

# EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Magazine of the Staff and Educational Development Association Ltd (SEDA)



Issue 9.1

February 2008 ISSN 1469-3267

£7 Cover price (UK only)

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## 'I fully understand how we all fit together...'

### Introducing SEDA's Developing Professional Practice Award at LJMU

**Helen Bennett, Anne Hogarth, Rachel Kynaston and Carol Maynard**, Liverpool John Moores University

#### Introduction

This article discusses the background that led to the adoption of SEDA's Developing Professional Practice award in one faculty at Liverpool John Moores University, provides a brief overview of its format, presents an initial review of the benefits of the programme and identifies how it links to future professional standards developments in the institution.

Liverpool John Moores University has adopted a 'life-cycle' approach in response to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UK PSF) published in 2006. Continuing professional development (CPD) has always been a high priority at LJMU, so it was a logical step for the university to link the UK PSF developments to strategic Human Resource processes such as recruitment and selection, induction, mentoring, and reward and recognition. A model outlining LJMU's Professional Standards approach was endorsed by senior managers in 2007. When creating it, LJMU job roles were mapped against the framework's three Standard Descriptors. The model aims to be inclusive and identifies a wide range of learner support roles with mechanisms in place to support their professional development. It is proving challenging to provide a framework to meet all these aims.

A key priority over the next year is to enhance the existing CPD framework through the identification of additional accredited opportunities that will meet the needs of staff in a variety of teaching and learning support roles. This will build on the positive experience LJMU had following the introduction of SEDA's Developing Professional Practice award. LJMU has been using SEDA's Professional Development Framework (PDF) since 2003 to provide recognition for CPD routes and it was a natural progression to extend the PDF portfolio with this new award.

#### Context

In 2006, following a period of significant academic restructuring within the Faculty of Business and Law, the need for a bespoke CPD opportunity evolved. Senior management in the faculty recognised the pressing need of a core group of

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## 2008 (Vol.9)

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Packs of 10 copies (each copy containing 4 issues) are available for £200 sterling.

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administrative and technical staff for support in their new roles and sought to address this. Working closely with the faculty's Director of Learning and Teaching and its Training Officer, the Faculty Manager discussed the needs of her administrative and technical staff. A working group which included representatives from the Learning Development Unit (LDU – the university's central educational development unit) and the Centre for Staff Development (CSD) was formed to look at the support that could be offered to the group.

As the faculty emerged with a new academic structure, the working group felt that some form of consistency and reliance on service was necessary to provide a stable platform on which the new academic structure could prosper. The group believed that a fresh and nationally recognised CPD opportunity would develop the skills and knowledge of this group of staff. This would contribute to the delivery of a consistently professional service, facilitate stability and enable staff to feel that their particular CPD needs were being invested in. In order for this development opportunity to be valued it would have to be perceived as relevant to both individuals and the organisation.

At the same time as this restructuring, the CSD had adopted an 'outward facing' model of staff development, following on from successful implementation of this approach by the Personnel and Finance functions.

A centralised unit can, in some instances, be viewed with suspicion partly because 'it is perceived to take resources away from the mainstream teaching units' (editorial, *International Journal for Academic Development*, 2000:1). In addition, its potential isolation from faculties/schools can add to the feeling amongst staff that the unit is unlikely to understand or appreciate the pressures common to working within a school environment. CSD is a relatively small team, sitting within the larger structure of Corporate Services. The department is separate from both Personnel and the Learning and Development Unit which directly supports teaching and learning within LJMU. For some years the Centre had noticed (and responded to) increased demand for bespoke work in the faculties and university service areas. The Centre wanted to ensure that development opportunities were focused on the learners' needs, and the support offered was both flexible and adaptable. The new approach means that each faculty and service area has a dedicated Staff Development Advisor who is their main point of contact and who works 'on-site' for staff to speak to. Land (2004) discusses some of the advantages that matrix-type structures may offer to developers working on educational projects – although CSD was not working within a formalised matrix structure, its new, flexible model directly contributed to the development of this cross-university initiative.

### Who was involved?

A working group was created and comprised: Acting Director, Liverpool Business School; Faculty Manager, Faculty of Business and Law; Faculty Trainer; Staff Development Advisor (CSD); Professional Standards Co-ordinator and SEDA PDF recogniser (LDU).

This proved to be one of the critical success factors of the development. The collaborative approach ensured that all relevant aspects could be explored including:

- Working context (as described above)
- Faculty needs
- University mission and values
- Skills and expertise in HR processes, SEDA PDF and leadership and management programmes.

The conditions and working circumstances were appropriate and timely for a collaborative approach to address the development needs of the staff in the Faculty of Business and Law. Those involved in staff and educational development often find themselves 'at the leading edge of change' (Thew, 2003:234) and this can be a pressure but also – more importantly – it is an opportunity to deliver something

new and innovative which impacts positively on others – both staff and students.

This group worked on a model which would be relevant to both administrative and technical staff affected by the restructuring. This collaborative approach ensured that all stakeholders were involved from the outset. Since the inception of a range of HR-related projects in 2003 (e.g. Leadership and Management Development), collaboration between departments had been the expected norm.

The Faculty Manager, Staff Development Advisor and Professional Standards Co-ordinator were the key developers or deliverers of the programme, with the Faculty Manager and Staff Development Advisor sharing the programme co-ordination role.

### Why an accredited programme?

There were three main drivers behind the creation of the programme – the needs of individuals, the faculty and LJMU students.

#### Individual

Any major structural change is likely to result in uncertainty and a degree of self-doubt regarding ability (Baxter and MacLeod, 2007). With the new structure in place it seemed appropriate for individuals to be supported in identifying how their roles fitted in to the new departmental processes. In addition, these staff needed to understand how their roles contributed to the achievement of the strategic priorities of both the faculty and the university. Feedback from Personal Development and Performance Reviews indicated that some previous development programmes and training sessions were often academically focused and, as such, lacked relevance for these staff. Those involved in the new programme development wanted to encourage a CPD approach (and aligned to this, adoption of a 'lifelong learning' culture) for this group of staff, many of whom had been out of education for many years and had had minimal professional development since joining LJMU. Such staff are recognised as being somewhat neglected in terms of CPD, 'the majority of those who have been given a formal development remit in universities appear to have teaching as their main or more often sole focus of attention' (Blackwell and Blackmore, 2003:xiii).

#### Faculty

There is pressure on HEIs to be adaptable "learning organisations" made up of networked communities of staff well able to embrace change' (Roche, 2003:172). Within the last 18 months, LJMU has refined and re-focused its strategic objectives in response to the national employability agenda. An increased emphasis on graduate skills and work-related learning will lead to significant developments for lecturing staff, but also for those learner support staff who work to, and for, lecturers. For the faculty to contribute effectively to the new strategic direction, it was necessary for these well-established staff to be just as receptive to change and to be working towards the common goal. In addition, the faculty was striving to improve the student experience specifically with regard to student retention. It was generally felt that

informed staff who felt better equipped to deal with students and their issues would improve the student experience overall and, this would, ultimately, translate into improved retention rates.

#### Student experience

One of the core LJMU values is 'putting students and clients at the heart of everything we do' (LJMU Strategic Plan, 2008-2012). Although not responsible for teaching and assessing students like their lecturing counterparts, faculty support staff are working with students face-to-face and have to deal with the range of problems and issues that students can encounter during their time at university. One of the aims of the UK PSF is to enhance the student learning experience. As this is a key part of faculty staff roles it was an important factor to consider when planning the CPD programme.

Collectively, these combined drivers led to the identification of a recognised award that would help to support the individuals involved and have a positive effect on the faculty and its students. Working group members recognised that the right programme could facilitate 'possibilities, creating opportunities from mistakes and unexpected experiences (often negative ones)' (Roche, 2003:173).

### Why SEDA's Professional Development Framework (SEDA-PDF)?

LJMU has a well-established relationship with SEDA, its Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LTHE) being one of the first programmes in 1995 to be nationally recognised by the Association. SEDA is well known across the university, thus providing academic credibility. LJMU already offers four PDF awards: Supporting Learning; Learning, Teaching and Assessing; Exploring Learning Technologies; and Embedding Learning Technologies. It was appropriate, therefore, to look at what SEDA-PDF had to offer.

SEDA's DPP provided a perfect framework to meet identified needs and drivers. The specialist outcomes of the programme are linked to individuals' reflecting upon their own work and professional development and, as such, can 'engage anyone in HE' (Pilkington, 2007:31). A core element of the PDF is also the identification of individual learning needs and gaps in current knowledge and skills. This requires the development of a bespoke programme for each separate cohort. Thus the flexibility of the DPP was ideal for the programme developers as they were able to ensure it linked with faculty priorities as well as addressing the programme's specialist outcomes. A number of staff who had expressed interest in undertaking the programme had not engaged with any formal education or training for many years – they needed coaxing back into more formalised training linked to their learning needs and styles. The DPP framework allowed for sessions to avoid peak periods during the academic year as well as recognising the need to fit it around their life outside the University – thus enabling the approach to support the University's policy on work/life balance. The DPP award allows adjustments to be made to the timeframe rather than trying to achieve the impossible when working with staff with varying workloads and

commitments. In addition, both taught and individual programme routes were developed to ensure that the award was accessible for all staff members and levels of ability, thus helping to widen participation.

### The LJMU DPP Award

Firstly the SEDA values and outcomes were mapped onto the proposed programme (see Figure 1). The Figure also outlines learning and assessment activities for the taught route. Common features for both routes are:

- Initial assessment of development needs with an agreed professional development plan
- Programme of learning activities to support development needs, e.g. taught workshops or directed reading
- Learning journal and on-going critical incident analysis
- Tutor support at key stages to review development needs
- Work based project.

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## TAUGHT PROGRAMME SCHEDULE AND ROUTE

### INDUCTION –

Programme Format and Structure, SEDA Values and the Principles of Developing Professional Practice (SV1, SV2, SV3, SV5, SV6, CDO 1, CDO 2, CDO 3, SO 1)

### SESSION 1 – CORE KNOWLEDGE 1

How People Learn, The HE and LJMU Context, Employability (SV1, SV2, SV5, SV6, CDO 3, CDO 4, SO 1)

### TUTORIAL 1 – Reflective practice

(SV1, SV2, SV5, CDO 1, CDO 2, CDO 3, CDO 4)

### SESSION 2 – COUNSELLING SKILLS/MANAGING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

(SV2, SV3, SV4, SV5, SV6, CDO 2, CDO 3, CDO 4, SO 1, SO 2, SO 3)

### SESSION 3 – COACHING AND MENTORING

(SV2, SV3, SV4, SV5, SV6, CDO 2, CDO 3, CDO 4, SO 1, SO 2, SO 3)

### SESSION 4 – DISABILITY, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

(SV2, SV3, SV4, SV5, SV6, CDO 2, CDO 3, CDO 4, SO 1, SO 2, SO 3)

### SESSION 5 – SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

(SV2, SV3, SV4, SV5, SV6, CDO 2, CDO 3, CDO 4, SO 1, SO 2, SO 3)

### TUTORIAL 2 – Developing Professional Practice Work Based Project Identification of priority areas and Meeting the SEDA Values and project criteria

(SV1, SV2, SV3, SV4, SV5, SV6, CDO 1, CDO 3, CDO 4, SO 1, SO 3)

### SESSION 6 – CORE KNOWLEDGE 2 – Content to be confirmed but to include Summative Assessment Exercise – Role play observation

### ASSESSMENT PRODUCTS – Formative and Summative Participants complete:-

- Daily end of session evaluation sheet – DAILY including actions
- Initial assessment of development needs – INDUCTION/TUTORIAL
- Review assessment of development needs – TUTORIAL 2
- Professional development action plan and development log – TUTORIAL/ WORK BASED PROJECT Ongoing
- Learning journal and critical incident analysis – DAILY Ongoing/WORK BASED PROJECT
- Work based project – SUMMATIVE/Start TUTORIAL 2
- Case studies/structured exercises/role play/reading/self analysis tools – TAUGHT PROGRAMME
- Peer review and observations – TAUGHT PROGRAMME

