brought different ideas and reflections during the process.

Importantly, it also allowed staff to understand from the ground how ESS had been perceived, its impact and how it can inform future change.

7.2.4 Analysis

The project provided an effective and inclusive vehicle to collect and triangulate viewpoints, enable flexibility regarding approaches and draw on ideas and views from diverse and different disciplines as well as individual staff. Strong narrative emerged that highlighted institutional strengths including togetherness and allowed the team to understand the organisation, its people, culture, resilience and approach to change. Staff highly valued the skills of each other, including the GTAs, which created a sense of collective achievement but also of individual professional development.

7.2.5 Conclusion

This project has been successful in collecting and analysing data across the University to assess and inform its future approach. Under excellent leadership, the team has worked well collectively to deliver a significant output. By mapping the project findings to the 10 Salford Behaviours the team established 7 positive enablers to promote inclusive cultures and 3 enablers to avoid negative behaviours and feeling of resistance to change. The key outcome was “The more individuals and Academic Schools were aligned to the 10 Salford Behaviours the more positive and inclusive was the lived experience”.

The project also strengthened the newly established Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre at the University of Salford, by bringing the PGR community and four Schools into the core of a key strategic institutional transformational project.

The project has also built and supported pedagogic enquiry, contributing to academic citizenship and providing further networking opportunities. This is strong impact at organisational level, but also at a personal level.

7.2.6 Action Plan

We need to ensure the learning is embedded in future culture change. We can further lead change across the institution by taking the enablers into Teams, harnessing the inclusive culture which guided our own success. This can continue to improve outcomes and student experience. We also need to continue to build a teaching and learning research community to showcase excellence that the project has uncovered.

7.3 Appendix 3 SPICED Poem

About the SPICED Methodology, why use it and what does it offer the project?

Sector leading inclusive methodology 'SPICED' has been used in the project to ensure the positioning and participatory elements facilitate the co-created approach and so that the critical voices within the study are heard.

SPICED is Subjective, Participatory, Interpretable, Cross-Checkable and communicated, Evaluable or Empowering and Disaggregated and Diverse. In this particular instance, to align with the project objectives, we are using 'Empowering' and 'Diverse' specifically. The SPICED approach places emphasis on developing indicators that stakeholders can define and use for their own purposes of interpreting and learning about change. Its focus is 'bottom-up' and participatory whereby community members define indicators of social or cultural change impact. SPICED particularly complements the project aims and Salford behaviours and is well utilised as an approach in third and fourth sector agencies where understanding the impact of change, culture and the community voice are important.

7.3.1 SPICED Poem

Exploring our ontological methodology,
SPICED begins with Subjective and Participatory,
Recognising that participants have unique insight,
The focus groups supplied perspectives to highlight,
In the analysis we identified keywords and themes,
That we could use in framework streams,
These keywords informed our survey,
Co-created questions to support our inquiry.
Objectives that are Interpreted and communicable,
Cross-checked and comparable,
The survey provided reflective space,
Empowering, with themes to embrace,
Diverse and deliberate to seek out any difference,
Exploring schools similarities and their divergence.

Subjective in driving the need for institutional clarity,
A choice of roles and expertise from across the University,
Monitoring the ESS progress through School leadership,
This project was based on a co-created and creative partnership,
GTA's could identify roles and volunteer,
A rewarding narrative, the different voices we could hear,
School input sought in this project which moved at speed,
Adding to the rich data captured for the analysis to proceed.
A qualitative bias in our approach by design,
Working to the team's skill set to align,
Collaborative and inclusive practices in project management,
As well as in the collation and analysis of the content.

The Participatory approach sets this work apart,
By gaining whole University involvement from the start.
Reaching out to all staff in schools at different levels and stages,
Uncovering a positive culture of togetherness through our project phases.
Including the views of different Schools Senior Leadership Teams,
Revealing School nuances and approaches it seems.
Using tools such as Jamboards, acting as a point of reference,
Engagement of team members according to their skills and preference.
The analysis highlights wellbeing, ESS and areas where views converge,
Mapped to the Salford behaviours, some beautiful narrative beginning to emerge.

Interpreted and communicable data, it was helpful to see our contributions.
We could all see uploads on the Teams site and able to voice our interpretations.

Exploring our message was clear and reflected in the question narrative.
Getting the ESS message over to staff, understanding what's inclusive.
The statement of intent sent out to Deans, who provided support
Multi instrument approach, providing multiple angles to collect viewpoints in our report
We flexed regarding approaches to sense check the pulse survey form bottom up.
Interesting perceptive from different disciplines, that enabled us
To be culturally sensitive to tone and feeling
Obtaining data and statistical analysis translated with meaning.

