

A coaching case study of BA (Hons) Sport Business Management students (2009-2012)

Pre-amble:

This paper refers to an undergraduate 3-year degree programme where students were gradually (year on year) introduced to a new system of 'coaching'. This innovative approach was endorsed by a 3 year JISC funded programme and led by Professor Janet Finlay who set up a support team to assist in the research and development of a programme known as PC3-Personalised Curriculum Creation through Coaching. Downey (2003:21) defines coaching as "...the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another". This emphasis demonstrates a shift in the needs and demands of potential students with a focus on what Nothedge (2003) describes as a learning process, which is initiated and accomplished by the student. The major pedagogic shift here is from a teacher/lecturer lead to a student lead for a variety of personal and professional development initiatives within the course.

Over the timeframe of the funding, the PC3 programme changed direction on a number of occasions (refer to the Institutional Story for further details) but what follows is a case study which evidences a systematic approach to rolling out a 'coaching ethos' to a new cohort of student every year for 3 years. However, because of the way in which this approach was received by the students and because of the compatibility with business coaching the PC3 'coaching ethos' soon became integrated into each level of the degree and even as an assessed piece of work at each level. Clutterbuck and Megginson (2008) relate to this strategy when they recognise that coaching can be linked as a main driver to support core business.

The programmes success must not only be evidenced by the staff's recognition of the pedagogic value of this change but more significantly by the 'students voice' which demonstrated that the 'coaching value' was to be recognised as being an essential tool in the delivery of a series of modules and where the students themselves are identified as the true 'agents of change'. Indeed Northedge (2003:169) goes on to demonstrate a greater insight into his theory when he states, "the teacher's role is to 'facilitate' this learning". This directional change must also be recognised against a backdrop of modular reductions and periodic review where the pressures and constraints of traditional Personal Development modules are often perceived as having little value. In these cases modules similar to the ones in this case study are diminishing and being replaced by less modules with increased academic content or modules with a new graduate attribute focus such as e-learning and globalisation.

Introduction:

As with the ideology of business coaching, coaching in this academic sense of the word has also taken some of its influence from the visible aspects of today's sports coaches who have helped to shape the 'thinking and approaches to applying coaching in the workplace' (Parsloe and Leedham 2009:5). This complicated mix between the true

meaning of the word 'coaching' was described to the students in the context of enhancing their own personal development skills, however some students still found it hard to distinguish between coaching (in this academic sense), sport coaching and mentoring;

Student 1:

'I'm enthusiastic about using coaching; we used personal coaching between students in our Work Based Learning Module last year. I felt being coached benefitted me as I became to realise that I was actually aware of all my weaknesses and with the encouragement of my coaching buddy became perfectly aware of what I needed to change about myself in order to develop. However, without the mentoring of my coaching buddy I wouldn't of asked myself the same questions and would probably not have acknowledged my weaknesses.'

While it is good to see the value which this student places on coaching it is also noticeable that towards the end of this statement the student adds the word mentoring and therefore it may be true to suggest that in this case student 1 may have received benefits from a form of mentoring practice as well as from a genuine coaching practice. However, this is common place and not unique to this case study; indeed Parsloe and Leedham (2009:3) even note that '...it is not surprising that there is still confusion over definitions and language' and Downey (2003) notes that other than coaching there is a range of other approaches such as counselling, self-actualisation movement and neuro-linguistic programming. There is no wonder then, that students then may often understand the academic way, which they have been taught to coach but that they often get confused about whether it is coaching, sports coaching or mentoring etc.

To demonstrate this further, student 2, makes comments about receiving advice from their partner and this can only serve to highlight some of the confusion around the introduction to the ethos of coaching; *'Not only was I helped out when I asked my coaching partners for advice, but also when they came to me to ask me for help I was able to see the different angles that people were taking to tackle the assignments. It was very beneficial to me.'*

However, noting the above some students do recognise the importance of coaching in relation to the modern day society in which we live and more importantly from a perspective of employment and the benefits it brings;

Student 3:

'Coaching is something of which I feel is really important in my self development in two ways; I need to be coached to aid with my education and all round development but also the ability to coach others is a useful tool to aid in developing skills of which I will need to use once employed as I do aim to work at higher levels within an organisation therefore the ability to coach successfully will be an important skill.'

