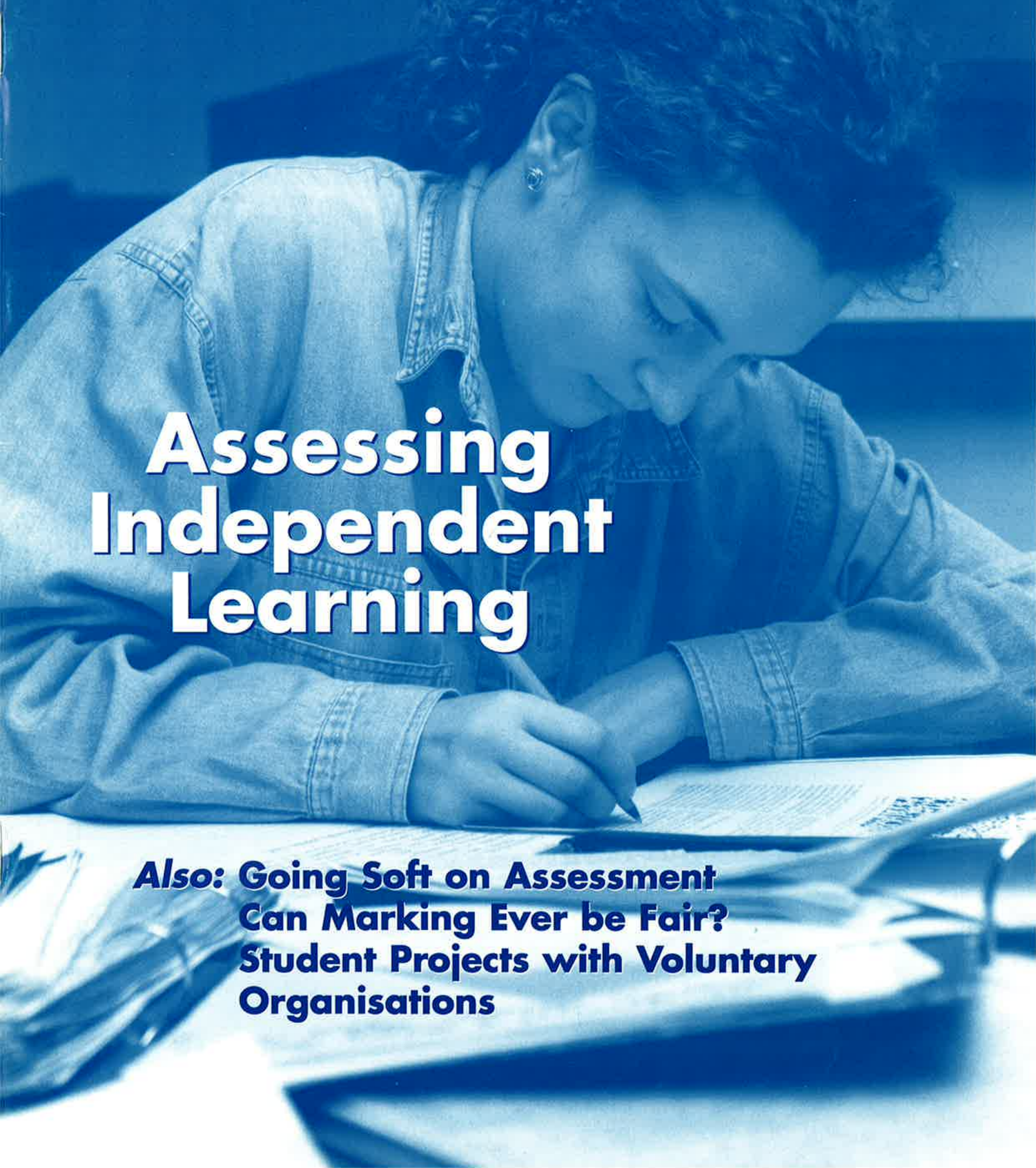
# *the* New Academic

The Magazine of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education  Spring 1996 • Vol. 5 No. 1



# Assessing Independent Learning

***Also:*** **Going Soft on Assessment**
**Can Marking Ever be Fair?**
**Student Projects with Voluntary Organisations**

**SEDA**
The Staff and Educational Development Association,
Gala House, 3 Raglan Road,
Edgbaston, Birmingham B5 7RA.
tel: 0121-440-5021
fax: 0121-440-5022

SEDA is the principal organisation in the UK for the promotion of innovation and good practice in teaching and learning in higher education. It was formed in 1993 through a merger between SCED (Standing Conference on Educational Development) and the Staff Development Group of SRHE (Society for Research into Higher Education). As of 1 January 1996, the Association for Educational and Training Technology (AETT) was reformed as the Learning Technologies Group of SEDA.



***The New Academic*** is published three times a year, once in each academic term.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**
£10 per year (3 issues)
Reduced rates for multiple subscriptions to a single address.
Postage will be added to overseas mailings.
For details, contact Jill Brookes, Administrator, at SEDA Offices.

**ADVERTISING RATES**

| | |
|---|---|
| Full page (181 mm x 251 mm) | £300 |
| Half page (181 mm x 123 mm) | £180 |
| Third page (57 mm x 251 mm) | £100 |
| Sixth page (57 mm x 123 mm) | £60 |
| Back cover (181 mm x 268 mm) | £500 |

Sizes are maximum possible.
Notional deadlines:
Spring - 1 February,
Summer - 1 May,
Autumn - 1 October.

To discuss your special requirements, please contact the Editor, Dr Elizabeth Mapstone, tel: 01840-770220, fax: 01840-770518.

# Information for Contributors

The Editor welcomes all material which might be of interest to teachers in higher education: the purpose of ***The New Academic*** is to promote good practice in teaching and better understanding of the processes involved in learning in all areas of higher education.

Audience is drawn from educators in all fields and disciplines. You should therefore not assume specialised knowledge, but write clear, straightforward accounts in plain English. When describing projects, please give concrete detail. Papers accepted for publication may be subject to editing.

All material should be submitted in three copies, typewritten on single side of A4, double-spaced. Submission of a paper to ***The New Academic*** implies that it has not been published elsewhere and that it is not currently being considered for publication by any other editor or publisher.

Everyone involved with ***The New Academic*** works on it only part of the time, and so delays in dealing with submissions are inevitable. All papers will be reviewed by at least two people, and expert advice sought where appropriate. If you wish prompt acknowledgement, please enclose stamped addressed envelope. Return postage is essential if you wish your script to be returned if not accepted. To speed production, the Editor would appreciate receiving finalised material on floppy disc in ASCII, where possible.

## Articles

These should be between 800 and 2000 words. References should be kept to a minimum: where necessary, author's name should be given with date in brackets in text, for example Thatcher (1992). Reference list should be in alphabetical order, in standard academic style: e.g.

Thatcher, M. (1992). How I turned back the tide, *Journal of Marine Studies, 14,* 123-45.

Thatcher, M. (1992). **Lessons for Canute.** Portsmouth: Celebrity Press.

## Illustrations

Photographs (black/white), drawings and diagrams may be used for illustration: copies of artwork should be submitted in the first instance, but author should be prepared to provide originals (clean camera ready copy) or suitable bromides for publication. Photos of authors are welcome.

## Book reviews

All material to be sent to Book Reviews Editor, who will give guidance: 200 to 400 words. For presentation, please see Books section.

## Conference reports

Reports on all conferences of relevance to teachers in higher education are welcome: 200 to 500 words, with concrete detail of interesting papers given. For style of presentation, please see Reports section.

## News

Events, decisions, discoveries, people: items of interest to teachers in higher education should be sent to the Editor. Notional deadlines: Spring, 15 January; Summer, 14 April; Autumn, 15 September.

## Acronyms used in The New Academic

- APEL — Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
- BTEC — Business and Technical Education Council
- CAT — Credit Accumulation and Transfer
- CNAA — Council for National Academic Awards
- HE — Higher Education
- HEQC — Higher Education Quality Council
- HMI — Her Majesty's Inspectorate
- HND — Higher National Diploma
- NVQ — National Vocational Qualification
- PCFC — Polytechnics & Colleges Funding Council
- SRHE — Society for Research in Higher Education
- THES — Times Higher Education Supplement

The list will be added to as appropriate.

ISSN 0964 6353

Printed in England by Leicester Printers Ltd.

Vol.5, No.1 Spring, 1996

# the New Academic

**Editor:**
Dr Elizabeth Mapstone,
St Yse, Trethevy,
Tintagel, Cornwall, PL34 OBE.
tel: 01840-770220
fax: 01840-770518

**Book Reviews Editor:**
Lesley MacDonald,
Staff Development and Training,
University of Durham.

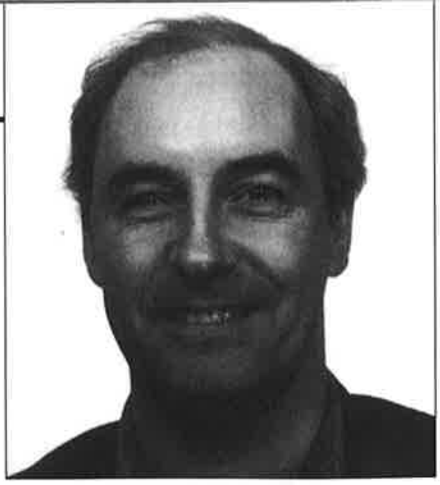


Published by
**SEDA,**
The Staff and Educational
Development Association,
Gala House, 3 Raglan Road,
Edgbaston, Birmingham B5 7RA.
tel: 0121-440-5021
fax: 0121-440-5022



Illustrations: R.M.Pomfret (cover, p.6), Nottingham University (p.11), Akita (p.13), Anon (p.15), University of Surrey (p.17)

# Who wants to know?



*Ivan Moore, Chair, Editorial Board.*

A favourite line, for me, from all those American detective stories: when the villain is asked for his name by the cop, he demands, "Who wants to know?" This usually sets the detective on edge, but it seems a perfectly reasonable question. He might even follow it up with "What's it to you?"

It seems these days that many people in HE spend a lot of time asking questions: questions of their students, questions about their students, questions about their teachers, questions about their teaching, questions about their institution... Do the words "Assess to stress" ring a bell with you? Have you ever counted up the number of different types of assessment or evaluation that go on within your institution? What's it all for?

Of course, Staff and Educational Developers love evaluations. We like to evaluate just about everything we do, from one-off workshops to our objectives for the year. And what for, and for whom? Just why are we evaluating our work? Surely not simply to justify our existence. There *must* be something in there to do with using evaluation as a tool to help us reflect on our strengths and weaknesses and to help us develop.

It must surely be the same with student questionnaires, graduate surveys, staff appraisals - even the HEFCE Quality Assessment exercise. There just has to be an element, at least, of their use to help us develop as teachers or as managers of teaching (or should it be managers of student learning?).

Oh yes, what about the students. With all of this self-centred activity, it is all too easy to forget about the students. Have you ever tried to estimate the time you spend setting and marking assessments? And have you ever tried to estimate the amount of time students spend on assessments, assignments and examinations? So, again, who wants to know? and what's it to you? If we insist on so much assessment of the students' learning, then we must consider how we can make it a useful learning experience in itself. Noel Entwistle put it so well when he said:

*"Although there are substantial practical problems in changing assessment procedures, such changes represent the single most effective way of influencing the quality of student learning."*

How do we do that? Who wants to know? I do.

# Assessing Independent Learning

Assessment is a major preoccupation of both teachers and students, so we are concentrating a large proportion of this term's issue on this important topic. As we noted last term, assessment takes up a great deal of time and energy, and it makes sense for teachers to spend that time and energy productively by choosing the most appropriate methods. Good teachers know they must assess their students' learning, and they want to do it well.

In this issue Phil Race continues his analysis of the various assessment methods by examining ways of assessing students' independent work. As before, he points out the advantages and disadvantages of each method, and gives valuable tips on how to set the assignments most productively. This term's theme of independent learning is carried forward with a few short case studies of good practice provided by Nottingham University and Oxford Brookes University.

*Elizabeth Mapstone, Editor*

But can marking ever be fair? Contributors to *The New Academic* have frequently raised this issue, and Ivan Moore pointed out that debates over degree class can be strong, even acrimonious. Mic Morgan, Jenny Spouse and Chris Rust took this question seriously, and enlisted the help of their colleagues at Oxford Brookes University to test a set of common criteria and grade definitions. Here they explain what they did and present their proposed marking criteria grid: a useful suggestion is for a core list of criteria which might be compulsory and a "pick and mix" selection appropriate for different areas of study.

Comparability is the theme too of Christine Butterworth's article. She suggests that the increasing choice of what she calls "soft" assessment methods make difficulties of marking fairly even worse. "Hard" methods include traditional examinations in which all students are presented with the same tasks: "soft" methods are the focus of this term's *The New Academic*, and are designed to measure a much wider spectrum of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Do readers agree with her? We would like to know.

### STUDENT PROJECTS IN THE COMMUNITY

Readers browsing through the magazine may well wonder why we introduce the article by Andy Cameron and Pat Green with a photo of a student parachuting from an aeroplane. The authors explain that students at University of Wolverhampton have the opportunity to carry out a research project that not only gains them necessary credits, but also - because of the direct involvement of local voluntary organisations - provides a valuable service to the community. But why the parachute? Read the article to find out!

