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Abstract

The professionalisation of teaching is of increasing importance in United Kingdom higher education due to a number of converging processes including the ongoing proliferation of managerialism, increasing quality agendas and changes to student fee structures. These changes have brought into sharp relief the need for greater understanding of how quality teaching evolves in university settings. One key element of this involves academic development and its impacts on teaching and learning.

Current literature in this area suggests that a plethora of ideas, frameworks and instruments claiming best practice exist (Hughes et al., 2016) but that take-up of these is inconsistent across the sector (Bamber, 2013). This prompted a Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded national research project which resulted in an evidence-based toolkit for evaluating academic development specifically within the UK context (Kneale, Winter, Spowart, Turner, & Muneer, 2016a). As part of the toolkit augmentation, academic development representatives from 12 Higher Education providers were asked to create, review and test uniquely tailored evaluation instruments from a core of pre-selected questions based on Guskey's (2002) critical levels of evaluation. These instruments were then piloted on university teachers who had participated in teaching-related continuing professional development activities.

This paper reports on these individuals' reflections of using the toolkit. It suggests that academic developers are interested in evaluating the impact of their work on a range of subjects; teachers, students and on the wider institutional culture but that confidence and expertise varies. Using the toolkit provided 'traditional' evaluation data for example satisfaction with the development activity and changes to lecturers' conceptions and behaviours. However, it also prompted important and timely discussions around current evaluation practice, including the urgent need for transformational reform of institutional culture to support potential links between evaluation of teaching and good standing; and helped to make more explicit the thorny issue of evidencing student learning.

This paper will be of interest primarily to those involved with academic development and its evaluation. However, the findings are relevant to all those with an interest or responsibility for evaluating teaching in a higher education context. The paper offers an important contribution to the international literature when higher education globally is faced with increasingly demanding questions about teaching, learning and quality. Evaluation, and how to do it well, is timely and important business.

Keywords

Academic development, Evaluation, Toolkit, Teaching Development.

Introduction

The professionalisation of higher education teaching is of increasing worldwide importance (Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2009; Parsons, Hill, Holland, & Willis, 2012). In the UK this journey has been delineated by several converging processes. In 2006 student fees increased and since 2015 student numbers are no longer capped; both of which serve to increase competitiveness and enhance demand for quality teaching. Teaching quality agendas are heavily influenced by the ongoing proliferation of managerialism; in the UK this has traditionally been overseen by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), an independent body with the mandate of monitoring standards and quality in UK higher education. However, in 2015 the UK government proposed the introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in which the monitoring and assessing of teaching in England's universities will instead be undertaken by central government with the underlying aim of identifying, rewarding and encouraging the highest quality of teaching (Office for National Statistics, 2016).

These trends have triggered a range of responses from across the sector. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) and National Union of Students (NUS) have developed targeted agendas at improving teaching and learning in universities and in 2012 the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) began collecting data on numbers of qualified teaching staff. As a consequence, academic development in some form is now a staple offer in most higher education institutions (Spowart et al., 2016) and how it influences teaching and student learning is an increasingly significant question (Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; Parsons et al., 2012).

Measuring the impact of academic development

The aim of academic development is to promote academic practice in higher education lecturers with emphasis on enhancing teaching and learning (Baume & Popovic, 2016). This relationship is conceptualised thus; academic development interventions influence lecturers' conceptions of teaching and learning and this in turn brings about changes in practice (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Mathijsen, 2006). If these changes are representative of a range of pedagogic approaches that foster student-centred active learning, then this may impact positively on student learning (Gibbs, 2010).

Despite this relatively straightforward theorisation of how academic development impacts on teaching and learning, how to *evaluate* this is a complex task (Hughes et al., 2016). Hotly contested debates rage about the nature of impact and the appropriateness of methodologies with which to capture it (Parsons et al., 2012). Evidencing the impact of academic development is challenging due to the scale and range of direct and indirect influences involved (De Rijdt, Stes, van der Vleuten, & Dochy, 2013) and the managerialist discourses currently prevalent in universities encourage the use of hard, quantitative approaches which specifically positions what is known about impact. These processes have tended to obscure voices advocating

for a value driven evaluation agenda from within the academic development community (Bamber, 2013).

