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SEDA and the 'Students and Universities' Inquiry

James Wisdom, SEDA Vice-Chair

Setting up the inquiry

In October 2008, the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee of the House of Commons invited evidence to inform its new inquiry into 'Students and Universities' **(http://tinyurl.com/5m24fj).**

This followed the events of June 2008 when the Committee took evidence from the QAA after they had published three rather critical reports into Assessment, External Examining and International Students. In the press, two separate issues were conflated – that universities might not be very good at assessing students accurately and consistently, and that the Honours degree classification system was no longer fit for purpose. These ideas, combined with the changing culture resulting from increasing tuition fees, created the fear that the reputation of the UK's HE was at risk.

The Select Committee established broad terms for the enquiry, looking at admissions policies, the balance between teaching and research, the classification of degrees, and student support and engagement. Around 100 Memoranda of Evidence were submitted by Christmas, and these, gathered into one document, can now be read at **http://tinyurl.com/c96zf9.** They came from universities and university groups, associations and professional bodies, researchers and individuals, some dissatisfied with current conditions. The Committee has asked Bahram Bekhradnia from the Higher Education Policy Institute, Sue Law from the Staff Development Forum and Ron Barnett from the Institute of Education, London, to be their advisers.

SEDA sent out an information e-mail through its discussion list calling for comment, drafted a memo within 3000 words, circulated it through the Executive for detailed comment, and submitted it. It is Memo 35 in the combined document, and is now in the working papers section of the SEDA website.

After Christmas the Select Committee started issuing invitations to give evidence in public sessions. Six had been held by the end of April, with a seventh announced, and the Committee has visited the two universities in Oxford and the three in Liverpool. Unapproved minutes are swiftly published on the Committee's website **(http://tinyurl.com/ckz44c)** with a warning that witnesses have not yet had an opportunity to correct this record, and videos of some of the sessions are downloadable, so it is easy to follow the inquiry. SEDA was invited to give evidence at the third session. The Committee hopes to have written its report by mid-summer.

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Summary of the SEDA Memorandum

A The introduction of professional pedagogic development programmes for new staff was important and has been successfully implemented across the sector.

B The sector now needs to invest heavily in maintaining the professional development of those new staff, and in supporting the professional pedagogic development of established staff. This is an urgent priority.

C The professional pedagogic development of middle and senior managers – those who manage and lead the main teaching programmes and the innovation and enhancement work – has been neglected. This has to change.

D The effects of the RAE have severely damaged the quality of student learning, by delaying and inhibiting the growth of a scholarly approach to researching teaching and learning and the development of the infrastructure required to successfully implement change, enhancement and reform.

The Memorandum went on to describe the value of SEDA's Professional Development Framework in helping the sector meet the National Standards. The underlying theme of the document was that, as the work of educational developers was becoming more professional, it was revealing the weaknesses of many of the existing practices of the sector. It stressed how HE needed staff who were investing heavily in their professional development as teachers and supporters of student learning in order to successfully implement the many changes it so clearly faces.

The first two evidence sessions

The first evidence session (in two parts) invited representatives of the main VC and FE bodies: Rick Trainor from Universities UK, Malcolm Grant from the Russell Group, Les Ebdon from Million+, Geoffrey Crossick from the 1994 Group, David Baker from GuildHE, Pat Bacon from the 157 Group and John Craven from the University Alliance **(http://tinyurl.com/ca672x).** The second (also in two parts) took evidence from the NUS (Wes Streeting and Alex Bols) and 14 students, mostly involved in students' unions. It was quickly clear what the questioning would be like.

Q6 Chairman: *Professor Trainor, why do not all universities publish how much time they will have in lectures; who will be the academic staff who are teaching them; the resources that are available to them, to give them the sorts of criteria by which they can judge between different universities, if you like, and also to evaluate the experience they have? None of that is made clear at all…*

Q21 Chairman: *Professor Crossick, your evidence and indeed that of Professor Grant is that if you have strong research in the university, that impacts positively on the teaching. Is that agreed?*
Professor Crossick: *Yes.*

Q22 Chairman: *Therefore, the spreading of research across all universities in order that we improve the access to research across all universities will improve teaching – yes or no?*
Professor Crossick: *It is essential that –*
Q23 Chairman: *Yes or no?*

Q59 Dr Gibson: *Do you think academics are trained sufficiently in how to mark a final exam paper?*
Professor Trainor: *There is a lot more training of academics in all the skills of the teaching role than there was a generation ago.*

Q63 Chairman: *It would have been wonderful just to hear that there was some slight flaw in the higher education system this morning. It is quite remarkable.*

One of the questions asked by the Committee was about the desirability of academics being trained to teach and having a qualification as teachers, and

especially whether such elements should be compulsory. This exchange **(in http://tinyurl.com/d2fb5y)** with the President of the NUS is an example:

Q 143 Chairman: *….The point I am making here is that if we want to raise teaching standards – and the Academy was supposed to do that – do you not feel, as a students' union, you ought to be campaigning to make sure that every university accepts the need for its academics to be properly trained?*
Wes Streeting: *I think if you ask the majority of students up and down the country, 'Do you want your lecturers to be trained to teach?', they would say yes.*

The third evidence session

The video recording failed, but the uncorrected transcript is on the Committee's website **(http://tinyurl.com/ckz44c).** I gave evidence on behalf of SEDA, together with Bob Burgess, VC at Leicester, Geoffrey Alderman at the University of Buckingham, and Gina Wisker from the Heads of Educational Development Group.

Several key points emerged from the discussion. Early on, Bob Burgess challenged the significance of the number of student complaints about quality with an analogy about satisfaction with any mass-market product (he chose washing machines). I was able to emphasise the importance of the transition between an older and a more modern HE, with new concepts and different language to describe its concerns. (In the uncorrected transcript the reply to Q276 has been wrongly ascribed to Gina Wisker.) Gina was able to stress the importance of parity of promotion between teaching and research. I tried to describe how false was the actual division between teaching and research in the real lives of most academics, and the effect of the RAE itself in creating this division. The compulsory teaching question arrived in this form:

Q289 Graham Stringer: *While we are talking about teaching and research, do any members of the panel believe that researchers should get a postgraduate qualification in teaching in higher education institutions? Are there any benefits to that, or is it just another qualification for the sake of a qualification?*
Professor Wisker: *Yes, we talked about this this morning at HEDG. We had a meeting and we talked about qualifications being a necessity for anybody who was working directly in student learning. If your researchers never engage with students and their learning, then perhaps they do not need a postgraduate qualification; but if they are going to be engaged with student learning at all, students posting or emailing, then anyone who is going to be doing that work with a student we think must have some form of development so that they can do this. It is a professional activity. I would not want to employ a plumber, just to go back to washing machines, who had absolutely no professional qualifications to do my plumbing and I would hope the same would be accorded to higher education.*

Q293 Chairman: *With respect, it is not standard practice, is it, because it is not a mandatory requirement? It is entirely up to you as a vice-chancellor, whether you wish to impose that? Am I right or wrong?*
Professor Burgess: *I think you are right, but I also would say that the practice is that many colleagues now go through courses, and courses that are –*
Q294 Chairman: *I am not debating that, but the reality is that this was supposed to be a requirement that everybody signed up to, and it is not happening, is it?*
Professor Burgess: *I think one would need systematic evidence that it is not happening. Certainly, colleagues go through courses of this kind, and indeed they comment on going through courses of this kind. I read external examiners' reports that come from courses of this kind.*
Q295 Chairman: *The point I am making is that it is not a requirement, is it?*
Professor Burgess: *It is not a requirement that you hold a qualification in teaching in higher education.*

Other issues in the discussion were: the importance of students knowing who will teach them, their qualifications and for how many hours per week (the 'contract' within the prospectus); the comparability of degree standards; the value of the Honours classification and the use of the Higher Education Academic Record; whether modularity had made high marks easier to get; and whether the Quality Assurance Agency should be replaced by a body concerned with standards, not just process.

The subsequent evidence sessions

Peter Williams of the QAA has received the longest sustained questioning of any witness. He was confronted with strong challenges such as *'You have no teeth and you do not look at standards'* and *'Are not the universities simply giving you a run-around in reality?'* In response, he commented on the value of peer review (an issue which SEDA challenged in its Memorandum), but signalled that the QAA was considering the scrutiny of primary evidence, alongside external examiners, rather than restricting itself to merely observing the way the institution has scrutinised that evidence.

At the same session Paul Ramsden from the Higher Education Academy gave evidence. The challenge question to the HEA was to show evidence that the £24 million it received each year was making a difference to the quality of teaching and its status. Many of the Committee's questions have been hard to answer convincingly, and this was no exception, although later Paul Ramsden suggested that the evidence for the success of accredited courses could be found in students' views and QAA reports. The transcript is also at **http://tinyurl.com/ckz44c.**

The session with the three Vice-Chancellors of the institutions in Liverpool was more thoughtful and measured, particularly in the contributions from Professor Pillay at Liverpool Hope, who signalled how the QAA's work might develop in terms of enhancement, the proper assessment of teaching quality and the recognition of the huge responsibilities which come with the claims for autonomy. One contentious area was the challenge, mainly to Liverpool University, that while it would have no difficulty closing a department with a poor research record, a poor teaching

record would not figure in such a decision. The subsequent session, in which Mantz Yorke, Bernard Longden and Lin Norton were witnesses, was a good examination of the evidence about non-completion rates and changes in the proportions of good honours degrees. In responding to a question about the QAA's fitness for purpose (Q95), Mantz put very clearly the reality of the interlock between standards and process in the QAA's work, suggesting that the current regime was effective, while respecting autonomy. All this can be found at **http://tinyurl.com/cq6cmn.**

The session at Oxford, with the VCs of Oxford and Oxford Brookes, concentrated on admissions, fees, the relationship between research and teaching, and the equivalence of degrees between the two institutions. This last issue generated a remarkable question from the Chairman:

Q207: *May I just come in here? I am treating this conversation with incredulity, if I am perfectly honest. If you are telling me that it costs roughly twice as much to educate a student at Oxford as it does at Oxford Brookes, in terms of the hours invested you invest significantly more time in your students than they do at Oxford Brookes, you are telling us that your admissions process is so rigorous that you are creaming the world's best students in order to get in and yet you are saying the outcome at the end of the day is exactly the same. Why do we bother?* After some discussion around the terms of the question, Dr Hood said: *I am not saying it is a higher standard, it is a different standard, it is a different education* **(http://tinyurl.com/dlmjm8).**

Students' views of teaching

The Committee has taken evidence from students about their quality of the teaching in two ways – directly at evidence sessions, and through an electronic forum.

Twenty-four students have given evidence so far – with one appearing twice. Most of these witnesses appear to be associated with their student union – the group at Oxford Brookes may have been selected differently. In general they appear to be enthusiastic, articulate and enjoying their experience of university life. They report that they have had some very good teaching, but occasionally some poor experiences, which are most often from lecturers for whom research is a greater priority than teaching, or from sessions in which lecturers just read PowerPoint slides. However, they often reported good teaching from lecturers who are enthusiastic about their research.

From the 40 postings on the Forum, the picture of a varied experienced is the same, but the proportions are very different. There is much more dissatisfaction about inaccessible lecturers, dull teaching and poor feedback, and a significantly greater demand for lecturers to be trained, even qualified, to teach.

SEDA's policy on professional development

The SEDA Executive at its February meeting developed a response to the question about compulsory training and qualification for teaching staff. Following its memorandum, SEDA decided that, although there was still a lot to be gained by continuing the voluntary approach, all staff who teach, and who are middle and senior managers of education, should be expected to achieve Standard 2 of the National Professional Standards Framework (or Standard 1 if they have reduced teaching responsibilities).

