

Teaching and Learning

May 2004 Post Compulsory Edition

Research for Education

The importance
of users to the
success of
TLRP



Mary James, TLRP Deputy Director

The TLRP is committed to research FOR education. It aims both to advance knowledge and to promote its use to enhance learning through the development of policy and practice. For this reason the engagement of teachers and policy-makers is vitally important at all stages in the research process, from deciding research questions to the dissemination of results.

'User engagement' is pursued in two main ways.

1. Practitioners' involvement in research activity.

This is achieved by research teams involving practitioners in various teaching, training and assessment roles, organisation managers and trades unions in development and research activity and in translating findings from one setting to the particular conditions of another setting. Practitioners' involvement also comes through setting up structures around the projects, such as advisory groups and networks. In this newsletter, you will find accounts of how some of the TLRP's Post-Compulsory Projects have involved different groups and organisations.

2. Liaison with national user organisations.

TLRP project teams work closely with user organisations that have a particular interest in their findings. Members of the central Directors' Team also liaise with key users in order to alert them to emerging evidence with relevance to their concerns, and to raise awareness in research teams of new policy initiatives that would benefit from their findings. They promote impact by drawing on user experience, strategic advice and dissemination infrastructures, such as seminars, websites and newsletters.

The TLRP has presented a 'showcase' of its activities in each of the four countries of the United Kingdom: at Westminster in June 2003; in Edinburgh in November 2003; in Cardiff in February 2004; and in Belfast in May 2004. Each of these showcase events has been attended by representatives of a wide-range of user groups. At the Welsh event, Jane Davidson, AM, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in Wales, announced £500,000 for TLRP extension work in Wales. She said that TLRP has a vital role in informing practices and improving outcomes for all learners and it links well with the programme of work set out in *The Learning Country*. A similar extension has been announced for Northern Ireland. Extension work in Scotland has already begun and researchers are currently submitting bids for the Welsh extension.

The extent of engagement with users will depend on our capacity to communicate effectively with them. Face to face communication continues to be important but we have also developed a portfolio of electronic and paper-based output and impact ideas. Martin Ince, TLRP Media Fellow and Kathryn Ecclestone, TLRP Associate Director, are both working with the press, including a special edition of the TES FE Focus KEY section.

If you have not already done so, we hope you will want to register your particular interests on the TLRP database so that we can target information to you. This can be done by registering at our website www.tlrp.org/register.html



Jane Davidson, Minister of Education for Wales, with Professor Andrew Pollard, TLRP Director (left) and Professor Bob Burgess, Chair of the TLRP Steering Committee (right).

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Mapping the Post-16 Landscape



