

# EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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## Assessing international students – ‘TIS’ about trying to stop worrying about the worries...

**Jude Carroll**, Oxford Brookes University

When I meet people who teach international students in the UK, they are more likely to want to talk about assessment than any other topic. At least, that is what I have found in the last two years through the ‘Teaching International Students’ project. It is far from the only topic of concern, but it is the most common. Teachers I meet ask about how to do it more fairly, more efficiently, and less painfully for themselves and their students. They ask about group work, about plagiarism, and about academic standards. They often vent their frustration and sometimes, they show their anger at what they see as the consequences of admitting more and more students from more and more different countries onto their (UK) courses, campuses and classrooms.

‘The Prime Minister’s Initiative 2 for International Education’ is a five-year strategy to strengthen the UK’s position in international education. Using funding and support from PMI2 and the United Kingdom Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA), plus hosting and additional funding by the HE Academy, ‘Teaching International Students’ (TIS) is a project providing guidance and information about how to meet the diverse learning needs of international students. The TIS project draws upon links with associated organisations like the discipline-specific subject centres and with specialist groups like the Centre for Academic Practice and Research in Internationalisation (CAPRI).

The project aims to enhance the learning experiences of all students and especially the learning experiences of those who have decided to travel to the UK to study (we usually refer to these students as ‘international’ though in truth - if the word has any meaning - we are all ‘international’). The TIS project therefore explicitly focuses on teachers’ adjustment, adaptation and accommodation in response to increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in their students, creating resources and providing support for ‘chalk-face’ teachers of international students accessible via the project website (<http://tinyurl.com/ygfcemd>). Several of the project team are also organising and contributing to dissemination and networking events, hence my meeting and hearing from teachers.

My experience prior to and as a member of the TIS project team has caused me to think about why this topic of assessment and international students seems to generate so much heat. After all, advice about assessment has been around for a long time. Many colleagues are revisiting generic advice in the light of international

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students' needs and language capabilities, producing guidance such as the useful set published by Dr Rosalind Duhs in this issue of *Educational Developments*. This kind of guidance consolidates what we know works best and suggests how to adapt generic good practice in the light of students' different previous educational experiences or language proficiency. Dr Duhs provides useful suggestions about feedback and choice of assessment methods and cites the many practical ways in which the experience of assessment can be improved for students and teachers alike. Yet most teachers still worry!

As suggested by the TIS summary on assessment and feedback (<http://tinyurl.com/2ufmz2c>) there are issues but, notwithstanding these, many teachers find international students a pleasure to teach. Some go so far as to insist they are less problematic than home students (though in general, this group tend to keep quiet whilst the worriers speak out!). Seemingly 'on the horns of a dilemma' I have been thinking hard about how we can best respond to the issues. How can we limit the worrying and concentrate more on the positive? Undoubtedly, a good place to start is with the kind of useful good practice advice as provided by Rosalind Duhs. However, once we have embedded the 'good principles' into our 'practice' it may be then that the really tough issues emerge.

Here I rehearse some of these tougher issues by quoting directly from materials which can be found in the TIS Resource Bank (which is structured around the student lifecycle) under the theme of assessment and feedback and provide a hint at how the conversation might then develop.

Firstly, **time** - in a diverse student group, it can take longer to teach necessary skills, to provide practice opportunities, and to offer feedback (especially formative feedback). It can take longer, sometimes much longer, to mark student submissions. Substantial tasks such as dissertations often require more drafting, editing and review time from supervisors.

...And the response? Since this is likely to remain an issue no matter what teachers do, discussions can at best address issues of scheduling, anticipating peak demands and advocacy for adequate resources.

Secondly, **academic standards** - it can be more difficult, compared with home students, to apply assessment criteria to determine a grade. This is especially true where forms of expression or organisation are unfamiliar (see the next point). Decisions about standards are especially acute when judging between a minimal pass and a failure. Some teachers describe a 'pressure to pass' when failure means loss of students' fees (though others strongly deny they experience this).

...And the response? Only a complex and nuanced interconnected set of interventions might help. Any solution would be based on creating opportunities for shared discussion within genuine communities of practice. That is the only way knowledge of standards is created and shared, though hardly the stuff of a 'quick fix' solution.

Thirdly, **what to mark** - where the student's English is grammatically inaccurate and/or where the student has structured the work in an unexpected or non-standard way, teachers ask themselves, 'What should I be marking?' Many struggle to see beyond the language in order to judge ideas and insights; they wonder how to ensure the grade reflects the relative importance of different elements.

...And the response? This is probably the most common question I hear (not that this is likely to be any solace). From English language teachers, I have learned ways to 'read through' the text and I might describe those. I might even suggest such down-to-earth approaches as never holding a pen so as to control the urge to copy-edit the text. But again, as with academic standards, a real solution will be complex and long-term.

Fourthly, **fairness** - many teachers are unsure how to be fair to all students whilst recognising that some have specific needs. UK law mandates that reasonable adjustments be made for students with disabilities so, for example, dyslexic students have extra time, yet those who read more slowly because their English is still developing do not. Further, because the international student group is not homogeneous, teachers are unsure whether it is appropriate to make adjustments for certain international students and not for others.

...And the response? Often, I fall back on suggesting that simply airing and sharing such concerns is a first step. Then, I might refer to university specialists, point to the literature I reviewed for the TIS resource and ask others to share their ways of addressing this issue. (In all honesty, I often hope this crops up just before a coffee break!)

Finally, **students’ underpinning knowledge** - teachers often go to great lengths to create a task or assignment that draws equitably on all students’ past experiences and assumed understanding. Alternatively, teachers might set an assignment that is only familiar to some. For example, asking students to simulate a public inquiry probably challenges all of them but some may be from countries with no such tradition and for the latter, both the requirement and the context are mysteries. As in the previous point, when seeking to compensate for students’ lack of knowledge, teachers

worry about how much additional information and support is feasible and whether it allows them to be fair to all.

...And the response? To point with pride and some relief to the growing number of case studies and examples which teachers are starting to contribute to the TIS website. That might be the best way yet of finding ways to address this issue. Sharing practice is not so much about agreeing the answers to worries about assessment, as the opportunity to explore and revisit some of these difficult but essential concerns.

### And a last word...

Take the last point as an invitation to offer your own case story, resource or contribution to the TIS project. That way, we will create a resource that will be around long after the two-year PMI2 funding has expired. It is unlikely that teachers will have completely resolved their worries by then!

### Further information

For PMI 2 see (<http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-pmi2.htm>).

For UKCISA, see (<http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/index.php>).

For CAPRI see (<http://tinyurl.com/393yzle>).

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# ‘Please, no exams!’ Assessment strategies for international students

**Dr Rosalind Duhs, UCL**

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to identify the key challenges faced by international students when their learning is assessed and to suggest ways of overcoming these difficulties. Although many of these issues are more pressing for international students, they are also relevant to home students. Pelletier (2003) suggests that ‘the extent to which UK institutions should internationalise the curriculum and adapt assessment procedures to meet the needs of overseas students is a contentious issue.’ However, assessment practices which enhance the learning of international students are beneficial to all students, whatever their background and needs. Multinational environments enrich learning as students contribute a range

of diverse perspectives which enliven shared assessment tasks.

Summative assessment, which contributes to final results, is a major concern among international students. Students may be unfamiliar with assessment practices and find it challenging to express themselves clearly in academic English. As assessment strategies shape learning, they have the potential to encourage students to adopt deep approaches to study and devote time to learning tasks. Formative assessment (feedback to students on their work) is a vital component of learning, but tutor comments, both oral and written, may be difficult to understand. Again, this often also applies to students who are working in their mother tongue

so clarification will not be wasted on them either.

The topics which follow originate from a review of research on assessment by Gibbs and Simpson (2005) and focus on how assessment can support learning. Studies of the impact of assessment on international students underpin suggestions for creating assessment regimes which promote significant learning and successful outcomes. Finally, ways of working with staff are outlined and three brief assessment dilemmas which could be used as a resource are provided. The aim is to help staff and their students to benefit from the diversity of international learners as they consider new ways of assessing learning.

## Key Challenges

### 'Time on task' and language proficiency

International students often devote considerable time to their studies and are generally academically successful. At the University of London, 'from 2003 to 2005, 51% of international students and 53.8% of home students graduated with either a first or 2:1' (Kingston & Forland, 2008, p.204). Academic reading and writing in a foreign language can be laborious, so that disciplines which depend less on high volumes of text-based assessment are more straightforward (Andrade, 2006). Language can naturally have a negative effect on the work of international students. Harris found that if students needed difficult language to express complex ideas, they sometimes avoided them (Harris, 1995, p.89). They may also find it difficult to speak because of cultural background or embarrassment about language skills and may prefer situations in which they can remain silent.

### Assessed assignments and unseen examinations

Students, and international students are no exception, adapt their study strategies to assessment requirements. Learning shaped by regular short assignments is likely to lead to a steady focus on study. Intensive cramming to prepare for summative assessment in the form of unseen examinations can lead to the short-term memorisation of disjointed facts rather than the more profound understanding gained from less frenetic learning. Kingston (2008) found that Asian students universally saw timed examinations as the most challenging and stressful form of assessment. Assessment by traditional unseen examination can disadvantage international students.

### Clear goals and high expectations

Assessment practices embedded in UK university culture may be unfamiliar to international students so that they are unsure as to what is required of them. Discrepancies between UK and other assessment cultures can be perplexing. Indeed, 'without understanding the role of cultural

identity and heritage embedded in a particular cultural framework, higher education (HE) cannot achieve one of its most important goals: to provide quality education for all' (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005, p.184). Assessment practices are strongly influenced by tradition and should be carefully described and explained for the benefit of all students.

### Useful feedback

Feedback often emerges as the 'most powerful single influence' (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005, p.7) on student achievement, and is especially important for international students, so that they can identify any difficulties and close the gap between current levels of work and desired attainment. Early, timely, specific and constructive feedback with information on how to improve is valued. As might be expected, discouraging feedback can be disastrous. Confidence already dented by the strain of adapting to a new culture can take a hard knock if some encouraging feedback is not forthcoming. Students need to know what they can build on, so it is important to identify any satisfactory areas of work. A simple explanation as to why certain aspects of a task are of a good standard is extremely useful to draw on when students start their next piece of work.

## Meeting the challenges: suggested strategies

### 'Time on task' and language proficiency

As international students often spend more time on their work, they need to understand exactly what and how much is required of them for assessed tasks in order to facilitate time management. It is helpful to provide information in writing to aid understanding. It is also good to offer students the opportunity to ask for clarification. Peer support is useful, but sometimes tutor input is needed. Students who most need additional explanation may find it difficult to approach tutors, so a welcoming approach and clear arrangements for office hours are essential. The virtual

learning environment (VLE) can also be used to communicate with tutors. Open answers to questions often benefit other students too.

As regards language, students need plenty of practice at writing and speaking to increase vocabulary and familiarise themselves with the appropriate academic discourse. Low-stakes, required, formative work is best, so that students are not afraid to stretch themselves and make mistakes from which they can learn.

The VLE is excellent for short writing assignments, as students can learn from each other. Start with easy topics to enable students to familiarise themselves with the VLE and establish communication before asking them to complete more difficult tasks. Posting exemplars of different types of writing on a VLE is helpful as a guide.

Speaking skills are too important to be neglected and should be part of the assessment regime. Presentations and comments on delivery and content with support from peers can be assessed formatively to begin with, but some kind of oral work should be included among the methods used for summative assessment. Encourage students to video and play back their presentations to check timing and increase confidence.

### Assessed assignments and unseen examinations

Diverse forms of assessment help international students to develop and demonstrate their learning. Some assessed assignments can be written or presented in multinational groups. This creates a rich learning environment for all members of the group, as tasks can be designed to draw on the cultural diversity of students. For instance, multifarious perspectives on a 'text' (case, building, engineering project, novel, historical event, etc) can emerge. Virtual project scenarios can be located outside Europe and students can be cast in the role

of international professional groups meeting global challenges.

Ideally, unseen examinations should be used sparingly to avoid putting international students at a disadvantage. 'Mock' timed examinations are advisable as many international students are not accustomed to writing timed essays.

### Clear goals and high expectations

Advance clarification of how the attainment of learning outcomes will be tested and graded is essential to ensure that international students understand assessment regimes. Exemplars to communicate expectations and the opportunity to apply assessment criteria to peers' work demystify assessment processes and improve student performance.

The issue of high expectations is also important. Should the same performance be expected of international and home students and should their work be marked according to the same criteria? We should arguably approach areas such as knowledge and understanding, professional values and many key skills in the same way for all. As regards language, transparent weighting of the different elements of performance is advisable. Institutions need to have policies in place regarding the assessment of international students if exceptions are to be made. For instance, if markers are to penalise international students for vocabulary, spelling and grammatical errors, it

should be decided how this is to be done and the same standards applied to all in an open way. Students writing in their mother tongue may also have problems with academic writing so all members of a multinational group will benefit from support in developing a clear writing style appropriate to the subject they are studying.

