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Reflecting on the virtual learning systems – extinction or evolution?

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What is the role of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) in the modern university? How are students using them? And are they as important as we once thought they would be? These are questions that a lot of people are now asking, given the rapid developments that can be characterised as the read/write web or Web 2.0.

In the last three to five years there has been a marked increase in the number of technologies that have been developed and deployed that allow us to interact online in ever-easier ways. Blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing sites, podcasts and a range of others have become more readily available. Alongside these developments have come changes to the way we behave online; it is now relatively simple to collaborate, share and publish, either to a wide audience or to 'trusted' colleagues.

How we got here

VLEs were a response to the difficulty in creating, developing and maintaining a coherent workspace online for students. The long-term work of sustaining the variety of tools that were required, the upload of files, the discussion forums, a place for lecturers to post their work *etc.,* has been important, and the list of requirements has grown even longer, including integration with other systems such as student records and 'portfolios'. The earliest systems which satisfied the 'consensus view' of VLE elements began to appear in the period 1995 to 1997 and included systems such as WebCT and Lotus LearningSpace. In the UK, a series of 'institutionally grown' systems appeared in the late 1990s including COSE (Staffordshire), Colloquia (Bangor) and Boddington (Leeds). At this stage the systems were largely constructivist in their approaches, were learner-centric and used novel interfaces.

With rapid uptake of the VLE in institutions, in parallel with increased use of the internet as a source for teaching and research, emphasis was placed on intuitive interfaces for use and maintenance. However, it has long been recognised that, in interface design, the term 'intuitive' equates to something which is viewed as familiar and unthreatening (Raskin, 1994). In 2001, research showed that 'ease of use' – especially by teaching staff – was the prime consideration in VLE selection (Stiles, 2004). Capitalising on the 'ease of use' elements, it could be argued that vendors sought to create a 'comfortable' metaphor for teachers using the systems. Hence, words like 'classroom', 'grade-books', and even 'blackboard', along with icons made from images drawn from mainstream practice, began to appear in the systems and these are still prevalent. Viewed in this light, it can be argued (Stiles, 2004) that this 'comfort' actually results in mainstream use of VLEs being bland and

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pedagogically conventional, with the 'VLE as notes dump' model being prevalent, as confirmed by JISC surveys (JISC, 2005).

However, the available tools and the simplicity with which students can use them have changed. Five years ago there was nothing online that most students had access to that could compete with an average VLE; now online spaces such as Facebook have more functionality than all but the most cutting-edge systems. The metaphors of these systems are different, they focus on social aspects and personalisation. The 'online' experience of students now entering higher education, and their expectations of how they will use technology to support their own learning, may be quite different and this distinction potentially changes the model for applying a VLE to the learning process.

What do our learners look like?

What does it means to be a learner in the twenty-first century? There are lots of new ideas being put forward and several commentators are also suggesting new learning theories. At the centre of the discussions is the role that technology now plays in a learner's journey. In his paper, 'Connectivism: a learning theory for a digital age', George Siemens (2008) asserts:

> *'Technology is altering (rewiring) our brains. The tools we use define and shape our thinking.'*

What then can we expect of students who, in some cases, are bombarded with technology shifts from pre-school? It is not disputed that the majority of students in higher education now have access to a vast array of tools and technologies, but it is difficult to draw sweeping conclusions from the use of that technology. Below are some short sketches of students using technology. The first is from Ross, a third-year student:

> *'The first thing I do is check my email, then see who is online (on my MSN and Skype). I usually open the VLE and look at the course work, but I discuss it on MSN and Skype in the background. Usually I have Facebook open as well and we might put notes up on that.'*

Ross demonstrates that email is still one of the main communication methods - checking email when logging on is something that most of us relate to. As a learner he accesses his course through the VLE, but instead of using the VLE's internal communication tools he prefers to use Skype and MSN (the first is primarily a voice-over IP telephony system, the second is an instant text message system). Both these tools automatically log in when Ross is online, showing his friends and colleagues that he is online and showing him which of his friends are online. Rather than use a discussion board he is able to see which of his classmates are available and instantly seek feedback to questions. In addition, his peer group also have a space in Facebook where they are discussing the course.

Jane was a first-year mature student who was a little more nervous about the e-learning aspects of her course:

> *'I don't do technology - it makes me nervous, and the e-learning thing sounded like I needed to be a computer programmer. Of course I'd used blogs and stuff before coming to university and I used quite a lot of sites like MySpace, Flickr and YouTube, but e-learning sounded more technical. Now that I'm here, I find it easier to get the assignments and then use the sites that I already use to chat about them. It's also a great way of getting to know people on the same course – as soon as you get together with a few friends on MySpace or Facebook and they invite their friends and pretty soon almost all the course is on there!'*

Jane was initially nervous because of the language used to describe her course, but on 'arrival' she discovered that many of her peers were already using the same online spaces, ones that she considers familiar and safe. She prefers to get her assignments from the VLE and then have the discussions *etc.* within the confines of her 'familiar' space.

These two sketches are not unique. A quick trawl around Facebook and you find literally hundreds of cohorts of students and student societies. Staff are also getting in on the act with many Facebook groups labelled as 'university of xxx' staff.

The 'shifting locus of control' is an oft-cited axiom when we discuss the way in which technology is changing in higher education, and to some extent it may be true with regard to how staff use of technology is perceived. But can it apply to students? Most students are coming to university with a technology skill set in place, either through their own use of the internet or through the school system. When they arrive at an institution there is an expectation of what is available; 'what's the url for that resource?' is no longer an uncommon question. Technology commentators have often described this change in students' technology use as a shift in the locus of control, but from the students perspective it is simply the way it is – there is no control, 'I use the technology how I want to use it, and do what I need to do with it'.

This shift in the perception of control challenges both the institution and the way learning is managed. Typically, institutions have controlled 'corporate systems' and increasingly applied policies which restricted the technologies used for learning (Stiles and Yorke, 2006). In teaching and learning terms, learners, it could be argued, are tracked, monitored, moderated and intervened with as never before – partly with 'good intentions', as staff see this as enabling them to support learning more effectively, and partly in response to the pressures on the institutions themselves to satisfy their paymasters. But now we have, as a result of the rise of new technologies, a generation of learners who can reject this control by staff and institutions, and the balance of 'power' in terms of learning interventions is returning to the learners, who can involve their tutors on their terms rather than the tutors'.

The VLE in today's context

Here and now VLEs play an important role in the student experience. There are many issues that make the use of the VLE a safe and sensible option from the perspective of the institution.

Protecting staff

For example, intellectual property rights (IPR) are core to many of the issues around educational content. An academic placing material on his or her institutional VLE can control access to it and control the version that is there, updating and removing as appropriate.

Material that is placed on most of the sites that have been developed under the heading of 'social networking' will be accessible to a wide audience, giving the ability to copy, download, amend and use. This is often covered in the terms and conditions, where by putting material on the site the user grants permission.

Users should always check the terms and conditions - one popular application states:

'All content on the Site and available through the Service, including but not limited to designs, text, graphics, pictures, video, information, applications, software, music, sound and other files, and their selection and arrangement (the "Site Content"), are the proprietary property of the Company, its users or its licensors with all rights reserved.'

The rise of portfolios

A recent addition to the technology applied to learning is the e-portfolio (Charlesworth and Home, 2006). These pose significant ethical and legal issues concerning the ownership of the information they contain. The information may be derived from (or be contained in) a variety of different systems, both locally on an individual's computer or in various places on the internet. Students are being asked to accrue materials and reflections from a variety of aspects of their lives, including activities that may be carried out in a VLE. Is the idea of the 'bounded VLE' an ideal that is no longer achievable? At the beginning of the article, Ross described how he had several other applications and sites running on the background, all discussing the course topics. Jane clearly thinks of her use of the VLE as nothing more than a system for posting the assignment details. Clearly, if a portfolio of material is required by the student, these must be available to 'import'.

One of the problems that the VLE is faced with is that students are now confronted with a world in which they are participating in a variety of social networks, have multiple email addresses and have potentially created content in a variety of different contexts - from Amazon pages to imdb.com posts. This transition between content that is created and kept in a personal context, content that is distributed to an unknown audience across a variety of contexts, and that which is also valid within an academic context, is complex and not easily modelled.

The phrase 'lifelong learning' in higher education strikes at the heart of the 'bounded VLE' problem. Students are given the skills to see their CPD as important and necessary and then we give them access to a VLE that is aimed primarily at the modular nature of their course, and when they graduate they lose access to that resource. Compounding this problem is the idea of 'life-wide' learning, where students are actively encouraged to draw on their broad experiences and integrate them into their educational experiences - but where is the space within the VLE?

What future for the VLE?

The VLE is a solution to a problem outlined several years ago and which may no longer hold true. The average VLE is designed only to keep information on a single course or a series of courses over a single semester. But students (and staff) are increasingly spreading their material across several platforms and sites, and it is important that they develop skills to maintain a 'portfolio' of experiences, data and information for both their life-wide and lifelong learning. Moreover, it could be argued that, in the context of developing students who draw on a broad range of

experiences, encouraging them to think more holistically about their education in the context of their own future development, the application of a bounded, modularised and time-limited system, such as many VLEs, is counterproductive to the skills they will need to develop to keep a portfolio to support learning in their future careers. For now, the VLE is here and is being used for teaching; experience tells us that learning is happening, but in what ways and contexts? Is the VLE nothing more than a technological notice board for most students, a place to pick up course materials, see timetables and submit assignments? If it is, then where is the students' learning taking place? And what is the lecturer's and institution's role in that place? Finally, given the growth in personalisation of technology and use of that technology in a student's learning, how will tutors cope with learners using their choice of tool? It has been suggested (Stiles, 2007) that perhaps the core role of a VLE is to articulate the structure of the intended learning experience - but would such a slimmed-down system still be a VLE?

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Riding the elephant: thoughts on the implications of e-portfolios for staff developers

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It sometimes seems that new fashions in educational ideas take over the old at an alarming speed; when technology is involved, the speed becomes quite staggering. In October 2003 the European Institute for e-Learning (EIfeL) organised their first international conference about e-portfolios in Poitiers (fittingly, at Futuroscope). How many of us in the UK were using the term much before this date? Our North American colleagues at that gathering seemed to be streets ahead. But things moved on quickly: in 2004 the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's Blueprint for e-assessment envisaged that within five years 'all awarding bodies should be set up to accept and assess e-

portfolios' [1]. The following year the DfES published their e-Learning Strategy, encouraging all schools and colleges to offer 'a personal online learning space to store coursework, course resources, results and achievements' which, together with 'a personal identifier for each learner' would constitute 'an electronic portfolio, making it simpler for learners to build their record of achievement throughout their lifelong learning' (DfES 2005)[2]. Not to be outdone, HEFCE also produced an e-Learning Strategy in 2005 which stated under Strand 3.4 ('Encourage e-based systems of describing learning achievement and personal development planning') that it would

support the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and the Higher Education Academy to:

> '…*continue to investigate the use of e-portfolios and other systems to support learner achievement and progression; and to promote and disseminate good practice in the development of new approaches for the use of e-portfolios and PDP* [Personal Development Planning].'[3]

What's the excitement about? It rather depends on whom you ask. E-portfolios are like the elephant described by six blind men: you could hear very different reasons for the

enthusiasm from, say, a primary school teacher, a careers guidance specialist and an examiner working for an awarding body (different issues and challenges too). This is because e-portfolio technology encompasses a range of functionality which can be used for different purposes. It's difficult to agree on even a basic definition of what *must* be there, but if the software claims to be an e-portfolio, it will probably have the following features:

- a means of storing the user's digital products – documents, audio and video files, presentations and so on

- a means of organising these, allowing the user to make selections and link items either together or to categories such as competences or assessment outcomes (to provide evidence for these)

- the facility to present them to a third party in an organised way, either online through a weblink or through some other form of technology such as a CD-ROM.

It is also likely to include a way of capturing the user's reflective thoughts and comments – perhaps organised chronologically as in a blog, or linked to the stored items as an explanation of how the user thinks they demonstrate a target competence or learning outcome. Some tools help the user to create these reflective comments by offering a template which provides structure, perhaps as a series of questions. Others, particularly if they are being used simply to manage assessment, may just present the evidence to speak for itself.

This capacity to store and share digital products has much appeal. In primary schools, teachers can see it as a way of celebrating their children's work and helping them to recognise and gain confidence from their own achievements. Children may be encouraged to add a voice-over, a favourite poem or piece of music to their presentation to increase the sense that they are telling their own story. These personal touches are important for children to feel they

own their e-portfolio and it reflects their identity. Later in life, the job applicant may feel a similar need to personalise the presentation of his or her e-portfolio, to grab the recruiter's attention and motivate them to spend time examining the evidence of their fine qualities and achievements. (There are problems associated with the desire for such personalisation: to create a highly distinctive portfolio generally requires a higher level of technical skill, the ability to use generic tools such as Dreamweaver and some web design know-how. It seems easier to offer students *en masse* a purpose-built e-portfolio system which will guide them through the process of creation.)

But let us recognise that there are plenty of other scenarios for using e-portfolios where such personalisation is less important. If the e-portfolio is being used as an assessment tool, the examiner is likely to be more interested in the quality of the products presented as evidence, and perhaps in the depth of reflection and appropriateness of any thoughts and comments presented. If the e-portfolio is intended to support the user's learning, 'presentation' may not be the issue at all – quick and easy sharing between student and tutor and among peers may be the key functionality needed. Technology used to support a group of learners distributed around several different workplaces (a scenario which might describe foundation degree students, healthcare students in clinical placements or employer-based learners) needs to have the easy functionality of social networking tools alongside the ability to store individual learners' records.