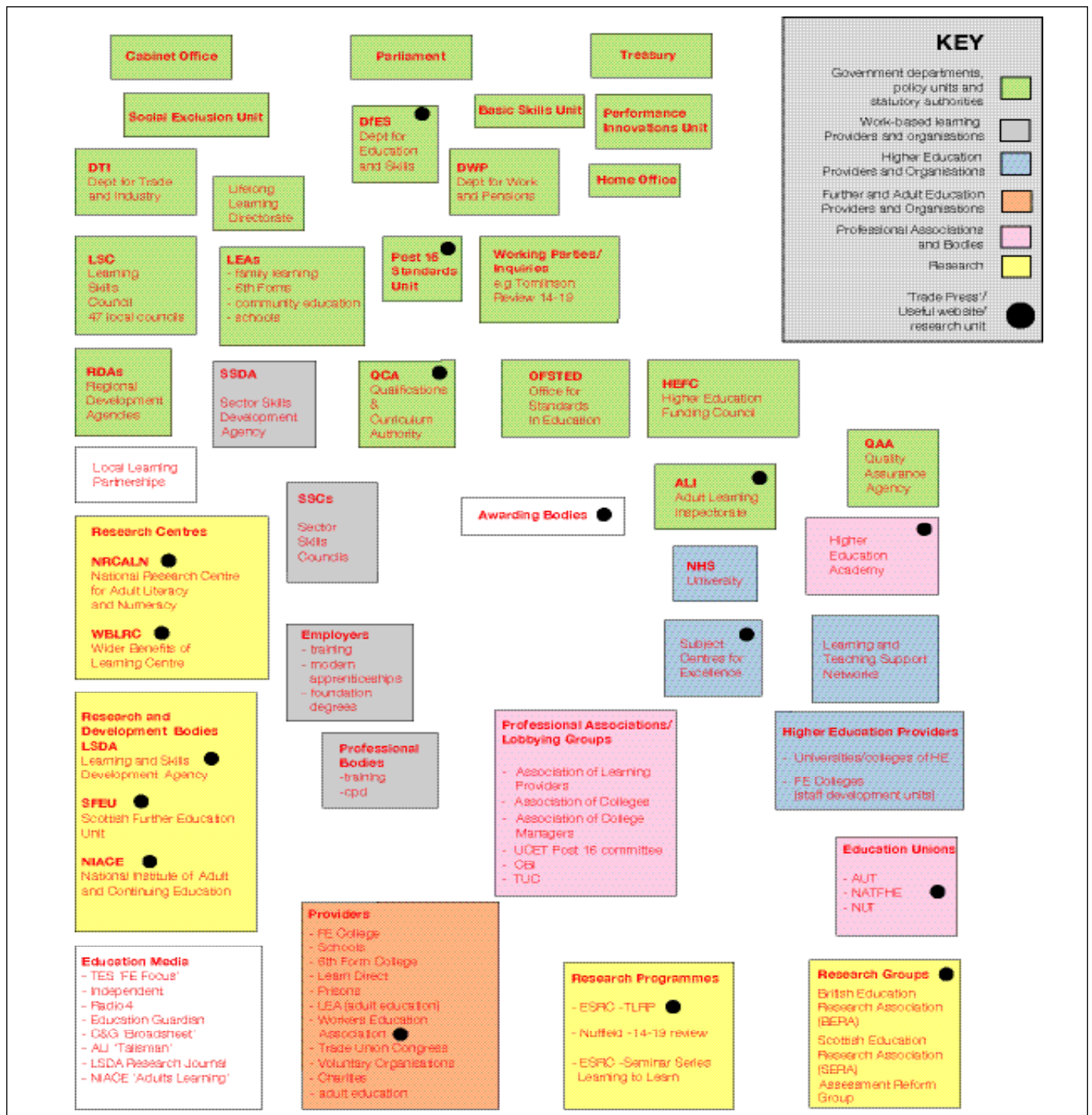
Kathryn Ecclestone is TLRP's Associate Director for post-16 and further education

The UK's post-16 education and training system is complex and subject to regular major overhauls. Changes to funding, regulation and organisation of the post-compulsory sector make it extremely difficult for user groups and researchers alike to make sense of who the key agencies and bodies are and to decide who are the most important. The TLRP must also make its voice heard amidst a range of bodies carrying out research and development work around the theme of improving teaching and learning in different post-16 contexts.

A map of the sector is, hopefully, a useful aid for researchers, policy and research bodies and practitioners. The one here is intended as an aid or starting point that can be amended and adapted for different projects and agencies. It is perhaps incomplete for some projects, or might overlook an audience or organisation that is crucial for particular projects. Nevertheless, it is a working document and offered in that spirit. For example, researchers on the 'Literacies in FE' project have adapted it in order to decide who their most important audiences are, what

'trade press' each has and who might be the most useful people to liaise with and to write for at different stages of the project. The notion of a 'trade press' is useful because it means that researchers can tailor the publication of different aspects of their work according to the house style and culture of each organisation's newsletters, publications and websites.

Feedback on the map will be very welcome.