Student 4 also provides an insight into how much they have valued the coaching work, which they completed on the course;

'The experience definitely benefited my Work Based Learning work as my coaching partner helped me to make my outcomes SMARTER and also made me more confident'

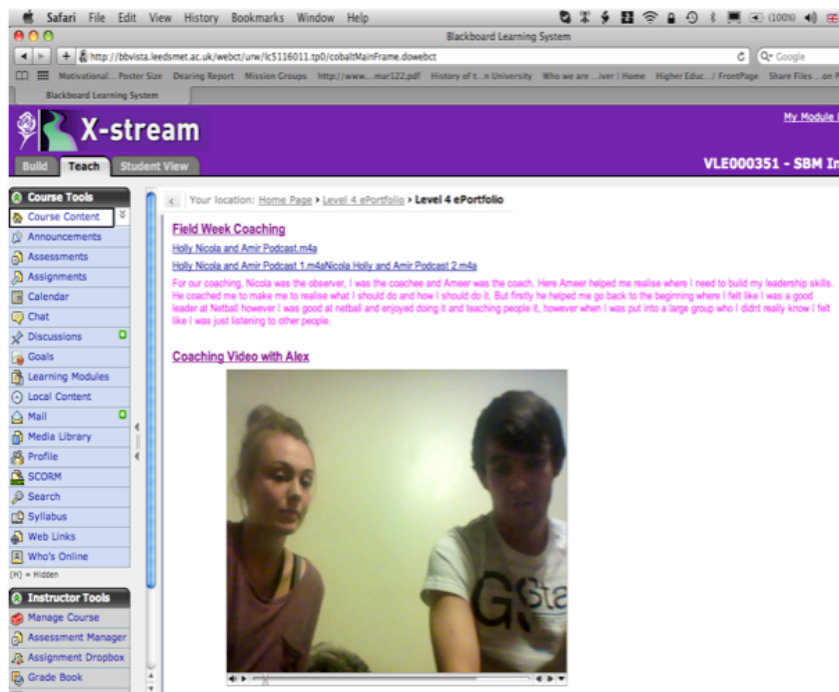
Although some of the evidence above demonstrates confusion about the use of coaching and mentoring and identifies that in some cases 'advice' has been provided, Jack and Matt below demonstrate their use of coaching and in particular the way in which appropriate questioning can put the emphasis back on the coachee;

Jack: I think that they are all important but one thing that really struck me during completing the diagnostic exercises and completing work in semester 1 was that I have poor time management skills, so I feel that the learning outcome 'Work along with members of staff to effectively manage my time in working towards deadlines' will help me to improve upon this.

Matt: Why do you think that time management is a problem to you?

Jack: Well I first found it whilst doing my a-levels and I found that I rushed to do work and therefore it reduced the quality of the finished article dramatically.

Matt: Why is time management important to you then and how did you come over your difficulty?



Holly's (L4) e-portfolio (on the Virtual Learning Environment-X-Stream) which evidences a number of 'coaching' podcasts.

These questions are open ended and avoid being 'leading or loaded' (Parsloe and

Leedham2009:153), which may mislead the coachee or promote a response which has been predetermined by the coach.

In September 2010, the BAHSBM course team introduced the theory of coaching to their L4 students via a Personal Development Planning module where the staff, coached the students through critical personal development scenarios. This included gaining the students confidence in a tutorial system and introducing them to University life. Cottrell (2003:81) demonstrates this best by explaining that 'intra-personal skills and qualities (how you manage yourself and your attitudes) will be of value throughout the entirety of you're life. In today's society where an environment based on overcoming and counteracting the trends of the latest recession are paramount in Higher Education a value for money approach where a course focuses on personal development as well as academic content may put students in an advantageous position as far as employment is concerned.

Wherever possible each student was allocated the same tutor throughout their time at University so the aim was very much to allow these coaching sessions to build rapport and enhance the student learning and engagement for the students' duration at University.

The course team then devised an 'employability pathway' which has been integrated into the academic curriculum and the following sub headings relate to the modules which are delivered in this pathway and provide examples of the modules where 'coaching' is currently delivered:

2012 Level 4-Personal and Professional Management Skills:

Coaching is embedded with the L4 PPMS module (Personal and Professional Management Skills-which replaced the Personal Development Planning module in September 2012). In this module staff, coach the students through a comprehensive tutorial system of at least 3 x 20 minute timetabled coaching sessions and these sessions are in addition to their normal tutor appointments which every student is entitled to.

