



A Life-Wide Curriculum: a means of developing a more complete education?

Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTrE)

The University of Surrey Student Experience Strategy is founded on the vision of a *complete education* that prepares people for the challenges and uncertainties of their future lives. The Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education shares and supports this vision through the concepts of a Life-Wide Curriculum and Experiential Learning Award. The Student Experience Strategy and Action Plan invites SCEPTrE to help the university 'develop the idea of a "life-wide curriculum" as a contribution to understanding the meaning of a complete education. This paper seeks to initiate discussion about a complete education and the way in which a life-wide curriculum might support it and the role of an Experiential Learning Award in recognizing and valuing the wider conceptions of learning embodied in the idea of a complete education.

Context 1 the imperative to adapt/innovate our current curriculum model so that all students might benefit from our commitment to experiential learning

The University of Surrey has for over 50 years sought to provide an education that is more complete than most universities offer by including in its curriculum designs provision for professional work experience and practice.

Our curriculum includes 3 year programmes in which practice-based experience is integrated throughout the programme (e.g. many health related professional programmes) and 4 year programmes containing a work placement year at the end of the second year of study. About 70% of our undergraduate students participate in discipline-relevant professional work experiences through these two curricular models. As a result of this commitment to developing professional as well as academic capability, our graduates have a competitive advantage and the University is consistently at or near the top the graduate employability league tables in England.

Taken at face value it would seem that we have a very effective educational model, but closer inspection indicates that (if we exclude the health programmes where clinical practice is mandatory) only about half of our undergraduates participate in our *Professional Training* work placement scheme. We might also anticipate that the rapid rise in fees that is predicted when the cap is removed in 2010, may well have an adverse impact on the numbers of students wanting to participate in professional training as students try to minimize costs by completing their degree as quickly as possible.

We are in a classic change dilemma – do we sustain a proven model that seems to work well for a significant proportion of our students or do we adapt and innovate to try to encourage and engage more students in the educational designs that we believe are necessary for a 'more complete education'?

SCEPTrE concluded that we need to do both and this paper outlines an adaptive curriculum strategy to meet such an objective and develop further the concept of a complete education. We are calling it a life-wide curriculum¹ and linking it to the development of a new experiential learning award so that we can value and recognize the learning embodied in a more complete education. By embracing such a strategy we will be enhancing the opportunities we provide to all students so that they can maintain their competitive advantage in the employment market place and enhance their ability to be successful in their chosen careers. We also believe that the concept provides the means to connect in a common sense way all the educational and personal/professional developmental enterprises that students will encounter while they are at the University.

¹ The term curriculum is being used as a general descriptor for the totality of learning experiences that are used and recognized by teachers and learners, and from which learning is derived and valued in the higher education learning profile of a learner. Such experiences include the formally validated modules of a study programme, work experiences that are incorporated into the award, additional curriculum experiences outside the award-bearing programme (the co-curriculum) and other experiences in a learners life.

Context 2 the university's aspiration for 'a complete education'

In July 2008 the University began promoting the idea of a '*complete education*' as the conceptual basis for a new Student Experience Strategy and the idea of a life-wide curriculum is highlighted in the strategy as an important part of developing the university's understanding what this might mean. The Student Experience Strategy offers some suggestions as to what a complete education might embrace.

a complete education: enabling professional [personal and social] development

Our distinctiveness is in the completeness of the education we offer, and its relevance to today's complex world. We provide a combination of personal development, academic learning and real-world application which results in a powerful blend of skills, knowledge and experience. We recognise that students combine this education with experiences they gain in the rest of their lives.

We have a rich multicultural campus, a long history of global connection, and are internationalising our student experience. We promote mobility of study, intercultural awareness and are making our curriculum responsive to the needs of global society, culture and economy.

We strive to offer the highest quality student experience in learning and life, and want all our graduates to be proud of their University, and want to remain part of it. We believe that students are our partners in the co-creation of their experience, and that every member of our community contributes to each others' experience

This paper provides an initial exploration of the life-wide curriculum idea in the context of the university's aspiration to embrace 'a more complete education'. But the strategy does not explain in any systematic way what this might mean. The relevant section of the strategy is reproduced below.