### PREPARING STUDENTS FOR WORK

In the second of a two-part series on Team Building, Peter Marshall and Alex Roberts explain how their engineering students become financially literate by creating a Business Plan for a new product to a professional standard. The same student groups also take part in a Team Skills Four Day course designed to teach them crisis management. So why do we show one team trying to build a tea-bag launcher?

We always like to know what you think about different issues, and have set aside the last page for letters from our readers. Do write to us. All topics welcome.

# The Art of Assessing 2

**In his first article in this two-part series on the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of assessment, *Phil Race* discussed various forms of examination. In his second article, he turns his attention to ways of assessing students' independent work.**

## ESSAYS

In some subjects, assessment is dominated by essay-writing. Traditional (and open-book) exams often require students to write essays. Assessed coursework often takes the form of essays.

### TIPS ON SETTING AND USING ESSAY QUESTIONS

Most of the suggestions given in last term's article about writing traditional exam questions continue to apply, whether essays are to be used as assessed coursework or as exam questions. (See *The New Academic,* vol.4, no.3. Autumn 1995, p.4.) Some further suggestions are given below.

**1. Help students see exactly how essays are marked.**

Alert students to the credit they gain from good structure and style. One of the best ways of doing this is to involve classes of students in looking at examples of past (good, bad and indifferent) essays, and applying assessment criteria. This can be followed by involving students in peer-assessment of each others' essays.

**2. Help students develop the skills required to assemble the content for essays.**

One of the best – and most time-effective – ways of doing this is to set class or coursework tasks which require students to prepare essay-plans rather than fully-finished masterpieces. A concept-map or diagram can show a great deal about the eventual worth of students' essays, and can avoid distraction from the elements of style and structure. Students can put together maybe half-a-dozen essay plans in the time it would take them to complete one essay, and perhaps making the plans involves far more thinking and learning.

## REVIEWS

Anyone who reviews books for journals or magazines will confirm that there is no better way of making oneself look deeply into a book than to be charged with the task of writing a review of it! Getting students to write reviews is therefore a logical way of causing them to interact in depth with the information they review.

### ESSAYS

#### Advantages

- Essays allow for student individuality and expression. They are a medium in which the best students can distinguish themselves.
- Essays can reflect the depth of student learning. Writing freely about a topic is a process which demonstrates understanding and grasp of the material involved. Students are used to writing essays. In many disciplines, essays represent the form of assessment with which students are most familiar with. However, mature students often admit that the medium of assessment which worries them most is the essay.

#### Disadvantages

- Essay-writing is very much an art in itself. Students from some backgrounds are disadvantaged as they have simply never been coached in essay-writing skills. For example, a strong beginning, a coherent and logical middle, and a firm and decisive conclusion combine to make up the hallmarks of a good essay. The danger is that the presence of these hallmarks is measured time and time again, and students who happen to have perfected the art of delivering these hallmarks are repeatedly rewarded irrespective of any other strengths and weaknesses they may have.
- Essays take time to write (whether as coursework or in exams). This means that assessment based on essay-writing necessarily is restricted regarding the amount of the syllabus that is covered directly. There may remain large untested tracts of syllabus.
- "Write down the number we first thought of"! Essays are demonstrably the form of assessment where the dangers of subjective marking are greatest. Essay-marking exercises at workshops on assessment show marked differences between the mark or grade that different assessors award the same essay, even when equipped with clear sets of assessment criteria.

### REVIEWS

#### Advantages

- Reviewing is an active process. Reviewing material gives students a task which focuses their thinking, and helps them avoid reading passively.
- Reviews are useful for revision. When students have reviewed material, the reviews are useful learning tools in their own right, and may spare students from having to wade through the material on subsequent revision.
- Reviewing involves important mental processes. When students are required to review material from different sources critically, they are necessarily engaged in higher-level skills of comparing, contrasting and evaluating far beyond passive reading.

#### Disadvantages

- Reviews are necessarily quite individual. For reviews to lend themselves to assessment, it is important that the task should be delineated quite firmly. This may go against the open-ended approach to reviewing which we may wish students to develop.
- There are not enough books! With large numbers of students and limited library resources, students may find it difficult or impossible to get adequate access to the materials we want them to review.
- Reviewing individually can be lonely. Reviewing a range of resources is often best done as a group task rather than an individual one, maximising the benefits that students derive from discussion and debate. It then becomes more difficult to assess individual contributions to such reviews.

### TIPS ON SETTING ASSESSED REVIEW TASKS

**1. Get students to assess existing reviews.**
For example, issue students with a selection of existing reviews, and ask them to identify features of the best reviews, and faults of the worst ones.

**2. Decide about credit to be awarded to search tasks.**
It is useful to get students both to locate all relevant major resources addressing a field, and to prioritise (for example) the most-important or most-relevant half-dozen sources.

**3. Set a tight word-limit for the review.**
The art of writing a good, short review is more demanding than writing long reviews. When students' reviews are of equal length, it becomes easier to distinguish the relative quality of their work.

**4. Think about combining collaborative and individual work.**
For example, suggest that groups of students do a search collaboratively, and identify the most relevant sources together. Then suggest they write individual reviews of different sources. Finally, consider asking them to share their reviews, then write individual comments comparing and contrasting the sources.

## REPORTS

Assessed reports make up at least part of the coursework component of many courses. Report-writing is one of the hardest things about which to provide general advice, as the requirements of different subjects are so varied. The nature of a report in Sociology, for example, differs substantially from one in Mechanical Engineering.

### TIPS ON SETTING ASSESSED REPORTS

**1. Make explicit the assessment criteria.**
Help students to see the balance between the marks associated with the structure of their reports, and those given to the content and the level of critical thinking and analysis.

**2. Ask students for full reports infrequently.**
For example, if during a course students tackle eight pieces of work involving report writing, ask students to write full reports for only two of these, and ask for summary or short-form or memorandum reports for the remaining assignments. These shorter reports can be structured in note-form or bullet-points, and can still show much of the evidence of the thinking and analysis that students have done.

**3. Allow students to assess past reports.**
This can be an effective way of alerting students to what makes a good report, and faults to avoid.

**4. Accommodate collaboration.**
One way round the problems of collaboration is to develop approaches where students are required to prepare reports in groups – often closer to real-life than preparing them individually.

**5. Involve students in assessing each others' reports.**
When marks for reports count significantly, it may be desirable to moderate student peer-assessment in one way or another, but probably the greatest benefit is that students get a good deal more feedback about their work than hard-pressed staff are able to provide. It is far quicker to moderate student peer-assessment than to mark all the reports from scratch.

### REPORTS

#### Advantages

- Report-writing is a skill relevant to many jobs. In many careers and professions, the ability to put together a convincing and precise report is useful. Report-writing can therefore provide a medium where specific skills relevant to professional activity can be addressed.
- Reports can be the end-product of useful learning activities. For example, the task of writing reports can involve students in research, practical work, analysis of data, prioritising, and many other useful processes. Sometimes these processes are hard or impossible to assess directly, and reports provide secondary evidence that these processes have been involved successfully (or not).
- Report-writing can allow students to display their talents. The fact that students can have more control when they write reports than when they answer exam questions or set coursework allows students to display their individual strengths.

#### Disadvantages

- Collaboration can be difficult to detect. For example, with laboratory work, there may be a black market in old reports!
- Report-writing can take a lot of student time. When reports are assessed and count towards final grades, there is the danger that students spend too much time writing reports at the expense of getting to grips with their subject matter in a way which will ensure that they succeed in other forms of assessment such as exams.
- Report-marking can take a lot of staff time. With increased numbers of students, it becomes increasingly difficult to find the time to mark piles of reports and maintain the quality and quantity of feedback given to students about their work.

## PRACTICAL WORK

Many areas of study involve practical work, but it is often much more difficult to assess such work in its own right; assessing reports of practical work may only involve measuring the quality of the end-product of the practical work, and not the work itself.

### PRACTICAL WORK

#### Advantages

- Practical work may be really important. For example, none of us wants to be treated by a surgeon who has the best theoretical knowledge available, but whose practical work is slipshod!
- Employers may need to know how good students' practical work is (and not just how good their reports are). It is therefore useful to reserve part of our overall assessment for practical skills in such cases.
- Practical work is learning-by-doing. Increasing the significance of practical work by attaching assessment to it helps students approach such work more earnestly and critically.

#### Disadvantages

- It is often difficult to assess practical work in its own right. It is usually much easier to assess the end-point of practical work, rather than the processes and skills involved in their own right.
- It can be difficult to agree on assessment criteria for practical skills. There may be several ways of performing a task well, requiring a range of alternative assessment criteria.
- Students may be inhibited when someone is observing their performance. When doing laboratory work, for example, it can be very distracting to be watched!

### TIPS FOR ASSESSING PRACTICAL WORK

**1. Reserve some marks for the processes.**

Help students to see that practical work is not just reaching a defined end point, but is about the processes and skills involved in doing so successfully.

**2. Get students to self-assess how well they undertook tasks.**

This at least helps students to reflect on their performance in practical work, and since the overall contribution to their final grades of the process side of their work will probably be small, the risk of any error due to over-confidence or under-confidence is well worth the benefits accruing from reflection.

**3. Ask students to include in their reports "ways I would do the experiment better next time".**

This encourages students to become more self-aware of how well (or otherwise) they are approaching practical tasks.

**4. Design the right end products.**

Sometimes it is possible to design final outcomes which can only be reached when the practical work itself is of high quality. For example, in chemistry, the skills demonstrated in the preparation and refinement of a compound can often be reflected in the purity and amount of the final product.

## PORTFOLIOS

Building up portfolios of evidence of achievement is becoming much more common, following on from the use of

Records of Achievement at school. Typically, portfolios are compilations of evidence of students' achievements, including major pieces of their work, feedback comments from tutors, and reflective analyses by the students themselves.

### TIPS ON USING AND ASSESSING PORTFOLIOS

**1. Specify or negotiate intended learning outcomes clearly.**

Ensure that students have a shared understanding of the level expected of their work.

**2. Propose a general format for the portfolio.**

This helps students demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes in ways which are more easily assembled.

**3. Specify or negotiate the nature of the evidence which students should collect.**

This makes it easier to assess portfolios fairly, as well as more straightforward for students.

**4. Specify or negotiate the range and extent of the evidence expected.**

This helps students plan the balance of their work effectively, and helps them avoid spending too much time on one part of their portfolio while missing out important details on other parts.

**5. Don't underestimate the time it takes to assess portfolios.**

Also don't underestimate their weight and volume if you have a set of them to carry around with you!

**6. Prepare a pro-forma to help you assess portfolios.**

It is helpful to be able to tick off the achievement of each learning outcome, and make decisions about the quality of the evidence as you work through a portfolio.

**7. Use "post-it"s to identify parts of the portfolio you may want to return to.**

This can save a lot of looking backwards and forwards through a portfolio in search of something you know you've seen in it somewhere!

**8. Consider using "post-it"s to draft your feedback comments.**

You can then compose elements of your feedback as you work through the portfolio, instead of having to try to carry it all forward in your mind till you've completed examination of the portfolio.

**9. Provide interim assessment opportunities.**

Give candidates the opportunity to receive advice on whether the evidence they are assembling is appropriate.

### PORTFOLIOS

**Advantages**

- Portfolios tell much more about students. They can contain evidence reflecting a wide range of skills and attributes.
- Portfolios can reflect development. Most other forms of assessment are more like snapshots of particular levels of development.
- Portfolios can reflect attitudes and values as well as skills and knowledge. This makes them particularly useful to employers, looking for the "right kind" of applicants for a job.

**Disadvantages**

- Portfolios take a lot of looking at! It can take a long time to assess a set of portfolios. The same difficulty extends beyond assessment; even though portfolios may contain material of considerable interest and value to prospective employers, it it still much easier to draw up interview shortlists on the basis of paper qualifications and grades.
- Portfolios are much harder to mark objectively. Because of the individual nature of portfolios, it is harder to decide on a set of assessment criteria which will be equally valid across a diverse set of portfolios.
- The ownership of the evidence can sometimes be in doubt. It may be necessary to couple the assessment of portfolios with some kind or oral assessment or interview to authenticate the origin of the contents of portfolios, particularly when much of the evidence is genuinely based on the outcomes of collaborative work.

## PRESENTATIONS

Giving presentations to an audience requires substantially different skills from writing answers to exam questions. Also, it can be argued that the communications skills involved in giving good presentations are much more relevant to professional competences needed in the world of work. It is therefore increasingly common to have assessed presentations as part of students' overall assessment menu.

### TIPS ON USING ASSESSED PRESENTATIONS

**1. Be clear about the purposes of student presentations.**

For example the main purpose could be to develop students' skills at oral communications, or it could be to cause them to do research and reading and improve their subject knowledge. Usually, several such factors may be involved together.

**2. Get the students to establish a set of assessment criteria.**

You may be pleasantly surprised how good their criteria are. When students have a sense of ownership of the criteria, they tend to work much harder to achieve them.

**3. Ensure that assessment criteria span presentation processes and content sensibly.**

It can be worth reserving some marks for students' abilities to handle questions after their presentations.

