Attracting and Increasing Diversity at the University of the Highlands and Islands

The GROW Model, which is said to be one of the most established and successful coaching models created by Alexander Graham, Sir John Whitmore and colleagues in the 1980s, proved useful as a simple, straight-forward structure to develop our project work.

1 GOAL: Vision Statement

We will address gender representation within Engineering as a discipline area to increase participation of females within engineering courses.

In parallel, we will undertake work to develop an action-orientated model that could be applied to multiple subject areas, gender and/or other protected characteristics.

Why?
- Less than 10% of students studying engineering across the university partnership are female.
- We want to support colleagues across the partnership to begin to address the underrepresentation of any protected characteristic in any subject area.

2 REALITY: Research

Aims:
- Identify and understand factors that influence the recruitment and retention of students from underrepresented groups in specific curriculum areas at UHI (with an initial focus on gender representation within Engineering).
- Produce an action-orientated model that could be applied across subject areas to look at student diversity with respect to gender and other protected characteristics.

Key Research Activity:
Identify and involve key people from across the university partnership who could support the project.

Gather and analyse both internal and external information:
- Course data.
- Student and staff perceptions/experiences.
- Previous institutional initiatives.
- Sector research - perceived issues/barriers.
- Key external drivers eg Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Gender Action Plan.

Research Findings

Highlights
Motivated project team who are keen to make a difference.
The staff and students who clearly welcomed the project aims.
There are/ have been many projects across the partnership to address the gender imbalance in Engineering.
Sector research evidence proved very useful in supporting the project.

Challenges
Identifying and involving key people from across the university partnership who could provide the information required.
The staff and students who were more dubious about the project aims.
The projects that have been carried out have not been co-ordinated across the partnership.

3 OPTIONS: Potential Plans

Bring together the current work of the university STEM team, Engineering departments and Learning and Teaching Lab to develop an initiative to tackle the gender imbalance in Engineering but to also tackle diversity in Engineering as a whole?

Continue to develop the GROW model or adopt the SFC provisional framework of approach to Gender Action Planning as a tool to support the addressing of the underrepresentation of protected characteristics in subject areas?

4 WAY FORWARD: Initiatives

1 To develop a STEM Strategy which would aim to:
- Spark an early interest in engineering in primary school children.
- Improve the transition from primary through to option choices, in a bid to tackle female pupils from becoming disengaged in early secondary school.
- Work with school groups to normalise female engineers to both male and female pupils in a bid to shift stereotypical thinking.
- Work with parents to try to shift stereotypical thinking.
- Look to improve confidence in primary school teachers and advocate the delivery of engineering activities in class.
- Achieve a greater awareness of pathways from school to higher or further education and then onto employment.

Moving forward - funding has recently been secured to develop the university STEM Strategy.

2 To develop an action-orientated model that could be applied to multiple subject areas, gender and/or other protected characteristics:

Templates have been developed to support evidence gathering and planning to address the underrepresentation of any protected characteristic in any subject area.

They follow the 5 broad themes, identified through SFC commissioned research, as being central to a successful and sustainable approach to tackling gender imbalances within an institution’s activities but which we have identified as being equally useful in helping to address the underrepresentation of any protected characteristic.

1 Infrastructure.
2 Influencing the influencers.
3 Raising awareness and aspiration.
4 Encouraging applications.
5 Supporting success.

Wanted
Examples of initiatives that have been put in place to tackle underrepresentation of protected characteristics in institutions.

Offered
Templates that can be used as a framework for gathering evidence and setting targets to address the underrepresentation of protected characteristics in institutions.

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