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Why we need a BProf: the case for a new UK award

Mike Laycock, HE Consultant

Introduction

For many years, Higher Education has been under increasing pressure to demonstrate its relevance, and contribution, to economic growth and regeneration. The rapid evolution of the Foundation Degree (FD) is one example of the Government's increasing emphasis on flexible modes of delivery, such as work-based learning, as important mechanisms for realising the UK's higher skills agenda, enhancing productivity levels and contributing to social justice and accessible opportunities. The recently revised section of the QAA Code of Practice on Work-based and Placement Learning reflects the growth of 'innovative practice in this area' (QAA, 2007:4). The Leitch Review of Skills has presented a challenging agenda for higher education, proposing that in excess of 40% of adults should be qualified to level 4 and above (up from 29% in 2005). Leitch is clear about the role of Foundation Degrees in this future agenda:

'As the Higher Education White Paper stated, new higher education growth should not be "more of the same", based on traditional three-year honours degrees. Rather provision should be based on new types of programme offering specific, job-related skills such as Foundation Degrees.' (Leitch, 2006:67)

This article argues that an appropriate award which reflects and recognises the growth, status and importance of work-based learning is now needed and proposes a BProf or Professional Bachelor's award. The award would clearly represent a departure from 'more of the same'. This article seeks to promote discussion about the development of a framework which extends and develops the current Foundation Degree and attempts to define the concept and principles of the BProf award by drawing on those of Professional Doctorates.

The BProf award

It is proposed that the BProf would be an untitled undergraduate award located at the Honours level of the FHEQ (and equivalent to level 6 within the NQF) and matched to nationally agreed work-based learning indicators (as, for example, currently used in the Learndirect Negotiated Learning Framework).

Of equal academic status to traditional undergraduate awards, the BProf would provide a bespoke progression route from a Foundation Degree and would be reserved for programmes where participants had developed high-level occupational skills and had made a significant contribution to the enhancement of an occupational area, informed by the application, development and testing of theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

The BProf progression route would not normally exceed 1.3 years for a full-time equivalent student in England, and two years in Northern Ireland. Progression may require a bridging programme. Though specifically articulated to FDs, a BProf

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could be articulated to any work-based learning undergraduate programme given the following principles:

- 1 The work-based learning of the BProf would be informed by real world problems in occupational practice, with participants typically being employees who complete the award to advance their career and/or to acquire the high-level skills needed to tackle career changes.
- 2 The programme would comprise a negotiated work-based learning project or projects formulated by the learners themselves (rather than 'assigned') according to their own and the organisation's longer-term goals. The respective interests of the three parties (employee, employer and FEC/HEI) in this negotiated learning would be protected by the use of three-way negotiated learning agreements. The learner would negotiate the purpose, direction and content of the learning, the FEC/HEI providing specialist supervision and access to accreditation, and the employer providing opportunities to learn through work with access to resources and help. The learning agreement could be devised and approved as part of a bridging programme.
- 3 In order to distinguish it from those undergraduate programmes which are accredited by professional bodies and to signify its trans-disciplinary nature, the BProf would be generic and not attached to any particular subject area or profession.
- 4 The BProf would meet the QAA descriptors of honours degree candidates in that, typically, candidates would be able to:
 - apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects
 - critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution – or identify a range of solutions – to a problem
 - communicate information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

Holders of the BProf would also have demonstrated:

- the ability to exercise initiative, personal responsibility, and decision-making in complex and unpredictable circumstances
- the ability to seek solutions to organisational/occupational/professional problems informed by theoretical and conceptual frameworks appropriate to those problems
- the ability to negotiate, by means of a learning agreement, a programme of study to graduate level
- high-level project and programme management skills
- high-level teamwork skills and, where appropriate, leadership skills
- high-level oral and written communication skills
- high-level organisational skills
- an ability to exercise moral and ethical judgements.

The BProf award would be appropriate for students undertaking a final year of work-based learning (e.g. within a placement year) or employees at various stages of their career, progressing from FDs or other appropriate work-based learning programmes.

The case for the BProf: meeting the challenges for Foundation Degrees

Foundation degrees are two-year, 'intermediate level, vocational higher education qualifications which combine academic and work-based learning through close collaboration between employers and universities'. They are intended to give a 'foundation' in a subject that enables the holder to go on to employment in that field.

No one can doubt the steady march of Foundation Degrees. In 2006/7 there were over 2230 Foundation Degrees with a total of 60,925 enrolled students. This reflects a steady rise in enrolment since 2001/2 (Figure 1). There are over 700 new courses in development (HEFCE, 2007).

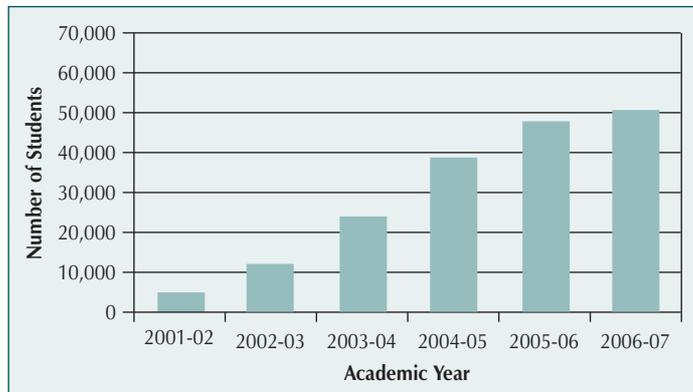


Figure 1 Number of FD students enrolled on Programmes 2001/2-2006/7

The distinctiveness of Foundation Degrees depends upon the integration of:

- partnership (between employers, HEIs, further education colleges and Sector Skills Councils)
- employer involvement in the design and review of programmes
- increasing accessibility through opportunities for learners to 'earn and learn'
- flexible delivery modes and study patterns, including full-time, part-time, distance, work-based, and web-based learning
- articulation and progression.

They are designed to appeal to learners wishing to enter a profession as well as those seeking continuing professional development and are targeted at national and international employment needs. Appropriate academic rigour is a hallmark of FDs where academic knowledge and understanding integrate with, and support the development of, vocational skills and competencies.

A number of challenges remain for FDs. First, there is a concern with apparent 'negative value' of the term Foundation Degree, one that is not well understood, particularly by employers. Longhurst (2007) admits that there is much work for Foundation Degree Forward (fdf) to address:

'The primary objective is to establish a distinctive identity for the Foundation degree and the central focus of the fdf campaign will be the creation of an informed awareness of the qualification amongst employers. One challenge we face is getting employers and others past the negative value represented by the misleading term 'Foundation'. Building upon the research undertaken in preparation for this campaign (please see www.fdf.ac.uk: Navigator research), the emphases will be placed upon the degree identity of the qualification and the integration of work-based learning into a challenging programme of study and development appropriate to higher education.' (Longhurst, 2007)

Second, as Longhurst intimates, the full integration of work-based learning has also presented challenges for Foundation Degrees. There is no doubting the pivotal importance of work-based learning in FDs. The QAA benchmark (2004) for the FD qualification highlights the fact that:

'Authentic and innovative work-based learning is an integral part of Foundation Degrees and their design.' (QAA, 2004)

The Foundation Degree Task Force Report to Ministers (2004) made it clear that:

'A central component of the Foundation Degree is work-based learning. It is the integration of the work and study-based learning elements, not just the work-based experience itself, which is important.' (2004:4)

In addition, Nixon et al. (2006) have asserted that:

'FDs are seen by some as a success story – they have been designed to inculcate a work-based element (underpinned by an academic construct) which sits closely with employer need.' (Nixon et al., 2006:14)

And yet, despite the professed centrality of, and pivotal role played by, work-based learning in FDs, some sources suggest that there is still not a clear understanding of the ways in which work-based learning can be designed, supported and executed. Beaney (2005), for example, has argued that there appear to be 'conceptual confusions' surrounding work-based learning in FDs. The statistics seem to bear out these confusions. In around two-thirds of the FD programmes reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency in 2004/5, 'WBL is highlighted as an area that would benefit from some further development', in particular to address the variability of student experiences across employment locations.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the conceptual fog is the fact that work-based learning itself, after over 15 years development in HE in the UK, still appears to present a challenge to post-compulsory education. As Nixon et al. (2006) concluded:

'...from an academic perspective, work-based learning remains a contested area, not least because it challenges the very essence of universities as the primary source of knowledge.' (Nixon et al., 2006:18)

Third, there are still issues with another of the fundamental tenets of FDs, that of progression and articulation. While FDs are self-standing two-year programmes, located within the Intermediate level of the FHEQ, and are recognised as being generally equivalent to level 5 (of 8) within the NQF (September 2004 version), they are also expected to provide opportunities for further study by linking to at least one programme leading to a bachelor's degree with honours.

It is the use of the word 'normally' which perhaps explains the freedom *not* to secure some form of articulation and progression. HEFCE (2007) notes that only 55% of the students registered at an HEI who qualified with a foundation degree in 2003-2004 went on to study an

honours degree in 2004-2005. However, 81% of those going on to honours courses were credited with the equivalent of two years full-time study on an honours degree programme.

Despite this latter buoyant figure, it could be suggested that the notion of articulation and progression for FDs is not operating as well as expected:

'The low graduation rate for those progressing to the final year of an honours programme reflects the need for development in articulation between foundation degree and honours programmes.' (HEFCE, 2007)

The proposed BProf, then, will hopefully address these three challenges for FDs:

1. the status of, and degree of 'informed awareness' (Longhurst, 2007) about, FDs
2. the 'conceptual confusions' and need for further development related to work-based learning
3. the need for further development in articulation between FDs and honours degree programmes.

Parallels with Professional Doctorates

In determining the need for an undergraduate version of the Professional Doctorate this article also seeks to draw parallels between the nature and purpose of the award and those proposed for the BProf. The award will carry status if its principles and purposes mirror those of the Professional Doctorate.

As with the context proposed for the BProf, Professional Doctorates are situated within occupational or professional practice. Participants are required to evidence that, through their studies and by applying and testing existing and new theories, they have made a significant contribution to the profession or occupation and improvements or changes in their organisation or working practices which can be applied elsewhere. The ProfDoc signifies an original contribution to knowledge about practice and for practice. Scott *et al.* (2004), for example, define the Professional Doctorate as:

'...an untitled award at Level D reserved for programmes where students have made a significant contribution to the enhancement of an occupational or professional area through the application, development and testing of theoretical frameworks.' (Scott *et al.*, 2004:2)

Professional Doctorates are a growing presence in UK HE provision from their origins in the US and further development in Australia. The recent QAA consultation paper on doctoral degrees (QAA, 2007) also notes their more recent development in Europe. Hoddell's (2001) survey, conducted on behalf of the UK Council for Graduate Education, revealed that there has been rapid growth in the UK since the 1990s, having increased from 109 in 1998 to 192 in 2004. In 2000, 70% of UK universities were offering at least one ProfDoc.