Figure 1 Developing Professional Practice – Faculty of Business and Law, Liverpool Business School February 2007

### SEDA VALUES

Participants demonstrate how their work is informed by:-

- SV1. An understanding of how people learn
- SV2. Scholarship, professionalism and ethical practice
- SV3. Working in and developing learning communities
- SV4. Working effectively with diversity and promoting inclusivity
- SV5. Continuing reflection on ethical practice
- SV6. Developing people and processes

### CORE DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

Participants:-

- CDO 1. Identify their own professional development goals, directions or priorities
- CDO 2. Plan for their initial and/or continuing professional development
- CDO 3. Undertake appropriate development activities
- CDO 4. Review their development and their practice and the relations between them

### SPECIALIST OUTCOMES

Participants:-

- SO 1. Reflect on their own personal and professional development needs
- SO 2. Demonstrate their ability to use interpersonal, organisational and coping skills
- SO 3. Demonstrate their ability to use their specialist knowledge and skills appropriately in the HE context

## INDIVIDUAL ROUTE

**INDUCTION MEETING** – Individual Development Programme Format and Structure, SEDA Values and the Principles of Developing Professional Practice (SV1, SV2, SV3, SV5, SV6, CDO 1, CDO 2, CDO 3, SO 1)

### COACHING SESSION 1 – CORE KNOWLEDGE 1

How People Learn, Principles of Reflective Practice, The HE and LJMU Context, Employability

### INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND MAPPING TO THE SEDA VALUES –

Development of Individual Professional Development Plan

### SOURCING OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- 1:1 Coaching and Mentoring (internal and external provision)
- Internal and External staff development opportunities
- Conference and seminar attendance and/or contribution
- Teaching and learning activity/Research and enterprise activity/Academic contributions
- Ongoing self reflection through Reflective Learning Journal
- Membership of representative groups
- 360 Degree Feedback Exercises – Self and Team Analysis

### SUBJECT AREAS

- Disability, Equality and Diversity
- Counselling and Difficult Situations
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Global market and working with international students
- The HE Sector
- Role of the Manager in Context
- Communication
- Ethical practice

### TUTORIAL 1 – Reflective Practice

(SD1, SV2, SV5, CDO 1, CDO 2, CDO 3, CDO 4)

### COACHING SESSION 2 – CORE KNOWLEDGE 2

Content to be confirmed but to include Summative Assessment Exercise – Observation/Peer Review

### TUTORIAL 2 – Developing Professional Practice Work Based Project Identification of priority areas and Meeting the SEDA Values and project criteria

(SV1, SV2, SV3, SV4, SV5, SV6, CDO 1, CDO 3, CDO 4, SO 1, SO 3)

### ASSESSMENT PRODUCTS – Formative and Summative

Participants complete:-

- Evaluation sheet – External/individually sourced taught programmes
- Initial assessment of development needs – INDUCTION/TUTORIAL
- Review assessment of development needs – TUTORIAL
- Professional development action plan and development log – TUTORIAL/WORK BASED PROJECT Ongoing
- Learning Journal and critical incident analysis – DAILY Ongoing/WORK BASED PROJECT
- Work based project – SUMMATIVE/Start TUTORIAL 2
- Case studies/structured exercises/role play/reading/self analysis tools – TAUGHT PROGRAMMES/SEMINARS
- Peer review and observations – WORK ENVIRONMENT/360 DEGREE FEEDBACK

The SEDA-PDF DPP award provided a good match for meeting the faculty and university needs at this time. Award outcomes were mapped onto, and covered in, the range of modules as detailed in Figure 2:

	<b>Induction</b>
Session 1	<b>Core Knowledge 1:</b> HE Context, Employability and Learning Theories
Tutorial 1	Identifying Learning and Development Needs
Session 2	Counselling Skills and Managing Difficult Situations
Session 3	Coaching and Mentoring
Session 4	Disability, Equality and Diversity
Session 5	Supporting International Students
Tutorial 2	Reviewing Learning and Development Needs and formulation of a Work Based Project
Session 6	<b>Core Knowledge 2:</b> Stress Management and Role Playing/Observing Application of Skills to a Work Based Scenario

Figure 2 Developing Professional Practice – modules

As this initial iteration of the award was a pilot, it was necessary to evaluate the robustness of the approach in readiness for future offerings of the programme. This incorporated taking on board vital feedback from those contributing to the pilot to ensure continuous improvement. LDU will carry out a formal evaluation once the current cohort has finished.

Each module was led by an in-house expert from either the faculty or LJMU. Their contribution was invaluable as they were able to put each module into an HE context within a student-facing environment. Presenters indicated their enjoyment at being involved, believing it to be a valuable professional development activity for themselves too.

### LJMU DPP – The Critical Success Factors

The programme team has identified the following critical success factors:

- *Alignment with organisational values and behaviours*  
This was crucial in gaining senior management endorsement and also in assisting staff to understand how their role impacts on the wider organisation.
- *Assessment rationale linked to work*  
One current work-based project example is a review of the staff induction process across teams within the University, and in particular the Faculty, with the intention of enabling new starters to fit in quickly and to feel they belong to the unit/team, highlighting areas of good practice and areas which require further review.
- *Flexibility and accessibility of the programme*  
The inclusive nature of the programme meant that any members of staff within the faculty could join it. Participants were able to complete the programme on

their own terms – being able to attend individual modules and receive in-house certification for these alongside those who were completing the full accredited programme. In addition, an individual portfolio route was also developed to ensure all learning styles were supported.

- *Collaborative working relationships*  
Using in-house experts to deliver the taught elements of programme built upon existing relationships. Working on the Developing Professional Practice programme enabled the programme team to work together to develop a greater understanding of each others areas. Undoubtedly the move has been a positive one which will hopefully continue on future projects and initiatives. The programme team were awarded an LJMU Learning and Teaching Award in January 2008 in recognition of the development's contribution to the University's LTA strategy.
- *Additional progression routes*  
With senior management support, the team has been able to offer current participants the opportunity to mentor the new intake thus ensuring their continued development and helping to disseminate the core lessons learnt during the programme.

### The future of DPP at LJMU and its impact on Professional Standards development

The DPP has had a positive impact on course members, particularly in how they have integrated their learning into their day-to-day work. A full evaluation is pending but real changes are evident in how some staff approach difficult situations. For example, having undertaken a module on managing difficult situations staff have reported that they now attempt to resolve issues and situations which they may have previously contacted another member of staff to solve for them.

As mentioned earlier, there are plans in place to use current participants in mentoring roles for future intakes. This links well to another university initiative (funded via Professional Standards monies) that aims to improve the induction and mentoring experience of staff across the university. In addition, the next set of priorities for Professional Standards is developing promotion criteria, and associated development opportunities, to enable staff to move within standard descriptors. Engaging participants in mentoring new course members provides them with an additional set of transferable skills which could provide a pathway for further career advancement. This is timely considering our future priorities and is an approach that could be replicated across the range of existing recognised programmes.

We foresee that the flexible nature of the programme will help to bridge the gaps in CPD to support staff in different roles across the university. The individual and group routes support this.

The next stage is to offer the programme to other areas of the university. With the flexibility and accessibility of the programme, it is hoped that a range of staff will embrace the opportunity to enhance their own practice in a familiar environment. The following quotes support these plans:

'I feel that I have a greater understanding of cultural diversity and this helps me in dealing with international students. I also feel more comfortable communicating with difficult students and situations and feel my listening and communicating skills have improved.' (Programme Administrator)

'I fully understand how we all fit together in the overall structure of the University. I have a greater overview of the academic process and how funding is allocated.' (Programme Administrator)

'I now see the reasoning behind why we do certain things.' (Programme Administrator)

## Summary

The introduction of SEDA's DPP award at LJMU was timely for a variety of reasons: faculty re-structuring, change in emphasis to university's mission; integration of the UKPSF within HR processes; introduction of a different approach to staff development plus a need to extend accredited CPD opportunities for a wider range of staff that support learning. The first run of the programme has confirmed that it was the right decision and although there is much to improve and develop, a model has been established that is highly transferable.

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# 'Time to develop my career? That's a fantasy!' What academics said about their roles and CPD needs and how I tentatively introduced them to professional standards

**Julie Hall**, Roehampton University

For many of us involved in educational development in the UK, the last two years have been a challenge as we attempt to create professional development frameworks linked to the UK Professional Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning in HE (UKPS).

For me, this work has brought to the fore a number of issues which have been bubbling away for some time and which centre on an increasing desire to be more critically reflective and to pay

attention to the myriad assumptions, power relations and perceptions which lie behind this task in particular and the work of professional development in general (Weimer, 2007). For me, the work on professional standards has been the catalyst for three key reasons:

1. It raises important questions about professional learning in HE and the dominant perspectives on effective learning and CPD
2. It creates a strange relationship between the educational development/staff development unit at the centre of the university, and academics and others supporting learning in the disciplines
3. I have found the notion of 'meeting standards' for teaching in HE something that is contentious and often unpopular.

In addition, the context in which we are operating is one where there is suspicion of initiatives which can smack of compliance, accountability and performativity. Educational Development Units, often made up of people committed to helping staff and enhancing learning, can be viewed with suspicion as being aligned to institutional agenda-setting and managerialist discourse (Havnes and Stensaker, 2006; Land, 2004; Weimer, 2007). This comes as no surprise when the pressures on academics in mass higher education are well known and have been well articulated (Barnett, 2007; Wisdom, 2006). We cannot escape from the fact that the UKPS requires an interventionist project – an intervention into the world of academic professional development which is already well developed and well understood in relation to professional bodies, research and scholarly practice.

However, a degree of standardisation has been accepted since most universities now offer preparation for the teaching role, usually accredited by the HE Academy, and various other kinds of professional development which focus upon enhancing teaching. Even though strong foundations exist, creating a framework which reflects and supports the on-going development of a teacher in HE is a challenge when, as Sharpe (2004) says, 'There is not yet an accepted model for the professional development of teachers in higher education.' Not only is there no model, but even the concept of professional education and professional standards are contested ones (Barnett, 1992; Rowlands, 2004). Thus at the centre of this task there are critical voices and, like many educational developers, I certainly know that my work will not be valued if I can be characterised as aiming for 'domestication' (Land, 2004) of my colleagues or of creating 'malleable but disciplined' individuals (McWilliam, 2002). I also know that a framework will not succeed unless there is some will on the part of my teaching colleagues to engage with it.

Thus my aim has been to explore whether I can create a professional

standards framework which builds on good practice in educational development, which offers something with integrity, generosity, challenge and development, something which invites the very people who are defined by knowledge to 'un-know' and 're-know'.

This article describes the action research project which helped me in this task. It begins with the responses I received from a sample of 45 experienced academics at Roehampton University, who were asked what they currently value as CPD and what specifically helps them develop their teaching. I then go on to look at ways in which they would like to be recognised and rewarded. In reporting the investigation, I raise questions about how professionals in HE learn and the educational developer's role at the interface between the worlds of 'development' and 'standards'.

Three half day 'away days', funded by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit, provided an opportunity to find out what my colleagues currently valued as professional development, but I began by encouraging them to reflect on their current roles as senior lecturers. Some of the responses which provide a flavour of their views are laid out below:

### Current roles

- We are writers, teachers, researchers, but 50% of our time is administration
- Research and reflection on teaching is sacrificed for the administrative tasks of running courses. This affects possible transferability to other institutions
- Time to develop my career – that's a fantasy!
- We know the programmes really well and could feed more into curriculum development, student experiences, teaching issues, but we're tied up all the time
- I'd like my role to be more about curriculum development and less about having to learn new university systems all the time
- My role is the key interface between students and University

systems. This is something I wasn't prepared for. It can be a shock. It has taken two years to get to grips with what I'm doing.

