

The University of Sheffield

The Tenth Annual Learning and Teaching Conference “Celebrating Success in Learning and Teaching”

Conference Feedback Survey Report

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This year the conference was held on Thursday 7th January 2016. Over 330 university staff and postgraduate students attended the event, which is the largest number of delegates since the first conference took place. With the title of the conference being ‘Celebrating Success in Learning and Teaching’, five themes were at the focus of the presentations: engagement, interdisciplinarity, global context, research led teaching and learning environment. An online poll of 13 votes showed that global context was the theme that the delegates were most interested in before the conference. A total of 103 delegates completed the feedback form either during the conference and online. Overall the feedback was very positive with some focus on specific areas for improvement. This report looks to identify the key themes within the variety of feedback.

Regarding attendance:

As stated over 334 delegates attended the conference from across the university. Colleagues and postgraduates from a variety of faculties attended the event. Here are the results from the main attending academic faculties.

Faculty	Staff	Postgraduate Taught	Postgraduate Research	Unknown/ Other
Arts and Humanities	19	0	4	0
Engineering	25	1	8	0
Medicine, Dentistry and health	40	1	7	0
Science	40	0	2	0
Social Science	47	5	5	2

The majority of the remaining numbers consisted of delegates from the professional services within the university. Some delegates represented other faculties or external companies such as other universities.

Regarding pre-conference information

The online questionnaire asked delegates their opinion on the pre-conference information that they were provided with. The results from 46 delegates were as follows:

“The pre-conference information contained all the necessary details.’ How far do you agree with this statement?

Strongly agree: 25

Agree: 17

Neither agree nor disagree: 3

Disagree: 1

Strongly disagree: 0

A common theme which arose when asked ‘how could the pre-conference information have been improved’ was that the delegates could not longer remember their chosen sessions. Although this information was provided, there is room for improvement and there is a possibility of an automatic emailing system being put in place in order to share the information more effectively.

Positive feedback commented on how some delegates believed the information to be ‘thorough and concise’.

Regarding the key aims of the conference

The first section of the questionnaire presented delegates with the following questions

A: This conference provided an opportunity to explore effective practice in learning and teaching from across the institution.

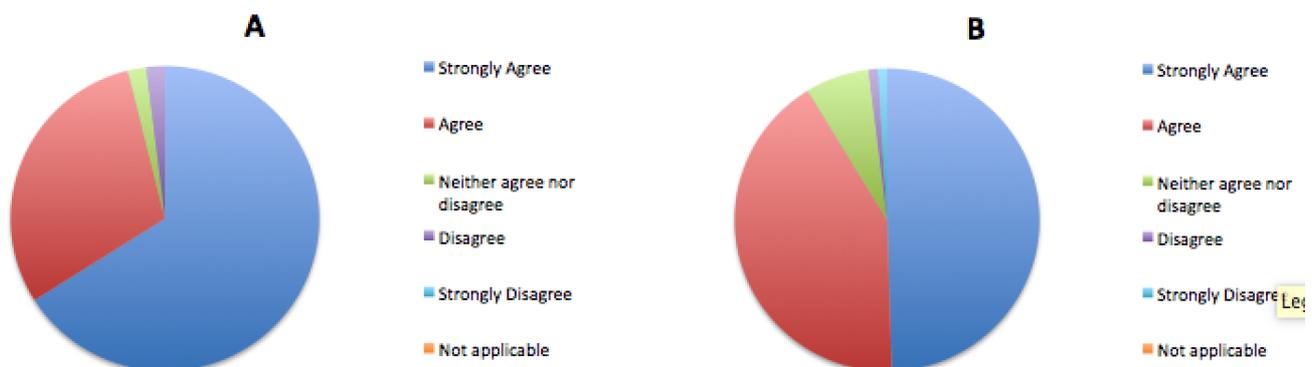
B: The conference introduced some new ideas approaches or strategies that I will consider implementing in my learning and teaching practice