### Useful feedback

International students sometimes find that tutors are inclined to focus on their language skills rather than the content of their work. As native speakers also make mistakes, tutors can help all students to learn from their language errors by preparing a key (P for punctuation, W for wrong word, Sp for spelling, etc.). Where opaque language makes meaning unclear, teachers will inevitably focus on language. However, markers should try to evaluate the quality of the argument, content and structure. They should try not to let minor errors which do not obscure meaning affect their judgement of overall quality.

Feedback is central to the learning of international students. The dialogic feedback system illustrated in Figure 1 is helpful, as it puts students at the centre of learning, providing them with a series of opportunities to act on feedback. Students write and re-write their work based on self and peer assessment and produce an outline of how they plan to act on tutor feedback. Dialogue ensures that students understand feedback so that it informs future work.

## Conclusion

International students and home students benefit in the same way from transparent, well-planned assessment regimes. They can also learn a lot from dialogic feedback systems. If assessment activities are designed imaginatively to take full advantage of the rich resource of the culturally diverse students at today's universities, graduates will be better prepared to work effectively in the globalised workplace.

### Developing rich assessment practices with staff

There are a lot of potential areas of development here. The alignment of learning activities with learning outcomes and assessment methods is helpful. The formulation of assessment criteria which all students, including international students, can understand is time well spent and can inform the provision of feedback. In addition to these basic building blocks of well-structured assessment regimes, imaginative use of VLEs can extend learning space so that assessment is well supported. Staff can work together on these three areas of alignment, assessment criteria, and designing formative assessment activities for VLEs.

A few short assessment dilemmas are included below. They are designed to provide a platform for discussion to enable staff to focus on their own students and learning and assessment contexts.

### Assessment dilemmas

Although the fictitious examples here suggest that these students may be international students, home students from all backgrounds also frequently encounter the same problems.

#### Language

Solange arrives at her English university. She is a keen student and wants to do well. After a few weeks, she is asked to write an assignment. When she sits at her computer, she finds that she can only think of the complex ideas she has grappled with on the course in her mother tongue, which is not English. It is an enormous

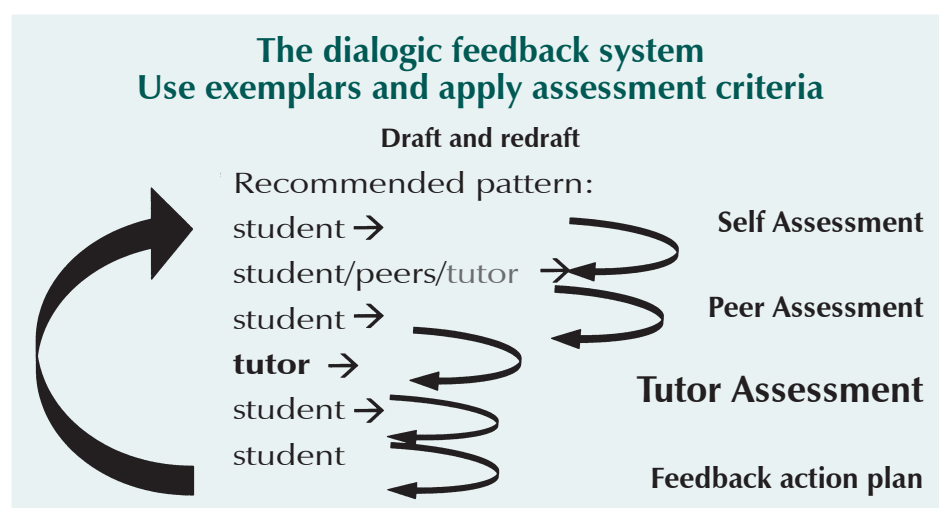


Figure 1 The dialogic feedback system

strain to write these ideas and she cannot think directly in English. She has to translate her thoughts one by one. When she gets the essay back, she is extremely disappointed with her mark. She is used to excellent results. Some of the feedback relates to her use of English and is very discouraging. Her tutor has written:

*'There are hints of some interesting ideas in this essay but they are often difficult to understand because you do not express them clearly. Please check your English carefully before you hand in your work. There are too many errors here.'*

Suggestions for activities and discussion:

1. Putting yourself in the shoes of the international student:  
You have to write an essay in a language which is not your mother tongue. Write the first two or three sentences of this essay in any language other than English. Choose a core topic of your discipline.
2. Consider how Solange could be supported.
3. Discuss the feedback. Try to redraft it so that it feeds forward and helps Solange to feel less apprehensive about her next essay.

### Assessment Methods

Mahmoud takes a lively interest in class discussions. His written work is just pass standard as he finds it difficult to structure an argument supported by evidence. However, he makes progress as the term progresses. When it comes to the final unseen written exam which accounts for 50% of the marks on the course, he does not achieve a pass, which is required for an overall pass. He explains that he finds it extremely challenging to write to the required standard in the short time-frame of the exam.

Suggestions for activities and discussion:

1. Discuss this situation and the issues involved.
2. Consider what steps (if any) might be taken to support Mahmoud and students like him.
3. If you would like to adjust the assessment model, how would you do it and how easy would that be in your institution?

### Oral Communication

Oral communication is an important part of your course. Students debate and discuss the subject topics and learn to justify their arguments on the basis of the course knowledge they gain. As many will continue to professional practice in your area or related areas, the ability to exchange ideas with others is an important skill. You notice that girls from an Asian background usually live up to their stereotypical image of tending to be on the quiet side. You have several girls from international backgrounds in the group and they are often reluctant to take part in discussions. You are not sure how to solve this problem as you have decided to include the ability to engage in debates on a range of course topics as a requirement for passing the module. At the same time, you do not want to put this group under too much pressure and are acutely aware of the difficulties of expressing complex concepts in a language which is not your mother tongue.

Suggestions for activities and discussion:

1. Brainstorm about the reasons for reluctance to speak in a group in post-compulsory education.  
Consider all groups, not only groups whose cultural background is not European.
2. Brainstorm about ways of encouraging all members of a group to speak and ensuring that no individuals become too dominant.
3. Consider how you assess classroom participation. Which

learning outcomes are you assessing and how can you help students to attain them?

4. Can classroom participation be assessed reliably in the sense that all teachers would arrive at the same grade for the same performance (inter-scorer reliability)? Can you assess classroom participation so that it really tests what you want it to test (validity)?

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# What Students want: feedback on assessment

**Alex Bols**, National Union of Students

The key teaching and learning issue of the past few years has been feedback on assessment. There has been significant time and effort invested by many institutions to improve student satisfaction with feedback. However, whilst there has been an improvement in the National Student Survey results, increasing from 59% to 66% satisfaction between 2005 and 2010, there has not been the step-change in satisfaction that would indicate that the problem has been cracked.

Why have student satisfaction rates been so stubborn? In part it is because it is not an easy issue to resolve, but I suppose the primary reason is that we haven't really got to the root of the question. Why do students want feedback? Once you have answered this question it becomes easier to address the concerns that students have. This has been an issue that academics as well as students' unions are keen to explore further and so any support provided through the educational development unit within institutions is something that I'm sure would be welcomed.

With the launch of the long-awaited Browne Review there will be increased focus on what students want including the development of student charters. The National Student Charter Group, jointly chaired by Janet Beer (Vice-Chancellor, Oxford Brookes University) and Aaron Porter (President, NUS), is currently developing a model charter. The Browne Review says that 'Institutions and students will work together to produce Student Charters that provide detailed information about specific courses and include commitments made by students to the academic community they are joining.'

The NUS has recently produced a Charter on Feedback and Assessment highlighting what we believe students expect in relation to feedback. The timeliness of the feedback has long been highlighted as a key concern, and if this feedback is to be truly a part of the learning process then it needs to be received soon enough after the assessment for students to use it to analyse their performance. The NUS/HSBC Student Experience Report shows that almost a quarter of students have to wait more than five weeks to receive feedback, by which time students have moved on. The NUS Charter outlines that 'students should usually receive personalised feedback within three weeks of the assessment submission deadline. There could also be generalised group feedback on the key learning areas that affect most students within one week of the assessment.'

Students have also made clear that they want to receive feedback in a variety of formats that best meet their needs and so having a dialogue with their tutor at the beginning of each module would be a good way of identifying

whether the majority of students want verbal, written or even electronic feedback. In addition, for courses where exams are the primary form of assessment it is important there is feedback on exams and it should also be considered whether it is possible to have formative feedback for larger pieces of work such as dissertations.

However, whilst these are all minimum expectations of students that should be put in place, they are still primarily about improving the processes of feedback rather than identifying how that feedback can best help the learning experience. It begins to raise the question about the quantity of the feedback – should students receive feedback on every piece of assessment? Or is the quality of the feedback more important? And how can we ensure that there is a dialogue between students and academics that will develop a deep learning, enabling students to move beyond simply acquiring knowledge towards being able to understand it, apply it, analyse and evaluate it?

As part of developing a real dialogue between students and academics about how they can improve their learning experience the NUS Charter says 'Students should have access to face-to-face feedback for at least the first piece of assessment each academic year', recognising that 'at the start of each academic year, it is crucial that students are given an opportunity to discuss their work with a tutor to enable them to set goals for the coming year.' Secondly, the Charter calls for students to 'be supported to critique their own work' recognising that 'students should not be overly reliant on feedback from tutors' and that 'Developing students' abilities to peer review and self reflect is an important skill for future employment, as well as deepening their own learning.'

It is through engagement with their learning in a deeper way that we will develop a community of learning in which students are full participants and challenge the instrumental approach that can sometimes be the by-product of a marketised system of higher education. Enabling academics to be able to engage in this dialogue and providing them with the information, tools and awareness of the issues will be of key importance in supporting this process.

## Further information

BIS Press Release announcing the formation of the Student Charter Group (<http://tinyurl.com/2b2wrzd>).

NUS Charter of Feedback and Assessment (<http://tinyurl.com/22qvcxw>).

NUS/HSBC Student Experience report (<http://tinyurl.com/2b56th3>).

**Alex Bols** is Head of Education and Quality at the National Union of Students.

# How can we do more with less? 'Ideal University'

**David Baume**, Higher Education Consultant

## Introduction

Universities are again being called upon to do more and better with fewer and less. Perhaps, if fear of debt discourages some students from higher education, we may be asked to do a little less with a lot less, but the effect will be much the same. This has been a recurrent, when not continuous, requirement throughout the life of everyone working in higher education.

How do we respond? Publicly and sincerely, of course, we resist. At the same time, in our offices and classrooms and VLEs, as good and concerned scholars and professionals, we strive again to generate, prompt, facilitate, support (or whichever combination of verbs we prefer) more and better learning, achieved in more efficient ways.

## Cuts, innovation and the 'Ideal University'

Perhaps unexpectedly, big cuts can, in one particular respect, be good for those who would help to make things better. The boxed story provides an example.

Slicing won't work well anymore, if it ever did work well. Big cuts require creativity. But creativity can rush off in many directions. So, how can we provide a direction for that creativity?

The approach offered here, through what is called 'Ideal University', is to start, not from today, nor from (real or more often imagined) past glories. The suggestion is to start somewhere else, specifically by asking: *What would our University be like if it were an Ideal University?*

The resulting account of our University as Ideal University can then be used as a template for the redesign of educational processes. Instead of being dragged slowly downwards, sharing the misery evenly and making the sub-optimal even more sub-optimal, we can at least make explicit

During the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council-funded Teaching More Students project (published in 1992), participants in a workshop on course design were asked how they would run their course if the staff:student ratio (SSR) went from 1:20 to 1:22 (a 10% cut). Participants suggested lots of things that they would cut a little.

Next, we faced them with the need to make a 50% cut in SSR. After the initial shock and anger, they became a lot more creative. They proposed, for example, huge increases in independent and resource-based learning, student-led seminars, and the like. (Some participants said 'Please don't tell management what we've come up with!')

compromises against a view of the ideal. When we start from the ideal, we may find that rather more of the ideal is attainable than we might have expected. Furthermore, as long as our account of Ideal University is reviewed and updated, it will remain ideal when growth returns. The account of Ideal University offered here concentrates on student-facing functions of the University. Those with other interests could adopt other foci, for example community engagement or research.

The account of the student journey through your Ideal University should not ignore requirements of, for example, the Quality Assurance Agency. Those are taken as read. You are developing your particular University's account of itself as Ideal University, not a generic account of an ideal. The account of the student journey, and in particular the goals, are intended to be an ideal, and also for the most part an attainable, state of affairs; a 'fit for purpose' standard, but not an unaffordable platinum standard.

## A student journey through Ideal University

Here is a possible starting point around which you could develop your Ideal University:

### Step 1

#### Discovery (of the programme by the student)

Most or all potential students are reached by accurate and appropriate information. This information communicates to each potential student what the University wants to communicate to them. The information tells the student at least some of what they want and need to know, leading in some cases to...

### Step 2

#### Enquiry and advice

...students making any necessary further enquiries or requests for information, advice and guidance. These enquiries or requests receive swift, accurate, clear and helpful responses. On the basis of these responses, the student makes a well-informed and personally, academically and professionally appropriate decision whether or not to apply for a place.

### Step 3

#### Application, response and admission decision

The student makes their application, a process which is necessarily somewhat time-consuming but does not cause them difficulty or confusion. Support is available. Students receive a response to their application within the promised schedule. If they are not offered a place, they receive advice on why their application was unsuccessful, and on their options. They find this advice helpful. If they are offered a place...