Such comments reminded me of the pressures on academics, juggling research, teaching and course administration (Wisdom, 2006). Many really felt they were 'riding the storm' and many were struggling, laughing ironically at the ideas of career development, organised professional development of any kind or recognition for teaching. At this stage of the discussion there was no way I felt able to bring in the world of standards and the idea of meeting or not meeting standards for teaching and supporting learning to people so obviously committed, but swamped by such pressures. My feeling was that it would be inappropriate, perhaps suggesting that they were to be judged in some way at a time when they were clearly struggling and doing the best they could in demanding circumstances.

The line of questioning I arrived at then focused on another 'way in' to the topic of professional development. I asked them about ways in which they either were rewarded or would like to be rewarded. These are some of the answers I received:

### Reward and recognition

- I'd like someone to notice all the work I'm doing and say thank you to me individually
- I'd like my knowledge of how the University works to be recognised and utilised
- I'd like key achievements to be officially recorded – perhaps on my appraisal form
- I'd like to have a proper job description for running a course and some authority
- I'd like other universities to be pleased that I've spent two years running a course and not question why my research output has stalled
- I like it when other staff ask for my advice – like mentoring really
- It's nice to be asked to contribute to the development of new programmes or just to be asked your views on something



- Someone could take notice of the fact that I’m a Fellow of the HE Academy.

Financial reward was not raised, nor was promotion. What seemed to be important was being able to share experience, and be recognised and valued for the knowledge gained. The suggestions were that this could be done in a fairly low key way – by being thanked individually, through supporting others or even through appraisal! At this stage I introduced the new UKPS and some who were already Fellows of the HE Academy felt that this could perhaps be celebrated and recognised in a more public way. It’s clearly difficult to encourage people to become Fellows and reach Standard 2 if no one in their department or their university pays any attention to the fact that they have achieved it.

The next stage of questioning explored that which the academics currently value as professional development. My feeling was that this was important as it would provide ideas for the ‘hooks’ upon which any new professional development framework might hang. I also suggested that a new framework, now tentatively presented as linked to the UK Professional Standards, could be something that was helpful. Below I present their responses in the order of most commonly cited first:

## What is valued as CPD

- **Chatting and sharing**  
This includes talking at meetings, social events and away days and sometimes in the corridor. It includes involvement with professional networks, talking with students and colleagues (for example during assessment), Teaching Fellows networks, peer observation and support.  
**But** it was felt by some that this kind of valuable time was not factored into workloads and was not physically possible in some places (no social space or timetable restrictions).
- **Researching**  
This includes writing, reading, exploring ideas, practical research, scholarship of learning and teaching, making links between

teaching and research.

**But** it was felt that ‘doing research’ was sometimes seen too narrowly as taking people away from the university and as having little to do with the teaching role.

- **Taking on roles**

This includes using and extending university expertise in roles such as external examiner, personal tutor, admissions tutor, committee member, editorial board member. It involves informal mentoring of others when they take up roles.

**But** time was a factor – time to give proper attention to such roles and time to reflect upon, prepare for and develop in these roles.

- **Curriculum development**

This includes redesigning a module or course, sharing and finding good practice, trying new things, taking part in a teaching project like TQEF, making links with other subject areas or employers, evaluating new initiatives.

**But** in reality this was felt to be sometimes rushed and without an evidence base.

- **Training**

This includes improving skills such as IT skills.

**But** central units can assume people are free to attend when they are not. Development works best when it is contextualised and comes ‘at the right time’; things might improve if other people’s development was looked at, such as administrators’, and ‘training’ offered by some areas of the University needs to go beyond bureaucratic procedural issues.

## Moving on – a framework with integrity?

Having held these away days and heard the views of so many of my colleagues, I felt a distinct sense of solidarity and community. People had spoken to me of important issues, and in a way which assumed I could help them solve some of the problems. I felt compelled to try to create a framework which would build upon that which they valued and which would value that which they were so

earnestly grappling with. The language of ‘standards’ does not make this an easy task and reminded me of a certain kind of benign paternalism I’d encountered in reading about nascent political movements aimed at supporting the working classes during the industrial revolution. In one autobiography, for example, an early pioneer declares ‘Teaching the poor to eat with a fork is all very well... but what good does it do if they have not the food’ (Goldmann, 1931). Reflective practice and time springs to mind! E. P. Thompson (1966) cites the work of Methodist theologian Dr Andrew Ure, who describes ‘the moral machinery’ with which to coerce the working class into obedience within the factory system. One of the central features of this discourse is the spectacle of the evangelist working upon the repentant subject to accept personal responsibility through the recitation of a conversion narrative. In addition the evangelists’ authority is confirmed each time a soul is improved! A framework which suggested that I would help people *meet* standards certainly echoed here.

Another aspect worried me too. It was the perennial question of how best to work with experienced staff. Why would people employed for their knowledge want to engage with such a framework, particularly as this kind of professional development requires a certain amount of courage to critically review practice, explore tacit knowledge and expose one’s thoughts to others? I had already struggled unsuccessfully over some years to persuade such groups of staff of the merits of peer observation. Returning to the comments from the away days, I was struck by both a commitment, a personal identification with the tasks they were required to take up and a sense of fragility and struggle as they moved into new roles bringing new anxieties and priorities. In his recent book ‘A Will to Learn’ (2007) Barnett explains that ‘through knowing, the student comes to stand in new relationships to the world’. What the comments from the away days seem to hint at is the complex and often stressful changes academic staff have to make as their relationship to their HE context and their knowledge of

their HE world grows. Barnett also alerts us to the fact that a student's sense of self fluctuates and varies as they move from one task to another. Again, this has relevance to the views of the academics at the away days who expressed a similar fragility in explaining how, employed for their knowledge in a specific area of the discipline, they felt undervalued and yet confident in some roles and hesitant and anxious in others. The framework would have some value if it could be seen as a vehicle for supporting this fragility, valuing tacit knowledge through being made explicit, for encouraging and developing the courage and understanding to help people cope in 'riding the storm' and in having their efforts recognised and valued. For this to happen, Barnett argues, people need to be nurtured and helped to see their actions, their self, on some kind of time horizon. If this could be an additional role of the professional development framework then it just might have some value.

The away day discussions have eventually led to a number of principles which will underpin the University scheme:

- It should not be bureaucratic or take up too much time
- It should recognise and value the commitment to leadership in teaching and the professional knowledge inherent in many university tasks, particularly as the HE career develops
- It should provide a space for the development of professional communities
- It should provide opportunities for talking and sharing ideas
- It should provide an opportunity to document and recognise key achievements in a way which could be used for promotion on the basis of leadership in teaching/ supporting learning
- It should be linked to probation, induction and appraisal
- Gaining Fellowship of the HEA should be more publicly celebrated
- UKPS to quietly underpin the process and the values highlighted.

In parallel to the creation of the framework a number of University processes are being reviewed and, where possible, they are being adapted to reflect and enhance the UKPS. These include the appraisal scheme, the promotion routes and criteria, induction and probation schemes, work loads, social spaces and generic job descriptions.

It has been relatively unproblematic to map the formal taught routes to HE Academy Fellowship and Associate Fellowship and to develop a promotion route for leadership in teaching and supporting learning which also reflects the UKPS. However, a key feature of the newly developed framework is the 'professional conversation', which forms the cornerstone of the individual route to Fellowship of the HE Academy and Standard 2 (and eventually Senior Fellowship and Standard 3). Scaffolding the conversation are University guidelines which explicitly value the work of the academic and encourage the member of staff to critically reflect upon and discuss their roles as course leader, as a member of course team, as a committee member, as a lecturer and as a member of professional communities in relation to the UKPS and particularly the values. The conversation takes for granted that these roles involve scholarly practice, critical reflection and professional practice. The process recognises that such conversations continually take place internally within the academic and across teaching teams, disciplinary groups and other outside bodies. It also recognises that the professional practice of teachers in higher education is complex, individual and self-critical. The conversation aims to recognise and value this and provide, through dialogue, insight into what the academic perceives, knows, values, guesses, plans and discards. This dialogic approach also recognises professional development as a collaborative project in that it happens across and within HE communities when we can make time and space for this to happen. If other structures such as appraisal, probation and promotion can work effectively to support this then the framework can fit such structures and won't require complex and patronising evidence gathering.

Perhaps we can then look forward to using the framework with confidence and integrity.

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# Graham Gibbs - on learning and teaching strategies, on educational development and on retirement

**James Wisdom**, Independent Consultant

*In the summer of 2007, Graham Gibbs retired from being the Director of the Oxford Learning Institute. As he is one of the longest-serving and most influential members of the educational development community, Educational Developments wanted to mark the occasion with an informal interview. This article is based on a conversation between Graham Gibbs and James Wisdom.*



We started the conversation by discussing learning and Teaching Strategies. In the first issue of *Educational Developments* (January 2000) Graham wrote 'Learning and Teaching Strategies: the implications for educational development', in which he outlined the scale and nature of the changes to SEDA members' work likely to be brought about by the HEFCE's new funding for learning and teaching strategies. He predicted, amongst other things, that educational development would become more mainstream, more devolved, more accountable and more strategic. He ended with 'Seize the day!' Then in November 2001 (Issue 2.4), after conducting a review of how these strategies were developing, he wrote a second piece about their impact on educational development, warning that while some changes were indeed happening quickly, others were taking longer than expected and some were not happening at all. He ended this with 'Let's get it right!' As this whole initiative has been so significant in the UK's educational development, we should consider how it emerged and what it might teach us.

In the late 1990s the funding council was concerned that its own and its predecessors' various investments in improving teaching had not had the impact they had hoped, and it knew that the forthcoming Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing) would take the view that teaching had not changed as fast as its context and was now no longer fit for purpose. Change was not happening fast enough. These initiatives, such as Enterprise in Higher Education, the Effective Teaching and Assessment Programme, the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme and the Computers in Teaching Initiative, had all been separately evaluated but no one had looked at the infrastructural changes that were needed to enable any of these initiatives to have much impact, to be

sustained, or to spread. Brian Fender, the then head of the council, commissioned Graham to diagnose the causes of the limited impact of previous initiatives. This involved discussion with the programme teams, evaluators and reviewers, VCs, civil servants, even the CBI. Amongst the many ideas his report put forward as alternatives to previous teaching development efforts (a coordinating agency, the Subject Centres, formalising SEDA's accreditation for new staff courses), the most important was the idea of institutions being more strategic about planning and implementing changes in teaching and being funded to develop and deliver such strategies. With such strategies in place the sector would have, for the first time, a matrix of national disciplinary networks and institutional mechanisms for generating, capturing and sharing effective teaching practices and means to develop them, and for deciding on infrastructural investment. And the funding council would have a strategy for directing its investment and would be able to articulate how its intentions could be realised. Graham urged that this initiative should be allowed to run for a long time, with stable funding or at least long warnings of significant change.

In common with many major organisational changes, it has taken institutions some time to learn how best to use these strategies, how to operationalise them, evaluate them, link them and fund them. Where they have gone through a number of re-writes, they are often becoming quite useful. Where they have linked with other strategies (estates, IT, staff development, assessment etc.) they can be very powerful. But in formal terms the funding councils, ever eager for new initiatives which preferably give almost immediate benefits, have let them slide and they have not funded further research on their effectiveness or put effort into learning how best to implement them, sharing best practices across institutions. Despite this, in many institutions they are now part of the furniture and it is hard to imagine them being discarded.

Since Graham moved to Oxford University he has become particularly interested in how research-intensive universities devise strategies for teaching and learning, and has formed an international network to support this work. Through interviews, visits and case studies he is finding a rich and varied range of strategies in operation. While the heart of the original model for the strategies lay in the more managerial culture of the ex-polytechnics, most UK institutions could grasp it and make it their own, though perhaps the small, mono-cultural colleges had the greatest difficulty because their style is immediate and personal. That managerial culture itself has been a new and very incomplete development – in the 1970s many parts of the polytechnics felt much like traditional universities, which is where their

staff had come from, and not at all susceptible to direction.

