

Learning Conversations

A partnership approach to enhancing the student experience

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Background

Institutional platforms for the student voice - such as student representative schemes and internal student satisfaction surveys - are commendable in their ambition to understand and respond to student experiences of learning and teaching. Yet there are two main problems with these one-directional feedback approaches: 1) they often leave staff feeling despondent about having to continually make changes to their practice in line with student requests and 2) the voices of many students are not captured by such processes. This case study presents an inclusive partnership approach to course enhancement which involved staff and students engaging in meaningful dialogue about learning (how learning takes place, what strategies support learning and how this could be improved). Working collaboratively with entire student level cohorts and full course teams to mutually shape learning and teaching has proved to be an effective way of fostering a sense of belonging in course communities at Solent University.

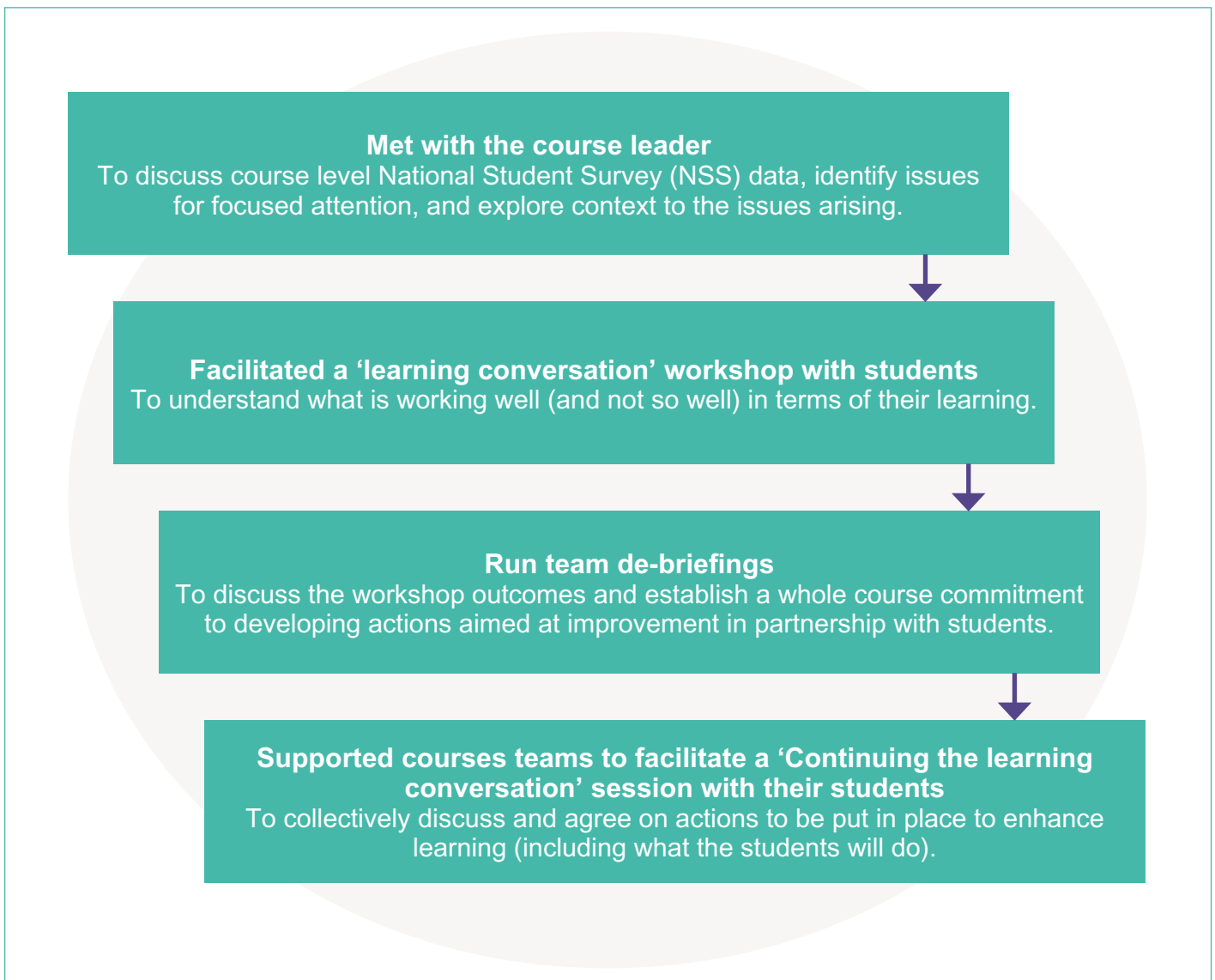
Aims

To develop an approach to course-level enhancement which is:



Initiative

The project has involved working with 30 selected courses at Solent University and over 700 undergraduate students to understand and enhance the student experience. For each of the courses, the Solent Learning and Teaching Institute Academic Development team have;



The project has demonstrated the value of educational developers working in partnership with students and academics to analyse what is (and what is not) working well within courses and building on this as a basis for pedagogic enhancements.

Impact and evaluation

In each of the course contexts, staff and students have developed and implemented evidence-informed actions to improve the learning experience. Feedback on the enhancement initiative has been overwhelmingly positive. The course teams have especially appreciated;

- + The focus on learning as partnership (rather than simply student satisfaction of teaching)
- + The detail and nuance gained from a dialogic partnership approach to course enhancement
- + Finding out what students value, enjoy and appreciate about learning (as well as what they find problematic).

Comments from staff include:

“Gave us confidence to prioritise and to bold in some of the actions we have undertaken.”

“It’s been useful to identify points for improvement and to develop a coherent course-wide strategy.”

Students have particularly valued;

- + The opportunity to reflect on the process of learning (including their role in it)
- + The chance to speak openly and honestly about their learning to somebody external to the course.
- + The interactivity of the workshop format (rather than just being asked to complete another survey)

“This should be done every year of a degree.”

“The best way this has been done!”

Many of the courses involved in the project made considerable improvements to their NSS results. For example, in 2019, three quarters of the courses showed increases to satisfaction scores relating to ‘The Teaching On My Course’ and ‘Learning Opportunities’. Approximately two thirds saw improvements in their overall satisfaction scores (with some courses increasing more than 20 percentage points). Although not all courses showed immediate NSS improvements, the approach is effective in understanding and addressing specific issues within courses and therefore it is expected that results will show in the longer-term.

For more information about this initiative please contact:

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A ‘Learning Conversation’ training resource PowerPoint presentation is appended to this case study.



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