### Step 4

#### Enrolment and induction

...they enrol successfully and smoothly onto the programme.

Upon registration, students receive any appropriate study materials and information, and access to online resources and services. Students feel themselves to be members of the University.

### **Step 5 Study**

All of the elements listed below meet the emerging needs of students, and the standards of the University and of the discipline or profession for which the students are preparing:

- Students' study schedule
- The structure, aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme
- The online and other learning activities which they undertake and questions that they answer, both alone and as a member of a face-to-face and online learning community
- The reading that they do
- The learning resources available to them
- The ways in which they prepare for assessment.

Students feel, accurately, that they are part of a supportive social and academic network of fellow students, teachers and other professionals, and that they are developing both personally and professionally in desired ways. Students undertake work set or negotiated with them to the best of their abilities.

### **Step 6 Feedback**

Students submit work for feedback according to the schedule provided or negotiated. With each piece of work that they submit, they include their own critique of the work. They receive feedback on their work within the specified schedule, from tutor and from peers. They find that the feedback:

- Confirms what they are doing well
- Is constructively critical of areas in which they have done less well
- Makes helpful suggestions, about the content of the work which they submitted for feedback and more generally about their approach to research, writing, referencing and other important features of their work.

The students use this feedback to

guide their future studies, further assignments, and their preparation for and performance in summative assessments.

### **Step 7 Assessment**

Students can give a clear and accurate account of what is expected of them at assessment. Students accurately follow the assessment rubric, for example in the case of examinations with respect to the choice of questions, number of questions from each section to be answered, etc. Students find that the assessment tasks are challenging and fair. Students, within their abilities, answer the question or address the requirements of the assignment, and achieve at least a pass. The questions or assignments:

- Allow more able students to demonstrate their high levels of academic and/or professional ability
- Allow less able students to give convincing and accurate accounts of the knowledge that they have gained and of the academic and/or professional capabilities that they have developed.

Because of the quality and quantity of feedback that students have received during their studies, few if any students are much surprised by the results they achieve in summative assessment. Inter-assessor agreement on marks awarded increases steadily year on year, until some high feasible level of agreement is reached. Results are published to students in an easily understood form and according to the assessment schedule. Students who have passed feel proud of their achievement.

### **Step 8 Re-assessment and re-enrolment**

Students who have not passed, or not achieved high enough marks to enable them to study what they wish to study next year, are offered prompt and helpful advice on their options, and perhaps the opportunity to be reassessed. Students experience the re-enrolment process as prompt, efficient and painless.

### **Step 9 Graduation**

Each student who wants to do so attends some form of graduation

ceremony, accompanied by at least some of the people by whom they wish to be accompanied. At this ceremony:

- They feel that their achievements are appropriately celebrated
- They confirm their network of fellow students
- Their enthusiasm for and their commitment to the University is strengthened.

### **Step 10 Alumni-hood**

To the extent that they wish, students:

- Associate with some of their former fellow students
- Take an active interest in the development of the University
- Receive news from the University that matches their current and evolving interests
- At least start their enquiries about any possible future study by seeing what their University offers
- Recommend the University to anyone they may meet who is contemplating study
- Perhaps undertake some form of University-recognized mentoring with any friends or colleagues who in future study with the University.

If they grow to be rich and/or influential, they use some of their wealth and influence to the benefit of the University, and perhaps make a legacy or endowment.

## **Ideal University as a tool for planning and development**

This account of Ideal University sketches a possible student journey through the University, and suggests possible goals for students and their experience at each stage of their journey. Developers can use the idea of Ideal University, and the particular account offered here, in many ways. Some examples:

### **Testing the account of the journey and the goals**

The account itself can and should be tested and adapted to your University.

1. Are all the necessary steps in the student journey included:
  - For your particular University and subjects?

- For all of our current and potential and sought-after students, including:
  - Part-time and full-time
  - Continuous and intermittent
  - Conventionally qualified and widening participation
  - Variousy abled
  - With various commitments outside of study, both initially and then perhaps changing during the student's studies?
- 2. Are some steps in the journey given excessive or insufficient attention?
- 3. Are vital steps missed?
- 4. Are the suggested possible goals at each stage the most important goals?

These tests and refinements of the account of the student journey in your University should involve the widest possible discussion and consultation, but not a whole new layer of meetings. 'What will we be like when we are ideal?' is a fit agenda item for many University committees. A little work may be needed to overcome any initial cynicism. Thereafter, the discussions and their outcomes will show the value of the approach.

#### Using the account

Once a more-or-less agreed account of the student journey and of the key stages and the key goals at each stage has been achieved, current practice can be reviewed and audited

against this account. Such review and audit should again involve wide consultation, probably mostly through normal channels, including but not limited to quality assurance. Such review and audit will in turn suggest priorities for development. Any ideas for change can be tested against how they will help the University achieve its account of its ideal self. However, constructing an account of the student journey through 'Ideal University' reveals major gaps in our knowledge. These gaps take two forms. We do not sufficiently understand the contribution of the various goals listed below to student success and student satisfaction. Also, what is known and published is not sufficiently widely and effectively disseminated to and embraced by those who could use it.

#### Increasing coherence

Some of the steps in the student journey go beyond the conventional reach of the academic developer. Steps 1 to 4, joining the University, involve marketing and registry functions. Steps 8 to 10, leaving the University (for now), involve registry and the alumni office. However, as already suggested, major benefits resulting from the use of 'Ideal University' are the conversations across the institution. Well planned and facilitated, these conversations and the development work that follows from them can increase the coherence and the quality of the University's

work. Increased coherence will in turn increase the likelihood of students progressing successfully through the University, a better student experience, and increased efficiency.

#### Concluding comment

Won't this attention to Ideal University, in these non-ideal times, lead to depression rather than innovation? It might. As ever, the skill of the developer is important. Many people enjoy the chance to be optimistic, to let their imaginations fly for while. Remember the story in the box near the start of this article. Hard times can prompt good ideas. An explicit account of the ideal can provide a beacon, a direction towards a better place in rough seas. Without some such direction, we may simply flounder, expending the same great effort to much less good effect.

#### Acknowledgement

The idea of Ideal University as a tool for planning and development was developed by the author with **Dr Milton Cox**, Miami University, Ohio, USA and the other international academic developers at the study conference organised by **Katarina Mårtensson** and **Torgny Roxa** from Lund University at Orenas Castle, Sweden, in May 2008.

**David Baume PhD FSEDA FHEA** is a Higher Education Consultant.

## How can you do your research project with no new resources?

**Steve Outram**, Higher Education Academy

Educational and academic developers who aspire to undertake institutional research and engage with the scholarship of teaching often face a Catch-22 situation. They cannot get the resources to undertake research without a track record of successful output; they cannot get the track record without being able to do the research in the first place. As resources get scarcer, and as the need to demonstrate impact and possibly to generate income increases, this circle becomes more vicious. What can one do?

I facilitated a workshop on this question at the SEDA Spring Conference in Brighton in May 2009. At the outset I had

no idea how to answer it. What I did have was a belief in the power of collaborative working, and experience in using a number of creativity techniques to structure the collaboration. Educational and academic developers are using a growing repertoire of collaborative inquiry techniques such as World Café and Open Space Technology and the activities used in this workshop embodied assumptions similar to these techniques. In our case, the techniques were adapted from ones used at the Higher Education Academy/Leadership Foundation *Change Academy* residential. This session, usually facilitated by Fred Buining, an organisational development consultant who devised the linked activities,

is used to enable participants to think more creatively about the difficult questions that emanate from their projects. We started by engaging participants, who initially diverged in their thinking, and then ended with activities to achieve convergence onto the question.

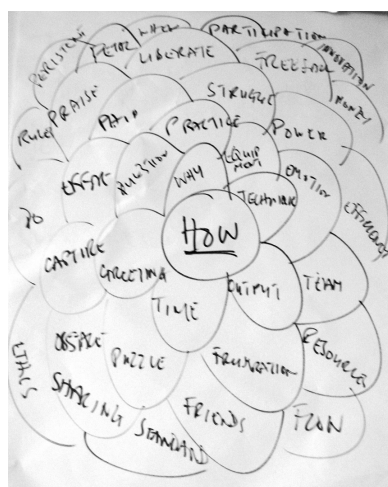
## Stage One – Quiet Round

The session commenced in an orthodox way with a buzz session around the question ‘how can one do research with no new resources?’ The participants had 5 minutes to think about answers, written on to a post-it. Then participants placed their post-its on a flip-chart, reading them out as they did so, one post-it for each answer and without discussion. Each post-it was numbered. Well...that was how it was supposed to work! In practice, the room was too small to allow participants to move to the flip-chart so I took the post-its from the participants and numbered them as I placed them. As the answers accumulated, participants were invited to submit further ideas that were generated by other colleagues’ responses. After about 15 minutes, the ideas stopped. The ideas generated at this stage included:

- Research current teaching
- ‘Employ’ students
- Interest other staff and work collaboratively
- Link with existing work e.g. evaluate practice, reflection, write up etc.
- Build in research to staff development sessions e.g. research projects in PG Certs
- Keep it simple, work it into current activity
- Subvert an existing project to your own ends
- Study Government and Funding Council policies and evaluate the ones being applied in your own place
- Use student work e.g. comparing assignments to find evidence of progress
- Encourage staff/students to research their own practice
- Build the ‘student voice’ into the teaching delivery
- Network
- Redefine research and scholarship.

## Stage Two – The Flower

This stage commenced with the participants choosing what they felt was the key word in the question. After a quick and dirty bit of negotiation, the group chose ‘how?’ This word was then placed at the centre of a flower drawn in advance on the flip-chart with numerous petals surrounding the centre (see Picture).



There followed a period of free association around the word ‘how’ with participants being invited to think laterally about the words that were generated. This is where creativity and divergence should take place. To facilitate this creativity,

particularly if the contributions start to become very similar, the facilitator asks participants to think about a set of words that are quite different to the topic and to the word in the centre of the flower, perhaps inviting them to think of films or TV programmes or musicals. One way of ensuring this happens is to draw bees at appropriate points as the flower petals radiate outwards to ‘trigger’ the divergence. As the flower begins to fill up so the words generated are less likely to be linked to the word in the centre. An important consideration for the later development of the session is to ask participants to think of concrete nouns rather than concepts, verbs or adjectives etc. Having filled the flower, the participants were asked to choose which word on the flower was the most bizarre or inappropriate in relation to the original question. They chose the word ‘petal’. They were then asked ‘thinking of the word *petal*, how can we do research with no new resources?’ This generated further post-it ideas, including:

- Go back to your roots
- Create an environment to encourage research
- Change the emotional framework – praise, encouragement, interest
- Manure is good!
- The Flower Show – prizes
- Naming the variety
- Be natural and loosen up a bit to get some good ideas
- Nurture/Nurturing growth
- Organic – set up project to grow by involving others
- Good nutrition and plenty of water
- Developing new colleagues (blossom)
- Time limited – only 4-5 weeks in full bloom
- Be colourful and interesting
- Use networks like the structure of a flower
- Layered research – building gradually from one idea to the next.

## Stage Three – Assumptions

It is quite likely that the ideas which have been generated have a set of similar assumptions that lie behind them. This stage of the workshop entailed asking participants to reflect on the collection of post-its and consider the assumptions that had been made in answering the original question. The participants identified the following assumptions:

- We want to do research
- It is RAE-like
- We know what the question is
- There are no new resources
- Research can be done with no new resources
- We have the skill set to be able to do research
- Students are happy to be exploited
- Petals are to do with flowers.

The next element to this stage is to illustrate how these assumptions may be challenged by choosing one of them and turning it round by asking ‘what if...the opposite was the case?’ The most popular of the assumptions chosen by the participants was ‘We want to do research’. Its opposite is clearly, ‘we do not want to do research’. The point of this

exercise is to demonstrate that there may be choices that lie between the two dichotomous statements. A radiating 'fan' was drawn between the two opposing statements and participants were invited to suggest what new 'in-between' possibilities there were. Out of this discussion, further new post-it ideas were generated, including:

- Manage your own and others' expectations
- Create collaborative groups and network them
- A little research is better than none
- Write something research-linked for just one hour per week
- Collaborate with a critical friend
- Pick what is most intriguing
- External interest in/recognition of the project is very important
- Read a research paper once a week and summarise it
- Stop doing something else
- Impose rigour on research-like ('lite') projects
- Search out and finish off existing incomplete projects
- Support other people rather than compete for limited resources
- Agree on the questions with a group of colleagues
- Ring-fence time
- Explore the balance of the different aspects of your role.