Most Higher Education Institutions[1] (HEIs) in the UK now make a core academic development offer in the form of a Post-Graduate Certificate or accreditation framework (Spowart et al., 2016) as well as additional support to engender ongoing good standing in teaching. Evaluation of the core offer has evolved (in line with the evaluation of mainstream teaching) to measure its impact on conceptual development through assessment of satisfaction with resources and teaching primarily through [module] questionnaires delivered immediately post intervention (Spowart et al., 2016). However, there are characteristics of academic development which render this approach insufficient to capture impacts.

Teaching expertise and competences are developed through the twin processes of critical reflection *and* evolving practice. Ho, Watkins and Kelly (2001) consider conceptual change a priori, whilst Guskey (1986) suggest that conceptual change follows adjustments to practice. Regardless of the competing nature of these claims both authors suggest that these changes take time to manifest and have impact. There is strong corroboration in the literature of a time lag of at least 6 months between intervention and changes to practice (Cilliers & Herman, 2010; De Rijdt et al., 2013; Postareff, 2007). This critically questions the utility of on-course assessment or post-event evaluation to effectively reflect this. Guskey (2002) and Kirkpatrick (1998) further advocate that evaluation should move beyond focus on the teacher, their perceived satisfaction and changes to conceptions and practice towards incorporating impacts on student learning and institutional culture. These latter two, although heavily theorised, have not yet been extensively operationalised (Chalmers, 2011; Chalmers, Stoney, Goody, Goerke, & Gardiner, 2012; Parsons et al., 2012). The findings of these studies collectively advocate for the transformation of current trends in evaluating academic practice towards robust, rigorous and relevant ways of understanding the impacts between academic practice, lecturers' conceptions and practice, student learning and the institutional culture. This has led to the development of several evaluation frameworks from across the international academic development community (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Chalmers et al., 2012; Farley & Murphy, 2013: Fink, 2013; Trigwell, Caballero Rodriguez, & Han, 2012). These frameworks, although representing distinct epistemologies and methodologies, share a consensus that evaluation should be contextualised, holistic and longitudinal.

It is this literature base and the aforementioned political drivers for enhancing teaching and learning in UK higher education that motivated the HEA funded project 'Evaluating Teaching Development in Higher Education: Towards Impact Assessment' (Kneale, Winter, Spowart, Turner, & Muneer, 2016b) from which the research in this paper is drawn. The project created state of the art knowledge and understanding about how to capture the impacts of academic development activity. This informed the design and testing of a toolkit to help academic developers (and

[1] We use this term to refer to all institutions which offer higher education programmes which includes private providers and Further Education Colleges.

others tasked with delivering teaching-related continuing professional development) to critically examine and design research-informed evaluation processes.

This paper focuses on one element of the research which underpinned the toolkit development; the piloting of the toolkit prototype by academic developers from 12 UK-based higher education providers. These individuals used and reflected on the toolkit providing valuable insights into how it prompted opportunities for raising current evaluation practices out of a practical and into a critical and discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984).

Methodology

The research took place between January and June 2015 and consisted of 4 stages. (i) An extensive literature review of current practice in evaluating academic development (Hughes et al., 2016). (ii) A UK-based national audit to establish current trends in evaluating academic development (Spowart et al., 2016). (iii) The development of a Toolkit prototype and (iv), the piloting of the Toolkit by academic developers. This led to the re-visioning and publication of the Toolkit resource (Kneale et al., 2016a).

