

Barriers to changing to active learning in lectures

Types of barrier

The professional setting in which academic staff work tends to be stable.

A lecturer's sense of professional definition tends to resist change.

Lecturers prefer to use formal lectures, having being taught that way when they were students. This is also the main teaching mode that they experience at conferences.

Lecturers can become self-enchanted as they think aloud and lecture. The traditional lecture can become an 'ego trip'.

The feedback circle in the classroom tends to be stable. Students and lecturers share consistent expectations about each other's role in the classroom.

Trying something new arouses inevitable feelings of discomfort and anxiety.

Students often prefer a passive learning environment as it is less demanding. They may give low 'scores' in questionnaires to modules that use more active learning methods.

Staff see few incentives to change: i.e. deviation from established methods invites risk but relatively few rewards.

Overcoming the barriers

Resistance due to . . .	Can be reduced by . . .
Fear of increased workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ground rules that only less time-consuming alternatives will be considered.
Fear that more efficient teaching will lead to extra duties to ‘fill-up’ hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • change in resource-allocation mechanism so lecturer hours aren’t counted, only student learning hours.
Fear of public exposure of weaknesses and problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • construction of layered evaluation systems where data are owned by users, and only reports on ‘action to deal with problems’ is passed up to the next level; • ‘buddy system’ (mutual peer observation and support).
Expectation that ‘quality assessment’ of all kinds will be cosmetic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ground rule that only review methods people believe in will be adopted (refusal to be cynical).
Fear of not having skill, personality or competence to meet the new situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guarantee of staff development support; • peer support; • tolerance of a variety of teaching styles.
Insecurity about the purpose or value of the current course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time spent clarifying rationale and aims that people can believe in.
Reluctance to help managers’ careers by improving performance indicators and students’ expense.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • variety of rewards for <i>lecturers</i> as well as managers; • agree appropriate performance indicators.
Fear that new methods will be expensive to introduce (even if they are cheaper once they are in place).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional funding for change; • release from other duties during the design phase.
Ignorance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information; • examples of use of alternative methods; • visits to other institutions.