So we have digital products held in filestores or repositories, sharing of these, sharing ideas and chatting, presenting oneself, presenting one's work, getting help in thinking and reflecting, selecting evidence, reflecting one's personality – and add to these issues of security and authentication. There's plenty for the e-portfolio community of enthusiasts to argue about and it's easy to forget the great crowd of the uninitiated, puzzled, confused or just plain

indifferent to all the fuss. If e-portfolio technology really does have the potential to support a huge range of educational goals – developing a strong sense of identity, supporting collaborative learning, increasing the authenticity of assessment without losing efficiency, improving career management and employer selection – there is a pretty massive staff development job to do.

So how do we go about introducing this technology in higher education? The individuals responsible for this, whether educational developers or learning technologists, need a clear understanding themselves of the range of functionality described above and also the limitations of the particular software used at their own institution (and there WILL be limitations). Then it's a good idea to think about what specific problems staff face for which an e-portfolio might provide an efficient solution. When I'm with my fellow enthusiasts I sometimes sense a danger that we sound like the man running down the street shouting 'I've got the answer! I've got the answer! Now what's the question?' We need a very clear reasons as to why this particular piece of technology is worth the hassle of becoming familiar with it, spending the time inducting students into its use, customising it for our own course and so on.

Assessment practice can be a good place to start. If a group of staff have already developed 'portfolio thinking' through using paper-based portfolios, they are likely to appreciate very quickly the advantages of electronic cross-referencing and hyperlinking to evidence, or the convenience of both student and tutor of accessing the developing collection any time, anywhere without having to hump heavy folders around. External examiners can pick and choose what they want to sample as issues occur to them. Systems which alert the tutor when new material has been added allow easy ongoing monitoring of progress and feedback. Where a number of outcomes have to be satisfied, tutors can assess and 'sign off' progressively over a period of time, to avoid the pain of marking a large number of complete portfolios in

a short timespan. For the educational developer, such assessment practice can form the foundation for more radical curriculum change where the portfolio becomes a learning tool as well as an assessment tool.[4]

Another starting point for many institutions is the need to record, make sense of and assess the learning from work-based experiences. Portfolios lend themselves to capturing the rich but often chaotic learning environment of the work placement: electronic portfolios which facilitate peer sharing can offer an added dimension of support to the learner through the exchange and discussion of day-to-day experiences.

It should help to find out how another lecturer has approached a similar problem. There are increasing numbers of case-studies of e-portfolio usage on the websites of JISC, the Higher Education Academy and the Centre for Recording Achievement. Self-help groups of staff have formed around particular systems – it really does help the average lecturer to learn from others' practice when that practice uses the same technology.

Of course, for many UK institutions the implementation of policy on PDP has been the main driver for the acquisition of e-portfolio technology. In a survey of institutions carried out for the Higher Education Academy in 2006[5], over half had already obtained or were actively considering acquiring e-portfolios and the implementation of PDP was one of the two main reasons offered (the other being 'to support overall development including personal and career areas, and experience/learning from less formal contexts'). However, this driver, while clearly important, is not necessarily helpful to the educational developer. Staff development around the concept and practice of PDP is often sufficiently problematic in itself without the added complication of a new piece of technological kit. There is also a real danger that institutional managers see the acquisition of the tool as equivalent to the provision of PDP opportunities: this kind of thinking leads to expensive software lying around unused as the majority of students and tutors see no real purpose for it.

Let's be realistic; even among those of us who are enthusiastic about the potential of this new technology, a minority keep their own, detailed, up-to-date portfolio. When it's not required for Continuing Professional Development purposes, job applications or towards a further qualification, it's hard to find the time to record and reflect, let alone to design and select for presentation. Why expect students to do so without the same motivation? However, some of us do keep blogs more or less spontaneously, a few build our own websites and more (especially among the young) use social networking software. This perhaps suggests that such functions should be built into any set of tools we offer to staff or students under the e-portfolio banner.

An obvious starting point for educational developers is to introduce e-portfolios on the courses that are under our control, the PG Certs and Dips we run for staff. If your institution has an e-portfolio tool, encourage staff to submit their work through it: where there isn't such a tool, try designing some templates using generic Office tools (have a look at the Hull Chemistry e-portfolio in .zip format at http://www.hull.ac.uk/chemistry/pdp.php: a means of organising files to provide evidence against skills/outcomes). Try keeping an on-line reflective journal using a blogging tool. Register for a SEDA Fellowship and resolve to submit your portfolio electronically! Of course we should be doing these things because we know our credibility with our students is boosted when, in the language of our American colleagues, we 'walk the talk' – but more because if this innovation is ever going to achieve its potential, we need the understanding of an insider.

1 See http://www.qca.org.uk/ 2586_6997.html
2 See http://www.dfes.gov.uk/ publications/e-strategy
3 See http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/ hefce/2005/05_12/05_12.doc
4 For some examples see http:// www.open.ac.uk/pbpl/resources/ details/ detail.php?itemId=460d156285141
5 See http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ resources/detail/ id631_survey_of_epdp_and_ eportfolio_practice

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Not another strategy? Linking the Learning and Teaching and Human Resource Strategies via the development of a Professional Doctorate

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When the Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching (now the Institute for Learning Enhancement (ILE)) at the University of Wolverhampton set out to develop a Professional Doctorate (EdD) in Professional Practice in Higher Education, we did not anticipate the overwhelming interest and application which has been shown by members of staff. The following article shows how the linking of the current Learning and Teaching Strategy with the Human Resource Strategy in this professional development initiative has led to significant increased staff participation in CPD in learning and teaching.

Most of the recent professional doctorate debate has been about the epistemological nature of doctoral education. However, this article focuses on the institutional management of the professional doctorate and the logic for establishing this route for staff development.

Introduction and Context

The professional doctorate is one of the fastest-growing qualifications in Higher Education (Bourner et al., 2001; Maxwell, 2003; Neumann, 2005; Park, 2005). It is obviously serving a need and appealing to a group of professionals who wish to acquire a qualification at the highest level that academia has to offer. However, the requirements of this particular group are not for three years of private study, but for an applied practitioner higher degree, based on the candidate's own field of practice rather than a traditional perceived gap in the literature.

The professional doctorate differs from the traditional PhD in several ways, although there are arguments that the PhD itself is actually available in a wide variety of models and that current PhD delivery models are much more flexible than a simple binary view of the two routes would suggest (Bourner et al., 2001; Evans et al., 2005). The professional doctorate is seen as an in-service rather than a pre-service award, making it more attractive to mid-career professionals (Maxwell, 1997), and it is viewed as an applied research degree and is conceptually different from the PhD, often starting with a practical problem area of interest.

PhDs are predominantly discipline-bound, while ProfDocs often transcend these disciplines. Many mid-career professionals do not function in a world as neatly divided into subject boundaries as the internal divisions of a university suggest.

It has been noted that this divide between the two routes can be viewed as a question of epistemology, in that the Professional Doctorate foregrounds the importance of knowledge in context, rather than a traditional PhD view of abstracted and objectified new and original knowledge to be added to the overall canon (Maxwell, 1997; Winter et al., 2000). Or, put another way, the achievement of a professional doctorate will reflect 'knowledge for' or procedural knowledge rather than 'knowledge of' or propositional knowledge (Maxwell, 1997).

The growth of the demand for the professional doctorate parallels the growth of the importance of the 'knowledge economy' for the economic growth of the country (Tennant, 2004), that is, the importance of and increased value given to particular knowledge situated in context, rather than the creation of abstract knowledge within a community of scholars. This also links, in the best sense, to the push for increased vocationalism and professional body relevance in many of our university curricula. In a post-Leitch higher education environment (Attwood, 2007), working in a teaching-intensive, regionally focused university developing ever-closer links with local employers, it is logical to develop our skills in supporting the design and assessment of increased work-based learning qualifications.

It was this coming together of several factors - growth of the importance of the knowledge economy, the publication of a Professional Standards framework, increased funding for Human Resource strategies and a growth in the sophistication of the sector in developing Professional Doctorates – that led us to turn the curriculum design camera on ourselves and use those skills to develop a Professional Doctorate in 'Professional Practice in Higher Education' geared to the professional environment of our own higher education institution and our own staff.

Linking into our staff profile

We have been overwhelmed by the amount of interest from our current staff, without any major marketing campaign. Whilst this may not be true of every university, this 'client group' is likely to exist in teaching-intensive universities where there are significant numbers of staff recruited for their vocational expertise, for whom a PhD is not a prerequisite for employment, but who are committed to a career in higher education. This reflects the balance of 'researching professionals' (Professional Doctorate) as

compared with 'professional researchers' (PhD) who are present in our institution (Bourner *et al.*, 2001). For staff who do not see themselves as career researchers, but professional practitioners, this is the ideal opportunity to link and develop their teaching/management career by doing structured, supported and rigorous research which enhances their understanding and practice. It is also true that the time commitment to a traditional PhD *as well as* an unlinked day job is a real stumbling block. A professional doctorate, which is no less intellectually demanding, but which is an ongoing part of the day job, albeit a significant addition, is seen as a more realistic option.

In addition to our internal market, a further EdD route targeted more specifically at schools and FE practitioners has had a similar enthusiastic response. The individuals who wish to increase their career potential are also those who wish to become more effective leaders and managers in their own institutions through a combination of supported and focused reflective practice, theoretical understanding and practical, innovative, work-based action research (Maxwell, 2003; Townsend, 2002).

Linking the Human Resource and the Learning and Teaching strategy

In many ways this tension between the professional doctorate and the traditional PhD mirrors the career tensions in a modern university between those who wish to ascend via the research/professorial route and those who are likely to climb the teaching/management route.

As educational developers, whose role is to promote learning and teaching and to support those practitioners who excel in this part of university life, we have struggled to develop an equivalence to the 'academic' promotion route of readers and professors for the careers of those who wish to stay close to the 'lecture room' or who see themselves becoming an 'Associate Dean of Learning and Teaching' or a 'PVC Academic'. The advent of a Professional Standards Framework (HEA, 2006) has given us a framework, but we are still a long way from establishing acceptance of this as a measure of staff promotion. It does however, give us a discussion point with Human Resources for promotional criteria or role descriptors for staff who see teaching and management as their main career route.

In a world where RAE funding, particularly for teaching-intensive universities, becomes ever-more elusive, and where the government exhortation to link more closely with industry becomes ever more strident, then there is a logic in expanding our higher education responsibility for the knowledge economy in a flexible, practical problem-orientated way, by developing our staff to research their own complex experiences. National pressures and curriculum moves towards vocationalism are mirrored by the changing professional roles of those in higher education and their perception of their own priorities in continuing professional development.

Linking the Learning and Teaching Strategy

The Learning and Teaching strategy (**www.wlv.ac.uk**/celt) is the driver of our practice. In terms of staff development, one of our objectives in the strategy is:

> '2.2. to develop supported career paths for academic staff for whom teaching is the main university activity.'

Our Human Resource and Learning and Teaching strategy promotes and supports the PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education as a mandatory requirement for all new staff who have a teaching responsibility, with less than three years' teaching experience. This blended learning programme is significantly resourced, giving time reduction in contact teaching hours, a laptop if required, and a salary increment and paid-up membership of the Higher Education Academy on completion.

It is a 3-module 60-credit programme, which is mandatory for new staff. It is based in the School of Education (SEd), but with a central steering committee which is the University Quality Enhancement Committee. Staff teaching on this programme come from both the ILE and SEd. Participants have always been able to progress from the PGCert to the MA in Learning and Teaching, by achieving additional modules offered by SEd. This has been a traditional, although not vastly popular, progression route for those interested in Learning and Teaching. What appeared to be attractive, for staff who often already held a Master's degree, was the chance to progress to a professional doctorate in Professional Practice. We therefore built a structured model allowing accreditation of prior achievement and experiential learning at Level 4 and Level 5.

Linking the Learning and Teaching Projects

Our Learning and Teaching Strategy has an annual round of Learning and Teaching Projects which encourage staff to bid competitively for project monies. New members of staff, 'graduates' of the PGCert, are often encouraged to see these projects as a way of progressing their interest in learning and teaching, or developing further an assignment or mini research begun on the PGCert. The projects have three phases which can be built up and funded over three years if the project holder chooses. Phase 1 (Year 1) is a literature review and small pilot project. Phase 2 (Year 2) is an innovation/action research project based on the pilot. Phase 3 (Year 3) is a significant embedding project where the action research is extended into mainstream development. At each of these stages, staff are encouraged to present and publish. At stages 1 and 2 we direct publication towards an internal or HEA Subject Centre or CETL publication. Conference attendance and writing workshops are supported via our Learning and Teaching Strategy. At stage 3 we support publication in an appropriate peer-reviewed journal.

In this new professional doctorate curriculum model, based on work-based learning principles, what we wanted to do was to be able to accredit the learning and teaching

expertise that the staff had already demonstrated and in some cases already externally published. (Figure 1 is only an outline diagrammatic model. The full curriculum model for the Professional Doctorate was validated in 2007. For further details, please contact the author.)
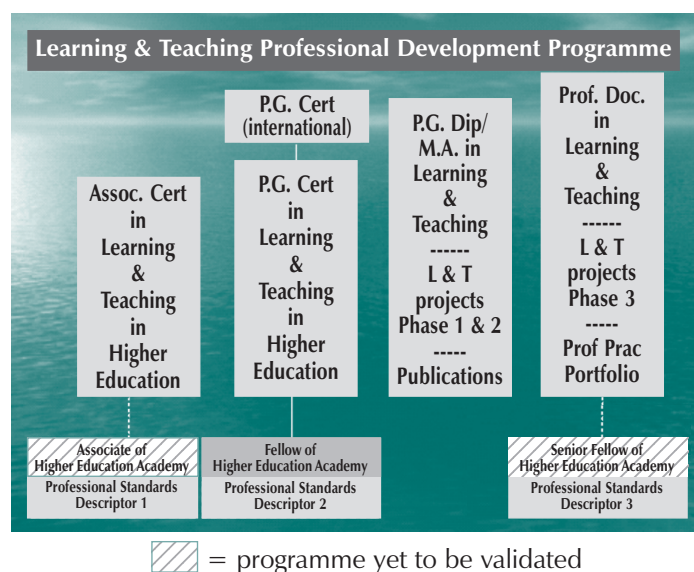

= programme yet to be validated

Figure 1. Linking the Learning and Teaching Strategy with the development of a Professional Doctorate: the outline model.