We recognise the value of real world, hands-on, professional experience (currently mainly via the professional training year - PTY) as a key contributor towards our distinctive success in professional preparation. We want to enhance opportunities for the development of professional intelligence and capability for students who do not participate in the PTY

We will

- a. Understand and act on the apparent decline in placement take-up by students
 - we will ensure a high level of support for finding and participating in PTY placements is available to all students
 - we will vigorously publicise the benefits of the PTY experience to all students, including through a network of strong relationships with employers

- b. Continually seek new and robust ways of offering experience-based opportunities for learning that contribute to the development of the whole person
 - we understand whole person learning to include professional intelligence, skills and identity; and interpersonal, social and emotional, as well as intellectual, development
 - we will develop a range of curricular and non-curricular opportunities for learning
 - we will develop a toolkit to identify, document and appropriately recognize a broad range of whole-person learning, including strengthening PDP across the University

- c. Develop the idea of a "life-wide curriculum" as an important part of our understanding of a complete education. We recognize this implies a rethinking of the academic curriculum, the role of professional services, the importance of co-curricular (DAVE, Cultural Academy, etc) and non-curricular (external life events) activities for learning. We acknowledge that this will also require new ways of recognising learning gained from experiences outside formal academic programmes

Core propositions

The ideal of a complete education signifies a commitment to the holistic development of learners – academically, personally, professionally, socially and culturally. Such whole person development can only be achieved through engagement with a rich mix of educational experiences and a commitment to learning through such experiences.

A life-wide curriculum is the most appropriate concept for a higher education experience that aspires to provide opportunity for a 'complete education' and help students develop themselves for a lifetime of learning in an infinitely complex ever changing world. A life-wide curriculum seeks to

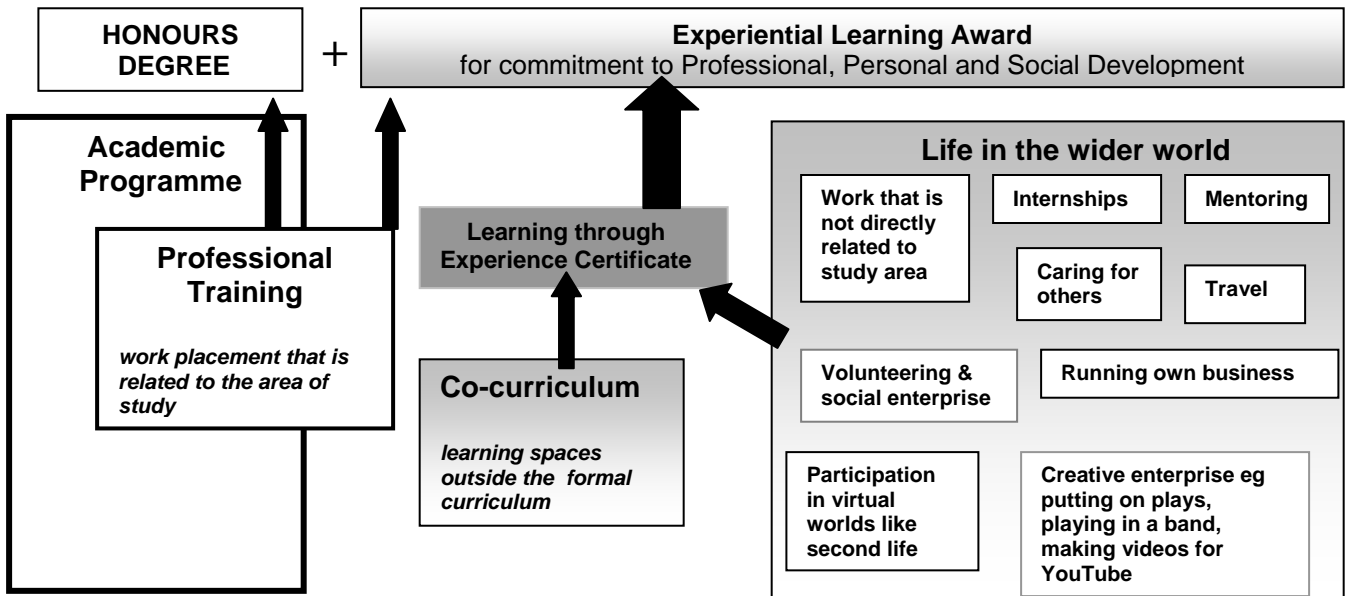
highlight the potential for drawing learning from the diverse experiences that a learner may encounter or create during his/her higher education experience.