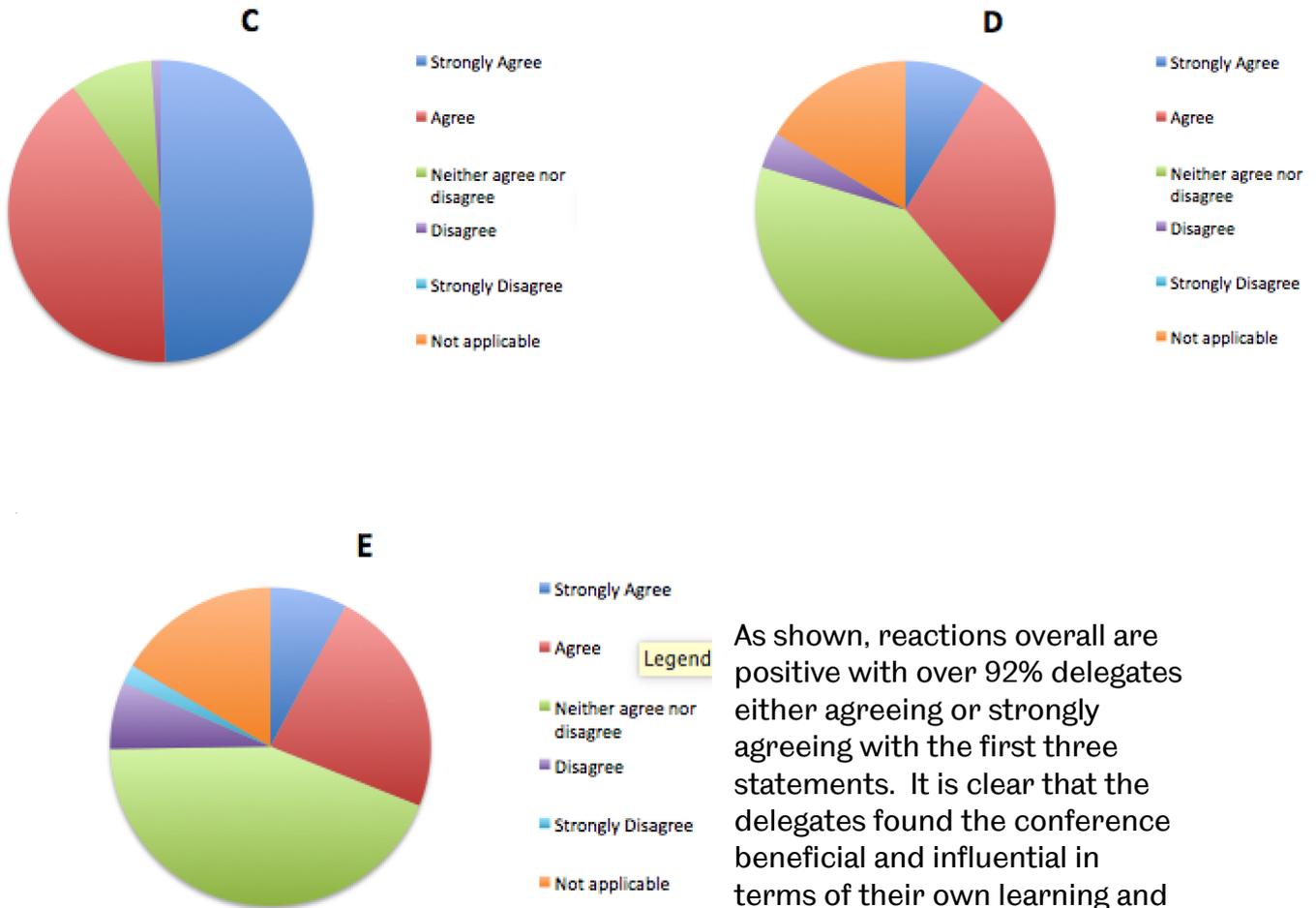
C: This conference provided an opportunity to network with colleagues from across the university.

D: The exhibition space raised my awareness of services that can support my learning and teaching practice.

E: The exhibition space introduced some new ideas, approaches or strategies that I will consider implementing in my learning and teaching practice.

The results were as follows:





As shown, reactions overall are positive with over 92% delegates either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the first three statements. It is clear that the delegates found the conference beneficial and influential in terms of their own learning and teaching practices.

