Developing the University of Brighton as a Health Promoting University: a pilot project final report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Acknowledgements

FOREWORD

The ambition to become a Health Promoting University presents a significant challenge, especially in the political and financial climate of 2011. But it is one which is fundamental to the purposes of this university. It proposes a unity of ends and means. It suggests that it is ultimately more worthwhile and productive to take the extra time and discussion to create a work and study environment which is enjoyable and fulfilling than to fall back on apparently easier authoritarian behaviours.

It requires the exercise of respect, tolerance and wisdom and a belief in the value of communal actions. It asks for and will foster positive thinking and optimism, even in the face of very testing circumstances.

This report speaks of the nature of that challenge, of how this university is currently placed and of how we can make further progress. I look forward to hearing your views on its analysis and proposals over the next few months.

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Developing the Health Promoting University (HPU) means using a 'whole organisation' approach to embed health, wellbeing and sustainable development into the ethos, culture, policies and daily processes of the university.

In 2009 the University of Brighton funded a two-year developmental project to determine the feasibility of establishing the university as an HPU. This work was overseen by a dedicated HPU project steering group (PSG) which included representatives of the u
Management Team
Departments of Sport and Recreation, Student Services, Occupational Health, Health and Safety, Marketing and Communications, together with the International Health Development Research Centre (IHDRC). The IHDRC team was commissioned to carry out the research underpinning the pilot project, the coordination of the project and its monitoring and evaluation.

The main project objectives were:

> to create a healthy and sustainable working, learning and living environment for all students, staff and visitors

A series of findings from Phase One (the research element of the project), together with a set of interim recommendations, were made to the PSG early in 2010 (Davies & Newton 2010). These findings directly informed the development of a series of high profile interventions in Phase Two of the project.

The two-year pilot was monitored and evaluated and the findings and recommendations summarised below.

MAIN FINDINGS

Key themes

Underpinning principles and values

affordable food choices, fresh water and sport and physical activity as examples.

The university was positively perceived in terms of being well led and well managed, having a caring and supportive culture which valued staff and students and supported their health and wellbeing.

The status of becoming an HPU was seen as positive and a useful tool for linking up, embedding and adding extra value to existing good practice within the university.

The HPU project was perceived as being equitable, with opportunities for engagement with staff and students made available at different points of the project. Further uptake of HPU concepts was expected with increased understanding about the HPU.

The sustainability of HPU was perceived as being dependent upon its inclusion in a formal university strategy, which could for example, stem from inclusion in the corporate plan as well as other related strategies/plans.

The key to embedding the project into university policies and practices   -
from key stakeholders as well as inclusion in relevant policies and practices.

Sustainability was a prevalent cross-cutting theme throughout the HPU project. Key strengths were recognised in elaborating upon, and making efforts to link, the health and sustainability agendas, made possible through existing university structures (eg Environmental Action Networks (EANs), the Sustainable Development Policy Management Group (SDPMG) and tangible ways to further health and sustainability links were realised during the HPU project.

External links were identified to contribute to the sustainability of the HPU including community partners, national, European and International HPU networks.

Funding and/or human resources were also recognised as key factors to ensuring the sustainability of the HPU.

Building healthy public policy

Policies and practices already in existence at the university were largely viewed positively and as being sympathetic to health and wellbeing.

Although the university was generally seen as supportive in this regard, variability and lack of coordination due to the nature of its

multisite campus were found to be a challenge.

The HPU was perceived as being able to make a contribution to the development of a healthy university policy, through increased awareness of its potential to improve health and wellbeing of staff and therefore further motivation to formalise HPU concepts into university-

to engage more fully with Estates and Facilities Management in planning future building design and use.

Strengthening community action

Opportunities for involvement, consultation and participation in decision making at the university were perceived as being a positive way in which to strengthen community action. Success was considered achievable through meaningful involvement and participation and through improved communication channels.
The HPU project was perceived as having

consideration in the future development of the HPU.

The project was perceived as having been empowering to those involved on the PSG, with potential for concepts of empower**m**ent resulting from the HPU-funded projects. Further exploration of the term

community, supported by relevant policies and practices (eg the Widening Participation Strategy, Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP), On Our Doorsteps and Active Student initiatives).

A suggestion for more time and resources to be formally allocated was recommended in this regard.

