

Engaging students to support inclusive cultural change

Case study 3 – ChangeMaker

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Birmingham City University

1. About the project

The Collaborative Development Fund supports the development of our members by addressing key sector challenges together, through a series of innovative projects. Topics are co-created with the sector and projects aim to highlight different approaches, in different contexts, to support members to understand how practice might be learned from and applied. Awards are made based on the expertise of teams and the evidence and the relevance to sector-wide practice from an open call for submissions.

Working collaboratively across six University Alliance Universities in England, this project, led by Kingston University, explores the key attributes of student engagement programmes which support meaningful, far-reaching, and sustained transformation to a more inclusive higher education,

Research indicates that students who actively engage with their University through not only their academic curricula, but also co-curricular activities are less likely to drop out and more likely to achieve better outcomes (Thomas, 2012). However, not all university students engage with their institutions to the same degree. These groups include mature students and those who are first generation to higher education, students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as those from lower socio-economic households.

This case study forms part of a project that aims to surface the work of various student engagement programmes in six higher education institutions in England which have been developed to support inclusivity in their universities.

1.1 Summary Section

This case study surfaces an initiative that universities may wish to consider. It was designed by Birmingham City University with the intention of helping to better understand how to transform and enable inclusive cultures and ways of working in higher education by exploring how the Changemaker programme intentionally sought out underrepresented students who have lived experiences of marginalisation and disenfranchisement to support the university to create more effective and culturally responsive (student) services and to provide meaningful and authentic peer-to-peer support.

1.2 Name of programme and university

ChangeMaker, Birmingham City University.

1.3 What is the programme trying to achieve?

The ChangeMaker Project was developed from an 'Earn2Learn' initiative and encourages students to be 'active change agents', promoting opportunities to those students who wouldn't normally engage. Specifically, it recruits students who have dealt with and overcome challenging lived experiences and are keen to support others who might benefit/prefer peer-to-peer relationships, while promoting and showcasing the range of support and opportunities available, both internal and external to the University. In this way, the programme is designed to encourage authentic 'peer-to-peer' support through the recruitment of students via 'lived experience' rather than specific skills and, in so doing, address non-submission rates, academic misconduct, and improve an overall sense of belonging for students to improve on transition and progression through to level 5.

Through lessons learnt, from this programme dedicated roles have been created to include Navigator, Peer2Peer Learning Tutor and Academic Practice. The future focus will encourage Faculties/Schools and central services to identify roles that already exist that have the potential to fit with ChangeMaker, creating an authentic identity for student roles.

1.4 Who is involved?

Launched in 2019, the Changemaker programme recruits approximately 12 students per year and is currently complementary to other student engagement programmes at the University. It is sponsored by the Head of Educational Development Services and is featured and linked to the BCU Learning and Teaching Strategy, reporting on a semester basis direct to Learning & Teaching and Student Experience strategic groups which are linked to the Learning and Teaching Committee and Student Experience Committee Forums.

1.5 Impacts and achievements

1.5.1 Participants

Key benefits have been identified for the student taking part including: meeting new people and building strong networks professionally and socially; developing their understanding of course content and curriculum design; improving their confidence through facilitating sessions; speaking change initiatives to authority figures; accessing tailored training and workshops; going to conferences and awards ceremonies; developing transferable skills; working towards an internationally recognised teaching qualification (HEA fellowship); and being fiscally rewarded.

1.5.2 Institution

Academic staff have also benefitted from working with students to gain an understanding of the variety of lived experience that can and often need to be considered. For example, ChangeMakers have been enlisted to support sessions that profile the authenticity of our student cohort via a 'culturally relevant pedagogy' session. ChangeMakers talked about their lived experience and how this sometimes can and does impact on study. This provided a session which allowed participants to get a real feel for the barriers and issues that some of our students face while facilitating an open dialogue to further enhance understanding.

Institutional impact is linked to participation, retention, and engagement of dedicated groups of students measured against APP targets in terms of reaching students, while focusing in on course-by-course data in terms of support as (and if) appropriate. Graduate Outcomes will also be considered as part of the metrics in moving forward, particularly within the Navigator role which will have a remit to ensure opportunities are disseminated across all channels, some of which are more readily available to students within a peer-to-peer environment.

1.6 Quotes

"At the start of my university life, I wished that there was an outlet where I could make the most of my university experience. Becoming a ChangeMaker has enabled me to provide a service that I needed during my time in University" – Mohammed Aslam, Third Year BSc Computer Networks and Security

"Inviting students to participate in the delivery of classes is an excellent way of enabling proactive students to further their experience... As both final year students had completed similar course content, they were able to suggest improvements from a student perspective which is very useful at this stage. I would certainly be happy to offer this opportunity as part of a wider range of modules next year if it is beneficial for the final year students in having the experience" – Dr Islah Ali-MacLachlan Pg Dip (IoA), AMIOA, FHEA, Senior Lecturer – Audio Engineering and Acoustics

1.7 This case study exemplifies the following toolkit attributes:

Authentic

The programme expressly seeks out a range of underrepresented voices and students who have lived experiences of marginalisation and disenfranchisement. The team summarised their programme as “Lived experiences make for authentic change”.



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