#### Stage 4 – COCD-Box

This is the part of the workshop that requires the post-its to be numbered. The COCD-Box (from the *Centrum voor de Ontwikkeling van het Creatief Denken*) is a most useful tool to capture originality at the same time as helping resolve one of the common challenges that one faces in facilitating organisational change. This is that the innovative ideas and proposals generated through creative thinking often seem to be impossible 'pie in the sky' suggestions or simply unsuitable when it comes to implementation and there is a strong urge to return to old, known solutions. Participants were given fifteen sticky dots coloured blue, yellow and red with the following principles as described in the *new shoes today* creativity catalogue:

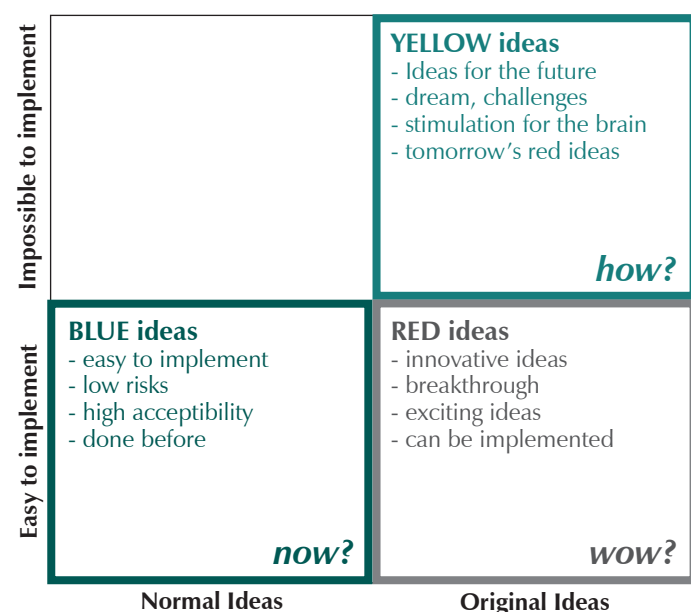


Figure 1 The COCD Box

Participants were asked to write down, individually, the numbers of the post-its that they would see being the best ideas to put into each of these three boxes. Only after everyone had written down their numbers were they then asked to place their sticky dots on the appropriate post-its. Doing it this way prevented a group dynamic of 'front runner' ideas becoming clear and participants changing their minds. Unfortunately there was insufficient time to engage with the final part of the process which would be to invite participants to stand next to the dot-clustered post-it of their choice. The groups which formed would then have been invited to develop an action plan to take that post-it idea forward. The ideas that gained most dots of any colour included:

- Build on an existing project
- Be creative
- Collaborate with a critical friend
- Use networks
- Set up your own WIKI
- Adapt an existing project to a new context/subject
- Nurture
- Design open modules which can use students as researchers
- Evaluate your own practices
- Use weekends/evenings.

#### Doing it differently

Having used this creative process a number of times there is no doubt that it can be extremely effective in generating new ideas which can be consolidated and developed further for implementation. The assumption behind the aims of the workshop is that creativity is a necessary element of successful innovation and change, and that, for whatever reason, we might be 'blocked' in some way in being able to be sufficiently creative to find a genuinely different solution. Educational developers are not alone in facing creative blocks. For performers it is a normal feature of their work. Brian Eno, celebrated rock guitarist and composer, has famously written, with Peter Schmidt, a set of 'oblique strategies' to facilitate 'unblocking'. These 'oblique strategies' comprise a set of over 100 cards, each of which is a suggestion of a course of action or thinking to assist in creative situations. The authors state that:

*'These cards evolved from our separate observations of the principles underlying what we are doing. Sometimes they were recognized in retrospect (intellect catching up with intuition), sometimes they were identified as they were happening, sometimes they were formulated. They can be used as a pack (a set of possibilities being continuously reviewed in the mind) or by drawing a single card from a shuffled pack when a dilemma occurs in a working situation. In this case the card is trusted even if its appropriateness is quite unclear. They are not final, as new ideas will present themselves, and others will become self-evident.'*

These strategies include, for example:

- No. 37 Bridges - build - burn
- No. 90 What mistakes did you make last time?
- No. 72 What would your closest friend do?
- No. 1 Don't be frightened of clichés.

Similarly, innovation and creativity are vital for new business development and there is a most interesting part of the East of England Development Agency website focussed on innovation. Until recently, for example, this website has included a downloadable tool called the Creative Block where individuals have contributed hints and tips for 'unblocking'. For example:

*No. 13 from David Bignell, Cloister Press, Cambridge: 'Lost for Words? Take a word from a dictionary, thesaurus or book at random. Write down all the word associations it inspires. Now attempt to link these words to your problem in however a convoluted way.'*

This exercise would replace the 'flower stage' of the workshop process by achieving richer results in a much shorter space of time. Similarly:

*No. 23 from Nigel Holder, Obsidian, Saffron Walden: 'Found in Translation. Use one of the online language translators such as babelfish, altavista.com and translate your problem into Russian, Japanese, Greek or Spanish, then translate it back into English.'*

'How to do research with no new resources' translated into Italian, then French, and then back to English, becomes 'Like carrying out research without the new resources'. This slightly revised sentence might suggest, firstly, what is it that we do that is like research that might be accomplished and, secondly, having not got the new resources, what can we do with the old resources? There might be a whole lot of historical secondary data in your university just waiting to be analysed!

*No. 3 from Sir John Harvey-Jones: 'How Refreshing. Is there anything that is at all associated with your problem which you've been doing the same way for more than two years? Change that.'*

*No. 19 from Paul Wells, Charles Wells Ltd: 'Stand in their Shoes. Imagine you're selling your idea to one of your customers, partners or your senior management team. Now stand in their shoes. What agenda might they have? What are the weaknesses they'll try to exploit and strengths they'll try to avoid?'*

If we return to some of the ideas generated by the participants in the workshop, how might your Dean or Head of Department respond to ideas about involving students in research, about creating a collaborative research group/network, or researching the implementation of policies? How might they be attracted to supporting your research endeavours without asking them for new resources?

## Conclusion

Overall, the participants generated over 100 ideas in an hour and a half to answer the question. Along the way they started to work together as a team and had a bit of fun. The conclusions they came to included:

- Work collaboratively
- Involve students in research
- Undertake research in manageable bits
- Be creative and imaginative.

Had there been more time, we would have developed action plans for each of these areas of work and answered the question, just how do you do research with no new resources?

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the workshop participants for their enthusiasm and ideas:

Anne Eardley, Alison Megeney, Bridget Middlemas, Cathy Minett-Smith, Frederik Oldsjö, Celia Popovic, Jacqueline Potter, Agi Ryder, John Sweet, Claire Taylor, Anne Waugh, Kim Whittlestone, James Wisdom.

## Further information

For Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt, Oblique Strategies - One Hundred Worthwhile Dilemmas, see (<http://www.enoshop.co.uk/>) and (<http://tinyurl.com/64vpe>).

For the Change Academy, see (<http://tinyurl.com/29hjduo>).

COCD – the Dutch abbreviation for the Center for the Development of Creative Thinking. See (<http://www.cocd.org/nl/node/729>).

For involving students in research, see Healey, M. and Jenkins, A. (2009) *Developing undergraduate research and inquiry*, York: HE Academy (<http://tinyurl.com/l27k5z>).

For new shoes today, see (<http://tinyurl.com/29xf34h>).

For the Creative Block: This has been replaced by the 'ideas centre' which includes 'ideas essays' by organisational development experts such as Sir John Harvey-Jones as well as details of how to conduct your own organisational 'ideas audit'. See (<http://tinyurl.com/39953gt>). Anyone wanting all the suggestions that were to be found in previous versions of The Creative Block please contact Steve Outram directly.

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## Notice to Publishers

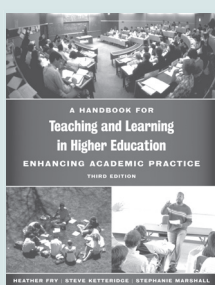
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# Book Review

**A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**  
Third edition  
(Routledge 2009).



Heather Fry, Steve Ketteridge, and Stephanie Marshall

544 pages,  
ISBN 978-0-415-43464-5

This hefty tome, now in its third edition, is a wide-ranging guide to all manner of issues and topics relating to higher education teaching. Divided into three parts – teaching, supervising and learning; teaching in the disciplines; and enhancing personal practice – it is a comprehensive guide for higher education practitioners that covers everything from how to establish ground rules in your lectures for encouraging respectful behaviour, to how to use your teaching credentials to further your career.

The book covers a surprising and impressive range of topics. There is something in here that provides insight into almost any situation that a lecturer

may be faced with. Simple things are covered, such as the basics of e-learning practice, how to motivate your students, and how to design meaningful learning outcomes. More specific and technical issues are also dealt with, particularly in the section about teaching in the disciplines, such as the pedagogic issues that are relevant to teaching pure mathematics, and assessment within the arts, humanities and social sciences.

So, as a reference book this is great. It's easy to dip into and read a chapter, or section of a chapter, and learn something of practical use immediately. The suggestions for further reading at the end of each section are useful and the book is packed with case studies that demonstrate how the principles and theories presented can be effectively delivered in the classroom. The final section on how to enhance your personal practice, although short, is a welcome addition that introduces new lecturers to such things as the Professional Standards Framework. It also provides insights into practices for developing your teaching skills (such as reflecting on teaching) and shows how a commitment to enhancing your teaching practice can be used to further your career as a lecturer. All this is presented in a way that appreciates that academics are busy people, juggling a range of administrative, research, and teaching responsibilities.

The book claims to be aimed at new lecturers and to have relevance for experienced lecturers who want to improve their teaching practice. However, the sheer range of topics covered along with the individual chapters on teaching within the disciplines may make this volume a little intimidating for new academics. Less daunting introductions to the lecturer's craft are available and some of the more specific sections on discipline-specific teaching are probably only relevant to a minority of academics. The level of material presented can veer between the very basic to the highly technical, which may also make it difficult to read for people new to lecturing.

In summary, this is an excellent text as a reference book on a good range of higher education teaching issues and will appeal to those who already know a little about academic life and pedagogic practice. On the other hand, its sheer scope may make it difficult reading for new academics. This is a thorough, well written, and comprehensive text on teaching and learning - one for those who take their pedagogy seriously.

**Dr Sean Walton** is a Lecturer in Higher Education Practice at the Centre for Educational Development, University of Bradford.

## An interview with Julie Hall, SEDA Co-Chair

In 2002 Educational Developments published an interview which **Julie Hall** conducted with **Kristine Mason O'Connor** upon her election as SEDA Co-Chair (Issue 3.3). Now Julie is SEDA Co-Chair, Kristine was invited to 'return the compliment'.

**K:** First of all Julie, warmest congratulations on being elected Co-Chair of SEDA.



*Julie Hall, SEDA Co-Chair*

**J:** Thank you, I am very pleased and excited to be in this role and, after seeing the work of past Co-Chairs, a little daunted

too. I am honoured to be taking on this role.

**K:** It would be interesting to know about your engagement with higher education and how you became involved with educational development.

**J:** I began teaching in the early eighties at an inner city college of higher education in south London. I learnt such a lot about working in a cross disciplinary team, about teaching and learning, about issues of race, gender and class. I am still in touch with some of my colleagues from this time and we all ask ourselves 'What was happening that made this period so rich and rewarding for us?' Interestingly a few of us have found our way to educational development in one way or another since then. After 17 years teaching Sociology and Politics and after running a large complex

modular programme, I moved into Staff and Educational Development. I was becoming more and more interested in what academics could do to ensure that learning happened. James Wisdom who was at London Guildhall University then and who is now the SEDA Company Secretary encouraged me to attend my first SEDA conference in 1998. I was amazed to be at a conference with lots of people who had the same interests and concerns as I did. Until then I didn't really realise that such a thing as an 'educational developer' existed. I went on to be SEDA's Development Officer, to be the Chair of Conferences Committee and to work at Kingston University and now Roehampton University. Throughout this time SEDA has been an important aspect of my professional life.

**K:** It's striking how staff and educational developers come from a range of academic backgrounds. Would you say that your disciplinary background has influenced your approach to educational development?

**J:** Yes I am sure it has. Sociology and Politics are discursive subjects and the student experience can often be transformative as people unpick and question important aspects of their lives – the roles of women, family structures, the place of education and the media in shaping attitudes etc. It also meant that I had students who were sometimes already far more engaged in the sharp end of politics than myself - refugee students who had fled civil war for example or students who had faced racism. I was often humbled by the stories from my students and their commitment to study in challenging circumstances. In addition, I remain interested in research areas which cut across sociology and educational development such as critical pedagogy and notions of professionalism.

**K:** What do you see as the key opportunities and challenges for the sector and for SEDA?

**J:** The sector and SEDA face one huge challenge and that is to survive and flourish at a time when resources will undoubtedly be cut. This is the key challenge but one I am excited to take on. For SEDA this means that we need to double our efforts to ensure that universities and individuals see the benefit of SEDA membership. It also means that we need to look carefully at increasing and diversifying SEDA's income while keeping costs to a minimum. We will need to look carefully at every aspect of our work. I think there are opportunities to offer services to the sector as a voluntary professional body, to work more closely with other professional bodies and to raise the profile of SEDA and what it can offer. To do this we need to ensure that what we offer is robust and effective and a first task I have is to meet committee chairs and explore the work of each committee.

**K:** What would you see as the distinctive contribution of SEDA to educational development in the present climate?

**J:** There are three distinctive contributions I'd highlight in the present climate.

Firstly, because SEDA is run for and by educational developers, its work is rooted in the real experiences of its members. This ensures that our events, publications and professional development activities are highly relevant and timely, and thus extremely helpful for the sector. They are also very cost effective because our work with SEDA provides rich and valuable professional development and it is not burdened by bureaucracy.

