

Developing Learner Autonomy In International And UK Students At SHU



What are the aims of this project?

This project aims to identify effective peer-support mechanisms to enable international and UK students to develop further their levels of autonomy by working in tandem.

The main objectives include:

- Identifying student and tutor views about what type of peer-supported arrangement they consider beneficial;
- Devising an appropriate set of peer-supported interactions;
- Evaluating student/tutor experience after engagement in the process, identifying the successful elements and the resource implications;
- Exploring ways of embedding some/all of the student interactions within the assessment of one of their existing modules;
- Assessing the viability of a credit-bearing module accessible to SHU and international students for roll-out to the university.

What is the background / rationale?

The experience of staff working with international students reveals that a proportion of these students at SHU do not engage effectively with the learning opportunities on their courses, showing weaker language skills, lower levels of participation in seminar activities and a lack of meaningful contact with UK students. The same is true of UK students going abroad to study or work.

Drawing on established TANDEM/peer-supported learning experience the aim is to allow the students to act as peers in their areas of expertise and to support each other in the development of autonomous behaviour across a spectrum of activities.

Furthermore, what sets this project apart from current informal arrangements is the aspiration to find ways of embedding the peer-supported learning directly into courses.

What are the benefits to student learning?

Key benefits would include:

- The development of the students' ability to make decisions regarding their own learning, which in turn should enable them to engage more pro-actively with learning opportunities on their courses;

- The acquisition of intercultural knowledge, understanding and skills, leading to a greater willingness to make contact with people from other cultures;
- the experience of "social" learning, including the development of greater interaction, negotiation, collaboration, etc.

Overall, the expectation is that the students will develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy, increase their levels of engagement and ultimately experience higher levels of academic success.

If rolled out across the university the project could make a substantial contribution to meaningful internationalisation and, in turn, to the standing of the university as a provider of a diverse learning experience.

How will this project be evaluated?

The evaluation will be an on-going process with a number of elements including evaluation of the outcomes of the discussions with students and tutors (via notes taken during the discussions; possibly use of audio-recording if students and tutors agree), evaluation of the pairing event by the students (via questionnaires in English and Chinese) and overall evaluation of the student and tutor experience (via individual and group interviews in English and Chinese).

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