The question then arises, by when? SEDA anticipates the most likely date will emerge from the debate in 2010 on the setting of tuition fees and the design of the support package. If the proportion of direct costs falling on the student is increased, one approach to mitigating the burden is for the Government to guarantee the highest possible standards of tuition. Assuming a lead time of two years to implement the change, SEDA expects 2013 to be the target year. Given the infrastructure of educational development which now exists, this is a heavy but not insurmountable challenge.

The broader view

The Vice-Chancellors and their two companies (the QAA for assurance and the HEA for enhancement) have all faced some very strong challenges. The performance of some of the vice-chancellors has not done Higher Education any favours. Long and unfocused responses have sometimes been abruptly cut short by the chair, and they have presented in the main what appears to be a complacent defence of the status quo combined with a fierce defence of their autonomy. For proof of excellence they have relied very heavily on the levels of satisfaction shown in the NSS and on the high demand from overseas students, despite the weaknesses of the NSS instrument and the failure to discount the importance of teaching in the medium of English. Most seemed untroubled by difficulties (either conceptual or financial) in the relationship between research, scholarship and teaching.

The Committee has had great difficulty in accepting, either from the vice-chancellors or from Peter Williams of the QAA, that the process audit approach is a guarantee of standards. No vice-chancellor referred explicitly to the HE Qualifications Framework or the Benchmark Statements, though Peter Williams did, nor to accreditation by professional bodies, though one student did. Perhaps these were implicit in their descriptions of their internal, self-regulating processes, but they missed the opportunities. Instead they have all relied heavily on the external examiner system, which members of the Committee challenged as being an old boys/girls' network. SEDA's memorandum referred explicitly to the need for external examiners to be qualified.

In the difficulty of reconciling the equivalence in degrees with difference in ranking of institutions and of taught input hours, most of the witnesses have concentrated on the diversity of intended outcomes of identically named degrees. None deployed the notion that the system was doing no more than guaranteeing the basic standard of each class, and that programme specifications and learning outcomes were making the differences transparent.

Alongside the theme of standards, the Committee are particularly exercised by some HEPI research into differences

in teaching time put into identical qualifications. This has broadened into questions about the validity of the reputation lists, because the Committee is suspicious that in the high-ranking research-intensive universities students don't actually get taught by the people named in the prospectus. As the work of the Committee is intended to inform the debate about fee levels, this set of ideas combines into the key questions – what improvements to their experience are students seeing for their money, and what more might they expect if the fees are increased? Thank goodness Janet Beer at Oxford Brookes had a clear response to his question – offering a lower SSR, investment in buildings and infrastructure, extending the work of the Reinvention Centre, offering more students placements and attracting some star researchers.

Two excellently argued Memoranda (SU 09 and SU 16) on the current state of assessment (from Chris Rust and others at the Assessment CETL at Oxford Brookes, and from the Student Assessment and Classification Working Group), along with an important account of the pattern of changes to grades from Mantz Yorke, do give a much firmer base for understanding what might be happening than much of the anecdotal and whistle-blowing evidence which has caught the eye of the journalists. The evidence session with Chris Rust and Margaret Price, of the Assessment CETL at Brookes, reinforced the notion that standards are developed through dialogue within communities and networks. The need to improve the quality of assessment, as with other areas the Committee is investigating, urgently reinforces the call from SEDA to have a properly trained and qualified profession – we may be in these difficulties through too great a respect for existing, well-meaning but fundamentally amateur practice.

Predictions?

Even though the inquiry is only half-way through, is it possible to suggest what the report might contain? Taking the students seriously – whether as customers, as colleagues, as apprentices in a discipline, as junior researchers, as parties to a contract in the prospectus, or whatever model of relationship that may be developed – is already at the top of the list. It is clear that the Committee is highly alert to any evidence of assumptions that the academics own and produce HE in ways that suit them, and students can merely take it or leave it. The Committee seems very clear that autonomy has been a cover for delaying or failing to address fundamental issues, though the more the Committee listens to the evidence, the less keen it seems on creating an OfQual to enforce standards. The hunt for research funding (not research itself) has been shown to damage the student experience, and universities which have encouraged this may be criticised. A better-trained and qualified profession in exchange for an increase in tuition fees seems a likely deal, with the Professional Standards Framework and accreditation being taken seriously. The call for a modernised profession able to deploy pedagogic scholarship to reform its practices should surely emerge from the conceptual confusions of the standards debate.

At the time the report is produced, John Denham will be publishing his framework plan for HE for the next 15 years (the background papers for this are on the DIUS website **http://tinyurl.com/chv2vh)** and the debate on tuition fees and models of student support will move to the top of the agenda. The biggest danger is that the attack on standards and quality processes (and the implicit assumption that the expansion of HE is at the root of this 'problem') will provide a justification to reduce funding and student numbers.

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This article was written in late April 2009, before the last three witness sessions had been held.

Re-engineering assessment practices: A matrix for curriculum and institutional change

David Nicol and **Catherine Owen,** University of Strathclyde

How do you promote and sustain curriculum and institutional change in higher education? For most educational developers this is a long-standing concern. Over the last 20 years, the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement (CAPLE) at the University of Strathclyde has been involved in many initiatives to redesign individual courses and to improve the overall undergraduate experience at faculty and institutional level. In this article, we share what we have learned about curriculum and institutional change through our leadership of a large, multi-layered, development project, called REAP (Re-engineering Assessment Practices – **www.reap.ac.uk).**

This project differed in important ways from others we had supported and has helped refine our thinking about how to manage institutional change. The REAP project had a widespread and strategic impact across the University of Strathclyde. Importantly, the lessons we learned go far beyond the boundaries of their original context: our experience to date suggests that REAP offers a transferable model that has relevance to all higher education institutions as well as to national agencies that fund projects to improve teaching and learning.

The e-learning transformation programme

In 2004, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) invited bids for funding under its e-learning transformation programme. Projects were expected to demonstrate enhancements in teaching and learning through the application of technology and strategic changes at institutional level. Having modelled its programme on a US initiative (Twigg, 2003), the SFC was looking for actual evidence of learning improvements, of teaching efficiencies and of institutional embedding of change.

REAP received £1 million of funding from the SFC over two years. It was a collaborative initiative involving three universities, Strathclyde (lead institution), Glasgow Caledonian and Glasgow. This article focuses on the work carried out at Strathclyde, as it received the largest funding allocation. The REAP development team comprised the Director (DN), the Project Manager (CO), two learning technologists and an evaluator. The Strathclyde virtual learning environment team also provided support, as did a pedagogical expert and two part-time evaluators from the University of Glasgow.

The REAP Project

At the University of Strathclyde, the REAP project involved the planned and supported redesign of nine large first-year modules and one third-year module with student numbers ranging from 190-560. Course teams from nine different departments across five faculties carried out the redesigns. By course team, we mean a group of academic and support staff responsible for the delivery of a module. The spread of departments across all faculties had a dual purpose: to demonstrate that the models developed through REAP could be applied within any disciplinary area and to ensure cross-institutional impact.

The large student numbers associated with first-year classes added significant value to the REAP project. Large numbers meant that REAP would have a big impact across the institution: indeed, over 3000 students participated in REAP redesigned modules at Strathclyde during 2005-7. Demonstrating success with large numbers enhanced the credibility of REAP both with academics and senior managers. More generally, high student numbers represent a worst-case scenario for curriculum change: hence models of innovation that prove successful in such conditions are more likely to transfer to other teaching contexts and to other class sizes. Also, but just as important, the higher the number of students, the more robust is the test of technology application.

All the planned redesigns were systematically evaluated in relation to input (staff time), process (changes in methods of teaching and learning) and output measures (exam results, student and staff perceptions). Of the ten redesigned modules, six showed measurable gains in student attainment, including improvements in the overall exam pass mark of between 6% and 16% and a reduction in the number of students failing exams. None of the redesigns increased teacher workload, after taking into account the cost-to-change, and some selected redesigns showed reduced teacher workload (see Table 2, Mechanical Engineering and French). Student satisfaction was high across all implementations and academics were also positive about the teaching benefits to the department.

As the project was progressing, REAP ideas began to spread across the university (this is discussed later under 'Dissemination'). Also, the success of the project internally and its perceived success externally led the Deputy Principal to request that the Director of REAP convene a Working Group to develop a new university policy for assessment and feedback. This policy defines the aspirations of 'assessment for learning' as a set of principles of good assessment and feedback practice. The principles derive directly from the REAP project (see below) but they were also informed and refined through extensive consultations across the whole institution. Many whole departments and faculty groups are now redesigning modules and programmes using these principles.

The REAP findings have attracted considerable attention across the HE sector. Many UK universities have adopted or adapted the REAP principles for course redesign and embedded them in strategy documents, as have some HE institutions in Europe, Australia and the US.

So what were the key features of the REAP approach, both at the local level of individual modules and at the pan-institutional level?

Putting it into Practice

The REAP project depended on a matrix of components that were brought into play during implementation. The change process was not linear but rather iterative and interactive. Each component, or configuration of components, addressed different stakeholder needs at different times.

A powerful pedagogical idea is a good driver for change

When driving educational change in higher education it is important to have a clear goal that can be expressed as one big and powerful idea. This pedagogical idea provides the overall rationale for development activities and ensures project coherence. A large project might, for example, have as its goal to enhance interdisciplinary learning or to improve student writing across the curriculum or to foster an inquiry-based approach.

The powerful idea in REAP was 'self-regulation': the goal was to develop in students the ability to monitor, evaluate and regulate their own learning. In REAP, this idea was also linked to practice, to 'what teachers do'. It was argued that to develop learner self-regulation, course teams would have to systematically redesign assessment and feedback practices.

In many HE institutions, the development of learner autonomy or independence is a stated goal within the teaching and learning strategy. However, institutional strategies rarely say how autonomy is to be developed. This linking of project goal to teaching practices was a distinctive feature of REAP.

Curriculum change is enhanced when there is an explicit bridge linking pedagogy to student learning
Teachers need to be able to translate the big pedagogical idea into actual educational practices. While self-regulation encapsulated our overall thinking about the goal of the REAP project, a set of assessment and feedback principles as used to show how that goal could be translated into effective teaching practices. The principles were seen as aspirations for practice: they specify, but do not over-specify, the kinds of assessment activities that students must engage in if self-regulation is to be developed.

Table 1 shows the eleven assessment and feedback principles that underpinned the REAP project. These principles are all supported by research (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Gibbs and Simpson, 2004; Chickering and Gamson, 1987). Taken together they provide a framework for redesigning first-year modules based on the dual ideas of engagement and empowerment (self-regulation).

The last four assessment principles (8-11) are essentially about 'time on task' (Nicol, 2009). Research shows that the more time students spend studying in and out of class, the more they will learn (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). In REAP, these principles meant redesigning first-year modules so they encouraged regular and structured engagement: for example, by replacing one or two large assignments at the end of the academic year (e.g. a large essay) with a series of small regular assignments (e.g. 500-word essays) throughout the year. The seven feedback principles (1-7) are about empowering students, giving them practice in managing and evaluating aspects of their own learning (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Redesigns might involve enhancing students' engagement with learning goals and assessment criteria, creating structured opportunities for reflection and self-assessment, enacting peer feedback processes, or organising assignments to ensure that feedback is expressed in actions.

EMPOWERMENT

Good feedback practice should:

1. Help clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards)
2. Facilitate the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning
3. Deliver high quality information to students about their learning: that helps them self-correct
4. Encourage teacher-student and peer dialogue around learning;
5. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
6. Provide opportunities to act on feedback
7. Provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape their teaching.

ENGAGEMENT

Effective assessment tasks should:

8. Capture sufficient study time in and out of class
9. Distribute student effort evenly across topics and weeks
10. Engage students in productive learning activity
11. Communicate clear and high expectations to students.

Table 1 Principles of good assessment and feedback design (based on Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) and Gibbs and Simpson (2004))

In the first year, academic structures that foster student engagement need to be balanced with learning activities that foster empowerment (Nicol, 2009). Students must know what they are expected to do and by when, but they also should experience a sense of control over, and responsibility for, their own learning. This will prepare them for life beyond the university, where they will invariably be required to set their own goals and self-evaluate against these goals.