Graham's experience of the way highly successful, discipline-focused research departments and institutions handle their internal relationships and structures has shown him that they might generate not just idiosyncratic, brilliant or disastrous teaching, but also very varied responses to the 'need' for strategic change in this area. For many, their reference group is not their own institution, but another team or department in an institution perhaps on another continent. Of course, in many places neither numbers, funding nor changes in student characteristics have required any reconsiderations at all and so the concepts behind the strategies have had little impact. Graham is quite explicit that it was the pressures of funding and numbers on the polytechnics that pushed them forward to develop many of the new educational approaches that have since become widespread. Where strategic approaches can be seen to have been implemented effectively in research-intensive departments it is almost always because the departments faced a crisis of some kind in their teaching – such as the potential withdrawal of professional accreditation – that required action that was more urgent and targeted than 'emergent change' could deliver. This is much as polytechnics, faced with rapidly rising student numbers and declining funding, had to find faster ways to cope.

What particularly intrigues him is that style of leadership which knows how to nurture and enable rather than to direct and control. He has found institutions where people have created an environment conducive to the emergence of change, with support and backing for ideas and projects, with real communities for discussion, sharing and increasing the sophistication of ideas, with proper career structures for pedagogic expertise and leadership. He is also fully aware of the time it takes to build a successful teaching and learning culture, citing here the University of Utrecht. A traditional research university but with large classes and open access, it has stuck to its strategies for over a decade and has seen its place on the Dutch teaching and learning rankings rise from middle to top. It may have perhaps 100 staff now working on enhancing teaching and learning in various ways, with local direction enabled by the centre – a major long-term project, with full political commitment, which is now bearing fruit. Other institutions which particularly intrigue him with their different approaches to developing student learning are Helsinki, Leuven, Stanford, Sydney and MIT.

Gibbs argues that it had been intended that, in England at least, institutional learning and teaching strategies would be the vehicle through which HEFCE supported whatever changes and developments seemed worthwhile. Instead he perceives that they have been used primarily to divert funding towards the 'professionalisation' of teaching, with other agenda being addressed in other ways, quite separately. Idiosyncratic agenda such as 'student volunteering' have popped up out of nowhere and got plonked inside TQEF institutional funding streams, but not in any planned way. This matters because there are large scale and expensive institutional efforts that have not born fruit, partly because of the lack of strategic thinking either by HEFCE or by institutions. In particular HEFCE have been hauled over the coals by the House of Commons for spending £600 million on improving retention, with no evidence whatsoever that retention is any better after five

years' funding. Gibbs sees this is a perfect issue for structural and strategic thinking and sharing between PVCs (Teaching) how they are dealing with it at an institution-wide level. Instead in most cases it has been subject to a raft of uncoordinated innovations, implemented locally, poorly evaluated, and funded in short-term and diverse ways. There has been no equivalent of the US centre that supports work on the 'first year experience' acting as a co-ordinating information depository, and so the sector as a whole seems to have learnt very little about improving retention, even though there are some (often isolated) examples of success.

Gibbs is also critical of Paul Ramsden's strategy of floating the HEA off into an unconnected and independent sunset. What was originally intended was a mechanism for co-ordinating and learning from funded national-level efforts implemented at institutional level. If the HEA does not do that then no one else is likely to be funded to do it, as it looks like setting up another co-ordinating agency. He anticipates what happens 'post-CETLs' being significant, as decisions have to be made about use of public funds to develop teaching. Do we go back to uncoordinated 'project-like' initiatives (and Gibbs sees CETLs as 'super projects' but with limited responsibility for dissemination or even alignment with institutional efforts) or do we remember what the review of initiatives in the late 90s concluded and try to build some coherence back into national scale efforts, and re-assert the primacy of institutional strategies and tactics and the need to learn between institutions?

When we move on to considering the last thirty years of educational development, the first thing he notes is the enormously increased scale of the current enterprise. There might have been twenty practitioners when he started who could (and did) all meet in a small room, with a total investment of less than £1 million a year – there may be 2,000 in the UK today, responsible for investment of perhaps £100 million a year, on so many projects and initiatives it is beyond one individual to keep track. What were once short induction courses for the few may now involve hundreds of staff on programmes of anything up to 400 hours. If this is one community of practice, it is one with many levels, many entry points, and an extensive range of internal and external contacts, through literature, conferences, events, electronic communications and so on.

The level of sophistication has changed as well. Whereas at the beginning everyone was perforce a generalist, sometimes only half a pace ahead of those with whom they were working, today the community works at a greater depth and with many specialisms. One such is disciplinary educational development – a growing area, but one that still benefits from generalists' support and co-ordination.

The status of its practitioners has changed significantly. Well-developed units are now headed by staff who are prestigious in their institutions, with growing credibility, working closely with their PVCs and acting as part of senior management teams.

The standards of scholarship have developed greatly. As the Improving Student Learning Symposia (which Graham founded) have been published for 15 years, contributors have a literature to build on, and it is very obvious when new presenters are unaware of it. It is now hard to get a

paper published in 'Assessment and evaluation in HE', whereas it had a home-grown feel to start with. The *International Journal of Academic Development* has made a particularly significant contribution. When it was proposed in 1995-96, some assumed that educational development was insufficiently mature to generate scholarly literature – but now it has become the archive within which developing thinking is laid down to be built upon, and it has brought the most important international differences in perspective. Given that there is now a substantial, growing and improving literature of educational development, he despairs of what he sees as unscholarly, such as some of the papers he is asked to review, or conferences which – no matter how large they are – have too many sessions which utterly ignore what is already known or what has already been tried elsewhere, and which are about phenomena that were better understood by writers some years ago.

The focus of educational development work has changed over the thirty years. Graham remembers when the early focus was much more on the individual teacher and the individual student, using a humanistic psychological approach and concerned with the affective as much as the cognitive. Today the influence of phenomenography has led to more emphasis on cognition, on conceptions and patterns of relationships between categories rather than relationships between individuals. Then, the emphasis was more on practice and how to do it; today the emphasis is more on theory and how to think about it. And at the same time the initial interest in what went on in the classroom and how that might be improved has evolved into a more strategic concern for the learning environment, the systems, the overall design, the structures and the infrastructures. While Graham's international experience has shown him that this shift is common in the UK, Europe and Australasia, he is sure it is rare in the USA.

Time has taught him to be wary of the false dawn that technology has endlessly offered. His own unit at Oxford Brookes grew from the promise of the transformative power of television, and many computer-based materials and processes have come and gone. Even today, despite such vast investment, most universities' classroom practice would be immediately recognisable to a teacher of thirty years ago, and IT is still not able to prove, beyond isolated examples, that it is significantly cost-effective. He notes that the National Student Survey's figures for good access to learning resources are mainly found at institutions which have maintained big libraries rather than made heavy IT investments.

He is also sceptical about the national professional standards framework for HE teachers. Over the accreditation of programmes, he believes that SEDA is owed a huge debt. He claims no other country comes close to the degree of comprehensiveness of provision in the UK that has derived from SEDA's initiative and the subsequent national funding. But having worked with accredited programmes at both Oxford Brookes and Oxford University, he fears that successful participants in one might be failed in the other. One emphasises a particular type of reading, thinking and writing about teaching, while the other is centrally concerned with the evidence that supports claims about good teaching. But where, he asks, is the evidence that these national standards actually produce

effective student learning outcomes? We seem to have accepted evidence of developmental processes as a substitute for evidence about effective teaching itself. Teaching awards and the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme have evolved in the same direction, using criteria and evidence ever more distant from the actual business of teaching.

He is sure that educational development work is now safely embedded in institutions. Teaching coordinators now exist in many departments and faculties and, as experience grows, the academics in these roles will become more effective at brokering their relationship with their subject centres, their institutions and the national educational development community. But educational development is not shaped into a uniform model, and what it does can be very different, both between UK institutions and even more so in international comparisons.

Some of the features of the scene in the late 1990s, which he did so much to handle with the learning and teaching strategies, are still visible today. He knows how long it takes to build real communities within institutions. These communities have to learn to deploy the various elements which can improve student learning, and how to handle the obstacles which keep the enterprise static. He also knows how disruptive the uncoordinated initiatives which tempt institutions away from the patient work of building these communities can be. He is not sure that, either institutionally or nationally, we can yet say that we have got the policies or strategies to get us from where we are to where we want to be. Without such strategies, his confidence in central funding of initiatives has weakened, as he notes that in Sweden (the NHSU) and in Australia (the Carrick Institute) there has been little resolution of the debate about whether such efforts add value.

In personal terms, he recognises the development of his areas of expertise has been rather unusual. He cites his last three funded projects – on teaching award schemes, on the effects of assessment on learning at programme level, and on the development of leadership for teaching quality among heads of departments. This is not the research portfolio of an academic who is drilling away at the subject in ever more sophisticated detail. But it does have the virtue of growing a broad perspective, which most educational developers have had to develop.

And it is that broad perspective which holds the key to what Graham might offer now he has left the Institute at Oxford. With his experience, he can see his way through complex, messy situations to the heart of things perhaps more quickly than others; he can put his finger on the major issues, and perhaps this is a talent which will remain in some demand. When he was awarded the 'Spirit of ICED' in 2004 for his contribution to educational development in general, and to the International Consortium in particular, Liz Beaty said of him, 'He is critical, tenacious, insightful, provocative, eloquent and wise.' When I asked how he would describe who he is and what he does to a new acquaintance, he replied, 'I'm retired!'

**James Wisdom** is Vice-Chair of SEDA.

# Can Identifying and Rewarding Excellent Teaching Improve Student Learning?

**Dr John Peters**, University of Worcester/Centre for Recording Achievement

This article is based on a keynote address given in 2006 to the 14<sup>th</sup> Improving Student Learning Symposium: Improving Student Learning Through Teaching.

There are two distinct discourses which impact on us when we talk about improving the quality of teaching and learning in Higher Education. The first emphasises improving student learning through increasing our understanding of, and ability to influence positively, the multiplicity of factors that shape the student's engagement with learning. The second seeks to define excellent teaching so it can be identified and rewarded, hoping that doing so will encourage us all to be excellent teachers. I call the first the learning paradigm and the second the excellence paradigm, in a conscious reflection of Barr and Tagg (1995). Most educational developers are firmly committed to the former though many, myself included, have benefited substantially from the latter. But there are fundamental problems in trying to avoid the tensions between these two discourses and, thus, seeking to serve God while gathering the rewards of mammon! One of the key tensions between the two comes when talking about teaching.

Educational developers often find teaching a difficult subject to discuss because of our commitment to a student-centred approach. There has been a failure to develop the necessary simple language, to signal the difference in the learning paradigm between the poor practice of teacher-centred teaching and the good practice of student-centred teaching. Instead we have often lazily juxtaposed teaching and learning. The result is that we have often abandoned positive discussion of teaching and left

the field to those who seek to define teaching in terms of the excellence paradigm. The resulting definitions of teaching in Higher Education are driven by a discourse which is inherently exclusive and which promotes performative, teacher-centred teaching. What we urgently need is to [re]establish a positive link in the rhetoric of educational development between improving student learning and effective teaching. This may be painful because it may require recognition that the learning and excellence paradigms cannot be reconciled, that it is not possible to engage everyone in defining teaching excellence on the basis of the learning paradigm and that, despite the best efforts of many seeking to channel the excellence paradigm from within, it is not possible to serve these two masters. However, educational developers, working from the learning paradigm, need to ensure effective teaching is powerfully and clearly [re]defined as an inclusive, value-rich and developmental practice which goes far beyond performing well in front of class.

## Don't mention the T word

The movement to improve student learning has consciously sought to downplay the importance of the teacher in order to emphasise the centrality of the learner. In doing so it has aligned with ideas about person-centred learning (Rogers, 1983), Schuell's pronouncement 'that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does' (Shuell, 1986), and the vast array of enquiries into student approaches to learning begun by Marton and Saljo (1976). Graham Gibbs has noted that the UK improving student learning conferences were established by innovative teachers, frustrated that

their attempts to improve learning by 'tweaking' their teaching were not particularly effective, then discovering a need to focus more broadly on understanding the student learner and the wider influences on learning.