Work-based learning

Comprehensive and all-embracing links

Helen Rainbird
Northampton
College of HE

Satisfying the often disparate, but overlapping interests of all the stakeholders and creating mechanisms for exploration, dissemination, exchange of views and co-operation are crucial and have to be created on a much wider basis than are available at present. The experience of the network on 'Improving Incentives to Learning at the Workplace' emphasised this in a most practical way, as Helen Rainbird from Northampton College of HE shows here.

There are at least four categories of stakeholder in the field of learning at, for and through the workplace. They are the policy makers at various levels including national government, researchers in universities and other locations, practitioner/providers including employers, trade unions and trainers/educators and, perhaps the most important stakeholders, the learners. Comprehensive, all embracing, links between those stakeholders leading to a virtuous circle of provision of learning, experience of learning, analysis of experience, dissemination of findings, policy determination, provision of learning and so on are pretty well non-existent.

Policy makers sometimes listen to researchers

if their findings confirm their intentions and researchers talk to each other but often not to learners or providers at large or in a language that they might understand. Providers often provide what they can rather than what learners need and learners, well, learners make the best of what is available. This last paragraph might be seen as a rather sour or cynical observation but there is more than a grain of truth in it.

Research has a crucial role to play in not only discovering and commenting on what is happening but also in developing and opening up new and different perspectives on the purpose and practice of learning at, for and through the workplace. The experience of Unison in working with researchers and other practitioners led to new and exciting types of learning provision in the health care and local government sectors contributing to improved occupational performance, changes in methods of recruitment and employee development, with employers 'growing their own' employees for the future, and heralding significant changes in individual life styles and personal development.

Those developments, together with the existing relationships between Unison, the

then opposition front bench on education and the subsequent government department contributed significantly to the emergence of the government sponsored Union Learning Fund which opened up a wide range of learning partnerships between unions and employers.

A key feature in the success of the network was the range of interests represented in the Advisory Group (see Helen Rainbird's description of the group's membership elsewhere), which helped shape the nature and direction of the research. The development of links between individual network projects, practitioners and learners during the research phase contributed significantly to the quality of the network's findings. Although the network has completed its work, it is spawning continuing development through seminars designed to translate those findings into practice outside the ESRC framework.

For details of projects and publications from the Phase 1 Working to Learn Network, see tlrp.org.uk or contact: helen.rainbird@northampton.ac.uk

Collaboration, Capacity Building and Communication

Lorna Unwin and
Alison Fuller
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The benefits of involving different groups and individuals at all stages of the research process, as well as tailoring materials about the research to particular groups and cultivating contacts over a long period of time, are all highlighted here by Alison Fuller and Lorna Unwin.

Any researcher who wants to employ a case study approach to research faces the problem of how to persuade people and organisations to give them sustained and unrestricted access over a period of time. Further down the line, there is the equally difficult problem of how to persuade potential 'users' of the research to take notice. In our Phase 1 TLRP project, we devised a number of strategies for gaining access to private sector companies, for building a relationship from which both they and we might benefit and, subsequently, for communicating our findings to a range of policymaking and practitioner audiences. Our project was set in the steel industry in England and Wales and its overarching aim was to identify the factors influencing how

inexperienced (apprentices) and experienced employees attain competence in the workplace. The apprentices were part of the government-supported Modern Apprenticeship programme.

Gaining Access

Although our project was concerned with learning at work, the primary aim of any workplace is to produce goods and services. We needed to convince employers, therefore, that exploring the ways in which learning took place in their companies might be useful to them. Our existing contacts with the (then) national training organisation for the steel and metals sector provided us with very important advice. They made us realise that, as researchers, we had skills and expertise that might be useful to companies who were seeking to improve their training and development strategies. This alerted us to the possibility of offering support to the companies in building their own in-house research capacity. In other words, we needed to think beyond the specific aims of the project and

focus on the concerns of employers. This formed the basis of a leaflet, which we designed in consultation with our contacts, as a 'letter of introduction' to potential case study companies.

