

STUDENTS AS CHANGE AGENTS

Principles

Over the last eight years, the University has developed an innovative student-led action research initiative that enables students to act as change agents in their educational environment. Students negotiate a topic of concern or interest and engage in a small research project. They then take responsibility for providing recommendations and solutions and putting them into practice. To date, hundreds of change agents' projects (125 last year alone) have promoted some important developments in curriculum delivery and employability activity in many subject areas across the University, and have impacted on decision-making processes such as for the new Exeter Forum (now the hub of the Streatham campus).



Students run Careers Fairs and Module Fairs, a buddy scheme for year abroad students; they have developed resources for mental health and well-being, for international students, to highlight sustainability, to improve seminar teaching; they have demonstrated the need for more support for mature students, and technology for teaching. They ran an Annual Staff Learning and Teaching conference, to great acclaim.

National profile

The initiative has created widespread recognition at a national level, even from the earliest days through a case study for the 1994 group and another in the previous government's Higher Ambitions publication; then case studies for the HEA and for JISC; a think-piece publication (Kay, Dunne and Hutchinson, QAA, 2010); a case study and resources for the National Union of Students (NUS); the running at Exeter of a national student-led conference on technology for JISC; a publication through the Higher Education Academy/ESCALATE (Dunne and Zandstra, 2013); and several academic articles: Dunne, E., Jaynes, A. & Wren, J. 2012, Emerald Publishing Group, New York; Kay, J., Owen, D. and Dunne, E. (2012) Libri Publishers. See also, Dunne, E. and Owen, D. (eds) (2013), The Student Engagement Handbook, Emerald.



Key benefits to the University

The Change Agent's initiative is important for:

- Providing a major USP for the Exeter student experience at a time when we need to be distinctive.
- Contributing to winning multiple student engagement awards (HEA/NUS).
- Giving students employability skills, so that Exeter students stand out from the crowd.
- Supporting higher student satisfaction scores.
- Attracting the best tariff students, and students who wish to engage fully with the University.
- Raising the University's profile in the HE sector as one that embraces change and innovation.
- Continually improving the student experience in areas that are selected by and meaningful to students.
- Improving student engagement with their learning
- Improving the ethos and culture of the University by promoting collaborative partnership.



Key benefits to students

Involvement with the Change Agents initiative supports personal and professional development:

- Employability skills and experience for a CV (The Exeter Award); engaging with change processes.
- Self-knowledge, confidence, self-esteem, empowerment and leadership (Exeter Leaders' Award).
- Involvement in communities of practice, with staff and students working in collaboration.

For more information, please contact
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