

Title: **Postgraduate Certificates in Academic Practice/Learning & Teaching – should they be compulsory for new academics?**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Compare requirements of new academics with respect to training in learning and teaching in the Russell Group and other HE institutions
- Review the advantages and disadvantages of making training in learning & teaching compulsory for new academics.
- Review the advantages and disadvantages of recognising and rewarding learning & teaching training/skills
- Discuss ideas for the training in learning & teaching of academics in the future

Session Outline

Aim: Postgraduate Certificates in Learning and Teaching are offered to new academics in many UK Higher Education Institutions, and there is some evidence for the effectiveness of this type of training for staff (Postareff et al 2008; Gibbs & Coffey 2004; Rust 2000). However, a formative evaluation of accredited programmes in 2006 found that a significant proportion of staff were uncertain that it was appropriate for early career academics to be required to complete accredited programmes (Prosser et al 2006). The Effective Postgraduate Certificate Study (EPGC) reported similar findings (Knight 2006). This session will facilitate a discussion on whether such programmes benefit from being mandatory.

Shelley and Maxine are Programme Directors of the Postgraduate Certificates (PGCerts) in Academic Practice/Learning and Teaching in Higher Education at The Universities of Southampton/Birmingham respectively. Both programmes have at one time been mandatory for new academic staff. At Birmingham the Programme became optional in 2003, whereas in Southampton it remains compulsory.

A survey of Russell Group Institutions has shown that there is significant variation in the requirements of new academics with respect to training in learning and teaching skills. A full PGCert is not compulsory in many of the Russell Group and instead either courses are optional, or only parts of the certificate (or alternative courses) are compulsory. In addition the timescale for completion of the programme varies significantly from 1- 5 years.

By comparing the two alternative approaches from two different institutions and considering the alternatives, we will facilitate a thought provoking discussion which considers the pros and cons of compulsory learning and teaching qualifications in research intensive HEIs.

Key issues to be addressed are:

- What are the needs of new academics and how can we best accommodate them whilst providing the necessary training for their educational activities?
- Is it better to force everyone to do it or reward those who voluntarily complete it (i.e. link the qualification to promotion rather than probation and/or include pay rewards)?
- Does “one size fit all” work and how can we tailor our training to our staff needs?
- What level of development programme should be the ‘minimum’ for academics?

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Please provide an indication of how the session will be structured and how activities and discussion will be facilitated. For discussion papers please include a few indicative questions which will focus the discussion element.

- Introductions – 5-10 min – introductions from presenters and participants (depending on the size of the audience, each member of the audience will introduce themselves either to the whole group, or to the group in which they are sat).
- Introduction to Workshop – 10 min – MC & SD to outline the aim of the session and to give a short report of findings from a survey of Russell Group Institutions with respect to training in learning & teaching. Southampton and Birmingham will be key examples of two alternative approaches.
- Experiences of audience – 15 min group work– Audience invited to share their experiences and discuss the topic in groups – in particular to answer the questions a) should training courses should be compulsory and/or linked to recognition & reward (e.g. promotion or pay awards)?, and b) does “one fit all” work or can we tailor our training to our staff needs?
- Discussion of key points – 10 min feedback – One member of each group to feedback the key points of the discussions that took place in their groups – again exact method for feedback may vary depending on group size.
- Evaluation – participants will be asked to give feedback on the session using feedback questionnaires.

References

Gibbs G & Coffey M (2004) The impact of training university teachers on their teaching skills, their approach to teaching and the approach to learning of the students. *Active learning in higher education* 5 (1), 87-100

Knight P (2006) *The Effects of Post-graduate Certificates: A report to the project sponsors and partners.* Available at

http://www.inspire.anglia.ac.uk/e107_files/downloads/knight_2006_epgc_report_september_2006.pdf [accessed 2/7/08]

Postareff L, Lindblom-Ylante S & Nevgi S (2008) A follow-up study of the effect of pedagogical training on teaching in higher education. *Higher Education* 56, 29-43

Prosser M, Rickinson M, Bence V, Hanbury A & Kuej M (2006) *Formative Evaluation of accredited programmes.* HEA research report. Available at www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/publications/researchreports [accessed 20/6/08]

Rust C (2000) Do initial training courses have an impact on University Teaching? The evidence from two evaluative studies of one course. *Innovations in Education and Training* 37 (3), 254-262