We selected four very different companies for our case studies, three of whom were keen to make use of our research expertise to help them develop survey instruments for evaluating staff development programmes, employee attitudes to learning, and other initiatives related to organisational change. The fourth company, however, was a family-owned business with some 40 employees and they made it clear that they were happy enough to let us in so long as we didn't interfere with production. This company never took any real interest in our research, a response which, in itself, proved to be characteristic of their approach to workforce development. From the perspective of our project, the research findings from this company were certainly very

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valuable, but the benefits of the much closer relationship we enjoyed with the other companies extended beyond the data gathering stage of the project. By collaborating with these companies to develop the research skills of staff in the training and personnel departments, we were able to deepen our understanding of their workplace cultures.

Engaging with policymaking and practitioner communities

The collaborative nature of our working arrangements with three of four case study companies also brought benefits in terms of our communication strategy. As we collected data, we began to develop an analytical framework to examine why the companies each created different types of learning environments. We called this the 'expansive-restrictive' framework. Our case study companies helped us to translate the theoretical and conceptual elements of our research to form an analytical tool that could work in practice in both the public as well as the private sector (see Fuller and Unwin, 2004, and Unwin and Fuller, 2003). This validation of the framework's usefulness helped us to prepare presentations to a diverse range of practitioner audiences including the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, the Local Education Authorities' Curriculum and Assessment 14-19 Network, and the Scottish Lifelong Learning Forum.

At a policy level, there was a focus throughout the lifetime of our project on the need to

improve the quality of the Modern Apprenticeship and employer investment in workforce development. The practitioner support we were able to mobilise for our research findings proved to be important in attracting the attention of the policymaking community at national and regional levels. We found two encounters to be particularly useful in extending our own thinking about how research can influence policy:

- a) Following a presentation to a DfES audience, a senior civil servant, working on the 2003 Skills Strategy White Paper, asked if we would take him and a colleague to two of our case study companies so he could see the 'expansive-restrictive' framework in action. This enabled us to gain a more detailed and sophisticated picture of the parameters within which civil servants have to work.
- b) The National Modern Apprenticeship Task Force, set up by Gordon Brown to work with leading employers to develop the programme, invited us to prepare a one-day seminar for their members to present the framework. We designed the day with senior training staff from one of our case study companies. This enabled us to present the generic application of our findings in conjunction with a presentation from the company on how they had used the framework to improve their apprenticeship programme.

Patience and persistence

The TLRP puts considerable emphasis on the need for researchers to engage with 'user' groups. We had been working in the field of vocational education and training for many years when we started our Phase I project and so had built up a number of contacts in the policy and practitioner communities. We had kept these contacts 'live' by attending their seminars, sending them details of our research and putting them in touch with other work we felt might be of interest to them. This proved worthwhile as they respond positively to our call for help. It was important, however, for us to remember that these contacts had different forms of expertise, which we could draw on at different times in the project. For example, the national training organisation played a vital role as an intermediary broker in helping us identify and gain access to suitable case study organisations, whilst our contacts at the DfES, the Adult Learning Inspectorate, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, and sector-based organisations provided background information and statistical data. Now that the project has finished, we are trying to ensure we continue to nourish these contacts, both for future use, but also as a way to remind ourselves that there is much more we can do with our findings. If only there were more hours in the day!

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Entering the Learning Zone

Karen Evans and
Sue Southwood
Institute of Education

The Teaching and Learning Research Programme Phase 3 project on Adult Basic Skills and Workplace Learning, led by Alison Wolf and Karen Evans, has the benefit of a close collaboration with the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, NRDC. NRDC is a core-funded by the DfES up to 2007, led by the Institute of Education, University of London in partnership with Universities, agencies and providers active on the field of adult literacy and numeracy.