Change is more effective when local needs are addressed while maintaining a strategic focus
Course teams had to be convinced that their redesign efforts would address local needs. At the same time, the REAP team had to ensure that the local redesigns had a strategic impact.

Most teachers are quite receptive to the idea that higher education should develop student autonomy and foster learner responsibility, and to the argument that there are bottlenecks within assessment and feedback practices, particularly in the first year (e.g. feedback workload with large classes). What is more problematic for course teams is the pragmatics of first-year redesign: how to redesign assessment practices in ways that would address these bottlenecks. This is where the assessment and feedback principles are especially valuable: they provide a means to readily formulate solutions to issues of concern (e.g. how to enrich feedback without increasing teaching workload) or, at the very least, they provide a basis for a solution (e.g. low retention in the first year can be addressed by organising assessments in ways that make it easier to identify students in difficulty as early as possible).

In REAP, the assessment and feedback principles had a dual purpose: to simplify for academic staff what is a complex body of research and to provide a framework for module redesign and evaluation. While the principles helped course teams address their own needs, their uniform application across all the redesigns helped the REAP team maintain a coherent and strategic focus.

REAP: EXAMPLES OF FIRST-YEAR REDESIGNS

- **Psychology (560 students).** Lectures were cut by half and replaced by a series of six structured online collaborative essay-writing tasks. Student groups took responsibility for own working methods and feedback was provided from multiple sources (through model answers, peer dialogue and the teacher). A significant overall improvement was evidenced in the quality of written essays, in end-of-year exam marks and in student satisfaction. Many students

requested this format for other first-year classes.

- **Mechanical Engineering (250 students).** Electronic voting technology was used to support interactive peer dialogue and feedback in large lectures, online testing is used to enable 'just-in-time' responsive teaching and an online homework system enables independent learning. This redesign led to a 60% reduction in staff assessment workload, improved retention and raised the performance of weaker students.
- **French (200 students).** Introduced regular online formative self-testing linked to summative tests, reduced tutorials by 50% and replaced with online tasks. Enhanced face-to-face contact with electronic voting technology. Reported a reduced exam failure rate (12% to 2.8%). Students reported that the online tasks established important study habits necessary for language learning.

Table 2 First-year redesigns

Curriculum change must be embedded in disciplinary and teaching contexts

We supported course redesign in two ways: through the use of the assessment and feedback principles and through the provision of multi-professional support. It is important to note that in REAP we did not promote the principles as a fixed template or set of rules to be followed. Rather, course teams were encouraged to adapt the principles to their own disciplinary context: for example, a self-assessment technique that works well in pharmacy might not be appropriate in psychology. For this reason we recommended a 'tight-loose' approach to implementation. While course teams should try to maintain fidelity to the pedagogy behind each principle (tight), the techniques of implementation should be tailored to the teaching and learning context (loose). Also, since the assessment principles are inter-dependent and overlapping in their effects (in fact, they tend to operate as building blocks for each other), we did not expect each course redesign to embody them all.

While the REAP principles were seen as a necessary condition, or starting point, for redesign they were not sufficient on their own. Educational development works best where there is a collaborative approach and where those with different expertise (educationalists, technologists, administrators) are brought together to support course redesign. Therefore we worked with course teams to tailor the application of the principles to the disciplinary and teaching context.

Large sums of money at course team level are not always necessary to promote curriculum change

In the first year of REAP five course teams engaged in module redesign and in the second year a further five teams participated. Each course team was given a grant, although we did not stipulate how funds should be spent, as we expected differences in local needs. The funding was used variously to pay for project support (e.g. employ a part-time local project manager), to buy technology (e.g. an electronic voting system) or to develop online resources. Overall, these costs were not as high as we had anticipated: for example, most redesigns involved innovative uses of technologies already available within the institution.

Importantly, what emerged during auditing was that the funding allocated to the first five course teams was over-generous. Few of the course teams had spent their grant: in discussions it seemed that for many the funding was more of a legitimiser than a necessity. Funding allowed groups to legitimately engage in redesign activities and to justify the time they spent to heads of department and others, rather as a research grant legitimises the spending of time on research. These findings led us to rethink the management and funding of the round-two redesigns.

In round two, funding was reduced and was more closely aligned to the project objectives. It was paid in two instalments. We asked course teams to produce a plan describing how they currently taught the module, the issues they wished to address and the changes they proposed to make. To receive the first instalment the REAP team had to be convinced that the redesign – while addressing the course team's needs – also embodied REAP assessment principles and that it could be successfully implemented. However, it was made clear to course teams that the REAP team was prepared to work closely with them and would provide as much advice on learning design as was required to produce a convincing course plan. A second instalment was released when a final report was received which had to include an evaluation of the project outcomes. In this way, funding support was used to 'buy' the deliverables required by the REAP team. Also, by requiring a well-thought out plan we reduced the likelihood of failure at the implementation stage.

In operational terms, the real funding bottleneck in REAP was at the centre not at the course team level. Many more redesigns could have been implemented if the REAP team had been larger and able to work with a greater number of course teams to support the planning of redesigns, their implementation and evaluation.

Change is more convincing when there is a robust evidence base

REAP is one of the few UK large-scale projects to produce robust data showing that module redesign using technology can improve student learning without increasing costs. Twigg (2003) has shown this in the US but under quite different and more favourable conditions.

In evaluating the project we commissioned an independent team to work collaboratively with course teams to devise suitable evaluation plans. The evaluation team then implemented this plan: they administered questionnaires, held focus groups and interviews with students, teachers and support staff and analysed course documentation. They also wrote reports for departments that were subsequently discussed in teaching and learning

committees. This contrasts sharply with the action-research approach favoured within many educational development projects, where the teachers themselves carry out all the evaluation.

Course teams collaborated in the evaluation process, which was both formative and summative. They provided qualitative information about the module *before* and *after* the redesigns, data on exam pass rates, on student retention, progression and attendance as well as data on whether the redesign took up more staff time. Most course teams also piloted their innovation before scaling up activities to include all students taking the module. Formative data was collected to inform this scaling up.

The REAP principles allowed the evaluators to collate data that directly related to the change *process*. For example, the module redesigns were compared against what they replaced using the 11 assessment and feedback principles. This information showed the ways in which each redesign had increased opportunities for self-assessment, for peer dialogue, *etc.* Taken together across all the modules, this provides a useful measure of institutional impact.

We were also able to use the principles to compare similar implementations across different disciplines and to draw out lessons from different implementation approaches. In theory, the principles allow examination of process and outcome relationships. The implementation of more empowering educational processes may well be associated with better quality learning outcomes. Few studies have drawn this link, which may in part account for some of the positive REAP findings.

Smart dissemination strategies can multiply the effectiveness of institutional change

A key goal of the REAP project was to create lasting change at institutional level. Working with course teams across disciplines was one strand of this work while another was getting senior managers to support the project and to make changes in institutional policy and procedures to ensure long-term sustainability. Our dissemination strategy was intended to address both these local and strategic levels. It required a coordinated approach both internally and externally.

Internally, we created opportunities so that the early dissemination of project outputs would influence and spread to other departments. To achieve this, we asked the course teams involved in the REAP implementations to share their findings at informal 'brown bag' lunches, at internal dissemination events and at internal teaching and learning conferences. This worked better than expected: some course teams were so enthused by the results of their redesign that they acted as vehicles for REAP dissemination through their own departmental and faculty committees and through personal links with colleagues in other departments. For many academics the REAP redesigns had revitalised their own experience of teaching. Some made presentations outside at conferences both in the UK and abroad. Also, whereas in round one the course teams were selected by the REAP Director because they already had a track record of teaching innovation, round-two course teams were self-selected; and this was partly a result of the high visibility of REAP across the university.

External dissemination involved systematically lodging all developing outputs from REAP on the website as the project progressed including the redesign plans, the evaluations, publicity materials, all publications and external presentations. The REAP team also made more than three external presentations or keynotes per month over an 18-month period. Papers were published in journals and publicity materials were produced to disseminate the project at a range of external events.

A centrepiece event of the REAP project was an online international conference which attracted over 400 participants from 32 countries. This was an extremely effective platform for the dissemination and discussion of the REAP findings and for the collection of new case examples. Three themes framed the conference, which included keynotes from international experts: great designs in assessment, assessment and the first year and institutional strategies for assessment. All conference materials are still available on the REAP website. The online conference was the first of its kind to be associated with a large development project.

This external dissemination had a powerful effect. Not only was there a buzz about REAP within the institution, but also when academics or senior managers attended external events they also reported hearing positive feedback about REAP. This strategy thus addressed the common concern that 'A prophet is without honour in his own country'. The external dissemination had as powerful an effect as internal change in getting senior managers on board. A revised version of REAP principles is now embedded in our academic strategy and quality enhancement procedures and we are now working with registry and planning personnel to alter course approval and validation documentation in relation to these principles. In addition, a faculty group is currently working on the redesign of all first-year modules with the educational purpose of developing learner responsibility and some whole departments are now engaged in redesign across all undergraduate years.

Conclusion

The REAP project has shown that pedagogical principles can help connect the local to the strategic. The assessment principles helped support module redesign; they were used to formulate solutions to local problems; they provided an extra dimension to evaluations (a process measure); they helped ensure that technology applications added value; and, importantly, they are now embedded as the underpinnings of good practice in policy documents and throughout quality enhancement procedures.

It is common in educational development to favour a problem-solving approach to change management. This approach assumes that effective change is best driven by

user needs. Although REAP embraced this idea, it also drew on rational planning models of change. The REAP team had their own agenda, formulated as principles drawn from educational research, which were applied across all module redesigns. This was a subtle departure from established practice and it raises an important issue for educational developers: would our efforts to improve educational cultures and practices institutionally be more effective if, in future, we adopted a more proactive rather than reactive approach to change?

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Eyes on! Hands on! Museums and collections for higher order learning

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Learning power

'Higher education has yet to be convinced of the learning power of museums' (Reeve, in Davis, 2001). When John Reeve, then head of education at the British Museum, said this in 2001, it was undoubtedly true. There had even been misgivings about the role and value of university collections. But there now appears to be a burgeoning interest in the potential of both virtual and real object-based learning at tertiary level through Britain's remarkable museums, as reflected in the links to the projects listed below. Rihanned Smith, who is developing the use of collections at Reading, has suggested that 'the integration of museum learning theory with the pedagogy of student-centred learning can create a unique educational context for undergraduate research' (Smith, 2007). The aim of this article is to provide staff and educational developers with suggestions for approaches to the exciting range of museum-based learning resources. The Museums Association Yearbook estimates that there are 2500 museums in the UK, so there are plenty of resources to choose from.

Theory

First, the theory. It has been said that 'There is nothing so practical as a good theory' (Lewin, 1951). The theories described here have been selected to help teachers harness the power of museum artefacts to enhance student learning.

Active object-based learning: knowledge-making and higher order learning

The exploration of material culture (including works of art, artefacts and different types of specimens) leads to learning beyond the object itself. Engagement with objects in museum collections is an example of active student involvement in learning and linked to deep approaches. Belief in the positive effect of student-centred teaching, which focuses on 'what the student does', is widespread among educational developers and supported by research. The teacher's primary role is to facilitate learning rather than to transmit knowledge. The process of transmission is regarded as problematic, as learners cannot be drip-fed someone else's knowledge. They have to create their own.

Using collections to stimulate and inspire learning harmonises with this constructivist view of personal knowledge-making. The museum object is more than something which can transmit information. It is a 'thinking device', a 'cultural tool for generating meaning' (Rowe, 2002, p. 31). A single object can generate a succession of activities and leave space for multiple interpretations, as illustrated in Figure 1. Developing a student's ability to link concrete objects to sets of abstract ideas raises learning to a more challenging level. Higher order learning is easier through objects because 'objects, although concrete, actually represent a vast continuum of abstract ideas and inter-related realities' (Paris, 2002, introduction, p.x).

