

Teaching and Learning in Social Policy

Monday 11th September, University of Wolverhampton

The Social Policy Association held a very successful teaching and learning day on 11th September. The day was an opportunity for those teaching social policy to share ideas and experiences of good practice and to think about challenges to come. People attended the day from across the UK and this diversity was really useful in the day's discussions. I would like to thank everyone who presented and attended for their valuable contributions.

Current and Future State of Social Policy Teaching

The day started with a presentation from Sophie Mackinder and John Hudson who had carried out the teaching and learning research project and wrote the report (available on the SPA website <http://www.social-policy.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Teaching-Learning-Report2c-2017.pdf>) John and Sophie provided an excellent overview of the research and a very honest discussion of the challenges encountered.

A number of themes came out in the conversations that followed the presentation:

- A large number of individual respondents chose not to say where they worked – the group discussed if this was linked to issues of competition (between organisations) or levels of trust in the SPA. It was felt that the SPA could facilitate greater collegiality through events like the teaching day but also by providing (through this and similar audits) a usable set of data for those teaching social policy – especially where the subject is fairly small. This, it was felt, would build trust within the subject.
- There was also discussion about perceptions not matching the audit information and the importance of people having accurate information about their own institutions.
- Overall the audit showed that there had been relatively little change in provision (courses offered) in the past five years which was good news but it was clear from the discussions on the day that many courses were running on small numbers or were part of wider provision that might not be captured as social policy.
- Linked to this discussion there were also concerns about recruitment and the issue of younger students not being aware of social policy as a subject. Central marketing material from the SPA would be welcomed.

Morning Workshops

Morning workshops focused on engaging students in social policy and addressing new forms of plagiarism.

Lee Gregory led the first workshop on engaging students which produced lots of discussion ranging from excellent examples of innovative practice (for example using outside speakers and drama and role play), to discussions about the continuing value of lectures and seminars. Lee provided a very practical example of how he had 'flipped the classroom' and incorporated a range of practice to produce an engaging and popular module on policy making.

Steve Iafrati led the second workshop looking at academic misconduct and there were some interesting discussions on how teaching staff can adapt to new challenges of plagiarism, in particular 'bought essays' and essay banks. There was a feeling that institutions are behind the curve with this and there is the

potential for them to be proactive in disrupting the market in this area. There was also an acknowledgment that poor referencing practice in A-level study exacerbated the problem.

Subject Level TEF

The afternoon session opened with a presentation on subject level TEF by Ben Brabon who is Academic Lead at the HEA with responsibility for the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Ben provided a great deal of information about the context of the TEF and the practicalities. He outlined the two subject level pilots that are starting this year and urged us as a subject / discipline to get involved at all levels of the process. As many TEF metrics are still not decided he emphasised the importance of the SPA being a visible representative of the subject.

Afternoon Workshop

The afternoon workshop focused on designing assessments that develop essential skills. This was the second workshop that Lee Gregory led and he again provided some excellent examples of practice with assessment that incorporated developing policy, writing press releases and providing a radio interview to defend policy. Discussions highlighted that excellent practice takes place in many institutions and takes many forms. Increasingly placements / work experience / volunteering are included as part of course assessments. It was clear that some institutions are more experienced than others in this area and some cross institution collaboration could be very useful.

Feedback

Feedback from the event was positive with people really valuing the opportunity to meet face to face and share experiences and ideas. There was strong support for providing an annual event and lots of good ideas for issues to be covered.

Recommendations

Throughout the day a number of issues were discussed that resulted in suggestions for action by SPA, these have been compiled into a list of initial recommendations.

- That the SPA look into funding a regular audit of social policy provision – yearly if possible, using a range of public data. That this is shared in a usable way that allows social policy departments/ subjects to argue for their position and value in institutions.
- That the data captured in the 2016 audit is used to build better relationships with institutions – there are many institutions that teach social policy but have no links to the SPA. Work needs to be done to identify the correct person / people in each institution to work with on the collection and dissemination of data.
- That the SPA develop marketing materials that can be used across institutions to assist with recruitment. Specifically, this information could look at the importance of social policy and the jobs that a social policy degree can lead to. The animated videos produced by SPA provide a good introduction but more is needed.
- That the learning and teaching day becomes an annual event
- That the SPA consider their lobbying potential – this is in terms of social policy and HE policy

Please address any queries or comments to clare.williams@wlv.ac.uk – Chair of the SPA convenors group