

The Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee Enquiry:

“Students and Universities”

Memorandum of evidence from the Staff and Educational Development Association

10th December 2008

Summary

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

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

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

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

1 Introduction

1.1 The Staff and Educational Development Association welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this timely enquiry, especially focussing on the balance between teaching and research.

1.2 SEDA's mission is “supporting and leading educational change”. It is the professional association for staff and educational developers in the UK, promoting innovation and good practice in higher education.

2 About SEDA

2.1 SEDA's work is organised around six **values**:

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

2.2 Through its **Fellowship** and **Associate Fellowship** schemes SEDA provides accreditation for people involved in academic staff and educational development in higher education, both in the UK and internationally. The schemes are for staff who help lecturers, support staff and their institutions to develop and enhance the quality of the student learning experience. SEDA also has development programmes for both new and established staff in educational development.

2.3 SEDA established the Teacher Accreditation Scheme which then accredited courses and programmes such as the **Postgraduate Certificates in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education**. They were described in the Dearing Report of 1997 as the basis on which professional qualification for teachers should be built and are now in place in almost every HEI in the UK. They are taken in the main by new or inexperienced staff, and in various forms enable them to reach Standard 2 of the National Standards Framework.

2.4 SEDA has gone on to create the **Professional Development Framework**, through which institutions gain recognition for their professional development programmes and the individuals who complete them. SEDA has recognised a wide range of these programmes, covering many aspects of the professional work of all staff in higher education. At present it offers 16 awards and has recognised 19 institutions which are running 38 programmes. SEDA is engaged in the active development of this area of its work.

3 Propositions

3.1 SEDA believes that teaching and supporting student learning in Higher Education is a profession in its own right. As most practitioners in Higher Education are already members of a profession, we propose the concept of “the dual professional”. We believe that every member of a profession has a responsibility to contribute to the future of that profession, whether through research, teaching or other means. We believe it is essential for the future of UK Higher Education that a substantial proportion of those who work within it should fully engage in scholarly pedagogic professional development.

3.2 SEDA believes that all students have the right to be taught well and welcomes the sustained investment in recent years into programmes for the initial preparation of teachers and others. Further such investment is essential to build capacity.

3.3 However, SEDA is also concerned with the long-term professional, scholarly pedagogic development of all those established staff who teach and support students’ learning. At present too low a priority is given to this, it suffers from a lack of recognition, arrangements for its support are fragmented and it requires more significant investment. SEDA believes this is a major challenge for the sector. Greater effort in this area is essential for the successful implementation of further change and reform.

3.4 SEDA believes that a second major challenge is the professional pedagogic development of all those who lead and manage teaching staff and who design and implement change and innovation in teaching, learning, assessment and the curriculum.

3.5 SEDA believes its Professional Development Framework, which has at its heart the enhancement of the student experience, provides one means by which such development can be structured, measured and quality assured. It enables the sector to meet the requirements of all three levels of the UK Professional Standards Framework.

3.6 SEDA also believes that it is essential that the sector swiftly develops both an academic route (Certificate, Diploma, Masters, PhD) and a professional route to pedagogic qualification. SEDA is heartened by the expansion of the DProf and the EdD awards in HE, which successfully combine academic and professional development.

3.7 However, SEDA also believes the introduction at this time of compulsory qualification and registration for established teaching staff in HE would be counter-productive. There is still much more the sector can do through the implementation of good promotion and reward structures. At present a voluntary strategy will be far more effective than one driven by legislation. The target must be that established teaching staff achieve Standard 2 of the UK Professional Standards Framework.

3.8 SEDA's final proposition is that the necessary development of a scholarly approach to pedagogy challenges the existing model of quality assurance, which depends heavily upon peer review. This is already under challenge as the sector diversifies. SEDA thinks it is essential that the culture of scholarly, professional pedagogic development should inform the quality assurance process, for example in the selection and preparation of discipline-based reviewers and especially of external examiners. SEDA assumes it is reasonable to expect external examiners to be qualified, and has developed an award within its Professional Development Framework for this purpose.

4 Specific responses

4.1 Level of funding:

SEDA, along with many other agencies in the sector, believes that well-funded higher education is essential both for individual students and for general benefit to the economy and society. However, as that unit of resource has declined since the 1970s, it is SEDA's members who have been at the forefront of the work to maintain quality, while wholeheartedly welcoming the significant increase in student numbers. That long process of change has revealed the need to move away from traditional and in many ways inappropriate pedagogies towards models of learning more suited to today and the future. The development of a scholarly approach to pedagogy has enabled professionals more effectively to evaluate costs against the quality of

learning and outcomes, and will enable them in the future to make best use of resources.

4.2 Balance between teaching and research:

The effect of the funding model derived from the Research Selectivity (now Assessment) Exercise since 1986 has had a real and damaging impact on the quality of the student experience. In the face of elements such as prestige, fear, career advancement and money it has been hard to hold the line that educating students and caring for their intellectual and personal growth is one of the noblest and highest callings in a civilised society.

The deleterious effects of the RAE has penetrated throughout the system and diverted even specifically teaching-focussed institutions. The level of funding is not the issue – it is the flexibility of research funding and the fixed nature of teaching funding which causes the imbalance. It is especially grievous that research into pedagogy has been belittled and that committed subject teachers have found it impossible to develop an equivalence either in their generic or discipline-based pedagogic research to their discipline-based research.