Wider community engagement was considered, although not explored to its full potential due to time and resource limitations of the HPU project. Future opportunities were perceived as existing with strong community links already having been established, for example, the CUPP programme.

core business of teaching and learning and fully embedding community partnerships was recognised as being important.

Public health drivers

Overall, there was a perceived provision of and access to healthy food and physical activity as well as an awareness of the support and services available for mental health and smoking cessation (as

examples), with variability between different campuses.
Lack of social space and communal areas

Students who attended an HPU were perceived as feeling safe, with a more rounded education, achieving better results and being more employable.

The HPU strategy was seen as one way of embedding health and wellbeing into the curriculum.

HPU status was perceived as becoming a tool for making the university distinguishable and thus be good for student and staff recruitment and retention.

There was uncertainty as to whether HPU had actually improved core business priorities, perhaps due to the lack of awareness from the outset about HPU. The potential for using HPU to improve core business priorities was recognised, with the corporate plan suggested as a key starting point to facilitate this process.

The growing importance was recognised of

the HPU could contribute to the wider positive student experience; the HPU could positively support changes underway in higher education; the project can be used as a catalyst to move this area forward; wide interest expressed to contribute to future HPU developments; opportunities identified for interdepartmental working; to continue to embed HPU concepts into the u
policies and practices.

Main threats: HPU could either detract from core business or be lost amongst other priorities; lack of recognition and/or interest and therefore understanding of beneficial aspects of the HPU to staff and students; misperception that the HPU could add another layer of bureaucracy to everyday practice; undefined roles and responsibilities in progressing the HPU and lack of ongoing coordination coupled with competing workload pressures; finite resources during a difficult economic period; demotivation and lack of resilience to current changes/financial and other cuts; the multisite/split-site nature of the university was perceived as being a major challenge in terms of variability and lack of consistency.

Project dissemination took place throughout the pilot project period and helped to raise its profile internally as well as externally. Opportunities exist for the continuation of dissemination of project activities at local, national and international levels. The final report and key outcomes of the project will be disseminated widely during autumn 2011.

Outcomes

HPU outcomes were varied and included eight HPU-funded interventions. Three of these were aimed at staff, two at students and the remainder at both staff and students. All of the projects contributed to the HPU approach and had the overall aim to improve the health and wellbeing of staff and students.

Whilst **outcomes** were perceived as being easier to evaluate, time constraints meant that the interventions were evaluated as work in progress. The importance of maintaining contact with national, European and international networks was reinforced. The HPU monitoring exercise outlined examples of good practice underway at the university on a broad range of health topics,

with 68 examples collated during the monitored period.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To move from project to mainstream by developing the university as a Health Promoting University (HPU) as a mindset/culture underpinned by appropriate principles and values

The university should maintain impetus by continuing to develop as a Health Promoting University as HPU status would be good for business due to increased recruitment, retention, productivity and morale, and reduced sickness and absenteeism. When considering the downturn in the economy, the HPU approach points to the value and cost-effectiveness of long-term investment in the human resources of the university. This applies in terms of both staff and students; for the internal benefit of the university as an institution and its external value to society in terms of social and economic engagement.

There exists a strong business case for the HPU. The HPU approach should be considered as a key

image it projects externally to the outside world and in particular distinguishes Brighton from other

universities. Key factors in adopting an

does not become lost amongst other priorities and receives a high level of strategic importance. Stakeholders at all levels of seniority from across the university (and including representatives of dea

and wellbeing. The work of the committee would need to be reported on and reviewed and it would need a home in the existing committee structure.

As well as relating to national healthy university developments, attention should be given to building potentially beneficial links to the growing European network of HPUs in order to learn good practice from international partners involved and apply in due course for potential European funding.

5. Comprehensive HPU communication and branding

To improve communication within the university and ensure high visibility for all HPU-related issues, a dedicated comprehensive internal HPU communication strategywet�be eto[dm.68 uropean f)-(und)3(in)3(fop

that all heads complete as part of the academic health review process. A core of stakeholders, such as key central departments, as well as academic

8. Staff wellbeing

Two HPU-funded interventions have highlighted the importance of good communication, sense of belonging and social support to staff wellbeing. The faculty-based pilot communication

community links are developed and maintained and are underpinned by principles of health promotion in all the university sites.

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www.brighton.ac.uk/snm/research/ihdrc