University of Wolverhampton 2008

We therefore accredited a module at M Level/Level 4, which was assessed by the achievement of a 'Learning and Teaching Project' at Phase 1 and 2, which could be used to build towards a PG Diploma/MA.

Linking the Learning and Teaching Research Network

At the same time as working with new staff on the PGCert, and supporting Learning and Teaching projects, we are also building a Learning and Teaching Research Network (LTRN), again in line with our Learning and Teaching strategy:

> '2.6 to build staff capacity and increase quality outputs in research into HE, both generic and discipline-based, through a range of schemes and programmes.'

The LTRN is led by a Senior Learning and Teaching Research Fellow of the ILE and is again supported and funded by our Human Resource strategy to develop the skills and confidence of our staff in building both their research profile and encouraging the development of management skills in institutional research.

Using expertise gained from this network, plus expertise from the School of Education, the ILE worked to accredit further modules at Level 5, in 'Advanced Educational Research', 'Advanced Professional Practice' and the Learning and Teaching Projects Phase 3. Staff seconded to work with the ILE on this project were again funded by Human Resource strategy.

Linking Learning and Teaching Professional Development

In addition to the fully accredited teaching programmes as outlined above, there is a substantial Professional Staff Development Programme in Learning and Teaching (**www.wlv.ac.uk/celt**). This part of our linking of Learning and Teaching and Human Resources strategy enables our staff to access a wide range of practical and theoretical workshops which can support professional development at many levels. Hence, if skills in NVivo or writing for publication are required in order to enhance individual accreditation through the professional doctorate, they are available outside the main taught programme. The electronic booking system and the electronic evaluation system for this programme are both products of collaboration between the ILE and Human Resources. The Professional Standards Officer who is responsible for managing this programme is supported by Professional Standards funding.

Linking the mode of delivery and model of assessment

Aiming to establish a doctorate structure which could respond to a transdisciplinary cohort was based on our expertise in the PG Certificate. In the PGCert model, although the teaching team is drawn mainly from the Institute of Learning Enhancement and the School of Education, the mentors and 'work-based assessors' are from the subject-specific area wherever possible. As we are at the beginning of this process in the ProfDoc, a similar mentor network is also being developed.

As professionals in an institution with developed e-learning systems, we can immediately base the professional doctorate mode on a blended learning model of delivery as our staff are already familiar with our own virtual learning environment, our own e-portfolio and learning centre database access. We have again drawn on our experience in the PGCert to use an introductory residential to its best advantage to get staff to know each other, develop support networks and introduce the overall structure of input and assessment favoured by professional doctorate candidates (Neumann, 2005), before embarking on the use of virtual networks during the programme. The relative physical proximity and shared institutional and lexical understandings are extremely useful.

The distinguishing factor in the professional doctorate as compared with a PhD is the centrality of context and the importance of new *application* as distinct from new *knowledge* (Maxwell, 1997; Park 2005), which seeks to research and implement changes in the workplace (Usher, 2002). Hence, the criteria in the major practice-based modules upon which candidates are assessed focuses on 'the contribution to professional practice and policy' (Neumann, 2005, 179).

For those candidates who are recent graduates of the PGCert, there is also the familiarity of the 'reflective practitioner' model popularised and clarified by Schön,

Moon and Cowan in the reflection-in-action, on-action, and for action concepts, related specifically to the contextual factors of the situation (Schön, 1983; Moon, 2004; Cowan, 1998). This leads to candidate confidence in the personal use of learning journals, learning sets, the development of e-portfolios and the underlying thread of continuing professional development.

Redefining the 'supervisors'

This development has meant a reframing of the traditional supervisor's role for a Level 5 qualification. Is the 'supervision' best done by those who are within the disciplines, or those who have an understanding of educational research? We have had similar issues with PhD students in learning and teaching sponsored by our CETL. Is a PhD on the 'persistence of students in science education in HE' better supervised by an educationalist with knowledge of learning and teaching theory or a scientist who understands the knowledge framework of a science education...or even an educational developer with knowledge of retention literature and strategies?

If what is important in the professional doctorate is the *contextualisation* of knowledge, then the traditional relationship of a supervisor who knows better or knows all is no longer valid, in the same way as a traditional lecturer/student relationship has changed. It is likely that the 'supervisor' will be 'required to negotiate more, to respond to rather than to assess drafted material' (Maxwell, 1997, 145). We are working with a concept of 'academic advisors'.

Where 'supervisors' and candidates, or mentor and mentees, belong to the same institution, they have the advantage of understanding the professional context, but the role of supervising/mentoring colleagues may prove difficult where there are possible issues of confidentiality. This has probably always been the case with a traditional PhD and a mature in-service institutional candidate, but the focus on professional practice rather than academic theory is likely to foreground these potential areas of overlap and conflict.

A future win-win?

The progressive linking of Human Resource and Learning and Teaching strategies has produced tremendous benefits for the University of Wolverhampton. Obviously, such a strategic move may not be as valid in a different kind of university, where there may not be the 'client group' that we have found. But in a teaching-intensive university, where a human resource strategy may take on a more proactive role in supporting and rewarding its staff for their commitment to learning and teaching, this EdD in Professional Practice in Higher Education with work-based learning accreditation could be seen as part of a way forward for staff, educational and professional development. There are several significant advantages in this approach.

Firstly, in a post-Leitch world (Leitch, 2006), the development of staff expertise in facilitating and assessing work-based learning is important for future confidence in approaches and negotiations with external employers. We

have gained valuable expertise in extending the role of the university towards 'providing an enabling framework and a credentialling mechanism' (Tennant, 2004, 437) which will transfer to industrial contexts.

Secondly, the use of innovatory processes of assessment – such as the use of multi-media e-portfolios – gives us increased expertise which can be spread across the university with undergraduates, postgraduates and CPD students alike.

Thirdly, the improvement in institutional research as results of on-going or completed Professional Doctorates feed into the University Strategic Plan, and the general direction and operation of the university, give us a continually improved theoretical and practical base at a high level with a totally appropriate contextualisation. As Usher writes, 'knowledge is now legitimated by its performativity or capacity to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the socio-economic system. It is its performative usefulness rather than its adherence to epistemological canons that is of most significance' (Usher, 2002, 146).

In addition, where members of staff are continually engaged in professional development which is sponsored by and supported by the institution, this will increase their commitment to the university and possibly reduce turnover and increase stability and focus in terms of human resource planning.

As educational developers who work to raise the status of learning and teaching and often transcend traditional discipline boundaries and encourage cross-university developments, then these Professional Doctorate graduates in Learning and Teaching are extremely useful additions to our learning and teaching communities.

The development of this professional doctorate is a real example of the embedding of a Learning and Teaching strategy. As TQEF, Human Resources and Professional Standards finance disappear as discrete funding streams, this is a significant contribution to persuading senior university management of the importance of continued identifiable support for learning and teaching.

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Trying something different: risk taking in professional development

Professor Ranald Macdonald FSEDA, Sheffield Hallam University

Background

I was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship in 2005 at a time when recipients were expected to carry out a three year project; mine was entitled: 'Ensuring effective professional development for those leading and supporting change in learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)'. My proposal recognised that recent funded initiatives have greatly increased the numbers of staff involved in supporting change in learning, teaching and assessment – academic development – both within and outside higher education institutions.

At Sheffield Hallam University we have a four-faculty structure, with divisions (or programme areas) and subject groups. Near the top, this means relatively few people to get together. Once the structure fans out, however, there may be up to 200

A newly established team on a 24-hour retreat.

people involved when all the quality enhancement initiatives are taken into account.

The aim of my project was to identify those with faculty LTA leadership and support roles and to address their needs and the challenges they were encountering through providing professional development opportunities.

The story told here also reflects my interest in viewing universities as complex adaptive systems (Stacey, 2003) where change emerges (Seel, 2005) through the interactions and, in particular, the conversations of diverse agents (Shaw, 2002). An example of applying these approaches to changing assessment practice in universities appears in Macdonald and Joughin (2008, forthcoming).

The retreats

As part of my programme of activities I offered each faculty a 24-hour retreat where we would take all the relevant staff out to a hotel in Derbyshire. The invitation which went out to staff described the event as follows:

> '*The purpose of the retreat will be to explore roles, responsibilities and development needs as a means of ensuring the most effective ways of promoting and supporting developments in LTA across the Faculty. Simply, we will explore where we are now, where we think we should be and what needs to be in place to achieve the desired outcomes.*'

The first retreat, in October 2006, was for the university's largest faculty with a diverse range of divisions. Many staff were relatively new to the role and those that were not had different views about what it entailed. I used a very structured approach, with a relatively tight timetable and each session leading to some output which could be compiled into a final report. The general feeling was that the retreat had gone well, that it was a useful team building exercise and that there was a series of actions which could be taken forward.

The second faculty decided to have a one day meeting in the Sheffield

Novotel instead of a retreat – something they were subsequently to regret. I used a similar format with similar outcomes, though this group was judged by the Head of LTA to be already working well as a group.

This left two faculties, and me feeling that I was not really presenting a significant challenge or risk taking to the participants, and certainly not to myself.

Some useful advice

The third retreat was scheduled for 24 January 2007, involving what I anticipated would be the most difficult faculty. During the previous week I pondered what to do and emailed my colleague and CETL Co-Director, Professor Anthony Rosie, to consider my options. His immediate response was to suggest looking at an approach he had just experienced – Open Space Technology (OST).

Not having ready access to a library I did what anyone else would do and put Open Space Technology into Google! The outcome was 18.8 million results which, after I remembered to include quotes, were reduced to 64,300. A quick scan led me to the work of the originator of Open Space Technology as a concept, Harrison Owen, and the website **http://www.openspaceworld.org.**

In an online user's guide to OST, Owen states that:

> '*Open Space Technology requires very few advance elements. There must be a clear and compelling theme, an interested and committed group, time and a place, and a leader.*'
> **(http://www.openspaceworld.com/ users_guide.htm)**

This was beginning to sound good for use with my forthcoming retreats.

While not everyone feels the detail of the approach is necessary for it to work, I have found that it is useful as a starting point when working with groups who have never encountered the concept before and are used to the facilitator taking a strong and continuous lead.

How does open space work?

There are a number of symbolic aspects of Open Space, of which the circle is for me one of the most important. Participants sit in a circle with no tables, just a pile of paper, marker pens and masking tape. There is a large blank wall which I introduce as the agenda for the session, which has yet to be decided. The theme of the event is on a large poster, together with the Four Principles and One Law. The Four Principles are:

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- When it's over, it's over.

The one law is The Law of Two Feet, which means that if anyone feels they are not getting enough from a group or feel that they are not contributing anything, they are free to walk away without it being seen as a negative statement. The law is also a good way of dealing with someone having taken over a group for their own ends as everyone else can walk away, leaving them on their own. Participants may also take the roles of butterflies or bumblebees – the former may opt out but sit there until they attract interest whilst the latter flit around cross-pollinating ideas.

After the theme is introduced to the group – and this has been decided on in advance in consultation with key people in the organisation – they all have the opportunity to write down an issue, idea or question that they would like to explore. They write their name on the paper and read it out before sticking it onto the blank wall. The symbolism here is that they have shown a commitment to, and interest or passion in, an issue and taken responsibility for it by putting their name on it.

When no more issues or questions are forthcoming the leader allows the group to negotiate a schedule by combining issues, dealing with conflicts and looking for synergies. It will be chaotic to start with and some will be extremely apprehensive

because the leader is not taking charge, though they can direct on some issues of process. However, after a short period of time a structure begins to evolve and the leader tells the groups to 'get on with it' before going off for a coffee.

How have I used it?

I have now used open space in various forms at least six times, with different types of groups and themes, and different outcomes.

The first, and most daunting, occasion was with the third faculty at Sheffield Hallam. I had arrived back from a trip to Hong Kong with food poisoning and under other circumstances would have cancelled. However, as I walked in the door and explained how I was feeling to the Head of LTA he responded with 'You should try Open Space Technology. I've been to two sessions using it recently and it's really good!'

Suddenly the whole prospect seemed far less daunting! The overarching theme of the retreat we had agreed was: *How can we be more effective in leading and supporting change in LTA?*

Once the groups had got going they asked me if they could capture their discussions electronically so we pooled all the available laptops, I provided a memory stick to each group and designed a simple template they could use. By the end of the 24 hours they had produced eight reports outlining their discussion, what action they were going to take, who was responsible and timescales. The reports became an agenda in their Faculty LTA Committees. There was still a group in the bar at 1.30 am – discussing assessment! A particularly significant comment from a more junior member of staff was that he felt no sense of hierarchy dominating their discussions, despite the presence of assistant deans, professors and senior academics. All had something to contribute and their contribution was valued.

My second use was the following week with the final faculty. This went less well because of the attempt to hijack the agenda by a particular group who had a political agenda to pursue. Suffice to say that, if this had been my first experience of trying open space, I might have been less willing to give it a second go! However, there were still significant positive outcomes leading to subsequent actions.

