

## 2011 UNIVERSITY ANNUAL LEARNING & TEACHING CONFERENCE

### *Changing Times: Refreshing the Learning & Teaching Strategy*

Theme: A university for the region

10:50 - 11:20

#### **Developing skills and enhancing the student experience through Children's University Partnerships**

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***"I think the Learning and Teaching Strategy should identify opportunities for synergistic staff-student-community learning partnerships."***

#### **Abstract:**

This paper will focus on how students undertake mentoring roles within a Children's University in Scarborough Borough. Students' voluntary participation in this National initiative ([www.childrensuniversity.co.uk](http://www.childrensuniversity.co.uk)) at regional level enhances their experience and provides opportunity to acquire and strengthen employability skills. These include communication, teamwork, use of initiative and self motivation, time management and global skills.

Students are increasingly drawn from different degree courses and find the opportunity to collaborate with undergraduates from other disciplines most valuable. Furthermore, in developing the initiative, they will have the opportunity to liaise with people from across the community including parents and those from schools, colleges, industry and commerce.

Students support primary school pupils during learning experiences and in some cases assist in the delivery of these activities. Some students are keen to plan the learning experiences. These activities involve collaboration between schools, community agencies and University staff. Partnerships are set up with North Yorkshire Business Education Partnership, wildlife centres, bookshops and Scarborough Athletic Football Club. Partnership and collaboration are actively sought for the mutual benefit of stakeholders and more broadly for the long term development of the region.

The two main key priorities are the needs of our students and the needs of the region. It is apparent from collected data that students value this way of learning. In some cases they would welcome it as an integral part of their course. Many of these students take up employment in, and develop empathy with, the region and consequently apply acquired skills for the benefit of the community.

This paper will identify issues arising from interviews with participating stakeholders that are related to their involvement with the Children's University initiative. The paper will also explore the merits of skills development in the context of broadly informal contextualised learning. The paper highlights the possibility of how such voluntary work, ostensibly unfunded, can inspire lifelong learning, develop skills and raise regional aspiration. In so doing, it further raises the positive profile of the University.