



Service-Learning at De Montfort University - the emergent field that uses learning for good to deliver impact



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DMU Service-Learning Initiative led by:

- Social Impact and Engagement Directorate
- Centre for Academic Innovation
- DMU Education for Sustainable Development

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Social Impact and Engagement Directorate



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- Project looked at how Service-Learning was currently understood, implemented and its potential at DMU
- 27 survey responses were analysed against criteria in the European Observatory of Service Learning in Higher Education definition:

“Service Learning (sometimes referred to as community based or community engaged learning) is a pedagogical approach that integrates meaningful community service or engagement into the curriculum and offers students’ academic credit for the learning that derives from active engagement within the community and work on a real world problem. Reflection and experiential learning strategies underpin the learning process and the service is linked to the academic discipline.” (EOSLHE, 2020)



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All responses were positive and supportive of the idea of the development of a Service-Learning agenda, but the extent of Service-Learning adoption as understood by the EOSLHE definition varied significantly as Table 1 shows.

Table 1: Summary of Criteria Demonstrated by programme

Criteria Demonstrated	ADH	BAL	CEM	HLS
All 6	2	1		3
5	1			1
3-4	6	1	1	1
1-2	2		2	
None	1			3



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- Twenty one submissions all contained some form or element of Service-Learning
- Six submissions were able to demonstrate practice that hit all six elements of the EOSLHE definition
- Three examples came from courses where the Service-Learning reflected the discipline - reflecting necessity for experiential or practice-based learning
- The majority of the six full examples came were developed as an innovative practice to engage students in learning.
- Examples included courses on Arts and Humanities-based programmes and also courses that link public policy to lived experiences



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- Two examples did not evidence a full Service-Learning approach because of one missing element of the EOSLHE definition.
- In one case this was the omission of reflective learning on practice, the other was described as ‘extra-curricular activity’ and also not assessed.
- Despite being extra-curricular there was still strong evidence of it being linked to the programmes and being used pedagogically as a method to teach the course content.



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- There were three other notable examples. One hit one of the key elements of the definition: 'working on a real-world problem'. This course described a practice where students work on a 'live brief' with industry. Field work constituted site visits rather than work with the organisation
- The second example fell short of full because it didn't include any element of direct service with the community and therefore no reflective work on that engagement. However, the course engages with real-world issues
- The final example was one that used extra-curricular international trips on its programme. These were not embedded as part of the assessed curriculum but still a good example of community engagement
- Four responses evidenced no element of Service-Learning at all
- Yet these and many other comments highlighted staff willingness to engage with different types of activity that had external impact beyond their teaching
- All these findings indicate a clear potential and willingness for development at DMU



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Mutual Benefit

- One of the key principles of Service-Learning is the concept of 'mutual benefit',
- Eight respondents evidenced work in community settings with little or no evidence of community engagement that would benefit the community partner
- Just two respondents to the survey were viewed as having some evidence of mutual benefit and in both cases indicated opportunities for the teaching to be developed further to meet the definition of Service-Learning
- Results indicate willingness and opportunity for stronger community engagement or social impact through co-creation of projects to be developed.



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Assessment

- Of the 19 responses indicating a Service-based element within the teaching, just four courses assessed students on their learning as a result of this activity
- Examples of assessment varied greatly
- Another five academics said the Service-Learning was not directly assessed, but students were encouraged to reflect on what they had learned as part of essays and dissertations which were ultimately assessed
- What is evident is that there is a direct link to student learning outcomes but how this is assessed is far from uniform



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- **Staff engagement**
- Evidence of a strong desire amongst many academic colleagues to provide real-world experiences as part of the taught curriculum within a broad spectrum of disciplines.
- What was less evident is a unified approach to how this might be achieved
- Throughout the focus groups, discussions, email exchanges and surveys it was clear that colleagues from a wide variety of subject disciplines were interested in the practice and develop their teaching and learning to include a community-based element or enhance it
- Key area of consideration is the academic discipline – some may have little leeway for change, others might harness Service-learning to enhance student engagement, employability and citizenship.
- These opportunities and barriers from the findings form interesting basis for discussion



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Discussion:

How would you like to see Service-Learning at DMU develop?

What are the barriers?

Are you aware of current support (DMU Local/CAI)?

What support would you need?

What ideas do you have to move this agenda forward?



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Thank you for listening!

Please get involved:

- Email: mcharlton@dmu.ac.uk
- Visit DMU ESD website: <https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk/service-learning-at-dmu/>
- Public Engagement Community of Practice fi.donovan@dmu.ac.uk
- Look out for future events!



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