Students also have to evidence their own coaching with other students:

Assessment guideline:

- Students will be working in 2s or 3s to facilitate improvements to the skill levels of both yourself and others.
- Students will practice this skill while on Field Week (an activity based and academic week in the Lake District as part of the Faculty's induction and retention policy).
- This then becomes a factor in your overall learning and development and it should permeate all levels of learning and assessment

Session 7 Week 5 26-300911	ACADEMIC TUTORIALS Each seminar group will be divided in two; each half will be provided with a 20-minute academic tutorial in either the morning or afternoon session.
Session 8 Week 5 26-300911	ACADEMIC TUTORIALS Each Seminar group will be divided in two; each half will be provided with a 20-minute academic tutorial in either the morning or afternoon session.
Session 9 Week 6 031011	ACADEMIC TUTORIALS Each Seminar group will be divided in two; each half will be provided with a 20-minute academic tutorial in either the morning or afternoon session.
Session 10 Week 7 Friday 101011	Lecture Topic/Lead Lecture: Cross-cultural capability, Diversity and Employability – Nick Halafihi Content: Introduction to Cross-cultural capability, diversity and education. Developing skills for future employment, opportunities during your degree Seminar Task: Portfolio development and checklist. Ensuring your portfolio is complete. Final task – critical reflection of identified skills for improvement
Session 11 Week 8 171011	ACADEMIC TUTORIALS Liaise with you personal tutor to book a suitable time and place
Session 12 Week 9 241011	ACADEMIC TUTORIALS Liaise with you personal tutor to book a suitable time and place
Session 13 Week 10 311011	ACADEMIC TUTORIALS Liaise with you personal tutor to book a suitable time and place
Session 14 Week 11 071111	ACADEMIC 'BUDDY' TUTORIAL Liaise with your L6 'Buddy' to arrange a suitable time and place
Session 15 Week 12 141111	ACADEMIC 'BUDDY' TUTORIAL Liaise with your L6 'Buddy' to arrange a suitable time and place
Session 16 Week 13 211111	ACADEMIC 'BUDDY' TUTORIAL Liaise with your L6 'Buddy' to arrange a suitable time and place
Session 17 Week 14 281111	ACADEMIC 'BUDDY' TUTORIAL Liaise with your L6 'Buddy' to arrange a suitable time and place
Session 18 Week 15 051211	ACADEMIC 'BUDDY' TUTORIAL Liaise with your L6 'Buddy' to arrange a suitable time and place
Session 19 Week 16 121211	ACADEMIC 'BUDDY' TUTORIAL PPMS E-Portfolio Hand-in Date! (12 noon on 141211)
191211	CHRISTMAS BREAK
261211	CHRISTMAS BREAK
020112	CHRISTMAS BREAK
Session 20 Week 20 090111	ACADEMIC TUTORIALS Liaise with you personal tutor to book a suitable time and place
Session 21 Week 21 160111	ACADEMIC TUTORIALS Liaise with you personal tutor to book a suitable time and place
Session 22 Week 22 230111	ACADEMIC TUTORIALS Liaise with you personal tutor to book a suitable time and place

An overview of the PPMS Module (September 2012)

Note:

- We currently use timetabled seminar slots as academic tutorials and see the students in formal coaching sessions.
- Items which are discussed include:
- Academic progress-especially related to specific diagnostic exercise such as VARK and the University's 'Positive Future' books
- Pastoral developments
- Personal issues

Capturing the coaching and providing evidence:

- Electronically as a podcast or MP3 file
- Via a recording of the coaching meeting
- Via a social network

- Via an alternative method e.g. email thread

In future we aim to develop this innovation to assist students across other areas of the curriculum e.g. in preparation for assessments in other modules.

Here are some examples of this type of work;



Three level 4 students (2010) Will (on the left) is the Coach, Jonny (on the right) is the Coachee and Jay (behind) is the Observer

Student 5:

'We have used different methods within our coaching, including written via a social networking website, aurally face-to-face and over the telephone and finally we have used a voice recorder to have a permanent copy of our coaching sessions. I have also acted as an observer to help the other two in our group to ask the right questions to each other or prompt them when needed.'

