



*'This was a timely response to an emerging community's desire to share issues and learning.'*  
Delegate feedback

It is recognised that new knowledge can be created by working across or between disciplines. Research funding is now targeted at interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary projects and multi-disciplinary project groups are not uncommon. Much of the published research surrounding interdisciplinarity has focussed on interdisciplinary research and the issues and challenges it brings. In higher education institutions where research informs teaching practice, it is inevitable that interdisciplinarity should feature in teaching. A number of institutions have recently introduced 'interdisciplinary' modules, programmes of study or schemes, each with a view to extending the student's experience of subjects and approaches. Literature on how this might be undertaken is scarce and staff involved in building, delivering and evaluating these initiatives have had to find their own ways to manage student understanding and expectations – often in contrast to discipline-specific approaches.

**Conference - Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching: Frameworks and Practice**  
**Thursday 7 April 2016, 10.00 - 16.30**

Following discussions within various networks (Combined Honours Network and Interdisciplinary Curriculum Group) colleagues at Sheffield felt that it would be beneficial to host an event in order to generate discussion around theories and practice of interdisciplinary learning and teaching. A conference was proposed to explore new theories and models, to share examples of interdisciplinary learning and teaching in practice, and to help address the gaps in shared knowledge and experiences, with a view to sharing approaches that were both successful and unsuccessful.

The conference aimed to share frameworks, projects and experience through which interdisciplinary learning and teaching can be approached. It focussed on the emerging practices of interdisciplinary learning and teaching and how theoretical pedagogical frameworks might enhance and further develop interdisciplinary learning and teaching practice for foundation level students, undergraduates and taught-postgraduates. Areas of interest included:

- Possible theoretical and pedagogical frameworks for interdisciplinary learning at Foundation and HE level
- Value in using interdisciplinary learning to explore issues related to knowledge production
- The impact of interdisciplinary study on learning experiences
- Sharing of practice and experience in providing and promoting interdisciplinary learning opportunities
- Interdisciplinary learning within the curriculum and in extra-curricular, non credit-bearing activities

The response rate was high and we were able to schedule parallel sessions. The number of delegates and the range of papers was testament to the appetite across the sector, particularly given this was the first conference of this type. To have received over 35 submissions for papers/posters and workshops within a short time frame demonstrated the need for such an event.

There were around 100 delegates, representing 22 institutions, including two from Europe. Overall we had 40 speakers and workshop facilitators and 7 poster contributions. A full list of delegates and institutions can be found in the [conference programme](#).







## Conference Feedback

Following the event, an evaluation form was forwarded to delegates. Forty-four, or just under half of the delegates, responded. The feedback from the event was very positive, with over 86% agreeing that it was excellent or very good. No one felt it was poor. Over 40% would like to see another conference organised and over 37% suggested that a 'network' would be a logical next step.

On a scale of 1-5 (5 being excellent and 1 being poor) how would you rate the event?

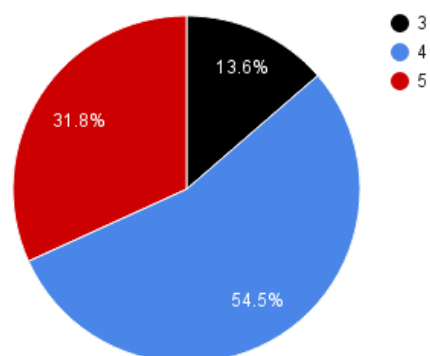


Fig. 1 Data from 44 respondents

### Feedback included:

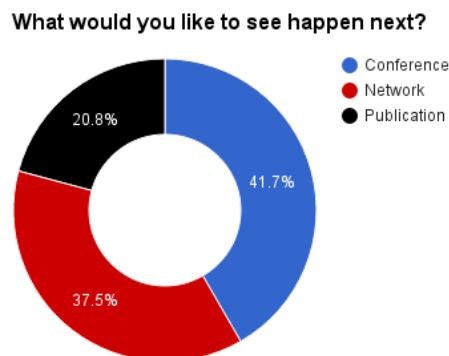
'...A really good range of thought-provoking and innovative talks and workshops that helped me to think carefully about what interdisciplinarity is - and isn't!...'

'Well organised with an excellent range of speakers and workshops.'

'A great range of speakers and delegates. Particularly as it was 'from scratch'.

'There were a good range of speakers, and unlike some conferences where people are really talking about their pet project that they somehow made seem like it was related to the conference topic, everything here was really about digging into interdisciplinarity in lots of different ways...'

### Suggestions for future activity included:



*'I'd really like to hear about the outcomes of the project, how it informs University strategy'*

*'A publication and an online network would both be very useful. A future conference of the same quality would be good to see.'*

*'Another conference - perhaps annually? - would be interesting, to see how interdisciplinarity has moved on / developed in the sector by this time next year. I'd also be interested in reading a publication - pulling together all the varying definitions / theories / practice in this area. An online network would also be interesting to be part of!'*

*'I think a conference looking more widely at interdisciplinarity activities across the UK would be helpful. Perhaps with several universities involved in the organization?'*

*'Another conference (perhaps in a year's time) would allow everyone to reconvene and discuss the progress of some of the programmes/initiatives talked about this year. In the meantime, a publication would be a wonderful way of collating the many ideas discussed at the conference. An online network would also be a good way for people involved in the conference to keep in touch and update one another about their work.'*

*'I'd like to see a hub that collates ongoing interdisciplinary teaching and examples of good practice at Sheffield and beyond.'*

### Conclusions and next steps

The event was received positively and helped staff supporting and developing interdisciplinary learning and teaching to share good practice, explore new approaches and learn from colleagues. Whilst Sheffield is not in a position to host another conference in the near future, its involvement in shaping this event is likely to help positively influence further developments in the sector. Sheffield colleagues are actively engaging in cross sector networks, such as the Interdisciplinary Curriculum Group and the Combined Honours Network, as well as carrying out their own practice based research. There is a clear need for this across the sector and it is hoped that a further conference will be hosted by another institution. The papers and presentations will be shared on the [conference website](#) for future reference.