

Empowering Students through Partnership: Enabling Student Representatives to discuss Concepts of Independent Learning Confidently and Competently

Dr Karla H. Benske – Lecturer in Learning Innovation

Julie Brown – Research Assistant

Sara Milne – Vice President Student Development

Overview of Presentation

- Moving Forward: Aims, Outcomes and Current Activities
- Action Research Project
- The Challenge of Independent Learning
- Caledonian Conference
- Feedback by Student Representatives
- Summary

Moving Forward: Aims

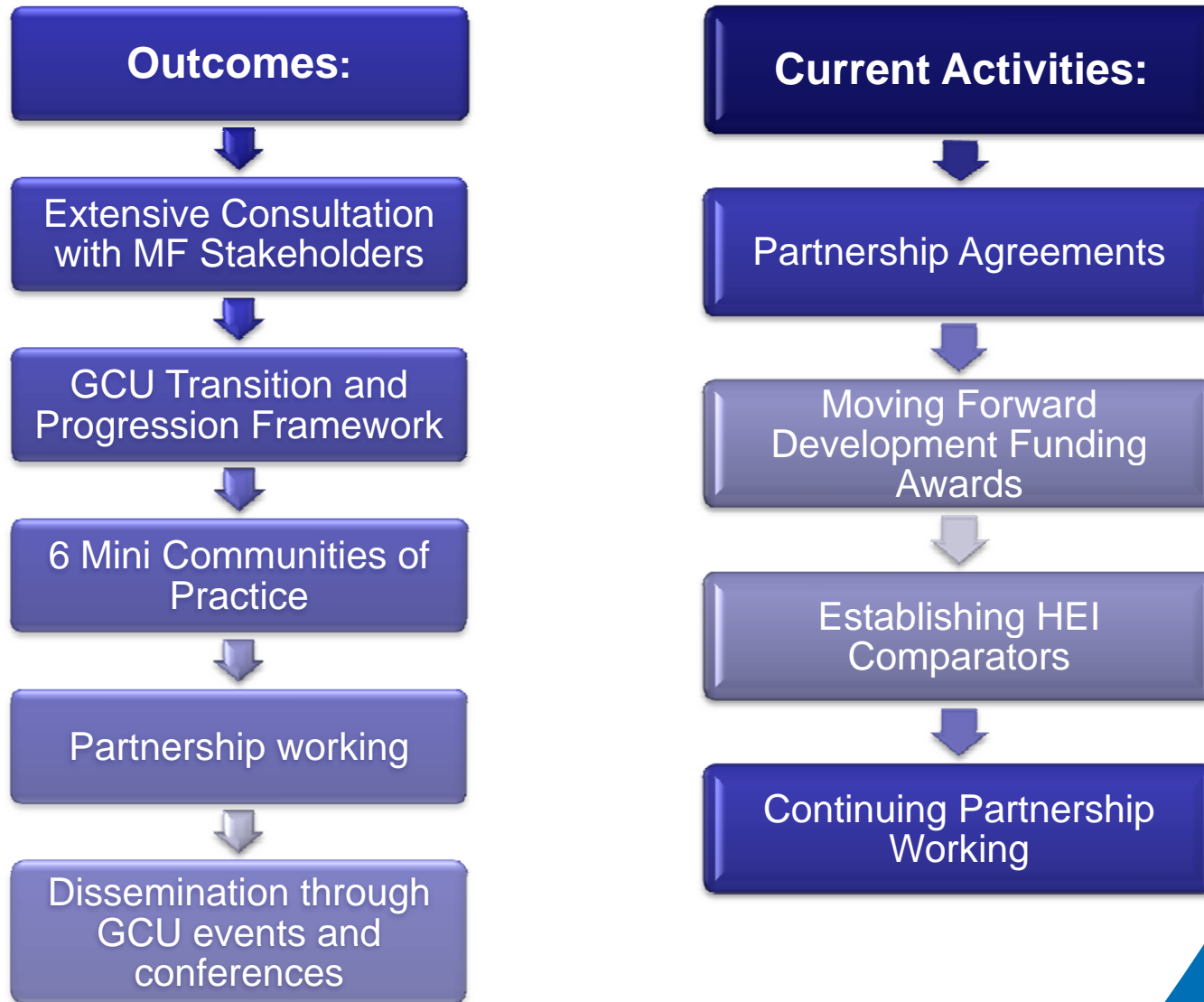
Improve progression rates

Enhance the student experience in terms of transition to GCU

Provide greater support for staff in developing and implementing strategies to address issues associated with transition and progression

Develop, support the implementation of, and evaluate the GCU Transition and Progression Framework

Moving Forward: Outcomes and Current Activities



The Action Research Project

Working towards the development of a multiple perspective approach to the concept of independent learning