The next opportunity to use the approach came on a visit to New Zealand where I am an external critical friend to a research project involving academic developers from all eight New Zealand universities. I was asked to run a session on dissemination of the outcomes of the project and, despite there only being eight participants, I decided to give open space another go. In a relatively short space of time we managed two sessions with two different groups in each, producing outcomes that have gone forward into the final phase of the project.

Following a Friday afternoon exchange on the SEDA JISCmail list, I was asked to run a SEDA workshop on OST, which subsequently took place in October 2007, again with eight participants. Obviously I felt I had to model the process whilst also giving time to explore what was happening and how, as facilitator, to deal with issues. There was some initial scepticism in the room but, by the close, most seemed committed to trying it. At the SEDA Conference in November a participant at the workshop told me she had tried a modified version with 60 people in her institution and it seemed to work. It is always nice to get some feedback!

Another occasion on which I used the approach was on a 24-hour retreat for a newly-established team of secondees and academic developers as part of The Assessment for Learning Initiative (TALI) which is seeking to change the culture of assessment and feedback at Sheffield Hallam University. The retreat was intended to both build the team and give them the confidence and skills to take forward an action plan to ensure the greatest impact across the university. Again, the outcome was judged to have been a great success after the initial trepidation had been quelled.

Finally, I used the approach in a workshop at the SEDA Conference in November 2007 to reflect back on my NTF project and how others might use similar approaches to professional development.

Challenges

I would love to lead a two- or three-day SEDA conference using open space principles and involving 120-150 participants! There are plenty of strong themes we could work with. However, the reality is that delegates often get funded for a conference on the basis of a paper they are presenting or a workshop they are to run, not an open space where they may have something to contribute. It may only be when enough people have experienced it and recognised what it has to offer that funders may be more willing to take risks.

As academic developers it is very difficult for us not to intervene when we hear an interesting discussion to which we would like to contribute. I dealt with this by going for regular walks, reading in a separate room, but spending sufficient time close by to judge how it was going.

Open space is not suitable for all situations and works best when there is a major and complex issue which needs addressing such as a significant educational change, team building with a clear focus on activity and involving diverse people, and situations requiring quick action and involving potential conflict.

A final thought

My experience of open space has been largely positive and, from reports, has had a significant impact on participants. However, it is just one more tool in our repertoire of approaches, though one which for me has been quite liberating in that it focuses much more directly on the interests of participants. Harrison Owen reflects on the workshops, keynotes and meetings he has attended where the coffee break discussions are often the most interesting and productive part. So, I describe what I am doing as giving the opportunity to have an extended

coffee break discussion and, certainly in New Zealand, all the sessions happened in different coffee bars across the campus!

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Writer's retreat: reshaping academic writing practices

Rowena Murray, University of Strathclyde

Introduction

Writing is a key academic skill. Through publishing, academics add to knowledge and improve career prospects. However, many academics report problems making time and space for writing. One initiative that directly addresses this problem is writer's retreat, providing dedicated, facilitated writing time off-campus. Research suggests that it initiates and/or increases scholarly writing. Retreats developed in different higher education cultures – New Zealand, Ireland and the UK – but there are common elements: retreats are off-campus, for progressing specific writing projects and include self-selecting participants. There are different types of retreat: women-only retreats (Grant and Knowles, 2000; Grant, 2006); five-day facilitated retreats, where writers spend most of the retreat writing alone (Moore, 2003); on-campus retreats, that operate like writers' groups (Elbow and Sorcinelli, 2006; Lee and Boud, 2003); and two-day structured, facilitated retreats, where participants all write in the same room (Murray, 2005; Murray and Moore, 2006). This paper argues that structured retreat can help academics in 'reshaping' their academic writing practices.

Structured interventions

A systematic review of the literature on interventions designed to support academic writing concluded that 'structured interventions' are effective and should be adopted more widely by institutions seeking to support writing and promote publication (McGrail *et al.*, 2006). Structured intervention can have an impact on output (Morss and Murray, 2001). The literature suggests that there is merit in developing a structured retreat; this section describes structured retreat and evaluates its impact.

The retreat was facilitated by an academic in the Faculty who had experience and expertise in running different forms of retreat in many higher education cultures, and who had developed this new form for this context. The programme began with introductions on the evening before day one, in which the facilitator introduced the format, programme and ethos of retreat, and participants discussed their goals. A five-minute writing task was a 'warm up' for writing and prompted participants to set and share goals. Brief discussions continued throughout the programme, but most of the time was spent writing:

Writer's Retreat: programme	
9.15-9.30	Discussion of writing goal for 1st session
9.30-11	*Writing session 1*
11-11.30	Break
11.30-12.30	*Writing session 2*
12.30-1.15	Lunch
1.15-1.30	Setting/resetting writing goal
1.30-3	*Writing session 3*
3-3.30	Break
3.30-5.30	*Writing session 4*
5.30-6	Printing/treatment/writing
7.30	Dinner

Writing together in the same room made it possible to have brief, regular discussions of writing-in-progress, focusing on writing goals and building peer relationships around discussions of research and writing. This would have been more difficult to organise if participants were writing in separate rooms.

Evaluation

The study evaluated a structured two-day retreat through participants' accounts of its impact on their writing practice and output. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Strathclyde. Forty academics who participated in one or

more of the six retreats between September 2005 and March 2006 were contacted by email and invited to take part in the evaluation. All were given an information sheet and consent form and asked to suggest a date and time for interview if they were willing to take part in the study. Three did not reply, two declined and two had left the university.

Thirty-minute semi-structured interviews were carried out with 27 academics (15 females, 12 males). Eighteen of these had attended more than one structured retreat. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were coded and emergent themes identified, and themes were checked by an independent researcher.

Analysis

For the purposes of this initial discussion of findings, three themes were selected from respondents' accounts. Firstly, comments on the structured form of retreat, since this is a new format. Secondly, participants' comments about changes they made to writing practices were selected, since these indicate where its potential impact may lie. Finally, comments of those who participated in more than one retreat were included, since these indicate a potential way of sustaining benefits.

Strengths of the structured approach

The majority of respondents thought the retreat structure was useful and necessary: '…the structured, focused nature means you can't just bow out'. The general view was that 'It is the structured process that seems to work'. Most associated this with increased output: 'I achieved more in that one weekend than I had for the months prior to that'. Most achieved their writing goal during retreat. Those who did not felt they had not prepared well enough for retreat or had set themselves unrealistic goals.

The role of the facilitator in implementing the structured approach was seen as 'critical,' as this 'kept order' and 'ensured you remained focused'. One participant summed it up by saying '…we would not have achieved the outputs without the facilitator'. Without the facilitator, some felt that they would have achieved something, but not as much.

Changing writing practices

Respondents reported that, since retreat, they had a more disciplined, structured and planned approach to academic writing: 'I am actually more disciplined when it comes to writing practice'. This involved setting realistic goals, both before starting to write and after completing a writing task: 'I now have a more realistic sense of what I can achieve in a given time.' Many associated this with increased confidence, as they achieved goals. One example of changing practice was 'writing in small chunks', breaking a writing task down into sub-tasks and writing in specific timeframes. Respondents found they achieved more this way. They also changed how they used breaks: previously an 'avoidance strategy', at retreat they learned to use breaks as a way of 'recharging [their] batteries'.

The benefits of working as a group of writers were repeatedly mentioned: '…we all had a common purpose'.

Most respondents felt that they were with 'like minded people' who provided peer review and a network to use after retreat. Verbalising writing goals to others 'clarified' them. They felt writing together in this way, while unusual, was 'energising': '…my writing flows better when I am at a retreat'.

Several reported that they had begun to fit writing into the working day: '…the experience of being on the retreat has encouraged me to prioritise writing and recognise it as part of my job'. Many reported changes in their attitude to writing: the retreat was a 'catalyst for a change in thinking about writing', it was 'transformative', and it made academic writing seem more 'manageable'.

Sustaining change: 'repeat retreat'

Respondents who returned to retreat found that they were better-prepared, started writing more quickly and were less apprehensive, both about retreat itself and about the writing they had to do. They gained more with each retreat: 'Change is slow, especially when it comes from…deep-seated…anxieties'. 'Repeat retreat' was a strategy for regular academic writing: '…if I had 3 or 4 retreats a year I would never ask for study leave'.

Some found there was 'additionality' to repeat retreats: interrelated benefits included peer interaction, productive writing time, new research contacts and information, enjoyment of the scenic location away from the city, the comforts of the accommodation and catering and new ideas and approaches to writing for publication. Writer's retreat was not just about dedicated time; it also brought into play other aspects of academic work and research.

Discussion

Three main points can be drawn from this evaluation. The first is that the structured retreat, which draws on other forms of retreat (Grant and Knowles, 2000; Moore, 2003), can bring similar benefits. However, its distinctive structure stands out as a strength. Secondly, this form of retreat can prompt academics to change their writing practices in ways that help them to manage their writing better and prioritise writing on returning to campus. This form of retreat helped many of these participants to see academic writing as more 'manageable'. Finally, there may be a cumulative effect, with 'repeat retreat' being an effective way of producing regular academic writing. This suggests that, while certain writing practices developed at retreat were transferred to campus environments, the structured retreat continues to play an important role in reshaping these academics' writing.

Conclusion

Whether or not academics have sufficient knowledge and skill to write for publication was not the issue in this study or for this paper, although it does feature in discussions among participants, who generally acknowledge that at retreat they are learning new ways of managing their writing. That they then change some writing practices suggests that learning occurred, and subsequent discussion, including the interviews in this study, are forums for surfacing and consolidating that learning.

What this small-scale study suggests is that writer's retreat can be of benefit to academics and that some writing practices developed at retreat can be transferred to campus environments. However, it also suggests that one experience of retreat may only take some writers so far; for some academics, writer's retreat has become a mechanism of this dimension of their research productivity.

Finally, since this evaluation showed that many retreat participants continued to develop their writing strategies, it would be interesting to interview them at a later stage, in order to capture any further development in their perspectives and strategies.

Note

Further detail on this and other interventions to support staff and student writing is provided in a forthcoming SEDA Special on academic writing (Moore, 2008).

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Making the case for staff networks

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Foreword

Our involvement in staff networks at the University of Manchester came about by chance. We knew we had to consult with staff groups under the requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act, the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equality Act but we had no formal mechanisms to do this. We probably did what most employers would do – we advertised the consultation and invited staff to come along and give us their views. We were surprised how readily staff became involved and by the contribution they could make. Staff input transformed the development of our policies from words written on paper to a process where they felt ownership and became stakeholders in what we were trying to achieve. Recognising the value of this we have now formalised the role that the networks play in the development and implementation of key University policies.

Networks don't replace traditional consultation processes with trade unions and other academic bodies – the trade unions were great supporters of the staff networks in Manchester and in some cases played a crucial role in setting them up. The development of staff networks is recognition of the fact that people come together in many different ways and that they can contribute to development of policies and working practices without having to be part of established groups. Everyone benefits when staff feel that they are listened to and can have a role to play. Staff networks can help you open the door to changing the culture of the organisation.

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Background

In 2002, Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) established four staff networks, supporting Black and Minority Ethnic (BME); Disabled; Women; and Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) staff. Using insights from their experiences with

the staff network concept, LJMU developed a HEFCE Leadership Governance and Management (LGM-030) project to support North-West HEIs in establishing their own networks. This two-year initiative, which the Leadership Foundation was involved with as a stakeholder organisation, drew to a close in December 2007, culminating in a dissemination event hosted by the University of Manchester, and the publication of a resource guide (Gaule and Box, 2008).

Through reference to the project and its findings, this article explores the potential benefits of staff networks to the HE sector and discusses some of the related challenges for HEIs thinking of adopting the model.

Why staff networks?
Widely used in private and public sector organisations
Staff networks have become an accepted feature of work-life in private (e.g. BT, Lloyds TSB, Ford) and public sector organisations (e.g. police, civil service, local government, probation service, NHS) and are beginning to find favour in the HE sector. They bring together people who identify with a minority group and/or have an interest in matters relating to the diversity strands (i.e. gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, age and disability). Staff networks fulfil various functions, providing opportunities for peer support and professional development, as well as acting as specialist 'think tanks' informing governance processes related to the diversity agenda.

Acknowledging diverse cultural realities
The adoption of staff networks signifies a growing recognition by employers of the need to acknowledge and support the culturally diverse realities of its people, and to harness these experiences in order to develop more inclusive organisational cultures. This logic makes for a compelling business case, as without knowing how people from different identity groups experience our institutes, how will we really know if what we're doing is appropriate, accessible and inclusive? How will we know if barriers exist?

And if there are barriers, if we don't create opportunities for people to inform us about their consequences, how can we really learn as an organisation and truly become an employer and service provider of choice?

Legal imperatives
The case for staff networks has been further reinforced by recent developments in diversity legislation. The Race Relations Act (2000), Equality Act (Gender Equality Duty) (2006) and the Disability Discrimination Act (2006), necessitate that public bodies, including HEIs, are pro-active in promoting equality of opportunity on the grounds of race, gender and disability as well consulting and involving staff (and other stakeholders) in the development and implementation of strategies (i.e. Equality Schemes) designed to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.

Supporting the setting up of networks in North-West HEIs
What we did
The LGM project, which began in December 2005, brought together a consortium of 12 HEIs, the majority from the North West region [see Figure 1]. During the first six months, the project team undertook extensive consultation with local public sector organisations (predominantly from Local Government Authorities and Police Forces) that had adopted the network model. Alongside insights gleaned from a small number of partner HEIs that had previously set up groups, this period of consultation helped us to develop a knowledge base to support partner institutes.