The results of the literature review and audit highlighted a sector-wide need for evaluation that moves beyond satisfaction towards more robust articulations of the influence that academic development has on teaching and learning. These ideas informed the development of the prototype toolkit which presented guidelines and templates for how to evaluate an academic development activity (teaching course for new lecturers, workshops, conferences, peer review schemes, teaching development projects, mentoring and accreditation schemes). The templates included a set of comprehensive question matrices drawing on Guskey's (2002) critical levels of evaluation over a longitudinal framework. This advocated undertaking evaluation pre-activity, immediately post-activity and then at 6 and 12 months plus post intervention (De Rijdt et al., 2013) (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of Toolkit design

Critical levels of evaluation (Guskey [2002])	Pre-activity	Immediately post activity	12-24 months post activity	ongoing
Satisfaction	Time →			
Changes in conceptions of teaching and learning	Open themed questions which can be used as a basis for developing questionnaires, interviews focus group schedules amongst other methods. Questions are designed to provide linked data which demonstrates the impact of academic development over time.			
Changes in teaching and learning behaviour				
Changes to student learning				
Changes to institutional culture				

The prototype was piloted by 12 academic developers who were sampled from a range of higher education providers representing research-intensive, teaching-focused, private and college based institutions across England, Wales and Scotland. These individuals used the prototype to develop context specific, holistic and longitudinal evaluation instruments to trial on lecturers [up to 3 in each case] who had undertaken academic development sometime in the past 36 months. Post pilot, skype and telephone interviews were used to elicit their experiences and reflections on using the Toolkit. Interviews were then analysed using content and thematic content analysis (Silverman, 2015) and the key findings are presented below.

Results

Each academic developer used the prototype to design and pilot an evaluation instrument tailored to institutional context and an identified evaluation need. In each case academic developers were asked to identify what the evaluation was for (Table 2), what academic development themes were to be evaluated (Table 3) and what the data would be used for (Table 4). Despite distinctive practices in each case there were identifiable trends across the sample. For example, there is significant emphasis on using evaluation data to inform the academic development offer and to articulate impact on institutional culture (Tables 2 and 4), but less interest in exploring impacts on student learning (Table 3). The interviews cast more light on these trends.

Table 2. What are the purposes of this evaluation?
(Participants were invited to choose as many responses as were relevant)

What are the purposes of this evaluation?	Counts
To inform the future academic development offer	8
To inform institutional policy	6
To articulate and evidence value	3
Evidence for internal auditing	3
Evidence for QAA audit	2
Individuals' on-going academic development	2

Table 3. Distribution of questions posed by academic developers categorised by Guskey's (2002) critical levels of evaluation

Guskey's (2002) critical levels of evaluation	Frequency
Satisfaction with the activity	57
Changes to conceptions of teaching and learning	45
Changes to teaching practice	46
Changes to student learning	25
Changes to institutional culture	57

Table 4. How will evaluation data be used?
(Participants were invited to choose as many responses as were relevant)

Use of evaluation data	Frequency
Informing future academic development activity including the development of metrics	5
Reported to senior management	3
Presented at committees	2
Reported to human resources	2
Reported to QAA	1
Reported to respondents	1

Informing the academic development offer

Engagement with the toolkit encouraged academic developers to critically reflect on how current evaluation practices informed their development offer. Current evaluation practices focused on evidencing satisfaction with teaching and resources rather than evidencing impacts on teaching and learning.

> *The evaluation we do is a judgement on the activity, not of its impact on people's practices (AD10).*

This was attributed partly to historical precedence and lack of funding for evaluation expertise within the academic development community, but also to centralised institutional administration processes which encouraged 'one size fits all' module evaluation forms. In each case there was criticism of the extent to which this method of evaluation reflected academic development themes or allowed sufficient time for the intervention to influence changes in teaching, learning and institutional culture.

> *The standard university evaluation forms-are they measuring what we are looking to measure? (AD7)*
>
> *Module evaluations are not aligned with our learning outcomes (AD8)*
>
> *We evaluate at the end of the event, but real impact can only be observed after years and years (AD4)*

Academic developers used the toolkit to move away from their usual practices and develop alternative approaches to evaluation. Whilst the national audit undertaken as part of this research reported that 100% of participating institutions used questionnaires as their primary evaluation method (Spowart et al., 2016), only 18% chose to do this using the toolkit with the remaining 82% electing qualitative methods including interviews and focus groups. Whilst satisfaction was still very much on the agenda (Table 3), the toolkit's emphasis on academic development themes generated data about the ways in which lecturers' conceptions and practices were changing over time. This enabled what were often quite complicated narratives involving elements of academic development, classroom practice and evolving lecturer identity to be communicated within the evaluation, providing what one academic developer described as, *'a more coherent account of what is going on' (AD1).*