They have grown for similar reasons to the FDs. The National Qualification Authority describes the reasons advanced by Scott *et al.* (2004) for the emergence of the Professional Doctorate as:

'...the changing roles of the university and society in the production and use of knowledge, pressures for diversification and more professionally relevant programmes, massification of higher education, demand from some professions and workplace requirements for high level skills and knowledge, the wider acceptance of the concepts of "evidence-based" practice and the "reflective practitioner" by professionals and the development of work-based learning.' (NQA, 2006:3)

As with that proposed for the BProf, participants take their own work as a work-based project. Lester (2004) notes:

'In all cases, the research is informed by real world problems in professional practice, and the participants are typically experienced professionals who take the degree to advance their career and/or to acquire the high level skills they need to tackle work-based challenges. At their best, professional doctorates are "based on development projects which result in substantial organizational or professional change and...a significant contribution to practice".' (Lester, 2004)

It has been proposed that the BProf would be generic and trans-disciplinary. While for most ProfDocs, reference to the specific profession in the title is the norm (for example EngD, DClinPsy, EdD, DSW, DBA), in their study, Powell and Long (2005) also found examples of generic professional doctorates and that:

'...such an award is typically either (i) a set of professional doctorates collected together and delineated from the PhD or (ii) a generic notion of doctoral study within professional domains in which an individual candidate negotiates a programme of study that is at doctoral level, makes use of core modules on methodology etc. and is within his/her particular profession.' (Powell and Long, 2005:16)

This kind of generic programme operates, for example, at Middlesex University's Institute of Work-based Learning and is:

'...able to accommodate candidates from a wide range of professional areas in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Its generic form has application to any field and is predicated on a form of trans-disciplinarity...' (Costley and Stephenson, 2005:2)

Many have commented on the need for ProfDocs to be trans-disciplinary rather than specific to one profession. Kemp (2002), for example, suggests that by their very nature, many professions often draw upon a number of disciplines to create a basis of knowledge, rather than professional knowledge being contained within a single discipline. Green, Maxwell and Shanahan (2001) contend that professional doctorates need to be trans-disciplinary in order to be of substantive value to the profession. Central Queensland University announces that its Professional Doctorate is 'explicitly trans-disciplinary', reflecting the 'fragmentation of the disciplinary universe underway and the complexity of the circumstances in most occupations and fields today' (http://www.profdoc.cqu.edu.au/what_makes.htm). The same reasons are advanced for the trans-disciplinary importance of the proposed BProf.

CQU also suggests that its Professional Doctorate draws on the distinction between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge. The Professional Doctorate, it contends, is typically Mode 2, applied and trans-disciplinary. Mode 2 knowledge draws on and is usually developed by university-generated knowledge and skills and is the identification and solution of practical problems in the day-to-day life of its practitioners and organisations, rather than being focused on the academic interests of a discipline or community.

Latterly, some authors have pointed to the evolution of Professional Doctorates from first to third generation (Figure 2). The first generation are said to be characterised as only structurally different from PhDs because they involved the privileging of academic over professional knowledge and outputs. Maxwell and Shanahan (1996) suggest that they ‘appeared to be dominated by academe’ (p.138). The ‘second generation’ are characterised by a shift in the relationship between the university and the workplace with a greater emphasis on partnership and a broader and more complex understanding of the production of new knowledge. In this sense Foundation Degrees might be said to parallel the evolution of ProfDocs, with some FDs still dominated by academe in their design and others clearly fulfilling the dominant FD discourse which centres on the notion of partnership and key references to the involvement of employers in design, delivery and assessment:

‘...it is important that employers are fully involved in the design and regular review of Foundation Degree programmes. It is beneficial if employers are involved, where possible, in the delivery and assessment of the programme and the monitoring of students, particularly within the workplace.’ (QAA, 2004)

Stephenson et al. (2004) have proposed a third generation of professional doctorates in which control of content, research method, context, assessment, and partnership between university and the profession lies with the participant as the ‘principal agent of control of a programme’ within a generic framework of procedures and support offered by the university. This is precisely what is proposed for the BProf.

Figure 2

First Generation Mode 1	Second Generation Mode 2	Third Generation Mode 3
Entails coursework but not very different from PhDs in that they privilege Mode 1 academic over professional knowledge. Coursework assessment. Academy has primary role in development and knowledge production	Increased flexibility of delivery. More integration with the professional workplace. Portfolio assessment. Emphasis on partnership co-production of new, trans-disciplinary, Mode 2 knowledge	‘Partnership’ notion is replaced by negotiation of content, research method, context, assessment. Control is learner-managed within a framework of procedures and support provided by the university

In the learner-managed learning of the third generation of ProfDocs, the notion of partnership is replaced by the dominant notion of negotiation. Both these approaches appear in the discourse of FDs but that of partnership appears to prevail. However, the QAA (2004) declares that:

‘Students can have an important part in negotiating programmes of study to meet their own learning needs in both the work and academic learning environments. These learning needs can be achieved, with guidance and agreement from the institution and employer, through learning contracts.’

I suggest that within this discourse lies one of the major confusions about work-based learning which the proposed BProf is designed to address. While the benchmark suggests that students *can* have (not will have) an important part in negotiation, Brennan and Little (1996) suggest that the presence of negotiation between the participant, the academy and the employer characterises and distinguishes work-based learning from other forms of learning. Reeve and Gallacher (2000) have shown how their case study prompted the notion that the idea of negotiation supersedes the theme of partnership ‘as a means of implementing and regulating flexibility’. Usher and Solomon (1999) offer another perspective on the process of negotiation underlying work-based learning awards which ‘lie at the intersection of different sites of surveillance, the university and the workplace’ (Reeve and Gallacher, 2000). For them, the process is potentially a:

‘...tension-filled struggle over meanings and interpretations derived from different sites of surveillance which seek to shape learner subjectivity in different ways.’ (Reeve and Gallacher, 2000:5)

Perhaps the most important educational principle of the proposed BProf is that it provides an opportunity, in Freirean (1970) terms, to sponsor transformational learning, whereas the current discursive framework for FDs seems geared towards the ‘domestication’ of students in an ‘economically driven conceptualisation of Lifelong Learning’ (Doyle, 2003).

The requirement that negotiated work-based learning is an integral and dominant feature of the proposed BProf will provide an important arena for contestation and debate about that nature and creation of ‘legitimate knowledge’. In the future much, no doubt, will depend on continuing to establish the epistemological legitimacy of work-based learning as to whether the potentially expansive and challenging nature of the proposed BProf will be realised. But the contention is that if the learner has a ‘sense of agency in critical environments’ (Stephenson et al., 2004), then enrichment of the workplace will take place.

In essence, the proposed BProf is intended to signify a ‘coming of age’ of work-based learning at undergraduate level; it will hopefully signal the importance of the control

and agency of the learner working with the employer and the academy in undertaking transformational learning, and will provide Foundation Degrees with a progression route which further supports their future development.

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Developing Academic Managers

Julie Hall, University of Roehampton

This article is a report of a SEDA National Seminar at Birmingham University on 17 July 2008.

In response to a need identified amongst SEDA members, a national seminar was held to explore the issues in developing academic staff as managers, to share some examples of good practice and hear more about the role of SEDA's Professional Development Framework in relation to this.

Presentations from Rachel Kynaston from Liverpool John Moores University and Corony Edwards from Birmingham University (who also provided the venue) provided a welcome focus for possible ways forward and the event also provided opportunities for delegates to plan ahead in their institution alongside their peers. Many people came with representatives from their Human Resources Department, and this contributed a particular richness to the discussions.

What follows is a report which highlights some of the key areas of discussion and ideas for ways forward. SEDA aims to repeat the seminar again in the coming academic year.

Context

- Moving academic staff into areas of unknowing and re-knowing is a challenge
- There is little evidence across the sector of the impact of appraisal or traditional management training on the effectiveness of those managing academic programmes or academic departments. Anecdotally, people report lack of enthusiasm and scepticism
- Academic manager roles are key in establishing cultural change in an HEI
- There are disciplinary differences in the conceptions of and responsiveness to continuing professional development (some academics see themselves working

at a university not for a university, for example)

- Language is very important and thus external providers should be used with care
- A values-based approach ensures that the focus remains upon improving the student experience
- Many universities report a move to the creation of full-time management posts to replace rotating HoDs and Dean roles
- A minority of universities reported beginning to explore management competencies or capabilities to address management behaviours.

Some fundamentals which have proved successful elsewhere

Senior management commitment is key

Example: At Manchester Metropolitan University all subject heads and new PLs (L&T) attend a compulsory management development programme which begins with a presentation/discussion with the VC and DVC on strategic priorities. This is followed by action-learning sets – supported by the L&T Unit and coaching to support participants, who work in small groups on projects linked to strategic priorities. The outcomes of these are presented back to the VC and DVC at the end of the programme. Projects have included e-learning, employability, work-based learning.

A core value underpins all development

Example: At Liverpool John Moores all development for staff relates to 'putting students first' and thus student evaluations, NSS survey results and student consultants play a role in the management development programme, which is compulsory for all new subject heads and those running large courses. Management development is also linked to the employee life-cycle and HR processes such as induction, probation and

appraisal. Appraisal has been adapted to alert staff and line managers to development opportunities and the need for succession planning. Line managers are provided with University staff demographics to highlight inequalities and imbalances in age profiles (many staff are due to retire in next 5-10 years).

Language is important for 'buy in' from academic staff

Example: At Cambridge University, academics with a research interest in professional development or senior academics who have used appraisal or management development with their own staff are recruited to help deliver the training. A Professor talks through the way he has used appraisal to change direction in his department and a change management session begins with the academic context and is delivered by an academic from the School of Education. These sessions have proved much more popular than those delivered by expensive management consultants.

Compulsory senior staff programmes can create leadership and strategic buy-in

Example: At Middlesex University a restructuring resulted in eight heads of department (three new). All were asked by the VC to attend an overnight off-site event on strategic priorities with the University senior team, followed by action-learning sets and coaching to follow through restructuring issues. All eight came back together with the senior management at the end of the programme six months later. The programme was facilitated by the Leadership Foundation which was 'expensive but worth it'. At Kingston University a compulsory senior staff conference brings together the senior management team, Deans and Directors and Subject Heads for an evening and one day. Presentations have included internal examples of programmes which have tackled retention but also external speakers on

change management and creativity. All promoted managers have to attend a half-day workshop on budgeting with Head of Finance and one on strategic issues relating to the student experience led by the Head of Academic Practice and the DVC.

Link to UK professional standards for learning and teaching, MA/EdD programmes and nationally recognised qualifications for QA and transportability

Example: At Wolverhampton the Learning and Teaching in HE qualification has been expanded to include a postgraduate academic leadership module, and other education Master's modules attract staff, including one on embedding new technology into HE teaching, and the EdD is providing an academic route for professional practice in HE. The SEDA Professional Development Programme is used extensively at Liverpool John Moores.

Research and evaluation throughout

Example: At Liverpool John Moores all programmes are evaluated and comparative studies are made between those who have attended and those who haven't. A baseline of activity has been established prior to the setting up of the programmes to attempt to chart impact on the student and staff experience.

Some suggestions for moving forward

Short Term

- Use the EDU and HR for middle management academic professional development as a central aspect of enhancing learning and teaching and improving the student experience
- Commission an internal investigation to review current management development opportunities for subject heads, deans and assistant deans
- Pilot new approaches and seek external accreditation through SEDA PDF
- Put 'improving the student experience' at the core of all training and development
- Review all external trainers involved in management development to ensure that they understand the academic context and HE work on professional learning. Consider co-opting internal academic staff with professional development expertise or experience
- Ensure that all management development includes the University academic context and University core values
- Ensure that new PLs and subject heads are mentored and have an induction focusing on strategic priorities, change management and

academic context. Support them through the VLE and the EDU

- Hold a compulsory senior staff conference.

Long Term

- Consider the development of a programme for all University senior managers building upon the success of action learning sets, but which include an 'away day' on strategy and planning (based upon the Middlesex model)
- Review HR processes around the employee life-cycle to ensure a holistic approach to management development and links with UK Professional Standards etc.
- Review the IT infrastructure of these processes
- Include succession planning in department plans
- Consider the creation of modules within the MA Education or Business for those wanting academic credit for HE management development (reflecting the Wolverhampton model)
- Create an overarching professional development scheme for all university academic staff from induction to retirement.

Julie Hall is Head of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit at Roehampton University, and Chair of SEDA's Conferences and Events Committee.

SEDA Membership Survey

Phil Poole, Chair, SEDA Membership Committee

When SEDA's Membership Committee was formed in September 2007, its terms of reference were, amongst other things, to develop a greater understanding of the sector and the role of SEDA in it through managing and collating market research. To support this, the Committee conducted a survey of existing SEDA members, using a web-based instrument, in April 2008. 29% of the members and 24% of the institutional members completed the survey.

What did the survey tell us?