And

'Both Kathryn and Amanda really helped me and we all worked well together through setting up a group on Facebook that we could all respond to and coach on there. This was easier than having to meet up to coach each other. It was more efficient to coach and respond to each other as and when we could online'

2012 L4-Planning for Work Based Learning

The Coaching ethos has also been introduced to additional areas of the curriculum including this module in 2011. Here students coach other students through work placement planning scenarios centered on the development of the students personal

Learning Outcomes (specific actions to be achieved during their placement). This unique pedagogy puts the students at the centre of their own learning in a very effective way. Ropers-Huilman and McCoy (2011:257) support this concept when they consider that 'Institutions could provide 'a developmental role, helping students to grow holistically'. In this case students are preparing for a 120-hour placement with a business or company who will aid their personal development in relation to eventual long-term employment.

The aim here, is to utilise these coaching sessions to build rapport, enhance the student experience and develop their level of engagement in an organic way but through a process where the students individual work with others will lead to an improvement of their personal and professional skills. Kelly (2004) is keen to point out that any curriculum content should be approached as a study of the social context and social relations rather than that of studying knowledge itself. This supports the course's ethos of approaching learning from varying perspectives rather than purely from a content and academic direction.

This example provides evidence to support Kelly's position and makes a connective between the students' academic work and the 'real-world' placement, which is a formal part of the students' assessment on this module [this conversation is taken from a facebook 'coaching' conversation];

Patrick

'George, as one of my weaknesses on the entrepreneurship questionnaire was initiative I would like to use this as one of my learning outcomes whilst I'm on work placement. I feel this should be an academic goal but struggling to know what to do it for? Please Help!'

George

In what areas do you think you can use your initiative in the work place?'

Patrick

'Initiative can be used in management. It is a very good skill to have within strategic management to be able to come up with new ideas to help improve the business. As I am going to do my work placement working with the managing department of a leisure club, I want to use test this skill within it. I feel that if I pair my weakness of initiative with one of my strengths such as communication I may be able to improve my weakness better than trying it alone. So I want my learning outcome to be based around them two skills.'

2012 L5-Work Based Learning

This module includes a coaching scenario as a formal summative assessment and the content outline below demonstrates this:

- Students will be doing this for each other.
- Students will be working in 2s or 3s to facilitate improvements in the skill levels of both yourself and others.
- Students will practice these skills in seminars over the weeks to come.
- This then becomes a factor in your overall learning and development as it should permeate all levels of learning and your assessment

This module differs from other modules because most of the coaching takes place while the students are actually on placement and away from the University.

Scheme of work

- Wk1 Lecture/Seminars: Work Experience Catch-Up, Where are you at, where should you be, what do you need to do next.
- Wk2 Lecture/Seminars: Authoring your own life choices. Taking positive steps forward and learning to accentuate the positive (Part 1)
- Wk3 Lecture: Authoring your own life choices. Taking positive steps forward and learning to accentuate the positive (Part 2) & Seminar: Group Tutorials with Personal Tutors
- WK4 Lecture: Learning Agreement Structure & Seminar: Group Tutorials with Personal Tutors
- WK5 Lecture: The Art of Coaching & Seminar: Applied Coaching Skills
- WK6: The Art of Reflection and Reflective Writing & Seminar: Coaching and Reflective Skills
- Wk7 Lecture: Poster Design and the Reflective Portfolio & Seminar: Q&A Session
- Wks 8-12 are reserved for individual tutorials with your assigned tutor.

An ongoing process:

As the students progress, the coaching emphasis relates more closely to improving the individual 'employability skills' and a self-assessment of each student's personal attributes. Although these self-assessments have been conducted at L4 as well, the diagnostic exercises which students use to complete the exercise is gradually directed towards their 'employability skills' through L5 (where work placements is the focus) and then towards a clear undivided 'employability' focus at L6.

Each student coaches another to enable them to bring out a 'common sense' approach to enhancing specific skills of their choice (level dependent). Cottrell (2003) refers to this as knowing your assets, understanding your limits and defining what you really want, something that Rogers (2004:163) discusses as a 'dilemma in action'. It is these 'actions', which help to add value to the BAHSBM degree course and while many courses have either reduced or devalued their PDP delivery and tutorial/individual contact time this course has increased this focus by integrating their 'employability pathway' which uses coaching as an essential tool in its effective delivery.