The funding of a practitioner fellowship by NRDC is one very tangible expression of NRDC collaboration in the TLRP project on workplace skills. Sue Southwood, from Transport for London, is working with the project team on a part-time secondment from her main duties as Learning Zone Manager. The Learning Zone is Transport for London's essential skills programme providing opportunities for staff to improve their skills in literacy, numeracy and IT.

The research team is working over a five year period to assess the impact of workplace basic skills programmes, both on the employing organisations and on the individual

workers who participate in them. The team also has an international link with the University of Ottawa, providing Sue with the opportunity to carry out some comparisons of approaches to basic skills teaching and learning in the UK and Canada, with a particular focus on collaborative learning in a work-based context, as Sue describes:

'I have been observing one of our classes, interviewing tutors and learners and writing up narratives. I am trying to focus on how students learn, whether they participate in collaborative learning and if they do, how it helps their progress and how able and less able students interact. I have had the opportunity to watch videos and read field notes compiled by the Ottawa team and have already been surprised by how different their approach is to ours. The emphasis placed in the UK on targets and the national adult curriculum has resulted in a very structured teaching approach. Our lesson plans have clear group and individual objectives that are linked to the core curriculum and national awards. One of the Canadian videos shows ESOL, literacy and numeracy students working alongside each other in the same class.



This is quite different to how basic skills provision is organised in the UK where, if possible, students are divided by subject and level according to an assessment linked to curriculum levels.

The Ottawa research also featured vocational courses with basic skills implicit in the curriculum. For instance, one class shows women learning how to bake cakes in a kitchen but, whilst the numeracy skills are part of the lesson, the tutor does not explicitly teach numeracy. The fashion in the UK has markedly swung towards the benefits of whole-class numeracy teaching and at the Learning Zone, we believe that it is the dynamic between this and individual

learning that achieves the greatest success. This research study will explore exactly how that dynamic works through interviews, reflection and observation. For me personally, after a decade of co-ordinating basic skills provision, it is refreshing to get back into the classroom and think about how people learn, to have time to reflect on teaching practices and to talk to learners about how they feel about their learning. The research has given me time to reflect and will no doubt influence my practice, it has also reminded me of how rewarding it is to work in this field!

This collaboration is also very productive for the TLRP *Adult Basic Skills and Workplace Learning* project team as a whole, since Sue brings practitioner insights and networks into many aspects of our work. This has been of considerable importance over the past

few months, during which we have been working with companies and organisations in transport, cleaning, care and food processing sectors to set up schedules and processes for collection of data from learners, managers and providers. We have also made two excellent new appointments: Liam

Aspin (an economist) and Edmund Waite (an anthropologist) have joined us as new researchers. As the research progresses into data collection and interpretation of the evidence, we are confident that our 'collaborative learning' as an expanding team will bring many benefits.



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Engaging with Difficult Findings

Carolyn Miller
University of Brighton

Partnerships in research are crucial when a project's findings require for employers to take action. Carolyn Miller, from a project on learning during the first three years of post-graduate/post-registration employment project writes about engaging employers of nurses in some difficult findings from the project about retention and support in the Health Service.

Retaining nurses in the National Health Service (NHS) is a serious practical problem. One aim of our ongoing, four-year study of learning at work by nurses, accountants and engineers during their first post, is to assist employers to develop their training and support for new recruits and contribute to retention.

Sometimes, research can reveal some unexpected problems that might cause difficulties for groups interested in the project. Or it might shed light on problems already known to those groups. In our project, for example, experiences of the novices in the first months in post showed that nurses carried the heaviest burden of expectations to perform. Accountants and engineers viewed themselves, and were viewed by colleagues, as learners. But for nurses, patients took precedence over their status as learners. Nurses' own expectations and their assumptions about the way that other staff colleagues viewed them, was that they should be able to assume full care and accountability for their patients from the start.

Newly qualified nurses (NQNs) described the transition from student to staff nurse as 'massive'. For the first time they had full responsibility for the care of patients and a common feeling was that they should 'hit the ground running'. Indeed they may well be running, first to get through all the tasks they perceive they have to do, and secondly, because they do not yet know how to prioritise their patients' needs.