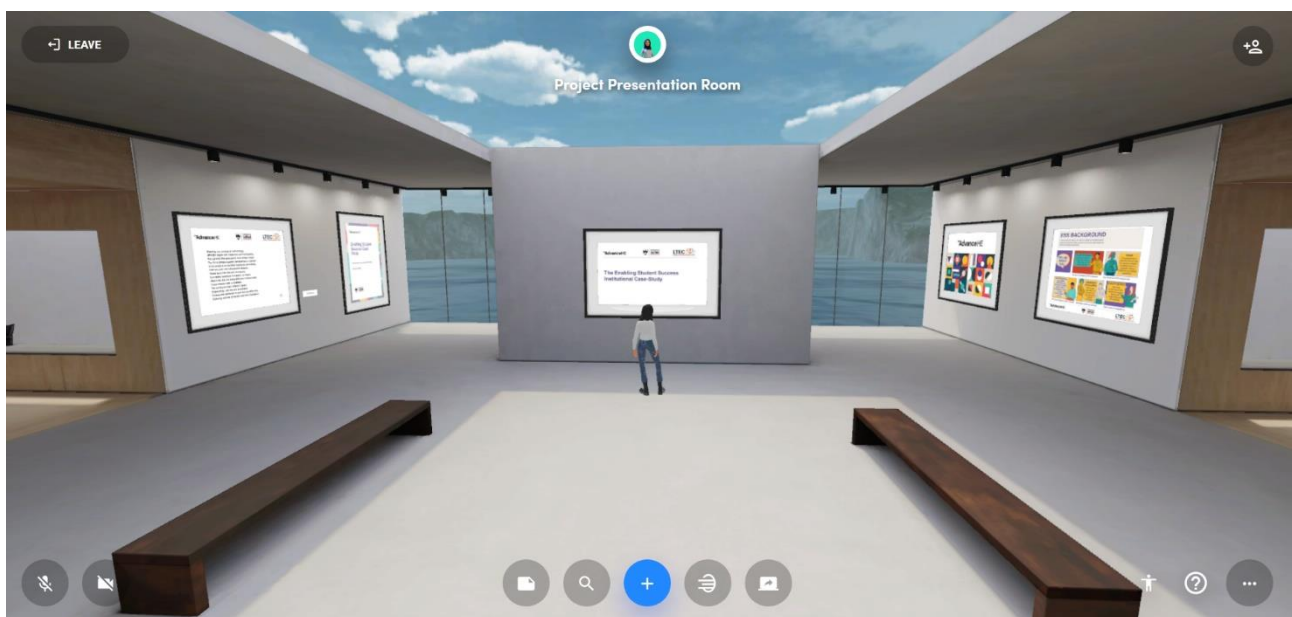
Cross-checked and compared, triangulating to existing frameworks
Depth and richness of viewpoints explored through InVivo networks
Comparable and relatable data from two methods used in the study
Ensuring quality of approach and not deviating from our ethical pathway
Mapping 10 Salford Behaviours into the thematic analysis
Exploring interpretations, similarities and differences
The study documented aspects that were grounded and empowering
Creating a sense of belonging
We got the most out of the project when immersed in it
A Eureka moment, within the rich tapestry of thematic analysis
Assessed indicators identified the position of institutional cultural change
As well as feeling involved and valued in the group exchange.

Diverse and disaggregated with data from four very different Schools
An outpouring of great practice identified through our research tools
We looked at each one independently, learning from organisation, people, culture,
Divergence within the frames of ESS, split by school, not by gender
The writing showed different opinions but part of a cohesive team
Collected and validated under the diversity theme.
The strength of voice as a collective but also rich cultural differences agreed
Learning so much about the resilience, an appetite to change and to succeed.

7.4 Appendix 4 Interactive case study

As part of the outputs from the Enabling Student Success Institutional Case-Study we have produced an interactive 3D Gallery containing all the paper and video-based materials produced by the project. The Gallery is hosted on the Spatial platform and is available internally (Figure 7). The room will remain live for a short period and serves as an example of how we can interact and digest information in multiple formats. With colleagues working both on campus and remotely, a key affordance of this technology is to allow staff both novel and traditional methods of accessing the projects outputs.

Figure 7. Interactive case study



For the interactive case study [click here](#).

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