

Keynote Address by John Hilsdon:

John is Head of Learning Development at the University of Plymouth and a National Teaching Fellow. His work has contributed to Learning Development as a field of practice in Higher Education. He helped set up the UK network of learning developers in 2002, and was the first Chair of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (see www.aldinhe.ac.uk). He is co-editor of the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (www.aldinhe.ac.uk/ojs).

John's main interest is in how students can make sense of - and get the most from - their learning experiences at university, through their participation in the language and practices of academic life, and their subject disciplines. As one of the Learning Area Coordinators for the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, 'LearnHigher', he has developed learning materials for academic writing (the 'WrAssE' project), and on the themes of critical thinking and reflection. He is co-editor of 'Learning Development in Higher Education' (Palgrave Macmillan). In the last three years John has delivered presentations and led research seminars at the University of Lancaster; University of Oxford; Chiba University, Japan; the University of the West of England; and Bournemouth University. He is currently working towards a doctorate in education.

'Co-producing not consuming! Students as partners in learning development'

Can learning developers help to build approaches that position students as partners and co-producers of knowledge at university? And can we also counter the apparent tendency for students to see themselves - and to be seen – merely as customers or consumers in a marketplace? The current changes in the English HE sector following the Browne Review place the payment of fees at the heart of the 'contract' between student and university, and are based on the notion that the quality of the student experience will only be increased by encouraging competition between institutions. A 'customer satisfaction' model of education may have some positive impacts in terms of getting universities to think about what students want and what will support their learning, but there are also dangers in such an approach. A model that presents courses primarily as products to be paid for, rather than as knowledge production and life experiences to be engaged with, risks encouraging students to be passive consumers rather than active creators. In these times of constant change, with threats to our wellbeing from environmental, climatic, economic and political crises, universities need to encourage transformative learning for a sustainable social and economic future. Learning developers and their initiatives can make a positive contribution to these goals. Furthermore, I argue that a learning development perspective offers a way to focus on the student experience that does not depend solely upon a 'customer satisfaction' model but which encourages participation, creativity and critical thinking as fundamental to the student role, and which reminds universities of these aspects of their mission.