Academic developers were positive about using the toolkit to inform their academic development provision. They acknowledged the advantages the flexibility of the toolkit offered and it's potential to align and enhance current evaluation practices, particularly through the use of academic development themes over a staged, longitudinal timeframe (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Stes, Coertjens, & Petegem, 2013; Willett, Iverson, Rutz, & Manduca, 2014).

> *One of the first challenges you often have is coming up with the evaluation questions, so actually having a readymade resource that has started to categorise things into different evaluation scenarios, and starting to give you*

different questions for different levels of evaluation, we found that really helpful…. you'll end up with better evaluation tool for whatever you design because some of that thinking and working through and revision have been done already (AD7).

We thought the evaluation themes (Guskey's critical levels) were really good, so the themes covered pretty much everything that we wanted to look at anyway. There were a few ones that we added about the UKPSF and whether the students know that lecturers are engaging with academic development activities (AD5).

Good standing and institutional culture

The changes in method and content motivated by using the toolkit produced more discursive, reflective and informative evaluation data. Academic developers recognised that this presented an opportunity to link evaluation data and the ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) of the participant. A move which could potentially contribute to maintaining and evidencing 'good standing' in teaching as advocated through the HEA (2016)'s 'Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy: Code of Practice'. However, academic developers recognised that operationalising this would mean a re-envisioning of how evaluation data is distributed and used across the university setting (Tables 2 and 4).

To connect evaluation data and lecturers' ongoing CPD there would need to be explicit links made between the data and institutional processes such as annual and peer review, probation and promotion. These mechanisms were seen as having potential to provide '*systematic and supportive opportunities*' (AD10) for evidencing teaching quality and remaining in good standing. Academic developers perceived the success of these links to be dependent on the capacity of managers to discuss and promote teaching development, the value of academic development and teaching quality within the institution and the extent to which annual and peer review are centrally coordinated.

There were however, barriers to enhancing these links. There was recognition that at present, annual review was not in most cases either focused on teaching development or linked to CPD provision. Although some institutions captured individual CPD trajectories this was the minority and only one case linked this to annual review. In general, these processes remained dissociated.

Annual review….its variable the extent to which people take part in that, take it seriously and use it developmentally (AD12).

We hope that appraisals can pick up CPD needs within specific departments, but we do not know (AD11).

Student learning

Despite the toolkit suggesting guidance on how to evaluate the impact of academic development on student learning, in line with the wider literature this proved to be a difficult area for academic developers to articulate (Parsons et al., 2012; Trigwell et al., 2012). This was evidenced by the comparative lack of questions about student learning that were included in the evaluation instruments (55% less than other categories -Table 3) and the ineffectualness of participating lecturers' responses to those questions. These together suggest a lack of confidence in both academic developers and lecturers about how to evaluate student learning. The interviews confirmed this.

> *The data suggests that CPD wasn't impacting on student outcomes…but we just don't know that, and we can't in any clear or direct correlated way (AD10).*

> *I can demonstrate that CPD has an impact on teaching practice but to evidence the same for students is impossible to be honest (AD6)*

Despite these frustrations using the toolkit opened up discussion and strategic possibilities for how to take this particular evaluation thread forward.

> *When you start unpacking it and thinking about it, well, CPD has to have an impact and where is that focus of impact…how has it enabled or changed or had that impact on people's behaviour or student learning, whatever it might be. So I think, yeah, using the Toolkit to start that process was useful (AD2).*

> *I haven't taken it that far in my current practice in terms of thinking about the impact that CPD has had on student learning….I wouldn't say my questions are particularly stretching ones, whereas these in the Toolkit are. So I think the Toolkit did make me think more about that, a bit more deeply about what is it I want to know and then how is the best way to achieve that, and which questions would help with that [student learning] or what other questions do I want to add in (AD9).*

As a result of the data received, one institution contacted their student union to discuss how best to raise awareness of CPD and its value for the student learning experience. However, despite these beneficial discussions and activities it was evident that academic developers questioned the extent to which evaluating impact on student learning was possible within a time-constrained political-functionalist university environment.