Secondly, at a time when the Government is focusing on evidence of quality and the improvement of the student experience I think we should really raise the profile of SEDA's Professional Development Framework. SEDA PDF provides a fantastic opportunity to develop and accredit the work of a wide range of staff reflecting local needs and values and a national framework. It could become one of the key vehicles for the UK Professional Standards and HE CPD.

Finally, SEDA's extensive national and international networks ensure that educational developers are able to share advice, ideas and good practice quickly and effectively at times when we are often under pressure to jump to changing agendas at great speed. Such a network is critical to the success of educational developers who often work in very small teams within universities and colleges.

**K:** Those contributions are certainly inspiring and impressive. In the future, looking back on your time as SEDA Co-Chair, what would you have wanted to achieve?

**J:** I would like to see that SEDA remained on a firm financial footing and that SEDA was in a good position to respond to the challenges posed by the current government. I'd also hope that my enthusiasm and commitment to SEDA and its values had encouraged others to become involved.

**K:** You combine the responsibilities of SEDA Co-Chair with those of Head of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit at Roehampton University, so I feel rather hesitant to ask this final question, but do you have time for other interests and activities?

**J:** Yes, it's going to be challenging combining these roles but I know I have the support of my Deputy Vice Chancellor at Roehampton and at SEDA my Co-Chair Mike Laycock and the Vice Chairs Liz Shrives and Caroline Stainton. I am really looking forward to working with these colleagues. If I'm not too exhausted I try and watch AFC Wimbledon, my local football team, at the weekend with my family and I also enjoy cooking and reading. I have two children at home and one who has just embarked on life at Brighton University and so I am kept busy.

**K:** Well very many thanks, Julie, for making the time for this interview, and every good wish to you for your work as Co-Chair of SEDA.

**Kristine Mason O'Connor** is Professor Emerita, Higher Education Development, Learning and Teaching Innovation at the University of Gloucestershire

# Through a Virtual Glass Darkly: probing time and type of first year departure using electronic engagement data

Dr John Buglear, Nottingham Trent University

## Introduction

When studying seeds in water under a microscope in 1827 the Scottish botanist Robert Brown observed that they were not still but in a constant state of agitation, which became known as Brownian motion. Eighty years later Einstein argued that the movement of the seeds was caused by the movement of the water molecules that surrounded them (Lee and Hoon, 1995). In the same way that physics students studying Brownian motion look at something they can see to understand something they can't (molecular motion) the study of students' electronic engagement data, can shed light on patterns of 'dropping out'.

Student retention is a key performance indicator for universities but retention data are unreliable (Longden, 2002; Reimann, 2004). One likely source of unreliability is the reluctance of some students to notify their institution of their departure. In this article we report the results of a case study of the last logins of undergraduate students who left their first year at a large UK university during the 2008/9 academic year. The last login is the final point of electronic engagement with the university's virtual learning environment (VLE) as a registered user. The focus on first year leavers is because this is when the majority of students who fail to complete their studies actually leave (Smith and Naylor, 2001).

The work reported here builds on an earlier pilot study of first year students leaving a single course (Buglear, 2009). The original motivation for undertaking the study was my experience of dealing with withdrawing students as a course leader of major undergraduate and sub-degree programmes. These departures reflected a diversity of circumstances and rationales which prompted

questions about the existence of general patterns of departure and how they might inform our practice. The venture was supported by the institution, initially in the form of funding doctoral research, in line with its developing focus on student retention.

This research is based on a number of premises. Firstly, following Peel *et al.* (2004) there is a connection between when students leave and why they leave. In broad terms those who leave in the first half year are more likely to have distinct reasons for going; they are generally what we might call the 'decided'. In contrast those who leave in the second half year are more likely to be those who may have become disillusioned, what might be termed the 'drifters' who fade away. In the following analysis, the 'decided' are defined as those who have notified the institution of their departure whereas the 'drifters' are those who have not.

The second premise is that engagement with institutions' virtual learning environments is an intrinsic element of the modern undergraduate experience, and one that chimes with students' comfort with electronic communication (Crosling *et al.*, 2008: 3). The implication is thus that evidence of virtual engagement is an information resource capability for tracking student departure that is likely to be more useful than records of physical attendance.

The overarching question that the research addresses is what more can be discerned about departure patterns from last logins data? More specifically:

1. What are the last login patterns over time?
2. How does the balance between the 'decided' and the 'drifters' vary over time?

3. What is the variation in this balance across the nine schools of the university?

## Digging out the data

The first stage of the research was to capture data from two sources within the institution: last logins from the department responsible for supporting the university's VLE, and official end of year status records from the Registry. The data set of last logins contained the date on which each of the first year students who left during the year last logged on to the VLE where this was before the examination period that began in late May and extended into mid June. The rationale for this cut-off was that students had to check the VLE for dates, times and venues of examinations. We therefore deemed lack of engagement with the VLE in the examination period evidence of withdrawal. This is to a certain extent arbitrary. When the last login is months before the exams it is clearly more justifiable than when the last login is much closer to the exams.

Distinguishing between types of leaver, whether 'decided' or 'drifter' was also somewhat arbitrary; the distinction was based on whether or not the student had formally notified the institution of their leaving. This was evident from some of the status categories. 'Gone into employment' and 'Transferred to other institution' clearly indicated notification whereas 'Written off after lapse of time' suggested an absence of notification. We also regarded 'Academic failure' as evidence of non-notification. This decision was based on the last logins occurring before the examination period, in the majority of cases by some considerable time, resulting in the academic result being no more than withdrawal by default.

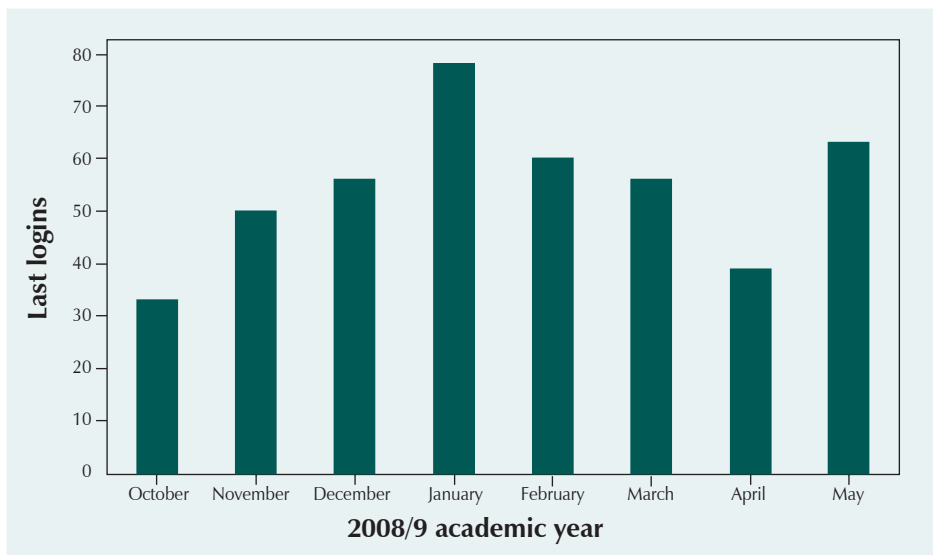


Figure 1 Last logins of first year leavers 2008/9

### Putting the pieces together

The total number of first year students who left in 2008/9 for whom there was a last login date before the end of May was 435. It is important to note that this is unlikely to be the total number of enrolled first years who departed in the academic year since many very early leavers probably had no electronic engagement as registered users.

Figure 1 shows the pattern of last logins of first year leavers over the 2008/9 academic year. The peak in January may well be associated with assignment submission deadlines. The later peak in May perhaps reflects baulking at the prospect of the forthcoming examinations. The pattern in Figure 1 has similar features to those

reported in other studies of withdrawal time series (Prescott and Simpson, 2004; York St John College, 2003).

In Figure 2 the last logins by month are subdivided by whether or not the university was notified of departure. The diagram depicts a contrast between the earlier months of the academic year, when roughly two-thirds provide notification, and the later months when this falls to approximately one half.

On the basis of this analysis approximately 180 first year students left the university without notification in the 2008/9 academic year. The departure of these 'drifters' constituted a financial loss to the institution of around £2m in tuition fees alone as

well as less tangible costs possibly related to reputation and efficiency. There is also the cost to the students concerned in terms of disruption and self-esteem.

More specifically, of the 435 students represented in the dataset, 217 left in the first half year (October to January) and 218 in the second half year (February to May). Over 40% (179/435) of the leavers did not provide notification of departure. In the first half year only 32.7% (71/217) did not do so whereas in the second half year 49.5% (108/218) did not. The difference between these proportions is statistically significant ( $P=0.000$ ), based on the test of differences between population proportions (Gauvreau, 2006).

Figure 3 presents the data by academic school and whether or not the departure was notified. The variation between schools is considerable, with the very high proportions of notified departures in ARE (Animal, Rural and Environmental Science) and A & D (Art and Design), contrasting markedly with much lower proportions in ADBE (Architecture, Design and the Built Environment), Business and Science.

It is possible to speculate that this arises in part because of the differences in nature between the schools. ARE is the smallest school located on a separate rural campus with vocationally focussed courses whereas Business is the largest school located at a city campus offering vocationally diffuse programmes. To use Tonnies' schema ARE might be the *Gemeinschaft* in which students stay together in spite of everything that separates them whereas Business is more the *Gesellschaft* where students remain separate in spite of everything that unites them (Tonnies 2001: 52). In Art and Design the high proportion of notified departures might reflect the significance of individuality in art education and hence greater student adhesion. The low proportions in Law and Science School could arise because of strong subject ethos being associated with a more survivalist stance among tutors (Johnston and Simpson, 2006) stigmatising departure.

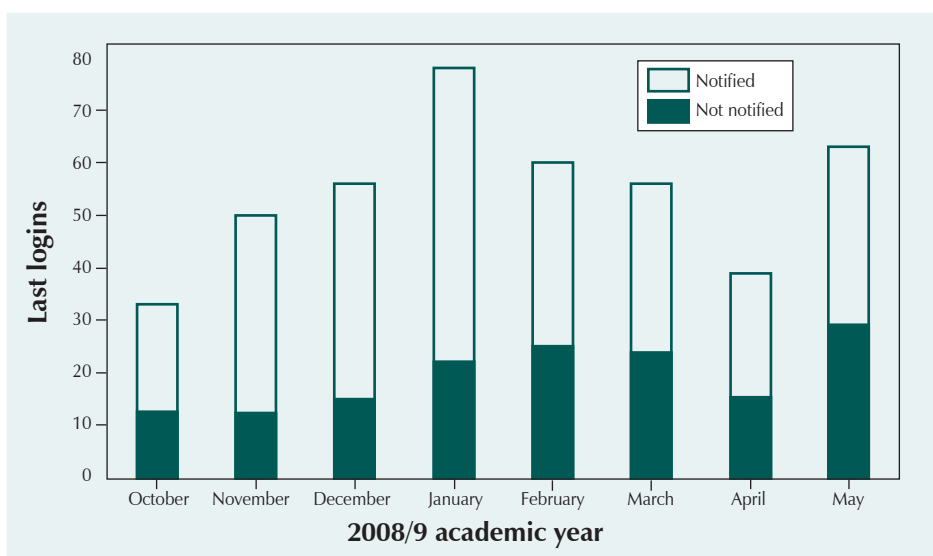


Figure 2 Last logins of first year leavers 2008/9 by notification

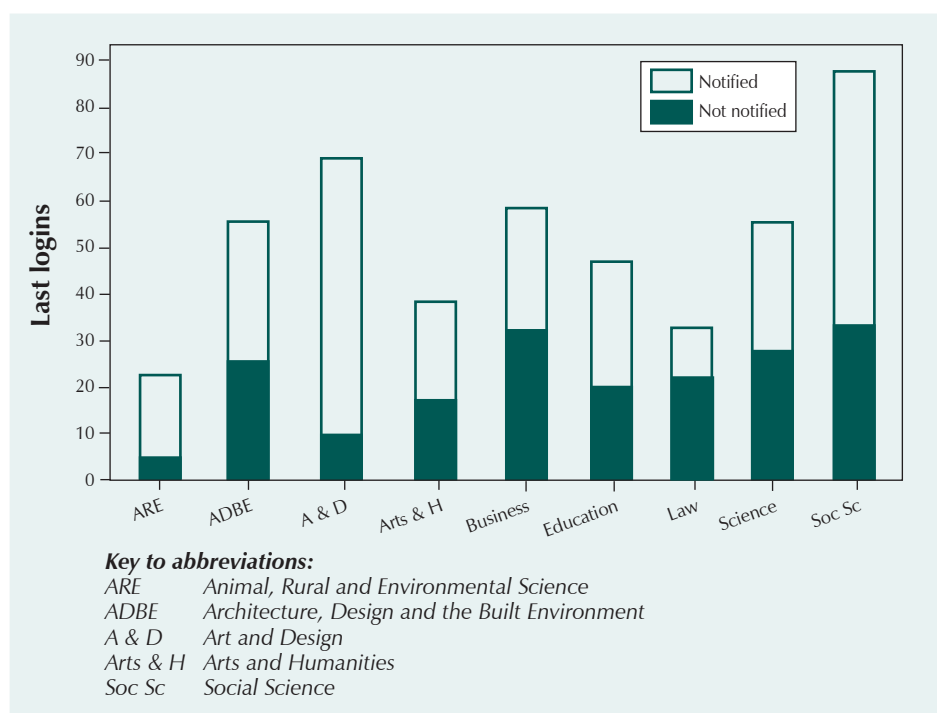


Figure 3 Last logins of first year leavers 2008/9 by academic school

Figure 4 presents the first half year logins by school and whether notification was provided. Figure 5 depicts the equivalent data for the second half year. In general the proportion of last logins of second half leavers not giving notification of departure is higher, although in some schools such as ARE and Law there is little difference.