In part, then, the focus on improving student learning and the learning paradigm emerged as a necessary corrective to models of improvement which merely focused on teaching performance and teaching technique. As Ramsden put it:

*'The ideology of staff appraisal presents a one-dimensional model of better teaching that focuses narrowly on the quality of individual lecturers' performances and inter-lecturer competition for excellence. Staff development that is focused on training lecturers to use teaching techniques is driven by an equally simplistic theory.'* (Ramsden, 1992)

Research on student approaches to learning has identified key conceptual differences which help to shape the way students learn. More recently, work examining the approach to teaching taken by HE lecturers has identified different conceptions. Correlations have been established between tutors taking teacher-focused or student-focused approaches to teaching, and their students adopting surface or deep approaches to their learning (Prosser, 2006). As Prosser and Trigwell summarised the position, 'good teaching is about taking a student's perspective' (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999).

However, while some may have been careful not to over-simplify the message, others have been less cautious in their choice of words, creating an unfortunate division of terminology which drives a wedge

between good teaching and supporting learning. This may have led to both a conscious and subconscious refusal to use the words ‘teacher’ and ‘teaching’ and to the denigration of those terms in educational development literature. These statements clearly suggest teaching is something different from, and on a lower plane than, facilitating and improving student learning:

- ‘This article highlights the changing role of university and college lecturers from teachers to facilitators of learning’ (Ellington, 2000)
- ‘Some trainers are [rightly] primarily oriented towards improving student learning, rather than towards improving teaching’ (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004)
- ‘I would want to stop rewarding excellence in teaching and start rewarding those who promote excellence in student learning’ (Matthew, 2003).

We should recognise that there is an unequal relationship between learning and teaching; by definition, for teaching to be taking place learning must be happening, but learning does not require teaching to be happening. Or, as Angelo and Cross put it:

*‘Learning can and often does take place without the benefit of teaching – and sometimes in spite of it – but there is no such thing as effective teaching in the absence of learning. Teaching without learning is just talking.’* (Angelo and Cross, 1993)

While this final, throw-away remark might pithily convey a useful point, its uncritical parroting by educational developers has been damaging because of the other point it seems to imply. If teaching without learning is just talking, then is teaching really just talking plus learning? Surely not. Angelo and Cross might highlight the dependence of teaching on learning, but they also stress the importance of good teaching to effective learning:

*‘The quality of student learning is directly, although not exclusively, related to the quality of teaching. Therefore one of the most promising ways to improve learning is to improve teaching.’* (ibid.)

If this improvement is to be achieved, what we should be arguing for is not a rejection of ‘teaching’ in favour of the ‘facilitation of learning’, but for a more inclusive re-definition of teaching as the much broader, more demanding, more creative and more challenging role it really is. The problem is that the current debate about improving teaching in HE is dominated by a search for the means to define, promote and reward excellence. We need to engage critically with those who are still defining teaching excellence in terms of talking and performing.

### Current criteria for excellent teaching

When asked to consider ‘What would your criteria be for excellent teaching as performance?’, delegates at the Improving Student Learning Symposium in 2006 focused on what the tutor does, including

demonstrating passion, being inspiring, and knowing and working with the students as audience. The delegates’ responses to the question ‘What would your criteria be for excellent teaching as facilitating student learning?’ had a much broader focus, including valuing student input through conversation and two-way communication, encouraging students to participate as equals, establishing high-quality learning outcomes and assessments, and deploying a wide range of learning activities. In effect an excellent teacher as performer was judged on what they do in the lecture room, but excellent facilitative teaching involved two-way communication with students and successfully shaping the whole learning environment beyond the classroom.

It should be a cause for concern that so many of the phrases in Table 1, taken from a recent set of formal criteria for teaching excellence (the Carrick Awards 2006), can be read as focusing on teaching as performance rather than on teaching as the facilitation of learning.

Teaching as performance	Teaching as performance or facilitation of learning	Teaching as facilitating learning
‘Encouraging student engagement through own enthusiasm’	‘Teaching that motivates and inspires students to learn’	‘Fostering student development by stimulating curiosity and independence in learning’
‘Inspire and motivate students through high-level communication and presentation’	‘Using research-led approaches to teaching and learning’	‘Providing timely, worthwhile feedback to students on their learning’
‘Developing and presenting imaginative resources that reflect a command of the field’	‘Communicating clear objectives and expectations’	‘Respect and support for the development of students as individuals’
‘Co-ordinating, managing and leading courses’	‘Scholarly activity to enhance learning and teaching’	‘Provide empathetic guidance to students’

Table 1 Formal criteria for teaching excellence

Like other current major national teaching excellence award schemes, the Carrick scheme does not fully reflect a definition of excellent teaching based on 'approaches to learning' research and the learning paradigm. Is this because it is difficult to write good criteria or, more fundamentally, because of a difficulty in defining good teaching? Why have the ideas about the focus on student learning and 'approaches to learning' failed fully to reshape these criteria?

To answer this question, we need to return to the impact on the wider debate about HE learning and teaching of the unfortunate division between teaching and facilitation of learning in much recent educational development literature. It has aroused strong negative reactions from many of those who might otherwise be expected to be broadly supportive, and has therefore undermined the possible emergence of a powerful alliance of committed learning-centred teachers against the threat posed by the performative excellence paradigm.

### **Critiques of teaching as facilitating and improving student learning and possible responses**

Partly because of the crass distinction between teaching and facilitating learning, many committed and effective HE teachers have been alienated from the ideas surrounding the research into student learning. Some now assume that much generic educational development is 'anti-teaching'. Recently, when I said I had been asked to speak at a student learning conference, one National Teaching Fellow put it to me, 'Tell them how important teaching is and how much you love it – that'll annoy them!'

The learning cycles and models used by educational developers – Kolb, Schon, Knowles, Gibbs, Race, etc. – omit teachers and teaching as a positive element of learning. The result can be a juxtaposition of 'teaching the subject' against 'facilitating learning'. Unsurprisingly, some HE teachers see this as a threat to their professionalism and to their expert knowledge; they

are being de-skilled as capable teachers of their subject if anyone can come along and facilitate some learning. Even those committed HE teachers who have engaged in some research into their own practice have, at times, been alienated by unfortunate pronouncements that educational research is best left to the real experts.

Other criticisms of the applicability of key ideas around 'approaches to learning' research are also relevant here. To those who see their HE teaching as having a socially progressive function, the criticism of 'approaches to learning' research as presenting 'a model of student learning which is based on a set of elite values, attitudes and epistemologies that make more sense to HE's gatekeepers than they do to many of its students' (Haggis, 2003) is particularly damaging.

The charge that 'approaches to learning' research is no friend of progressive social values because it is narrow and value-free lies behind Malcolm and Zukas's (2001) critique of the 'psychologisation of teaching and learning'. Skelton (2005) suggests that, far from resisting performative models of teaching excellence, this psychologised model of excellence has become part of an unholy alliance, shutting out both traditional elitist models and more critical responses. The evidence of the Carrick award criteria would tend to support him. However, all this has echoes of the 'turf war' between psychological and sociological approaches to education which Dewey would have recognised and rejected:

*'I believe the educational process has two sides – one psychological and one sociological; and that neither can be subordinated to the other or neglected without evil results following.'* (Dewey, 1897)

These criticisms must be addressed if the important contribution which approaches to learning research and the learning paradigm more broadly can make to HE is not to be damaged by divisive academic debate.

The sometimes pejorative language of educational development needs to be addressed directly, and inappropriate short-hand phrases which seem to denigrate teaching need to be expunged. We need to ensure teaching is defined positively, clearly and inclusively. Teaching is about much more than talking while students learn, about more than performing in front of class, about more than knowing a variety of techniques and about more than designing appropriate learning activities. We need to establish that defining teaching as facilitating student learning is indeed tautological, as Malcolm and Zukas (2001) idealistically claim.

'Approaches to learning' research needs to focus more attention on the links between effective learning and effective teaching. We need to identify the positive differences a teacher can actually make to learning. For example, how exactly is 'deep learning' to be facilitated? Work which is establishing correlations between tutor conceptions of teaching and their students' conceptions of learning offers hope. However, correlations are not causations, and it is very difficult to see how this particular research paradigm is going to produce ideas and recommendations on what practising HE teachers can do to effectively facilitate student learning.

To do this, we need to move beyond psychological examinations of HE learning and embrace the opportunities which other approaches, disciplines and research paradigms offer, to examine the relationship between HE learning and teaching in historical, social, cultural and political contexts. This is not to reject the value or importance of 'approaches to learning' research, but to seek to ally it with, rather than against, Skelton's critical approaches and against, rather than with, the performative, excellence model of teaching. Wider research paradigms are better able to cast light on causal links between effective teaching and effective learning, and to help identify key principles and values to support HE teachers going about their complex task of supporting effective situated student learning.



For example, as a historian by background, I think it useful to reflect on the broader purpose of higher education as expressed throughout the development of Universities, and to move beyond the dry debate between teaching a subject and facilitating student learning. Since the origins of current European Universities in the middle ages, there have been tensions in their purpose, including what students should learn. The mediaeval institutions developed the mind, soul and spirit to the glory of God, for service in the Church, but also provided a source of educated civil servants for the State. They had a responsibility to teach the otherworldly concerns of their (Christian) discipline, to develop the practices of a profession (in the Church) and to produce skilled, employable graduates (for the State). It is therefore interesting to reflect on the continuities between statements about this issue in more recent times.

Cardinal Newman is famously quoted as having stated that Universities are for ‘the teaching of universal knowledge’. This was a statement of the primacy of teaching over research in the purposes of a University, but also sounds like a disappointing commitment to a content-based curriculum. However, his definition of knowledge in his 1852 work, *The Idea of a University*, has little to do with the rote learning of content:

*‘When I speak of knowledge, I mean something intellectual ... something which takes a view of things; which sees more than the senses convey; which reasons upon what it sees, and while it sees; which invests it with an idea. Such knowledge is not a mere extrinsic or accidental advantage ... which may be got up from a book, and easily forgotten again; it is an acquired illumination, it is a habit, a personal possession, and an inward endowment.’*

The Robbins Report (1963) also gave primacy to teaching and learning in its declared aims of HE:

- *‘Instruction in the skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour*
- *What is taught should be taught in such a way as to promote the general powers of the mind. The aim should be to produce not mere specialists but cultivated men and women*
- *The advancement of learning [and] search for truth*
- *The transmission of a common culture and common standards ... to provide ... that background of culture and social habit upon which a healthy society depends.’*

Most recently, Barnett (2000) spoke of the threefold purpose of HE:

- *‘[It has] to create disturbance in the minds and beings of students. Students have to come to feel in every sense the utter insecurity of the post-modern world*
- *[It has] to enable students to live at ease with this perplexing and unsettling environment.*
- *It has to enable them to make their own positive contributions ... while being sensitive to the unpredictability and uncontrollability of the consequence of what they say and do.’*

The similarities between these statements are striking. They all suggest the primary purpose of HE to be the development of the individual and their cognitive abilities. This entails the encouragement of a different and more challenging way of seeing and thinking, to produce graduates who are equipped to play a full and proactive part in society. This teaching to produce personal development and critical but creative thinking in students is encapsulated by Lucy Adrian’s statement about her director of studies:

*‘She taught me to think, to challenge idea[s], to follow my enthusiasms. She was decisive in me finding myself. She was all about making connections, about thinking laterally.’* (Burkill, 2002)

If the University has long been intended primarily as a means of personal and

intellectual development for the student, then the focus can turn back to an examination of how such transformations can be facilitated by effective teaching. It should be possible to identify how this philosophy, conception and intention can be translated into effective situated approaches to teaching.

### The myriad problems of excellence

Identifying important principles for effective teaching is still a long way from identifying excellent teaching. There needs to be a full debate about whether it is valuable, possible or desirable to define and reward teaching excellence in the light of ‘approaches to learning’ research and the learning paradigm. I profess to be deeply uncomfortable even with the concept of ‘good practice’ and the associated assumption that ‘it’ can somehow be de-contextualised – held up for all to see and copy – then implemented by teachers to achieve effective learning, whatever their particular institutional, disciplinary, or educational context, and whatever the needs of their students. This problem is exacerbated when discussing ‘best practice’ and excellent teaching. Can generic criteria for excellent teaching really be developed and can excellent teaching thus be identified, rewarded and reproduced?