**4. Consider using student peer-assessment.**

Make up grids using the agreed criteria, allocating each a weighting, and get all of the group to fill in the grids for each presentation. The average peer-assessment mark is likely to be at least as good an estimate of the relative worth of each presentation as would be the view of a single tutor.

**5. Consider giving students some prior practice at assessing presentations.**

It is useful, for example, to give students a dry run at applying the assessment criteria they have devised to one or two presentations on video. The discussion which this produces usually helps to clarify or improve the assessment criteria.

* * *

## THE ART OF ASSESSING: WHERE NOW?

The challenges created by greater numbers of students and increased assessment workloads provide an opportunity to make a radical review of the ways we assess our students. In particular, we must ensure that our attempts to meet these challenges do not lead to a retreat from those forms of assessment which are less cost-effective, but which help students to get due credit for a sensible range of the knowledge and skills they demonstrate. Probably the best way to do our students justice is to use as wide as possible a mixture of the assessment methods outlined in this term's article and in the previous one, allowing students a range of processes through which to demonstrate their respective strengths and weaknesses.

None of the forms of assessment I have discussed this time and last is without its merits or its limitations.

Moreover, we need to ensure that learning is not simply assessment-driven. It can be argued that presently we have far too much assessment, but that neither the quality nor the diversity of this assessment is right. Students are highly intelligent people; if we confront them with a game where learning is linked to a rigid and monotonous regime of assessment, they will learn according to the rules of that game. To improve their learning, we need to improve our game.

### PRESENTATIONS

**Advantages**

- There is no doubt whose performance is being assessed. When students give individual presentations, the credit they earn can be duly given to them with confidence.
- Students take presentations quite seriously. The fact that they are preparing for a public performance usually ensures that their research and preparation are addressed well, and therefore they are likely to engage in deep learning about the topic concerned.
- Presentations can also be done as collaborative work. When it is less important to award students individual credit for presentations, the benefits of students' working together as teams, preparing and giving presentations, can be realised.

**Disadvantages**

- With large classes, a round of presentations takes a long time. This can be countered by splitting the large class into groups of (say) 20 students, and facilitating peer-assessment of the presentations within each group on the basis of a set of assessment criteria agreed and weighted by the whole class.
- Some students find giving presentations very traumatic! However, it can be argued that the same is true of most forms of assessment, not least traditional exams.
- The evidence is transient. Should an appeal be made, unless the presentations have all been recorded, there may be limited evidence available to reconsider the merit of a particular presentation.
- Presentations can not be anonymous. It can prove difficult to eliminate subjective bias.

### FURTHER READING


Brown, S and Knight, P (1994) **Assessing Learners in HE** Kogan Page, London.

Brown, S, Gibbs, G and Rust, C (1994) **Diversifying Assessment** Oxford Centre for Staff Development, Oxford.

Coulson, A (1994) **Objective Testing Series 11**, Red Guides for Staff, No.4, University of Northumbria at Newcastle.

Race, P and Brown, S (1993) **500 Tips for Tutors** Kogan Page, London.

Race, P (1994) **Never Mind the Teaching – Feel the Learning** *SEDA Paper 80, SEDA Publications*, Birmingham, UK.



*Acknowledgements*

*Phil Race is grateful to Carole Baume (Oxford Brookes University), Sally Brown (University of Northumbria at Newcastle) and Ivan Moore (University of Ulster) for very useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.*



*Phil Race was formerly Professor of Educational Development at the University of Glamorgan, and is presently based at Newcastle where he works part-time for the Educational Development Service at the University of Northumbia.*

# Can Marking Ever Be Fair?

**Is consistency in marking an impossible dream? *Mic Morgan, Jenny Spouse* and *Chris Rust* propose a set of common criteria for assessing written assignments.**

Do we always achieve consistency, parity and equity in our marking? Are we always confident that the 'A' grade we award is really an 'A', and not in fact a 'B+'? When students are handing in academic work towards their university degrees, it is only fair that such considerations should be paramount in marking their assignments within each Field of Study, School and University.

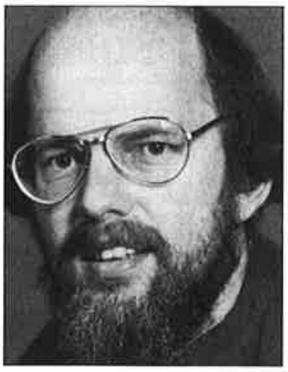
We have been looking at ways of working towards the goal of parity and equity within a single School: the School of Health Care Studies. The recently developed philosophy of this School is written very much from an 'I'm O.K., You're O.K.' life-position which *'recognises and respects the capacity of all the individual members of staff and encourages growth from that strength'* (Hewson & Turner, 1992,p.156).

We took for our case-study a Field of Study which has an agreed conceptual framework and a set of key themes (eg. social and political issues) which individual modules are expected to address. Yet, with each modular unit of study having its own teaching team, specific focus, learning outcomes, and assessment strategy, there is a potential danger that no such coherence will exist in marking the students' work. This in turn may well lead to understandable feelings by some students of a lack of equity within the Field, and an assumption that some modules may be easier than others!

The problem of achieving consistent quality assessment has frequently been raised in *The New Academic.* For example, Ivan Moore wrote (Moore, 1994, p.1):

"Many times we witness debates over a student who has an average of 69% Is she a first class or a 2.1 student? And staff will "die in a ditch" over their marks. But, how rigorous really are their assessment profiles of their students?"

Prior to this in 1993, we had reviewed the literature (eg. Dept. of Employment, 1992; Trigwell, 1993), and published some proposals towards a common set of academic assessment grade definitions in our University Newsletter (Morgan et al, 1993). The paper elicited considerable interest, not only within the University itself, but also at a series of national seminars on assessment strategies run by the Oxford Centre for Staff Development (Brown et al, 1993). We have now trialed our proposal, and this paper is an account of findings and recommendations up to this time, together with the revised marking criteria grid.



***Mic Morgan***

***Jenny Spouse***

***Chris Rust***

### WHAT WE DID

All ten Health Care Studies modules in the Field, running in the first two academic terms of 1994/5, were invited to participate in the trial. Some module teams used the original marking criteria grid – similar to the one published here but much less well defined – in addition to their own criteria previously used, while others simply added module-specific criteria to the listing, leaving out those items that were not relevant to their learning outcomes and assessment strategy. Two modules used the grid for marking some assignments only, and only one module team chose not to use it at all.

At the end of this trial period, feedback was requested as to how the exercise worked, and what changes were wanted in the framework as a result of using it within their modules. Based on this feedback, we devised a new, revised marking criteria grid for the Field.

### CONCLUSIONS

This research led to some interesting conclusions and possible further developments.

1. Not all assignments appeared to fit into this schema, though module teams for nine out of ten modules found the concept of a common marking criteria framework both useful and adaptable to their own module's assessment strategy. Most modules had between one and four assessments, including essays, reflective journals, projects and learning contracts.

2. Some marking criteria did not need distinctive boundaries between grades, but rather fell logically into a continuum across two or more grades, eg. referencing skills (see Table p.8).

3. Weighting of the criteria for individual modules was suggested so that, for example, use of theory within a particular assignment might contribute 10% of total marks. This would maintain the autonomy of the module team in prioritising what they wanted to mark within their own modules, while moving in the general direction of parity and equity.

4. Our original aim was to produce a composite listing, to be endorsed as a framework for the Field, which module leaders/teams could then use on a 'pick and mix' basis, i.e. they would be able to choose appropriate criteria from the common framework which could be used in addition to their own module-specific statements. However, our feedback suggests that there was some support for a 'core' list of criteria, which could be compulsory or simply recommended.

Were such a core listing of criteria to be agreed within a University, we would suggest that it would be good practice if other useful criteria were shared by module teams in a common 'pick and mix' list. This would allow for more consistent criteria to be used by each Field of Study. Thus, were three modules to be assessing (say) the student's critique of political implications of health promotion policy, then module leaders could select that item from such a common Field-

## PROPOSED CRITERIA FOR MARKING WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

| | SKILL | A | B+ | B | C | REFER/FAIL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Presentation of assignment & Clarity of expression | Presentation shows a polished and imaginative approach to the topic. Thoughts and ideas – clearly expressed. Grammar and spelling accurate. Fluent academic writing style. | Presentation carefully and logically organised. Thoughts and ideas clearly expressed. Grammar and spelling accurate and language fluent. | Presentation satisfactory, showing organisation and coherence. Language mainly fluent. Grammar and spelling mainly accurate. | Presentation shows an attempt to organise in a logical manner. Meaning apparent, but language not always fluent; grammar and spelling contain errors. | Presentation is disorganised/incoherent. Purpose and meaning of assignment unclear and/or language, grammar and spelling contain errors. |
| 2 | Referencing | Referencing is consistently accurate using the Harvard system. | Referencing is mainly accurate using the Harvard system. ← (continuum) → | | | Referencing is absent/ unsystematic/Harvard system not used/work suggests plagiarism. |
| 3 | Use of literature | Has developed and justified using own ideas based on a wide range of sources which has been thoroughly analysed, applied and discussed. | Able to critically appraise the literature and theory gained from a variety of sources; developing own ideas in the process. | Clear evedence and application of readings/theory relevant to the subject/uses indicative texts indentified. | Literature is presented uncritically and indicates limitation of understanding/literature has been used in a purely descriptive way. | Literature either not consulted or irrelevant to assignment set. |
| 4 | Use of theory | Assignment demonstrates integration and innovation in the selection and handling theory. | Insightful and appropriate selection of content/ theory in key areas. | Most key theories are included in the work in an appropriate straight forward manner. | Selection of theory is appropriate but some aspects have been missed or misconstrued. | Inaccurate or inappropriate promotion of content or theory. |
| 5 | Critical analysis of theory | Assignment consistently demonstrates application of critical analysis well integrated in the text. | Clear application of theory through critical analysis/critical thought of the topic area. | Demonstrates application of theory through critical analysis of the topic area. | Some evidence of critical thought/critical analysis and rationale for work. | Lacks critical thought/analysis/reference to theory. |
| 6 | Conclusions | Analytical and clear conclusions well grounded in theory and literature, showing development of new concepts. | Good development shown in summary of arguments based in theory/literature. | Evidence of findings and conclusions grounded in theory/literature. | Limited evidence of findings and conclusions supported by literature and theory. | Unsubstantiated/invalid conclusions based on anecdotes and generalisations only. |
| 7 | Conceptualisation | Able to recognise consistency and reconcile inconsistency between information using cognitive and hypothesising skills. | Consistent understanding demonstrated in a logical, coherent and lucid, manner. | Demonstrates understanding in a style which is mostly logical, coherent and flowing. | Attempts to demonstrate a logical and coherent understanding of the subject area but aspects become confused or undeveloped. | Understanding of the assignment not apparent or lacks a logical and coherent framework or the subject is confused or undeveloped. |
| 8 | Problem solving | Able to critally analyse many sides of a complex issue and resolve informational conflicts. This student uses a process centred approach to problem-solving/needs assessment activities. ← (continuum) → | | Able to critically analyse simple issues and to recognise conflicts. Evidence of a process approach to problem solving/awareness of needs assessment apparent. | Some aspects of the work shows an attempt to be critical but is not consistent or successful and informational conflicts are not addressed or recognised. | No evidence of attempt to be critical or to recognise/address informational conflicts. Problem solving/needs assessment is absent. |
| A | Attention to the purpose of the assignment | Has addressed the purpose of the assignment comprehensively and imaginatively. | Has addressed the purpose of the assignment coherently and with some attempt to demonstrate imagination. | Has addressed the purpose of the assignment. | Some of the writing is focused on the module focus, aims and themes of the assignment. | Writing makes no attempt to address module aims or fails to address the task set. |
| A | Conforms to assignment requirements | Work has been submitted within time boundaries and within the prescribed parameters. ← (continuum) → | | | Work has been submitted late but with reasonable negotiation or does not conform to the required parameters. | Work has been submitted late without suitable negotiation or does not conform to the required parameters. |
| A | Application of theory to practice | Topic applied to personal, social and professional practice relevant and innovative. | Well considered and appropriate application of theory to personal, societal and professional practice. | Begins to show appropriate application to personal, societal and professional practice. | Superficial or inappropriate application to personal, societal and professional practice. | Fails to apply topic to personal, societal and professional practice. |
| A | Evaluation | Evaluation carried out in a rigorous and appropriate manner throughout. | Good evidence of evaluation carried out within assignment. | Evaluation reasonably well carried out. | Some attempt at evaluation within assignment. | No attempt at evaluation within assignment. |
| A | Critical analysis of interaction | Level of critical analysis of the interactional process indicates a perspective transformation. | Critical analysis of the interactional process indicates psychic and conceptual activity. | Level of critical analysis of the interactional process indicates judgemental reflectivity. | Analysis of the interactional indicates recognition of personal aspects of the interaction. | Discussion of the interactional process is confined to description of the interaction. |

A = Additional 'Pick and Mix' Criteria

agreed list of 'additional' criteria, rather than individually making up their own.

The use of an agreed marking criteria grid should also aid staff in applying more academic rigour in considering whether to award a first or a 2.1. There would, of course, always be a place for module leaders to include module specific criteria that did not appear on either list, but we suggest it is likely that over 90% of marking criteria would appear on the common lists.

