**A quantitative and qualitative investigation into communications sent to students for selected level 1 MST and science modules**

**Nicolette Habgood:**

I bumped in to a colleague the other day and she was asking me about eSTEeM because she’s interested in sort of starting a project and it just made me think about why did we start? What made us interested in the first place? Can you remember?

**Linda Robson:**

Yeah, there was a call came round from eSTEeM on email asking for people that were interested in particular topic areas and I had a look at it. I couldn’t actually think of a project myself but I was just keen to be involved in some scholarship. So I put my name forward.

**Lynda Cook:**

Yes, that’s similar for me in a sense that I wanted to get involved in scholarship and we’d had a CDSA meeting and mentioned about doing some scholarship as well as students support teams had been implemented at that time. So I was interested in student support teams and their role.

**Nicolette Habgood:**

Yeah, and that’s right, you’ve triggered my memory as well. So I was involved in sort of setting up student support teams and as such I was interested in all the generic emails that were going to be going out to students. So that was my interest.

So did we actually then start? I mean what did we do next can you remember?

**Linda Robson:**

eSTEeM called a meeting where those of us that were interested in a particular topic area got together and we kicked around a few ideas. And then we identified that the three of us had a common interest in student communications.

**Lynda Cook:**

And I recall that we did some initial investigation ourselves and we were amazed at the amount of communications that were sent to students and in particular emails that were sent to students. And also it raised a concern, was this effective communication.

**Nicolette Habgood:**

As staff tutors we’re quite fortunate in the fact that we have access to voice so we can look at student records and get all the sort of quantitative data. But eSTEeM provided us with other support. Can you remember what that was?

**Linda Robson:**

Yeah, one of the key things for me I found was just being part of the eSTEeM label which meant that in legitimised spending time doing scholarship and that was really, really useful. But then in more practical terms they gave us contacts in LTI and particularly with the ethics clearance when it came to talking to students it was really useful to have their support through that process.

**Lynda Cook:**

Yes. And in regard to the students we wanted involved in the project we wanted students to sort of buy in and eSTEeM were able to give us some resource to give an incentive to those students. So that was really useful as well.

**Nicolette Habgood:**

Yeah, I think that worked really well actually because it did get a good take-up to the survey. And also they provided us with resource to pay the tutors, the ALs, to actually undertake interviews. So I think that was really helpful.

So we had 20 days research allocated to undertake this project. How did we manage to do it?

**Linda Robson:**

It’s really around organisation. I found that actually working with other people was really useful because then when we’d set a deadline I felt obliged to meet it and on my own often they would slip a lot more. So that was really key for me.

**Lynda Cook:**

Yes. And I remember we had a website set up. So we had access to that website and the ALs had access to that it so we had a central repository where we could store any resources.

**Nicolette Habgood:**

Yeah, that was good. And we used the online room in the website didn’t we to brief the ALs. So that was really helpful.

So we had three key findings that I recollect from the project. Can you remember what they were?

**Lynda Cook:**

One was definitely the volume of messages that are sent to students. A lot of email messages from different areas of the university.

**Linda Robson:**

One that was quite surprising was that actually students are happy to receive lots of email messages and they’re quite competent in selecting out the ones that they particularly want to read.

**Nicolette Habgood:**

Yeah, I remember. And that was unexpected to all of us. And I suppose the main finding was not unsurprisingly that the emails they value most were the ones that came from their tutors.

So we presented our findings. Where did we start?

**Lynda Cook:**

Well we started with the eSTEeM Conference so that gave us a really nice platform to share our initial sort of twelve months of work. And we presented it as a poster.

**Linda Robson:**

And then we went international and had a fabulous time at the INTED Conference in Valencia where we were able to present but also we benefited from seeing lots of other presentations there which for me certainly sparked some ideas about future projects as well.

**Lynda Cook:**

That’s right. And then actually we presented as a presentation for the subsequent eESTeM Conference here. And that was really useful to be able to disseminate our findings with colleagues and take on board some feedback from those colleagues as well.

**Linda Robson:**

And those findings are also on ORO and on the scholarship platform. So they’re there for our colleagues to have a look at whenever they want to.

**Nicolette Habgood:**

So we shared our findings quite widely with, well everybody within the university including the Vice-Chancellor who is interested in our project which is quite nice. So personally what do we get out of doing the eESTeM research project?

**Lynda Cook:**

Well for me apart from really enjoying it also I was able to put it in to my promotion case.

**Linda Robson:**

And it’s really important because obviously scholarship is one of the key criteria in promotion so I’ve used it there as well. It was also great to be able to work with you two as well because I hadn’t really worked with you before so it’s a great way to meet new people and expand your network within the university.

**Nicolette Habgood:**

Yeah, absolutely. And for me it boosted my confidence. I wasn’t really sure if I could do pedagogic research before I did this project and I learnt that I could. So much so that in a couple of months I’m going to be actually presenting at the Higher Education Academy Conference, so that’s been really good.

And of course we’ve got our sort of ongoing friendship and support.

**Linda Robson:**

It’s been fabulous.

**Lynda Cook:**

Absolutely.

**Nicolette Habgood:**

Yes it has hasn’t it? Thank you.