Throughout the institution the pattern of delivery at first year undergraduate level is 'long' and in most cases 'thin' modules that cover the entire academic year. This rules out the possibility that second half year

departures reflect experience of a different set of modules although clearly they might be influenced by different assessment components within those modules.

Table 1 provides a statistical analysis of these differences using Fisher's exact test (Gauvreau, 2006). At the 5% level there is a significant difference between the two half years in only one school, Science although at the lesser standard of 10% the difference in ADBE is also significant.

On the basis of their last logins the majority, 108 out of 179 or 60.3% of

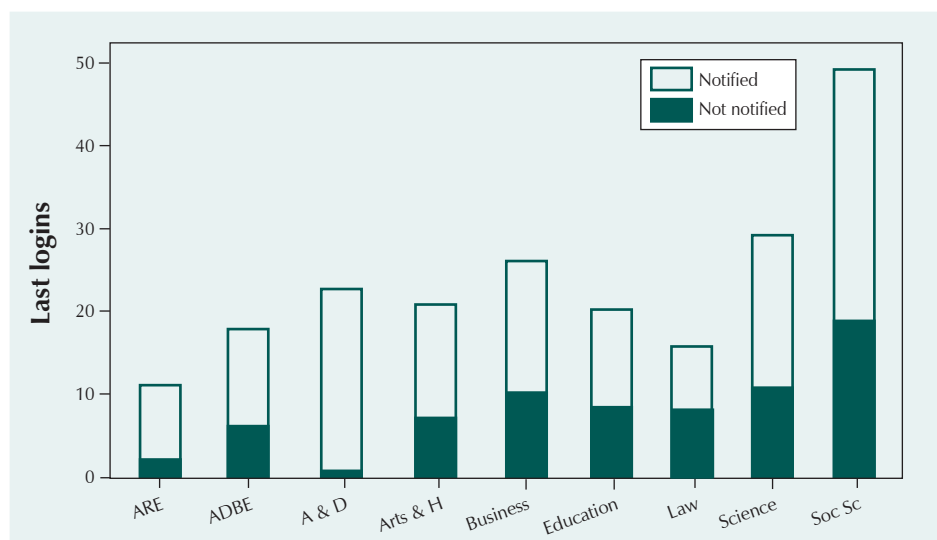


Figure 4 Last logins of first half year leavers 2008/9 by academic school

these 'drifters' departed in the second half year. In the Fitzgibbon and Prior timeline model of the academic year this is Zone 3, a stage when 'students who have poorly established...study habits really come under pressure' and 'students... receive feedback from their first assignment (so) constructive feedback and reassurance is...crucial.' Yet by this stage 'staff assume students have settled...but this is frequently not the case(,) students are still seeking significant levels of contact with their tutors for a whole range of issues' (Fitzgibbon and Prior, 2003). This suggested lack of synchronisation between students who are potential 'drifters' and tutors may be of significance.

## Reflections

The analysis above suggests that although in each half year there are departures by both the 'decided' and the 'drifters', the majority of last logins prior to the examination period at the end of the first year were by the 'decided', students who conveyed their decision to depart. Their doing so suggests they engaged in some form of dialogue about their leaving. Approximately 40% appear to have been the last electronic engagement of the 'drifters', those who did not inform the institution of their departure, suggesting an absence of dialogue about their leaving.

A significantly greater proportion of 'drifters' appear to have left later in the academic year. The potential increase in persistence among such students through the application of connecting strategies as well as retrieval and reclamation would be the quantifiable pay-off from those strategies. The distinct variation between schools in the level of unreported later departures suggests that the case for applying such strategies is stronger in some academic spheres than others.

In addressing the retention challenge presented by the 'drifters', the Beatty-Guenter schema of retention strategies offers a framework for consideration. She distinguishes between Sorting, Supporting, Connecting and Transforming strategies (Beatty-Guenter, 1994: 114). Connecting strategies promote 'bonding between

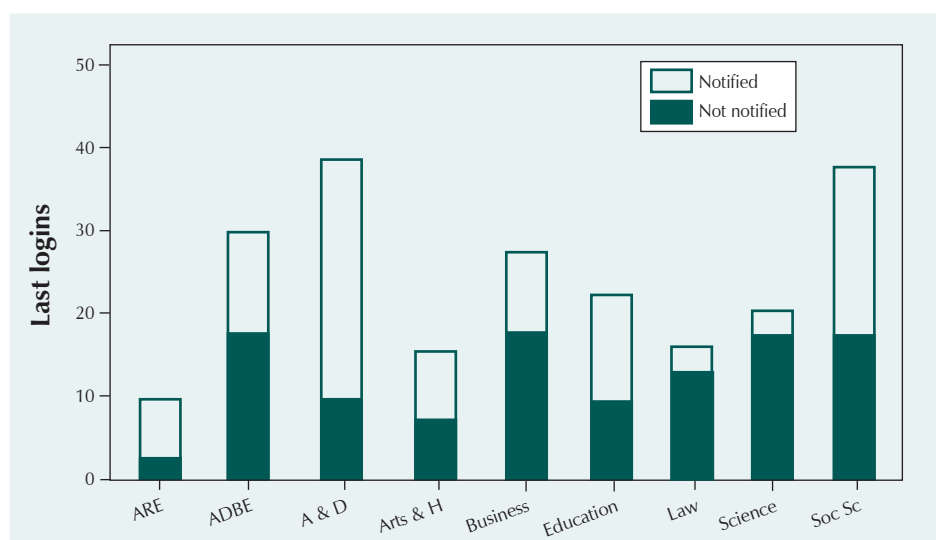


Figure 5 Last logins of second half year leavers 2008/9 by academic school

a student and the institution' (Beatty-Guenter, 1994: 118). We suggest that these, applied in Fitzgibbon and Prior's Zone 3 (2003) might be a means of ameliorating the situation and that profiling last logins provides a focus for their implementation. Examples of such strategies are a more interactive and individual approach to returning assessed work and 'welcome back' events after the winter vacation.

The results of the pilot study from which this research developed (Buglear, 2009) shaped the design of a first year module delivered in stages that preceded the peaks in the departure patterns. The early indications are that the introduction of this module has probably increased the proportion of withdrawers reporting their decision, although as yet there is no robust data that can demonstrate

the effect on retention. The main impact of the module thus far seems to have been to sensitise tutors to the pressures on some students in Zone 3 of the Fitzgibbon and Prior (2003) model; indeed for some colleagues the transformation has been of near Damascene proportions.

The analysis of last logins also offers a means of targeting the retrieval and reclamation strategies put forward by Simpson (2003: 150). Retrieval is the process of getting students back into their original cohort after withdrawal (Simpson, 2003: 95). Reclamation involves getting students back following withdrawal, but to join a subsequent cohort or different course (Simpson, 2003: 111). In support of his case for these strategies Simpson cites one study

where the sending a standard letter with a return slip to all students who had withdrawn resulted in 20% of them re-enrolling (2003: 110). This sort of approach could be applied once a given period of time elapses following a last login. Yorke's finding, that more than half of the respondents in his large survey of student 'drop-outs' had re-entered higher education and a further quarter reported that they intended to do so (Yorke 1999: 55), suggests that in many cases this would amount to knocking at an open door.

The evidence above suggests that there is potential for more gain from these in some schools rather than others. It is perhaps too easy for academic staff to assume that once induction and orientation processes have been implemented all students are 'on track'.

Last logins analysis does not present a full picture of departure patterns, omitting as it does the earliest leavers but it does offer an additional perspective on retention. The case for using it is strong by virtue of the fact that the data on which it is based is automatically embedded in institutions' IT infrastructures. By mining it this information resource capability can be brought to bear on improvement of persistence.

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School	Non-notifying first half leavers (as a % of first half year last logins)	Non-notifying second half leavers (as a % of first half year last logins)	Significance (P-value)
ARE	2 (18.2%)	2 (20%)	1.000
ADBE	6 (31.6%)	18 (58.1%)	0.086
A & D	1 (4.4%)	8 (21.6%)	0.134
Arts & H	7 (31.8%)	6 (40%)	0.730
Business	10 (38.5%)	17 (60.7%)	0.173
Education	8 (38.1%)	9 (40.9%)	1.000
Law	8 (53.3%)	13 (76.5%)	0.266
Science	11 (37.9%)	17 (81.0%)	0.004
Social Science	18 (31.3%)	18 (48.6%)	0.273
<b>Overall</b>	<b>71 (32.7%)</b>	<b>108 (49.5%)</b>	<b>0.000</b>

Table 1 Last logins of notifying first and second half year leavers by academic school

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# What is the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector?

**Chris Rowell**, Croydon College

In 2007 the government introduced legislation to change initial teacher training in the Life Long Learning (LLL) sector, which includes further education colleges, adult and community education, work-based learning, prison education, armed forces and training institutions. All teaching staff within this sector have to complete the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS).

The learners who come onto the DTLLS course reflect the diversity that exists within the LLL sector. They have to be teaching a minimum of 75 hours per year but the subject they teach varies greatly. Some teach quite traditional subjects in FE colleges but others might be teaching in village halls, care centres or a variety of private training centres. Just teaching Tai Chi or IT skills a few hours a week to 'silver surfers' now requires the tutors to complete the DTLLS qualification.

The DTLLS course is a two year in-service qualification. There is some variation in how it is delivered but in most cases students complete five modules in the first year and another five in the second year. The first module is called Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS, pronounced 'Petals'). The first few modules have a very practical orientation, showing the basics of lesson planning, devising schemes of work, a variety of teaching techniques and an introduction to classroom management. Later modules look at assessment, theories of learning and, in the second year, students explore the wider professional context, curriculum design and look at the role of the personal tutor and funding within the sector. In addition to their academic studies they are assessed by completing four observations of their teaching per year, two of which are usually done by their DTLLS tutors, one by their employers and one by their mentors.



DTLLS Class 2010 Croydon Higher Education College.

In an attempt to give more professional status to the sector, the government set up the Institute for Learning (IfL), which all DTLLS students and teaching staff in the sector must register with. Once the DTLLS course has been successfully completed tutors can apply for Qualified Teaching, Learning and Skills (QTLS) status. This status needs to be renewed annually and requires teachers to complete and record up to 30 hours per year of continuing professional development (CPD) activities and this can be recorded online on the IfL's website. At the end of last year the IfL announced that 80,000 of its members are using Pebblepad software 'REFLECT' to plan, review and record their CPD.

The DTLLS course has not been immune from the general financial situation facing HE at the moment. Up until this academic year the government was paying the full cost of the course for the learners but from September 2010 the DTLLS course is being treated the same as all other part-time higher education courses. This means learners can apply for a

means tested maintenance grant up to £2650 per year and a fee grant up to the maximum course cost. It is difficult to say how much impact getting the learners to pay for the course will have on recruitment but it will be a hefty expense for those whose only income is teaching and who only work a few hours a week.

There are a variety of DTLLS providers at the moment, mostly within FE and HE institutions. Most FE colleges have a CPD or education department that will staff the DTLLS provision. Sometimes they are full time Education Lecturers but often they are more experienced teaching staff who deliver DTLLS modules in addition to their normal subject teaching. These staff are given a variety of job titles. At Croydon College where I worked they are known as Advanced Practitioners. It is very evident from my own experience how little training and qualification these lecturers have. In my own case I had been an Economics and Business Studies lecturer for sixteen years before I moved into teacher training. I had completed a PGCE nearly twenty years previously, but I was appointed as a result of my teaching experience in FE. It was only after I started delivering the DTLLS course that I enrolled on an MA in Education. My experience is not untypical. I knew that the DTLLS course was being delivered nationally but there did not seem to be any training or network groups for the staff delivering this course.

There are still some question marks about how well the DTLLS course is coping with the demands of a constantly changing and diverse sector. FE colleges have changed so much since I started teaching in them in the early '90s. In many cases they have become quite brutal and depressing places. They are dominated by a culture of targets, success rates and an endless pursuit of increased student numbers. The process of education is now of secondary importance compared to the output of how many students complete their courses. Managers are constantly putting pressure on the lecturers to make sure that all the students pass their

course, no matter how this is done. Managers who have high success rates on their courses are rewarded with promotion and yet the quality of the education provision for the students remains superficial at best. In this climate, it is very difficult for new lecturers on the DTLLS course to resolve the contradiction between the managers' relentless pursuit to jump up the league tables by any means necessary and the expectation of delivering a meaningful and creative learning experience for the students.