Recent discussions about excellence in Higher Education, sponsored by the Higher Education Academy for their 2007 conference, seemed to miss the deeper point here. For all the detailed debate around whether excellence had become a meaningless term through over-use or lack of valid evidence, nobody seemed to ask the basic question about whether the concept was helpful for improving learning and teaching.

If the concept of excellence itself is problematic, then the implementation of schemes to reward excellence in teaching is more so. The rationale for such schemes does not generally convince. The establishment of criteria has proved controversial; establishing acceptable measures or evidence has raised yet more complaint. Finally,

rewarding excellence so as to promote the aims of the process has proven difficult.

The reasons that have been variously given for identifying and rewarding excellent teaching raise as many concerns as they address. The claim is that making as much fuss over excellent teachers as over excellent researchers raises the morale and status of those who have committed time and effort to their teaching. However, for each 'excellent' teacher who is rewarded, many more teachers are alienated by such schemes. In the UK National Teaching Fellowship Scheme each HEI is encouraged to put forward up to three excellent teachers. This immediately creates division and contestation within institutions over the criteria and who should be nominated, leaving many more disappointed at not being recognised by their institution than excited at the prospect of national glory. Then only fifty of these hundreds of 'excellent' teachers receive a national reward. Many impressive HE teachers are thus branded as failures.

Funding for such schemes is explicitly intended to send a message that excellence in teaching is recognised and rewarded on a par with research. However the funds are no match for the sums invested in research. Increasingly, this problem is being compounded in the UK by the investment of funding council learning and teaching money in the conduct of educational research, rather than in supporting effective practitioners to improve pedagogic practice across the sector on the ground.

This undermines another claim made for excellence schemes, that they encourage the sharing of excellent practice within and beyond institutions and disciplines. Additionally, the schemes are generally competitive, which obviously discourages sharing for fear of losing competitive advantage. The individual nature of many of the rewards, with the honourable exception of one element of the recently restructured Carrick awards, equally serves to reward individualism rather than team

endeavour. That there has been some powerful sharing of ideas and practices is largely due to the collegial attitudes of many of those administering and receiving such rewards. But it is not inherent in the schemes, and there are surely better ways of allocating funding if the sharing of effective practice is really the central aim. Perhaps more collegial and inclusive approaches are required in the future.

National schemes are often proposed as a means of encouraging local reward mechanisms and as a route towards a career structure for effective teachers. The UK NTF scheme has certainly spawned institutional and discipline-specific reward schemes. But these have suffered from similar problems to the national one. They tend to ape the national criteria and process and to operate as 'bolt-on,' short-term, small-scale reward mechanisms, rather than in ways which would embed recognition of effective teaching in normal HE human resources practice. Such schemes are far from providing an alternative structured career route for dedicated teachers.

However carefully designed, such schemes are only as good as the measures which can be set against the criteria. There are problems with any of the obvious means and methods currently used to measure excellence. We could start with the statistics for student retention, completion and results, which in reality are shaped by factors well beyond the control of even the most gifted tutor. Leaving aside whether degree results actually serve to realistically reflect the personal and intellectual development of the individual student, there would need to be some measure of value-added in order to judge the tutor's contribution, and universities cannot agree on how this can be measured.

A criticism of many schemes is that they pay little attention to the scholarly appraisal of the individual's actual teaching. This might perhaps be achieved by basing excellence schemes on student feedback. However, measurement by student response is open to the challenge that

teaching is not about making the students feel good, happy or supported. Learning can often be challenging and uncomfortable. Tutors who make students uncomfortable might suffer if student satisfaction ratings were used as the key measure of excellence.

If the student voice alone will not do, then perhaps colleagues could be used as peer reviewers. The time required to undertake proper observations has made this problematic. There are also tensions between observations for development and support and observation for such value judgements. Robust, detailed and accurate criteria would have to be developed to ensure that the experience of observation and judgement were the same for all candidates, and this has so far proved impossible.

Different excellence schemes place varying emphasis on application and nomination in the process. Nomination of excellent HE teachers by institutions or departments is a form of patronage which gives rise to concern that particular individuals will be put forward as a reward for services, or that mavericks and critics will not be nominated. Allowing individuals to apply avoids this, but the nature of the application process for many awards has become so complex, and the nuances of the language so reified, that it is in danger of becoming a process for rewarding good form-filling and the assistance of experts.

Increasingly, the answer to these concerns is seen to be the production of a portfolio of records covering all the possible sources of evidence and allowing the individual to make a claim against the criteria. But the portfolio-building process is highly intensive and time-consuming. Assessing them again takes considerable time and is problematic if the criteria are too narrow and fail to allow for individual submissions, or if the criteria are too loose and do not give the assessor enough guidance.

Is it any wonder that sets of criteria seem to include all possible ways in which a HE teacher might shine? The results are often theoretically

unfounded and, as we have seen, mix criteria for performance with those for improving learning, scholarship and critical reflection. Finally, there is something unhealthy about the way success in gaining reward for excellence is now commonly used as a criterion for further reward.

If the measures of excellence are problematic then so too are the current reward mechanisms. Prizes are, by nature, retrospective tokens. Teaching fellowships, either nationally or within institutions, often carry additional burdens, responsibilities and pressures. The existence of such posts often makes more explicit, and therefore heightens, the divisions between teaching and research. When 'excellent teachers' are rewarded by being given funded development projects, they often struggle to 'make a difference' through such fixed-term, extraneous activity. Project work also commonly results in buying 'excellent teachers' out of teaching. Even where proper promotional routes are beginning to emerge, they can be the poor relation of routes for traditional researchers. These often only raise greater concern about whether the measures and criteria are really robust and are being used to reward teaching, or something else.

As Liz Allen puts it:

*'All the national teaching fellowships and institutional prizes, however welcome and celebratory, cannot make up for a situation where pay levels are generally low, appointments are still focused on research excellence, the overwhelming majority of academic promotions are research-based, and pay rewards for teaching are designed to exclude all but a very shiny few.'* (Allen, 2003)

This takes us back to the basic philosophical problem with the excellence model. Excellence as an idea is loud, ostentatious, generic, exclusive, competitive and individualistic. Rewarding it is often subjective, divisive and discriminatory. Effective teaching in the learning paradigm is quiet, situated, developmental, collegial and inclusive.

The discussion about the improvement of teaching must move away from rewarding the excellent teaching of a few to promoting effective teaching by all. To do this, the educational development community must engage more clearly with debates about what makes for good teaching and how we might work together to improve student learning across the sector.

The observation that the most effective teachers might be those who put the student first, not those who stand out and grab the limelight, is not new. With apologies to Taoist scholars everywhere, it seems appropriate to conclude with an interpretation of a verse from the *Tao Te Ching*, written approximately two and a half thousand years ago:

*'When the best tutors achieve their purposes their students say "amazing, we did it all by ourselves."'* (Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 17)

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# Supporting Part-time Teaching Staff in HE: a fire-side chat between Colin Bryson and Tony Brand

**Anthony Brand**, Anglia Ruskin University

Colin Bryson is Learning and Teaching Coordinator of Nottingham Business School. He has a long-standing interest in academic staff employed on part-time or temporary contracts. He has undertaken several studies on hourly paid part-time lecturers and engaged in policy and advisory work on this issue. Studies in the UK national context include work commissioned by the LTSN and HESDA (*Strategic approaches to managing and developing part-time teachers: a study of 5 HEIs*, LTSN, York, 2004) and by NATFHE (*Hiring lecturers by the hour: the case for change in Higher Education*, NATFHE, London, 2005). More recently he has been working with the HEA on two major projects. Here, in discussion with Tony Brand, they bring together the outcomes of these recent studies and projects to update readers on how the sector supports and develops part-time lecturing staff in HE.

*Colin, you have been associated with researching the roles and support for part-time teaching staff for some years. What were the conclusions and outcomes from the early work?*

Tony, what is most striking about the period before 2000 is the lack of focus by anyone – policy makers, managers, unions and researchers – on the issue of part-time teachers. Only ten years ago, the Dearing Report ignored the issue, noting that there were a mere 4000 teachers on hourly paid part-time contracts. Obviously this was a huge underestimate.

Much of the research that was undertaken just after this was exploratory. It started to uncover the sheer scale of deployment of part-time teachers and the diversity of them both as a group and the roles they undertook as teachers in HE. What did emerge was just how *invisible* these staff were – to senior managers and to systems. Institutional managers were quite incapable of stating how many such staff they employed.

Case studies at the level of subject and institution then began to show the consequences of the weak and *ad hoc* approach to employment and support. This research identified issues like exploitation and lack of equal opportunities – an issue that was taken up by the unions. Legislative changes were making it more difficult to use temporary or part-time contracts as a cheap and disposable alternative to more secure employment. The research also identified the risks to quality at a time when the sector

started to come under more scrutiny to provide a better student experience and more professional development of the core role of teaching. It was not that part-time teachers were shown to be bad teachers, indeed many were perceived by students to be very good; the point was that the 'system' undermined this by offering unequal (in comparison with salaried staff) and inadequate access to professional or career development, promotion structures and security of employment. This led to marginalisation, under-employment and lower status and esteem.

There were a number of funded initiatives to start addressing the issues by creating and strengthening support and development mechanisms, but such initiatives tended not to be sustainable once the initial funding ran out.

*In recent times the HEA sponsored group has returned to this area and one of the initial challenges was in defining who are the group of staff.*

Very true, Tony. Part-time staff are very diverse indeed and, of course, the context of roles varies considerably between subjects and departments within the same university and even more between institutions – not just in mission but in location, as labour markets are different. Some part-time teachers are employed on permanent fractional contracts, but a rather larger group have short-term, hourly paid employment. These may be drawn from postgraduates or graduate teaching assistants or staff carrying out other roles in the university such as technicians or library staff, professional practitioners with external roles, those who have retired, from academic or other roles, and those who work in several part-time teaching roles. That is not an exhaustive list! The HEA-sponsored group found it useful to categorise part-time teachers on the basis of what is most useful to the teacher in terms of professional development and support. Therefore we sought to map staff to the Professional Standards Framework. In an ideal world everyone would have full access to all developmental opportunities and support. However, mapping to the PSF can also be used to identify prioritisation of support to those whose roles and prior experience can most benefit from it. (Full details are in Report 1 on the HEA website resource on Part-Time Teachers.)

*As part of the work of the group you had the opportunity to return to and refresh your initial work. Were there any significant differences?*

It is rather sad to relate that very significant problems still remain. The issues are just not being addressed across very broad swathes of the sector. It does appear that the imperatives of legal change have persuaded some senior managers to address the employment issues and offer more secure contracts to some teachers. I do realize that there are many competing priorities in the sector but my recent national surveys of the HEA Subject Centres, CETLs and universities showed that few initiatives to improve support are currently being undertaken. There are exceptions: the Open University has developed a stronger infrastructure of support and postgraduates who undertake teaching roles can access more development, in general. The Roberts agenda probably has something to do with that. Of course there are local examples of much better practice and I did undertake some case studies to examine this in greater detail.

*So you were able to locate some promising examples of good practice – but this seems to be rather localised.*

I looked at three universities on behalf of the HEA Planning Group, Tony. They were selected because they are able to demonstrate in their reply to my national institutional survey that they had several mechanisms in place to support part-time teachers. The full details are on the HEA web-site resource on Part-Time Teachers (*cf.* Report 6: Case studies of good practice).

In the first of those, a research-intensive university, the focus of support was on postgraduate tutors who made up the great majority of part-time teachers there. They had undertaken a comprehensive review and created a standing group to monitor policy. They had a training programme which all new tutors were required to attend meaning that hundreds of tutors had undergone it. They were also piloting a mentoring scheme and had excellent web-based resource guides.

The second case was more of a teaching-intensive university. Again they had undertaken a comprehensive review and, in this case, formed an alliance between staff development and HR. They had a comprehensive range of support mechanisms – written guidelines and a staff handbook, induction, educational development courses and a mentoring scheme.

