



Stitching together research and data to create evidence for innovation

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Presentation abstract

In this paper, colleagues from the University of the Arts London shared insights regarding how they were, first, using data to adapt their offers to enhance students' learning experiences and outcomes and, second, developing a data approach to examine impact and share evidence for further change.

The London College of Fashion learning development department has access to institutional grade, retention and continuation data, and survey responses. However, this high-level data can be challenging to examine for feedback on practice and for innovation. In response, the presenters of this session evolved an approach of stitching together a patchwork of institutional data with finer-grained exploration of students' formal and informal feedback relating to their experiences within the College. Particularly useful was listening to students' perceptions shared through learning conversations and interactions, sessions with Changemakers, and during collaborations when trialling new ideas. In turn, those involved in the initiative pieced together qualitative insights with analysis of a range of institutional data within a situated perspective of students' learning and research in the field to create theories of change to enhance students' outcomes and experiences (Thomas and Jones, 2017; Snoussi and Mompelat, 2018; UUK, 2019; HEPI, 2023; TASO,

2024). These included higher attainment, students' greater belief in their efforts, and increased connectedness of lecturers and students in the College.

A challenge was gathering varied data to infer in detail how the adaptations to practice influence equity, inclusivity, and success within the contexts they are operationalised in. The session shared some collective conceptual and technical developments and challenges for the practical implementation of a data infrastructure to enhance our understanding and inform how evidence is shared for improved student experiences and outcomes.

Keywords: data-informed practice; institutional data; student feedback.

Community response

This session was described as 'really informative and thought-provoking'. One participant, working within their institution in an academic skills service, focused on addressing widening participation and social mobility challenges, reflected on affordances and (perhaps implicit) weightings offered institutionally to different forms of data, describing how there was:

Great emphasis placed on the need for direct causal mechanism evidence, with a reliance and import placed on quantitative data, sometimes over qualitative investigations that are more likely to provide a richer insight into the conditions that facilitate ... challenges to student success.

The session also addressed the challenges of evaluating abstract but essential concepts such as belonging, trust, and the enduring importance of key relationships – contributing factors to student success that are, of course, difficult to quantify in terms of impact. An example of adaptive and student-focused practice shared in the presentation described the role of a feedback form that allowed participants to respond in a format of their choosing, rather than through fixed, restricted, or descriptive metrics, allowing students agency and scope for expression. This approach offered a creative, personalised, and meaningful way to capture rich, authentic responses and was an actionable take-away that participants considered valuable for their own exploratory practice.

The phrase, 'we design for and within (student) complexities' was described as having captured the spirit of the presentation and the inclusive, community-based approach demonstrated by the University of the Arts London (UAL). The model of embedding academic skills staff within each school was noted as being particularly inspiring and aligned with ongoing efforts to integrate academic support more deeply across faculties.

Next steps

Our next step is to develop further how we evaluate the impact of the activity for students. We are particularly keen to collaborate with students to explore how we might develop the offer further. We would also welcome further conversations with learning development colleagues as we all engage in this activity.

Authors' reflection

The process of co-developing and co-presenting the session led us to focus more on the multiple ways in which we aim to enhance students' learning and experiences, the purposes of our different activities, and affordances and limitations of tools available within higher education. Within London College of Fashion, the activity we set out within the session takes place alongside our embedded and aligned group offers, and general tutorial offers, that can be seen as prioritising academic literacies for different requirements of the students' studies.

That offer is recognised as important within the College. However, it is not sufficient for the challenging conditions within which students have been studying for some years.

Furthermore, the specific character and implications of those conditions are not always evident. For instance, they may be represented by proxy indicators relating to retention, continuation, grades, and attendance, which tend to be interpreted in varied ways. Hence, the importance of gaining multiple forms of qualitative data too. By developing our community-based and relational offers further, we aim to enhance the conditions students are learning within.

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Jo Peel is joint Head of Academic Support at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, UK. She is an artist and educator who focuses on improving equity in education. Her work tackles awarding gaps and explores how race and class shape

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