



WESTMINSTER LEARNING COMMUNITIES GUIDANCE

1. Introduction

This handbook provides information and guidance on the principles of Westminster Learning Communities, and the expectations for how they will operate.

The University has established Westminster Learning Communities as a vibrant and dynamic means to foster innovation in learning and teaching using a bottom-up, collaborative, reflective and scholarly approach. Westminster Learning Communities have the scholarship of learning and teaching at their core. They will facilitate exchange, critical reflection, scholarship and pedagogic research and will provide opportunities for enhancing and sharing practice, exchanging resources, expertise and experience and for developing and promoting new ideas and innovation.

Westminster Learning Communities are based on the key characteristics of a Community of Practice, as set out by Wenger, 1998): members share a common interest (mutual engagement or shared passion); they are working on the same goals (joint project); and they share a language, approach, stories etc (shared repertoire).

Communities will need to be aligned with the University's strategic priorities and as such they should form around one or more of the priority themes set out in the [University Learning and Teaching Strategy 2015-2020](#), though it is recognised that other innovations and issues will emerge.

Communities can apply to the Centre for Teaching Innovation (CTI) for funding. Even if you don't require funding for your community we would still like you to register your community with the CTI to facilitate sharing and provide an overview of pedagogic research and development activity around the University. This also means that you can join in and benefit from being part of this forum of communities.

Communities will be largely self-managed, but will be overseen by the CTI, which will ensure that communities are supported and promoted, and that there is effective communication both within and between communities, and to the wider university community and the outside world. From time to time, the CTI will also commission communities to explore areas it has identified as a priority.

Communities will be asked to provide regular updates to the CTI, and will at times be asked to provide an update to the University Teaching Committee.

Communities – funded and unfunded – will be encouraged to work collaboratively where relevant and share practice, and to participate in and add to the CTI's programme of events.

2. Starting a Community

2.1 Scope

The focus of all Westminster Learning Communities will be on the scholarship of teaching and learning. As such, any areas explored by Westminster Learning Communities will need to be aligned with the priority themes set out in the [University Learning and Teaching Strategy 2015-2020](#), and will need to have demonstrable impact on the University, and / or the higher education sector.

If you have a developing idea for a community, the CTI website's [Marketplace](#) page provides an online forum in which you can discuss these ideas with colleagues and seek partners with whom to collaborate. From time to time the Centre for Teaching Innovation will also use the [Marketplace](#) to issue a call for a community to be established around a particular theme or responding to a particular priority emerging at the University.

Events will also be held for colleagues to come together and identify, collectively, areas which would benefit from further exploration by a learning community. Keep an eye on the [CTI website](#) for more information.

2.2 Membership

Membership of communities should be open to colleagues across the university, and all communities will need a core membership of active, interested and enthusiastic participants. Membership may also change over the course of the community's activity, for example due to widening interest in the area, or to reflect changing needs of the community. Communities should have a minimum of 3 members. (If membership drops below 3, the community may be considered for closure - see section 5).

There should be a community facilitator(s) who will be responsible for co-ordinating the community. Training will be made available for this role. (It is mandatory for facilitators of funded communities to have completed learning communities facilitator training, whether this is through the CTI or has been undertaken previously).

Westminster Learning Communities should be inclusive. Alongside academic staff and colleagues in Professional Services, communities are strongly encouraged to include members external to the University to bring in different perspectives. These may be, for example, colleagues from other higher education institutions, representatives from relevant industries, or employers or teachers in schools.

In line with the University's commitment to student partnership, each community will also be expected to incorporate input from students, either as members, or through consultation and collaboration.

If you would like to start a community and would like to discuss your developing ideas and seek partners with whom to collaborate, place a call on the [Marketplace](#).

If you would like to join a community, visit the [Communities](#) page on the website for more information about the communities currently running. Or you can visit the [Marketplace](#) where you can find calls from colleagues who wish to start a community and are seeking members.

2.3 Application and Registration

If you already have a fully scoped proposal in mind, have agreed the members of your community and would like to request funding for your community, fill in the **application form** on the [Starting a community](#) page.

Funding is available to communities whose applications for funding are successful. See the [CTI website](#) for the deadline for submission of application forms. (Communities not seeking funding can submit their application form at any time). All eligible application forms will be reviewed by a panel who will determine whether funding will be awarded, and the amount of funding.

Even if you don't require funding for your community we would still like you to register your community with the CTI to facilitate sharing and provide an overview of pedagogic research and development activity around the University, and so that you can join in and benefit from being part of this forum of communities. All registered communities will also be given access to a dedicated online forum on the CTI website to support collaboration and communication.

If you already have a proposal in mind and have agreed the members of your community but are not seeking funding, you should still fill in the **registration form** on the [Starting a community](#) page.

3. Funding

Funding is available to communities whose applications for funding are successful, for a period of one year. The amount of funding available will depend on the number of successful applications. In order to be eligible for funding, communities will need to be aligned with one of the themes set out in the [Learning and Teaching Strategy](#), will need to clearly evidence how the community will meet the criteria set out in the **application form** on the [Starting a community](#) page.