The life-wide curriculum is an opportunity enhancing and enabling concept rather than a policy for making people do things they don't want to do. The concept is learner driven ie outside the requirements of the formal academic curriculum a learner can choose or not choose to include her experiences and learning in her unique learning profile. Put another way – he or she must have the will to participate: the will to be involved in this more complete educational enterprise is central to the idea of a more complete education as this ideal can only be achieved by wilful and purposeful engagement of the learner in the opportunities for experience that life provides.

What is a life-wide curriculum?

The idea that higher education is one component of a life-long process of learning is well established in educational policy and practice throughout the world. The idea of a life-wide curriculum is proposed to highlight the potential for drawing learning from the diverse experiences that a learner may encounter or create during a single episode in his/her life-long journey – their higher education experience. The sorts of experiences that might be recognized in this concept of a curriculum are represented graphically in Figure 1. Four general domains of activity are recognised – the academic programme, the professional training experience, the co-curriculum and diverse experiences that are encountered or created in the rest of life.

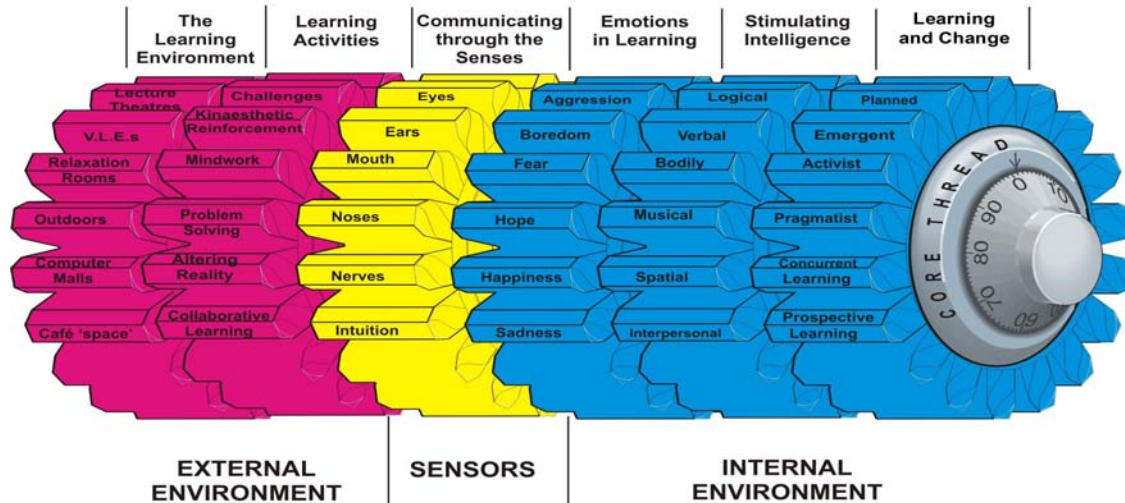
Figure 1 Scope of the Life-Wide Curriculum / Experiential Learning Award concept being developed at the University of Surrey. The shaded area is a key focus for development.



Learning potential of a life-wide curriculum

The most powerful argument for a life-wide curriculum is that it contains more potential for learning than any other curriculum! Adopting a life-wide curriculum changes the paradigm of what counts as learning and where learning occurs. It shifts higher education into a more experience-based model of learning (Andreason et al 1995) i.e. the experience of the learner occupies central place in the learning process. This experience may comprise earlier events in the life of the learner, current life events, or those arising from the learner's participation in activities implemented by teachers and facilitators. A key element of experience-based learning is that learners analyse their experience by reflecting, evaluating and reconstructing it in order to draw meaning from it in the light of prior experience.

Figure 2 the comprehensive model of learners, their environment for learning and the nature of learning developed by Beard and Wilson (2005: 4) - the combination lock!



An experience-rich curriculum that engages with the full breadth of a learner's life also provides an environment within which a more holistic conception of learning and individuals' sense of being in the world can be appreciated. We can appreciate much more (Beard et al 2007:5) 'learning through being, doing, sensing, feeling, knowing and changing'. (Beard and Wilson 2005:4) provide a powerful and comprehensive visualization of this whole learner, whole world interaction through the metaphor of a 'learning combination lock' Figure 2. This is the sort of comprehensive model of learning we need to underpin our concept of a more complete education and it is the sort of model that an experience-rich life-wide curriculum could promote.

