Planning for UHI Mainstreaming Report 2015

Shetland College UHI

Key area where progress has been made with regard to equality and diversity:
Learners can access an on-line talk box to express their suggestions to improve the learners' experience of the college

Action you have taken to progress this key area:
One of our strategic priorities is to *'enhance the approaches to learner engagement and the student voice'* therefore we value the importance for suitable opportunities for learners to provide feedback. Equally important is to 'close the loop' and show learners that their feedback has been taken seriously. During the 2012/13 the college reviewed its learners feedback mechanism 'You said, We did.' An idea was developed into Talk Boxes – a network of anonymous suggestion boxes placed throughout the college buildings and learning centres. For those learners who studying online or via distance learning, a Talk Box page of the website was produced allowing learners to provide feedback (through an online form) and read responses from staff. During the year it was agreed to run a pilot of the learner feedback system and to monitor the engagement of learners and that and responses would be displayed. It was agreed by the Senior Management Team that the responses to the comments should be clearly visible to all leaners. Therefore a designated display board in the café area was used, as well posting the responses on the college website. After the successful pilot it was decided by SMT that Talk Boxes should become an integrated part of the college's quality improvement processes. Whereas course team meetings are primarily focused on learning and teaching matters, Talk Boxes are able to provide feedback on any aspect of the learner's experience.

Measures you are using to monitor your progress:
Talk Boxes are managed by the Communications and Student Engagement Assistant, whose role is to mediate between learners and relevant staff. If lecturers or other support staff were reading the comments, they may recognise handwriting and identify the learners involved therefore possibly compromising anonymity.

Evidence of progress that has been made:
During the 2012/13 pilot the total number of comments from learners was thirty-one. This suggested the use of the feedback system was proving to be very popular and was actively engaging learners.

However the total figure for learner comments in 2013/14 was ten. This significant dip in usage was due to the difficulty in locating a permanent display of the Talk Box responses due to major building work that was taking place in the café area that academic year.

However at the start of 2014/15 the building work had been completed and the café now houses a permanent display for the Talk Box mechanism. To date the total figure for usage is fifty-three, covering all aspects of college life.

In the January 2014 the review of Shetland College UHI by Education Scotland, cited the following regarding the Talk Box feedback mechanism, *'learners are provided with a range of opportunities to engage in the work and life of the college. Learners provide evaluative commentary on their experiences and suggestions for improvement through use of the online Talk Box feedback forum.'*

Challenges that have been faced in progressing this key area:

Initially in 2012/13 it was difficult to gage whether learners would 'buy in' to using the new feedback system, therefore it was decided to pilot the system and monitor the results.

During 2013/14 the college underwent major building works in the area normally located for the display of the Talk Box responses. This resulted in difficulty in finding a suitable location for the display the Talk Box responses.

Further action you intend to take:

In January 2015 it was decided for this successful initiative should be forward for the UHI Student Support Initiative Award 2015. Below are the Judges' comments regarding the Talk Box feedback mechanism and we are delighted that it was 'commended' by the judges.

'The concept of a suggestions box updated in an innovative way with a prompt and public response. This is a very useful project which could readily be replicated in other institutions. There are normally a number of opportunities for students to comment on academic issues and this project gives them a clear route to give feedback and information on other issues.'

'Very good mechanism for student voice, with excellent feedback to the student body on actions taken. Good that it is being embedded as part of the culture and seems well managed.'

It is envisaged that Talkbox will remain as an integral part of the college's quality systems and the learner engagement strategy.