In the research observations and interviews, the support and help provided by others in the NQNs' work environment was seen as crucial to their development and to their ability to cope with the responsibilities and stresses of patient care. The need for feedback on progress, whether positive or negative, was very important to the NQNs. They needed to know if they were meeting the expectations of other staff and were performing satisfactorily. A crisis point, between four and six months into the job, could result if NQNs felt that they were receiving no feedback.

Instead of 'needing to do everything' for their patients, NQNs had to learn how to delegate some tasks to care assistants and to prioritise. Tasks, such as delivering drugs correctly, using equipment, and learning what signs indicated that medical help should be sought and why, had to be mastered through questioning and observing others. Here the importance of having their knowledge tested and challenged by a supportive colleague was key.

However, the nature of the support that NQNs received was highly variable across our sample of 40 nurses, working in 15 different acute care specialisms, across eight hospitals. There was no consistency in the length and content of orientation to a ward or whether they had supernumerary status at the start of the post and if so, for how long. Although all were allocated a mentor, some never worked with them, or had little opportunity to engage in questioning and exchange of knowledge with them. Sometimes staff development courses were available, but NQNs were not always made aware of them, or staff shortages prevented attendance. Only one NHS Trust could identify where NQNs were employed in the hospital. There was therefore little central targeting of NQNs to meet their needs or to follow their progress.

These findings were fed back to the employers, who had been partners in the research from the start. The project design involved providing a report to them at the half way stage that they could use to enhance provision for newly qualified staff. The impact of any changes made on a new group of employees would then be evaluated during the second half of the research, in a small scale study.

Our collaborating partners in a Trust covering three hospitals, took up our interim report enthusiastically. We were asked to present the findings to a number of groups of staff and managers. The director of nursing established a steering group to take forward the recommendations in the report. Several initiatives were set up: a means of identifying NQNs across the hospitals; a Trust 'welcome day' for NQNs; a training programme for mentors, focussing on the key areas of need outlined in the findings; establishing learning sets for NQNs; and a staff development package offering progressive learning experiences to retain staff.

Setting up these initiatives took time and the time scale to evaluate their effects with a new group of NQNs before the end of the project is tight. However, our project is rare in allowing scope to develop theories of learning in the workplace alongside action research on practical outcomes to determine the impact on the development and retention of staff. Although the contexts in accountancy and engineering are quite different, support, feedback and effective mentoring are also important issues for our partner employers in those sectors, who will shortly also have their tales to tell.

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Further Education (FE)

Mobilising a Network



Roz Ivanic
Richard Edwards
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The Literacies for Learning in Further Education aims to investigate literacy as a resource for learning across the curriculum, drawing on previous work in New Literacies Studies. Here, Roz Ivanic and Richard Edwards outline how they are mobilising a strong network around the project.

Our approach to user engagement is informed by both previous experience and our own understandings of engaging with others in research practices. For us, this requires not merely understanding partnership, collaboration and user engagement as sets of institutional and/or personal relationships. It involves thinking about our research practices as a way to build up shared understandings, not merely of things held in common but also of differences.

Involving networks in the proposal

Creating a successful proposal for this project involved discussions with those working in further education and in organisations that support FE such as LSDA and the SFEU in attempting to develop a shared view of the purpose and focus. As academic researchers, this required us to engage with the policy and practice priorities within FE as well as with existing theory and research. For our FE colleagues it meant engaging with our view of literacy practices alongside discourses in colleges of basic skills, key skills, core skills and the like. In this way, we were able to begin to fashion a network of communication around the proposal.