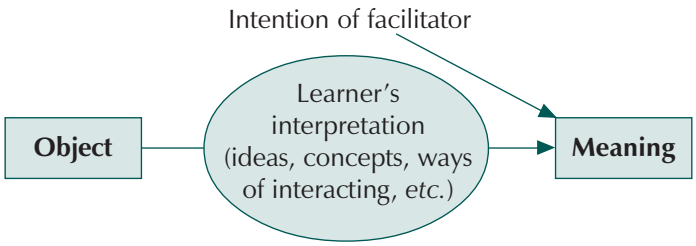

Figure 1 Objects and Meaning-making (based on Rowe, 2002, p. 31)

The teacher's role and interactive learning

Learner-centredness has become so well established that we sometimes forget that every step of the way, learners' experience is shaped by their teachers' actions. Ideally, when working with collections, the teacher's role is to seek to facilitate student learning by making appropriate objects available and planning activities around them.

Object-based learning activities lend themselves well to interaction. Piscitelli and Weier (2002) have classified 'Interactive Teaching-Learning Behaviors' of the type which occur when students are offered stimulating learning opportunities through objects. Their table (Table 1, adapted for an HE setting) would be useful as a basis for discussion with academic staff preparing to work with museum collections. They could consider how the study of objects in their discipline might relate to the processes in the table. Sharing those processes with students prompts insight into the learning process and is beneficial for both students and their teachers.

Key skills

Table 1 foregrounds interactive learning which not only increases subject-related understanding, but also helps to develop learners' key skills. It is well worth focusing on key skills, as they improve students' ability to learn. Individual study with collections fosters self-reliance and self-reflective awareness of learning, and collaborative study develops communication and teamworking skills. Presentations and different types of writing task can improve speaking and writing skills. Literature searches and the critical analysis of literature can be linked to collections, either in preparation for work with objects, or following on from it. The learning object sharpens focus, clarifying the topic area, which helps to advance skills development effectively.

Learning and the senses: touch

Object-handling is a powerful trigger for learning; the sense of touch can generate a stimulating, memorable learning experience. Biggs maintains that '[The] more [Teaching and Learning Activities] tie down the topic to be learned to multiple sensory modes, the better the learning'. It has also been observed that 'object-handling has a long-lasting effect and relationship with memory, more so than text-based learning often has' (Romanek and Lynch, 2008, p. 284).

Physically, we use our arms and hands to weigh an object and to gauge its size, reinforcing the information we gain through sight. Our skin senses texture as we move our fingers across the surface. We may also find the sense of

Theory	Description
Sociocultural	Meaning-making through interaction with 'tools, signs, symbols, activities, and people' in museum and exhibits' context. Learning process highlighted especially learner to learner interaction and interaction between learners and objects
Cognitive	Knowledge acquired through interaction with objects and people. Appropriate learning environments lead to 'discovery, perception, communication, skill use, analysis, and critique'. Also careful selection of resources and supportive guidance
Aesthetic	'Affective, emotional, spiritual, creative and pleasurable experiences and activities of learners' *i.e.* emotions – 'joy, disgust, shock, delight'
Motivational	Need to 'provide connections' with 'prior knowledge'. Learners use strategies linking learning to areas of personal relevance. Motivational factors: 'opportunities for construction of personal meaning, option to make choices, willingness to accept challenges, capacity to take control of own learning, opportunity to work in collaboration with others, and positive consequences (benefits) of action'.

Table 1 Interactive learning theories and museum artefacts (adapted from Piscitelli and Weier, 2002, Table 8.1, p. 127)

smell involved, in the case of a musty old document, for instance, or an old piece of fabric. Sometimes, the object is too delicate or valuable to be handled without gloves. This conveys a strong sense of its importance.

The thrill of gaining access to an original historical document or holding an ancient object is significant. Indeed, 'when speaking about their own experience of objects, … people frequently talk about how they *feel* as opposed to what they think, and the role of touch and *taking hold* so as to viscerally experience the emotional object appears to be of prime importance' (Romanek and Lynch, 2008, p. 276). The experience of coming into direct contact with artefacts is memorable, even moving, and can enrich and deepen the learning generated from it. It is often moving because it brings the learner nearer to the person who made or used the object. As for specimens, seeing and handling the fossil of an extinct creature conveys the significance of the loss of species in a more powerful way than reading or listening to a lecture.

Barriers to hands-on object-based learning

The problem of what can be touched by whom and in what circumstances is complex and interesting. The value of an

object selected to belong to a museum collection adds excitement. Based on the preliminary evidence of the learning power of object-handling (Chatterjee, 2008), however, time spent working with museum staff to find suitable artefacts for concrete object-based learning is well spent.

As is often the case with projects involving innovation, it takes time to plan object-based learning activities. Starting in a small way helps teachers to see how they can gain fresh perspectives on student learning and even develop new ways of looking at their discipline as a spin-off. Teaching informs research through work with museums and collections (Chatterjee, 2007).

Learning without touching: Virtual and 'glass case' object-based learning

Touch is exciting and enriching, but not essential. Digital collections are growing and images can be explored by exploiting IT to 'zoom in' on details. An object in a glass case may seem more remote, but it may be possible for students to photograph it with a digital camera or even their mobile phone and use their image to illustrate a presentation or make a point in an essay. Sketching, even if students feel they are not skilled at drawing, leads them to look closely at the object of study. The aim should not be to produce a high-quality sketch, but simply to outline one or two salient features relevant to learning outcomes.

Theory to Practice: Museum collections in teaching, learning and assessment

So much for the theory and ideas. How are they put into practice? Examples of some projects follow.

Projects

CONTACT (collection networks for archaeology and classics teaching) (http://contact.group.shef.ac.uk/)

The CONTACT project aimed to counteract the decline in material culture teaching. Student groups are often large, which can be problematic. As a result, institutions often limit material culture teaching and 'restrict artefact handling to small-group seminar work' (Doonan and Boyd, 2008, p.109). The CONTACT project has led to the development of virtual networks which back up experiences with real material in Archaeology and Classics, and successful pilot projects have been run at York and Sheffield. The project offers valuable insights which are relevant across the disciplines.

UCL Museums and Collections: a resource for all (http://www.museums.ucl.ac.uk/he.html)

At UCL, the Museums and Collections website states 'object-based learning takes place at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, involving over 100 course units and 2500 students per annum'. Past projects have shown how interdisciplinary approaches can be highlighted using collections, as in Libby Sheldon's work with History of Art with Material Studies students (Sheldon, 2008). Paintings from UCL's collections were examined using various scientific techniques.

A current project is entitled 'Object-Based Learning: Assessing student and staff perceptions of the role of objects in learning and related E-resources'. The three-year project will focus on Zoology, Geology, History of Art, Anthropology, and Archaeology, all of which already use object-based learning.

Zoology objects and related e-resources are designed to help undergraduate biology students master vertebrate taxonomy. They start by working hands-on with the museum objects using study sheets. Students have access to the UCL Grant Museum of Zoology **(http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/zoology/),** founded in 1827 specifically as a teaching collection. Images from the collection are available online.

Suggestions: working with objects

Collections

The range of resources made available through collections, such as the *Digital Egypt for Universities* project, would be useful not only for student learning but also for introducing academic staff to active object-based learning. The multifaceted activities prompted by such materials are stimulating and motivating, especially if there is an element of choice. Sets of artefacts can be made available and groups can select what they work with. Enriching 'jigsaw learning' can take place. Students can pool the knowledge they have built up so that each contribution can gradually create a complete picture related to abstract concepts.

Figure 2 Contact between peoples: from 'Digital Egypt for Universities', UCL Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology (http://www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk/)

Artefacts and Specimens

On the more detailed level of a specific example from the UCL Grant Museum of Zoology, the Thylacine skull is the type of specimen which can motivate learners to think along new lines and across subject areas.

Figure 3 Complete skeleton of the extinct Thylacine (Thylacinus cynocephalus)

The Thylacine, also known as the Tasmanian Wolf, was a large marsupial carnivore that lived in Australia and New Guinea. After European settlement, however, numbers began to fall because of hunting and loss of habitat. Many were shot by landowners because the Thylacine was believed to prey on chickens and sheep. They were seen as such a pest that from 1888 to 1912 the Tasmanian government even offered rewards to those who brought the head of a Thylacine. By 1936 a law was passed to protect the species, although it was too late, and the last known captive animal died that year.

This specimen could be used for a range of enquiry-based learning activities. The impact of human activity on species could be explored by groups, using the Thylacine as an example. Theories of colonisation and imperialism are also relevant. Skills such as the ability to observe, sketch, make notes, and write a detailed description of the skeleton could be developed. Examination for signs of injury or illness could be carried out if appropriate.

Making links between observations and previous knowledge, reflecting, discussing, and drawing thoroughly grounded conclusions, then writing these up, are all useful skills. If a succession of steps have to be followed for the learning activity to be completed, the attainment of higher order learning can be designed into the activity.

Assessing student learning

There are obvious limitations to the types of knowledge and skills which can be tested during an unseen written examination. A promising alternative for at least part of a summative assessment score could involve using objects from museum collections. For example, asking students to work with artefacts, make notes, and engage in a dialogue with the examiner about them is a more flexible way of enabling students to show the knowledge and skills they have acquired. These assessment tasks are like Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) in medicine and veterinary education. They need to be carefully pre-planned in relation to well-formulated learning outcomes. Some flexibility must be allowed so that credit can be awarded for the unexpected learning outcomes which can result from engagement with this type of stimulating learning activity. If used, grades can be allocated soon after the assessment activity. Time-consuming marking of scripts is not needed and students can receive useful, timely feedback to help with future learning.

Why not try 'hands-on' learning?

Why not try developing a 'hands on' approach to object-based learning? Learning through objects in museums and collections at tertiary level is growing ever more popular, as powerful active and interactive learning occurs when students work with objects.

The projects described here show that the use of museums and collections in higher education is well worthwhile. There are small museums in towns and villages around the UK with stocks of hidden treasures waiting to be discovered. You could start by exploring a museum near you.

Links

Access to collections: University of Reading – Projects in Agriculture, Archaeology, Geoscience, Typograpy, Zoology (CETL in Applied Undergraduate Research Skills) (http://tinyurl.com/dchalr).

Behind the scenes at the museum: University of Brighton with the Victoria and Albert Museum (http://tinyurl.com/ae7bpy).

Intute: links to a range of digital resources, University of Oxford Museum of Natural History (http://tinyurl.com/bvvewd).

Lemur: Learning with museum resources (digitised) – University of Aberdeen (http://www.abdn.ac.uk/lemur/).

Virtual Poster: History of Art and Material Studies. From Idea to Object: making the invisible visible (http://tinyurl.com/btxw2q).

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Technology Enhanced learning: a recent graduate's view

Habib Lodal, Leeds Metropolitan University

The first time I used a PC was during my latter years of primary school, where I recall a stand-alone PC in the corner of the classroom. This was the only PC that the school had and the purpose was to 'entertain' with its games certain students who had disabilities. I am a recent graduate, now 23, but it seems my generation has experienced the whole evolution of new technologies within its lifetime.

Only in my second year of high school did we have a classroom with PCs, shared by the whole school. In our weekly session we were taught how to use Microsoft Office and the internet. The first time I had a PC along with a dial-up internet at home was when I began studying at college and it was through education that I really started to use a PC and experience new technologies. Subsequent generations of students have had much more experience of technologies and are more intuitive about using computers. This provides universities with a superb opportunity to take advantage of and promote e-learning, but it also presents a number of problems.

Most of the e-learning I experienced was at Leeds Metropolitan University in 2004 using VLE based on WebCT. Not only did this system offer me all my course resources online but it also provided me with a positive and flexible learning environment with which I became very comfortable. However, children reach this level of confidence in primary school nowadays.