One of the most common comments in regards to the conference was the ample opportunity to network with colleagues. Delegates made specific reference too the ease of discussion with new people, who share an interest in learning and teaching. Such opportunities also allowed for delegates to get different perspectives on the discussions that had taken place during the parallel sessions. With a majority of the positive feedback commenting on the networking during the conference, it can be said that this element of the conference was successful.

Many of the delegates commented on ways that they will implement new strategies into their learning and teaching. Examples include: new approaches to teaching and interacting with students, utilising new technology such as Adobe Connect or Google Classroom. One of the delegates tweeted the day after the event saying 'Already putting what I learnt yesterday at #SLTC16, my first screencast is live.' Another delegate commented that 'I have much more faith in Google Classroom, now that I have met people I trust who use it.' Out of those who answered the question 'Would you re-attend the conference in 2017?' The vast majority said they would consider re-attending, only two people said they wouldn't one of whom is retiring.

With regards to the exhibition, it is unclear as to how many delegates attended. The questionnaire (both online and the paper copy) could have been considered somewhat misleading, as a 'not applicable' option was not provided. This means that many of the delegates who were indifferent to the exhibition may not have attended. With this in mind however those who did visit the exhibition gave positive feedback with the majority agreeing that it raised their awareness of services that can provide support for their learning and teaching practice.

Discussions with delegates also highlighted how the exhibition seems too separated from the conference, as it is located in a separate area to where the majority of the delegates are located. This means that people do not take advantage of the exhibitions that were present, despite additional refreshments being served on the same level as the exhibition. Suggested solutions included holding the conference in the Delhi, adjacent to Uni-Central, to encourage more people to attend during the lunch break.

Regarding the sessions

Many positive comments were made regarding the introductory session and the keynote speech. Delegates stated that it provided a 'good insight into the aims of the University.'

Feedback from the sessions showed that the delegates were extremely satisfied with the variation of the presentations. Common responses expressed an appreciation for the diversity for the ideas and discussions, which went on throughout the day, in addition many delegates agreed that the sessions showed examples of excellent learning and teaching practices. When answering the question 'What were the most positive aspects of the conference?' one delegate responded by saying that it was 'difficult to choose, good plenaries, great sessions, wanted to see more.'

The feedback brought attention to specific areas for improvement in regards to the sessions such as the amount of time for 'post-talk' discussion. The variety and diversity of the presentations throughout the day meant that many delegates wished to attend more talks than the conference allowed for, this was shown by several requests for more parallel sessions. In addition, due to each parallel session containing two or more presentations the time for an in-depth question and answer was limited. This was specifically the case when there were three presentations in an individual parallel session. Possible solutions were mentioned within the feedback and 'stricter time keeping' and 'longer sessions' were some suggestions. This year over 70 abstracts were submitted which was a fantastic response. Due to this the conference aimed to provide as many of these as possible with as much variety for delegates. All presentations will be available to view on the online web

resource, so that delegates can get any information that was missed on the day.

Regarding the venue

The conference took place on levels four and five of the students union building, utilising the space of Uni-Central dining hall and Inox Dine, throughout the day. Despite some maintenance work taking place within the union the comments regarding the venue were largely positive.

This year a new catering system was put in place for both the lunch break and the drinks reception, to prevent large queues from forming. Positive comments regarding the food itself and the new catering system were common in the feedback and in various discussions with delegates.

The only issue to arise in regarding the venue was the lack of seating during lunch. This was an issue, which arose due to the difficulty of eating the food, which was provided whilst standing. Delegates were understanding and knew that space was limited particularly downstairs in the dining hall, however, using more of the balcony space could improve the situation, as some seating in the surrounding area may not have been fully utilised.

Conclusion

Based on the feedback for the Tenth Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, overall the conference was successful in its aims. Particular areas of success included the ample opportunity to network with new colleagues who are of a similar mindset. The variety and diversity in sessions not only aided networking but was influential for many of those who attended. In sum delegates complemented the organisation of the conference and the event as a whole. Examples of this are delegates who said that 'there was a really good energy' and 'the event ran very smoothly'. The success of this conference marks an important point in the development of learning and teaching at the University and highlights just some of its future prospects.