- that beyond institutional and individual membership the categories were confusing. The Associate category is not achieving its objective of creating a network of associates within their institutions who engage with SEDA and receive its materials
- that half of SEDA's institutional members locate themselves in 'Educational Development Units', and half are in a variety of other roles such as staff development, but not necessarily in units
- that half of its members first came across SEDA by 'word of mouth', with SEDA's activities such as conferences and publications being less important as means of introduction. Members then went on to join and stay in SEDA because of the opportunities it offered for networking and for professional and career development
- that the institutional contact not only makes the key decision about subscription and renewal for the institution, but has an influence on renewal decisions amongst Associate and sometimes individual members

- that both institutional and individual members see SEDA's benefits in similar ways. The six main benefits are almost equally valued – they are Educational Developments, Networking, Conferences, SEDA Specials and Papers, and the two Journals *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* and the *International Journal of Academic Development*
- that amongst SEDA's activities, the Workshops and Events are the most highly valued, followed by the Fellowship scheme and the Professional Development Framework, and then the Courses and the Summer School
- and that overall SEDA membership was seen as good value for money.

What issues arose from the survey?

- that a lot depends on how well the institutional contact actively exploits the benefits of SEDA membership within their institution, and that the category of Associate Membership needs consideration
- that SEDA has the potential to expand its membership to include learning and teaching coordinators, learning technologists, staff developers and colleagues in Subject Centres, CETLs and HR
- that potential members are most likely to engage through personal contact, word of mouth and networking opportunities
- that the membership would be improved through more active use of the web site – for example, that Educational Developments could be available as a searchable archive, and that consideration could be given to making Papers and Specials electronically available
- that through the provision of an electronic mailing list for contacts, the news, flyers and adverts, registration forms and other materials sent out monthly should be distributed electronically, to make it easier for institutional contacts to pass these on to a broader range of colleagues with an interest on educational development
- that the career and personal development opportunities of serving on SEDA's committees could be made more explicit
- that SEDA should work to be perceived as a primary source of support and guidance for colleagues who are operating at Descriptor 3 of the UK Professional Standards Framework.

What did the free-text comments tell us?

'In my view, the key issue is for colleagues to actually perceive their role as involving staff and educational development, and/or even more problematic, as an educational developer. My first step would therefore be to talk to colleagues about the fact that there is such a thing as an educational developer, and that it is possible to have a career as one, and that SEDA can help them with their

professional development for such a career.'

'Our own experience of engagement with SEDA has had both individual benefits to staff but also critical benefits to the institution in supporting it to develop an institutional CPD framework – in particular the SEDA PDF, the support associated with it, its flexibility, relevance, scope, and the benchmarking/networking of practitioners across the sector are particularly valued.'

'Great organisation run by a very altruistic group of people who care passionately about HE Education. The more you put in the more you get out. Membership means contributing actively. We need to make all members feel they can contribute.'

'There seems to be some overlap between SEDA and the HEA – not always clear who is responsible for what and consequently the benefits of becoming members.'

'Extremely supportive and helpful organisation. Should be something many more people should join.'

'With SEDA, you get more out if you put more in. There are so many conferences, organisations etc. it is only once you become involved quite closely with SEDA that its true value becomes clear.'

What next?

The detailed results of the Survey are now being considered by SEDA's Committees and will be reviewed at SEDA's annual planning event in the autumn. Work on upgrading the web site is already in hand. Of course, SEDA always welcomes comments, suggestions, feedback and guidance from its members, either directly to the Executive Committee (office@seda.ac.uk) or to the Membership Committee at the same address.

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Information for Contributors

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

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'The World Is Watching This Work'

Roni Bamber, Heriot Watt University

Introduction

Tom Haffie (University of Western Ontario) gave an inspirational kick-start to the Enhancement Themes (ET) 08 conference, telling the Scottish HE Community that 'the world is watching this work'. He was referring to the unique enhancement-led approach that has characterised our quality assurance systems for the last five years. The Enhancement Themes are one of five aspects of the Quality Enhancement Framework, which aims to:

- 'address the problems and challenges inherent in twenty-first century mass and global higher education
- find high quality and effective solutions to improve the student experience
- be more efficient and effective in delivering transformational change.' (Quality Enhancement Framework, 2006)

The uniqueness of Scotland's Enhancement Theme culture is probably only clear to those, like Tom, who inhabit other quality cultures, or who have long enough memories to remember what preceded it. For instance, the Themes, although organised by QAA Scotland, are characterised by sector-wide involvement which puts much of the decision-making about the Themes in the hands of five partner bodies:

- the Scottish Funding Council
- Universities Scotland
- QAA Scotland
- Higher Education Academy
- NUS Scotland.

What seems, perhaps, like a (potentially) politically explosive mix of bodies appears to have found a *modus vivendi* in the ET set-up – perhaps in the common realisation that working towards quality enhancement together is better than battling over quality assurance. All of the groups are represented on SHEEC, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee, which manages and plans the ET approach. The process is also made easier by the small number of

HEIs in Scotland (20). Previous Themes were *Integrative Assessment, Flexible Delivery, Employability, Responding to Student Needs* and *Assessment*. Current Themes are *The First Year* (just finishing) and *Research-Teaching Linkages* (which will finish in autumn 2008). The new Theme which is about to start is called *Quality Cultures and Systems and Structures for Enhancement*. Details of all of these Themes, and reports/publications/resources from each of them, can be found on the Enhancement Themes website.

The highlight of the ET year is the annual Conference, when those involved in the current themes come together to disseminate their findings and discuss ideas with colleagues across the sector. This brief article will cover some of the highlights of the two days of the March 2008 annual conference, covering the Themes of *The First Year* and *Research-Teaching Linkages*.

The First Year

Tom Haffie's presentation was, on the surface, about how to use Personal Response Systems ('clickers') to engage students in lectures. He very ably demonstrated some of the techniques he uses with his (well attended!) 800-student classes, and had the participants intrigued by test questions related to hypothetical male-female proportions in the population. Conference delegates voted to agree or disagree with the assertion that if families had to stop having children as soon as they had a female child, then current male-female population proportions would continue. We all left the session arguing about the topic, demonstrating Tom's key point: that technology can contribute to lectures being lively, discursive occasions, rather than delivery events, even when large numbers of participants are involved. Tom also emphasised the importance of lecturers themselves having satisfying teaching experiences, citing a number of writers, including Palmer's (1998) concepts of 'generativity' (creativity by elders, in the service of the young) and 'the courage to teach'. Tom's

presentation, and those of the other speakers, can be found on the Conference website.

The first day of the conference also showcased a number of projects sponsored by the First Year Theme, which ran from late 2005, with final reports available in 2008. The Theme, and the keynote speech on the topic by the Theme Leader, Professor Terry Mayes, focused on how to enable first year students to achieve their maximum potential, rather than just 'get through' – what Mayes called an emphasis on success, rather than on avoidance of failure.

The First Year – Academic Writing

The First Year Theme projects are now fairly mature in their stage of development, since the project leaders have been working on their topics for almost two years. For example, Fran Alston and Karen Thomson (Napier University) have looked at how to embed scholarship skills institutionally. Their university was building scholarship development into curriculum review, linking scholarship skills to employability and generic skills: in fact, in both the First Year and the Research-Teaching Linkages (RTL) workshops, it was clear that all the strands under consideration were linked, and part of a spectrum. The spectrum starts with transition into HE and the development of scholarship in the First Year, through to the graduate attributes which are the focus of the RTL theme, and on to the employability of our graduates post-university (*Employability* was a theme in 2004/5).

One of the challenges for all of us is how to focus our efforts to coordinate the whole spectrum of needs. For Alston and Thomson, the key was academic writing, which they saw as the point at which students could demonstrate that they had achieved the intended learning outcomes. They highlighted the importance of building academic communities and academic literacies, and of using an embedded approach where possible – although

they were realistic about the significant barriers which hinder the adoption of such an optimistic, holistic approach. Conference attendees had many opportunities to offer their ideas and solutions; for example, I heard a lecturer from RSAMD advocate the development of writing from the first term of the first year, not in the third year. A recent innovation for her students was the introduction of summaries of reflective journals from the very start of their course. Workshop attendees agreed that students needed to learn the academic 'grammar' (paraphrasing Farrell, 2000) of their discipline early on – even if academics themselves speak different dialects of that language. Dialect differences include citation and referencing conventions – even within subject disciplines – and expectations of what students could and should write. It was suggested that, while students need to learn to manage ambiguity and appreciate the complexities of academic work, a basic set of parameters could be agreed, for example within a faculty. These parameters would reduce linguistic 'noise', i.e. distractions or misconceptions which detract from good communication, and help students and staff to achieve shared meanings and approaches to skills like writing.

The First Year – Posters

As well as workshops on a range of projects, almost 40 posters were presented, making it difficult to know whether to talk to colleagues or look at some of the really interesting posters during breaks. The posters were both generic, e.g. *Supporting the First Year Experience* (Aberdeen University), *The First Year Experience for Distance Students* (Open University), *Coaching to Enhance Student Learning* (RGU), *Variations in Grading* (Glasgow University), and subject-specific. Examples of the latter were *Wiki Use in Veterinary Pathology* (University of Edinburgh), *Pre-entry Contact with First Year Engineering Students* (University of Glasgow) and *Wiki Use in Combined Physics Labs/ Tutorials for First Year* (Glasgow). For me, if there had been a prize for best poster title, it would have gone to *Mammoths and Tigers and Quests, oh my!...and a little dog too: research-enhanced teaching of introductory programming* by Coull et al. (University of Abertay). Unusually (in

my experience) most of these posters were excellent, and perhaps deserved more time for viewing and discussion.

Like the project workshops, the posters encapsulated key issues and how specific institutions or departments were dealing with them. For example, Chirnside et al.'s poster entitled *Signposts to Success: Helping Students Get Prepared* offered a useful diagrammatic summary of what they felt their first year students needed (and I hope they will forgive my rather more amateur depiction, see Figure 1). For the original version see <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/documents/AETC2008/poster%20abstracts.pdf>

The First Year – Plenary

An upbeat note was struck at the end of the First Year day by Randy Swing (Executive Director, Association for Institutional Research, Florida). Randy informed attendees that the US has been static on the First Year for 10 years, while the papers for this Theme show that Scotland has made significant steps forward. He felt that some of the things we had got 'right' were:

- the power of peer working
- a coordinated approach
- tackling issues both in and outside the classroom
- multiple L&T methods
- that the focus has been on all students, not just those at risk.

Randy offered the metaphor of Momentum Theory, based on work by Collins (2001). The key element in Momentum Theory is the fly wheel (a heavy weight which stores energy, and is difficult to get moving, but hard to stop once moving). Students who struggle and don't achieve enough credits in the First year suffer from not getting the momentum to get their 'fly wheel' moving. Equally, students with a low grade point average (including those who proclaim 'I only need to get 40%') have less chance of finishing up with a degree. Randy's ideas on how students can be helped to gain momentum included creating a sense of social belonging (e.g. in the US, by being part of a sorority/fraternity), or offering students summer modules so they can study at a pace which suits them. He asked what the accelerators and brakes were for students in Scotland – what helps the fly wheel get going? He suggested that two key issues (which have been partly addressed in the Theme) relate to transition to university – we haven't yet linked up the stages – and social norming. This is about helping students realise what is 'normal', and about correcting misconceptions. Students may behave according to a perceived norm (e.g. 'everyone drinks too much at university'; 'nobody does much work for their assignments'), which can jeopardise their chances of success. He offered ideas for confronting such misconceptions from

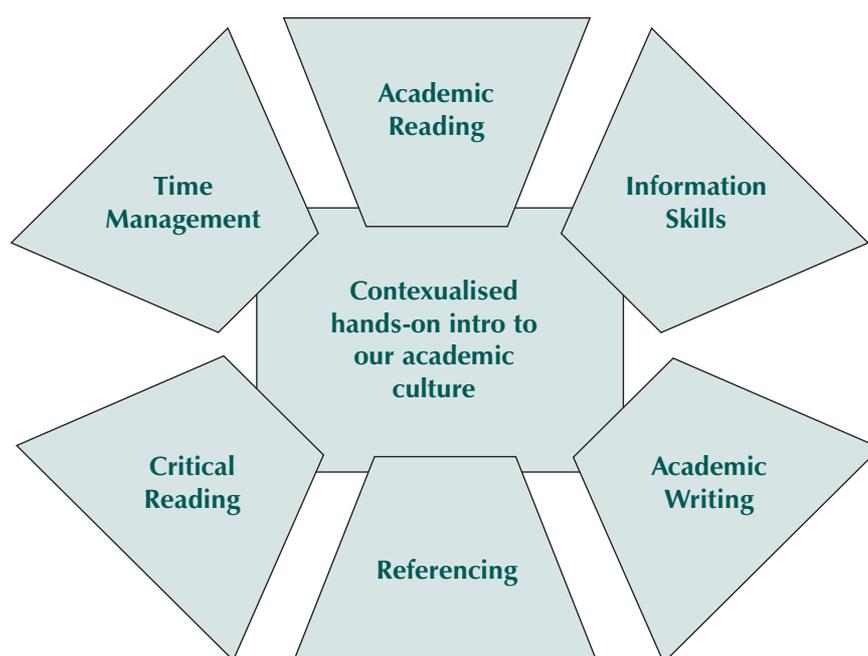


Figure 1 Signposts to Success poster

Ball State University, Indiana, which runs the MAP-Works programme, and where students undertake self and peer assessment of the type:

1. What grades do you think you'll earn this semester? [mostly As: students tend to over-predict on the basis of what they got in high school]
2. What do you think most other students will get?
3. Now here's the profile of last year's students, and here's how you fit in.