Complex learning and achievement

Learning that is grounded in experience, especially when it is a rich, meaningful and immersive experience has the potential to contribute to all forms of learning identified by Marton et al (1983 p283-284) and most importantly, support development of the most elaborate forms of learning. Experience of working and learning in different environments is also essential to developing a repertoire of 'ways of knowing' and 'being able to come to know'. Knowing is part of action and it lies at the heart of the epistemology of practice. It complements but is different to explicit and tacit knowledge and can only be gained through acts of doing and being (Cook and Brown 1999).

Baxter Magolda (1992 and 2001) identified four qualitatively different *ways of knowing*. These are:

- *Absolute knowing*: knowledge exists in an absolute form, it is either right or wrong
- *Transitional knowing*: knowledge is certain in some areas and uncertain in other areas
- *Independent knowing*: knowledge is uncertain. Everyone has their own beliefs
- *Contextual knowing*: knowledge is contextual. One judges on the basis of evidence in context.

If a learner only possesses a way of knowing that is absolute, then he or she is unlikely to cope well with problem-solving in the conditions of uncertainty that characterize the real world. However, a student who possesses an independent way of knowing is likely to feel more confident, and be more effective, in such a situation. A student who has learnt in lots of different experience-based contexts will realize that knowledge, in real world problem working, is often strongly situated and contextual. A way of knowing is more than an academic cognitive skill that can be "developed" through carefully designed learning activities. It is firmly a part of who you are – your identity. In other words, changing one's way of knowing is to change as a person.

One reason for the success of the University of Surrey's professional training educational model is that it pays particular attention to the epistemology of practice(s) in the sort of social, professional and working worlds that students enter when they leave the academic environment. The epistemology of (professional) work practice (coming to know what to do through doing in a specific situation or context drawing on past experiences that include learned theory) can only be learned through the experience of practising with other practitioners. The epistemology of practice pays particular attention to the idea of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Learning for a complex world requires learners to appreciate and experience the epistemology of practice in professional situations that are relevant to chosen career pathways and more generally in other social practice settings embodied in the idea of a life-wide curriculum.

Learning epistemologies of practice

Raelin (2007) identifies the building blocks of an epistemology of practice as:

- *Extensive use of tacit knowledge* – the tacit processes that practitioners use as they work through the problems and challenges of daily practice. Such knowledge is deeply rooted in action and involvement in a specific context in a specific time. But while people may be knowledgeable about what they do and can do it, they may not be able to explain how they know what to do.
- *Critical reflection* – the thinking capacity to make sense of their own practice and experiences and mindful habit of doing it. Or the ability to think about how their actions resulted in a particular outcome. This ability results in the creation of a personal 'real time' learning environment through which beliefs, assumptions and mental models as well as actions, can be tested and evaluated.
- *Mastery* – people develop their expertise not only by repeated practice in a single domain but by acquiring skills in multiple contexts. Mastery is developed through an appropriate apprenticeship in which novice practitioners are exposed to embodied practice, apply and develop their own practice, are encouraged and given feedback on their performance and gradually take on more and more responsibility. Developing mastery is coupled to the development of tacit knowledge and knowing, and the ability to evaluate and learn from own experiences through critical reflection.
- Michael Eraut's (2007 and 2008) more pragmatic visualisation of an epistemology of professional practice (based on empirical evidence of how professionals actually work), complements Raelin's conceptions. He notes that the basic epistemology of practice involves the professional actions of: *Assessing situations* (sometimes briefly, sometimes involving a long process of *investigation and enquiry*) and continuing to monitor the situation;
- *Deciding what, if any, action to take*, both immediately and over a longer period (either on one's own or as a leader or member of a team);
- *Pursuing an agreed course of action*, performing professional actions - modifying, consulting, evaluating and reassessing as and when necessary;
- *Metacognitive monitoring of oneself*, people needing attention and the general progress of the case, problem, project or situation; and sometimes also learning through reflection on the experience

His empirical observations of how people learn in workplace settings, either as explicit learning activity or a by-product of work, provides the basis for new tools to help learners in work situations to observe themselves and others, and think about what they are doing and the effects of what they are doing more wisely.

Learning to cope with immersion

Being immersed is one particular type of experience that the life-wide curriculum can usefully open up. Immersion is a metaphor to describe a state of being which can have both negative consequences – being overwhelmed, engulfed, submerged or stretched, and positive consequences – being deeply absorbed or engaged in a situation or problem that results in mastery of a complex and demanding situation.

