

CHERI

Centre for Higher Education
Research and Information



Assessing the value and impact of services that support students: Findings from the literature review

Ruth Williams, CHERI, The Open University
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Background to the review

- Financial sustainability of learning and teaching (HEFCE, 2008)
- Importance of the role and functions of students services (AMOS SHE, 2009)
- Dearth of evidence to test/prove the value of student services
- AMOSSHE value and impact project (Apr 2010 – Jun 2011)
- Literature review is first outcome

Aim of the literature review

- To produce an analysis of published literature on the policy and practice of undertaking assessment of student services provision, which is broader than process monitoring and user satisfaction surveys

How the review was undertaken

- International bibliographic database (and other sources) searched
- Similar work undertaken in comparator sectors (eg health, local government) sought
- 50 publications identified, mostly US
- Focus on the 'generic' rather than the 'specific'

Review conclusions

- US dominated literature
- But little empirical research
- Strong on conceptual frameworks, weak on practical solutions
- Focus on learning outcomes based assessment
- The process is a challenging one (no 'quick fix')
- Implications for staff development, leadership, resources and communications

Messages from the literature review (1)

Why assess student services?

- (A note on terminology – assessment v evaluation)
- Survival in the context of increased competition for resources
- Sustainability in the context of a more diverse student population, raised employer expectations
- Social and economic agendas

Messages from the literature review (2)

The assessment process

- Schuh and Upcraft (various): general steps to assessment, different kinds of assessment, and their application to student services areas
- Bresciani (2004): assessment tools, criteria, best practice, methods...
- Above (and other sources) to be adapted and developed for project's pilot stage

Messages from the literature review (3)

Focus of learning outcomes (Keeling, 2004 & 2006)

- Implies the integration of academic learning and student development
- Stresses the importance of partnership working
- Notes the failure of student services professionals to reflect on their roles as facilitators in helping students learn

Messages from the literature review (4)

Assessing learning outcomes – some caveats

- Can interventions be isolated from other variables influencing outcomes (issue of impact)?
- Not all outcomes associated with student services are 'learning' outcomes (health, finance...)
- Outcomes need to be measurable and meaningful to demonstrate impact (Bresciani)

Messages from the literature review (5)

Inhibiting factors to assessment

- Resources
- Staff resistance and time
- Functional silos (learning outcomes)

Enabling factors

- Commitment
- Partnership/collaboration
- Mission

Messages from the literature review (6)

Lessons learnt from US case studies

- Limited research on student learning outcomes based assessment
- Assessment in student services is not widely practiced

Developments in the UK

- DfES/UUK research (2002)
- Sheffield University – holistic evaluation
- Higher Education Academy - EQUIP
- Scotland – enhancement themes

Next steps in the project (1)

- Peer support group established (Jul 2010)
 - to provide advice on assessing student services, pilot HEIs and services, toolkit, general guidance
- Adaptation and development of a toolkit of assessment/evaluation methods (Jul-Sep 2010) for the pilots

Next steps in the project (2)

- Pilot institutions and service areas to be identified (Sep 2010)
- Piloting of toolkit (Oct 2010 – Feb 2011)
- Evaluation and dissemination of pilot findings (Mar-Jun 2011)

Interactive task

Aim:

- Discuss approaches to a value and impact study
- Identify issues/problems that might arise
- Use of Schuh and Upcraft, and Bresciani to aid discussion
- Report back three key messages