The First Year – Other Activities

An innovative aspect of the First Year Theme which was not presented directly at the Conference, but which came out in workshop discussions, was the provision of small grants to each institution, to allow them to develop the First Year agenda in their own context. For example, at Heriot-Watt University, bids were invited for the small project fund and the grant was given to the Students' Association. They surveyed first years across the University, and the report is being used to inform future strategy. So, although the First Year Theme has formally come to an end, institutional projects are still running and some continuation funding has been provided to allow this to happen.

At undergraduate level:

- Critical understanding
- Informed by current developments in the subject
- An awareness of the provisional nature of knowledge, how knowledge is created, advanced and renewed, and the excitement of changing knowledge
- The ability to identify and analyse problems and issues and to formulate, evaluate and apply evidence-based solutions and arguments
- An ability to apply a systematic and critical assessment of complex problems and issues
- An ability to deploy techniques of analysis and enquiry
- Familiarity with advanced techniques and skills
- Originality and creativity in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence-based solutions and arguments

- An understanding of the need for a high level of ethical, social, cultural, environmental and wider professional conduct.

And at Master's level:

- Conceptual understanding that enables critical evaluation of current research and advanced scholarship
- Originality in the application of knowledge
- The ability to deal with complex issues and make sound judgments in the absence of complete data (from Enhancement Theme RTL website).

Research-Teaching Linkages – The Projects

The second innovation was to focus not only on the generic Theme, but also on subject-discipline projects to report on RTLs across Scotland. The discipline groupings were not easy to categorise, but constraints meant that it was not possible to have the same number of groupings as, for example, the HEA Subject Centres. The websites of the nine discipline projects, each led by a Project Leader from a different institution, can be found at the Activities section of the RTL web pages.

Each of these groups reported on its findings at the Conference, giving examples of good practice and patterns they had found. This is not to say the Project Directors had an easy job; there is probably a level of apathy in the sector, after five years of the Themes, to yet another call for case studies or 'good practice'. An interesting focus for the Project Directors, however, was to identify the graduate attributes in their subject(s), and suggest how these attributes could be developed in their courses. Not surprisingly, the picture from, for example, Physical Sciences was different from the picture from Arts and Social Sciences since each reflected the philosophical and epistemological characteristics of their fields.

As with the other ETs, the challenge for RTLs was not just to uncover interesting ideas or case examples, but to work out how to engage staff across the sector with the Theme. The

subject-discipline approach was one strategy, and these discipline projects will be disseminated among their disciplinary communities. In several cases, the HEA Subject Centres were involved, and this will surely facilitate dissemination. The Conference gave project directors and other academics the chance to discuss their project findings as they were approaching the end of their project activity. Project reports will be published in Autumn 2008.

A further project, an overarching sector-wide study, was conducted by Professors Ray Land and George Gordon of Strathclyde University. Ray and George provided an overview of RTLs conceptually and empirically, both in the UK and internationally, and this fed into the work of the discipline projects. This relieved the discipline project directors from doing basic research into non-discipline-specific aspects of the Theme. Professor Alan Jenkins acted as Consultant/Advisor to both the Discipline Projects and the Institutional Contacts who coordinated their institution's contact with the Theme.

Research-Teaching Linkages – Final Plenary

The final session of the RTL day included a presentation by Calvin Smith (Griffith University, Australia) with his insights into the challenge of embedding graduate attributes into the curriculum, and the necessary alignment of 'purpose, policy, conception, curriculum strategy, QA and QE' to ensure a successful outcome. Calvin argued that to achieve this alignment, an 'organisational development perspective' was required, with accompanying professional development for staff. This professional development should focus on knowledge about curriculum and course design, independent and collaborative approaches to curriculum design and on collective approaches to the integration of courses into programmes. An agreed understanding of what these 'Graduate Attributes' are is also required and a variety of attributes was discussed. The use of mapping across the programme was proposed as a means to ensure that all elements

of the course contained these GAs, and the development of a 'learning community ethos' to support the development of students within an RTL-based curriculum was encouraged.

The Student Voice

Since 'the student voice' is an integral component of the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework, student leaders attended the conference, in representation of the student body, and contributed a great deal. In fact, one of the keynote speakers on the second day of the conference (Liam Burns, President of the Students' Association at Heriot-Watt University) laid out a number of challenges for the institutions present in his presentation on 'Empowering, Engaging and Developing Students'. Liam gave his version of the Jenkins *et al.* (2007) research-teaching links matrix and threw down the gauntlet to those attending to think not in terms of rhetoric and self-evidently good ideas, but to tackle the real practical issue of making the Themes real for the students who experience Scottish higher education.

All done bar the shouting?

By the end of this year's ET Conference, it was clear that, while lots of hard thinking and talking had been done, no-one was complacent about having all the right answers. The plenary discussion sessions raised a number of issues which conference attendees were still grappling with. Examples were:

- Do we set high enough expectations for our students, and is the first year challenging enough? To what extent is there a mismatch between what students bring with them from school, and what we then offer in universities?
- The First Year and RTL Themes have taught us a great deal about the literature on these topics, about approaches in other countries, and about practice in Scotland. So how do we overcome the difficulties of translating this knowledge –

which is still in the possession of the subset of staff who have chosen to access it via the themes – into real improvements in what our students experience? Embedding and extending engagement with the Themes is a real challenge, as recognised by the SFC Review of the QEF (2007) which talked of 'the uncertain relationship between the enhancement themes and daily practices'. Part of this challenge lies in how to make our learning from the Themes systemic: if it is optional information, then it will probably be used by those who are already L&T champions.

- An implicit theory of change behind the Themes is that of transfer. The implication is that we can learn from what has been done elsewhere, and transfer it to our own contexts. But, of course, much is 'lost in translation', and so more hard thinking is required as to how to help L&T professionals develop their own take on the Themes, and decide how they can apply the thinking to their own specific teaching.

The Future

The Quality Enhancement Framework has been reviewed by the Scottish Funding Council (see http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info_circulars/sfc/2007/sfc1107/sfc1107.html). The review felt a strength of the whole Quality Enhancement Framework was:

'...a theory of educational change that placed far more weight on consensual approaches than on the more coercive stances embedded in some quality assurance regimes.' (Scottish Funding Council, 2007)

And there is a commitment to 'the long run'. There has been substantial consultation about how the sector would like to see the Enhancement Theme initiative taken forward, with a general feeling that the sector would like more time to work on each of the Themes. So the rapid turnover of

Themes in the last five years is set for a more realistic pace, and we can assume that the Enhancement Theme Conference will be one opportunity to discuss not only the Theme of the moment, but also the way these Themes can best be used.

Acknowledgement

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Placing student voices at the heart of institutional dialogue

Anne Oxley and Abbi Flint, Sheffield Hallam University



Working with a Dialogue Sheet at the SEDA Spring Conference

(This article is based on a workshop delivered by the two authors at the SEDA Spring Conference 2008 on Engaging with Student Expectations (Flint and Oxley, 2008).)

Many of us face an increasingly difficult challenge in making it possible for students to attend staff development events and to participate in activities. Students have many pressures on their time and our experience at Sheffield Hallam University shows that although we can always identify many willing students who want to participate in and contribute to one-day events, the reality is that they are often unable to, as they have academic studies, assessments, part-time jobs, family commitments and often volunteering or Students' Union activities, all of which make competing demands on their time.

However, placing the student voice at the heart of institutional dialogue remains extremely important to us so we are constantly looking at creative ways to bring the student voice to conversations about educational

change. In this article we describe just one way of achieving that through an activity which is set in the context of an innovative and aspirational response to the National Student Survey (NSS) at our institution, and which uses a particular tool (Dialogue Sheets) to engage staff in dialogue.

The evidence to inform the content of this dialogue tool came directly from research with current final year students, the NSS free text comments, and voices from the sector about the student experience. In describing how we have used the tool in this particular context we have focused on how students feed back into our institution; how staff respond to and act on that feedback; and how to identify ways to close the feedback loop by reflecting the institution's responses back to the students.

Setting the context

It is important in understanding our approaches to institutional dialogue to first have a brief overview of the authors' areas of work, the institution and our perspective on working with aspects of the NSS.

Sheffield Hallam University

Sheffield Hallam is a post-92 institution with 30,000 students, 4,000 staff and a good reputation around learning and teaching, particularly e-learning. We place a strong focus on employability and have partnerships with organisations and industries regionally, nationally and internationally. The authors both belong to an Educational Change Team within the university's educational development unit (the Learning and Teaching Institute). Broadly, our remit is to work with colleagues at all levels in the university to develop and articulate approaches to educational change which result in large scale and significant impact. One of the aims of our LTA Strategy is to be evidence-informed, with a strong focus on evaluating the impact of change. This encompasses an appreciation of the role of conversation and dialogue in cultural change (Ford, 1999; Shaw, 2002) and working with students as agents of, and advocates for, change.

We have both been involved in various work around the NSS for some time, taking an approach which agrees with Prosser (2005: 1) in focusing on 'interpreting the results as indicators of student experiences of the context in which their teaching and learning occur' and using these to highlight areas for deeper exploration. We also take an aspirational approach reflected in the way that we do not just react to the results, but use them to feed into strategic business planning and action planning for the future student experience. In the context of the event we are about to describe, the most important factor to us was to get beyond the scores.

Institutional level professional development event

'Preparing for the next National Student Survey' was the title of our

one-day staff development event aimed at putting student voices at the heart of institutional dialogue (Flint *et al.*, under review). The process leading up to the event itself was extremely important as it captured many conversations with our students and also afforded us the time to meaningfully populate the dialogue tool with a range of student voices, both internal and external. This significant amount of pre-work shaped the event programme, the content of the sheets and several of the outcomes.

We set ourselves two key starting points:

- having an absolutely clear understanding of why we are getting the scores we are (both high and low)
- feeding back to students on how we are responding to the NSS.

The aims of the event included:

- understanding how students feed back to the university and how we deal with that feedback
- starting new conversations and networks
- achieving local ownership of future actions and plans.

Our pre-work involved focusing on two groups of NSS questions: 'Teaching on my course' and 'Academic Support'. We carried out focus groups with the (then) final year undergraduate students and, not unsurprisingly, found that their comments reinforced the free text from the previous NSS; for example, students experience the course, not the module. These discussions with students also emphasised the importance of feeding back to students on their feedback to the university, both to close the feedback loop and to maintain an ongoing dialogue and relationship. This was addressed through one of the outcomes from the event: a leaflet ('You Said, We Did ...') informing students about the next iteration of the NSS, set within the context of real examples of how the university is working with issues raised in previous student feedback.