In the third case, another teaching-centred university, there was a good example of L&T courses aimed more specifically at the needs of part-time teachers. In addition, one school had developed an excellent induction framework. In all these cases the role of champion, individuals who took responsibility for maintaining these initiatives, was vital.

*Any bright spots in regard to discipline areas?*

I can commend readers to two other studies that I undertook for the HEA Planning Group in 2006 (reports on both are available on the HEA website resource on Part-Time Teachers). The first of these (Recent or current major initiatives on supporting and developing PTT) reported on

progressive projects by a range of parties. The other study was a survey of all the national subject-centres about any work they were doing or had done with a specific focus on part-time teachers. The best example of a strong initiative with a disciplinary focus is the ADEPPT project in Art and Design. This FDTL project produced some excellent resources and made a big impact in the subject area. Although the project, which involved gathering evidence, providing training, and facilitating collaboration, has now concluded, the website with the resources is still live. There are materials both for part-time teachers themselves and for those who take (or should take!) responsibility for managing and supporting them.

The subject centres of Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance, and of Health Sciences and Practice are in the final stage of the major research project on part-time teachers. This is looking at, in particular, those part-time teachers who are also, or have been, senior practitioners of the profession outside HE. I think this project is going to be helpful for informing us about how best to support this group and it will also raise some sharp issues that part-time staff on fractional contracts have. There have been some other initiatives too, in particular subjects, which deserve worthy mention – Psychology, Sociology, Politics, and Economics have all produced support material for postgraduates and they (and other subject centres) offer courses for postgraduate tutors. Continuing Education has been active at various times and in various ways to support part-time teachers. I understand ESCALATE (Education) is giving more priority to this issue at the moment.

*Now, overall this group of teachers make up a significant proportion of staff across our institutions, making and contributing significantly to student learning experiences.*

Tony, as far as we can estimate there are at least 80,000 teachers in HE working on part-time contracts, and there are some more who do not have contracts at all. This excludes those teaching on franchise and collaborative provision overseas. But 80,000 constitutes half of the academic teaching workforce. Many of these part-time staff do rather more teaching than some full-time staff who may be titled lecturers but do not spend much time teaching! So, in most universities, something between a quarter and a half of teaching roles are undertaken by part-time staff who receive very little support and development to do this. They often support students, such as first-year undergraduates, part-time students, distance learners and international students, who are likely to require particular support to facilitate their learning and transitions to higher education.

*How would you go about redressing this situation?*

A big question! I would start with the policy makers, both at sectoral and university level. They need to take this issue seriously. It will not do just for them to prescribe against it, without providing sufficient resources. The deployment of this casualised work-force grew from pressures on the system from expansion of student numbers not being matched by funding, and the fact that activities other than teaching and

learning are privileged....but we will not solve that one quickly! It is time that university managers know who they employ and report this accurately. An analysis of the HESA data shows that this does not happen yet.

So any remedy has to address both the needs of part-time staff, the students and the local managers. These local managers are equally likely to be programme, or even module, leaders rather than heads of school or department. It is important to sort out who is responsible for what. Ideally, all would take appropriate responsibility, but it seems that having a champion – somebody charged with supporting part-time staff – is essential to initiate and support change.

There needs to be an appropriate balance of local and more central support. Much of academic activity takes place locally, so in implementation of a support and development infrastructure that is where the *locus* of provision must lie.

There needs to be reward and recognition, and some obligation, for part-time staff to engage in professional development. Another key strand is to address the issue of lack of inclusion and marginalisation. The voice of the part-time teacher needs to be listened to. What does that individual want and what do they want to develop? One size will not fit all. Colleagues and managers need to address these expectations, at least to some extent. Transfer to fractional contracts for many is likely to address some problems immediately. There are still issues arising out of 'part-timeness'. Flexible duplication and replication of support and development opportunities is essential. So the priority for educational developers is to build the infrastructure and ensure that it is maintained.

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## HE Lecturers Researching HE Issues: issues and dilemmas for academic developers

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*A version of this article was presented to the annual conference of the Society for Research into Higher Education, Brighton, December 2007.*

In this article I will explore some issues raised by a phenomenon in contemporary UK higher education with which many readers of *Educational Developments* will be familiar – namely, the phenomenon of higher education lecturers engaged in research into higher education issues as a part of their academic practice. I am referring mainly to lecturers who are specialists in subject areas other than 'Education', but who choose to engage in various forms of educational research – mainly, but not exclusively, research into aspects of pedagogic practice and student learning within their discipline areas. (For the purposes of this article I will refer to this research as 'HE/pedagogic research'.) Lecturers engaging in these research activities do so either in addition to, or in preference over, research that is more recognisably 'disciplinary'. These are lecturers working in both 'old' and 'new'

universities – though the greater number are probably based in the latter. Their backgrounds may be in areas broadly related to education – either in terms of professional practice (e.g. health, social work, management) or in terms of intellectual traditions (e.g. sociology, psychology). However, they may also be found right across the subject spectrum, from 'soft-applied' disciplines through to 'hard-pure' (Biglan, 1973). And their motives for engaging in this form of research vary as well, from an uncomplicated scholarly curiosity about aspects of pedagogy and learning, often stimulated by their own experience of teaching, through to a more strategic attempt to meet institutional expectations that they should be research-active. Research outputs from this activity range from books and articles in world-class journals right through to nothing more than new insights informing an individual's practice. Between these two extremes is a diverse array of print, electronic and face-to-face dissemination approaches, under the auspices of individual institutions, professional

bodies, national subject centres and many others.

Why does this development matter? One reason for examining this phenomenon is because it focuses attention on a form of research into higher education which is at best tolerated by institutions, departments and colleagues, and at worst actively discouraged. As one Head of School once remarked, when I asked him what I could do to support the pedagogic researchers in his School, 'You could tell them to do less of it'. In only a few places is it positively encouraged and supported, and even there it tends to be a fragile thing with doubtful sustainability.

I have a personal interest in this issue. At Westminster University I am responsible for, amongst other things, leading, developing and supporting what in my institution is mainly called *educational* research. (This is only unambiguous because there is no education department or teacher training programme at Westminster.) With one facet of my professional

persona I believe that HE research carried out by subject specialists can make small but significant contributions to the enhancement of teaching quality and the advancement of scholarship. Moreover, I believe that the value of such research derives precisely from these researchers' subject-specific perspectives. For this reason I endeavour to support my colleagues around the university who are engaged (or aspire to engage) in forms of educational enquiry, through various activities including methods workshops, seminars, mentoring, advice and information, networking, consultancy, resources and small-grant funding. At the same time, however, I am sceptical about the whole business, and wonder whether I (and others like me in other institutions) are doing colleagues a disservice by encouraging them down a path that may be counter-productive – not just for them and their careers, but also for the institution and for the sector more widely.

There are signs that the potential value of this research – for both teaching quality enhancement and for the advancement of scholarship – is being increasingly recognised at different levels of the HE sector, at least in the UK. For example, a number of HEIs (like Westminster) have invested in various forms of support for lecturers investigating HE issues. At national level, documents from RAE2008 included some of the strongest statements yet of recognition for pedagogic research within the disciplines. It would be fanciful to suggest that there is anything approaching parity of prestige between disciplinary research and pedagogic research. Nevertheless, the steady increase in the number of journals and websites reporting practitioner research into pedagogical issues within the disciplines indicates a modest sea-change.

Despite these positive developments, it has to be acknowledged that the position of HE/pedagogic research within contemporary academic practice is at best ambiguous and, at

worst, a very poor relation. This is hardly surprising, when most of the undercurrents at each level of the system flow against it. I recently conducted an informal survey amongst academic developers with responsibility for leading HE/pedagogic research in their institutions, in an effort to map the factors and practices that facilitate or undermine attempts to promote such research. At the level of institutional strategy, for example, it is still rare for HE/pedagogic research to be a prominent part of HEIs' research strategies and HR strategies. HE/pedagogic research features in a few institutional *learning and teaching* strategies, but only rarely is this commitment echoed in institutional *research* strategies, which tend to place emphasis on research income, publications, research students and other markers of prestige, even in institutions that are essentially teaching-led. It is also rare to see HE/pedagogic research featuring in institutions' HR strategies: even in cases where there are clear promotion routes based on teaching quality, as opposed to achievement in research and/or administration, HE/pedagogic research is not often included as a performance indicator. As one respondent to my survey commented, 'pedagogic research is widely seen in this institution as a potentially dangerous distraction from disciplinary research'. The fact is that, for many academics, involvement with pedagogic research is viewed as a form of career suicide.

And there are many other obstacles and impediments. Inducting lecturers from across the disciplines into the methodological culture of HE/pedagogic research may involve a daunting journey (Stierer and Antoniou, 2004). Despite my point earlier, about lecturers' disciplinary perspectives being a highly valuable resource in HE research, we do them (and research generally) a disservice if we pretend that anyone can do decent educational research without some form of apprenticeship. Most lecturers instinctively know this, though they sometimes exaggerate the scale of re-

training they require before they may be permitted to start. At the departmental level, I know from my work with some practitioner-researchers that their engagement with HE/pedagogic research often involves a sometimes painful form of self-marginalisation, a disengagement from their native community of practice, even though it might result in a new engagement with a different community of practice. Despite all the fanfare over Learning and Teaching over the past ten years, including the impressive work of the national subject centres, little has been done to address the psychic dimensions of these choices for individual academics. From one kind of viewpoint, HE/pedagogic research continues to be seen as the domain of the remedial: it is actively promoted only by institutions which have given up competing for RAE prizes, and it is conducted only by lecturers with no hope of becoming serious disciplinary researchers. At the same time, I also know HE lecturers for whom engagement with HE/pedagogic research is a source of considerable personal and professional satisfaction, which they insist is *disciplinary* in its orientation and in its contribution, and which serves as valuable ballast within their departments, which might otherwise list away from teaching-mindedness.

So, why should staff and educational developers promote this form of research activity? And would it be a significant loss to the HE sector if it all stopped tomorrow? Does it matter that most HE/pedagogic research conducted by HE practitioners is done *in spite* of the infrastructure rather than because of it? Should we applaud those institutions that encourage lecturers to get involved with HE/pedagogic research, as part of their academic practice? Should we lobby for greater recognition of HE/pedagogic research as a significant and prestigious element of the academic practice of HE lecturers, at national, institutional and departmental levels? The fact is that we don't know what the impact and benefit of these

research activities are. We don't even know how we might measure them, as David Gosling (2006) has pointed out recently.

So, one answer to my questions here is the classic one: *this points to the need for further research*. This is not necessarily an occupational cop-out. If we cut away the layers of personal belief, professional values and career pressures, there is something of an evidence vacuum at the centre of this debate. We need to find out more about the personal stories of practitioner-researchers. We need to find out more about why some institutions value it so highly, beyond the level of reputational positioning: 'Management are very supportive, particularly senior management. They see pedagogic research as a niche

opportunity for raising the scholarly profile of the institution', as one of my respondents commented. And we need to find out what kind of *difference* this research can make, in terms of student learning and the collective professional learning of disciplinary communities. This is an ambitious research agenda, but one that would contribute substantially to a better-informed debate at the level of policy, and to the leadership and support activities of people like me: pedagogic research developers in higher education institutions. A number of pedagogic research developers in different HEIs have recently begun to network with one another in order to share practice and compare circumstances. I should be very pleased to hear from others.

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# The First Year Experience: Approaches to Enhancement

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## Introduction

Research and innovations to enhance the first year experience (FYE) are by no means new phenomena. Work in this area appears to be increasing rather than decreasing, with the Higher Education Academy funded projects (Yorke and Longden, 2007), Scottish enhancement themes (currently including the first year experience) (QAA Scotland, 2007), CETLs and various institutional-based enhancements all focusing efforts into better understanding and improving the student experience. Considerable attention has been given to student retention, progression and achievement, widening participation initiatives and the influence of funding in institutional, national and international research over the last decade. What have we learned, what aspects do we need to find out about and, more importantly, how do we adopt these at a practical level? This article focuses upon this last question by looking at some of the practical ways in which institutions are attempting to improve their first year students' experience within higher education.