My first experience of computer-aided assessments (CAA) was in my first year of BSc (Hons) Computing. As far as I was aware, previous assessments on this course were paper-based. Using the VLE, the tutors devised a number of online assessments, which were thoroughly thought out and flagged up to all students in the course handbook at the beginning of the year. For me, this was a new way of learning, and although it seemed frightening at the beginning, due to the number of tests we were doing, I was excited by the concept, as it seemed right for the subject area I was studying, Information Technology.

So did CAAs work for us? The tutor explained that every fortnight we would have an online test on the topics we covered in class. The tests were designed to help us understand how well we were coming to terms with the material, thereby giving formative assessment. We were told 'The pass mark is 80% for each test…you may attempt each quiz as many times as you wish with the proviso that each attempt must be at least 24 hours after the previous attempt'. With this flexibility, it made the assessments a lot more manageable and less strenuous. It also took the pressure off, knowing that we could keep attempting the tests until we were comfortable with the material.

They also told us 'Successful completion of each quiz will contribute 10% of your overall module mark' and each of these tests was done during classroom sessions every fortnight. This made sure that the majority of the pupils attended the classes so as not to miss out on the marks. Each test we took was password protected and the relevant password was issued within the class when the test was set, with the password's validity lasting a week, so the onus was on us to get the best possible marks. Committed students had the flexibility to retake the tests to ensure maximum marks, while the others also had the opportunity if needed. This made the 10% mark more achievable depending on the students' commitment.

Because I subsequently did a project as a placement student exploring CAA, I got to know quite a lot about the different question types available. In hindsight it was a shame that the tests mostly consisted of multiple-choice questions (MCQs), and only on a few occasions would we get questions in which we had to fill in the gaps, use drop-down menus or had questions where you could drag and drop solutions into place on screen. You would think that this approach would

make it easy for students to do well, but although the CAA consisted mostly of MCQs, the pass mark of 80% and the challenging questions made it a lot more difficult. The art of making the task demanding was in the way tutors worded the questions. The other advantage of using these approaches was that the tutors could assemble a large bank of questions, so that on each attempt we would get different ones. The questions and the options for each test were randomised – therefore looking across at your neighbour's monitor during a test was pointless!

We could take the test as many times as we wished until we received the 80% mark, and that would give us 8% of the overall module mark; but in order to gain the full 10%, we had to ensure that we received maximum marks for each test. This incentive allowed us to retake the tests; however, with a large bank of questions and randomised structure, it meant that for each test you needed to know the topic really well. It also minimised plagiarism. CAA meant that the testing became part of the learning process and in the drive to gain maximum marks we developed our knowledge of the subject and we also kept on top of the module. The instant feedback we received after each test allowed us to understand where we had gone wrong.

Looking back, this was a very innovative and positive way of learning. Not only did I find this module stimulating and fair, but also refreshing and flexible. The pressures associated with traditional tests were absent, as CAA allowed a more flexible and varied way of learning, with the same outcomes, if not even better, than a traditional assessment.

The module's focus on formative assessments ensured that I was receiving constant feedback and was also gaining a measure of my progress. The VLE has a function which allows staff to track students' activities online; this allows the tutor to view the number of tests any student has taken, as well as the marks that they are receiving for a particular test, so that they can offer extra support as necessary.

Overall, my experience of using CAA as a student was a really positive and stimulating one. Not only was it an effective learning tool, but also it was a very interesting way of moving away from the traditional paper-based assessments. The classroom tests did not have the negative connotations that are linked with the traditional assessments – such as the pressure and stress of an unseen, time-constrained exam – yet the purpose and outcome is equivalent.

After my degree, having done a placement within the university, I am now working as a graduate trainee with four-monthly placements in different areas, including within the Assessment, Learning and Teaching team. This has given me a very useful perspective on my experience of learning and assessment, which I am happy to share through this article.

Habib Lodal is a graduate of the School of Computing at Leeds Metropolitan University.

Technology Enhanced learning: three tutors' perspectives

Dr Maurice Calvert, Dr Alec J. Grierson and **Paul Scorer,** Leeds Metropolitan University

Introduction

Today's students are immersed in technology and have been so for much of their lives, using phones, Facebook, Twitter – ever smaller bite-sized chunks of networked interaction. Some argue that attention span requirements are diminishing as each generation of technology appears. Change has been rapid and teaching methods have been adapted accordingly. In response to the accompanying paper by one of our graduates, Habib Lodal, we summarise how things have progressed in the short time since he was a student.

Progress since Lodal's time

The quizzes which Habib Lodal describes in his article were developed over a couple of years with the aim of enthusing students who by then were accustomed to using computers in their studies. They were an early development using the University's first VLE, WebCT. The quizzes have evolved over the years as modules have come and gone, the shape of the teaching year has changed and a new VLE, *Blackboard Vista*, has come online.

Now, 'Operating Systems and Networks' is worth 15 credit points and runs for seven weeks. The complete bank of computer-marked questions extends to some 1000 questions, of which perhaps 300 are used in 12 quizzes taken by students.

Students have shown themselves unwilling to engage in formative assessment for (as they see it) no reward, so the quizzes, essentially formative, have been given summative marks. Full marks can be obtained for correct answers to 80% of the questions.

Students can take each quiz as many times as they wish within a two week period, subject to no repeat being allowed within six hours. They receive feedback in the form

of an indication of where to find the correct answer, but not the answer itself, so they quickly know which topics they need to research further. The timescales have evolved from experience and student feedback. It is structured so that students cannot repeatedly 'guess' the correct set of answers because we want them to actively engage in their learning and be confident of their answer. Students who engage with this process most thoroughly report that their learning is enhanced.

Plagiarism could be an issue but we do not mind collaboration by students – this is all part of the learning process. Students are, in fact, remarkably independent in their approach to their learning. They need to be, because there is an unseen, time-limited end-test which fully tests their knowledge on the same topics as the quizzes.

Another innovation

Introducing students to computer programming has long been considered a stumbling block; it has lower pass rates than most other subjects, especially for students who have not done any before. Students need to overcome several hurdles when solving their first programming exercises:

- the environment – how is the program edited?
- syntax – learning the 'grammar' of the programming language
- logic – what is the difference between 'and', 'or', 'not'?
- problem solving – how to get from A to B
- context – how does the program fit into, say, a web page?

Keep it simple (stupid!) is the programmer's mantra. This has been applied in a system developed by Tim Balls which has so improved results that 'Introduction to Programming' now often has the highest percentage of passes. All module materials are delivered via our VLE so students have easy access. This VLE also allows us to track the level of student engagement. The student interacts with a simple user interface (Figure 1). The instructions are in the pane on the left whilst the student edits code on the right. Initial code can be delivered to the student, who then needs not worry about anything other than the Javascript language they are learning. By clicking a button the syntax of their program is checked and, if ok, the program can be tested by pressing the 'Run' button. Students keep a log of their work which

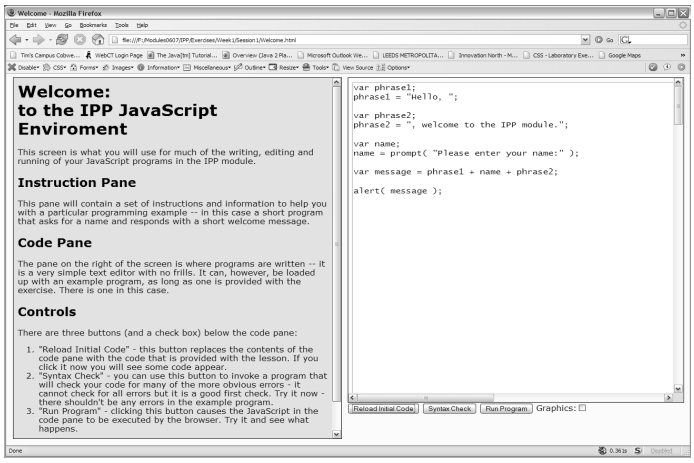

Figure 1 Student user interface

may be used for reference in the end of module test, where students are presented with two exercises to solve within two hours. The fact that this log could be used in the test was initially an insufficient incentive to keep one, so it now carries a mark of 20%.

A Novel Approach to the Delivery of Computer Communications and Networks

The move towards flexible delivery has presented new challenges, and resulted in a novel approach to the delivery of CCN, a core Level 2 module. It is a broad and important topic that pervades the discipline: the internet is ubiquitous. We needed to capture that breadth in both the learning and the assessment.

Based on our view that 'students do not like traditional lectures', we developed a three-pronged approach. First, the material could be assimilated from that most traditional of Learning Objects: a book. Secondly, practical work could permit in-depth examination of the details of computer networking – 'what happens under the bonnet'. Finally, formative assessment is crucial to the integration of the theoretical understanding gained from reading with the practical understanding of how things actually work. And, of course, it is also necessary to grade student performance.

The first key step was to find the core text. It is truly a Learning Object in that it is supported by lecture slides, laboratory exercises, programming exercises and numerous problems. As there was no lecture time, the students had to 'read the book'. The Library was able to issue one to each student.

Each week students had to undertake a specified task, which they could either undertake in supervised time (in a purpose-built *sandboxed* laboratory), or, since the required software is open source, on their own machines at home. They were encouraged to use the lab as it broadened their perception of what was going on and they could clarify difficult points from their reading.

Students had to submit, on-line, three pieces of work each week: answers to questions on the laboratory work and to each of two specified questions from the book. But here's the rub: only one item of the work submitted each week was marked – and the students were not told which one this would be! The final mark was the average of the six weeks' marks. Continuous re-assessment was built into this scheme: if a week's submission did not reach the required standard, a second item was marked as a re-assessment. Marks feedback was provided as soon as possible.

The student (and staff) workload was high. Perhaps too high. Certainly, the temptation to search the internet for solutions was evident. This could only be handled through the use of plagiarism detection software (*Turnitin*).

Student feedback from the first delivery was positive. They thought it was a high workload, but worth it. A frequent request was for lectures, not of the traditional nature, but

rather to guide their reading and to identify areas on which to focus: the students clearly valued the idea of directed reading, which they could then carry out in their own time.

Future deliveries will change, but the concept is sound overall. The student workload was too high, largely because of the mechanics of having to submit a lab report each week: this might be replaced by on-line quizzes. But the total uncertainty as to whether work was formative or summative is a major force for learning. Above all, the key to making a system like this work is to integrate the many forms of computer support with traditional approaches into a coherent learning process.

Where from here?

Clearly, designing modules is not a science – we are always adjusting for best fit. Technology for education has been adapted in many other ways, including the use of Podcasts to record teaching material – and five-minute module-bite delivery to phones may be next – but how much deep learning can occur in the length of a commercial break? Technology provides new tools, but is far from a panacea. Judicious use remains the best approach.

Dr Maurice Calvert, Dr Alec J. Grierson and **Paul Scorer** teach in the School of Computing at Leeds Metropolitan University.

Stakeholders, Strategies and the Status Quo... evaluating the impact of the Educational Development Centre at a London University

Bridget Middlemas and **John Shaw,** Roehampton University

Many central learning and teaching units are uneasily aware that although they can rightly congratulate themselves on fostering many worthwhile individual and small-group initiatives, there is still a problem of achieving change over a broad front. It has become something of a mantra, repeated at many education development gatherings, that what we need is not a few excellent lecturers but many good lecturers. Students' dissatisfaction and disorientation is said to come from being faced by inconsistent and contradictory approaches to learning and teaching. This awareness leads us to explore ways of using a 'joined up' approach to the task of fostering institutional change. This paper offers one way forward, but more importantly, will, we hope, offer encouragement to other units seeking ways of stepping up to this ambitious, but surely worthwhile, project.

Working with a senior member of staff from Student Services, to discuss ways of working more closely with our stakeholders

Introduction

As a small educational development centre (known as the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit) based in a relatively new university, we have become increasingly aware of the need to continually evaluate the impact of our work, and to consider what our role is in enhancing learning, teaching and assessment at Roehampton University. We fully acknowledge the underlying tension between the designing and planning of any new initiatives, and the need to ensure that all our stakeholders are actually 'on board'.