As we knew it would be difficult to guarantee that students could attend and participate in the staff development event, we used the findings from the focus groups to populate the discussion tool and ensure that authentic student voices were represented. This was complemented by using all the various forms of student feedback available to us to inform detailed materials and vignettes for activities at the event.

A broad mix of staff from across the university, including the Students' Union, participated in the event. We adopted a light touch approach to facilitation, reflecting our strong belief that through the use of authentic student voices, represented in the variety of materials used throughout the day, we would achieve the greatest impact. Although a high risk approach, this did prove to be the case and we achieved our original aims. The final activity of the event focused on developing solutions using ideas generated in the previous session and categorising them into easy to implement, innovative and ideas for the future. These were prioritised and some were worked up into named action plans.

An innovative discussion tool

Much of the success and distinctiveness of this event can be attributed to the use of an innovative discussion tool: Dialogue Sheets. Dialogue Sheets are a sophisticated development of the World Cafe technique (Holtham and Courtney, 2006) and were originally developed through an FDTL5 project at Cass Business School, City University. We corresponded with the creators and agreed to share with them our subsequent experiences of using them. What the sheets did in our particular context was to bring authentic student voices to an activity which the students could not attend. Their use enabled difficult conversations to take place, enabled challenging statements to be made in a non-threatening way, and generated valuable discussion and ideas for future actions. From a staff development perspective the activity also provided everyone round the table with an equal opportunity to speak.

We produced two different dialogue sheets for this particular event: one on student feedback to the institution and the other on the student learning experience.

Instructions on how to use the sheets were printed on them and primarily involved each of the 6-8 people sitting round the table to take it in turns to lead a conversation, based on the 6-10 quotes around the edge of the sheets. Whoever led the conversation was also responsible for capturing comments, ideas and reflections on the actual sheets. The task could take anything between 45 and 90 minutes to complete, with an emphasis on participants being encouraged to take ownership of the sheets and to engage in in-depth discussions. Consensus was encouraged, but was not an essential requirement.

The important message about using this particular tool is the need for thorough preparation. It is vital that staff think very carefully about the content in order to ensure a successful and productive dialogue during the task and to maximise meaningful engagement. The authenticity of the voices captured on the sheets is crucial. A maximum of two or three people should work on producing the statements; this part of the process requires the most effort, and should be done over a period of time to ensure the validity of what you want to discuss (we spent two months on pre-work for this particular dialogue sheet). The emphasis really should be on the quality of the dialogue and ways in which to change the conversations, rather than on the tool itself. The sheets are more effective when used as part of a longer process *i.e.* they are not the only activity on a particular topic, but contribute to a wider debate, as was the case with all our other work around the NSS.

For the staff development event we collated statements, quotes and facts from the sector, undertook student focus groups and used NSS and other feedback free text comments. We also spent considerable time developing the prompt questions in order to generate good quality conversations and carefully selected the key words

for the activity around the edge of the dialogue sheets by striking a balance between being provocative yet not being personally threatening. Another key factor in the use of dialogue sheets was to make absolutely sure that the right people were in the room.

Since the success of using the dialogue sheets we have gone on to use the tool in other contexts, such as engaging staff in the evaluation of our internal change academy, and have advised others in using them, for example at a Students' Union representative retreat and at a Quality of Service Measuring Equipment conference. Feedback from presenting this work at the SEDA Spring Conference was very positive. The conversations generated through delegates using a dialogue sheet in this workshop were wide ranging, including: thinking about the difference between responding to students and acting on their feedback; getting better feedback from students by enabling them to see the bigger picture and; closing the feedback loop in order to empower students in speaking and knowing they are being heard.

We have also developed a dialogue sheet which captures our own reflections whilst at the same time offering guidance on ways to use the tool. A final note of caution, however, is that the power of tools like these lies in the appropriateness of use in particular environments and the novelty of the approach. These could be compromised by uncritical or excessive use.

Summary

The approach we have described combined collecting and responding to authentic student views with the opportunity for different staff groups to discuss the learning experience at their own institutions. Returning to our opening statement about the difficulties in involving students in professional development events, we firmly believe that although not an equivalent replacement for actual student attendance, having authentic student voices represented through the dialogue sheets brought a powerful dimension to all the staff

conversations and was preferable to resorting to anecdote. One of our key reflections on using the tool is that the activity, within the context of the wider event, led to unique and tangible outcomes for the institution and students.

The way we organised and ran the event significantly influenced the way we have since worked as it positively demonstrated what can happen when academic developers adopt less traditional facilitation roles and use a specific tool which allows difficult and challenging conversations to take place. Our overall approach enabled us to achieve a truly deeper understanding of the student experience at our institution by going beyond working only with existing student feedback. The real and transferable impact is the difference an institution can make to the student experience by taking an aspirational approach which is proactive rather than reactive and which places dialogue at the heart of the process.

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All in a day's work? Educational Developer as NTFS project lead

Celia Popovic, Birmingham City University

Birmingham City University was fortunate enough to be awarded an National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) project in 2007 – 'Creating Future Proof Graduates: Transformative Learning Through Critical Incidents'. The aim of the project is to create resources which will help students identify and prepare for critical incidents which, according to employers, epitomise the major problems that newly qualified graduates encounter when they start work in the 'real world'.

What, you might ask, has this to do with Educational Development? As Head of the Educational Staff Development Unit, I asked the same question, particularly as only days after starting my current role I became project lead.

The first stage of the bid had been produced as a collaborative process involving a group of people including two National Teaching Fellows and staff from two central departments before I arrived at the University, and I can therefore take no credit whatsoever in its genesis. One evening, as I was crossing the car park, I was approached by one of the team who asked if I would be interested in taking on the role of project lead. I was flattered and naively accepted. I know better now. We then went through the time-consuming process of writing up the bid for the second stage, and were delighted when we heard it had been successful.

That is when the real work began!

What team do I lead?

The core project team consists of six Birmingham City University employees, including two National Teaching Fellows (Professor Anne Hill and Dr Nick Morton) the Head of Educational Staff Development (that's me), our Teaching Fellow for Employability (Ruth Lawton), our Tutor for Educational Development (Jenny Eland) and our Project Research Assistant (Carmen Tomas). We are supported by a project board drawn from employers, students, FE colleges and other HEIs. The resource production has been led so far by team members, but increasingly with the involvement of other staff – mostly academic – from across Birmingham City University and beyond.

What exactly am I leading?

We want to create resources for the classroom that will help students practise and prepare for being new graduates. To identify the types of incidents where graduates were weakest, we interviewed employers and recent graduates from a range of disciplines, and this led us to the first four scenarios. We plan to start work on another two in the next few months.



Birmingham City University Creating Future Proof Graduates, NTFS Project Team. Back row: Nick Morton, Ruth Lawton, Celia Popovic, Anne Hill. Front row: Carmen Tomas and Jenny Eland.

'**No Offence Meant**' was originally designed around the teddy bear incident in Sudan: Gillian Gibbons, a schoolteacher, became embroiled in an international incident when she allowed her pupils to name a teddy bear 'Mohammed', unaware of the offence that this was likely to cause in a Muslim country. We have trialled the resources and we have changed the emphasis from considering the cultural implications of introducing ideas from one culture to another to a broader one of understanding what culture can mean in many different contexts e.g. differences between different commercial firms.

'**Ethical Dilemma**' has involved the production (by a Student Union Society) of video footage in which actors (our own students) play the parts of a team of employees. The story follows a newly employed graduate who overhears a conversation which suggests that colleagues are behaving in an inappropriate way. The dilemma for the graduate is what to do in response. The resource presents students with a range of sources of support and requires them to put themselves in the shoes of the graduate and decide what they would do in a similar situation.

'**Cut to the Chase**' emerged from discussions with employers from a range of disciplines who commented on the problem of weaning graduates from the behaviour that has been instilled in them by the typical assessment process. When asked to give advice a novice is likely to recite everything that they know on the topic. Although the information is usually correct, it is not the key elements the client needs at

that stage. This resource consists of several conversations between the professional and a client, for example, someone giving housing advice, and another explaining the procedure of a barium enema. Students are encouraged to put themselves in the place of the client to recognise the difference between being told the 'textbook' response and receiving relevant helpful advice.

'*Stone Soup*' is a rework of the Brothers Grimm story in which a stranger encourages a village to produce a nourishing soup by offering to make the meal using nothing more than a stone. By encouraging the villagers to contribute seemingly inconsequential additions such as an onion or a carrot, the whole community is soon enjoying the meal together. Students will watch this as an animated cartoon, and then compare it with a documentary into a recent air crash where the cause is demonstrated to have been the cumulative effect of negligence by several individuals failing to take action at different stages.

The second phase will involve the following scenarios:

'*Sliding Doors*' draws on the film by the same name in which a woman's future is dramatically affected by whether or not she catches a tube train. Just as in the film two storylines unfold, this resource will show the consequences of a graduate deciding whether or not to take up an opportunity. The issue involved here is the need to recognise opportunities when they occur and to take appropriate action.

'*Sorcerer's Apprentice*' concerns the danger of not asking for advice early enough, and is influenced by the story of the young sorcerer who causes an increasing degree of chaos as he tries to put his limited knowledge into effect before he learns how to control the consequences.

How will the resources be used?

The critical incidents act as a trigger for learning in a classroom setting. While the incidents themselves are designed to be generic and therefore applicable in any discipline area, we are also keen to ensure that they are embedded into curricula. The incident itself is accompanied by teaching notes which give suggestions about how the resource could be used. In most cases this represents one teaching session, with some follow-up activity.

What are the lessons I have learnt so far?

In addition to the salutary lesson – don't volunteer for extra work – I have learnt a great deal from the process to date. Lessons fall into two areas: issues to do with employability; and issues to do with involvement in a large collaborative project.

In terms of developing graduates' employability, one lesson is that many of the issues identified by employers are the same as those raised by recent graduates, and indeed undergraduates, albeit using different language. The strength of the critical incident is that it enables student, lecturer or employer to refer to the same thing, whereas labels such as

'cultural awareness' or 'communication skills' may have different constructs for different people.

In terms of project involvement I have learnt to be highly strategic in my approach. When I agreed to be project leader we had not been awarded the grant. The focus was on achieving that as a goal. Once awarded the funds, however, suddenly I had another job to do on top of my role managing a busy unit with six staff (four of whom joined us at the same time as the project began). The onus was on me to keep the project on track, to ensure that we met our agreed goals and that we involved as many people (staff, students and employers) as possible, while at the same time maintaining a collegiate environment.

When we wrote the bid it was all too easy to convince ourselves that people would be queuing up to join us. The reality has proved to be different. As an educational developer I have found that my neutral role in a central unit has advantages, but it also has disadvantages. I am in a position to meet with a large number of lecturers – as time has gone on I have become increasingly forward in encouraging them to take part. However I do not have the access to staff in any one faculty that an academic might have. Fortunately, though, I am not on my own. I am part of a dynamic and supportive team. We have all improved our powers of persuasion as a consequence.

The experience has been rich in learning opportunities in a wide range of directions. As well as enhancing my knowledge of employer expectations, student experience and staff concerns (in the context of employability) I have also learned a huge amount about the demands of taking on a significant research project while continuing with the 'day job'. This last aspect alone has increased my empathy for academic staff who are faced with this tension on a regular basis.

What next?

I feel fortunate to be involved in the project, as in my experience Educational Development Units do not often get invited to participate directly in projects such as this, involving students, employers and staff. The project has provided me with an opportunity to express my creativity, and I am not referring to our twice yearly progress reports to the HEA when I say this! As well as leading the project I am involved as a content developer on one of the incidents. It has also given me the chance to interact with a wider range of people than would have otherwise happened, and to promote the Unit as a result.