4.3 Financing of innovation:

Much of the financing of innovation has been less efficient than it could have been through the absence of a scholarly pedagogic culture able to incorporate project outputs in a systematic and managed way. In many universities the current analysis is that the core teaching processes are working well, the prestige of the institution is high, and innovation is an enhancement activity rather than the core of essential reform. In these places the claim is made that modest incremental improvement will be sufficient to guarantee high quality. SEDA's view is that a more critical approach is required, and that funding both to devise and then embed innovation is a necessary part of a bigger package of simultaneous developments.

4.4 Teaching/research integration:

Too many institutions have diverted energy and funding into a thin interpretation of this issue – namely that as long as its staff keep abreast of the latest developments they can teach them to their students. An associated development has been the growth in research-led universities of a substantial amount of student-tutor interaction being carried by postgraduates (many of whom have attained Standard One of the UK Professional Standards Framework by engaging with elements of the PG Certificate courses described in 2.3). A more imaginative development, which SEDA supports, has been the incorporation of research activities and processes within undergraduate study. Students learning in 'research mode' should be central to the curriculum. We endorse the view, recently outlined by Healey and Jenkins (in the University & College Union Newsletter, October 2008), that "all undergraduate students in all higher education institutions should experience learning through and about research."

4.5 Teaching provision and facilities:

Many institutions, buildings, rooms and spaces have been built to deliver a range of pedagogies that are becoming progressively less appropriate. SEDA would strongly urge future investment to be in flexible and adaptable provision, supporting the development of social learning spaces which are more suitable for the student centred learning approaches in which students become producers and not just consumers of knowledge. There is no doubt that for some staff the rigidity of the provision and the assumptions that go with it make significant educational change harder than it needs to be.

4.6 Methods of assessing excellence in teaching:

The significant educational research in the last 20 years has been into the quality of student learning, and away from more traditional assumptions about the concept of the excellent teacher. It has revealed in growing detail how the different elements of the programme interact with each other and emphasised issues of programme design, assessment and outcomes, revealing the vital importance of well-managed course teams which themselves include many roles beyond simply that of the lecturer. While recognising the value of some of the recent steps to identify and reward individual excellence, SEDA expects in the next few years the emphasis will move towards the excellence displayed by schools, departments and programme teams, incorporating such features as cooperation, scholarly enquiry and evaluation, and leadership.

In terms of promotion and reward, while many HEIs have developed notions of equivalence between teaching and research in their procedures, embedding these in practice has been a slow process, and today the picture is patchy across the sector. While staff in a few institutions are reasonably confident that a commitment to developing their teaching will benefit their careers to the highest level, many are still hesitant and sceptical. In some institutions, choosing the teaching route is seen as a public acknowledgement of the weakness of their research status. Those who wholeheartedly choose the teaching route more frequently speak of the personal satisfaction of working with students and becoming progressively more professional in one of the great vocations.

5 Endorsements

5.1 SEDA has had sight of, and endorses, the submission from Professor Lewis Elton.

5.2 **Degree classification and plagiarism.** SEDA has chosen to confine its comments to the Committee's questions about the balance between teaching and research. However, SEDA wishes to stress that the outcomes of the enquiry into degree classifications and plagiarism will make significant changes to assessment processes, therefore to curriculum design, teaching and learning activities and the quality of student learning. This alone will require a major investment in the professional pedagogic development of established staff to support the changes which are long overdue. SEDA wishes to endorse the approach taken by the Assessment Standards

Knowledge exchange (a Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning) in its "Assessment Standards: A Manifesto for Change".

The Staff And Educational Development Association

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Supplementary Memorandum of evidence from the Staff and Educational Development Association

4th May 2009

Since SEDA submitted its original Memorandum of Evidence to the Select Committee in December 2008, its policy has changed in one significant respect.

In the original memorandum SEDA stated that it preferred to maintain the current model of voluntary training and qualification for established teaching staff (3.7).

Through decision at its Executive, SEDA now holds the view that, while it is preferable to achieve such change through voluntary means, it is so important for the quality of student learning that, as soon as possible, all staff who teach should be expected to achieve Standard Two of the National Professional Standards Framework. It also takes the view that those who manage the educational process should achieve this Standard. Other staff who support student learning in a variety of ways should be expected to achieve Standard One.

Established teaching staff are those who have been in post longer than the opportunities for pedagogic development have been available and who may need support to be able to make a successful claim to have reached Standard Two. The same condition usually applies to those who manage the educational process.

SEDA would also like to take this opportunity to draw the Committee's attention to SEDA's Professional Development Framework. This has been designed to make it possible for those who work in higher education to engage in an appropriate development process which strengthens their professional capacity and which leads to SEDA Recognition. It was this process which SEDA used to develop the programmes for new staff which are now widespread across the sector. Within this Framework, for example, SEDA has already been supporting institutions to develop and then recognise External Examiners. There are 16 Awards within the Framework, and they cover a comprehensive range of development opportunities for many different staff at different points in their careers.

James Wisdom
Co-Chair

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