Firstly, what do we actually mean by the 'first year experience' and why does it all too often sound as if we're trying to strive for this one ideal experience for all? Clearly institutions are coping with larger numbers of students from increasingly diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, as students

are entering with various learning needs and various aspirations from higher education, the term FYE, implying singularity, appears to be something of a myth and one of which we are all aware (Harvey *et al.*, 2006). Instead, is it not the experiences students have within the first year that are our concerns? How might we enhance these in order to support students in progressing on their programme, developing skills for lifelong learning and ensuring they meet their potential? Although these are by no means the only purposes of the first year, they do demonstrate elements of the challenges we face.


We must also acknowledge that the activities in place to enhance the FYE need to encompass *all* the elements of experience, academic and otherwise. Undeniably, academic factors are the main focus of our efforts as an education institution, but we must also recognise the complex interplay of administrative, social and personal aspects that clearly affect the experiences of first year students, particularly in non-completion.

## Setting off on the pathway

Looking at a variety of literature, it is clear that early student experiences are key to shaping their views and their time in higher education. Even experiences prior to entry are



important to their FYE. For example, a common complaint of students is their lack of understanding when selecting a programme, and then having little knowledge about their chosen programme. Significant issues are often found in the early stages of the student life-cycle, namely pre-entry, induction, the first few weeks, early assessments, the ends of semesters and transition to the following year. This table demonstrates and proposes some activities to help to engage students at some of these stages.



1 Raising aspirations	Outreach work
2 Pre-entry support and guidance	Bridging materials
3 Systems to ease transition	Induction activities
4 Engagement activities – personalising the experience	Mentoring/personal tutoring
5 Feedback and assessment	Formative activities

Table 1 Early student engagement

### Raising aspirations

Much is said about the increasing diversity of the student body and, while this is clearly a positive factor, there is still more we can learn about the demographics of the students entering HE, and in particular our own institutions. Many institutions undertake a great deal of outreach work with schools, colleges and employers to encourage prospective students to consider HE as an accessible pathway for them through talks with current students, student ambassadors and mentors. In particular, considerable work is undertaken with local schools to arrange ‘taster days’ for Year 10 and 11 students to receive a day of university life, covering things to consider when selecting a programme, experiencing learning and teaching approaches in higher education, and being given information about expectations at university.

### Pre-entry support and guidance

From retention and student experience research it is clear that students require support, guidance and engagement prior to the first year of teaching. Institutional research at Middlesex illustrated that many students had different expectations of university life which failed to match the reality. Many had little understanding of the programme they had applied to study and required more to ‘bridge the gap’ from their previous experiences. Therefore Middlesex University adapted Sunderland University’s ‘Getting Started’ pre-entry materials and developed ‘My Middlesex’, which was designed to engage students, manage expectations, and provide guidance materials about the university and their programme. The materials provided initial access to their peers through the university’s virtual learning environment (WebCT). The materials are designed to promote engagement as well as providing content delivery. They comprise three different areas:

1. Materials concerning what is expected of them in HE, *i.e.* what a typical week might include, information and activities about the university, guide to academic terms/jargon
2. Information about the support services available, including finance, childcare, accommodation, learning support and social events offered at the university, with information guides to London and to their particular campus, including social information
3. The last section contains information about their chosen programme, a welcome from their programme leader, what they will be studying week by week and activities involving their programme.

These materials are sent out from August to September with students receiving welcome letters, passwords and information about how the materials can help them.

The intention is also to help the students learn about the culture and ethos of the university, to help promote a sense of belonging to the institution and also to help them to familiarise themselves with our virtual learning environment. These materials were first piloted in one programme during the summer for the 2006-2007 September intake. From the success of this and from what we learned in 2007-2008, we expect them to be in 75% of our undergraduate programmes by 2008-2009. Student feedback shows that, although they were only intended to be of use during the pre-entry period, these materials have been consistently engaged with throughout the first year as an additional tool of support. Furthermore, those who engaged with the materials during this pre-entry period were shown to be more likely to remain than those who had not.

### Easing transition

A plethora of work has been undertaken promoting the usefulness of a clear induction programme without overloading students with information and bureaucratic processes (Harvey *et al.*, 2006). There has been a move towards timely information, moving away from the term ‘induction week’ and instead towards the spiralling of the induction process, providing ‘bite-sized chunks’ of information from before they get to the campus through to on-campus inductions in their first weeks.

The early weeks of enrolment processes and ‘finding your way around’ are thought to be most beneficial when coupled with social and academic integration involving group work and mentor-led sessions, in order to engage students with a variety of aspects of their university life (Whittaker, 2007). Personal Development Profiles are increasingly being used by institutions to encourage students to reflect upon their early weeks in order to learn from their personal progression. An approach taken by Middlesex University is to conduct a ‘programme progress review’ at scheduled points during the first year. Adopted from Cross and Angelo’s (1993) minute paper, it uses a pause in the teaching to ask students to reflect upon three successes and three areas for improvement in a variety of different areas. The earlier sessions focus upon transitional issues whilst later ones focus upon key concepts in subject areas and reflections from assessed work.

## Engagement activities – pro-active tutoring mentors/social/student achievement advisors

Activities to 'personalise' the student experience are significant, as a successful transition into HE relies upon engagement of the individual and belonging to the institution, programme and/or peer groups. Its increasing importance is seen with the work conducted by Knox and Wyper (2007:16) as a part of the enhancement theme of the first year experience. From this work, staff perceptions of the reasons for personalising the student experience emerged in five themes:

- To counter the effects of large class sizes which have risen in the wake of widening participation and massification of HE
- To take account of the preferred learning styles of the individual students
- To engage and empower students by adopting pedagogies which are student-centred, thus shifting the axis of power from the institutions, its staff and its curricula to the individual student
- To exploit the potential benefits of new learning technologies
- To address issues of transition.

Attempts to encourage engagement and to personalise the experience may take the form of pro-active personal tutoring, peer mentoring schemes and academic advisors, all of whom are responsive to the needs of the individual students. Some institutions attempt to personalise the experience by attendance or engagement monitoring and contacting students at different intervals to either note that they have attended classes and encourage them to continue, or to express concerns and invite them in for a one-to-one action planning session with a dedicated advisor to suggest a plan to 'put them on track'.

## Feedback and assessment

We are aware that some students experience difficulties with understanding what is expected from them at university, particularly when it comes to assessments. A common story heard from students is that they are aware they are required to do more work but they're not sure what it should be. Evidence shows that formative assessment, combined with feedback, has an impact upon the quality of learning (Nicol, 2006) and various research projects in this area recommend the need for curriculum design to include early and regular formative assessments. However, in order for formative assessments to be beneficial to students, they need to 'buy' into why these are useful to their learning development. They need to be more than merely summative assessments. For this to happen, it is essential that timely feedback is given, at a stage where improvements can be made and students are expecting it. Taken from Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) eleven conditions under which assessment supports student learning, they propose that feedback:

- Is sufficient (detail, frequency)
- Is provided quickly enough to be useful
- Focuses upon learning rather than marks

- Is linked to assessment criteria
- Makes sense to students
- Is received by students and attended to
- Is acted upon to improve work and learning.

Approaches taken to assessment and feedback are numerous and include the suggestion of self-assessment and peer assessment activities in order to promote the student in having an active role in the processes.

## Conclusion

As the work and research into the FYE increases, an abundance of case studies addressing different aspects of the first year is building up. While these are undeniably useful for the sector and for institutions to learn from one another, it is clearly important for institutions to undertake rigorous internal research in order to learn from their own students, in order to create the most beneficial learning experience for them, whether it be in the FYE or in the programme as a whole. Efforts in this area would be wasted if the subsequent years of the programme were not given the same attention.

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# Book Review

## A Practical Manual for Evaluating Teaching in Higher Education

S. Huntley-Moore and J. Panter

Dublin: AISHE, 2006

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Those readers of *Educational Developments* who experienced the first rounds of Teaching Quality Assessment in England in the early 1990s may recall that there was a system of commissioned 'readers' who, on behalf of HEFCE, would read self-assessment documents where an institution had claimed *excellence* or where they had failed to make a *prima facie* case for *satisfactory*. To facilitate 'readings' the reader had a confidential template to work to which asked whether the institution or the discipline grouping had a system for the peer observation of teaching. Of course, knowledge of this imperative leaked out and templates for the peer observation of teaching and workshops on how to do it were quickly established. This book is a reminder of what the issues are and how to tackle them. With six substantive chapters and seven appendices, this handbook, the outcome of a project funded by the Higher Education Authority for the Republic of Ireland, contains much advice and many ideas about 'good practice' that endure (although the manual also has a number of omissions).

Chapter 1 reminds us of the principles we might work to in the evaluation of teaching and emphasises the importance of identifying our evaluation purpose – summative evaluation of teaching for accountability, or formative evaluation of teaching for improvement, or a mixture? This is a theme that runs throughout the text although the

authors do not engage with the customary third purpose for evaluation – a generative research one. As with the whole text, the authors remind us that the focus might usefully be placed on student learning where teaching is but one variable alongside the quality of the learning environment, departmental culture and the curriculum and so on. They go on to provide a dauntingly comprehensive suggested stakeholder list and their possible roles in this.

Importantly, the authors remind us that collecting data does not automatically provide an evaluation – someone else has to interpret and analyse it. Another important consideration in Chapter 2 – Evaluating Teaching at the Institutional Level – is the significance of viewing the quality of learning and teaching at an institutional level. The authors suggest benchmarking as one approach that might be worth considering and discuss an Australian project involving the participation of 33 of the 36 publicly funded universities in that country, that led to the production of a benchmarking manual which (with some adaptation) could be used in the UK.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 3 continues the discussion of evaluating teaching at Faculty and Departmental levels with an emphasis on learning outcomes, as well as examining how one might look at the potential strategic role for a scheme that evaluates teaching. (A further recommended web resource to support this can be found at <http://www.ucd.ie/quality/reports/qaqiguidelines.doc>)

Chapters 4 and 5 compare formative and summative approaches to evaluating teaching. The discussion of formative evaluation stresses the importance of peer review, looking at teaching roles around course design and administration, learning activities and assessment. The authors also discuss the pros and cons of using student surveys as well as focus groups. This last warrants more detailed discussion. For example, they do not address the importance of the focus group facilitator being independent of the subject of

discussion or the importance of establishing effective ways of recording the discussions. Interestingly, they also introduce 'classroom assessment' – a method common in the USA – and describe the classroom quiz and the minute paper as two techniques that aid formative evaluation.

Chapter 5 identifies a minimum number of dimensions for summative evaluation, recommending a self-report stage, but does not provide model templates for self-evaluation; what it does do is make clear that peer observation should play no part in summative evaluation.

Chapter 6, 'After the Evaluation: feedback loops', does what it says on the tin – it describes the importance of embedding the evaluation of teaching within a feedback-loop framework to ensure that the processes are developmental. The authors note the importance of involving students in these processes and, usefully, they draw on relevant research with 'over-surveyed' students.

The authors describe some of the issues in relation to summative evaluations of teachers, arguing that such schemes require support mechanisms in place before such schemes are initiated and whilst such support might be located in departments, there is no substitute for using a confidential academic or educational development service.

In the concluding chapter, before providing a number of appendices, the authors suggest evaluation of the teacher evaluation processes themselves. They suggest a series of questions resembling those of 'old' quality audit that are, nevertheless, still valid: What are we trying to do? How are we trying to do it? How do we know it works? How do we change in order to improve?

Whilst there is much of value in the Manual there were also some omissions. It would have been interesting and helpful to consider observation of lab and studio work and to discuss how one might evaluate teaching in virtual learning environments. It also would have been

useful to examine in more detail how teaching evaluation might be situated within reflective practice and the development of reflective portfolios. However, overall, the Manual reminds us of important debates and considerations in relation to institutional and departmental schemes for evaluating teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> McKinnon, K. R., Walker, S. H., and Davis, D. (2000) *Benchmarking: a manual for Australian universities*, Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (<http://tinyurl.com/m4n4e>).

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