Here is an assessed reflection completed by student 5, which provides a detailed

overview of this case study and provides examples of many of the areas discussed above:

Assessment:

A reflection on the coaching process by student 6;

During this module we have been working together to help each other improve our learning agreements. The Coaching Academy (2010) states that 'If you are coached, you can take massive leaps forward in all parts of your life, career and relationships, as the coach, you benefit at the same time because when you coach someone you are also developing and growing yourself'. Personally I believe they have been really helpful. Through the coaching I've really had to think about each of my learning outcomes to see if they are actually what I want to achieve. Also by asking one and another why and how has made me ask myself why and how about my own work.

We have used different methods within our coaching, including written via a social networking website, aurally face-to-face and over the telephone and finally we have used a voice recorder to have a permanent copy of our coaching sessions. I have also acted as an observer to help the other two in our group to ask the right questions to each other or prompt them when needed. Specifically I have helped Catherine to finalise her learning outcomes as once I asked her questions she realised that some could be linked, which has allowed her to create more varied learning outcomes so that she can now gain the most from her work experience.

This student clearly understands the art of asking open ended and leading questions to gain a better more informed response from the coachee. The student discusses using the words 'why' and 'how' which will allow the coach to put the thought process squarely onto the ownership of the coachee. This student also values the other role of being an observer and clearly understands the importance of ensuring that the right types of questions are asked. The assets in this case (Cottrell, 2003) and the dilemma under discussion (Rogers, 2004), is the assessment of identifying appropriate learning outcomes prior to a work placement. Student 6 takes this a stage further by identifying a deeper level of analysis:

Student 6 summarises the benefits, which they have experienced while completing their coaching and also embeds the work of Palmer and McDowell (2010) regarding the promotion of a forward thinking approach;

Supporting evidence by student 7;

I feel that coaching should be used at every given or relative opportunity. It enables people to reach goals and achieve movement from where they currently are to where they want to be, in a shorter time frame, with more efficiency than you would see without the use of coaching. It improves relationships, strengthens skills and also brings to light the differing insights and ideas people have. Knowledge is power and the more you know and understand the quicker you can accomplish goals, which is initially what

coaching enables you to do. From using coaching in the past I certainly feel that it helped me immensely, it allowed me to critically analyse myself and I was able to turn the findings into solutions which enabled me to achieve the outcomes I had set for myself, I was also able to build a greater understanding of people and my inter personal relationships improved, my overall experience was that coaching works, it develops the attributes people have and makes it easier to understand and ultimately achieve tasks or goals set.

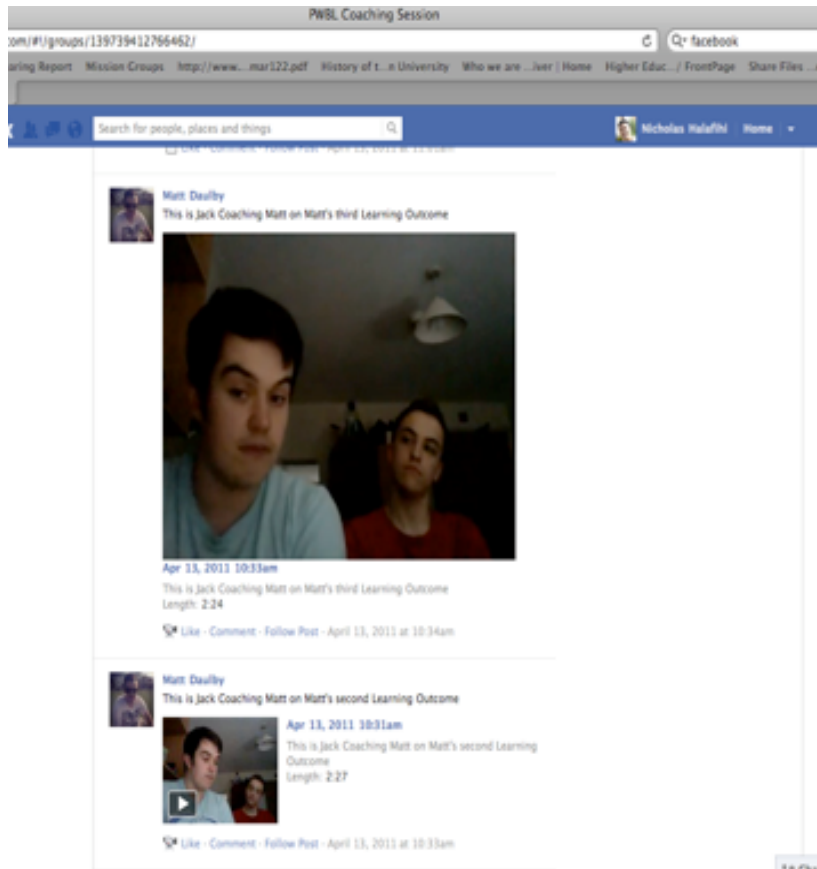
Palmer and McDowell (2010:63) also discuss the importance of setting goals and make a direct link to something which they call 'possible selves' these are representations of themselves in the future and this is most certainly aligned to student 2's comments regarding the setting of goals through the assessment which had been set i.e. identifying possible learning outcomes which can be achieved while on placement. Student 2 talks about how coaching '*ultimately achieves tasks or goals*' that will '*strengthen their skills*' and therefore improve some aspect of their personal development.