Funding is intended to assist with communities' activities. Funding provided to communities is at the discretion of the CTI and the CTI cannot guarantee to allocate all the funds a community applies for.

If you are successful, you will be asked to formally commit to the completion of the agreed outputs, and to a delivery and reporting schedule. Payments will be contingent on the agreed milestones being met.

If your community will need to continue beyond the period of your funding, you can apply for a further year's funding via the **funding renewal form** on the [Starting a community](#) page. Unspent funds from the previous funding period cannot be rolled forward.

3.1 Payment of funding

The CTI will hold each community's funds. Payments will be made via an expenses claim form, supported by original receipts or, where a supplier has been used, via the University's purchasing processes. (See the University's Finance webpages for information and guidance on expense claims and purchasing).

It is recommended that communities nominate an individual who co-ordinates funding requests to the CTI on behalf of the community and is responsible for tracking expenditure against the agreed budget.

Payment will not be made for items that do not correspond to the agreed budget, unless prior agreement has been sought from the CTI for a variation to the budget.

3.2 Conditions of funding

- Once funding has been agreed, no additional funds will be available during that funding period.
- Committees may not apply for funding retrospectively for activities that have taken place prior to the submission of the Westminster Learning Communities application form.
- It is mandatory for facilitators of funded communities to have completed learning communities facilitator training, whether this is the training co-ordinated by the CTI, or has been undertaken previously).
- Funded communities **MUST**
 - Be active, as demonstrated by a programme of activities (see section 4.3). This must include regular meetings of the community.
 - Provide update reports to the CTI at agreed intervals, summarising activity during the reporting period, progress against the agreed schedule and reasons for any variations, evidence of impact when available, membership status and expenditure. See Appendix A for a template activity report. *Any significant variation from the agreed schedule and / or budget should be discussed and agreed with the CTI as soon as it is identified.*
 - Deliver the agreed outputs according to the schedule agreed with the CTI. Schedules can be revised subject to advance discussion and agreement with the CTI.
 - Provide evidence of impact
 - Ensure expenditure corresponds to the agreed budget, meets the University of Westminster's finance policies and procedures (see the University's Finance webpages) and adheres to the eligible costs for Westminster Learning Communities (see sections 3.3 and 3.4). Receipts must be provided for any expenditure.
 - Make the results of their work available to be published on the CTI website
 - Acknowledge the financial support of the CTI at their events or on any products.
- There may also be additional conditions related to the specific scope of each community

In the event that any of these conditions are not met, or that it is determined that there has been misappropriation or inappropriate use of funds, funding will be withdrawn and the community will be considered for closure.

In instances where funding is withdrawn, communities may continue if they demonstrate that sufficient activity, progress and impact can be maintained. See section 5 for more information on the conditions under which communities will be closed.

3.3 Eligible costs

All expenditure should follow the guidelines on the University's Finance webpages. Wherever possible, use should be made of University of Westminster services and approved suppliers.

Communities may use their funds to support the following (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Attendance at events such as conferences, seminars and symposia and workshops. This includes registration fees and reasonable travel and expenses. Communities are encouraged to use a fair and open method for agreement of which community members will attend events.
- Running events. This includes room hire (communities should seek assurances from host institutions that appropriate insurances and levels of cover are in place), hire of audio-visual equipment, reasonable expenses for speakers (agreement for overseas travel should be sought from the CTI in advance), catering, materials such as badges, flipcharts, post-its etc
- marketing materials
- incentives and prizes
- field trips
- student helpers (via Talentbank) for time-limited pieces of work. Funding should not be used to provide ongoing administrative support for the community.
- Computer software

3.4 Ineligible costs

- Attendance at events unrelated to the communities' work
- Community members' personal research
- Salary costs

4. Running the Community

4.1 Format

There is no fixed format for a community, so the function and operational arrangements for each community may vary. Three possible types of community are outlined below which communities may wish to consider:

Special Interest Communities are envisaged as 'standing' communities, which are established and continuous, though not necessarily permanent. These communities will provide a forum for staff with an interest in a particular issue to come together (both face-to-face and online) to exchange ideas and share, develop and disseminate effective practice.

Examples of issues around which communities might be formed could include (but are not limited to):

- Learning technologies and mobile learning
- Group work
- Engaging students in lectures
- Assessment and feedback
- Inclusive curriculum
- Interdisciplinary learning
- Digital literacies
- Employability
- Graduate attributes

Action Learning Communities would be established in response to an immediate challenge or issue. Action learning sets would be used to provide support through asking questions and probing in a non-threatening manner. These communities would operate on a ‘task and finish’ basis, in the sense that the community will only exist long enough for the issue to be resolved. An example of a situation in which an action learning community might be formed is when a course team wants to develop a new approach to the delivery of a course (e.g. using inquiry-based learning). A small team, with an experienced action learning facilitator, could work with the course team over a limited period of time to encourage the team to develop their ideas through action learning sets.