The first eight of the criteria listed in Figure I are proposed as 'core' for the case-study Field; the remainder are seen as the beginning of a 'pick and mix' list as described. A 'core' list could well be developed and agreed within a particular Institute of Higher Education, appropriate to its learning philosophy and objectives, while the 'additional' criteria listing may differ considerably from Field to Field, and between clinical and theoretical-centred assignments.

## WHICH WAY FORWARD?

Achieving coherence, parity and equity in our marking is difficult. But, if we are to be confident that our 'A' grade really is worth an 'A', and is not a 'B+' mis-marked, it is vital that we aim our sights in that direction. We hope that our proposals towards common marking criteria are a useful contribution to this problem.

We would welcome suggestions and further thoughts on its use in a wider context from readers of *The New Academic.*

## REFERENCES:


Brown,S., Rust, C., and Gibbs,G. (1994): **Strategies for Diversity Assessment in Higher Education.** Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff Development, Oxford Brookes University.

Dept. of Employment (1993): **Assessment Issues in Higher Education.** London: HMSO.

Hewson,J. and Turner,C.(1992): **Transactional Analysis in Management**. Bristol: The Staff College.

Moore, I.(1994): You've Got Me...But Who's Got You? *The New Academic*. Vol 3, No 3.

Morgan,M., Spouse,J., Rust,C., Tippett,A.(1993): When is an 'A' grade really worth an 'A', or is really a 'B+' : a Possible Framework for Marking Criteria. *Teaching News* (Oxford Brookes University), 33, 18-19.

Trigwell,K. (1992): *Assessment.* University of Technology. Sydney, Australia.



***Acknowledgements***

*The authors of this paper wish to thank David Jaques and Rosemary Walsh for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper, Lorraine Soanes for the artwork, and Chrissy Allott for her literary assistance. We also wish to acknowledge all the constructively critical feedback from colleagues piloting the original grid.*



*Mic Morgan and Jenny Spouse are Senior Lecturers in the School of Health Care Studies. Chris Rust is a Principal Lecturer in Educational Methods. All are based at Oxford Brookes University.*


**Important note for subscribers to *The New Academic:***

**YOUR COPY OF VOL.4, NO.1 (Spring 1995) HAS BECOME A COLLECTORS' ITEM!**

**Vol.4, nos. 2 and 3 available for only £6, from the SEDA office.**

# Case Studies of Good Practice

**We present a selection of case studies from two different universities. Further brief examples of good practice would be welcomed by the Editor.**

## ASSESSING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN STUDENT DOCTORS

### BACKGROUND

Effective communication skills are essential to medical practice. They have been a requirement of undergraduate medical courses since the General Medical Council published their recommendations in *"Tomorrow's Doctors"* in 1993. In addition, poor communication is one of the most commonly cited patient complaints. In the past there was little explicit teaching of communication and medical students were left to pick up what they could from observing others. In these circumstances, there was an urgent need to review the training student doctors received to ensure that medical graduates left with the communication skills they needed for independent practice.

### THE COURSE

Dr Paul Garrud of the Behavioural Sciences Section at Nottingham University Medical School has developed a new course in Communication Skills which takes roughly 2.5% of the curriculum and extends throughout the five years. The annual intake of over 150 medical students begin learning about communication in medical practice in their first semester and continue until their first clinical post.

In the first two years, teaching and learning activities take several forms. For example the directed experience of a typical student in Semester 1 would be:-

1. A course guide – summarising the content and learning objectives and a workbook – giving details of activities and space to record relevant aspects.
2. Lectures on general aspects e.g. verbal and non-verbal communication.
3. Practicals involving identification and analysis of communication in video recordings of doctors and patients.
4. Videoed role playing of interviews and consultations.
5. Clinical practice in interviewing: Each student then interviews a patient attending a GP surgery. With permission, they record an interview to discover why the patient has come to the surgery and what implications it may have for their work and family life. The recording is transcribed (omitting identifying information) and the transcript is used to complete a workbook exercise. (See assessment.)
6. Seminars in groups of 8-9, in which there is discussion of clinical experiences of communication, identification of difficulties and successes.

### ASSESSMENT

This skills oriented course has necessitated the development of two new forms of assessment : Interview Analysis; and OSCEs (objective structured clinical examinations).

In the **Interview Analysis,** students tape record an interview with a patient after obtaining consent. They then transcribe the interview and use the transcript to analyse the communication that occurred. The two tasks are: first, to identify a number of features of communication (e.g. clarification; open question); and second, to evaluate their own contribution to that communication. The student is marked on accuracy of identification and of evaluation, thus signalling that it is appropriate to reflect on their experience and identify strengths and weaknesses, but that they are not yet expected to be completely competent.

In the end of year **OSCEs,** students are presented with a practical task to carry out in interviewing someone who is role playing a patient. This task might be opening an interview and eliciting the presenting complaint, or explaining test results, diagnosis and management. 'Patients' used are adult or child volunteers. The student's performance is scored against a checklist of required behaviours (declared to students in advance) using agreed criteria (not given to students). At the end of the station, students are given a copy of the marked checklist to retain, which provides them with a direct indication of what they got right and where they went wrong.

## USING AND ASSESSING POSTERS

### BACKGROUND

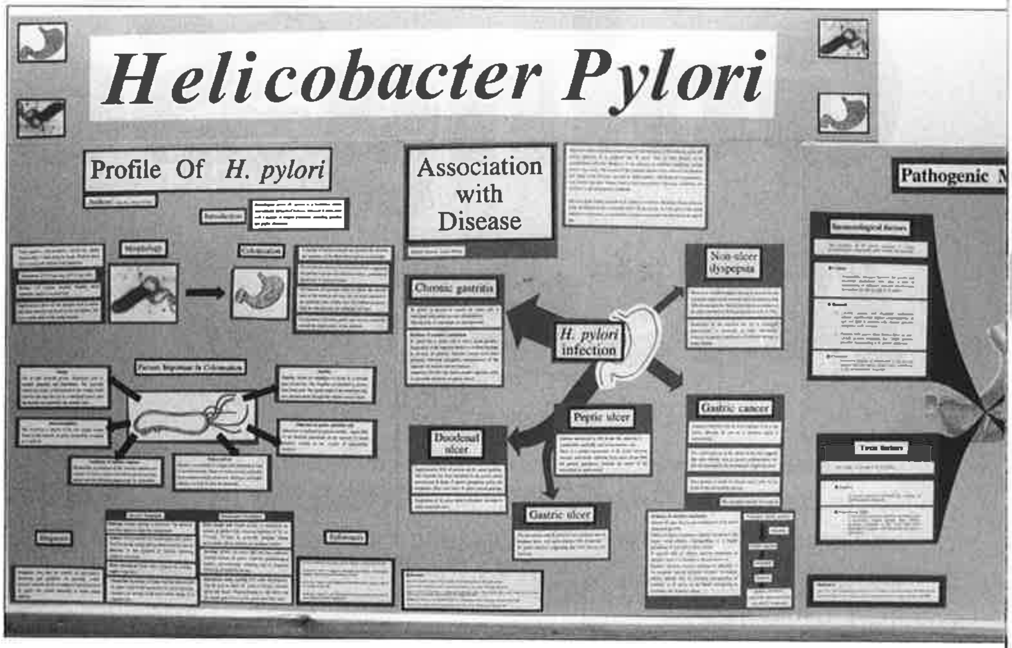
All 150 Nottingham medical students undertake Honours year studies based in one of six Departments, Behavioural Science, Biochemistry, Human Morphology, Pathology, Physiology & Pharmacology and Public Health & Epidemiology. The year's work begins with Module 1, an introductory research training, followed by a personal research project (Module 2) and finishes with Module 3, a two week course on 'Antimicrobial Chemotherapy' This seminar course has been developed by Dr A.H. Short with colleagues Prof. D Greenwood and Prof. A.M. Emmerson. The student assessment is based upon an individual essays and a group poster project. It is the poster project which is of interest here.

### THE POSTER

The time available for the project is three half-days plus the students' unscheduled time. Twenty topics for the poster project were proposed by the staff each representing a current problem or controversy in infectious disease. Students were asked to work in groups of 8 and to produce a poster 90cm high by 75 cm wide. Production materials were provided. It was recommended that groups work by dividing the topic into four sub-topics each to be tackled by a pair of students.

### ASSESSMENT

Assessment was made of both the **accuracy** and the **impact** of the posters. The marks for accuracy in each sub-topic were assigned to both members of the pair of authors. The impact mark was based on the whole poster and therefore, assigned to all eight authors. It was further proposed that these marks should be multiplied rather than merely added. This was based on the blameless principles that only like quantities can be added, and that either extreme case (wholly accurate with zero impact, or completely inaccurate with total impact) should yield a zero mark. The




***A group poster by medical students at Nottingham University***

posters were presented at the end of the course and staff awarded prizes for the two best. Formal assessment of the posters took place three days later and was carried out by two senior members of staff. The poster marks account for 40% of the module 3. credit and about 5% of the credit for the BMedSci degree as a whole.

### WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES OF THE FORMAL ASSESSMENT IN 1995?

The following marks were agreed by the assessors

**Accuracy (out of 10) Mean 8.7 SD 0.9 range 7-10**

10=well-selected, correct material; 9=few and minor omissions, no inaccuracy; 8=generally sound but with one significant error or notable omission; 7=mostly sound, but several omissions or two major errors; 6 barely acceptable with several errors; 5=unacceptable error rate; 4 grossly misleading

**Impact (out of 10) Mean 8.5 SD 0.6 range 7-9**

0-2 for each of a)very clear, b)well laid out, c)large type, d)colourful, e)interesting;

**Overall (out of 100) Mean 74.2 SD 11.6 range 49-90**

where the Faculty definitions of % marks apply, i.e. 0-34 Uncompensable fail; 35-39 Potentially compensable fail; 40 – 59 Satisfactory; 60-69 Good; 70-84 Very good; 85+ Outstanding.

### CONCLUSION

Where students' voluntary efforts to fulfil a clear brief are assessed it is the experience that high marks have to be assigned because students are able and willing, when the examiners make their expectations clear, to deliver whatever is needed to achieve them. The use of a shortened mark scale for the attributes being assessed, together with verbal definitions of each point of the scale makes for fairness and consistency. The use of a multiplicative combination of the marks has the advantage of arithmetic rationality and reduction of the scores to a distribution approaching that of marks for other assessments.

** Both these case studies were provided by Dr Kate Exley, University of Nottingham..*

## NOT THE TUTORIAL: ALTERNATIVE 1-1 SESSIONS

This is a model of one-to-one student-staff contact we have been developing in English Studies. Each student taking our first year introductory module is allocated two 15-minute sessions with the seminar leader.

First is a practice session in week 5; second counts as 25% of overall assessment for this course and is in week 8.

In each case, the exercise is an oral analysis of a passage which the student has already seen and had an opportunity to prepare. Each session is tightly structured: 5 minute student presentation; 5 minutes dialogue between student and tutor; 5 minutes feedback and guidance from tutor.

This is not a conventional tutorial in that (a) there is firm and formal control over the shape of the meeting (student monologe – dialogue – tutor monologue), (b) the student may use written cues in the form of brief headings and notes, but no verbatim reading of a script, (c) there are explicit criteria relating to knowledge and skills on which the student will be finally assessed. These criteria are: technical knowledge, critical awareness, skill in structuring and presenting materials, capacity to engage in dialogue.

Both students and staff say they are getting a great deal out of these sessions. This, they report, is because the social contact is direct and personal and yet also highly structured, and because there is a clear skills expectation tied in with a particular knowledge requirement. Tasks are both specific and assessable. Above all, they seem to be welcomed as small islands of social sanity and academic rigour in a sea of potential alienation and mediocrity.

***Rob Pope**, School of Humanities, Oxford Brookes University.*

## STUDENTS CHOOSE OWN ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Third year students in a Paediatric Nursing Degree course work together in small groups to research a child health promotion need, develop materials and trial them with children. This encourages students to develop a variety of skills, including setting realistic objectives, communicating effectively with children and evaluating learning outcomes. A member of staff acts as facilitator for each group, helping the group to refine its plans as necessary. The same staff member assesses the group's teaching and presentation skills during the trials.

To encourage students to develop skills of evaluation, each group is required to agree with the facilitor, not only the aims and objectives for the trials, but also the criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the experience. Students were encouraged to review the value of the criteria after the trials, and suggest any modifications resulting from experience.

The students found that having to develop criteria for evaluating their effectiveness was a valuable learning experience. It helped them think more deeply about how chilren might demonstrate learning outcomes, interest and enjoyment, and gave them confidence for future independent health promotion work with children.

***Sandy Oldfield**, Health Care Studies, John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford.*

** Both these cases first appeared in Case Studies of Good Practice, Oxford Brookes University, 1994. Thanks are due to David Jaques for drawing our attention to them.*

# Going Soft on Assessment

**Christine Butterworth continues our occasional series designed to encourage and provoke discussion among practitioners in HE. Here she argues that the proliferation of new "soft" assessment strategies is creating major problems of comparability. Letters in support or in disagreement should be sent to the Editor, and if received by 30 April, may be published in our next issue.**

If there is such a thing as a "culture" of assessment, then the new mass HE sector is in the throes of a culture shift with far-reaching consequences. The new polyversities are developing courses with forms of assessment that focus as much attention on the process of learning as on the content. These developments derive from curriculum innovations in the fields of further and vocational education. Major problems of comparability are developing, partly as a result of this proliferation of new assessment strategies in a large sector answerable only to itself for its standards.