2012 L6-Continuedd Personal and Professional Development

This year has seen the development of a new phase of our coaching delivery skills, those of academic 'buddy' coaching-where students coach and are being coached by fellow students from outside of their comfort zone, i.e. students who they don't know directly but who have already been through the academic programme (L6 students), which they have recently embarked on (L4 students).

This strategy integrates the L4 PPMS and L6 CPPD students and is designed to help both students in their academic development This work encourages level 4 students to take on the role of the Coachee (looking for appropriate support in the early stages of their academic life) and the L6 students will take on the role of the Coach (looking to utilise their 3 years worth of coaching experience to assist a first year student). This 'buddy system' also reflects the industry specific element of coaching where colleagues assist and support each other through a similar process. 'A flexible framework, guiding principles and strategic approach to developing and implementing learning-centered curricula' Hubball and Burt (2004:51), is aligned to the ethos of this module where an appropriate learning process for students helps to support an area of the students development in a formal measured and open environment while maintaining the students themselves are at the heart of their own personal development.

This 'Academic 'buddy' partnership provides a unique learning environment where students can carry on developing their educational development away from the prying eyes of the tutor and in the privacy of a natural environment agreed on between the coach and the coachee. Indeed it is this environment where students can both hone their coaching skills and develop their personal development plan. This partnership between student and student also develops their interpersonal skills and is another example of how this pathway and the integrated PC3 work genuinely puts the student first (Palmer and McDowall, 2010). This is also evidenced below;



An example of a L4 'coaching group' on Facebook

Both Kathryn and Amanda really helped me and we all worked well together through setting up a group on Facebook that we could all respond to and coach on there. This was easier than having to meet up to coach each other. It was more efficient to coach and respond to each other as and when we could online. Through coaching it helped me to understand more about the point I was trying to make and decisions I made improved my experience in this area. I would definitely take the opportunity to do some coaching again, the effects of coaching have positively helped me with my outcomes, so I was not struggling myself it was great that others could help me and I could help them.

Summary:

Sing (2003) informs us that 'Learning requirements and the preferences of each learner tend to be different and it's the coaching focus (within the 'employability pathway') which evidences this in a unique and innovative way. Indeed it's the students themselves who are the 'change agents' here and who are responsible for each other's personal development.

This work is also able to bring the personal development of the students to the fore in a way, which has not been done previously. Dewey as cited in Wear and Skillicorn (2009) in Van Puymbroeck (2010) looks to explore the term 'the hidden curriculum'-Dewey suggests collateral learning [pastoral development also known as Continued

Professional Development] may have more of a lasting effect on learners than that of the formal curriculum. Perhaps this type of work, using the students as genuine 'agents of change' can eradicate the 'hidden curriculum' and make it more visible in a way which Cottrell (2003) and Rogers (2004) both argue would be a positive and refreshing pedagogic shift? In summary and as a way of evidencing once more, the level of student engagement in this research project and the process of coaching, the final example of student 7s comments are typical of the student feedback in general and will be used to evidence a student led focus in the new direction of the degree course as it changes its curriculum design in line with the University's Undergraduate Curriculum Refocus. The student voice is clear they are calling for an increased integration of coaching across other modules and a greater emphasis to be placed on a connective between their own personal diagnostic exercises and their coaching focus. These new elements have all been embedded in the courses new Course Approval Template and this in itself is evidence of how students really can be agents of change.

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