We wanted to attempt to accurately define *who we are* and *what we do*, so that we could prioritise our team's

efforts as we work with colleagues from across our campus. Who exactly are our stakeholders? What are our strategic priorities? And, as a small unit, what is the status quo at the moment, and what might it look like in one or two years from now?

The higher education landscape has undergone a major transformation during the last five to ten years, as we have made the move towards a more customer-focused and inclusive system. The world of educational development has had to move fast in order to keep at the forefront of systemic and legislative initiatives. As Gina Wisker notes:

> *'Our roles in educational development centres have changed enormously over the last few years, and if they are volatile they are also much more strategically embedded in the variety of core work of the university, the curriculum development, CETLs, research grant bids, and the initial and continuing professional development of those who teach and facilitate learning.'* (Wisker, 2006)

So, we wanted to find out the most effective way to measure the impact of what we do in our own setting, because as a small team of just four full-time-equivalent staff, we wanted to be able to target any weak areas of practice, and build up our strengths through more effective networking.

Our campus is spread across two sites, which are about half a mile apart, and the university consists of four separate colleges (all of which were originally teacher training institutions). The university also has a number of programmes which are delivered off-site, both locally in the London area, and further afield in places such as India, Grenada and the Seychelles. We therefore set out to capture the views of all our stakeholders, so that we could have a clearer idea of particular areas that we needed to develop.

The importance of listening to the 'student voice' has been well highlighted over the last 4-5 years, to ensure that we have a better idea of what we are doing, and whether it works (e.g. Campbell and Rumpus, 2008). Gaule and Box's work on the development of effective staff networks is also particularly pertinent here, and they emphasise the importance of 'staff voice' when an educational development centre is working with colleagues around the campus: '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' (Gaule and Box, 2008).

We feel that student input is essential when launching any new initiatives or policy discussions, and we are keenly aware of the importance of listening to the 'student voice', especially when taking note of what van der Velden describes as 'NSS league-table pressures' (van der Velden, 2008).

Many authors have discussed their professional roles in relation to 'journeys' or 'pathways' (e.g. Brown, 2007; Gosling *et al.*, 2007) but we were also interested in the many junctions, dead ends or dual carriageways that might intersect our own pathways, as well as the need to improve the traffic flow along such routes! Is your own mode of professional transport fit for purpose? If not, what will you do about it? *(We had great fun when we tried to answer the question, if our unit was a car, what sort of car might we be?)*

We are currently in the process of launching our new 2009-2012 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, and want to be sure that this strategy will have the maximum possible impact across all the various departments of the university. We therefore decided to carry out some simple baseline research to identify who our stakeholders are; how we can 'roll out' our current strategies; and what our 'status quo' really looks like.

Who are our stakeholders?

We needed to find out who our stakeholders are, although we were quite sure that we already knew the answer to this question. A simple mind-mapping exercise was devised for groups of staff to work with, which clearly teased out some areas of concern. We already knew that we worked very closely with our four Assistant Deans (for Learning and Teaching), and that our relationship with our Deputy Vice-Chancellor was very healthy – but what about all the other academic and support staff around the campus? What about the students?

Firstly, the main departments, units and key staff from the university were listed, and colleagues were then asked to place themselves or their own department in the centre of the mind-map. We then asked them to think about how close they were to other colleagues, and to indicate how good their communication pathways were with these colleagues – using a coloured marker pen to indicate their thoughts. A 'traffic light' colour-coding system was devised:

Green = **G**ood communication, regular meetings with these stakeholders

Amber = **A**lright, but communication pathways could be better

Red = **R**ubbish! We need to work much harder with these stakeholders.

To gain a clear picture of our impact as a small unit, we carried out this exercise with diverse groups of colleagues from around the campus, including:

- LTEU (Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Unit) staff
- Assistant Deans, Learning and Teaching
- Academic staff attending our PGCert Learning and Teaching in Higher Education
- Academic colleagues on awaydays
- Students from a range of programmes
- Library and IT services staff
- Colleagues from support departments such as Student Services
- Laboratory and technical support staff attending our SEDA Supporting Learning programme.

We did not include any off-site or

overseas staff or students, but hope to include them during the next few months as we make plans for 2010.

Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis

Having used the mind-mapping activity with a range of stakeholders, we were then able to think more carefully about the state of our relationships, and were also able to target weak areas that needed attention. Our mind-mapping approach closely resembles 'Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis' (PIPA) , as described by Alvarez *et al.*, 2008. This is an approach in which the participants in a project co-construct a current audit and future strategy. Note, by 'participants' we mean not just project staff from our own unit, but also key stakeholders and ultimate beneficiaries (such as the general body of staff and students). The basic premise of PIPA is that people act on the basis of their 'theories of action' (Argyris and Schon, 1974, cited in Alvarez *et al.* 2008) or understanding of how their world works. Like scenario construction, it describes likely impact pathways by which our project outputs are used by others in a chain of outcomes, which, in turn, have an eventual impact on the broad environment of the institution. It has been described as a *logic model,* as it describes the logic of what the project will do, is doing, or what it did.

It is important to note that the following description of PIPA is a theoretical model taken from the literature. Our own educational development unit, like most similar units, had time, resource and political constraints which meant that some stages were merged and revisions were frequent and *ad hoc*. We simply offer it as a model of best practice that may be of interest to others working in the same professional area. The most important insight to us was to contrast a systematic and all-encompassing approach with our more usual approach, which could be unkindly characterised as spasmodic firefighting!

The term 'impact analysis' has been in use in management theory for some time, referring to the differentiation between critical (urgent) and non-critical organisational functions followed by the construction of 'impact scenarios'. The term PIPA, however, was first used in a workshop in January 2006 in Ghana, which dealt with a series of development projects. It arose from innovation histories and work carried out by the Institutional Learning and Change Initiative (Douthwaite, *et al.*, 2007). What is attractive to us as a team of educational developers, is that it helps our workshop participants to foreground, discuss and record their assumptions and theories about how our current learning and teaching strategies can contribute to desired goals, such as enhancing student experiences, or creating effective learning environments.

We found that by using a PIPA approach, we were able to:

- Clarify where we needed to improve collaboration and communication across the campus
- Have a much clearer idea of our impact (or, lack of impact!)
- Identify possible areas for future collaboration
- Set our unit's targets for the forthcoming year in a much clearer way
- Provide a useable framework for future auditing, monitoring and evaluation.

The PIPA process describes project impact pathways in two ways:

(i) causal chains of activities, outputs and outcomes by which the project is expected to achieve its goals
(ii) networks of evolving relationships between implementing organisations, stakeholders and ultimate beneficiaries necessary to the achievement of the goals.

How have we changed our practice?

As a result of our PIPA/mind-mapping project, we have now:

- Devised a Strategies Impact Assessment proforma for future work
- Regular meetings with our four assistant deans for learning and teaching
- A designated 'LTEU link person' for each of our four Schools
- Regular involvement in all validation/programme reviews
- Two seconded staff members to support cross-campus links
- Improved CPD provision for academic-related staff
- Regular meetings with colleagues to discuss SENDA and e-learning issues
- Improved relationships with admin and support staff
- In general, started to build and maintain learning communities
- Set up formal links with the Students' Union, and are working towards the appointment of a Sabbatical Officer for Learning and Teaching
- Started to review the way that some of our central systems operate
- Started to recognise the importance of working more collaboratively with our off-site and overseas colleagues, as well as those who are based at Roehampton.

Interviewing our stakeholders

We also carried out some short interviews with a range of stakeholders, to back up ideas that had arisen from our mind-mapping exercises.

One of our Assistant Deans was very positive about the process, and said that:

> *'We now see a wealth of possibilities in the way that we work with the LTEU….however, the frustrations remain as despite the potential to really improve learning and teaching, we fail to make real progress because of weaknesses in central services at the university.'*

Another encouraged us to:

> *'Be more lively, more flamboyant..... to get a higher profile, do things a bit differently!'*

A member of the laboratory staff was

also interviewed, and was pleased that the University is beginning to recognise the contribution of support staff to the learning and teaching process:

'The LTEU has really enabled me to see that I might have a career in learning and teaching, rather than staying in my current role as a technician. I'm so much more confident now when doing presentations and seminars…'

What did we learn?

- **STAKEHOLDERS**
  It's important to clearly identify *all* your stakeholders and identify any areas of weakness or poor communication
- **STRATEGIES**
  It's a good idea to audit your communication channels for weak/non-existent links – how will you support the educational development of *all* your colleagues?
- **STATUS QUO**
  And finally, do remember to continually research *your own practice*, not just support others in researching theirs – what's really going on in your institution?

Through this process, we have been able to prioritise which stakeholders we most needed to work with, so that we could have a much better idea of where to focus our energies over the next few months and years. Sally Brown's insightful comments continue to inspire us:

> *'Educational developers cannot command; they work by persuasion, conviction and scholarly argument. They are change agents who need to be able to analyse the needs of people who don't recognise that they have any, and help people to come to practical solutions to problems the problem owners have barely formulated.'* (Brown, 2007)

We will endeavour to revisit areas of weakness until we are fully confident that our work is having a real impact with academic and academic-related colleagues – across the whole campus, as well as in the UK and beyond. We love Gosling's description of educational developers who have a 'common passion for improving teaching', alongside a recognition that educational development has such a pivotal and central role at the heart of an institution's core purpose.

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Congratulations

to **Annette Edwards,** at the Centre for the Development of Staff and Academic Practice, Aberystwyth University, who has passed the Supporting Educational Change qualification course.

Assessing learning from placements

Pam Shakespeare, Open University

The employment world and the academic world meet in practice placements. Students spend time undertaking practice, using theory they have been learning in the HEI and assimilating experience of what goes on 'out there'. They experience a complex situation. They need, at the least, to satisfy employers or institutions they are safe and useful, that is, to *blend in* with the culture. They also need to emerge with practice understandings that satisfy an HEI. How the experience is organised and assessed is, of course, the subject of a great deal of activity between a wide range of people.

Many people have their fingers in the practice pie. Different stakeholders have different shades of understanding about the purpose of practice placements. Employers and HEIs are direct stakeholders. But there are others – for example, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and professional bodies regulating various professions. Students are stakeholders, too. What this means is that assessment in the practice environment isn't simply a matter of setting an essay to capture a learning outcome, but of ensuring the practice setting is rich enough, and the assessment relevant and purposeful enough, to satisfy the needs of all stakeholders.

Bearing this in mind, it seems to me that there are three big issues: the nature of the assessment, the support for the assessment and the quality of the practice setting for assessment.

- How do you develop a formal assessment strategy in work situations which are contingent and sometimes chaotic? What does assessing 'on the ground' have to do with the HEI curriculum and academic assessment? How long does a practice placement need to be, to be able to deliver an opportunity for relevant and focused assessment? How should practice experience be documented and how does this relate to assessment?
- Who are the cast of characters involved in assessment? What do employers, practitioners, academics and students think about the part 'the others' play in assessment and whether it is sympathetic to their needs? What support do students get in practice placements and, in particular, in the assessment of their activity? What are appropriate roles in various practice situations? Who pays for support roles and who administers? How are supporters supported?
- Are students in sufficiently rich practice placements to benefit from the experience? How can practice settings best be audited? Are there enough practice placements so that everyone can have an experience of them?

All these issues hint at the multiple stakeholdings involved in practice assessment. It is vital to see them as inviting *many-layered* assessment rather than assessment which risks being made unmanageable by tensions between different stakeholder world-views. For example, how do students' understandings of practice which emerge from 'being out there' relate to what HEIs set out as 'the learning' in the institution? For many students, practice placements do not easily stack up with the orderliness of higher education learning. But more than this, students often point in more than one direction, experiencing what their mentor/assessors do and say in a practice setting and then having to translate this into completing an assessment which recognises the HEI's take on things. Such tensions need to be seen as opportunities for multi-layered assessment. They reflect the fact that satisfying multiple stakeholders is a feature of much professional practice.