> "Criterion-referenced assessment methods are not inherently more unreliable than norm-referenced ones. The critical issue is the possession of a shared set of standards by the assessors. Currently the HE sector seems a cultural melting pot"

There has been a shift from a traditional focus on testing knowledge of content to testing a wider range of abilities, with a corresponding change from a narrow range of "hard" assessment strategies (the essay, the terminal exam) to a much wider range of "soft" strategies (continuous assessment via profiles, portfolios, peer assessment, group projects, oral presentations..)

"Hard" strategies were traditionally norm-referenced and could be quantitatively monitored, thus making it possible to compare sets of results between courses within an institution, or between institutions. The hegemony of the essay and the exam as the major HE assessment strategies meant there was an unspoken (and untested) established consensus that like was being measured against like. Marking criteria were largely implicit and not made known to students.

The developing preference for "soft" strategies, on the other hand, means that assessment becomes criterion-referenced. These criteria are closely related to the specific courses for which they are written. The wider range of assessment strategies referred to above means that the criteria can relate to a wide spectrum of knowledge of content, practical and intellectual abilities and values and attitudes.

Alison Wolf's work on assessment (Wolf, 1993; 1995) makes it clear that criterion-referenced assessment methods are not inherently more unreliable than norm-referenced ones. The critical issue is the possession of a shared set of standards by the assessors. Currently the HE sector seems a cultural melting pot in relation to the internalised standards of those devising and monitoring the criteria.

Consequently, establishing comparability has become much harder, both within universities and between them. Within a university, modes of assessment and the distribution of classes of degrees can vary widely between subjects. This may create "difficult" and "easy" subjects; in some subjects unpopular (with students) classes of degree such as thirds, seem to be withering away altogether.

"Soft" strategies also create problems for the tutors marking and returning them to students. Assignments such as profiles, portfolios and individually-tutored projects are often expected to contain more personal material from the student. This blurs the boundary between marks which are given for achievement (the public aspect of the work) and those awarded for effort (its private aspect). The act of assessing such assignments has become personalised – students feel more aggrieved by poor marks, tutors can feel more intimidated by the ensuing confrontations.

Comparability between university degrees


cannot be taken for granted as it was before the end of the binary divide. Qualifications may still be called certificates, diplomas and degrees, but their content (fragmented by modularisation) and forms of assessment vary much more widely than previously. Articles in the educational press reflect the developing scepticism of employers about the comparative value of degrees.

The development of credit accumulation and transfer systems has not tidied up this variety but made it more confusing: something called a "postgraduate" certificate in one institution will earn the students credit rated as equivalent to the second year of a first degree – another institution will be awarding credit for such a course at Masters level. The demise of the CNAA means there is no national guardian of the credit tariff system.

The determinants of this "product variety" may well be the market, so there's little point in expecting it to make any sense by academic standards. Students are known to shop around for the "best deal" in fees and credit values. HEFC funding mechanisms using retention and positive outcomes as criteria may also support a reluctance to fail anyone. Such issues, however, are outside the scope of this article.

The shift from "hard" to "soft" assessment is not in itself contributing to current uncertainties about degree standards. As a curriculum initiative it stems from a desire to reflect more accurately what a student learns on a course. Traditional focus on content neglected all those taken-for-granted aspects of the context in which students learnt: the values and attitudes "modelled" by the tutors, the kind of language performances expected, the presumption by university teachers that study skills had already been "picked up" by doing 'A' levels. Where the socialisation of learners was previously implicit, its elements are now made explicit in lists of learning outcomes and marking criteria.

The traditional norm-referenced university assessment system was geared to picking out "our kind of people" (the Thatcherite test of ultimate clubbability). It functioned as a classic example of cultural reproduction, an apprenticeship scheme for academics. Degrees were also the desirable background from which to draw the professions and the managerial class, and consistency in the products (i.e. the graduates) made it easy to go on identifying "one of us". This consistency was due, not only to selection criteria (which, even then, varied according to demand) but also due to the kind of assessment tests used to distribute and rank student achievement.

Since there is no audible public debate that testifies to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that staff in universities should share a consensus about what graduates should know and be like, i.e. some version of the definition "an articulate individual, committed to liberal democratic values, with a trained, critical mind and a command of their chosen subject or field." (UDACE,1991)

Subscribing to broad aims is meaningless, however, if the actual details of how they are achieved vary so much that no-one can be sure that they are talking about the same thing. The proliferation of "soft" assessment strategies makes issues of reliability and comparability much more problematic than they were formerly for HE. The obvious dangers are that if such problems are not addressed the perceived value of ex-poly degrees and other awards will continue to decline.

If the public perception is that opening up access and widening the range of kinds of testing coincides with a failure of confidence in the equivalence of academic qualifications, then it will be all too easy for people to jump to the conclusion that the latter is the result of the former. This will destroy the value of what the new universities are offering.

### REFERENCES

Wolf, A (1993) **Assessment Issues and problems in a Criterion-based system.** London Further Education Unit.

Wolf, A (1995) **Competence-based Assessment.** Open University Press.

UDACE (1991) **What can Graduates Do?** National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

*Christine Butterworth is Senior Lecturer in the School of Post Compulsory Education & Training, University of Greenwich.*

## STUDENTS TALK ABOUT SEMINARS

*"I only yawned a couple of times and usually I spend the whole day yawning, so I think it must have been a good seminar."*

"In a lot of seminars, you say something and somebody says something else and you don't bother to listen to what they say. I just sit around. If you think you've got something to say, you say it, and then go back to sleep again until you think you've got something else to say."

*"Half way through the seminar, it just stops. Nobody speaks for two minutes. These silences can be rather draughty at times. The seminar leader can't stand silences. He is always the one who breaks it."*

# Forging a Student Link

## Projects with Voluntary Organisations

***Andy Cameron* and *Pat Green* explain how students at University of Wolverhampton undertake research projects designed to benefit voluntary organisations in the community as well as gain them degree credits. This innovatory scheme is called "Student Link".**

Students studying Humanities and Social Sciences in our university can strengthen the vocationalism in their studies by undertaking an applied research project designed to benefit a voluntary sector organisation in the local community. The project becomes part of the student's programme of study, counting for 15 or 30 credits like any other option module. The work undertaken can be given a 'subject specific' emphasis in a named degree, or can be undertaken as a generic piece of independent study, lying outside the student's subject specialities. The scheme is known as 'Student Link' and has potential benefits for all three parties involved.

### WHO BENEFITS?

The student, the local organisation and the University all stand to gain from being linked in this way.

The student gains practice in working autonomously, developing a range of negotiating and managing skills as well as hands-on experience of the research process. More generally the student can find out about life in the 'third' or voluntary sector, for many a hitherto rather hazy and uncharted corner of the labour market. On completion of the project, they can strengthen their record of achievement and curriculum vitae, or continue to work as a volunteer in the organisation.

The voluntary organisation gains a motivated and committed worker with skills in information gathering, analysis and processing. The student may be available for one or two days a week through a twelve week semester, depending on the credit rating of the project. The expertise of the student's university based supervisor is also on hand and a chore the voluntary group's staff have been meaning to get round to for months, if not years, suddenly becomes achievable. Frequently the organisation gains a willing hand who meets more than the basic requirements of the project and may subsequently remain as a volunteer. One student performed a sponsored parachute jump to raise funds for the organisation with which he was linked, and survived to take up a full time post with that organisation on completion of his course.

The University generates links with the local community, occasionally draws P R advantage when a successful project attracts local media coverage, increases the 'employability' of its students, develops the research supervision skills and experience of staff and may pave the way for subsequent research contracts in this growing sector. Subsequent collaboration has seen voluntary sector personnel contributing to the University as visiting speakers or at research workshops.

### SOME EXAMPLES

Typical examples of Student Link projects:

- evaluating the effectiveness of mediation and reparation schemes in the justice system
- drug and alcohol abuse prevention programmes
- researching and designing a pamphlet on crime prevention for older people
- surveys into the needs of the elderly to assist a community work organisation with planning and fund-raising
- assistance in marketing the services of a fringe theatre group
- research into the reasons for grant aided students dropping out of HE, for a local education advice unit.

Women's refuges, African-Caribbean business development agencies and child care groups feature amongst participating groups, showing the breadth and diversity of the opportunities on offer.

### IS IT THAT SIMPLE?

Like many apparently simple and logical ideas, the scheme requires close and effective management and co-ordination. Precise, three way contracts need to be drawn up from the outset, so that all parties have clear expectations of what is planned, and what the assessment criteria are. This reduces the danger that, three months into the work, the organisation discovers that the student is barking completely up the wrong tree or that, although interesting and beneficial to the organisation, University staff, when confronted with the final report respond that "there's no way this is an honours project".

This process has been assisted by the production of clear and concise handbooks for both the student and participating organisations, and the appointment of a Student Link Co-ordinator to overview the scheme, in conjunction with the various tutors who take responsibility for individual projects in particular subject areas.

Regular liaison and support for the student are similarly essential. Experience shows most projects can be greatly enhanced by appropriate support at the writing-up stage. Students who have been weaned on verbose essay style assignments tend to find the more punchy and to-the-point report style favoured by innovative organisations is an art they have to acquire – if they want their work to be read.

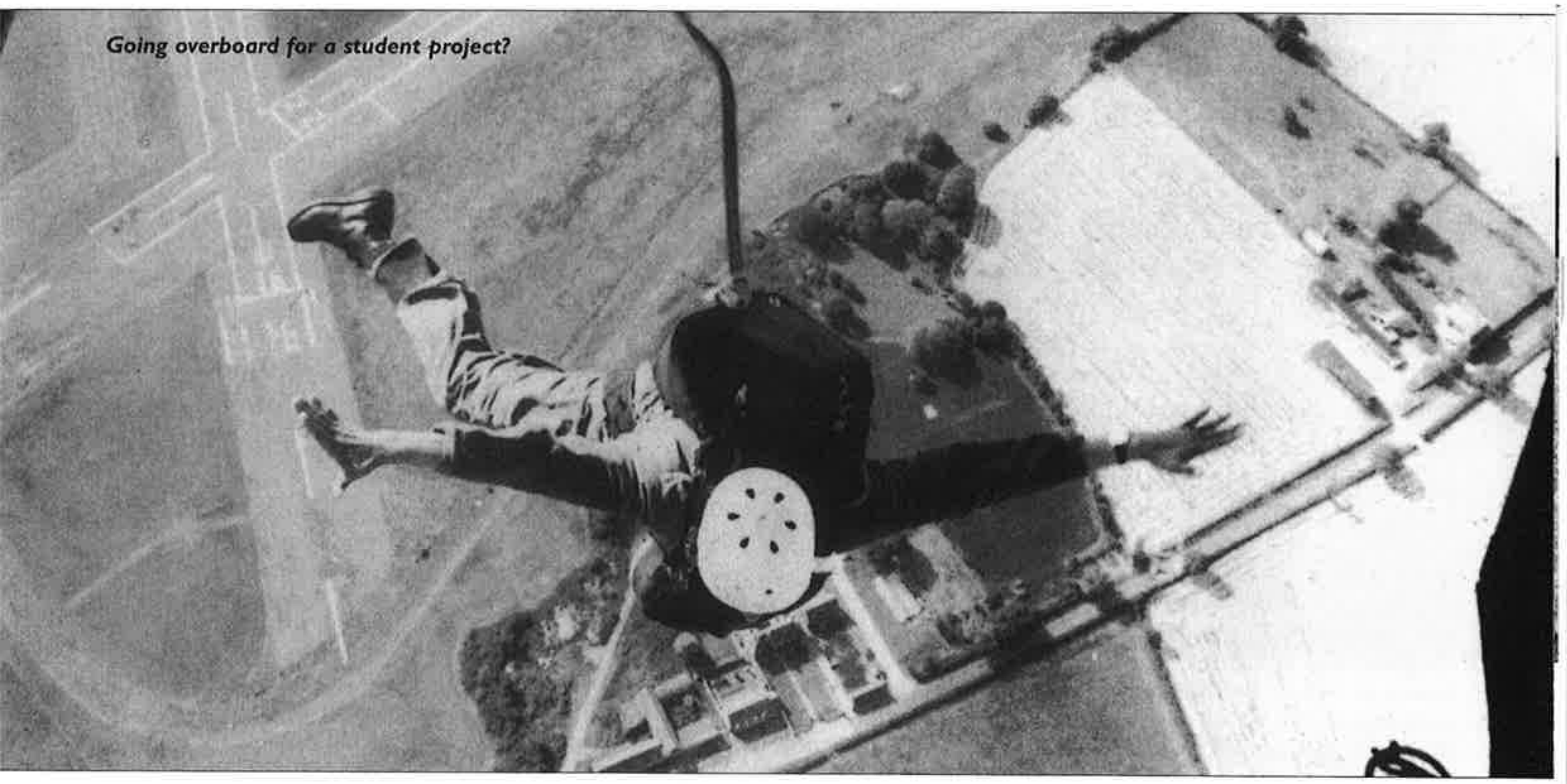
In some instances students produce a slim and tightly focused document for the client and a longer exposition with contextual and discursive material for the academic readers. In all cases students are expected to produce a diary or log which includes some self-evaluation of the learning experience.