Pedagogic Research Communities would be project-based, purpose-driven, time-constrained and focused on learning and teaching issues. They will be aligned with the Centre for Teaching Innovation’s Pedagogic Research Strategy. [For more information, see the CTI’s pedagogic research pages.](#)

Communities are not limited to these formats and will be encouraged to consider whether, during the life of the community, alternative formats may become better suited to the issue being addressed. For example, if an issue being considered by an Action Learning Community cannot be satisfactorily resolved, then it may be proposed for a project by a Pedagogic Research Community.

See also the [Tools](#) page for more information on how a community could take shape and operate, the kinds of activity that may be found in a community, and examples of communities at other higher education institutions.

4.2 Community Facilitators

Community Facilitators should co-ordinate the community in a fair and transparent way in the interest of the membership as a whole.

Training will be made available and advice and support will be provided, where needed, by the CTI. Training will be mandatory, and a condition of funding, for facilitators of funded communities.

Communities can have more than one facilitator.

Community facilitators will be responsible for providing any updates or reports to the CTI. For funded communities this reporting will be a condition of funding (see section 3). Facilitators of funded communities will also be responsible for ensuring the agreed schedule and budget are adhered to.

Community facilitators should also take responsibility for addressing any complaints or issues about or arising from the community. The CTI will be available for advice and guidance in these instances.

4.3 Activity and reporting

Westminster Learning Communities will be self-managed and should determine their activities based on the methodology selected and schedule agreed to explore their topic and disseminate their findings.

All activities undertaken by each community will need to be organised and co-ordinated by the community itself, which should be meeting regularly. The CTI will be able to provide advice and guidance if needed.

Communities should build the profile of their work internally and, where appropriate, externally. They should plan to undertake activity to encourage internal and external participation in and engagement with their work and their outputs, such as hosting and attending workshops, seminars or conferences, undertaking speaking commitments, contribution to panels and debates and publishing work.

All registered communities, both funded and unfunded, will be provided a [dedicated area on the Westminster Learning Communities online platform](#). This will include information about the community, a discussion forum for community members to maintain regular interaction between meetings, and it will offer a space on which to host the community's outputs. Access to these sections will be restricted to community members, but can be widened over the course of the community as needed. If access is granted to non-members who are external to the University, communities should ensure they adhere to the University's [data protection guidance and policy](#).

Communities are strongly encouraged to promote their activities and the results of their work. Alongside the University's communications channels, the CTI website will also be available to communities to promote any news and events. Communities should contact the CTI to organise, giving sufficient advance notice. Individual communities should also view the wider network of Westminster Learning Communities as a resource for promotion and collaborative work.

All registered communities will be expected to provide regular updates to the CTI on their activities and may also be asked to update the University Teaching Committee. Funded communities will be required to report at agreed intervals to the CTI on their activity and will need to meet agreed deadlines regarding delivery of the community's outputs. See Appendix A for a template activity report.

The CTI will ensure that communities are kept up-to-date with its wider work, that of other communities and any opportunities to participate or collaborate.

Any published material should display the Westminster Centre for Teaching Innovation logo prominently.

5. Closure

The CTI will work with all communities – funded and unfunded – to review regularly their continued relevance, to ascertain whether they are continuing to generate activity, outputs and impact, to identify any potential areas for further collaboration with other communities, and to avoid unnecessary overlap or duplication.

It will be recommended that communities close prior to the end of their anticipated lifecycle under the following circumstances:

- Membership has consistently been fewer than 3 individuals
- There is no evidence of the community meeting or interacting
- There is no evidence that the community is generating any outputs
- There is no evidence that the community is having any impact on the University or the higher education sector
- Activities of the community are no longer aligned with the University's [Learning and Teaching Strategy](#)
- Activities of the community are in contradiction with University of Westminster policies

For funded communities, failure to meet the conditions of funding (see section 3) or misappropriation of or inappropriate use of funds will also lead to a community being recommended for closure.

If it is determined that the activity and /or outputs of the community overlap with or duplicate those of another community, the scope of both communities will be reviewed to ascertain continued need, including consideration of the possibility of merging the communities if appropriate.

Communities may take the decision themselves to close. In this instance, Community Facilitators should notify the CTI as soon as this decision is taken.

Upon closure of the community the following activities will need to be undertaken by the Community Facilitator:

- Notify all members
- Submit a final report to the CTI summarising the activities of the community and any impact discerned to date and, for funded communities, a summary of expenditure
- Close any open forums on the Westminster Learning Communities online platform
- Provide the CTI with any final outputs

The CTI will:

- Communicate the closure of the community to other Westminster Learning Communities
- Update the CTI website to show the status of the closed community

- Ensure any outstanding agreed expenses are paid

Appendix A

Westminster Learning Communities Activity Report [Template]

Attachments can be included – please ensure these are clearly labelled

Name of Community

Reporting period:

Date from

To

Summary of activity during reporting period. This should also indicate progress against the agreed schedule, including reasons for any variations and any outputs that have been delivered

Evidence of impact

Membership status

Summary of expenditure