Consortium of partner HEIs
University of Bradford
University of Central Lancashire
University of Chester
Edge Hill University
Leeds Metropolitan University
University of Leeds
Liverpool John Moores University
University of Manchester
Royal Northern College of Music
University of Salford
University of Cumbria

Figure 1 List of project partners

We used a number of strategies to support the setting-up process, including institutional workshops, bespoke one-on-one sessions with practitioners, as well as telephone and e-mail support (including a JISC-mail discussion forum, a project website and blog). In the spirit of collaborative learning, we also linked partners with local organisations (in and outside the sector), which resulted in staff attending network meetings at other institutions, and exchanging related information and resources.

Regional network events
During the second year, a number of regional staff network events were organised to support the various diversity strands, hosted by LJMU, the University of Central Lancashire and the University of Salford. These occasions brought together network members and practitioners, and also attracted participants from local public sector bodies and HEIs outside of the consortium, making for some insightful cross-institutional and cross-sector dialogue.

In hosting these events we wanted not only to provide valuable networking opportunities, but also to pick up on some of the themes that were being focused on at an institutional level. For example, at a Gender event hosted by the University of Salford, we invited a project team that had been researching flexible working patterns to present findings and lead a workshop, which required participants to reflect on their own work-life patterns and challenges. At the end of the day, picking up on the links that had been forged between Gender (and Women) networks and the Gender Equality Duties, participants broke up into action learning sets to discuss progress that had been made within their institutions, and the involvement that networks had played in supporting this process.

By the end of the project, eight partners had established staff networks, supporting one or more of the diversity strands. Input from the project helped to set up 15 networks in six of the HEIs.

Outreach and impact

In the majority of partner institutes, staff networks are still very much in their infancy, finding their feet and bedding in. Nonetheless, the project was able to highlight a number of demonstrable benefits for individual members, as well as on an organisational level.

Individual benefits

Towards the close of the project, a survey of members' experiences was undertaken, which included asking people what they had gained from being a member of a network. The most commonly cited benefits, highlighted by 45-63% of respondents, were:

- Peer support
- Networking
- Sharing information about issues that affected them
- Learning more about the institution
- Feeling their opinions help to make a difference.

These commonly-cited benefits underline the potentials of staff networks as supportive spaces for information sharing and affirmation of lived experience, allowing staff to air often previously silenced or marginalised narratives in the company of others that may have had similar or even identical experiences of work-life.

Furthermore, findings from the survey concurred with anecdotal insights, which highlighted that, by bringing together staff from across the academic/non-academic divide, networks functioned as important contact points, where people could exchange information and practices, and be updated on diversity-related issues and developments occurring across the wider organisation. What is more, for those members who believed that their input had helped to make a difference, networks would seem to exemplify best practice, allowing staff to identify strongly with their university because they feel they are recognised and their contribution is appreciated within an inclusive environment.

Whilst a more in-depth discussion of the value and benefits for individual members is out of the scope of this article, it is worth highlighting that networks afford notable opportunities for continuing professional development, not least for core group members. In taking on additional responsibilities and assuming network managerial roles, some members acknowledged that their involvement had allowed them to hone a range of skills and competencies (e.g. chairing, facilitating, administration, project management, team development, negotiating and influencing, working with senior managers etc.).

Organisational benefits

One of the inherent strengths of staff networks in supporting organisational learning is in the pooling together of experiences, knowledge and ideas of people from across the whole spectrum of faculties, departments and services within the institution. This collective intelligence enables networks to function as effective consultative and advisory bodies on diversity-related issues.

Within the partner HEIs, networks were actively engaged in forging partnerships with key functions such as Human Resources, Equality and Diversity, Staff Development, as well as Trade Unions, and other departments and organisational services. This was often undertaken as a means of raising awareness, mutual information sharing, and usually with the intention of exploring opportunities for partnership working (*vis-à-vis* networks and organisational functions). This had resulted in collaboration on a number of projects and initiatives.

Case Study 1: *A Disability Action Group was set up at Leeds Metropolitan University to provide a safe environment for staff and students to discuss disability matters, raise awareness of disability equality across the institution and contribute to policy and strategy. The network has invited personnel from Estates, Registry and Human Resources to report on progress regarding disability issues in these areas. This has resulted in staff*

from the group acting in an advisory capacity to Estates on their access policies and procedures (which led to the installation of handrails, automatic door features, improvements to toilets, colour schemes, lighting, as well as improved signage in the built environment). They have also collaborated with HR in developing a Disability Employment Policy, which includes a code of good practice and toolkit for managers.

Case Study 2: *A central aim of the BME staff network at the University of Manchester is to work with the institution to better support staff in accessing professional development and career progression opportunities. Building upon insights from a pilot scheme at the old UMIST, and working alongside the Careers service, the network has been involved in developing a BME Managers' Mentoring Programme. The group has also been successful in campaigning for the appointment of a senior manager with the remit of addressing the under-representation of BME staff in leadership roles as well as wider race discrimination issues. The role holder has set up a 'Race in Leadership' initiative to support these aims and has been working with a steering group comprising of staff from all levels of the University, including network representatives.*

The role of networks has been formalised in many institutes via their involvement with strategic, governance and decision-making processes. This included representation on Equality and Diversity committees and working groups, as well as performing a formal consultative role in reviewing, developing and implementing diversity polices and procedures. This was seen as a definite breakthrough in terms of how partners had progressed work in mainstreaming diversity, not least in HEIs with little or no real history of engagement with minority groups. This point wasn't lost on practitioners with one colleague noting that the involvement of network representatives was instrumental in re-energising their Diversity Forum, contributing invaluable context to discussions and

a 'grounded awareness of the real issues at hand.'

This formal involvement is still at an early stage in most of the partner institutes. It is likely to involve a steep learning curve if the process of consultation is to develop into effective working practices that help elicit real changes in organisational culture. Some immediate concerns of core group members were expressed as follows: how relevant and effective are Diversity committees as action forums? How can consultation via these channels realistically bring about change? Similarly, questions were also raised as to how to find a balance between networks acting as critical friends and being (ab)used as catch-all depositories for *all* BME, Disability, Gender, and LGBT issues?

Challenges and learning points

'The project has taken place in a period of increasing awareness of the usefulness of staff networks/advisory groups. The requirement for consultation in the latest equality legislation and the growing recognition of potential roles for staff networks/ advisory groups, have lead to a greater interest from the higher education sector.'
(Independent evaluation report of the LGM-30 project)

Being pro-active in supporting the diverse cultural realities of the communities of staff, students and clients that make up an HEI, and involving these people in the decision-making process, makes good business sense. Furthermore, if recent developments in diversity legislation are indicative of future trends, advocating partnership approaches, prefaced upon the long term involvement of staff (and other stakeholders), will become the required norm for HEIs, *not* the exception. Therefore a key challenge for leaders is to ensure that sustainable partnerships with different identity groups are nurtured. The staff network model doesn't offer an all-encompassing and definitive solution, but the LGM project has demonstrated that it can provide an important intervention to assist HEIs in fulfilling moral and legal responsibilities.

Organisational support of staff networks: identifying best practice

A colleague in local government noted that the growing recognition accorded to staff networks as good practice '…wherever you go and in whatever organisation', had led some to approach the setting up of networks with a mindset focused more on box ticking and being seen to do the right thing, and less on attending to the finer details that determine whether or not best practice on paper translates into effective working practices. Insights derived from partner HEIs and consulted public sector bodies suggested that there are a number of pointers in terms of how HEIs can best support networks, enabling them to develop into sustainable and effective forums. These include:

• Visible and active championing by senior management

Best practice was evident in organisations which involved staff at all levels, underlined through principles of co-ownership. Support at the highest level is critical if groups are to be taken seriously and fulfil their potential. In a recent article in the LFHE Engage journal, it was stressed that leaders should endorse diversity activities and '…of crucial importance was…for leaders to be visibly engaged in "doing" equality and diversity' (Bebbington, 2007, p.13). Senior Diversity Champions have a key and incisive role to play in supporting networks, which encourages 'action' and involves 'doing' [see Figure 2].

• Efforts to market and raise awareness across the organisation

A number of historical myths are likely to be attached to staff networks, which could leave some feeling resentful about their purpose, believing they offer people an unfair advantage. It's important for universities to be pro-active and vocal in helping to dispel these myths, and market participation as helping the university to redress historical causes of discrimination, whilst enabling staff to become part of the solution. If not, people could be reluctant to participate and members may be subjected to unfair criticism from some sections of the university.

Involvement of Diversity Champions could include

• Participating in a launch event
• Visibly endorsing participation (citing networks as 'Positive action' initiatives)
• Holding scheduled meetings with network representatives
• Participating in some network activities
• Championing the group amongst peers (internal and external)
• Briefing management team on issues arising
• Helping to align networks with mainstream functions/services

Potential benefits for Diversity Champions

• Useful insights of staff perceptions of what is happening 'on the ground'
• Grounded awareness of how policies and practices impact
• Increased knowledge and capacity to understand diversity issues
• Better positioned to pro-actively respond to changes
• Provide a conduit and 'sounding board' to source innovative solutions to identified corporate challenges

Figure 2 Role of Senior Diversity Champions and associated benefits

• Allocation of a reasonable budget

Networks need to develop the practical capacity to evolve into self-sustainable forums, and to take some ownership of this process. Associated costs relate to: advertising and publicity; refreshments and catering; travel expenses; team development and capacity building activities; guest speakers; launch events; administrative support *etc*.

• Provision of organisational time for staff to participate in network activities

Without this, it's unlikely that networks can become inclusive forums, reinforcing dominant division of labour patterns which privilege members of

staff with responsibility for managing their own time. Allowing people time off sends out a clear signal to staff (and those line managers that might trivialise networks and prevent people getting involved) and demonstrates that the university values the contribution networks make in supporting, core business objectives and fulfilling legal duties.

- Recognition and reward of staff contribution

The work involved in managing network business has been shown to significantly cut into people's time. Good working practice is evident in organisations that have allocated 'faculty time' for this purpose, and recognised involvement as CPD, rewarded via the appraisal process.

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Discipline-based Support for Early Career Academics: Subject Centres and the Professional Standards Framework

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Abstract

The launch of the UK Professional Standards Framework in February 2006 introduced an explicitly discipline-based element to accredited institutional programmes for new academic staff. The Higher Education Academy's 24 Subject Centres support and complement this institutional provision through a wide variety of activities and services. This article provides a brief synopsis of such support as a quick guide for busy educational developers and to offer ideas for how institutions and Subject Centres might work together to support new academic staff.

Introduction

The UK Professional Standards Framework (PSF) was launched by the Higher Education Academy in February 2006. It includes outline descriptors of standards for three different career stages for staff engaged in teaching or supporting learning in higher education. These standards are underpinned by set areas of professional activity, core knowledge and professional values. The standards are intended to be flexible in order to allow institutions to define their own criteria in applying the descriptors to their professional development provision. More information on the PSF (including a version in Welsh) can be found on the HE Academy website at **http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/policy/framework.**

The core knowledge element of the PSF specifies that staff have knowledge and understanding of (amongst other things) 'appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme'. Thus introducing an explicit discipline-based element to accredited institutions' programmes for initial and continuing professional development related to learning and teaching in higher education.

Many institutions have implemented innovative approaches to supporting this discipline-based element of the framework, for example:

- Work-based learning portfolios
- Action research projects
- APEL of participation in Subject Centre activities/events
- Subject-specific assignments.

In addition, the HE Academy's network of 24 Subject Centres provides a valuable resource to complement

institutional provision in support of early career academics. For educational developers, reading through multiple websites to gather information on provision for particular subjects can be time consuming. This article provides a brief synopsis of some of the activities and resources, specifically targeted at new academic staff, that are available from each Subject Centre.

The diversity of approaches taken across the Subject Centre network illustrates the diversity of the various discipline communities: whereas one community may respond well to interactive workshops another may prefer online or paper-based support. In addition, supporting new academic staff is only one of many priorities and the examples listed here cover only a fraction of Subject Centre provision for continuing professional development and support for learning and teaching.

Please note that the web pages listed below were live and accessible in February 2008.

Art, Design and Media (ADM-HEA)

(http://www.adm.heacademy.ac.uk/)

- Learning and teaching development day: http://www.adm.heacademy.ac.uk/events/learning-and-teaching-day
- Webpage on staff development: http://www.adm.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/resources-by-topic/staff-development
- 12 case studies on the linking teaching and research SNAS project theme: http://www.adm.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/adm-hea-projects/snas-nw-network
- Supports the Postgraduate Network of the Media, Communications, and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA-PGN): http://www.meccsa.org.uk/pgn/

Bioscience

(http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/)

- Web pages:
  - New Lecturers: http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/network/newlecturer.aspx
  - Postgraduates who teach: http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/network/postgrad.aspx
  - Staff and Educational Developers (includes a document mapping the Centre's activities against the Professional Standards Framework): http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/network/sed/index.aspx
- A resource folder of subject-specific information for new academic staff
- An annual briefing to staff and educational developers updating them with information relevant to their role (also available through the Centre's website).

Built Environment (CEBE)

(http://www.cebe.heacademy.ac.uk/)

- Workshop for new teachers of architecture (18 December 2007): http://cebe.cf.ac.uk/news/events/new_teachers/index.php
- Packs of support materials for new lecturers in architecture and landscape
- Thematic workshops and a Special Interest Group (SIG) for Planning
- A short briefing paper to senior staff, 'How to make the best of new members of staff'.

Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance (BMAF)

(http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/business/)

- A combined BMAF/Health Science and Practice 'Supporting Part-Time Teachers in HE' (PTT) project funded by the Academy
- 'First Steps in Tutoring' electronic resource: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/business/resources/newteachingstaff
- Case studies relating to, 'Key aspects of teaching and learning in accounting, business and management' have been developed as part of an update for the 3rd edition of Fry, H., Ketteridge, S. and Marshall, S. (2003) *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, Kogan-Page, to be published in August 2008
- Collaboration with Dundee and Aberdeen Universities on SHEER 2 project relating to 'Enhancing educational development for new academic staff through the inclusion and comparison of disciplinary pedagogies'.

Economics

(http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/)

- Annual new Lecturers workshops (10-11 October 2008): http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/events/newlec1008.htm
- Graduate Teaching Assistants workshop (25 September 2007): http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/events/gta0907.htm
- A web section to support new lecturers and GTAs: http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/themes/gta.htm
- A total of eighteen Handbook chapters which are an important resource for new lecturers: http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/

ESCalate (Education)

(http://escalate.ac.uk/)

- A publication entitled 'Becoming a Teacher Educator: guidelines for the induction of newly appointed lecturers in Initial Teacher Education': http://escalate.ac.uk/3662

- A one-day workshop (November 2007) on 'Becoming a Lecturer in Initial Teacher Education: http://escalate.ac.uk/3947

- A page of resources focusing on the induction of new teacher educators: http://escalate.ac.uk/ite/induction.

- Toolkit on induction and transition needs for new ITE staff.

Engineering
(http://www.engsc.ac.uk/)

- Workshops
  - A two-day workshop for new engineering lecturers (June 2008): http://www.engsc.ac.uk/nef/events/new-lecturers-june08.asp
  - Workshops for demonstrators (postgraduate laboratory teaching assistants), in collaboration with the Physical Sciences Subject Centre: http://www.engsc.ac.uk/nef/events/demonstrators.asp
  - An Introduction to teaching, learning and assessment workshop for PhD students/postdocs: http://www.engsc.ac.uk/nef/events/index.asp?ID=1304
- Web pages
  - New academic staff: http://www.engsc.ac.uk/er/snas/index.asp
  - Postgraduates: http://www.engsc.ac.uk/er/postgrad/
- The Centre's Resource Database currently contains 59 resources specifically relevant to new academic staff.

English
(http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/)

- An annual two-day training conference: http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/newlecturer/trainingconf.php
- Book series 'Teaching the New English': http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/newenglish.php
- Web pages for Educational Developers: http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/newlecturer/profdev.php
- Web resources for new lecturers: http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/newlecturer/index.php

Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES)
(http://www.gees.ac.uk)

- An annual residential workshop for new and aspiring lecturers (10-11 April 2008): http://www.gees.ac.uk/events/2008/newlect08/newlect08.htm
- The residential workshop programme has been mapped to the professional standards framework to ensure the workshop aligns with existing PGCert

activity and to provide a focus for reviewing/updating it

- A New Lecturer's Induction Pack has been put together, based on the collated SNAS GEES Subject Centre records
- A matrix of activities mapped to the Professional Standards Framework.

Health Sciences and Practice
(http://www.health.heacademy.ac.uk/)

- Events
  - A workshop for new academic staff (February 2008): http://www.health.heacademy.ac.uk/news-events/eventsbox/2008/workshop-for-new-academic-staff/view
  - The Festival of Learning runs a strand specifically targeted at new academic staff: http://www.health.heacademy.ac.uk/scevents/
- An induction pack of materials and information (to be available by the beginning of the academic year 2008)
- Occasional Paper 6: 'Making Practice-Based Learning Work: An Overview of the Nature of the Preparation of Practice Educators in Five Health Care Disciplines': http://www.health.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/occasionalpaper/occp6.pdf
- Becoming a Nurse Educator/Allied Health Professions Educator: From Expert to Novice: see article by Boyd and Lawley in *Educational Developments,* 8.3. August 2007.

History, Classics and Archaeology
(http://www.hca.heacademy.ac.uk/)

- Twice yearly workshops for new Lecturers and Post-Graduate Teaching Assistants are held in Archaeology and Classics: http://www.hca.heacademy.ac.uk/events/details.php?id=532
- Postgraduate and new lecturers' network and services for History: http://www.hca.heacademy.ac.uk/HistoryPGDocNetUK/
- Meetings for training of new History faculty/GTAs; and with institutional TLDUs to provide the context
- Support for ancient language and other Classics teaching: events and practitioner networks mostly targeted at new lecturers.

Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism (HLST)
(http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/hlst/)

- An annual residential workshop for new lecturers: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/hlst/documents/events/new_staff_flyer_feb08.doc
- A forthcoming guide for new staff.

Information and Computer Science (ICS)

(http://www.ics.heacademy.ac.uk/)

- An online resource on 'Getting started in Pedagogic Research': http://www.ics.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/pedagogical/cs_research/
- New staff wiki: http://www.ics.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/newstaff-wiki/
- Online 'tips and tricks' for supporting/mentoring new staff
- A forthcoming resource pack for new staff.

Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS)

(http://www.llas.ac.uk/index.aspx)

- 'Life and work in academia: an event for new lecturers in languages, linguistics and area studies'(15 April 2008): http://www.llas.ac.uk/events/llaseventitem.aspx?resourceid=2886
- CILT HE event for postgraduates and new staff (July 2008)
- Event for new staff / PG students on academic careers (2008-09)
- Resource pack for new / international staff (2008-09).

Law (UKCLE)

(http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/index.html)

- A web page for new staff and postgraduates who teach: http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/postgraduate/index.html
- Toolkit for Teaching event (September 2007): http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/newsevents/archive/tookit2007.html
- A web-based, flexible, participatory, modular resource (the 'Toolkit'): http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/research/projects/toolkitproject.html
- Forthcoming briefing on developments relating to the professional recognition scheme and the Professional Standards Framework.

Materials (UKCME)

(http://www.materials.ac.uk/)

- New Lecturers course (4-6 September 2008): http://www.materials.ac.uk/events/newlect2008.asp
- Forthcoming Publication from the findings of the 2006 PedR project 'Experiences of New Lecturers in Materials'
- Joint workshop on 'Facilitation of Laboratories by Postgraduates' (forthcoming)
- National Special Interest Group/Forum for new Materials lecturers.

Mathematics, Statistics & Operational Research (MSOR)

(http://www.mathstore.ac.uk/)

- An annual two-day 'Induction Course for Lecturers new to teaching Mathematics and Statistics': http://mathstore.gla.ac.uk/index.php?pid=126
- Teaching modules for new academic members of staff:
  - Teaching Statistics in HE Course: http://www.rsscse.org.uk/activities/tsihe.asp
  - Associate Module: 'Learning and Teaching Mathematics in Higher Education' accredited by the University of Birmingham: http://www.hr.bham.ac.uk/development/courses/landt/MSS013_Associate_module_in_Learning_and_Teaching_in_Higher_Education_mathematics.shtml
- A web page on Professional Development: http://mathstore.gla.ac.uk/index.php?pid=18
- Regional one-day workshops for postgraduates who teach: http://mathstore.ac.uk/postgrads2007/index.shtml (to be repeated in Autumn 2008).

Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science (MEDEV)

(http://www.medev.ac.uk/)

- A web page on Supporting New Academic Staff: http://www.medev.ac.uk/SNAS
- The RAFTT (Resource Archive for Teacher Trainers) project: http://www.medev.ac.uk/blogs/raftt/
- Support for the Academy of Medical Educators: http://www.asme.org.uk/academy/academy_faq.htm
- Initiate a project to better support the subject strand of PG Certificates for new academic staff.

PALATINE (Dance, Drama and Music)

(http://www.palatine.ac.uk/)

- 'Starting Out: Workshop for New and Early Career Lecturers in Drama/Theatre Studies'(16 February 2008; the scheme will be rolled out for Music and Dance in 2008 and 2009): http://www.palatine.ac.uk/events/ view/1200/
- An information pack for New and Early Career Lecturers: http://www.palatine.ac.uk/themes/career_lecturer/
- A web page for early career lecturers: http://www.palatine.ac.uk/themes/career_lecturer/

Philosophical and Religious Studies (PRS)

(http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/index.html)

- Forthcoming New teachers event
- Doctoral research student development programme (series of events)
- Collaboration with Academic Practice CETL (Oxford) (event)
- 'Guide for New Lecturers' (to be launched shortly on the website).

Physical Sciences

(http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/physsci)

- A web page for new lecturers: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/physsci/home/professionaldevelopment/newlecturers
- Workshops
  - For postgraduate demonstrators in collaboration with the Engineering Subject Centre (February 2008): http://www.engsc.ac.uk/nef/events/demonstrators.asp
  - For new lecturers (2 November 2007): http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/physsci/events/detail/New_Lecturers_Workshop_Nov
- Contribution to an EU-funded summer school of new chemistry lecturers from across Europe
- Publication packs will be provided to new chemistry, physics and forensic science lecturers.

Psychology

(http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/)

- Information packs about the work of the Psychology Network are sent to identified new lecturers at the start of the academic year
- An annual two-day forum for new lecturers: http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/docs/doc/p20070322_New_Lecturers_Forum_report.doc
- Co-sponsorship of eight places on an online course, GRAD980: preparing to teach psychology, run by the University of New Hampshire, US
- Support for postgraduates in running the Postgraduates who Teach (PGwT) Network: http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/html/postgrads_who_teach.asp

Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP)

(http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/)

- A residential 'Early Careers and Refreshers Event for Politics and International Studies' (7-8 February 2008,

this will run again on 18-19 September 2008): http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/events/new_event.htm?id=164
- Biannual Early careers event in sociology (January and September 2007) co-sponsored with the SWAP Centre: http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/events/past_events/old_event.htm?id=141
- A web page of annotated references for postgraduate teachers and new lecturers: http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/subject_areas/anthropology/key_texts/ShowTopic.htm?id=8
- The Centre has a variety of teaching tips and guides appropriate for new academic staff: http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/resources/guides/

Social Policy and Social Work (SWAP)

(http://www.swap.ac.uk/)

- Web pages for new academic staff: http://www.swap.ac.uk/research/snas1.asp
- Biannual Early Career and Refreshers Events for sociology and social policy teaching staff in collaboration with C-SAP: http://www.swap.ac.uk/events/workshop.asp?ref=1436
- A series of Guides to support new academic staff: http://www.swap.ac.uk/about/SWAPguides.asp

In addition to the various activities listed above, each Subject Centre has contributed resources to the Supporting New Academic Staff (SNAS) Database on the central HE Academy website at **http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/professional/snas.** Searching the wealth of generic and discipline-specific literature and examples of practice available can be intimidating to colleagues newer to learning and teaching in higher education, so the SNAS resources have been specially selected to provide a useful starting point.

Helen King is a higher education consultant (http://www.helenkingconsultancy.co.uk).

SEDA Conferences

13th Annual SEDA Conference 2008: Changing Educational Development: Whose Values? Whose Agendas? Whose Future?

18-19 November 2008, Aston Business School Conference Centre, Birmingham

SEDA Spring Learning Teaching and Assessment Conference 2009: Underpinning Academic Practice with Research and Scholarship

7-8 May 2009, The Thistle Hotel, Brighton

Information for Contributors

The Editorial Committee of *Educational Developments* welcomes contributions on any aspect of staff and educational development likely to be of interest to readers.

Submission of an article to *Educational Developments* implies that it has not been published elsewhere and that it is not currently being considered by any other publisher or editor.

For more information please contact the SEDA office via email: office@seda.ac.uk

Re-aligning assurance and enhancement: Quality Management at the University of Bath

Gwen van der Velden, University of Bath

Introduction

A few years ago I received a phone call from a professor in one of the sciences asking me for advice. He explained that he had finished eight weeks of teaching in his course, but as our terms had been extended to a longer period, he now wanted to know what he was expected to be doing with the students for the rest of the time.

The answer was straightforward of course, but the fact that the question was asked was astonishing. This colleague is a committed teacher, with pedagogically sound instincts and more years of experience than my age was at the time. I had come to know him as an instigator of innovation projects, extra-curricular scientific challenges for his students and cross-institutional reviews of teaching practices. Yet somehow, he had formed the view that those final four weeks of teaching were not his; they had come to belong to someone centrally responsible for learning and teaching.

That incident, and a number of discussions with valued colleagues in institutions, SEDA and HEDG, has led me to believe that in highly-centralised quality assurance systems, specifically if they are separated from quality enhancement, the perceived ownership of learning and teaching transfers from those who teach to those who regulate. Stated like that, it seems straightforward, yet I see across the HE sector in the UK endless examples of this occurrence, often only easily visible with hindsight.

Sir David Watson, in his keynote speech at the 2006 Quality Strategy Network conference 'Who killed what in the quality wars?' uses similar hindsight to explore the politics of the quality agenda and points out who has lost. He rightly mentions the interest of students as one of the victims. I would

add to this the interests of discipline-based staff. Or, at least, the understanding by many discipline staff of what this mythical creature that we call 'Quality' is – or as Simeon Underwood more appropriately called it at his Teaching Quality Assessment training workshops in the early nineties: 'the Snark'.

Obviously I am by no means alone in being critical of the disjointed manner in which quality assurance has been able to develop over recent years. Major moves are underway – partly driven by the Scottish part of the sector – to re-align enhancement and assurance and on top of that, to seek new ways of creating space for discipline-related pedagogical considerations. The former has become something that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) stresses in its strategic plan for 2006-2011. It states that:

> '…quality assurance in higher education, be it internal or external, is not an immutable process or set of inspection procedures, to be repeated when completed. Rather, it is a constantly evolving means to achieve certain desired outcomes, including institutional and public confidence in academic standards and quality; an opportunity to acquire institutional self-knowledge, leading to improvement of practice; public information; and a proper degree of accountability. Most of these aspects of quality assurance and enhancement will be most effectively achieved within institutions themselves. As institutions are increasingly able to demonstrate clearly this achievement, the nature of QAA's engagements will change.'