Being immersed in an extremely challenging experience might be very uncomfortable but it is particularly favourable for the development of insights, confidence and capabilities for learning to live and work with complexity and messyness. It is in these situations that we need to draw on both our intellectual and our creative resourcefulness. SCEPTrE is currently exploring the meanings of immersive experience (Jackson and Campbell, 2008) and the contexts in which it occurs. It is clear that a life-wide curriculum offers much more opportunity for recognizing immersive experiences than a more traditional curriculum.

Changing our conceptions of a curriculum

A life-wide curriculum seems to be in tune with the complexity of learning experiences required to prepare people for a very uncertain world – it's a common sense idea. The common sense proposition is that a life-wide curriculum holds more potential for learning than a traditional curriculum which only combines and integrates academic study and practice with a year long work placement. More significantly it holds considerably more potential for learning for students who do not participate in the professional training curriculum.

There are also many arguments drawn from the science of learning that support the need for more complex conceptions and experiences of learning in the higher education curriculum such as would be supported by a life-wide curriculum. Beard and Wilson's comprehensive notions of learning and environments for learning (Figure 2) provides us with a glimpse of what a complete education might mean (one that involves emotional, intellectual and practical learning in many different contexts). The life-wide curriculum idea provides us with a concept of curriculum that embraces the diversity of experiences one would expect in a more complete education: one that is co-designed and is unique to the learner herself. But having an inspiring idea and persuading a university to embrace the idea and the practices that would give concrete substance to it, are entirely different matters. **The difficult question is where do we go from here?**

October 8th life-wide curriculum discussion

The discussion meeting will provide an opportunity to consider how we might move from some ideas on paper to something that is concrete and meaningful. Discussions will inform SCEPTRe's work plans for 2009.

An attempt is made in Table 1 to identify key questions that need to be addressed and some initial ideas on how the idea of a life-wide curriculum might be developed and implemented.

- 1 Are these assumptions and propositions correct?
- 2 Are these the right sort of questions? Are there other important questions?
- 3 Are these the right sort of actions? Are there other actions?
- 4 What are likely to be the important challenges in taking this forward?
- 5 What else do we need to consider?

Table 1 Developing and implementing the concept of a life-wide curriculum

Assumptions, propositions and questions	Possible actions for discussion and refinement
The overarching concept within which a life-wide curriculum will need to be embedded is a ' <i>complete education</i> ' How do we explain what a complete education means? How can these two ideas be connected?	1 Through discussion the development of a proposition explaining what a complete education might mean and how the life-wide curriculum idea supports this ideal.
In presenting these ideas to staff and students we will need to be aware of the benefits and potential disadvantages of adaptation. What are the pros and cons of the ideas of :1) a complete education 2) a life-wide curriculum 3) experiential learning award?	1 Continuous discussion with individuals and groups to help people develop their own understandings and meanings and to identify through this process – the arguments for and against these ideas and how they can be progressed in practical terms.
We will not be able to implement these idea unless we can develop a critical mass of people who believe that investing time and energy will yield a positive return on personal investment. Who are the key people and groups who need to be involved, and at what stage should they be involved? What are the things that need to be done to engage the key people, groups of people in the university who need to be involved in discussing and co-developing the ideas of 1) a complete education 2) a life-wide curriculum 3) experiential learning award?	1 Identify key individuals and groups who are likely to have an interest in the idea and involve them in discussion. 2 Establish a network (experiential learning network?) of interested people to facilitate ongoing discussion, development and sharing of practice. Resources to be found to support development of new practices.
There is already a lot of experience-based practice in the University that is contributing to students' educational experiences beyond the academic programme.	1 Through discussion create a map to show how practices that currently contribute to students' personal, professional and social