Another area that remains very underdeveloped is that of mentoring within the LLL sector. Every student teacher on the DTLLS course must have a subject specialist mentor who will give guidance and advice in the workplace and will complete two of their observations and feedback to them areas for development. However, colleges and especially private training providers provide very little time or resources for the mentors to give effective support to their mentees. Consequently, the DTLLS student experience of mentoring is very mixed. If they are lucky they will get an experienced mentor willing to give them time and support but too often they are given little or no mentoring support in the workplace. Mentoring will have to improve dramatically to reach anything like the standard in schools or in HE generally.

Overall most DTLLS learners really appreciate the whole experience of taking time out from their busy teaching lives to attend the DTLLS course. They enjoy the collective experience of being in such mixed and diverse groups, where there is a real mix of vocational and academic subjects. They have entered the profession because they have a real enthusiasm for their subjects but appreciate that the pedagogic skills they learn on the DTLLS course really do help them in the classroom with their own students.

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## Writing for Assessment in Practice-based Courses: the experience of university teachers

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### Background

This article raises questions about engagement in writing and assessment on courses for new lecturers. It introduces the findings from a small project carried out at the Open University and suggests the implications for those teaching on practice-based courses more generally.

The OU is probably unique in offering its 'Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice' online and at a distance, not only to our own staff but also to people teaching in other tertiary contexts. Consequently, our participants teach on a range of courses across many different disciplines and subject areas and many of them teach in practice-based

professions. For some time the course team has been concerned about some participants' struggles with assessed writing on the course. In order to explore the issue further we obtained funding from our 'Practice-based Professional Practice' CETL. The funded project aimed to extrapolate results to see whether findings could have relevance for others involved in

teaching and learning in postgraduate, practice-based courses, not only those for new lecturers. Many of our teachers have no previous experience of engaging in the kinds of educational discourses and genres which tend to be fore-grounded in courses of this nature (Stierer, 2008). Nevertheless, it is through writing that they provide evidence of their practice-based development, becoming adept in a range of written genres in order to complete formal assignments and a practitioner enquiry into their own practice.

It might seem strange to be addressing writing issues with a group of people who, by dint of their employment as HE teachers, are assumed to be already competent writers in their own subject areas. Problems with writing are commonly attributed to student lack of familiarity with appropriate writing skills. Given their history and profiles, this is unlikely to offer a useful explanation for this group and we were interested in a more nuanced explanation for the apparent difficulties that some were experiencing. Sensitivity to the complexity of the issues meant that we were keen to avoid drawing on a deficit model describing people as 'good' or 'bad' writers, which would not adequately take into account the full context in which participants were writing.

In order to frame the project, we looked to academic literacies research (Ivanic, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998; Lea & Stierer (eds.), 2000; Lillis, 2001; Lillis and Scott, 2007; Rai, 2010). With its orientation toward the social, cultural and contextualized nature of writing in the university, it offered a framework for exploring participants' experiences of engaging with unfamiliar written genres. In particular, we were interested in potential tensions between the experience of one's own professional practice and writing about that practice. We wanted to unpack the implications of the requirement, in course writing tasks, to conceptualise practice-based knowledge and understanding in relation to theoretical and conceptual literature. In addition, we were keen to explore disciplinary differences

concerning notions of 'successful' writing.

### Project design

Initially we interviewed course tutors about their own academic and professional backgrounds, including their attitudes, beliefs and observations about writing on this course. The themes that emerged were used to frame the interviews with course participants, which were supplemented by copies of their assignments. During both sets of interviews we uncovered the diverse range of professional and academic backgrounds that were being brought to the course. For example, some tutors held several academic qualifications spanning different disciplines, for instance, a B.A. in Spanish plus a degree in Nursing, or a degree in Archaeology and an MA in Systems Analysis and Multi-Media Design. The professional background of individual participants was equally varied, with many having experience of working in several professions, not necessarily as teachers.

### Course concepts and practice-based knowledge

This project has helped us to understand the different emphases that tutors and participants (themselves also teachers) give to particular aspects of the course. A central purpose of the programme is to enable participants to reflect on their own practice, critique and develop it. The balance between the value given to participants' practice-based knowledge and theories about teaching and learning are crucial. With this in mind, participants described in detail how they went about writing their assignments and the rhetorical choices they made. For some, the central focus was on the course theory - the authorities cited in the course and the theoretical frameworks were the starting point for their thinking and writing. For others, the main focus of their thinking was their own practice, the experience and knowledge of practice was more central to their concerns:

*'When you go to do the assignment you can relate that to your own practice. So it's kind*

*of looking at your experiential learning and based on the theories and the models, but a lot of it is more about what you do in your everyday practice and I think that's how I managed to keep my scores up.'*

Some experienced difficulty in relating theory and knowledge of practice because they were not used to writing about their practice nor reflecting or critiquing this practice, with one student describing this experience as 'rearranging mental furniture'. Others experienced a mismatch between their own valued practice and the course theory which impacted on their writing, particularly when they found some of the theory not very relevant to their own teaching practice:

*'I was doing it (i.e. using references to course theory) because I thought it was expected. I'm doing a series of tutorials soon and I'm not sitting there thinking 'now what would Biggs do?' I've not referred to any of the literature, I'm back to sort of 'right, this is the objective; this is what I want the students to go away with, how am I going to get that across?'*

For some, the fact that they were required to provide references from the literature to support claims and statements about their own practice negatively influenced their processes of meaning making, because of the focus on meeting academic writing conventions and expectations rather than their own professional practice:

*'Sometimes I found myself desperately wanting to make a point and foraging about on the net, googling, going to education sites trying to find some sort of support for something I wanted to say.'*

The forging of the link between course theory, via appropriate references, and practice-based knowledge was presented as pragmatic in order to meet assessment criteria. Knowledge of practice had value in assessment terms only if it was framed within the course requirements and structures.

This produced a dislocation between participants' own beliefs and practices and the way in which they represented these in their writing. Although they explained that their own view of practice and the basis for the validity of their points and arguments needed to be supported by theory encountered in the course, they did not necessarily own this perspective. For example, one person suggested that her role as assessed 'student' was in conflict with her identity as a professional teacher:

*'That's all about the references. That is about having it reported by someone else rather than you just writing yourself, the 'its right' - because other people are saying its right as well, so it definitely wouldn't be scholarly if I wasn't referencing anybody, even though I could still be right.'*

This relationship between course theory and knowledge of practice is neither transparent nor straightforward. 'Starting from theory' and 'starting from practice' represent different orientations towards the course and different ways of making meaning. In terms of writing, the starting point for an assignment is significant because it influences and shapes the focus and argument. Whilst providing opportunities to reflect on and enhance practice, the ways in which participants can write as confident practitioners is often compromised by the necessity to view everything through the lens of the course theory.

## Values and implicit models of writing

One of the interesting things that emerged was the tutors' use of the terms 'post graduate' and 'scholarly'. These seemed both to embody implicit models of writing and signal possible rhetorical and genre patterns that were expected and valued in assignments. The terms signified a standard or level of writing and absence of this was considered to be a problem:

*'The fundamental problem around writing that I perceive is that it is actually at post-graduate level and it is scholarly.'*

Amongst the tutors there was general agreement about the highly valued features and characteristics of this scholarly or postgraduate writing, as illustrated when a tutor described what she was looking for in assignments:

*'...to critically analyse the literature that they were reading, and integrate appropriately into their work in a way that both showed that they understood what they'd been reading, and could reference it appropriately, but more importantly that they could read things and be constructively critical about what they read, and not just take the quotes or the words of others at face value. And almost without exception, maybe one of my students., but all the others I've had real difficulty trying to get them to understand the concepts of . . . first of all not just putting quotes in, and big chunks out of other people's work. Most of them actually have a good stab at referencing, but its just that to begin with there's a great tendency for people to do that or indeed if they did put things in there was no attempt to any discussion or debates in their writing.'*

Reading a quote like this one, I find it necessary to remind myself that the writers or 'students', referred to are themselves university teachers. Without the context, one might think the tutor was referring to perceived problems with first year undergraduate writing. Critical analysis of course theory, texts containing argument and academic norms of referencing as a way of validating claims, foreground the priority tutors give to discussion of course theory:

*'They really haven't grasped the importance of the theory behind what they're now referring to and talking about.'*

For tutors, course theory was generally the 'starting point' for successful writing. They expected to see participants start from the frameworks, concepts and information in the course readings and then relate these to practice rather than the other way round:

*'They're supposed to be analysing course materials that are in the course...It's quite often the bit that they miss as well.... because of all the other stuff, because of the reflective practice.'*

*'For me it's the taking the material, and thinking about it in their particular discipline, and practice setting that for me makes the best kind of answer.'*

Nevertheless, most tutors recognised the complexity of integrating critical analysis with reflection on practice whilst using an academic style of writing:

*'I also think this course is more complicated because 'yes' there is a need to do that (i.e. critique the course material), but there's also a need to do reflection on your professional practice, after all that's what the course is about, so possibly its about understanding how to combine that.'*

Nevertheless, they still expressed concern when accepted referencing and bibliographic practices were not followed:

*'I would never have thought I would have had to discuss with the student about referencing at this level.'*

Interestingly, participants didn't make any reference to writing in terms of 'postgraduateness' or being 'scholarly' unless specifically asked. This is despite the fact that some were teaching on postgraduate courses and most were responsible for marking assignments. Prompted with the term 'scholarly writing', their responses indicated that their understanding was affected primarily by differences in disciplinary and professional background. For example, a participant who taught postgraduates herself in the arts was unsure how far the conventions of academic writing she used could be applied to her writing on this course:

*'The scholarly writing, or academic writing it's giving you a clear argument, it's the setting out the information, convincing the*

*reader you know what you're talking about, and that they will know what you're talking about by the end, whereas I don't know whether either the educational, or social, I don't know whether that's what they're after or whether it's something different.'*

Students' description of scholarly writing varied considerably with emphasis on different features, including concerns about the acceptability of using a personal voice and ways of writing about experience:

*'I think there's always been this problem that if you introduce the first person it can't be scholarly, and you can't have the appropriate jargon in there if you like, but I don't think that's the case. I think you can have a very scholarly piece of writing that can have a lot of personal experiential evidence in it, and I think it should be scholarly. It is a Masters course.'*

Another student made a distinction between writing 'an academic piece' and writing about his own practice and saw these as different forms of writing. The issue of using references also emerged in terms of students' understanding of postgraduate or scholarly writing. Whilst they recognised that referencing authorities in the field was conventional academic practice, they frequently admitted to being strategic in the use of citation:

*'When I was writing the assignments I was consciously trying to reference it to make it seem more academic rather than just a 'this is what I do.'*

Others shared the view of the tutors, with reference to noted authorities in the field plus critical analysis as signs of postgraduate writing. Overall, there was very little consensus about writing in a scholarly way, with this concept appearing to be more problematic for participants than for their tutors.

## Disciplinary and emerging genres

The lack of consensus noted above is perhaps unsurprising in light of the different disciplines and

professions that are represented on the course. The literature tells us that both professions and academic disciplines draw on a range of writing genres which shape the ways in which members of that profession or discipline communicate with one another (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995).

The differences between genres are not only subtly nuanced but are also heavily reliant on context and are much more than a set of rules for 'good writing'. They govern what can be said and how it should be said in a specific community. In academic writing, genres shape how the arguments within the discipline can be made and how knowledge can be developed (Bazerman and Prior (eds.) 2004).

An additional complication in a course like this is that it requires engagement in an emerging group of genres that draw on both disciplinary models of writing and writing about practice-based knowledge. This means that participants find themselves in a dynamic and developing situation in which several models of writing are operating and intersecting as practice-based learning evolves. All participants spoke confidently about the writing they did in their disciplines and professions, often in contrast to the writing they were required to do here. For example, one who wrote professionally in the areas of science and psychology tried to make sense of the differences between her field and the educational/social science field:

*'I find writing in science and psychology given a title I can just research and write on it, that's fine. Writing for this course is slightly less easy because it's a lot more 'wafflie', and it's not so fact based. I like facts.....but maybe that's why I'm struggling because I'm used to writing, and I've written hundreds and thousands of words in a specific, in a scientific, in a psychological way.'*

Adaptations from their own discipline to this new context are complex and include the way arguments are supported and knowledge constructed. Someone with a postgraduate degree in a humanities subject described the

different ways in which she supports claims and makes arguments:

*'I suppose I was supporting why I was doing things by, in some cases, referring to the theory, in others referring to 'well I've done this before and it's worked'..... Whereas in a (humanities subject) essay you would sort of do 'this is suggested, that's suggested, but if you look at this other new bit of evidence well that draws it more in favour of this one, therefore we'll go with that theory', and a lot of the other ones were very much a 'this is the current thought on this. This is what people think formative assessment is, and this is why it's important, and this is what I do in practice and actually use this.'*

Some articulated the adaptation to a new genre in terms of lack of experience in what they called 'academic' as opposed to professional writing:

*'I found that I didn't know if I had got the level right, you know my academic level... I always have a bit of difficulty with the writing.'*

Others realized that there are models or styles:

*'There is a house style accepted in the teaching profession.'*

and tried to identify this to aid their writing:

*'You know how there's method acting well I thought this was 'method assignment writing.'*

Others were unable to reconcile the assignment writing with their prior experience:

*'I actually found it more difficult than writing research, or the assignments I wrote previously for my Masters' degrees.'*

This participant had two masters' degrees in humanities and social sciences and she enjoyed the control she had over her writing in her own research projects, whereas in this context she said that she never felt sure that she had provided the 'right' information. Some suggested that

having an extensive experience of writing in other contexts was helping them adapt to these new genres although this did not always mean that they found the writing straightforward. Writing confidently seemed to involve some implicit or explicit recognition of features of emerging genres and being able to make sense of these.