This is an interesting statement worth

further exploration. Apparently, it is not just the case that enhancement *and* assurance are easily aligned as the outcome of processes only of 'quality assurance'. It is also the case that institutions themselves are the primary actors in this. This is potentially confusing. Many academic colleagues will speak of 'the institution' when they mean the senior management and central organisation. They will not use the term to describe themselves and their students. But what does QAA mean by the term? Which actors in the institution are the ones that are 'effectively achieving' the quality assurance and enhancement? Maybe it is an indication that in current institutional audits, few discipline-based academics are involved in meeting with the auditors, and it has also now come as an – in my view welcome – afterthought that there should be some student representation on an audit team.

The same strategy also suggests quality enhancement as a result of quality assurance:

> '…QAA took a lead in promoting an understanding of quality assurance as a process that embraces quality enhancement, and has provided enhancement benefits in a number of ways.'

I suspect that most readers of Educational Developments are aware of the discussion one could have about that statement. Has the regime led to enhancement or compliance? Does assurance come first, or are there many cases where enhancement has led to measurable ('assure-able') improvements in learning and teaching? And on that note, what happened to learning and teaching as the central theme of quality? Or are we back again at the central discussion of an *'immutable process or set of inspection procedures'*?

Quality management principles at the University of Bath

Luckily, the QAA now agrees that institutions themselves are probably best positioned to decide on these matters. And this is precisely what is happening at the University of Bath. We are a medium size '60s university, established from a number of technical colleges, with a majority presence of science and engineering subjects, but also a highly successful School of Management and a strong Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty. For a number of years now Bath has been ranked in the top ten of UK universities, due to excellence in research and outstanding teaching and learning. Grown from discipline level, there are extensive links with industry and employers, allowing us to offer placements to our students with some of the most desirable employers. About 60% of our students take a substantial placement through these connections, which has the expected effect on their career prospects. The body of staff and students is substantially international, and in many ways it is comparable to fellow '94 group universities. However, we have an unusually devolved structure for student support (skills development, *etc*.), as these are provided through the Student Union. This stems from a view of our students as active 'academic citizens' sharing responsibility with the university for contributing to an all-round student learning experience.

Somewhat ahead of national discussions, in 2005 the university decided it wanted to capitalise on these strengths and develop an approach to quality management that allowed a close fit to our institutional ethos, i.e. with strong student representation and ownership of learning and teaching at the discipline level. This has allowed us to develop an integrated approach to quality management, with 'challenge and rigour in learning and teaching' as its central theme.

So now we concentrate on learning and teaching in our quality management. It is *not* the pursuit of procedure and regulation so as to satisfy external agencies (a cynical form of quality assurance at the one end of the continuum), nor is it just the pursuit of pedagogical (research) development (a particularly academic form of quality enhancement). Instead, we concentrate on finding out about the learning and teaching processes *as staff and students experience them*, as well as preserving, enhancing or reviewing them, whichever is most appropriate.

Three main principles underpin our approach:

1. Students are the beneficiaries of the education we offer. Ours are high calibre students and we expect them to be pro-active about taking responsibility for their learning and study. In order to challenge them and to prepare them for careers in which responsibility and leadership are likely to play a part, we invite them to co-own and steer the learning and teaching processes that affect them. We are finding this leads to invaluable contributions towards learning success.

We do not view it as sufficient to simply establish what students 'enjoy' or are 'satisfied' with. Instead we wish to see our students engage with their responsibility for learning by being informed and playing an integral role in the steering and review of their education. Several of our data-collection and analysis exercises are a shared activity between the Students' Union and the university, informing the academic community as a whole. We call this the *student informed quality aspect*.

2. Bath is a university where our work is heavily underpinned by one of the important values of academic practice: the value of peer esteem and review. This is what validates much of our research, and it comes naturally to academic processes to seek validation of our research work through application of this principle. This works equally well in learning and teaching. Not unlike other HEIs, we use external examiners to assure the quality of our assessment, we use externals (often employers) to inform our Degree Scheme Reviews and programme approval, and to support our staff development, and we make comparisons to practices in universities similar to Bath, when we develop policy or gather examples of good practice. We call this the *peer informed quality aspect*.

3. Within the culture of a research–intensive university, it is reasonable to expect that when concentrating on our professional learning and teaching practices, we inform our choices by considering scholarship or academic research. Hence we expect that learning- and teaching-related decisions are made on the basis of a considered, pedagogical rationale (rather than on reasons of a historic or habitual nature). At the same time, we accept that there are discipline-specific ways of approaching learning and teaching, because of the discipline-specific intellectual culture of staff – and in due course their students.

Combining those two elements, when looking for quality, we are expecting that considerations are based on sound learning and teaching principles, while fully accepting that what works for one discipline may not be appropriate for another. We call this the *quality aspect informed by sound learning and teaching principles*. 'Sound' may relate to a well-established research base, a peer-reviewed evidence base or practices that are well-evaluated against criteria relating to student learning (rather than teaching efficiency).

Whenever proposals are made for changes to our Code of Practice, it is these three quality elements that need to be considered. At first sight, these principles may not seem all that different from general principles underpinning traditional approaches to quality management, but there are some distinct differences, partly in the nature of their interpretation, partly in terms of implementation. Most notably, these quality principles are easily understood and accepted by the academic community, which clearly supports implementation.

Interpretation and implementation of the quality aspects

The student informed quality aspect

Firstly, where the student voice has long influenced institutions and individual academic staff in their teaching decisions, it has recently become much more significant – most notably through NSS-related league-table pressures. But even with the introduction of students onto audit teams, or the recent expectation that students are to receive external examiners' reports, such activities are reactive and mostly aimed at satisfaction. We have taken a different approach and are encouraging the active student voice that is informed and contributes (or criticises) with an emphasis on learning needs, rather than satisfaction.

So, senior representatives of the Student Union meet up fortnightly with colleagues from the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (which has responsibility for quality management oversight). At these meetings, joint proposals for enhancement and/or assurance are drawn up, so that both university staff and student representatives are engaged in an informed partnership for learning and teaching progress. Departments and Faculties have similar arrangements and, these days, few proposals for enhancement are accepted at institutional levels unless student views are included in the paper.

Similarly, the great majority of the disciplines now have enhancement working parties consisting of staff and students following up on annual NSS results, thus ensuring that both parties are equally informed about each others' considerations and progress is made in partnership. Moreover, the results of our NSS and other surveys are these days reviewed and addressed by the institution and the Students' Union together. Therefore our response to NSS for all Bath students was presented by the President of the Student Union and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) together.

Most recently, one of our departments has taken this partnership an important step further by including an additional round of interviews to the procedure for appointing new staff, so that students can question prospective candidates on their learning and teaching strengths, and inform the appointing panel of their findings. Other disciplines are now discussing this.

The peer informed quality aspect

With regards to the second quality aspect, the university sector internationally has always recognised the value of peer review and peer esteem in its (e)valuation of research. But in the UK – and in a very few other countries – this is also the case for learning and teaching. Mostly, peers are used as external examiners or as advisors on curriculum development, and often as partners for educational development, through collaborative projects. That is also the case at Bath. But again, we are broadening the debate on this quality aspect by seeking recognition of success at faculty or institutional levels for those in elected or representative roles. After all, if leadership on learning and teaching finds commitment and approval from other committee or working party members, then this too is recognition by peers, even though they may not be of the same or a cognate discipline. This is clearly reflected in the criteria for teaching awards and career promotion for our academic staff.

Furthermore, when reviewing our assessment and feedback practices recently, departments were invited to discuss their practices with external examiners (visiting our institution as well as our own staff examining elsewhere), and seek views of peers on how further enhancements could be made. As a result, assessment and feedback enhancements that are informed by discipline-related practice and experience are finding credibility within the disciplines, and are introduced after due consultation with students where appropriate.

Discipline specificity is highly important to us in enhancement terms; in fact, the university motto is 'Generatim Discite Cultus' or 'learn each field of study according to its kind', and this is reflected in a strong sense of ownership of learning and teaching at the discipline level. Linking that to positive experiences of peer review, we are now exploring whether discipline-based staff with an educational enhancement responsibility would be interested in 'pairing up' with a colleague with a similar remit in a comparable institution. At a central level, we are developing this principle already for mid- to senior-level professional administrators in relation to quality management specifically, with another research-intensive university in the South West.

Quality informed by sound learning and teaching principles

For the third quality aspect, we are investing in the development of pedagogical awareness across all disciplines in the university. A practical discipline-based example of this was given above in relation to enhancing assessment and feedback practices. Our efforts to strengthen pedagogical understanding are not much different from those in other institutions, and we may be less advanced with this kind of scholarly development than some other HEIs with a longer tradition in this area. However, we are working in close partnership with employers who relate to the discipline and this is a quality that is particularly well-developed at Bath, where many of our programmes are professionally-based or closely linked to industry or employment in other ways. So, our School of Management has an advisory board consisting of leaders in business that looks at curriculum development and a number of other aspects of learning and teaching, including strategic direction setting. Our architecture teaching is done partly by our own academic staff, but also by a number of professional architects, recruited and supported to teach and develop our students. Incidentally, the feedback students each year give to the architecture group heavily influences the precise make-up of the teaching team of the

following year, while the input of professional architects is regularly sought to develop the curriculum. On our postgraduate health programmes many of our teaching staff are senior practitioners, supported through internal mechanisms (including an online course on online learning for health practitioners) to deliver online the academic and professional content of our courses. And again, any proposals put forward for policy development or change, or for exemption of policy at any level of the institution, are expected to be underpinned by a rationale referring to sound pedagogical principles.

Further developments are the establishment of learning and teaching scholarship networks and seminars for cognate discipline areas and generic pedagogical scholarship, building on seminars and research efforts already present within individual disciplines.

It is worth noting that we don't feel that we're 'there' yet. We haven't caught the 'Snark', nor has our model been 'reviewed' by the QAA. And in some ways, that does not matter. This model has brought students and staff to a partnership, which supports a strong ownership of learning and teaching. A good two years into this effort and we have still not heard of concerns over centralisation, overregulation in relation to quality, nor has there been any reason to assume that devolved quality management to a partnership of staff and students puts the mythical quality at risk. Rather the opposite.

And personally, I hope never to receive a phone call again, asking me what to teach in the few weeks left at the end of a semester…

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How I write books and get them published

Maxine Alterio, Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand

Novelist and academic writer Alexander McCall Smith's quip 'Everyone says they have a book in them, but I say you should go and get an X-ray', hints at the complexities inherent in writing and publishing. It can be a long and tortuous road. One we would probably avoid if we truly understood what we were taking on. Knowing our books must compete against the four thousand that are published worldwide every day doesn't help either. So what keeps writers writing and how can we maximise our chances of being picked up by a publisher? In my experience it comes down to five factors: believing you have something worthwhile to say; having the will and stamina to focus on a project for a lengthy period of time; developing a repertoire of skills that enable you to craft and re-craft your manuscript; having the acuity to identify a gap in the market; and, finally, being willing to listen and respond openly to feedback.

As an academic writer, a short-fiction author and a novelist, I am often asked to describe my writing habits and to explain how I approach publishers. My experiences of working with six publishing companies, including Kogan Page (UK), RoutledgeFalmer (UK and USA) and Penguin Group (NZ), inform the suggestions outlined in this article.

Although I tend to write about what interests me, I do take note of subtle market shifts. *Learning through Storytelling in Higher Education,* initially published by Dunmore Press (NZ), focused on creative learning and teaching practices. My co-author Janice McDrury and I linked the art of storytelling to reflective learning and demonstrated how educators might use processes and strategies to better prepare students for the rigours and uncertainties encountered within professional practice contexts. According to Questia (an online library service) our book was the first to make these connections.

Presenting new concepts and innovative approaches can attract international attention. *Learning through Storytelling in Higher Education* was picked up by Kogan Page after the commissioning editor was present at a conference in Edinburgh, where I talked about 'learning how to learn through storytelling'. Not long afterwards this book was acquired by RoutledgeFalmer. On this occasion, an innovative writing project, hard work by two committed writers and good timing came together. But even under such ideal circumstances, writing a book comes with multiple challenges, some of which I will now comment on.

People often ask how I find time to write since I work full-time as a Learning and Teaching Advisor in the Educational Development Centre at Otago Polytechnic. My answer is always the same. I dedicate at least 12 hours a week to writing. My regime involves going down to my computer in the den under the stairs at home two evenings a week and one afternoon at the weekend, regardless of whether I feel

like it or not. Once a week I print what I have written and write reflections in the margins. I also read my work out loud, a useful method for detecting flaws. I even use exercise time, such as walking to work or going for a swim, to think about my current writing project. If I strike a troublesome concept in an academic piece, or a problematic character in a work of fiction, I think about the issue as I drift off to sleep. I often wake with a solution. Trusting my subconscious enables me to access a rich array of possibilities. I record any useful fragments and ideas in a notebook before getting up, otherwise I risk losing their essence.

Seeking feedback from other writers is another useful strategy. If they struggle with aspects of my writing, so will my readers. Re-working chunks of my precious manuscript can feel daunting but writing friends' suggestions invariably strengthens it. Few writers produce a draft, polish it once and move on to the editing phase. I re-work manuscripts many times, honing content, structure and style. *Learning through Storytelling in Higher Education* underwent considerable restructuring and rewriting after Janice and I wrote our first draft and received initial reader feedback. My novel, *Ribbons of Grace*, which was published by Penguin Group (NZ) in 2007, and hit the New Zealand Best Seller List, also benefited from astute input from members in my Dunedin writers' group. I always consider any feedback for a few days before acting on it. Taking time to 'ponder' and 'wonder' enables me to look at my work more objectively and places me in a better position to make wise decisions about what to change and when to stand my ground.