### ASSESSMENT

The only real change introduced since the inception of the scheme relates to the system of assessment. This has become increasingly 'front loaded' and formative and less exclusively focused on the final output.

The marking scheme now normally allocates 10 per cent of the marks to negotiation of the contract, 30 per cent to the diary and the remaining 60 per cent to the final report or outcome.

This shift in emphasis towards assessing the process rather than just the final outcome has seen students taking increased responsibility in the early stages of the project. They now take a major role in the initial approach to the organisation and the negotiating and drafting of the contract tasks which previously fell to



*Going overboard for a student project?*

the project supervisor. Since negotiating and organising skills are increasingly recognised by employers as particularly valuable, and transferable, this development is seen as an important one by the host organisation, students and University staff alike.

### HOW IS IT GOING?

Feedback and evaluation of four years of Student Link show the scheme has a high success rate. In part this may result from the appeal it has to the more motivated and committed students. The most successful, like the parachutist, have gained employment or access to professional vocation training largely as a result of their 'link' work. Others find a mention in job applications means they are more likely to be short listed.

Occasionally problems ensue, where weak students have been tempted by what they see as a 'soft option' and sometimes it is necessary to mount a rescue campaign. The research may have been over-ambitious, the host organisation may have had its budget cut, or key personnel may have changed. In some cases such rescues may be effected by re-negotiating the package, or the student may revert to a conventional extended essay, using the experience gained as the basis for an account of organisational life in the deep recesses of the 'not for profit' sector.

Host organisations tend to report general satisfaction, sufficiently impressed by some students' abilities to offer employment or glowing testimonials. With some 'links' the end product is a positive and important part of the organisation's work that otherwise would have been put off or left undone. In other cases the report may be supplementary to other plans and can be used by the organisation to assist in making applications for funding, or to assist in reorganisation.

From the University perspective, many rewarding lessons have been learnt about 'non profit' organisations. In general a greater awareness of the voluntary sector, with its diversity and talent for innovation has emerged – contrary to the poor relation image traditionally associated with such organisations. In particular the high commitment to training and the supportive management style demonstrated by paid workers in the sector has proved a recurring feature.

Because of the voluntary sector's innovative tradition, students can find themselves engaged on work at the leading edge of social policy and practice, evaluating pilot projects in drug abuse prevention or community care initiatives. Similarly, voluntary sector organisations have proved a very willing, accessible and 'permeable' avenue for student placement, unlike their commercial or statutory counterparts which frequently prove more bureaucratic and unreceptive to student placement or involvement.

The positive contribution to a real piece of work must, however, be stressed: voluntary sector organisations have an instinct for making the best of any resource coming anywhere near and tend to be less hide-bound by professional and procedural niceties, with few inhibitions about pitching students in where the action is.

Students benefiting from the scheme come from a variety of academic disciplines. Sometimes their interest in the voluntary sector aspect is minimal, it being the research experience they seek. For others the 'link' project is part of a greater commitment to the voluntary sector world. They may choose to study the undergraduate Voluntary Organisations module, offered as part of a Social Policy course of study, or, part time students in particular, may choose Student Link as a way of complementing work they are already engaged in, as volunteers or paid professionals.

### WHERE FROM HERE?

More than four years experience of Student Link has demonstrated numerous advantages, with demand from both organisations and students continuing to grow. Currently plans are in hand to extend this approach to other Faculties and Schools, to provide increased training in relevant research skills and techniques, and to include a similar scheme on postgraduate study programmes. A current initiative is under way to provide a regular 'rolling programme', with ten or twelve students per year being involved in day centre evaluation research for a national organisation facing up to the increased pressures associated with the advent of 'contract culture'.

*For readers who wish to know more about the Student Link scheme, copies of the handbooks are available from the authors:*

*Andy Cameron and Pat Green*
*School of Humanities and Social Sciences*
*University of Wolverhampton*
*Castle View, Dudley DY1 3HR*

# Team Building 2: Skills for Business

**In the second of two articles on Team Building, *Peter Marshall* and *Alex Roberts* describe how students learn both team skills and an understanding of what business management will require of them in their future careers. The authors teach engineers, but teachers in a wide variety of study areas may find inspiration here if they want to prepare their students for the future.**

For graduates to be successful in large organisations, the ability to produce beautifully designed artifacts is insufficient. Graduates need to understand how to raise finance as well as the basic principles of marketing, accounting and project planning. Being able to communicate and negotiate with non-specialists is also essential.

Many professional institutions have long supported this view. However, as seen in the first of this pair of articles (Team Building 1, *The New Academic,* Autumn 1995), the Association of Graduate Recruiters, in their summer survey of 1994, rated business awareness and communication skills top of their "list of skills in short supply" amongst new graduates.

While most (but not necessarily all) academics agree that business skills are important, there is a lack consensus on how these subjects should be taught in universities.

### THE EXAMPLE OF ENGINEERING

Given the general lack of funding and the emphasis placed currently on research, engineering departments might be forgiven for concentrating resources into mainstream engineering subjects, properly equipped laboratories and computer technology. A widely expressed view, in Senior Common Rooms at least, is that an engineering student without business skills might be disadvantaged but without laboratory skills he or she is crippled. Lip service can be paid to business skills through traditional lecture courses – often unpopular and poorly attended by students. The one advantage of such *chalk and talk* courses is that they can appear to satisfy the demands of the professional institutions while being cheap. There is scant evidence that any learning takes place.

Our Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering takes a different approach; students learn through small group assignments with a team Business Plan at the hub. Formal lecturing is minimised and designed to service the assignments rather than vice versa. The course is used for second year undergraduates, the majority of whom have experienced our two-day course on Action Centred Leadership.

### THE BUSINESS PLAN

Groups of eight students are selected to give a balance of age, experience, gender and nationality. Getting the right balance in the groups is crucial particularly for the 35% of the cohort (mostly from Singapore and Norway) who enter the course directly into the second year. A member of staff is assigned to each group to act as a tutor.

Over a period of 12 weeks, each group of eight develops a *Business Plan* to a professional standard for a new product or service capable of generating £1,000,000 in sales during the first year of trading. The choice of product or service is left to each group and usually decided by brainstorming and heated debate. Although detailed design is deliberately discouraged, being taught elsewhere, the product or service needs to be convincing and meet a market need.

The *Business Plan* is expected to occupy about 160 student-hours of work per group, with a team leader elected. Factors in the choice of leader are often interesting: energy is more highly regarded than experience and a disproportionate number of female leaders are elected by the male-dominated groups. Full Minutes must be taken at each of the group meetings, chaired by the leader, forming an annexe to the Plan – the record is invaluable when the time comes to allocate marks.

Leadership styles vary from students who believe their role is to complete the Plan almost single-handedly to those who delegate extensively and simply monitor and co-ordinate. The role of the tutor/facilitator is central in allowing some mistakes to be made and lessons to be learnt without jeopardising the project as a whole. Occasionally the tutor has to intervene more overtly to prevent a team disintegrating, particularly when an individual is perceived by the rest of the team as letting them down. Twenty-year-old students under stress can be brutally unforgiving of weakness when their own marks depend on the performance of their colleagues.

Proper delegation of achievable tasks to individuals with a proper briefing, clear instructions, carefully considered interfacing to the work of others and realistic deadlines are as important (and perhaps rare) in student groups as they are in university departments.

> *"Britain needs fewer accountants and, as in Germany and Japan, more financially literate engineers to explode the accountants' myths."*
> – Edward Owen,
> Consultant and Accountant.

> *"We shouldn't waste time teaching Business – what the students need is more Maths and Physics."*
> - a colleague.

The documentation for the *Business Plan* must include a Sales Plan, Profit and Loss Account, Balance Sheet and a Cash Flow Plan. For the first year of trading, monthly financial plans are necessary, easing to quarterly for the next two years. Professional accounting software is provided for which tutorial assistance is given to the nominated 'accountant' in each group. Groups produce a PERT chart for activities between the inception of the business idea and the start of trading and a Gantt chart detailing the significant milestones for the three years of trading.

Detailed plans for a Marketing Strategy are required and one enterprising student recently completed his market survey on 3000 users of INTERNET, yielding 700 replies.

All of these activities are supported by a lecture and tutorial programme featuring Marketing, Accountancy, Business Organisations, Project Management and Negotiating Skills. Inevitably with 150 students there is little opportunity for interaction in lectures. In compensation for this we provide a consultancy service where representatives from each group have access to professional advice, including the local campus bank manager. To ensure that students think through their questions in advance, the consultancy is rationed on a strictly timed basis.

In keeping with this professional ethos, any Business Plan submitted late after 12 weeks' preparation is penalised. Excuses for lateness, however imaginative, are not accepted.

***Designing a teabag launcher is a test of team skills***

### REALISTIC COMPETITION

The *Business Plan* ends with a group presentation to an assessment panel comprising a chartered accountant, a marketing consultant, a bank manager and a chartered engineer. Competition is intense, partly through pride but also because of a substantial cash prize donated by Procter and Gamble for the winning team. The winners also have an opportunity to make a lasting impression by making a presentation about their business plan on company premises.

Such a structure undoubtedly motivates the majority of students, with the best *Business Plans* being of superb quality. Unfortunately for some students the motivation proves to be too great and technical subjects suffer through over-commitment of time. To try and instil a sense of proportion we now penalise *Business Plans* which exceed 50 pages. Particularly difficult are cases when team members fail to make a contribution, perhaps because of part-time jobs, or withdraw from the course completely, leaving the team short-handed. The tutor has a major role to play in Examiners' Meetings when a minority of students have sacrificed other subjects to carry the team.

Partly in recognition of the effort student have put into Business Skills, the weighting of these modules has recently been increased to one-sixth of the grand second-year total.

### TEAM SKILLS SHORT COURSE

The *Business Plan* is an effective learning vehicle for long-term complex projects where the work runs in parallel with a myriad of other activities. On the other hand, the four-day *Team Skills* course teaches crisis management – all activity is concentrated on a single short-term goal. For *Team Skills* the teams remain unchanged from the *Business Plan*, but the mood varies from euphoria to foreboding, depending on the examination circumstances of individual students.

The general pattern is one of brainstorming, evaluation of ideas, agreement about the best solution and preparation for a presentation to the whole cohort. Each team is monitored by a member of staff who, as facilitator, may have to keep the more dominant personalities in check. Nineteen presentations on each subject would be necessary with 150 students, which is impracticable and so, once everyone is assembled, four groups are selected to speak through the drawing of lots.

The final day is undeniably light-hearted with a competition to design, build and demonstrate a launcher for propelling tea bags (unused) using a standard set of unlikely bits and pieces.

**Four Day Team Skills Course**

| | |
|---|---|
| Day 1 | SURVIVAL: a team exercise<br>SECURITAG: a case study of conflict in a small company<br>*Copyright A.J. Slawson 1987* |
| Day 2 | MORGAN MOTOR COMPANY: a case study on profitability and investment after 'Troubleshooter", Sir John Harvey-Jones |
| Day 3 | DESIGN A BETTER SECOND YEAR DEGREE COURSE: a team exercise |
| Day 4 | PROBLEM SOLVING -TEABAG DESIGN PHASE<br>PROBLEM SOLVING -TEABAG COMPETITION PHASE: a team exercise<br>REVIEW AND PRIZES |

**Learning Points**

- Effective work allocation, delegation and coordination.
- Design of market surveys for easy completion and analysis.
- Seamless multi-author documentation of a consistent and attractive style.
- Effective use of financial spreadsheet software.
- Exploitation of graphics software for diagrams, office layouts and organisational family trees.
- Presentation to experts using visual aids of a professional standard.

*"We found out a little about how a business works and a lot about ourselves – including our ability to meet deadlines by working long hours immediately prior to the submission date – you know, the Business Plan was probably the most useful thing I did."*
- Toby Martin, 1995 graduate.

### ASSESSMENT

Assessment of the Business Skills modules is heavily weighted towards the *Business Plan* – some seven-eighths of the total. In a similar way to the first year *Leadership Course*, marks are given for simply attending the *Team Skills Short Course* without any attempt to discriminate in the assessment. The view taken is that grading individuals would divert the tutor's attention and stifle creative and unconventional contributions from students.

For major pieces of work, such as the *Business Plan*, deciding marks for individual students based on their contributions to a team activity is notoriously difficult. Who actually did the work? Can we be sure that the student with good communication skills is not claiming the work of other, less eloquent team members? Is it realistic to assess discrete parts of an interlinked and complex document?

The solution adopted is simple – the *Business Plan* as a whole is marked and students are left to recommend the division of the marks between themselves. This might appear to be a recipe for conflict or victimisation, yet works remarkably well. Roughly half of the groups agree to an even split of marks while the remainder recognise greater or lesser contributions. On the few occasions when a group cannot reach a settlement (which must be signed by every member) they are called to a meeting with the tutor and argue their cases until a compromise is reached.

This mechanism has a significant motivating effect, for while students frequently believe they can deceive staff and often manage to deceive themselves it is almost impossible to fool their peers.