If anyone is interested in trialling the resources or talking to us about the experience of being involved in an NTFS project we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact us at futureproof@bcu.ac.uk

(N.B. my thanks to my colleague Ruth Lawton for a very heavy edit)

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Change Management and a Model of Distributed Leadership in the Context of Academic Development

Lorraine Stefani, University of Auckland

Introduction

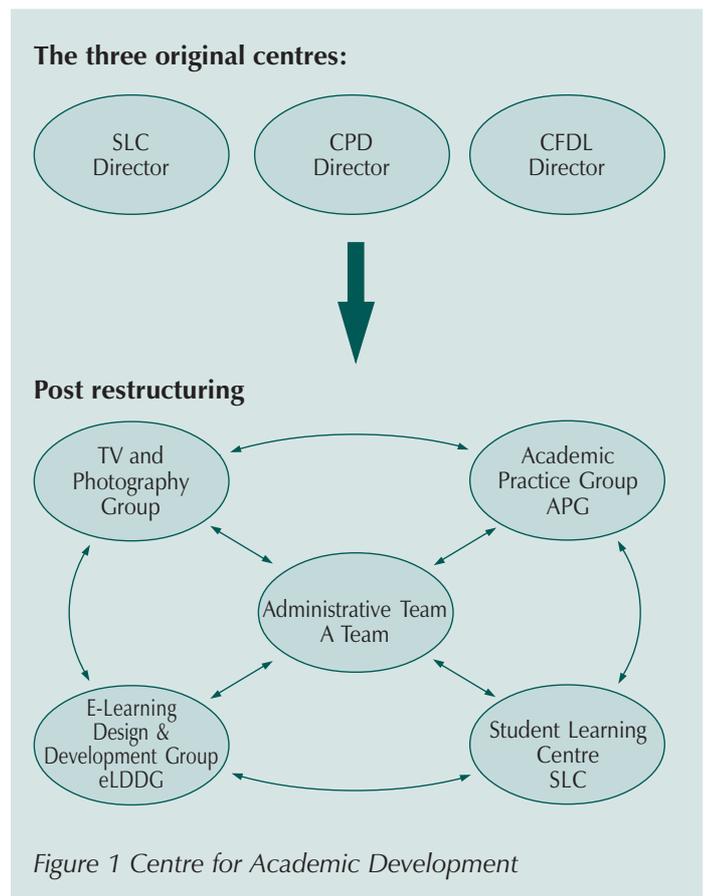
The focus of this article is on a restructuring of staff and student support services at the University of Auckland, bringing three autonomous units into one overarching Centre for Academic Development, and the resulting distributed leadership model of management within the new Centre.

Some researchers argue that radical change within universities is essential if they are to survive and compete within an ever-changing world. Governance, management and leadership structures are changing, generally for the purposes of increasing flexibility, efficiency and effectiveness (Bromage, 2006). However, despite the rhetoric on change and the need for radical change, most universities do not appear to manage change particularly well. While it is easy to be critical of universities in this respect, the reality is that 'change' is highly problematic because it is human nature either to love change or to hate change. Bromage, (2006) provides an excellent treatise on different models for change management in higher education in general, with a focus on educational change in particular. Bromage cites the work of Paul Trowler (1998) and the view that to manage change successfully requires fostering academics' commitment, reflection and involvement within the context of a highly collaborative 'learning organisation' (Bromage, 2006, p.9). Lewis Elton has had a longstanding view that for universities to manage change successfully requires a blend of top-down and bottom-up initiatives that emphasise staff development, with an overarching goal of turning universities into change-ready learning institutions (Elton, 1994).

Clearly, it is not an easy task to change the culture and the operational systems of large universities or other organisations. Organisational change and development requires a holistic and strategic approach from within the institution.

This restructuring exercise required change-management processes to be deployed within a specific context, which in essence represented a case study in:

- focusing on culture and structure for a new Centre
- shifting focus from top-down decision making to creating conditions for all staff within the centre to commit to a vision and mission
- developing a strong commitment to building leadership capacity within the centre



- shifting focus from the delivery of 'products' to supporting faculty in developing and enhancing their teaching, learning and research endeavours, and students in their approaches to learning.

The Change and the Change-Management

The University of Auckland had, over time, set up three independent autonomous units with responsibility for providing staff and student support in teaching, learning, research and enhanced use of technology in teaching. These units were: the Centre for Professional Development (CPD) which had a remit to provide professional development opportunities for both academic and academic-related or general staff; the Centre for Flexible and Distance Learning (CFDL) which was charged with promoting and operationalising the institutionally agreed strategic direction for e-learning; and the Student Learning Centre, with a remit to provide instruction and support in a wide range of areas for all students enrolled at the university. In 2005, the Senior

Management Team made the decision that the three named units should be brought together to form a new Centre, to maximise the resource that was specifically targeted to staff and student support services. At the same time general and generic staff development activities such as career development planning, project management and leadership programmes, much of which had previously been part of the remit of the Centre for Professional Development, would be accommodated within a new unit based within Human Resources.

The rationale for the restructure was that the university would like to achieve greater cohesion between the opportunities it provides for professional and skill development in academic work for staff and students. In the longer term, the goal would be to achieve closer links between the development opportunities for staff and for students through dovetailing many of the activities. In addition as e-learning came to be seen as part of the overall teaching and learning strategies within the university, the view was that it made sense to encourage and develop closer collaborations between the three individual units.

While at a pragmatic level the rationale for the restructuring of the three autonomous units into one overarching Centre made perfect sense, difficulties arose from the perception of top-down decision making, and a lack of consultation with the staff in the original units. Before the restructuring process, collaboration between the individual units was minimal. While some positive interpersonal relationships existed, that is not quite the same as, nor does it translate easily into, constructive collaboration and dialogue.

While there is now an extensive literature on change management (e.g. Hunt *et al.*, 2006) there appears to be no realistic protocol within universities to guide the change agents, nor to prepare people for change. It generally falls to an appointed leader to manage as best as possible while 'business as usual' is underway. In this case there were a number of complicating factors: each of the autonomous units was led by a Director, and the new Centre would be led by a Director. It had been pointed out by the Senior Management Team that no extra resource for staffing would be made available and the restructure would not be for the purpose of making any staff members redundant. The Director of the new Centre would be drawn from the three existing Directors, through a normal interview process, an approach that could and did create additional stress within the new structure.

A more constructive approach would have been to consider disestablishing the Directorship positions until the Director of the new Centre had been appointed, and then redefine the roles of the other Directors within the new structure. The most likely explanation for not doing so was the view that the restructuring was merely a cosmetic exercise in which three autonomous units would simply remain unchanged but would fall within the umbrella title of the Centre for Academic Development – in other words, this would be a 'no-change' model of restructuring which would do little to

promote a more collaborative approach to staff and student academic support services.

Effecting culture change

Restructuring and change generally causes a level of anxiety among staff. This has to be minimised to reduce the potential for losing good staff. As the appointed Director of the new Centre, I had to work with staff in a collaborative, consultative, collegial and strategic manner to devise a structure which would foster collaboration, streamline resource management, recognise the different skill sets of the staff from three culturally diverse units – and provide positive career development opportunities for staff.

Levels of hostility were initially high amongst many staff; complexities arose because CAD staff were now distributed across four separate locations, and it could be and indeed was viewed that there was a winner – and losers – arising from the decision to appoint the Director of CAD from the three existing Directors. As it happened, one of the Directors left to take up a new position elsewhere. This caused a sense of loss for the staff working with this Director. While textbook treatises can provide change-management 'recipes' and 'to do' and 'not to do' lists, most of the advice and guides on change-management omit the power of emotional responses. Over-riding the hostility was a major task in the early stages of the restructure in this case. Many consultation meetings were facilitated in an endeavour to design a workable structure for CAD. Staff from the three original Centres put forward ideas that ranged from 'no change' to 'very radical change' with little agreement between the staff groups. Senior management advocated as flat a management structure as possible for the new Centre.

While discussion and consultation was ongoing it was necessary to conduct 'business as usual' in as efficient a manner as possible, but one definitive issue that could be worked on during this period was to streamline the administrative function of the Centre.

The process deployed for this was to bring all of the administrative staff from the three original centres together, give them ownership of the change process and allow them to develop a CAD Administration Team. A 'Continuous Improvement Process' (see, for example, <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/CIPtoolkit/index.html>) was used whereby the administrators from the three original units collectively worked through all of the administrative processes essential to the running of any unit or centre, such as budget management, human resource management, secretarial services and receptionist services. Once all tasks had been identified, they were then distributed according to the current roles and responsibilities and the skill sets of individual staff members. Job descriptions were re-written and the need identified for an Administrative Team Leader. This exercise was conducted without the Director of CAD actually present, but in the knowledge that the Director could be asked for advice and support at any time. The overall outcome of this process, devolving and delegating responsibilities to those who have the administrative

knowledge and understanding, appointing a leader and reshaping the role descriptions, has been a strong, committed and effective team who value their sense of ownership over their work.

The process of delegating the development of an Administrative Team to the administrative staff was intended to show a commitment to delegating and devolving responsibilities and empowering staff. This was the intended goal in the restructuring exercise as I conceived it.

Deciding on the best configuration for the rest of CAD was on the one hand difficult because of staff reluctance regarding the major changes but on the other hand there were positive opportunities to be built upon.

The academic group which had originally been part of CPD was essentially intact and made for a further obvious staff grouping. Also, this group of staff, along with some of the members of the new Administrative Team, had already experienced change, a refocusing of how we engaged with our target audience groups, a shift in style from offering generic workshops as the primary mode of academic development to working in partnership with staff within their disciplinary base and an alignment of activities with the institutional strategic priorities.

This group was confident enough to work with the changed structure into CAD. The obvious step to take was to appoint a Team Leader, delegate responsibility for the work of the team and provide support through coaching and mentoring the team leader. This group decided to call itself the Academic Practice Group. The APG Team Leader and the Director of CAD worked together to draw up a working document on delegated responsibilities for the Team Leader, which subsequently became a model for the development of other teams and team leaders.

Staff involved in e-learning and IT Literacy developments constituted a mixed group of academic and general (or academic-related) staff drawn from CPD and CFDL.

As the Director of CFDL had left the University to take up another position many of the staff of that Centre (CFDL) felt bereft at the loss of a visionary leader and not necessarily positively disposed to the change that 'caused' their loss. The staff of this Centre were distributed across two different locations which was an added complicating factor in bringing people together.

An opportunity came about that was fully exploited. Relocation of a group of staff unconnected to CAD to a different building created space to co-locate a large group of CFDL staff with the APG and the Administrative Team.

To smooth the passage of this co-location, funding was available from the University to refurbish offices and create a vibrant working environment. The staff who were co-located included learning designers, a web-developer, a graphic designer and a systems analyst. It took a lot of time to settle this group and to refocus their modes of working to align

with the institutional strategic plan and to encourage collaboration with other CAD staff.

In time, after the initial wave of hostility to change had subsided and there had been one or two new staff members recruited, which meant bringing on board staff whose first identification was with CAD rather than with one of the original Centres, it was time to appoint a leader of this team. The choice was not difficult. A member of staff who had originally been part of CPD and who had the most experience of the challenges of promoting the use of technology in teaching agreed to take the role of Team Leader. The team worked together and decided to be identified as the e-Learning Design and Development Group. With some minor modifications the working document on delegated responsibilities described above was equally relevant to this team.

Another group of staff who had been part of the Centre for Flexible and Distance Learning (CFDL) was the Photography and Television Group. This group of six staff members was collectively responsible for television and video productions for staff across the university, university wide photography for special events, ceremonies, openings etc. and for technical expertise and maintenance of the university owned television studios.

This group had been under a range of different management structures over a long period of time and this restructure, while not initially welcomed, was to them 'just another move'.

By another accident of fate, it was possible to custom design an office block and facilities for them co-located with the Administration Group, the APG and the e-Learning Design and Development Group. None of the staff in this group had previously taken on a leadership/management position but one member of staff, either through volunteering or by default, became the spokesperson for this group. He did not want to be called the Team Leader but felt comfortable in the role of Co-ordinator of the group. This was agreed on by the Director of CAD and key responsibilities were drafted out for this staff member.

This left the Student Learning Centre (SLC). SLC has long been a clearly identifiable Centre providing learning support for students either on a one-to-one basis, through organised seminars and workshops, or in departments working in partnership with disciplinary-based staff. At one level, the SLC experienced the least disruption. The Centre is located in the middle of the university's city campus and no location change could be considered. The role of the Director of SLC would remain largely unchanged but with different line management arrangements.

The distributed leadership model of management of a new Centre

The structure of the Centre for Academic Development which emerged is as shown in Figure 1. The Centre

comprises five teams all with a leader reporting to the Director of CAD. As Director of CAD I believed that putting staff into leadership positions had to have real meaning as opposed to staff being nominal leaders with responsibility but no authority. This constituted the distributed leadership model of management for CAD.

The team leaders have responsibility for line managing their team members, carrying out institutional processes such as Academic Performance Review, General Staff Salary and Development Reviews, managing leave, suggesting and offering professional development opportunities to continually up-skill staff and for setting the direction of the work in accordance with the institutional strategic plan, promoting a research-led approach to work where appropriate and facilitating team meetings.

Part of the role of Director is not only to line-manage the team leaders but also to provide coaching and mentoring for them.

The CAD Committees include a CAD Management Team, a Finance Team and a Research and Conference Committee. All team leaders are members of these Committees and the minutes of Committee Meetings are accessible to all staff.

At an early stage of the restructuring exercise a Planning Retreat was organised with an external facilitator to which all CAD staff were invited. The intention of the retreat was for CAD to develop a vision, a mission and a strategic plan, thus inviting all staff to take ownership of the future direction of the Centre.

Strenuous efforts have been made over a three year period to develop staff and to encourage them in achieving their career aspirations. The intention has been and is to define the larger purpose of the work of the Centre and to shift the focus from producing results to encouraging the growth of people who produce results (Senge *et al.* 2005).

Regarding change management and shifting the culture of a Centre within the university, the key aspects of the change were:

- *To create a collaborative culture within CAD* – this has been effected by the building of leadership capacity. There are five teams within CAD, each with a leader with delegated responsibilities. Research clusters have been developed, each with a designated leader who is not one of the Team Leaders. This is enabling many more staff to develop leadership skills than was previously the case.
- *Shifting focus from top-down decision making to staff ownership of key decisions* – the two day Planning Retreat gave all staff an opportunity to contribute to the development of CAD's vision and mission. A CAD Research Retreat was organised using funding from the Performance Based Research Fund (New Zealand's equivalent of RAE). This allowed for a sharing of current research endeavours, the development of research clusters with nominated leaders and shared input to CAD's research vision and mission.
- *A commitment to building leadership capacity* –the

development of CAD allowed for five staff members to take key leadership roles. As Director of CAD I give over a commitment to coaching and mentoring these leaders. The leaders themselves are now building leadership capacity within their own teams by delegating responsibilities and mentoring and coaching their team members.

- *Shifting focus from delivering products to supporting faculty in their teaching, learning and research endeavours* – CAD staff work in partnership with staff and students in their faculties and departments to facilitate changes in approach that are sustainable – sustainable within the department and sustainable in terms of the capacity of CAD. In other words we try to leave behind the 'development', enabling staff to build on the work we carry out in partnership with them – as opposed to offering generic workshops which do not necessarily lead to sustained change at any level.

No staff losses were experienced as a direct result of the restructuring and CAD now has a positive working culture, dynamic leadership and increased leadership capacity, a strong focus on working in partnership with academic staff and with students in departments – and conducts its core business in alignment with the institutional strategic priorities. Many leaders of equivalent centres in Australasian universities look to CAD for advice on restructuring and creating a distributed leadership model of management. Where better to model this process of change than in an academic development centre? CAD has become a positive example of a 'learning organisation' within the larger institution and is a well functioning Community of Practice (e.g. Wenger, 1998).

More information on the work of CAD can be obtained from our website: <http://www.cad.auckland.ac.nz>

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The Student Experience of Assessment: challenges for the professional development of staff

Andrea Lee, University of Central Lancashire

'There is no breathing space... you are on a hamster wheel and you've just got to keep up.'

Assessment has long been recognised as central to the student experience, and a key element in the transition for students moving into Higher Education. As Brown *et al.* noted, 'Assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and then as graduates... If you want to change student learning, then, change the methods of assessment' (Brown *et al.*, 1997:7). Yet in the endeavour to improve student learning, how much do we know about the assessment experience, and the assessment behaviour of our students?

This article explores student experiences of assessment in a Business School in the context of widening participation, and issues of student engagement in the learning process at key points of transition. The material is based upon research in a larger project, carried out in the Lancashire Business School, University of Central Lancashire, in a longitudinal study over semester 2 (2005/6) and semesters 1 and 2 (2006/7), using a focus group methodology to explore the student experience of assessment and feedback. Modularisation of programmes had placed emphasis on the assessment strategy of individual modules but lost the sense of the totality experienced by students over a programme covering eighteen modules. Whilst no claim is made that the data is representative of all student views and experience, the focus groups involved all the years, with diverse student membership covering a wide range of programmes across the Business School.

Student perception of the learning environment was identified by Entwistle (1991, cited in Struyven *et al.*, 2005) as a key determinant in the learning process. The way in which a student thinks about learning and studying determines the way in which assignments and evaluation tasks are tackled. Assessment is thus one of the defining features of a student's approach to learning. Three main approaches were identified: surface approaches with limited engagement; deep approaches seeking deeper understanding; and strategic approaches aiming to achieve the optimum grades (*ibid.*).

Listening to what students say can prove illuminating, and the findings from the study will be reviewed to discuss the implications for the learning of both students and staff. Recurrent themes were:

- the volume of assessment
- the ambiguities of assessment criteria
- the types of assessment which did not relate to vocational expectations
- the purposes of formative assessment
- the perceived utility of feedback
- the support which students felt was needed.

The volume of assessment

Much was said about the quantity of assessment. *'I've handed in a 750-word one, next week I've a 2000-word report, a 1500-word essay, a presentation, organise an event and do an evaluation, a 3000-word essay, and 1000-word essay – that is a lot, I know.'* This represents the collective experience for a student over six modules, the holistic view showing the duplication and sheer volume of tasks.

For others there were additional problems. A student stated *'2500 words is all I can write in a week. Any more and I've problems with the amount I've got to read, digest and put into my own words.'* Another noted: *'In college you are kind of spoon fed and so it was a big shock to be left on your own – even though it's 1500 words, which is not a lot, but it is still daunting when you don't know what you are supposed to be writing about and referencing and stuff.'* These statements support the findings by Chambers (1992, cited in Struyven *et al.*, 2005) that a 'reasonable' workload was a precondition of deep learning, although there may be a gulf between staff and student views over what is considered 'reasonable'.

Referencing was universally recognised by all the students as difficult. It represented something students had not experienced before. They felt specific guidance and explanations were required, along with discussion covering the application of referencing in essays and reports, as opposed to simply being issued with handouts which covered the Harvard system.

Assessment criteria

Students also identified the need for clear expectations, clear briefs and structured assessment criteria, as noted in the study by Drew (2001). Students did recognise the need to internalise notions of standards and criteria if they are to take responsibility for their learning (Ecclestone and Swann, 1999). However, they perceived many assessment criteria to be unclear: *'Generally not very helpful'* and *'Repeat platitudes and parts of the assignment'* rather than expressing what they felt they needed to know.

Titles were often ambiguous: *'The title was really confusing to everyone'* and they noted *'huge inconsistencies between lecturers'*, leaving students unclear about what was required. These difficulties led students to resort to strategic learning, whereby they tried to identify the specific requirements of an individual lecturer: *'I don't feel I've learned anything in the past two years, really – I feel I've just done things to get good marks.'*

Types of assessment

Student felt they would like more choice in assessment to allow them to pursue individual interests, and that it would be *'better if tasks varied rather than being constantly given essays...some people struggle with essays where they may feel it is easier to give a presentation'*. Many wanted assessment which related more closely to their vocational programmes: *'I prefer assessment which touches on what you want to do and why you are here.'* Others felt assignments were irrelevant: *'I can't see the point', 'As a first year I found a lot of the assessment was just keeping us on our toes, to check we were listening';* and they noted that the task often only related to a small fraction of the module, for example: *'Our last assessment was to do with career planning – don't get me wrong, it was very valuable and most of us found it useful but we didn't see how it linked with what we were doing in lectures.'*

The findings concurred with the work of Sambell *et al.* (1997, cited in Struyven *et al.*, 2005) with many students perceiving traditional modes of assessment as arbitrary and irrelevant but a necessary imposition to complete modules, whereas authentic assessment reflecting real-life situations was more highly valued.

Formative assessment

Research has highlighted the significance of formative assessment and positive, constructive feedback for the retention of students (Yorke, 2001). Although the term 'formative assessment' was not familiar to students and misinterpreted, they saw it would be a *'good thing - takes the pressure off'* and counters the view

that: *'I've spent substantial amount of time and money in first year' and 'When it doesn't count for anything then it doesn't feel real or anything.'* They felt it was important that the first year should be understood as a key foundation for later years of study, noting: *'It was not made clear to me how important things were that I'd done in first and second year and how they would contribute to the third year.'* Students felt it would be useful to see samples of good work – essays, reports, and dissertations, and that guidance was needed to make explicit the differences between work at level 1, 2 and 3 with essays, for example.

Feedback

Feedback was considered by all to be important and to *'give confidence'*. Clear views were expressed concerning what constituted good feedback: *'She (the lecturer) is really good... feedback is personalised, detailed and constructive.'* None of the students stated that the feedback they received was not good, but their problem was the length of time which elapsed, noting: *'By the time feedback is received another 3 assignments have been completed and so there's no opportunity to put feedback to use.'* As a result of the delay students said they *'only look at the mark and not at all the comments'*, because it is seen as specific to one essay and not to generic aspects of learning. Students wanted feedback to provide clear direction and outline *'...ways of analysing, or steps to becoming a better writer... or moving up to a 2.1 or a first', and 'how to analyse properly, and do it well'*. Students also wanted *'tests (and examinations) back, to know what I got right'*.

Support needed

The student groups also made some valid suggestions about improvements which they felt would support their learning. They mentioned more coordination over hand-in dates to avoid 'bunching' of assessment, and suggested guidance on reading lists which they felt should be available on the web prior to the start of a module. They also wanted more in-module guidance and class discussion related to the assessment task, although most

emphatically did *not* want more added to induction which was: *'So confused - with a million pieces of paper and tasks.'* Requests were made for 'conceptual maps' of the programme terrain, noting that it was not until the final year that: *'It all clicks into place.'* It was stated: *'If the course is structured so you are building knowledge overall, then assessment is focused... and you can bring in stuff from other assessments.'*

Professional development

Data from the focus groups was triangulated with information from other sources used in the project – semi-structured interviews with all heads of department and division leaders and a range of documentary sources. Good practice was identified and disseminated via the 'Assessment Exchange' on Web CT. An assessment database was developed to provide information about the assessment on all modules, to give effective mapping of assessment over programmes. Assessment mapping also became a required element in the curriculum design of all new programmes going forward for validation. The *'Lightening the Load – Increasing the Learning'* campaign led the professional development for staff. A keynote workshop led by Professor Phil Race identified key issues, and work was followed up with participants in each division of the Business School. This active implementation model produced a pilot using 24-hour feedback, an approach to developing assessment dialogue with students, further workshops within divisions and facilitated discussions with course teams to discuss proposed changes to assessment.

Discussion

The findings presented clear implications for the learners and the learning environment, and raised further questions about the assessment process. Students clearly expressed the emotion generated by assessment: *'I felt really stressed.'* The amount of assessment *'is scary'* and beyond student expectations at the start of the programme. The difficulty of the unfamiliar terms and language made some students *'feel really stupid at the*

beginning' and the loss of control which felt as though: 'There is no breathing space... you are on a hamster wheel and you've just got to keep up.' Students experienced assessment as something done to them, the overload preventing learning.

To move on from the surface/deep/strategic approaches to learning and examine the experience drawing upon sociological perspectives identified by Mann (2001), the findings highlighted the extent to which staff control the assessment process, with much practice reflecting the prevailing hegemony in education (Leach, Neutze and Zepke, 2001). Mann (2001) goes on to suggest that such hegemony promotes the 'alienation' of students from the learning process and that students will only be engaged in the learning process when they are empowered to take more control over their assessment and learning.

'There is no breathing space... you are on a hamster wheel and you've just got to keep up' – student words which leave a potent image. We are clearly occupying our students with assessment, but are we engaging them in learning or alienating them from the learning process?

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constant level during 2007. The total number of members was 366 (compared with 367 in 2006) and of these, 90 were institutional members, 165 associate members and 111 individual members.

September 2007 saw the establishment of a new Membership Committee which will ensure that SEDA continues to reflect, respond to and be relevant to the educational development community. The new committee is particularly concerned with raising SEDA's profile within the sector and increasing SEDA's membership base. As with any campaign to increase membership, the starting point for this will be to gain a better understanding of SEDA's existing and potential membership. The Membership Committee started this process off in the latter part of 2007 by planning a survey of the SEDA membership, which is to be conducted during 2008.

Phil Poole, Chair, SEDA Membership Committee

SEDA Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met on four occasions throughout

the year.

Frances Deepwell and Helen King completed their terms of office as members of the Executive Committee, and were thanked for their work.

James Wisdom came to the end of his term as SEDA Co-Chair and was warmly thanked on behalf of the SEDA membership for his enormous contribution to SEDA over the past 15 years.

Notice to Publishers

Books for review should be sent to:

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educational developers acting as mentors and recognisers for PDF awards.

Finally, the SEDA-PDF Committee has welcomed new members from the University of Leicester, Liverpool John Moores University, Birmingham City University and Edge Hill University. These colleagues will be joining the committee from January 2008.

Ruth Pilkington, Chair, SEDA-PDF Committee

Innovations in Education and Teaching International

IETI is published four times each year, and in 2007 it ran 31 articles on many topics, from e-learning and mobile learning, through enquiry-based and resource-based learning, reflection and learning through placements, to student engagement and the experience of new lecturers. It is a truly international publication, carrying articles, case studies and opinions on the full range of issues relating to student learning. It is cited in many abstracting and indexing services, including the ISI Social Sciences Citation Index and the Research into Higher Education Abstracts. We always welcome approaches from authors and are happy to give guidance and support.

Professor Gina Wisker, Chair, IETI Editorial Board

Papers Committee

The following were published during 2007:

Leading Educational Change, edited by Bland Tomkinson; *SEDA PDF – A Tool for Supporting and Structuring Continuing Professional Development Frameworks*, by Ruth Pilkington with Anthony Brand and *e-Teaching: Engaging Learners Through Technology*, by Stephen Bostock. A number of new publications are in progress for release in 2008, commissioned and peer-reviewed by the members of the Papers Committee.

Where practicable, the release of new publications is being coupled with educational development events, such as the session in London in October, which focused on Stephen Bostock's e-teaching book.

Marketing and sales of existing stock have been a key focus of the committee's recent activity, with attention given to recouping printing costs and enhancing income.

The following members were welcomed to the committee during 2007: Michaela Borg, Rachael Carkett and Sarah Moore, and we offer our thanks to Shirley Earle on her retirement. New members will be recruited in 2008 to the key aspects of leadership of marketing and sales.

Dr Philip Frame and **Mark Schofield**, Co-Chairs, SEDA Papers Committee

Educational Developments Editorial Committee

In 2007 we again published four issues of Educational Developments, the magazine and newsletter for SEDA

members and for colleagues who are acting as educational developers in their work. There were 32 major articles in those four issues, along with book reviews, photographs, flyers for events, information about SEDA's latest publications and an inserted collection of memories of Peter Knight (coordinated by Tony Brand). The Editorial Committee, which was stable throughout the year, prides itself on the speed with which it can bring an article to its readers – some authors, responding to a commission, have seen their piece in print within a few weeks. We are attracting more unsolicited articles than before, which is interesting, and although we are explicitly a magazine, many of the pieces take as scholarly an approach as if they were for a refereed journal. It is the magazine for SEDA members, so please consider offering something.

Professor James Wisdom, Chair, Educational Developments Editorial Committee

Conference Committee

2007 saw two very successful conferences, 'Exploring Enhancement in Further and Higher Education' in Glasgow and 'Professional Standards and Continuing Professional Development: ideals and realities' in Birmingham. The Glasgow event included a new addition to the conference designed to provide time to share artefacts and ideas – 'The SEDA Ideas Exchange'. Feedback indicated that people would like us to continue with this useful 'space' outside of the hectic conference timetable. We also improved the look of publicity for SEDA conferences. We continued to attempt to increase the participation in conferences of Subject Centres and CETLs. We see conferences as a good opportunity to boost membership and raise awareness of SEDA and look forward to working with the new Membership Committee to facilitate this.

In addition, one-day events on particular topics proved to be popular. These included a seminar on 'Professional Standards and CPD for Academic Staff: challenges, issues and ideas' run twice during 2007 and a networking event for postgraduate certificate course leaders run prior to the annual conference. This was particularly popular and will be repeated. In 2006 we pointed to a clear capacity for more one-day events and the committee has sought to work more closely with other committees to ensure that there has been both an increase in the number of events and greater synergy between committees' activities which lead on to events.

In 2007 Celia Popovic and Fiona Campbell joined the committee bringing with them their experiences of working in an educational development unit. The conference planning timetable continues to ensure that we work well in advance of events and conference deadlines. Thanks go to the committee, Roz Grimmitt, Ann Aitken and the SEDA community for their hard work during 2007.

Julie Hall, Chair, SEDA Conference Committee

Membership Committee

SEDA's membership numbers remained at a reassuringly

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Committee Reports

Scholarship, Research and Evaluation Committee

Following a period of reduced activity from the previous SEDA Research Committee, the Scholarship, Research and Evaluation Committee (affectionately known as SchREC) was re-launched with the remit '...to promote research, scholarship and evaluation in staff and educational development as a means of bringing about understanding of, and further improvements in, our practices'.

The Committee focused on four main areas during the year: the SEDA Research and Development Grants, the SEDA conference reading group, collaborative activities and events, and the Innovations in Education and Teaching International journal (IETI).

A call for bids for grants was made around the theme of supporting and leading educational change for up to 10 proposals of £500 each (or a collaborative bid of up to £1000). The May and November conferences saw reading groups around articles by Malcolm and Zukas, and Manathunga, respectively, with both providing an appropriate challenge to thinking and practice.

An event for leaders of practitioners of HE research was put on by the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) Academic Practice Network in conjunction with SchREC in November. Much discussion has taken place about the future direction and shape of IETI with a paper being agreed by the SEDA Executive Committee in October. The intentions are that IETI should better reflect its position as SEDA's journal and to increase its readership. Changes will be apparent during 2009.

Future SchREC meetings will, where appropriate, be followed by an open seminar or workshop around topics related to the committee's purpose.

Professor Randal Macdonald, Chair, SEDA Scholarship, Research and Evaluation Committee

Fellowships Committee

We saw a stable year for Fellowships during 2007, allowing us to embed the new suite of courses on supporting and leading educational change. These courses will now help to ensure a growing number of Associate Fellowship holders, with four awarded last year. In terms of activity on the main scheme, there were seven new Fellowship registrations in 2007 and one Fellowship was awarded. This brings the total number of Fellowship holders to 33, with 37 registered for the Fellowship.

The Fellowships scheme continues to provide an excellent means for colleagues to network and to enhance their own work as developers. One highlight of the year was the introduction of a new CPD master class, which drew a good audience. This was given by Professor Ray Land and entitled 'The Paradox of Educational Development: multiplicity, complicity and occasional duplicity'.

We were also pleased to note that three of the 14 newly

appointed Senior Fellows of the Higher Education Academy in December 2007 were Fellowship holders; and a further one was a registrant on the scheme. This confirmed the value of discussions that we held with the Academy, and which included attention to links between these two schemes.

In looking to future developments, we will continue to collaborate with the PDF Committee. We plan to hold some committee meetings on the same morning, with an open event of mutual interest in the afternoon. The first of these, planned for February 2008, is entitled 'Shaping Development beyond TQEF'.

Over the coming year we will be looking again at the main Fellowship scheme, with a view to updating it. You are welcome to contribute any views on what you think should happen to the scheme. My own term of office as Chair of the committee comes to an end at the beginning of 2008; so others will take this forward. I would, though, like to thank the Fellowships community for its engagement with the scheme during my term.

Dr Peter Kahn FSEDA, Chair, SEDA Fellowships Committee

Professional Development Framework Committee

SEDA's Professional Development Framework (SEDA-PDF) Committee continued the successes of 2006. The mapping of SEDA-PDF awards against the UK Professional Standards Framework resulted in the publication of SEDA Special 21, *SEDA PDF – A Tool for Supporting and Structuring Continuing Professional Development Frameworks*. This publication provides practitioners with details of the mapping of the SEDA-PDF awards against UK PSF. It also provides insights into how awards can be used to structure continuing professional frameworks across the sector.

Collaboration with partners in the sector continued to be a keystone within PDF. Inquiries about the use of SEDA-PDF by non-higher education institutions (training organisations and national groups) grew and became the focus of attention around a number of awards, including the development of a new award in internationalisation.

Core work continued in recognising and supporting new and existing members to engage with SEDA-PDF awards. SEDA-PDF welcomed several new institutions to the framework with the interest in multiple awards continuing. In total SEDA-PDF has now recognised 19 institutions and 38 programmes. In addition re-recognitions and institutions adding awards have predominated this year, again targeting the development needs of wider and more diverse groups of staff.

SEDA-PDF ran two events this year, a very successful one-day workshop in January 2007, jointly badged with the Staff Development Forum. The workshop focused on SEDA-PDF as a tool for CPD. In June, SEDA-PDF repeated its mentoring and recognising workshop for new and existing colleagues interested in joining the widening group of staff and

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SEDA

ANNUAL REPORT 2007

The Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) is the professional association committed to improving all aspects of learning, teaching and training in higher education through staff and educational development. SEDA's purpose is to enable staff, institutions and the sector to meet the fast changing demands of the external environment for the benefit of student learning.

SEDA members, SEDA Fellowship holders, and holders of all SEDA awards are a community that shares the same values, being committed to:

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



SEDA Executive Committee 2007

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Report from the Co-Chairs

SEDA has continued to be a thriving, well-administered and stable association during 2007, serving its members and the wider community with conferences, networking and meetings, publications, courses, its Fellowship scheme and its Professional Development Framework. It brings together colleagues who are supporting or leading educational change in an effective and supportive way, and provides them with many of the resources they need to work in this field.

In most of its activities, SEDA has been expanding. The Professional Development Framework is being taken up widely, with 38 programmes now recognised in 19 institutions, and 641 individual participants accredited during 2007. The Fellowship scheme has created a community of skilled and professional educational developers. The courses on Supporting and Leading Educational Change are now – like the Summer School – part of the landscape and are providing regular opportunities for practitioners at many levels to enhance their practice – this year there were 36 participants.

Attendance at the two conferences increased this year, with the mix of familiar and new participants, creating a productive and supportive atmosphere in which to consider the workshops and discussion papers. SEDA's one-day events successfully meet immediate needs, and are always well attended.

Our liaison with the Heads of Educational Development Group has resulted in jointly-orchestrated events plus the joint publication of a SEDA Special on the issues and concerns around leading educational development units, and a second volume will follow. We have maintained our liaison with the International Consortium for Educational Development, and are actively working to establish this body on a secure basis.

We have also re-shaped the Research Committee into a new committee with a new mandate, which includes oversight of SEDA's refereed journal, *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* – Ranald Macdonald writes more fully about this later in this report. And we have created a new committee concerned with Membership and SEDA's public profile, to ensure that SEDA stays relevant to the needs of its members and its potential new constituencies.

Dr Shân Wareing and Liz Shrives, SEDA Co-Chairs

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