How do I know a book is finished? When I read the entire work out loud and feel proud, and when I find myself taking out commas I put in the day before. My preference is then to put the manuscript aside for several weeks since distance helps me read it later with 'fresh eyes' before I submit it to a publisher.

Sometimes publishers visit educational institutions asking for book proposals. Occasionally an international publisher secures overseas rights from the initial publisher of a book. Janice and I experienced both situations with *Learning through Storytelling in Higher Education*. From time to time two publishers simultaneously offer a writer a contract. I found myself in this enviable position with my novel *Ribbons of Grace*. But I have also experienced pangs of disappointment when a returned manuscript has appeared in my letterbox.

How do I decrease such a likelihood occurring? Firstly, I only approach publishers who take the type of books I write and I always read the submission guidelines on their website and follow them exactly. Secondly, I keep in mind that publishers are not impressed by gimmicks - coloured folders or a manuscript delivered in a wastepaper basket - as recently happened to a UK commissioning editor. So, unless I already have a contract, I submit a one page letter, an outline or synopsis of my book and three chapters. My letter is always brief - just three paragraphs. I introduce myself in the first, describe my book in the second and in the last I outline my target audience and say what gap in the market my book will fill. I then carefully proofread my submission, make any changes, print out a clean copy and post it.

Waiting to hear back from a publisher can be stressful, as this stage often takes between three and six months. I use the time to make notes or begin the research process for my next writing project.

If my submission is returned without feedback I accept the rejection with grace and focus on how I might strengthen the work before I send it out again. However, when a publisher does provide feedback, I take it seriously. I re-work my manuscript with their comments in mind before sending it to a different publisher. Perseverance is a crucial attribute for any writer. If I have a well-written book aimed at a clearly defined audience and my topic is 'hot', someone will pick it up. Then the celebrations begin!

Maxine Alterio lives in Dunedin, New Zealand, where she works full-time as a tertiary educator. She is co-author of *Learning through Storytelling in Higher Education: using reflection and experience to improve learning,* RoutledgeFalmer (UK and USA). Maxine is also a fiction writer. Her first collection, *Live News and Other Stories*, was published by Steele Roberts (NZ) in 2005. Maxine's first novel, *Ribbons of Grace*, was published by Penguin Books (NZ) in 2007. She is currently working on her second novel, *In Quiet Exile*.

Book Review

FE Lecturer's Guide to Diversity and Inclusion

A. Wright, S. Abdi-Jama,
S. Colquhoun, J. Speare and
T. Partridge

London: Continuum

102 pages

This little book is part of a series entitled 'The Essential FE Toolkit' and I was already familiar with other titles such as the 'FE Lecturer's Survival Guide' and 'Teaching the FE Curriculum'. The series aims to provide an easy-to-read overview of the essential information any FE lecturer/practitioner in the LSC-funded sector needs to enable him/her to keep up to date with the 'torrent of new initiatives' referred to in the Series foreword. This book aims to support practitioners to develop their skills in managing the range of individual differences and learning needs they will be confronted with in their classes.

The opening chapter gives an overview of inclusion and diversity, explaining the difference between integration and inclusion. It outlines key organisations and legislation, such as the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) of 1995 and how this has been

amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) of 2001. It thus provides a brief historical context and explains the background to the current position for the context of FE. The subsequent chapters look at different areas, such as ESOL provision, working with 14-16-year-olds, gender, dyslexia, autistic spectrum disorders and the needs of refugee students, so the book does cover a wide range. Despite the variety of material the authors manage to give a concise overview whilst also highlighting deeper issues for the reader to consider. There are suggestions for further reading in the general references at the end of the book, but I think it might have been helpful if there were some specific suggestions after each chapter.

Most chapters share a common, accessible format: beginning by defining terms and establishing the historical context, with reference to relevant legislation and research. So, for example, the ESOL chapter explains the application of terms such as TEFL and ESOL and provides some

of the theoretical background to language learning, with suggestions for further reading. The gender chapter explains the role of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the background to the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts in order to contextualise gender differences in subjects studied and achievement. The chapters on Dyslexia and Autistic Spectrum disorders identify general characteristics and relate these to classroom behaviours, with a range of practical suggestions for classroom strategies to support such students. The format works.

Very topical is the inclusion of a chapter on younger students, to address the increasing provision of 14-16-year-olds within Colleges. This chapter is useful in identifying practical issues about working with younger learners and highlights differences between school and College environments. I found the chapter on emotion and learning interesting and useful; here the authors use a comparison of behaviourist and

psychodynamic approaches to understanding emotion in order to illustrate how our underlying assumptions will influence our classroom practice. This encourages the reader to think beyond the immediate issues the authors are presenting and this approach is undoubtedly one of the strengths of the book. The chapter on support staff – whose role is so often overlooked – is also a useful inclusion, again to encourage practitioners to think more widely about their practice context.

The book's chapter formula functions well, allowing it to provide a concise overview of each area in turn, while going beyond a simple summary and highlighting more profound issues for practitioners to consider. The book very definitely achieves what it aims to do - it is a useful introduction to diversity and inclusion for lecturers in Further Education environments.

Liz McKenzie teaches at Truro College and in the Faculty of Education at the University of Plymouth.

In one of the latest references to cat-herders in the educational press, Alan Ryan (THES, 2007) advises HE managers not to attempt to herd academics from behind but to lead them by walking in front, and maybe this tongue-in-cheek vision is, ironically, the best way forward.

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Jacqueline Tuson is the Staff Development Officer for Southampton Solent University. She and Helen Gunner (the former Organisational and Staff Development Manager) have since regretted not seeking to accredit their programme and have noted the SEDA-PDF Developing Leaders Award (http://www.seda.ac.uk/pdf/ 26%20developing%20leaders.htm).

Jacqueline perceives the benefits of the Developing Leaders Award to be the educational context and also its accommodation of local design, but is unsure if she would gain 'buy-in' from the participants themselves for a longer-term development. She would like to hear from those whose colleagues have gained the Award to help her make the case.

Participant Feedback Results

On a scale of 1- 5 (5 is high) how do you rate the programme as a whole? 4.1

Programme item	Content (Average)	Delivery (Average)
Leadership/Management	4.5	4.5
Strategic planning	3.3	3.4
Communication/MBTI	4.2	4.6
Resource planning	3.6	4.6
Team Awayday	4.1	4.3
Managing staff resources	4.4	4.4
Team role presentations	4.3	4.4

Most frequent comments from questionnaire:
+ positive: - negative

How far do you feel the programme has prepared you for the roles that you are about to undertake?
+ better team understanding and understanding of common goals (7)
- need more practical skills (2) wait and see (2)

Retrospectively, what are the three most important learning outcomes you gained from the programme?
+ Better sense of the team and individuals within it (9) better self awareness (2) clearer overview of university (2)

Please make any other comment or suggestion with regard to the programme that has not been covered by the evaluation questionnaire.
+ At last we are taking developing staff seriously. Professionally done (3)
- Team awayday revealed that more work needs to be done on team building (1)
70% left blank

Please suggest topics for *future sessions* (either knowledge or skills) which would further your development.
Practical skills – people management (6) committee structure (2)
50% left blank

Kirkpatrick's second level is to review the original objectives and assess whether learning has taken place. The Dean had commissioned the programme and, from his perspective, the programme had met the aims of raising awareness and, in some cases, provided new knowledge and clarity on procedures. The Developers reflected back on the original three aims and felt that these were the right aims at this stage in the new structure but that further development should focus on more specific skills, once staff became more familiar with their roles.

Kirkpatrick's third evaluation level recognises the fact that training does not end at the completion of a training programme. At the end of the AL programme, the Dean agreed further sessions that dealt with skills acquisition at point of need so that the momentum was not lost. A follow-up questionnaire took place 2-3 months into the role to identify need, and the School Heads and the Functional Associate Deans continued to meet with the ALs in a 'mentoring' capacity.

Kirkpatrick's final level – and the most notoriously difficult to evaluate (Megginson *et al.*, 1999) – is the impact of development on operational performance. As far as the AL programme is concerned, its value will only be gauged, over time, and by asking both team leaders and their teams. Early indications of impact are beginning to emerge, however, in that the ALs' ability to communicate the benefits of a recent audit exercise has been the key factor in gaining 100% response. Similarly, support staff have noted less confusion with regard to lines of authority and responsibility within the academic teams.

Another objective measure of value can be gained by comparing the programme with best practice. Recent research conducted by Development Dimensions International for the CIPD suggested that transition training was both valuable and valued but surprisingly underused; with 54% of the leaders questioned noting that their organisations failed to provide adequate preparation for new roles and 60% also reporting a failure to provide support once new leaders took up their responsibilities. In this respect, the AL programme followed best practice in that it was run before staff took up post and provided follow-up at 'three months or so after' (DDI, 2007:9).

The DDI respondents claimed that the 'new role required different ways of thinking' and 59% reported that, compared with other life events, the leadership transition was 'either very or extremely challenging'. They highlighted the value of mentor support and a strong peer network to help with emotional transition. Thus, the AL programme's focus on team identity and team-working would also appear to be supported by the research.

Interestingly, the DDI study revealed that the most common problem for newly-promoted leaders was 'working through' others and that these junior/middle-ranking leaders had as much difficulty with 'leaving behind elements of the previous role' as they did with 'grasping new skills and perspectives' (DDI, 2007:7). This finding takes us full circle back to the cat-herders in that the one clear request from the Programme participants was for further training on boundaries, dealing with performance issues and managing conflict. A session on these issues has been planned and will be delivered once the University's new disciplinary policy has been ratified but, taking advice from the DDI and Roger Kline, the former Head of NATFHE, this session will focus on building trust and follow on from the work on self-awareness that the ALs have already completed.

Training the cat-herders! Transition development for newly appointed academic leaders

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In 2006, the arrival of a new Dean provided the opportunity for a radical re-think about how the 'business of education' is managed in the Faculty of Technology at Southampton Solent University. The resultant re-structure was underpinned by a 10-week staff development programme for those who stepped into the newly defined roles.

In the new structure, the Faculty was divided into three Schools with a Head of School and four Academic Leaders per School. The ALs were given leadership of smaller subject areas or Domains and took functional responsibility for either: Operations, Learning and Teaching, External Development or Enhancement. The AL job descriptions were based on the JNCHES Academic Role Profiles - Teaching and Scholarship: Level 4. The functional aspects of the roles were aligned with the responsibilities of the Faculty's two Associate Deans.

The new posts were described as Academic Leaders rather than managers so as to avoid the fear of managerialism that McCaffrey (2004) notes. In his study, academic staff neither wished to be seen as managers nor wished to be managed. Indeed, the popular conception of managing academics being akin to herding cats (Bennett, 2005) seems to carry more weight than Newby's vision of a Higher Education sector where 'structures of governance…..combine collegiality with an institutional ability to act decisively and adapt to change' (Newby, 1999).

Importantly, the title, Academic Leader, was not just an aphorism. The subject domain element of the new role was concerned with implementing strategy rather than maintaining the status quo (one of the distinguishing differences between leaders and managers according to Drucker's classic definition (1974)),

and the AL's functional duties served to enhance the transformational and forward-looking nature of the role.

Training Analysis
An initial meeting was held between the Dean, the Faculty Development Officer and the Organisational and Staff Development Manager at which the aims of the programme were agreed along with the adoption of a systematic approach.

The Developers analysed the AL and the Heads of School job descriptions and cross-mapped them against Adair's interlocking circles model of leadership functions (2005) and the Management Charter Initiative Level 4/5 competences. This process highlighted several generic themes that needed to be addressed within a leadership development programme.

Planning
The programme was planned to run for 11 weeks from the time of appointments having been confirmed until the end of the semester. A clear expectation of attendance was set by the Dean and a budget of £7k was set aside to provide refreshment, external speakers and resources.

Delivery
The programme had three overall aims:
- to raise skills levels of newly appointed Academic Leaders and Heads of School in line with their newly defined roles
- to enhance knowledge of strategic direction and its impact on the Faculty and Faculty roles
- to promote effective team-working in the Faculty.

The programme consisted of five 'formal' sessions. These contained inputs from a specialist speaker and were followed by related group activities that were facilitated by the

Developers. These activities were often customised to the University's context: for example, the input on Resource Planning was followed up by case studies using real-time financial spreadsheets.

There were four 'informal' sessions where the group worked in Adapted Action Learning Sets. The sets mirrored the matrix structure that had been adopted by the Faculty. For the first two hours, the Academic Leaders met with the relevant Associate Dean to agree the parameters of their functional roles and responsibilities, and for the last hour they moved into School sets where issues raised in the functional meeting could be aligned with their Domain roles and responsibilities within the School.

The sets were 'adapted' since there was a remit, a joint task and a time limit. The sets remained true to the action-learning ethic; however, the members were able to agree their own agenda for each meeting and individuals could bring problems/ solutions to the group for facilitative discussion.

The secondary intention behind using such sets was to build a sense of common purpose, team identity and mutual support among the newly constructed layers of leadership within the Faculty. A general team-building Awayday was also included in the programme with the whole Faculty Management Team taking part.

Evaluation
Four levels of evaluation were operated to correspond with the Kirkpatrick model (1994). At Kirkpatrick's first level of 'Reaction', participants gave immediate feedback in the form of post-it notes at the end of each formal input and completed an end–of-programme questionnaire: