

**Title:** **Sustaining Communities of Practice: fellowships and enquiry groups**

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Session Learning Outcomes**

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

- Share and consider ways of developing communities of practice among colleagues involving a variety of practices and formats such as fellowships and research enhanced practice groups.
- Have some practical ideas and suggestions about setting up managing and sustaining communities of practice particularly fellowships and enquiry groups, and ways of identifying their perceived effectiveness on colleagues practice and students learning.

#### **Session Outline**

Key issues to be addressed are:

Communities, research enhanced learning and teaching, sustainability

Much of what we do as staff and educational developers supports colleagues in their engagement with research underpinned and enhanced learning and teaching and with the scholarship of learning and teaching: 'Educational development may thus be described as all the work that is done systematically to help faculty members do their best to foster student learning' (Knight, p.98).

Educational Development has become increasingly strategic in location and function in the context of the third round of HEFCE TQEF funding, and beyond. One of the challenges is to ensure and further develop ways in which we can work with colleagues across the university, developing sustainable communities of practice (Lave 1991, Wenger 1998) which will lead to the embedding of good practice and the maintenance of a culture of enhancement and the ownership of enlightened, managed development. Staff and educational developers work in many instances through a model of dialogue with academic communities and individuals (Ramsden, et al 1995, 1998, Hannan, A. & Silver, H. 2000) Our changing roles are associated with the increased identification of universities themselves as learning organisations (Barnett 2000/1). Staff and educational developers who work with schools/faculties /central units/departments and individuals are doing so by encouraging and supporting related activities between groups and individuals to engage with current and future developments and needs, enhancing the scholarship of teaching, overtly relating research to teaching and encouraging students as researchers.

One model which enables colleagues to engage with such changing priorities and developments and to build communities of practice, is that of learning and teaching fellowships and other funded or unfunded networks which bring colleagues together to become involved in research underpinned enhancements of learning and teaching.

This workshop session is a further development from earlier work which was funded by a SEDA small grant (2006). The workshop explores ways in which we can develop and sustain communities of

practice in learning and teaching through a variety of ongoing capacity building activities and sustainable developments including fellowships. Recent work at the University of Brighton is taken as a case study where learning and teaching fellowships, enquiry groups, small funded projects and a vibrant internal conference culture have focused colleagues and helped develop such communities. This is situated in a wider exploration of such communities at other universities. Colleagues are invited to share and consider the development of similar schemes and practices.

### Session Activities and Approximate Timings

1. Introductions 5 mins
2. Introductory outline of theories of communities of practice, development of fellowship and similar schemes at University of Brighton and elsewhere. 15 mins
3. Discussion of value and forms of communities of practice 5 mins
4. Sharing experiences and practices 10 mins
5. Defining ways of developing, supporting and sustaining effective community of practice oriented activities and schemes for sustainability in our own university contexts and considering ways of ensuring their impact. 10 mins

Questions include:

- Do you know of schemes involving fellowship type processes?
- Do you have such schemes in your university? What are their aims? How, when why and in what ways were they set up? Who champions and supports them? How are they funded? Pros and cons? What helps them to work well? Do they involve research? Are they oriented towards development of individual practice, Faculty/school/department development? University wide change and development? Sector and international impact? Are colleagues expected to disseminate? Publish? How are the results of their fellowships (or similar), their suggestions received, acted on, embedded?
- What might we do to further encourage fellowships and other appropriate forms of research evidence based communities of practice developments which lead to /explore/develop student learning/curriculum development and institutional change?

### References

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