Title: **Using the NSS as a tool for enhancing learning, teaching and assessment across a university**

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:
•   Understand how a performative approach to improving NSS scores at an institution was shifted towards a developmental approach to learning, teaching and assessment
•   Reflect on the challenges in implementing such a change, particularly at the level of programme teams
•   Relate this to a specific example of how an institutional assessment policy has been used to drive improvements in NSS questions related to assessment.

Session Outline

This session explores an effort to shift from a performative approach to NSS Action Planning towards a developmental approach underpinned by a more holistic engagement with policy and practices at programme level. It uses a sociocultural approach to change to explore the possibilities and challenges inherent in this.

Performative measures such as league tables are becoming a powerful driver of institutional quality assurance and enhancement in an environment of increasing competition for students, and limited enhancement funding. One of the effects of this has been to shift the focus from leading good practices from the front by supporting the scholarship of teaching and learning, to highlighting programmes that fall below institutional benchmarks, backed up by performance management. However, I argue that achieving institutional KPIs still depends on a developmental approach to enhancement, although the focus may have shifted from supporting excellence to setting benchmarks for minimum standards.

A sociocultural lens was used to shed light on responses of two programme teams to this initiative. Initial findings suggest that while there has been significant engagement with the new tools, particularly by programme leaders, there is resistance in programme teams to bringing together performative and developmental approaches to change: academics appeared to resist engagement with NSS data to identify and address problems, but were happy to engage with the assessment policy if it was presented in a positive developmental light. The wider implications of the findings for educational developers are explored.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Presentation: 15 minutes

Group discussion: 15 minutes
Indicative questions:
- What experiences have you had of improving NSS results from an enhancement perspective? What have been the challenges?
- What elements of programme cultures do you think might influence the way they respond to the initiative?
- What elements of institutional or national cultures and discourses do you think might influence the responses of programme teams to the initiative?

Plenary, including summing up of key points: 15 minutes

References

Mathieson, S. (2009). Situating academic teaching cultures from the South African experience: A modified community of practice approach (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Lancaster University, UK.

Mathieson, S. (2012)Disciplinary cultures of teaching and learning as socially situated practice: rethinking the space between social constructivism and epistemological essentialism from the South African experience, Higher Education 63(5). Springer.

Trowler, P. (2008) Cultures and Change in Higher Education: Theories and Practice. Palgrave Macmillan