<p>What are we already doing within our university that can be connected to the ideas of 1) a complete education 2) a life-wide curriculum 3) experiential learning award?</p>	<p>development which might be included within the working concepts of a complete education and a Life-Wide Curriculum.</p>
<p>The academic curriculum tends not to be seen as a vehicle for experiential learning but it implicitly or explicitly it contains many opportunities for experience-rich learning.</p> <p>What are we already doing within the academic curriculum to connect with the wider world of learning? How can we encourage more experiential learning in the academic part of the curriculum?</p>	<p>1 Continue to promote experiential enquiry-rich learning through SCEPTRe Fellowships and Curriculum Innovation Awards. 2 Identify the variety of ways in which the academic curriculum promotes experiential learning.</p>
<p>Professional Training provides the main context for experiential learning for many undergraduate students.</p> <p>How can we ensure that Professional Training is given the prominence it deserves in the concepts of life-wide curriculum and a complete education? Is there any scope for connecting professional training to an Experiential Learning Award?</p>	<p>1 Ensure that Chair of PTCC and PTCC are kept fully informed and involved in the project.</p>
<p>The co-curriculum is relatively under-developed as a place to support experiential learning.</p> <p>How can we encourage the development of more co-curricular activity that supports the ideals of a complete education and promotes experiential learning?</p>	<p>1 Identify the variety of ways in which the co-curriculum is being used to support the ideals of a complete education and promote experiential learning.</p>
<p>USSU is a major provider of opportunities for skills development and increasingly opportunities for experiential learning for example through the DAVE scheme and support for social enterprise.</p> <p>How can we ensure that the USSU is fully involved in shaping and promoting the idea of a complete education, life-wide curriculum and experiential learning award?</p>	<p>1 Ensure that USSU Officers and staff are fully involved in the programme of development work and in shaping thinking and contributing practices.</p>
<p>Understanding will only grow across the university if people are continually brought into the development process and contribute their ideas and practices.</p> <p>How do we develop our understanding of a complete education and the role of experiential learning in the idea of a more complete education?</p>	<p>1 Through continuous discussion with interested people and groups 2 By involving people with expertise in this area in our project eg through seminars and external fellowships 3 By providing resources eg Fellowships, Curriculum Innovation Awards to encourage active experimentation 4 Through a conference (April 1&2 2009) on the theme of Experiential Learning in a Life-Wide Curriculum aimed at learning from other practitioners and universities.</p>
<p>The core belief that underlies the life-wide curriculum project is that we can enhance students preparedness for life and their experiences of higher education by paying more attention to experiential learning and expanding opportunities for such learning.</p> <p>How do expand our capacity for supporting and encouraging experiential learning?</p>	<p>1 Continue to expand the use of the Learning through Experience Certificate with willing partners. 2 Develop new capacity for mentoring learners so that more can be involved in experiential learning (this will require dedicated resources).</p>
<p>Metacognition - self-awareness and capacity to reflect learn from thinking about the actions of oneself and others are critical to the idea of learning from and through experience. (personal and professional development formerly PDP) being promoted by SPLASH is a crucial epistemology for successful implementation of a complete education, life-wide curriculum and experiential learning award.</p> <p>How can we ensure that PPD is at the heart of the experiential learning enterprise?</p>	<p>1 SPLASH to play a key role in this area of development</p>
<p>Technology is an essential aid to learning but how does technology support experiential learning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What technologies are being used? 	<p>1 E learning Unit to play a key role in this area of development 2 Through discussion create a map of</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and why are they being used? • Who is using them? • How are students supported or how do they support themselves? • To what extent can institutional technologies interface with learners' own technologies? • Where is there scope for further development? 	the technologies that are currently used to support experiential learning.
<p>Once we have started this development process we will need to keep people informed of progress.</p> <p>How do we raise awareness of this set of ideas and keep people informed of the development of ideas and practices?</p>	<p>1 Through papers and reports to committees</p> <p>2 Through the conference proposed above</p> <p>3 Through a wiki to host information http://lifewideducriculum.pbwiki.com</p>
<p>To show to students, their parents and staff that the University values commitment to experiential learning it will be necessary to develop an Experiential Learning Award to sit alongside and complement the Academic Award.</p> <p>How do we begin to develop such an award? What are likely to be the challenges in developing such an award?</p>	<p>1 By establishing a working group to develop ideas</p> <p>2 By connecting the working group to the Student Experience Strategy Group and policy</p>
<p>Any new developments in pedagogy and infrastructure require new resources. How do we create additional resources to support development work? What are the potential sources for additional funding?</p>	<p>1 Actively seek out opportunities for bidding for new resources</p>
<p>People will want to know that any new strategies and infrastructures are having a beneficial impact on students' learning and experiences. How will we know?</p> <p>How do we evaluate the effects of any new infrastructures/ practices that are developed? What criteria will be used to judge the educational worth of what we do?</p>	<p>1 Develop an evaluation plan to ensure that all new areas of practice developed are evaluated.</p>

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