Capturing practice in assessment is tricky in a number of ways, as practice is often messy. I'm reminded of that old joke about the complaints of novice language learners: it would be OK if 'they' didn't actually talk back to you and even better if 'they' didn't have accents and dialects! Practitioners are very like 'they', developing local ways of doing things and making quick-fire responses. Every practitioner has stories of extreme busyness, of having to juggle all sorts of priorities, of thinking on their feet. Often there is a belief that if only the crisis would come to an end, people could get on with the *real* practice. But in many ways 'the crisis' *is* the real practice. So practice doesn't come out like a textbook, and often not at all in the order of the curriculum.

This leads us to consider support, which has somehow to be set against this backdrop. Practice supporters have to do their job as well as assess. They may not have a full picture of student learning at the HEI and often they and the student have to work to make what they do together fit into the assessment requirements. They have to try to find a way of giving the student an all-round experience no matter how long or short the time they are in the setting. Clearly, the length of a practice placement has a lot to do with how students experience the environment and relate to practice supporters. A long placement provides a sense of what it really is like to work in 'this place' on a day-after-day basis, and an understanding of the challenges their host employer faces (three weeks actually gives very little sense of what it is really like to be in a job). Shorter practice placements which offer the opportunity for 'a taste of work' do not always manage to capture the richness and complexity or (often contingent) nature of the working environment. Students working with practice supporters over a long period of time allows for assessment which more fully reflects what it is to do the job. But practice supporters still need to be able to make something of short placements and to have a sense of the feedback appropriate either for a quick visit or for a long haul.

The item that involves most stakeholders is often the portfolio, which HEIs frequently use when assessing practice

experience. Some portfolios come in the format of 'forms' to be completed to demonstrate certain experiences have been had (often to certain professional standards). However, the trouble with practice is that it's all over the place. Students and supporters sometimes struggle to make practice fit portfolios. Remember, though, the HEI has quality assurance obligations, probably to QAA and possibly to professional and statutory bodies, and so does need some kind of standard format. So, a lot of people are juggling with practice and how best it can be condensed into a portfolio.

The issue about quantity of practice placements links to how 'rich' or 'impoverished' a setting might be. Regulatory bodies and quality assurance colleagues are particularly concerned with this aspect of practice placements. Practice placements have the capacity to be understood as rich and complex. Complexity is to be found in how people do their work, obey explicit rules, understand implicit rules, recognise authority, understand the culture of working with service users, clients or customers (and who these people are: raising issues of practice in terms of age, race, class, gender, religion and secularity), how they cut corners and, last but not least, how they fill in expenses forms! The capacity for richness can be monitored at audit, but it is substantially enhanced by a good practice supporter or mentor who is able to introduce a student to this complexity. Partly they do this through their understanding of their work setting, and negotiating all the busyness that it involves, and partly through understanding the key moments to draw attention to in the practice.

I want now to reframe these ideas about stakeholding concerns into what Etienne Wenger (1998) calls the *landscape of practice* – the territory everyone inhabits in a profession or practice. Like any landscape, the landscape of practice has different people, communities, features and boundaries in different parts of it. Wenger talks about professional practitioners being able to walk confidently through a landscape with all these different communities, terrains and boundaries. And he draws attention to the tensions and multiple interpretations of this landscape saying:

> *'Crossing boundaries between practices exposes our experience to different forms of engagement, different enterprises with different definitions of what matters, and different repertoires – where even elements that have the same form (e.g., the same words or artifacts) belong to different histories.'* (Wenger, 1998, p. 140)

Think of a practice curriculum as a specialised map of a landscape of practice, which involves design, delivery and experience of an educational programme. The map will be of interest to a number of people who have a stake in the territory. Assessment is on the curriculum map and will interest a number of stakeholders too and so may be complex for that reason. For example, a portfolio is usually designed by HEIs to enable students to examine practice in practice settings, often (but not always) using professional criteria of what counts as effective practice. Such an assessment has an integral link with the landscape of practice, and not just the academy.

So from here on, let's talk about your landscape of practice. (I'm assuming that you are yourself a stakeholder, and therefore on such a landscape.) Before your read on, spend two minutes or so thinking about what *you* need assessment of practice to do, given your own job. Whatever that is, it is worthwhile labelling what everyone else on your landscape needs the assessment to do as well, looking at your assessment devices and seeing whether they cope with this many-layered requirement. Since assessment is part of an overall curriculum, you can look at it in terms of design, delivery and experience, and in each of these aspects begin to fill in what various stakeholders need. I've filled in the table below with some questions about the construction of a portfolio.

	Design	*Delivery*	*Experience*
Assessment	Based on professional standards? (professional and statutory bodies) Does it show fitness for purpose? (employer requirement)	How is it administered for ease of student use? (HEI)	Are students feeding the experience of working on practice effectively into this particular portfolio 'shell'? (student)
Supporters	What instructions do supporters need to make the portfolio effective? (HEI)	What education and support do supporters need regarding working with curriculum? (HEI) Can supporters capitalise on the setting sufficiently? (HEI and employer)	Are participants assured of the time to be able to work with students? (HEI, employer, practitioner negotiations)
Quality	Is it auditable for QAA? (HEI to check that conforms to QAA standards)	Is the practice setting one where students can get enough experience to actually be able to fill in? (HEI audit)	Does the student recognise the setting as relevant and offering them enough opportunity to make links with other learning at the HEI?

Table 1 The multi-layered portfolio

It's a useful exercise to look at each cell of the chart and ask yourself to which stakeholder is it relevant. You might want to try this with all your specific assessment devices and ask: will all parties at least see that their interests are included in that assessment device? Your own checklist and its level of complexity will be down to the stakeholders in your situation. Some people have professional and regulatory bodies as stakeholders, others have sector skills councils, and so on. As you do this exercise, if you find HE features prominently, don't worry. HEIs often co-ordinate and facilitate a whole qualification. They put the package together so *are* likely to feature in a lot of the 'fixing'.

What assessment, what landscape?

There is no magic formula for assessment of practice placements. If there were, we'd have all memorised it by now. What I think is useful is to keep holding to the idea that assessment takes place on a complex landscape of practice, and that assessment structures really need to enable the student to feedback to all the stakeholders that they can 'read the map' and they can 'inhabit the landscape'. We all recognise the assessment devices. But getting a clear idea of the territory they ask the student to walk through is the crux of the matter. Whether you are a practice supporter or an HEI academic (in this you are a practitioner too), assessing learning in practice involves capitalising on this landscape of practice, who inhabits it, and what practice issues arise in that territory with those people. Assessment is complex, multi-layered and represents a range of interests. And in this, it is practice itself.

Practice placements are real-time, situated practice learning opportunities with their safety nets being the supporter, the HEI background and the preparedness of the student. The supporter can offer ongoing interpretation, modelling and adjustment, but it is *for real*. HEIs may also replicate aspects of practice landscapes (skills labs, *etc.*), where through monitoring and assessment practice can be practised, rehearsed and readjusted in safety.

The role of supporters is a key element in successful practice assessment and improvement, because not only can they enable the student to adjust their practice, they can also get leverage from their own experience and alert the student as to who is on that part of the landscape and what the terrain is like.

Developing scenarios, telling stories, working on narratives all offer a framework in which assessment work can be carried out. Practice assessors can build up their own scenarios playing off work with current students against scenarios which may be built into the HE curriculum resources, and using their own experience of being in an employment setting. Examples might be practice supporters responding to student confusion by citing examples of how they had been confused, as a basis for examining a particular practice. Practice isn't just theory on the ground. It plays out through people's lives, talk and workplaces – therefore stories of experience are an appropriate medium.

Supervision is an activity which is not just about students but often part of a professional identity. Students need to know about the sort of thing that people do talk about in supervision as part of their professional interactions (often mundane but crucial). Where practice supervision is part of the definition of the profession, the assessed student version usefully looks like and rehearses the real thing. Examples might be specific practice episodes being related to a code of conduct, or employer constraints such as health and safety (or melding these together – the professional implications of health and safety in a practice context).

Finding assessment moments

The above modes of assessment are maps of well-trodden paths. They offer a structure for students. But, for practice supporters, there are also those serendipitous instances when a teaching or assessing moment comes along, a moment which can be turned into a learning resource. *Finding the moment for assessment* is key for supporters whether this is focusing on a 'snapshot' of something going on, responding to a question, or latching on to a moment of student puzzlement. These are the moments of situated assessment which can be fed back into portfolios and investigations. No HEI can anticipate what these moments might be. They are often moments of crossing some kind of boundary on the landscape of practice. All the more important, then, that any assessment enables students to have an opportunity to represent those moments of 'landscape awareness'.

Whether you are replicating the landscape of practice or putting students into practice placements, in addition to practice adjustment and improvement through assessment, the student usually has to make some kind of an account of the practice experience (including those adjustments).

Portfolio work is a classic assessment account. It needs to offer a framework to interrogate practice in real situations, building on the student's own experience. It also draws down from professional standards (which often shape its format), contextualising them professionally and academically. At its mechanical worst, it's a tick-box exercise, but with some flair it can be a very rich and complex location for assessment. Examples of portfolio development might be if you need to use a set of given standards to build the portfolio, using a second axis – for example, a structure to accommodate reflective practice for each competence, or a novice-to-expert categorisation, thus accommodating several stakeholders.

Personal diary and journal work offers students a safe place to set out their experience and play around with it in terms of practice opportunities and constraints they encounter - such as the standards and ethical codes of their profession. Diaries may be written about stakeholders, but unlike some other forms of assessment, are not publicly for them. While rarely assessed *per se,* personal diaries and logs are good feeders into the portfolio, enabling students to be involved in a messy process leading to more formal portfolio outcomes.

(However, for some professions there are issues around the status of such records if anything goes wrong.) Once you start thinking about process-based diaries, this may challenge the construction of the portfolio itself. Ongoing, process-based work may be more useful than completed work (which is sometimes an unfortunate consequence of portfolios linked to a specific period of practice).

Project and investigation work in practice settings lets students explore situated practice in terms of academic theories, practice imperatives and professional requirements. It allows them to latch on to the world as it is rather than the world as it ought to be. Much like practice supervision, there is a strong element of this actually being what it is like as a competent practitioner, so investigations are usefully generated out of consultation between stakeholders and an agreement as to what is relevant in a practice situation. The end point of such investigations is accounts which discuss outcomes which blend understandings borne of practice with evidence and theory.

I'm aware that in borrowing and simplifying Wenger's image of landscape so much, I have done little service to the subtlety of his analysis, and would highly recommend his book on communities of practice. But I remain convinced that the image is powerful even as a very abbreviated shorthand for the complexity of the experience that students have on practice placements, and that orienting to this complexity is key to assessing learning in placements.

In the past several years a substantial amount of resource and stimulus material around assessing learning in practice has been developed by a number of CETLs. The HEFCE CETL website offers the addresses of these sites.

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'Dreams and Aspirations of what might be Achieved': The Quality Enhancement Themes Conference 2009

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'I experienced the Enhancement Themes Conference as a bit of a mixed bag …[but it] left me reassured that problems in making progress are not unusual nor are they reasons for giving up on dreams and aspirations of what might be achieved' (PgCert participant, University of Dundee).

This was the feeling of one of our colleagues who attended the annual Quality Enhancement Themes (QETs) conference in March at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. Now in its sixth year, the two-day QET conference appears to be going from strength to strength in terms of its size, range of contributors and participants and in its growing reputation. In this article we reflect on the conference, its highlights and aspirations, and to what extent it is hitting the mark.