> *Getting at the important stuff [impact on student learning] is so much harder, so much more expensive and will take forever. It is in the too difficult box, we don't go there. But if you want change, real change then that is what you have to do (AD4).*

Discussion

The results suggest systemic faults in academic development evaluation practices. Evaluation is often misaligned with academic development themes, particularly around student learning; and current evaluation methodologies do not effectively exploit the full potential of evaluation data. This calls for transformational changes to evaluation practices in which the framing and learning systems that underlie current goals and strategies are questioned (Argyris, 1982).

The results here and of the audit (Spowart et al., 2016) suggest that motivation and expertise to review academic development evaluation practices is variable across the sector. However, the intensification of political debates around teaching quality and value for money are likely to place pressure on academic development units and their proxies to create evaluation which evidences impact on a range of audiences. The data here supports the literatures' assertion that evaluation should be considered as an integral part of curriculum development, aligned with learning outcomes in the same spirit that Biggs (1999) constructively aligns these with pedagogy and assessment. Although evaluation expertise may be fostered across the HEI setting it should *also* be cultivated in academic development units since these are uniquely placed to disseminate evaluation results: both as curriculum content and as a product to evidence value.

Evidencing a relationship between academic development and student learning is considered problematic because of the asynchronous diffusion between them. However, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) claim that literally hundreds of studies demonstrate that teacher behaviour and student learning are positively correlated and there have been numerous instruments developed which claim to capture/measure student learning (e.g. De Rijdt et al., 2013; Guskey, 2002; Trigwell et al., 2012). This suggests two changes to current academic development practices that may help. The first of these is to develop strategies to enhance and distribute evaluation expertise amongst those who require it to evidence their practice. This includes lecturers. A recent meta-review of concepts in academic practice listed reflective practice, constructive alignment, student approaches to learning, scholarship and assessment driven learning as central to the field (Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2009). Although the evaluation of teaching and learning is implicit within these concepts, the reorientation of academic development curricula to explicitly teach lecturers how to evaluate student learning would better enable them to do so and to be able to report on it.

In parallel to this are discussions about what constitutes student learning and how this can be captured. For some time now there has been international interest in the concept of student engagement as a proxy for learning (Kuh, 2009). Student engagement is theorised as consisting of structural and psycho-social influences (Kahu, 2013) and has been defined as the 'time and effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities' (Coates, 2009, p. 1). It is typically characterised by 'student perceptions of student–teacher relationships, their experiences in class of collaboration with peers, active learning, promptness of feedback, time spent on task, teacher expectations and how diverse talents and ways of learning are

respected' (Zepke, Leach, & Butler, 2014, p. 388). This involves looking beyond commonly used evaluation instruments such as module evaluation and the National Student Survey to accommodate evidence drawn flexibly from student engagement data, learner analytics, higher education corporate data, self-reflection, peer review feedback from colleagues and reviews of data on student performance, retention and progression (Fink, 2013; Kneale et al., 2016a).

To be successful these suggestions for change would need to be supported within the institutional culture through the policies, processes and values which constitute teaching in its widest sense. Evaluation data, if properly communicated and understood can potentially provide managers with evidence of what works *and* a vehicle for progressing teaching-related CPD. This however, requires changes to the nature of evaluation data and how it is communicated and a re-envisioning of the processes which can potentially support teaching enhancement; annual and peer review, probation and promotion.

Conclusion

This paper explored the value an evaluation toolkit based on best practice principles had for academic developers. Academic developers reported that although the toolkit provided a useful framework with which to evaluate academic development themes over a longitudinal framework, exploiting its full potential required significant changes to academic development curricula and the institutional processes which support teaching and learning.

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