SUSTAINABLE FUTURES BRIEFING:

RAPID IMPROVEMENT EVENT (RIE) – Student Feedback (Business School)

INTRODUCTION

During the last week of trimester 1 (week15), a Rapid Improvement Event (RIE) was held focusing upon Student Feedback within the Business School. A team of fourteen (14) colleagues, predominantly academics, from across most subject groups, with representation from Faculty administration, Academic Development, and Student Affairs looked at the current situation, identified improvements, and developed an action plan to implement them.

- This was the first Rapid Improvement Event that the University has held focused exclusively upon an area of academic practice.

- The event was preceded by several weeks of research and getting the views of students and staff. The Business School is now focused upon implementing the actions identified.

- The Event focused on all feedback that is provided to Undergraduate students in the Business School. The team focused on the format, timeliness, frequency and quality of feedback provided to students during their studies.

- Findings from data gathered in preparation for the RIE included:
  - Students cited inconsistency in feedback practices within modules
  - Evidence of students not receiving assessment feedback within three weeks
  - Students strongly favour 1:1 and other personal feedback approaches
  - Promptness of return scored as lowest criteria for Business School within Assessment & Feedback element of National Student Survey 2009 (NSS 2009)
  - Widespread confusion and concerns around feedback from both students and staff
  - Evidence of poor timeliness of feedback provision
  - Other issues include bunching of assessment (and feedback) and predominance of traditional exam & assessment approaches as main foci of feedback.

- In identifying the current situation and developing the numerous improvements, the team sought feedback from students and staff across the Business School, as well as from colleagues across the University. The Implementation phase will commence in January 2010

- Progress will be evaluated using the following indicators:
    - National Student Survey (NSS) – An improvement from 2011 survey onwards. Improved position for Business School within the University
    - NSS – Improve position for Business School relative to other Business Schools in Scotland to upper quartile by 2013 (currently in lower quartile)
    - Business School – University internal survey – Improve against all criteria relating to Feedback
    - Re-instigate module evaluation processes in Business School
    - An annual re-run of the data survey undertaken in preparation for the RIE

ISSUES EMERGING

The RIE team highlighted three main themes, each of which had several key issues associated with it, as follows (NB. the below relate to the Business School):

- **Definitions & Expectations Theme**
    - No agreed working definition or set of expectations for staff and students on Student Feedback. Feedback guidelines exist in the Assessment Handbook but not all Academic staff are aware of the guidelines
    - The analysis of module feedback process does not take place at Faculty level
    - Low profile within the Faculty of feedback
    - Feedback currently does not feature explicitly within the Quality processes of the Business School

- **Pedagogy Theme**
    - Lack of Programme Level Feedback
    - Feedback not incorporated in Module Plans
    - Lack of early Module Feedback
    - Lack of sharing of Best Practice
    - Exam Feedback

- **Delivery & Effectiveness Theme**
    - Lack of understanding of what Feedback is (students & staff)
    - Feedback often not meaningful
    - Problems delivering Timely Feedback
    - Limited improvement oriented feedback (i.e. feedforward) & early assessment

OUTCOMES:

A summary of the improvements and the associated benefits are detailed below (again, please note that the below apply to the Business School):

Main Improvements	Key Benefits
Definition & Expectations Theme	
Agree working definition of feedback	Raise feedback profile among staff and students
Launch a Student Feedback campaign	Raise feedback profile among staff and students
Promote feedback guidelines to staff via Student Feedback Campaign. Develop student version of student feedback guidelines and communicate using campaign	Create and maintain mutually acceptable expectations
Identify professional development needs and develop bespoke Professional Development Plan	Raising Profile Clarity of responsibilities Improving good practice & overall student learning experience
Implement Module Feedback process at Faculty Level	Raising Profile Clarity of responsibilities Improving good practice & overall student learning experience
Raise Feedback profile – place on agenda at Faculty Exec, School meetings, LTA committee etc	Embedding importance of feedback Cultural change
Add Feedback to the quality and LTA documentation	Raise awareness of feedback Embedding importance of feedback
Incorporate feedback into Week 1	Raise awareness of feedback Embedding importance of feedback
Pedagogy Theme	
Revise and Define PDT role	Clear signpost for students Improve student retention Clarify PDT/YT roles, less confusion, more efficiency & effectiveness
Inclusion of module feedback in Assessment brief feedback sheet	Students will know when and how to expect feedback during the module
Introduce early individualised feedback - formally via Programme Leaders and informally via staff self selecting to introduce early feedback methods into their modules	Increase independent learning, help identify weaker students, improve pass rates, focus on feed forward

Disseminate good practice via Subject Group meetings	Improve professional practice
Raise awareness with students that exam scripts can be accessed	Improved student satisfaction
Delivery & Effectiveness Theme	
Increase the awareness of study skills required to help students understand when feedback is being given and how to use the feedback	Improved dialogue between students and staff
Provide meaningful feedback – using a pilot to trial comment banks and other forms of E-Marking	Better Feedback practice, enhanced learning experience
Deliver timely feedback – communicate student charter timescales to all module leaders	Better Feedback Practice, improved student satisfaction
Staff will be encouraged to provide improvement oriented feedback and early assessments Pros and Cons of assessment types against class size; composition etc will be produced to encourage staff to consider utilising the full range of assessment types.	Improved learning experience, improved performance
Develop Student and Staff resource area to support the delivery of Student feedback	Better Feedback practice, enhanced learning experience

The Project Leader, Dr. Rob Wilkinson (Associate Dean, Business School) will be leading the implementation of the improvements above along with support from members of the RIE team, students and colleagues within the Business School, Academic Development and Student Affairs.

Considerable work is now ongoing to embed these changes, and your co-operation with this work where required will be much appreciated.

Regular progress checkpoints are planned, and updates on the improvements will be communicated in due course via the Project Leader, Dr. Rob Wilkinson.

If you have any queries regarding the above, or would just like to know more, please get in contact with a member of the Sustainable Futures team.

Dr. Keith Horton
Sustainable Futures,
January 2010