### STAFFING

In a similar vein to complaints about leadership courses, many academics worry about the staff time given to Business and Team Skills. Comparing staff costs between subjects is difficult and allowance has to be made for preparation, examinations and marking. However in terms of the 'headline rate' – contact hours – teaching in this style is undeniably expensive. This single course absorbs substantially more man-hours of contact than the entire technical lecture programme for all second year subjects.

Given the deterioration in the standards of basic Mathematics, Physics and English amongst students entering engineering courses, perhaps this style of Business Skills teaching is a luxury which diverts resources more important remedial work? Alternatively we might ask the question: "If team based learning is so successful, are there lessons here for mainstream subjects?"

***Acknowledgements***

*The authors would like to thank Peter Bowers, Graduate Recruiting Manager of Procter and Gamble (London Plant) and Colin Nicholls, Manager of NatWest Bank (Surrey Campus Branch) for their support of the Business Plan.*

*Peter Marshall is Deputy Head Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering University of Surrey. Alex Roberts joined the University as a lecturer after a career in industry.*

# Competent Teachers

**Accreditation of University Teachers has become headline news with the recent publication of a discussion paper by the Association of University Teachers. Here the *Teacher Accreditation Committee* (chaired by *Liz Beaty*) gives a brief account of the AUT paper for those who missed it and presents some views of those who have undergone SEDA's recognition process.**

SEDA

## AUT Makes Accreditation a National Issue

A recent discussion paper by the Association of University Teachers explores the "Professional Accreditation of University Teachers".

AUT acknowledges the many pressures towards accreditation, and concludes: "Either the profession itself grapples with these complex and difficult questions of qualifications and standards, or some system, appropriate or otherwise, will be imposed from outside."

In its review of recent developments and the case for accreditation, the discussion document says

"*We should not overlook the fact that a higher education Teacher Accreditation Scheme already exists....It is not yet clear whether SEDA has the potential to become a major force in professional accreditation but its experience in thinking through some of the problems in the accreditation of teaching, and in attempting to apply a competence-based approach to the academic environment, are important and can be learned from.*"

○AUT's President, Joanna de Groot is a member of SEDA's Accreditation Steering Committee.

## A Secret Vice ?

**Pauline Ridley is a lecturer in Historical and Critical Studies at the University of Brighton. Here she reviews her experience as a participant in Brighton's SEDA-recognised Certificate in Teaching and Learning in HE**

"*You* don't need to do the Certificate - you're an experienced lecturer." My colleague's reaction was polite but fairly suspicious, as if I'd confessed to a secret vice. So, nine months later, why did I do it ('it' being the University's Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education) and would I recommend it to other people? (If you want to skip the rest, the short answer is a definite 'Yes'.)

**More to teaching...**

I've been teaching for over twenty years. Like most lecturers of that (pre-training) generation, I started by imitating the least boring of my former tutors and then picked up the rest as I went along. Closer acquaintance with primary education when my children were small made me a bit more curious about how learning takes place. Then a few years working for the Open University introduced a range of new techniques and got me hooked on the idea that there is more to teaching than just knowing your subject and being nice to students.

So, after a couple of years at Brighton, when I found out about the Certificate course, I signed up.

**A chance to exchange ideas**

The most valuable aspect of the course was the chance to exchange ideas with colleagues from different departments, mainly through the Action Learning Sets. These were learning support groups of five or six people. At the fortnightly meetings, we each had time to discuss current issues in our teaching and identify the areas of practice that we wanted to develop. This became the basis of an individual learning agreement. Throughout the year we kept a log book, which included discussion of our teaching, statements about the relevance of the workshops we attended, and evidence to show how we were pursuing our own targets.

**Stepping outside...**

I had been sceptical about working with people from outside my discipline - how could they understand the particular challenges of teaching an academic subject to artists and designers? But of course I was wrong. The very act of stepping outside the culture of one's own Department and trying to explain it to other people helped to clarify issues and prompt a rethink of some fundamental assumptions.

**To be a student...**

An unexpected bonus was a renewed insight into what it feels like to be a student. All mature qualified professionals, we still sometimes felt like first years, wanting the tutor's approval or resentful because we didn't understand something, feeling suddenly nervous about self and peer assessment, not because of the way the course team behaved, but because of the power dimension inherent in teaching and learning.

**An oasis of sanity...**

Every part of the course had some immediate practical use. But the main benefit was something simpler - the

# Reflections on the SEDA Accreditation Process

**Leaders of recognised programmes at Hull and Hertfordshire review their experience of the SEDA recognition process.**

**University of Hull - Higher Education Training Diploma**

From the outset it has been evident that the accreditation process has been positive and transparent. The documentation and the training day made it quite clear what is required for accreditation and what constitutes acceptable information. At no point in the process is there any need to 'second guess' what may be needed.

The comments which were made about our submission were fair, and identified areas where we had failed to grasp fully the SEDA requirements or had not completely thought through their implications for our own practice.

Awareness of SEDA criteria informed the design of our initial Certificate course, but we were unsure how it might dovetail with all objectives and values after an evolution significantly shaped by participants' feedback.

Unsurprisingly, that confirmed the truism that no single model of teaching and learning - even one so concerned with facilitation as SEDA's - can claim to be more than a model. Moreover we feel that one of the distinct strengths of our course is the human and material resource which supports our workshop programme. We are, therefore, a little concerned with an accreditation process which focuses upon outputs, and pays less attention to inputs and course processes. We fully appreciate the sensitivities which would be engaged if accreditation did intrude into these areas, but the quality of any course must depend, in part, upon the people who provide it.

To reverse the thrust of that point, particular benefit of the accreditation process is that it provides the opportunity to meet colleagues in other Universities engaged in developing their own courses, and to exchange ideas.

We are therefore pleased to conclude with the observation that accreditation exchanges have proved constructive, particularly in their recognition that the balance of emphasis in discrete courses in part reflects (and encourages reflection on) the diversity of cultures, traditions and missions in the institutions seeking accreditation. We are, for example, reassured by the SEDA assessors' suggestions for the collaborative monitoring of the weight and catholicity of the Diploma assessment.

*David McNamara*

**University of Hertfordshire - Professional Development in Teaching & Learning in HE**

The process of SEDA Recognition has seemed to us to be 'user-friendly' throughout. It is very clear in its documentation, sequence and responsibilities (who has to do what and when). It is formal where necessary (such as the items each programme must meet) but not excessively so - the general atmosphere is of professional informality. It is consistent in that the process of recognition adheres to SEDA's own values and attitudes.

The training day was very helpful and well designed and run. It was useful to attend this day before we had started designing the course. However, the day was structured as to assume participants already have a course plan to work on. In our case our course did have a predecessor that we could work on for the day, but which bore no relation to our eventual new course. We speculated on whether the training day could make use of a case-study which could be mapped as an exercise, thus enabling those who are starting a course from scratch to understand the SEDA system before they start their designing.

The area where SEDA had most effect on our thinking was assessment. Interestingly, our internal validation process had made no enquiries as to what was meant by certain statements re assessment, but SEDA forced us to think this through more thoroughly. This, we feel, has been the single most important benefit to course design.

Conversely, the area in which SEDA has been able to affect us least is APEL. We are using an APEL route and would have appreciated some advice on this, although we understand we have no predecessors.

One issue which has come up with respect to internal validation and is also relevant to SEDA has been who tutors courses like this?

As a course team we have a strong feeling that it is more important the tutors are validated/recognised than the content, as teaching and learning is so dependent on the process. We should be interested to know what SEDA's view is on recognising tutors. We feel that the process needs monitoring, but beyond knowing our tutors and the process they use personally, we have no clear way of doing this. This does not seem to be addressed by the SEDA system.

The SEDA process has given us the opportunity to try out our plans and ideas on other experienced colleagues. We look forward to continuing this contact. The feedback we have received has been very helpful and the advice constructive. In general, we have felt ourselves to be very much in sympathy with what SEDA is doing, and feel that, in gaining Recognition, we have joined a community of the proverbial 'like-minded scholars'.

*Lin Thorley*

**For further information**, write to: Jill Brookes, SEDA Administrator, Gala House, Raglan Road, Birmingham B5 7RA
Or see the Teacher Accreditation Scheme Home Page on the Internet, on *http://www.lgu.ac.uk/baume/sedatas/tashome.htm*

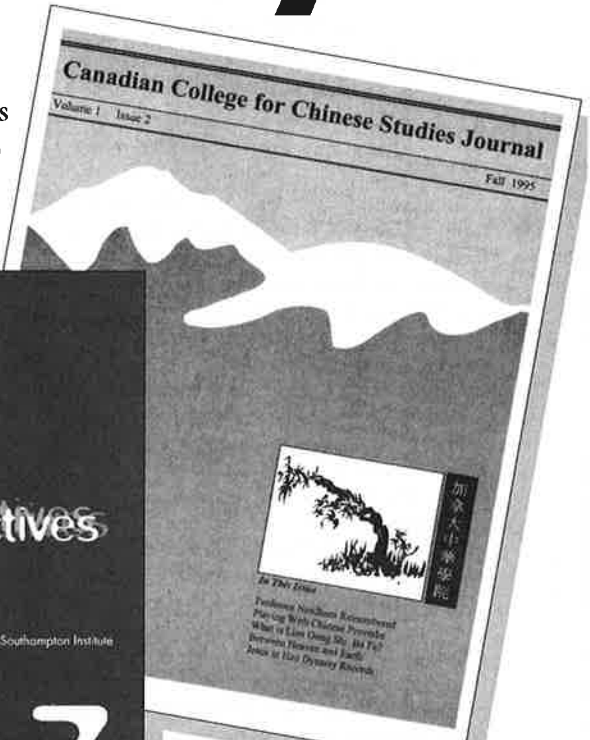
***Secret Vice** continued from page 19*

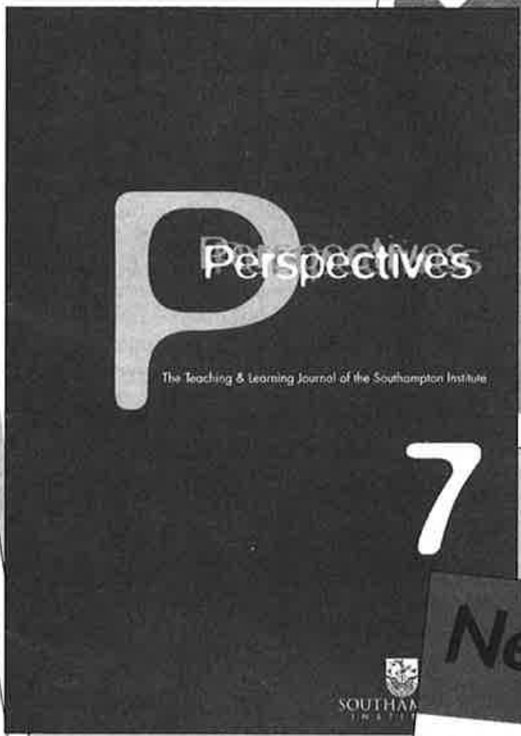
chance to take time out to think about teaching. In what turned out to be an even more hectic year than usual, Wednesday morning was an oasis of sanity, and I'll miss it. So, yes, I'd recommend it however skilled and experienced you are. The more the pressures build up - more students, fewer resources, less time - the more urgently we need to make some space in our working lives to reflect on what we do, and how and why we do it.

# What Others Say

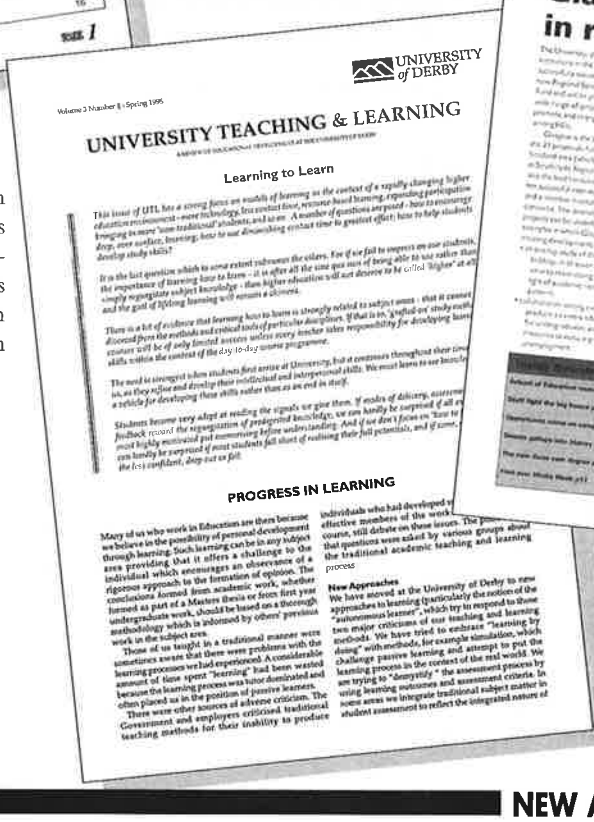
In our last issue, we asked readers to send us copies of all those internal newsletters and magazines being published in universities and other institutions of HE. Thank you to all those of you who responded by putting the Editor on the mailing list.

Here we show a few of the very varied publications that have been sent our way.






Next time we plan to print excerpts from one, or even several of these publications, as many of them are publishing some very interesting material. Could Editors of newsletters please note: to ensure that we republish accurately, we will need to receive the text on disk (for PC if possible) in ASCII.

# BOOKS

## CULTURE SHOCK

**Human Resource Management in Higher and Further Education**

*David Warner and Elaine Crosthwaite*

Open University (1995)£16.99

"Culture shock" is often the term used by those whose previous professional experience has been outside the FE/HE sector.

Peter Knight's foreword recognises the need for insights into this somewhat idiosyncratic culture, and suggests ways in which issues of management and change can be firstly understood and then addressed appropriately.

Human Resource Management is very properly a focus for Personnel Departments but, as this book recognises throughout, also needs to be the valid concern of all managers if an "empowered" rather than a command structure is to be maintained.

The handbook format of the topic-based chapters, prefaced by editorial comment, offers an overview of the issues currently being faced within the sector, as well as providing free standing information and case study materials, to augment personal experience and generate creative thinking. Topics include Managing Diversity, The Learning Organisation and Developing Managers as well as Recruitment, Employment Law and Industrial Relations.

There can be a concern that where management is the figure, in a figure/ground relationship, it can be seen as stifling rather than enlivening or even freeing! Here we have attempts at capturing the potential vibrancy of HRD as well as recognising the need to be sensitive to individual institutional histories.

Perhaps there is insufficient recognition of what HRD practice can learn from education (coaching, mentoring, work-based learning). Good practice works both ways.

Useful and necessary concepts can be negated if they are not seen to be immediately relevant – this book offers a valid starting point for moving forward.

***Jean Aaron-Walker,***
*University of Central Lancashire*

## AREN'T WE ALL?

**Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence**

*Michael Eraut*

The Falmer Press (1994)

ISBN 0 7507 0330 X cased
ISBN 0 7507 0331 8 paper

This book is important for a variety of potential readers and reasons. It should be of interest not only to staff and educational developers but also to teaching staff whose work concerns professional preparation or continuing development. Eraut draws on a wide range of research to analyse professional knowledge and learning and to suggest 'reconceptualizing the relationship between higher education and the professions'.

Many of the chapters in Part 1 are based on previously published material, dealing with the nature, acquisition and use of professional knowledge. Eraut examines the common contrasts of theory and practice, public and personal knowledge, propositional and process knowledge, and analytic and intuitive thinking. He aims here to enhance our understanding of '[t]he process of interpreting and personalizing theory and integrating it into conceptual frameworks that are themselves partly inconsistent and partly tacit ....'. This reminded me how often, as a trainer, I resort to the 'slogans' derided in the preface, such as 'the reflective practitioner' and even 'professional development'. Eraut's delineation of different kinds of professional knowledge is enlightening and useful.

Part 2 considers the concepts of competence, their applications in the NVQ/SVQ system, and the author's recent research in formal assessment of professional competence. Eraut's calm analysis here is a pleasing corrective to the claims and counter-claims of the friends and enemies of 'competence'.

Part 3, on professional accountability reflects on increasing social and political emphasis on outcomes for clients, and returns to the moral arguments around 'professionalism' as an ideology. At first sight this final chapter seemed oddly placed (perhaps I was expecting a more pedestrian summary), but it speaks to the condition of higher education in drawing attention to the neglect of moral and emotional elements of professional training and management.

Reading this book was challenging and at times I felt rather like a first year student overwhelmed by intellectual rigour and brilliance. This was the mental equivalent of the need to digest a pudding full of concentrated wholesomeness, steamed for several hours and set aflame with a sprig of holly on top. A leavening of realism and the occasional spark of wit:

*'...for every incompetent professional, there are probably several who are competently doing the wrong thing.'*

ensure that Eraut's pudding is rich but not heavy.

***Lesley MacDonald,***
*University of Durham*

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT IDEAS

**Teaching Improvement Practices**

*W. A. Wright and associates*

Anker Publishing Co. (1995) $41-95

This is a collection of fifteen articles on teaching improvement written by experts in the USA, Canada, Australia and the UK. The articles are well-grounded in the practice of staff development and make impressive use of the research literature. As a source of ideas about staff development programmes it is better than recent, British rivals, although it has the most useless index I've ever encountered.

Chapters include an excellent one by Keith Trigwell on the importance of developing colleagues' basic conceptions of teaching; ones on problem-based and co-operative learning; on laboratory teaching (another good one); on staff development workshops; and on meeting the needs of different groups such as graduate assistants, new staff and academic leaders. The chapter on teaching portfolios is ever-open before me at the moment.

The first and longest chapter, by Alan Wright and Carol O'Neil, is a report of an international survey of staff development personnel's beliefs about the nature of effective practices for improving teaching instruction. There are some interesting national variations – the British have more faith in workshops and less in wise hiring practices than overseas colleagues, for example. However, there is considerable international agreement that the keys to instructional improvement are held by Deans and Heads of Department. Overall, university employment policies and practices were rated second, with the provision of development opportunities and grants for teaching improvement coming third.

However, articles by Wright and O'Neil written specifically for Canadian and US audiences and published elsewhere struck me as more useful. Of course, it's useful to have results such as these, embodying as they do collective wisdom about what seems to work. But it's important to keep in mind another priority: we have virtually no evidence about what does work (Weimer and Lenze, 1991) ó shouldn't collecting that evidence be the next priority?

I've used this book repeatedly since receiving it and recommend it to colleagues with educational development responsibilities.

***P. T. Knight,***
*Lancaster University*

## NOTICE TO PUBLISHERS

Please send books for review to our new books editor: Ms Lesley MacDonald, Staff Development and Training Advisor, University of Durham, Old Shire Hall, Durham DH1 3HP.

# Small Advertisements

This year we begin a new service for readers of *The New Academic*. Small ads may be inserted for as little as 20p per word (minimum 30 words). Just send copy and prepayment direct to the Editor (address on page 1). Cheques should be made payable to *The New Academic*. Telephone numbers count as 2 words.

22-26 April 1996
**Teaching About Studying Workshop,** London.
Contact: Centre for Higher Education Studies, Institute of Education, 59 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0NT.
Roy Cox (Tutor), tel: 0171 612 6383
Janet Harding (Secretary), tel: 0171 612 6362
Fee £170

8-9 May 1996
**Strategic Financial Management Course,** London
Contact: Centre for Higher Education Studies, Institute of Education, 59 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0NT
Professor Gareth Williams (Tutor), tel: 0171-612 6375
Janet Harding (Secretary), tel: 0171 612 6362
Fee £300

6-17 May 1996
**Research Supervision Workshop,** London
Contact: Centre for Higher Education Studies, Institute of Education, 59 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0NT.
Roy Cox (Tutor), tel: 0171 612 6383
Janet Harding (Secretary), tel: 0171 612 6362
Fee £170

29-31 May 1996
**Research Management Workshop**, London
Contact: Centre for Higher Education Studies, Institute of Education, 59 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0NT.
Cari Loder(Tutor), tel: 0171 612 6370
Janet Harding (Secretary), tel: 0171 612 6362
Fee £255

18-19 June 1996
**Reading Efficiency Workshop**, London
Contact: Centre for Higher Education Studies, Institute of Education, 59 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0NT.
Bill Bailey (Tutor), tel: 01926 842681 or Roy Cox tel: 0171 612 6383
Janet Harding (Secretary), tel: 0171 612 6362
Fee £170

2 July 1996
**Conference Presentation Skills for Woman Workshop**, Bristol
Full day session prior to Psychology of Women Conference,University of West of England, Bristol.
Contact: Elizabeth Mapstone (Tutor), Trethevy, Tintagel, Cornwall, PL34 0BE 01840-770220, Fax:-770518
Fee £65

Please mention *The New Academic* when replying to any of our advertisements.

# LETTERS

## TEACHING WITH THE INTERNET - Does form follow function?

Now that most British Universities have a World Wide Web site in operation, it may be useful to take stock and, in particular, to consider how we might progressively develop these in order to best support the teaching function of our institutions.

In the early stages of development I believe this question of optimising teaching opportunities was overshadowed by a number of imperatives, including

- the need to have something on-line as quickly as possible
- a focus on the public relations and institutional information functions of the Web site
- a tendency for managers/administrators to accept the Internet as a technical issue rather than an academic one
- a collegiate ethos (within some universities), allowing the site to grow by individual contribution or, contrary to this, a managerial ethos assigning site construction to a central facility concerned mainly with publicity issues.

In general, academic staff, and particularly those working in educational development, have not been as involved as they might and I believe that, as a result, the university Web sites tend to resemble those of other information providing organisations and do not yet address the issue of providing students with an efficiently planned learning environment. If we are to make progress in this respect it will be necessary to put less emphasis on content and more on examining function and designing appropriate page structures. In fact, the authoring language used to construct Web pages (HTML or HyperText Markup Language) is not different in kind from the authoring languages used to create computer-based learning or multimedia materials and the same principles of structural design are applicable.

Providing we accept the necessity for wide student access, there is no reason why there should not be an area of each university Web site dedicated to the teaching process and providing access to course specific resources, identified as relevant by the responsible teaching staff, and in a structured format. That is to say, we can create a learning environment, rather than an information environment, which provides for all the modes of engagement which we use in more traditional teaching/learning contexts i.e. not just open-access to raw information but reference driven enquiry, guided study and interactive learning through exercises, case studies, simulations etc.

Because an area like this would consist partly of local pages, as well as focusing student activity and restraining formless browsing, it should be welcomed as a way to reduce the traffic burden on the Internet itself.

Each institution needs to develop its Web site as a teaching resource and, collectively, we have to address this need as soon as possible or we may find our options curtailed by the gradual embedding of incompatible structures. I suggest this is a very significant academic issue with many aspects requiring exploration and with major implications for the future of Higher Education.

**Dennis James**
*Learning Systems Consultant*
*Leeds Metropolitan University*
*Leeds, LS1 3HE*
*Email: d.james@lmu.ac.uk*

## CAN STUDENTS AFFORD A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE?

It has been suggested that four-year degrees, such as the MPhys and the MEng, will be a prerequisite for students hoping to do postgraduate research at universities. It has also been suggested by the Engineering Council that in the future, a four-year degree will be needed to become a chartered engineer. It is becoming clear that these courses will be regardd as providing the proper full undergraduate education that used to be found in the three-year BSc and BEng degree courses.

With successive reductions in the real value of the student grant and other government savings, large numbers of students find themselves in real financial difficulty. One of my students has serious doubts about whether he can afford to complete the final year of his three-year degree course. His earlier interest in the four-year MEng option has long since gone.

I am concerned that the four-year courses could become an option only for the well-heeled student whose family can provide the necessary financial support. Are we unintentionally developing a system of qualifications that will again lead to professional scientists and engineers only coming from comparatively wealthy families?

**Darryl Almond,**
*School of Materials Science,*
*University of Bath.*

## CAN WE TALK?

I should like to make contact with HE teachers and staff developers with similar interests in the UK. As coordinator of a course called Introduction to Tertiary Teaching, I have worked on direct observation of teaching, reflective practice and portfolios as major strategies for staff development. These are related to subject design, planning and preparation, large group and small group teaching, independent learning, teacher-student relationships, student assessment and self-evaluation of teaching. I hope to be in the UK in July, and also to attend the SEDA Conference in the Autumn. I should be very glad to hear from anyone with similar interests who would like to exchange views.

**Max Gillett,**
*Faculty of Education*
*University of Wollongong,*
*NSW 2522*
*Australia*
*Fax: +61 42 213 892*

## Coming in our next issue:

•

**The Teaching Improvement Project System in Action**

•

**Student Assignments as Tutor's Research**

•

**Skills Employers Want**

•

**Careers and the Undergraduate**

•

Yet more on assessment

Letters should be sent direct to the Editor (address p.1). They should be as concise as possible, and we reserve the right to shorten further.

# TWO SEDA CONFERENCES

SEDA

STAFF AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

## The Environment for Learning 2006

*An investigation into possible scenarios for HE in ten years' time*

**The conference will present:**

* A model of how learner-centred learning can be organised at an institutional level.
* An opportunity to experience first hand how such learner groups can be facilitated by students themselves.
* Exchange of ideas from participants.

*Organised for SEDA by a team of staff and students at the University of Bradford*

**15 to 17 May 1996**

**Bankfield Hotel, between Bradford & Bingley, West Yorkshire**

**Fee: £385 (including 2 nights accommodation). Due to the interactive format, participants are asked to attend the full 48 hours**

## Staff Development in Teaching and Learning Technologies

**The conference will address the following questions:**

* What is it in particular technologies that helps staff and educational development?
* Which staff development strategies and activities work best?
* How can workers in technology, pedagogy and staff development cooperate?
* What will be the mainstream learning technologies for the millenium?

**University of Derby**
**25 - 26 June 1996**

**Residential and conference fees**

- £245 (ensuite),
- £220 (study bedroom)
- £25 extra night

**SEDA A.G.M. 4.30pm 25 June**
**University of Derby**

**For further information about the Bradford Conference, contact:**

*Jill Brookes, SEDA Administrator,*
*Tel: 0120 440 5021*
*Fax: 0120 440 5022*
*Email: office@seda.demon.co.uk*

**For further information about the Derby Conference, contact the Organiser:**

*Chris O'Hagan*
*Tel: 01332 622262*
*Fax: 01332 294861*
*Email: C.M.OHagan@derby.ac.uk*