- Project design, negotiations, development
- Focus group discussion with Students' Association (SA) executive
- Design of 'creative response' (informative postcards) based on the outcomes of focus group discussion

The challenge of 'independent learning'

- 'Independent learner' and 'independent learning': predominant descriptors of academic study in the UK (Leathwood 2006)
- GCU LTAS: Goal One: to 'equip students [...]to operate as flexible, *independent* lifelong learners'
- Students are unsure, if not confused and often interpret it as studying alone (Green 2008; Hewitt-Taylor 2002; Leathwood 2006; Wilde et al. 2006).
- Students may interpret the need to ask for support as a sign of dependency and failure to be an independent learner (Leathwood 2006).
- This can lead to disengagement and students leaving early (Green 2008; Harrison 2006).

Iteration

- Idea of cards and first draft discussed with SA
 - Challenges of the two-tier approach
- Feedback from course tutor and examiner
- Integrating work and study: discussions with some lecturers on the topic of 'independent learning'

Focus Group Leaflet accompanying the postcards:

Focus group discussion with flipchart and pens (c. 30-45 min)

Please remember to explain the purpose of the discussion, take notes and offer opportunities to opt out. Allow about 5 minutes each for 1-4 and 10 or 20 minutes on the last part.

1. Ask the students to name one term/expression they associate with 'independent learning' and note it on the flipchart paper.
2. Looking at the flipchart, ask the students if they can specify what they mean with...
Or
When looking at the flipchart feel free to remark that there appears to be a cluster of terms/expressions on... And then ask what exactly do you mean by...?

Then ask the students to share any previous experiences in relation to discussing independent learning:
3. Have you discussed 'independent learning' before? If yes, with who and in what context?
4. What did you find most frustrating when discussing the topic 'independent learning'?

And finally, hand out the postcards and ask the students to look at them, compare them to the answers on the flipchart, and tell you what they think about the cards (design, language, information that's offered):

- Are the cards useful/informative?
- Would they use them (after checking the websites)?
- Would they use the cards to discuss 'independent learning' with other students?

Focus group discussion with activities (c. 1 hour)

Please remember to explain the purpose of the discussion, take notes and offer opportunities to opt out.

1. Activity (make sure that you have two different coloured sets of post-its - 5 minutes):

Ask the students to write down one term/expression they associate with 'independent learning' per post-it note (2 post-its of the same colour per student).

Feel free to explore previous experiences of discussing the topic 'independent learning' during the collection of the post-its asking the questions below (5 minutes). Make sure that take notes and that you promise to return to the post-its later on:
2. What are your experiences in discussing 'independent learning'? With whom have you discussed it before?
3. What do you find most frustrating when discussing the topic 'independent learning'?
4. Looking at the post-its, ask the students if they can specify what they mean with...
Or
When looking at the post-its feel free to remark that there appears to be a cluster of post-its on... And then ask what exactly do you mean by...? (10 minutes)
5. Ask the students: what motivates you to learn? Why do you want to learn? (5 minutes)

6. Activity (use the other coloured post-its - 5 minutes):

How do you learn best yourself? Can you give examples, please?

Ask the students to write down one example per post-it note (2 pink post-its per student). Offer one or two of your own examples, something along the lines of:

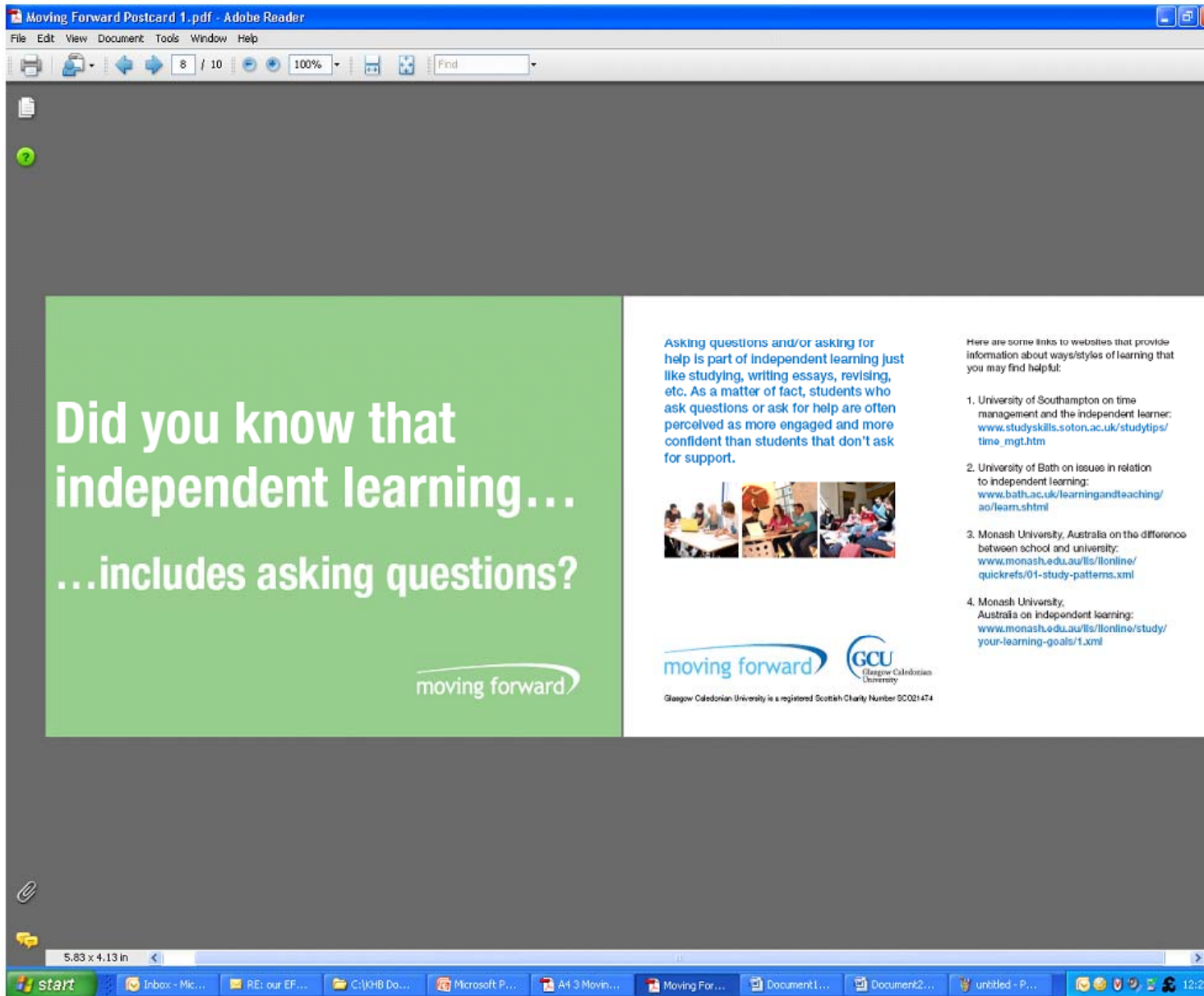
'I learn best in a very old-fashioned way, by writing things out in long hand... 2). Also, I cannot learn anything in absolute silence, which has led to many a debate with my parents...'

The aim of this exercise is to highlight that everyone learns in their own way and that can be different from others.

7. Ask the students: where does learning occur? What do you think? (5 minutes)
8. And invite the students to discuss the following:
How do the ways you learn and the places where you learn relate to 'independent learning'? What do you think? (5-10 minutes)
9. Hand out the postcards and ask the students to look at them, compare them to the first round of post-its, and tell you what they think about the cards (design, language, information that's offered - 15-20 minutes):

- Are the cards useful/informative?
- Would they use them?
- Would they use the cards to discuss 'independent learning' with other students?

One example of the postcard:



Caledonian Conference

- Annual Event to gain Student Representative Feedback.
- Four groups of students discussed questions around Independent learning.
- ‘Personal learning’, ‘Self directed learning’, ‘Using own initiative’.
- Within University there was minimal discussion around the term and Information only provided centrally to students at Induction.
- Cards not vibrant enough, too wordy.

Feedback by Student Representatives

- Important to discuss independent learning with students when they first arrive at University.
- Design/Purpose of the card was not desirable to students
- Providing accessible information online would be favourable

What students would like to see..

- Central Website link about independent learning
- 1st year student/ Direct entry students informed about Independent learning
- Promotion through many different mechanisms
- Timetabled sessions for New students to G.C.U

What next?

- Learning from student feedback...
- Develop an online tool on independent learning as part of a new GCU Widening Participation website
- Ensure student input regarding the online tool
- Explore additional ways of engaging students

References

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Hewitt-Taylor, J. (2002) 'Teachers' and Students' views on self-directed learning', *Nursing Standard*, 17(1), pp. 33-38

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Wilde, S. et al. (2006) Nuffield Review Higher Education in Focus Groups. Preliminary Report. Oxford: Oxford University, available from <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/documents106-1.pdf>, last accessed November 2009

Contact details:

Dr Karla Benske – Karla.Benske@gcu.ac.uk

Julie Brown – Julie.Brown@gcu.ac.uk

Sara Milne – Sara.Milne@gcu.ac.uk