The Quality Enhancement Themes

The annual QET conference provides a forum for practitioners from across Scotland, and increasingly beyond its borders, to participate in a two-day event of presentations, keynotes, project findings and scoping discussions centred around a 'Theme' (or two). This year's Theme was the newly launched 'Graduates for the 21st Century: Integrating the Enhancement Themes'. This new Theme is the latest in a line of QETs (being the eighth) launched by the Quality Assurance Agency (Scotland) as part of a rolling programme of quality enhancement work that commenced in 2003.

QETs and Launch Years

2009
- Graduates for the 21st Century

2006
- Research-Teaching Linkages: Enhancing Graduate Attributes

2005
- The First Year
- Integrative Assessment

2004
- Flexible Delivery
- Employability

2003
- Responding to Student Needs
- Assessment

http://tiny.cc/nfAe0

The aim of the QETs, part of the enhancement-led approach to quality in Scottish higher education, is to support the sector in addressing the challenges of mass higher education in the 21st century; achieving high quality and effective approaches to the improvement of the student experience; and effecting transformational change (see also Ross *et al.*, 2007). Following consultation with the sector in 2008, it was agreed that in light of the resources developed through the activities of the previous QETs, any new Theme should aim to consolidate and build on that work. 'Graduates for the 21st Century' therefore takes an integrative approach, set within two overarching contextualising questions: 'what should be the attributes of a graduate from Scottish Higher Education in the 21st Century?' and 'how can the achievement of these attributes best be supported?'

Conference Highlights

The focus on graduates for the 21st century allowed for a potentially wide range of contributions to the conference which was realised in the poster presentations and workshops, which for the first time this year were open to anyone who wished to present on their work in the area of enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment, as opposed to previous years where they have been restricted to specific Theme project outcomes. This was a welcome change of direction which allowed for greater inclusivity and a variety of platforms for discussion. The posters in particular were a highlight of the event, strategically placed in the dining room to allow browsing and discussion at a number of points throughout the two days. The keynotes, meanwhile, were more centred on the topic of graduate attributes.

Phil Winn, Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) of St Andrews University and Chair of the steering committee of the Graduates for the 21st Century QET got the event off to a good start with an overview of what the term 'graduate attributes' might incorporate. He posed a series of high-level questions in order to prompt thinking amongst the audience, including asking whether graduate attributes should be viewed as aspirational or practical in their orientation. By considering attributes as dynamic rather than static, Phil noted the notion of 'emergence', that graduates might only begin to appreciate the attributes developed during their time at university after some period away. He went on to question the extent to which the 'Ivory Tower' skills and attributes developed at university are of use to what he described as 'economic engineers'. He finished by turning this latter notion around, asking the sector to think about a supply-side agenda, being clear about what we in higher education actually do and the valuable contribution that our graduates make to society, rather than having demands dictated to us by business.

Simon Barrie, Associate Director of the Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Sydney, is a long-standing critical friend of the QET conference, who has challenged delegates in previous years to look more closely at, and think more deeply about, their practice. This year's challenge was the achievement of graduate attributes, where he contended that 'meaningful solutions have proved elusive and there remains a "national gap" between the rhetoric of graduate attributes and the reality of the student learning experience' (Barrie, 2009). Simon's presentation centred on the conceptual work he has carried out around the topic of graduate attributes and his current work on the National Graduate Attributes Project (GAP), a nationwide project funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, looking at structural and institutional barriers to curriculum renewal and the achievement of graduate attributes.

Simon Barrie's presentation suggested that there are a number of key issues in relation to embedding graduate attributes:

- HEIs need to explore staff 'conceptions of graduate attribute learning outcomes and processes' and avoid 'limitations inherent in conceptions based on "generic" and "skills" '
- Acknowledge different stakeholder perspectives and in particular student perspectives
- Implementation has to come at all levels of the organisation and not to be left to some individuals
- Rethink aspects of the curriculum, such as modularity and the range of learner experiences offered
- If graduate attributes are to be achieved, then constructive alignment needs to be developed, in particular, in relation to assessment practices.

Educational developers need to keep in mind:

- Need for support and encouragement to engage in curriculum renewal and development of new learning experiences
- We are faced with a different (broader) cohort with different needs
- Educational development needs to address all aspects of the puzzle not just 'tools'
- It's a long-term undertaking – there is no short-term fix
- Staff motivation to engage is vital.

(Adapted from Barrie, 2009)

Caroline MacDonald, until recently Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student and Community Engagement) at Glasgow Caledonian University, and currently Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience) at the University of Teesside, maintained a clear focus on supporting student success in her outline of the international benchmarking work that she has been leading in this area (MacDonald, 2009). Key to this new work is the emphasis on identifying contextualised good practice, in the recognition that different contexts require different responses. A further important issue raised was the move away from seeing

student support as remedial, and towards a more holistic, integrated way of thinking and acting, with the student experience at the centre.

The final afternoon of a conference is always challenging to handle as delegates begin to weigh up the pros and cons of staying for that last session, or hitting the road to miss the worst of the Friday evening rush-hour traffic, but the organisers did well in their choice of Paul Redmond, Head of Careers and Employability at Liverpool University. Paul's presentation on Generation Y students was a full-on extravaganza of images, eyebrow-raising statistics and powerful anecdotes. Generational theory may provide too much of a broad-brush approach for some, with learners hived off from one another in generational camps of Boomers, GenXers, GenYers and Millennials, but it does create food for thought – and a good session for a Friday afternoon.

Perhaps one of the most provocative keynotes, however, came from Liam Burns, Depute President, NUS Scotland, who changed the focus from graduates to *lecturers* for the 21st century. This point was well made as the whole idea behind this Theme does raise challenges and opportunities, particularly for teaching staff and thus for educational developers as well, to turn the spotlight onto themselves and to reflect on how their approaches to developing teaching staff within their home institutions are aligned in turn with the need to develop graduates fit for the 21st century. It is to be hoped that the steering committee for the new Theme will consider educational development as a key project within this QET.

Reflecting on the focus of the conference keynotes, there is a potential issue here in that the framing questions set for this Theme will direct its focus more squarely onto the 'graduate attributes' aspect, rather than 'integrating' the work of the previous Themes. While there is doubtless a continuing job to be done in relation to addressing the issue of graduate attributes (not least in the context of the current 'credit crunch' and its subsequent impact on the graduate jobs market), this is a topic that has already been, and continues to be, addressed as a result of a previous recent Theme – Research-Teaching Linkages: Enhancing Graduate Attributes. It would be unfortunate if the opportunity for addressing the integrating part of the Theme were to be lost. At the same time, it must also be acknowledged that the conference is only the starting point for discussion and activity around this Theme, and the emphasis on graduate attributes at the conference could be considered as providing a bridge towards such integration, rather than a substitute. Furthermore, unlike with the previous QETs, the major part of the activity of this Theme will concentrate on the Scottish HEIs themselves, in order to provide an opportunity for them to focus on their own priorities and areas of interest, within the context of the overall framework.

Did the Conference Meet its Aims?

One of the principal aims of the conference was to provide one of the first opportunities for the sector to engage in a discussion around the new Theme. The perceived extent to which this aim was successful was somewhat mixed but it was encouraging to see such a wide-ranging programme of workshops on offer, each of which clearly focused on aspects of current or previous Themes, raising a number of questions that could be explored further through the new QET, for example:

- How does the impact of the QETs 'trickle down' to students?
- How do we go about defining graduate attributes? (Walkden and Comber, 2009)
- How do we capture the level of staff engagement with both the QETs and the concept of graduate attributes?
- How can we increase student and staff engagement with graduate attributes?
- Do we need to develop a more holistic approach to the first year? (Benske and Whittaker, 2009)
- In what ways could we use the concept of teacher 'authenticity' to foster a different kind of approach to the QETs and to graduate attributes? (Kreber, 2009)

Discussions during the workshops were wide ranging, with participants commenting favourably on the opportunities to explore the issues raised with the presenters. Striking a balance between presenting information and providing prompts for discussion is one of the challenges of a conference of this sort, where mainline academics are invited to present in a developmental, rather than a broadcasting, forum.

Hitting the Mark?

Undoubtedly, the annual QET conference has become a significant feature in the landscape of both quality enhancement work and sharing of practice around learning, teaching and assessment, with a clear focus on the student experience, support and engagement. The PgCert participants from Dundee were also struck by the friendliness of the conference and the accessibility of the dialogue and debate. Yet some serious questions remain in relation to the whole premise of the conference – the QETs themselves – which cannot be glossed over by the success of the event itself. Levels of staff engagement with the QETs beyond those who attend the conference, and who engage with the institutional teams which support the work of the Themes in individual HEIs, persists as an issue. And by the end of the conference there still remained a lack of clarity around the focus of the new Theme. Is it really about consolidation and integration of previous work, or sustaining and deepening engagement with one or more specific QETs, or is it simply about graduate attributes? The idea of Graduates for the 21st Century needs to embrace more than just attributes and to look at new conceptions of the teacher, educational development roles and approaches, and the impact of disciplinary contexts and inter-professional working (to name but a few areas), if it is to develop a fully rounded picture of what leads to the development of today's graduates. It

forces us to ask searching questions about the very essence of what we're about as institutions of higher education in the 21st Century, set against a backcloth of a rapidly changing society which is placing increasing, and increasingly complex, demands on its universities.

Final Thoughts …

In addition to being 'a welcome opportunity for a day's reflection, away from the university' (PgCert participant from Dundee), the QET conference also offers a range of effective opportunities for networking and engagement with ongoing work across the sector, as evidenced by the wide range of workshops on offer, and through that, for new opportunities to network within one's own organisation as well as across other HEIs.

Potential also exists to articulate the conference experience with educational development activities for new and experienced staff. PgCert participants at the University of Dundee are encouraged to attend the conference as one of the ways of addressing a specific learning outcome within their programme of study – as well as providing a great networking and socialising opportunity. Next year may see making a poster presentation for the conference become an assessment option within their initial module.

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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.

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Proposals are invited for the SEDA Spring Teaching, Learning and Assessment Conference 2010. The conference theme is to be Communities of Learning and the event will be held at the Park Plaza Hotel in Leeds from 6th - 7th May 2010. For details of how to submit a proposal see **www.seda.ac.uk.** Proposals should be submitted to the SEDA office by Friday 25th September 2009.

News from SEDA

SEDA Roll of Honour

Congratulations to Jill Brookes who was awarded a place on the SEDA Roll of Honour at SEDA's recent conference in Brighton. The SEDA Roll of Honour recognises those who have made an exceptional contribution to the work of SEDA or to staff and educational development generally. Jill worked as the SEDA Administrator from 1988 until 2005, bringing to the association a brilliant combination of administrative ability, understanding, commitment to the SEDA goals and values, and tolerance. Jill helped to give SEDA its long-term future and deserves our deepest thanks.

Jill Brookes receiving her SEDA award

Committee Updates

We would like to thank Fran Beaton, Ann Rumpus, Pam Shakespeare, Ellen Sims, Nicky Torrance and André van der Westhuizen, whose terms of office on the SEDA Executive Committee came to an end earlier this month. Thanks also go to James Wisdom, whose term as Vice-Chair has come to an end.

We would like to warmly welcome our new Executive members: Peter Kahn, Ranald Macdonald, Ruth Pilkington, Chris Rowell and Marion Webb, and new Vice-Chair Julie Hall.

Forthcoming events

- **Workshop: Turning a Conference Presentation into a Publication**
  10th June 2009, London

- **SEDA Summer School 2009: Supporting Educational Change**
  21st - 23rd July 2009
  Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park

- **14th Annual SEDA Conference 2009: Changing Educational Development: New Ideas, New Approaches, New Contexts**
  17th - 18th November 2009
  Aston Business School Conference Centre, Birmingham

- **SEDA Spring Teaching, Learning and Assessment Conference 2010: Communities of Learning**
  6th - 7th May 2010
  Park Plaza Hotel, Leeds

See **http://www.seda.ac.uk** for further details of all of these events.

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SEDA Paper 123:
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Edited by Mike Laycock and Liz Shrives
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