Addressing the assessment criteria was a particular challenge. A nursing teacher explained how her teaching was about 'learning in practice' and what she believed she was required to do in her assignment writing did not map closely with her own experience as a practitioner. One of the areas she had particular difficulty with was the use of very specific terminology in the course. She felt that course-based terms presented a particular theoretical perspective that did not sit easily with her own day-to-day practice, working with her own nursing students. She was unsure whether the theories fitted with what her students did. In her writing she referred to the theory because she was required to do so and not because she thought that there was really a clear relationship with her own professional practice as a university teacher. Even though the criteria draw on a recognisable language of assessment, such as 'reflection', 'integration of theory and practice' and 'drawing on one's own practice', the meaning of these terms is not immediately transparent but is implicitly tied to the context of this particular course.

### Writing about practice: some wider implications

Although this project focused specifically on the writing experience of new lecturers it has obvious implications for assessment in other practice-based courses. In particular, the findings remind us as teachers that writing is not just an undergraduate issue. It is always contingent upon epistemological imperatives and what counts as valid knowledge in any particular context, in this instance at the intersection of academic and professional domains. It also provides evidence that negotiating unfamiliar and emerging assessment genres is a challenge for professionals once they step outside their own familiar disciplinary practices.

Although those teaching in practice-based contexts are sensitive to the theory/practice dyad, how this is actually articulated in assessed work may need further interrogation. This means paying attention to the implicit assumptions and models of writing on which we base our assessment practices and how these mesh with the writing experiences that students bring with them to our courses.

Understanding meaning making processes is likely to require going beyond the criteria for assessment or assignment rubrics, to provide opportunities to bring out issues of writer history and writer identity across both academic and professional contexts. It includes providing spaces where both tutors and 'students' (professional practitioners) can explore and make visible the forms of writing that are being valued in a particular context (Crème and Lea, 2008). Although these kinds of discussions can take place in the classroom, blogs offer a real potential for such explorations. As open online writing spaces they offer ideal opportunities for the articulation and visibility of a range of different kinds of writing, which are easily hidden or lost in face to face encounters and discussions around writing. They also provide the potential for play and creativity (Crème and Hunt, 2010), which is missing from most assessed writing. In examining the tensions between theory and practice in a provisional and exploratory textual environment, which is not overlaid with assessment, this kind of approach could become a valuable course resource for both staff and students in making visible the range of different genres with which practitioners are engaged.

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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.

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

For more information please see: [www.seda.ac.uk/publications](http://www.seda.ac.uk/publications)

# SEDA's committee members shape future strategy

**Julie Hall**, Seda Co-Chair

SEDA's activities are managed and developed by 5 vibrant committees, involving 74 committee members. Positions on committees are advertised via SEDA jiscmail and at conferences and events and members apply for a three year term. SEDA just would not exist without this process, which ensures that SEDA responds effectively to the needs of the educational development community. Serving on a SEDA committee also provides a rich CPD opportunity.

On the 28th September 2010 SEDA hosted an event for committee members both to thank people for their contribution and to gather views on the future direction of the association. More than 50 people attended a world café strategy workshop at SEDA's headquarters in Woburn House London and a drinks reception and celebration at the Houses of Parliament.

This article outlines the responses to a number of key strategic questions asked of committee members at the event which will shape SEDA's future planning. In parallel to the challenges faced by SEDA's 90 institutional members, questions focused upon how the association might work more efficiently and productively as resources become squeezed. Here are the emerging themes and ideas.

## How might we increase individual and institutional membership?

### Publicity and Marketing

Improve publicity and marketing so that more people understand the benefits, particularly new educational developers, those who complete SEDA programmes and those in countries without local associations. Publicity should demonstrate the impact of SEDA and potential savings derived from activities such as targeted CPD. Make better use of existing members who can bring others on board.

### Consider what we offer and to whom

Review what SEDA might offer as quangos close or merge. Link SEDA into institutional bids to JISC, HEA etc. Be bold and reach beyond the educational development community to the para-academics in libraries, IT etc. and other HE providers. Consider new categories of membership. Offer something of real value like a safe membership space to share CPD frameworks, Learning and Teaching Strategies, hot topic interest groups etc.

## How might we increase income and/or cut costs?

### Cut committee costs

Stop producing hard paper copies for committees. Replace some face to face meetings with Skype, Elluminate or



*Nancy Turner studying the suggestions*

telephone conference calls. Review the committee portfolio. Ask members to offer meeting space at their institutions.

### Cut other costs

Could one or both conferences be one day only? Could more publications be electronic? Send out fewer SEDA mailings.

### Increase income

Link event attendance to a membership offer. Ask someone on Exec to seek sponsorship deals. Offer consultancy services. Explore funding from collaborations and via bids to the British Council, the EU etc. Send PG Cert leaders SEDA publications lists and ask them to add to library orders. Make sure institutional bids include SEDA as a collaborative partner (a great method for dissemination).

## What key themes should SEDA be addressing?

Effective, engaging and cheap models of student support and learning and teaching/curriculum design. The impact of efficiency savings in the curriculum/student experience. Working in partnership with students and off site and overseas colleagues. Facilitating staff development across institutions (research, leadership, e-learning etc.) Evidencing impact through sound research. Academic leadership and working effectively with senior managers. CPD. Learning Spaces.

## What could your committee do to raise SEDA's profile?

### Marketing and Publicity

Improve the way we evidence value and impact from our activities. Identify a marketing professional or MA intern who could help us improve leaflets etc. Review what kind of support/online community we offer. SEDA PDF offers us lots of opportunities to work with academic-related colleagues. We could offer SEDA membership to those who complete a SEDA PDF course.

### Links with other bodies

All committee members should exploit their links with other bodies such as QAA, HEDG, NUS, SHED, HEA Subject centres etc. Can we make sure Educational Developments gets to all these kinds of bodies?

### Why do you give your time to SEDA?

One participant echoed the comments of many when she said, 'The rewards of participating exceed the effort and time I put in.' Others pointed to the enjoyment and fun and friendship they find in SEDA.

For many an important aspect of SEDA is the national and international perspective it provides: 'I have great conversations and opportunities to hear what other universities are doing. It provides a network of likeminded

individuals - I get a national perspective on things.'

SEDA provides CPD opportunities for many people: 'I gain professional development. SEDA is very important professionally. I was encouraged to get involved for professional development. I want to make a difference to my community.'

Thank you to all those committee members who attended on the 28th September, to all those who continue to contribute to SEDA's work and to those who have contributed in the past. If you would like to add your ideas, please send your responses to [office@seda.ac.uk](mailto:office@seda.ac.uk).

**Julie Hall** is Head of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit at Roehampton University.

## Book Review

### Transformative Learning Support Models in Higher Education

Educating the whole student

Facet Publishing 2008

Margaret Weaver (ed.)

240 pages

ISBN 978-1-85604-644-2

With a title containing the phrases 'Transformative Models' and 'Educating the whole student' the reader may be forgiven for having misapprehensions about the contents. It is not, however, another work on student study skills and certainly not for the fainthearted. Rather, it is transformative in two regards - first, in challenging any remaining assumptions about the context of modern higher education and second, in providing an insight into emerging models and paradigms. The book is split into three parts and thirteen chapters. Whilst there is a predominantly UK flavour to the contributions, some wider international input is apparent.

With its focus on learning support services, the first part addresses what are the self-professed 'Cinderella services'. Starting with a swift overview of the last 15 years of UK HE the scene is set for a radical look

at student life and learning in the modern context. Obviously, much of the history is not new, but in the subsequent chapters the reader gains a growing sense of awareness of the depth of change required in university structures in order to meet new challenges and demands. A good student experience is not simply premised on quality teaching and this work clearly endorses the view that a vast and diverse range of people contribute to an overall good experience at university. The case studies presented in this part particularly show how deep and profound a change to university systems and structures is required to address the needs and expectations of current students. We are now clearly well beyond meeting these challenges and trends with simple, modest and piecemeal changes to the ways in which we work with students. It is therefore unsurprising that the word 'holistic' frequently occurs in the text.

The second part moves into the arena of learning environments. The chapters on transforming the physical environment tend to be rather more convincing and compelling than those discussing virtual environments. It is difficult to locate new insights and materials about virtual support, which perhaps is a subject already well-rehearsed, and the chapters tend to present a general overview of existing technologies and approaches.

The focus of the final part is exploring research-informed transformations associated with integrative practice. Here the concept of the 'multiprofessional team' emerges in a discussion which draws upon the outcomes of the work of CETLs such as SOLSTICE at Edge Hill and the OU's PILS. Once again, the point that the student experience is not uni-dimensional or exclusively associated with teaching is readily apparent. The final chapter, *Beyond Artful Doing*, provides an absorbing conclusion to what has gone before, drawing on all the contributions to the volume in a very effective fashion. The reader is left to ponder the challenge that 'Further research may be concerned with an even more holistic understanding of students, including their home and work cultures, and the conceptions of educators and support professionals will form a major part of such research.'

As indicated above this is a potentially challenging read for those who believe that in the current climate we can cling to the raft of business as usual in the face of a tidal wave of change. For others willing to embrace the wider and deeper transformation required to negotiate the waves and successfully reach the shores, it is a compelling read.

**Tony Brand**, Higher Education Consultant

# SEDA News

By the time this edition of Educational Developments arrives on your desk greater detail about the impacts of the spending review and the Browne Report will have started to become clear. Some may take the view that the potential increase in fees will compensate for the 40% reduction in teaching funding and so the status quo can be maintained. However, this is unlikely, as there will be an increasing requirement to demonstrate impact and value for money plus the inevitable efficiency gains of 'more for less'. Clearly many significant changes are on the way and this is a context in which SEDA has previously contributed major support for the sector. We are well placed to work within and across institutions to move ahead with a positive agenda to develop, enable and enhance all aspects of our institutions' work with students.

Looking ahead and being proactive, the SEDA Executive has ratified a number of major initiatives. At the November Conference the new Fellowships framework was formally announced and launched with a panel session. Detailed planning for implementation from January 2011 has now been passed across to the Services and Enterprise Committee. The new framework is progressive, highly developmental and designed to raise the status of those working in a variety of capacities in educational development. For a number of years SEDA has provided two professional award courses which have enabled participants to claim Associate Fellowship status. These are to be combined and refreshed into a new online course which will be called Supporting and Leading Educational Change. Upon successful completion this will lead directly to Fellowship status in the new framework.

Addressing and meeting the needs of institutions and members with the development and responses to policy initiatives SEDA will be running a range of online professional award courses. You will have received notification of the first of these, starting in January 2011, for those who hold a lead institutional brief for Employer Engagement and/or Work-based Learning. This wholly online course is based upon the well-established Leading Educational Change award and successful participants will additionally be able to gain SEDA Fellowship. In the pipeline is another for those leading internationalisation initiatives in our institutions.

Tuesday 28th September was a seminal day for those associated with the work of SEDA. The first part of the day provided those who serve on our Committees to come together as a group to share and explore experiences, ideas and opportunities – see the Report from Julie Hall in this edition. In the early evening Member of Parliament Justine Greening hosted a reception for SEDA in the Strangers' Dining Room at the Houses of Parliament. This provided a unique opportunity to celebrate SEDA's impact and achievements over close to twenty five years. These were acclaimed, from various perspectives, by Pat Cryer, Gwen van der Velden, Sally Brown and Caroline Stainton. James Wisdom, with his usual wit, enlightened those present through an exploration of the demise of educational developers and development predicted in a book written nearly thirty years ago. Yet we live on, and seem to be a hardy breed, now much more deeply engrained in the warp and weft of institutions.

**Tony Brand**

## SEDA Fellowship

Congratulations to Celia Popovic who has been awarded Fellowship of SEDA

## Supporting Educational Change (Professional Qualification Course)

Congratulations to Laura Hills, Open University; Jo Peat, Roehampton University and Clare Power, Bath Spa University who have recently passed this course.

## Leading Educational Change (Professional Qualification Course)

Congratulations to Darren Comber, University of Aberdeen; Barbara Dexter, University of Derby; John Lea, Canterbury Christ Church University and Vicki Simpson, University of Surrey who have recently passed this course.

## Forthcoming event

- **SEDA Spring Teaching Learning and Assessment Conference 2011 – Academics for the 21st Century**  
Thursday 5-Friday 6 May 2011, Edinburgh