The mobilising work in and around the project does not cease once it is funded but is integral to continuing development and ultimate success. The proposal becomes a basis for further communication, as we move into the detailed phases of the project and start to draw others in as part of a multi-directional understanding of how a large project evolves. These include, among others, staff within the

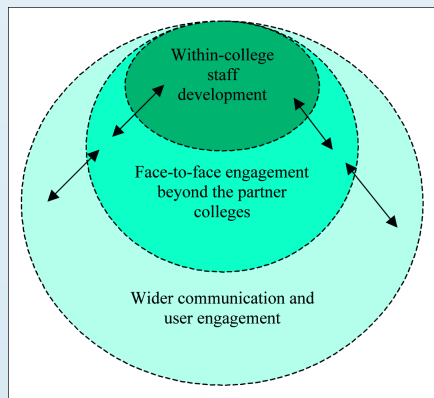


Figure 1. Communication and Impact Strategy: In-house staff development activities provide the starting-point for increasingly wider impact.

Research partners work with colleges to:

1. share their processes and findings with immediate colleagues.
2. identify similarities and differences between the research sites and their own teaching situations.
3. translate research processes and findings in a different context by carrying out similar investigations and interventions in their own subject areas, with the support from the college systems.
4. discuss what works and doesn't work, and the effects of different contexts on this.

Figure 2. A recontextualisation model for achieving impact

four colleges with which we work, colleagues working elsewhere in the sector, an Advisory Group of stakeholders and interested researchers. Unlike a community, a network is open and fluid and can be pushed and pulled in different directions depending upon the nodes that are connected. Obviously, some actors within the network are more powerful than others, but in taking this approach, we attempt to position all participants in the project as actors, even if in different ways. And we let the relationships develop through the practices in which we engage, rather than positioning certain groups or individuals as 'partners' or 'users'.

We are already networked to others who have an interest in our aims. At Lancaster, recent consultations conducted for the National Centre for Research and Development in Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL have established a network of practitioners in a variety of post-compulsory settings in the North West of England allowing for fruitful cross-sector communication. The Workplace Basic Skills Network is based at Lancaster, providing a ready-made network of client groups within which to embed the research. In addition, Roz is a founder member of the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Group which has since 1985 maintained communications between learners, tutors and researchers in Adult Literacy, and encouraged and supported practitioner-research in the field. At Stirling, Richard is part of a well-developed network through the work of the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning.

Communication and Impact Strategy

Communicating research involves a recontextualisation to make sense of the outcomes in differing situations. This is a dialogical process rather than one-way dissemination in order to

- (a) engage those literacy practices that benefit learning outcomes in further education and the life course. and
- (b) inform and establish cross-sector research partnerships, with a view to enabling further education practitioners to undertake research beyond the project itself.

At the end of the three main Phases of the research, the process and its outcomes will be communicated within the research sites, across the sector in Scotland and England, and within the TLRP Programme. Staff research partners across all four colleges, collaborating students and the project Advisory Group will participate actively in the communication strategy. They will contribute to identifying ways of transforming the understandings reached in the project into outcomes which will be relevant to staff and students in their own and other similar contexts. This process will inform research and curriculum innovation capacity across the sector.

On-going college activities

As part of the process of developing the proposal, partner colleges have committed themselves to building this research into their on-going quality enhancement and professional development activities. Senior staff will ensure researchers contribute to staff development programmes in colleges, to communicate their experiences to colleagues, and to implement new developments. In-college communication and impact activities will accompany each phase of the research, with different findings, processes and issues as the focus of attention for each phase. Achieving impact in partner colleges involves interaction with colleagues, set out in Figure 2.

Achieving impact beyond partner colleges is more demanding, since there is no institutional commitment in other institutions to the process. In-college staff development activities provide the basis, and the work will be facilitated by the mediation of local and national networks. We will also make use of our existing avenues for communication such as the Scottish Forum for Lifelong Learning and the LLRC discussion group, which bring together policy-makers, practitioners and researchers on a regular basis, in order to translate the research into different situations.

For further details of this project, please contact:
www.lffe.stir.ac.uk

Enhancing Learning Cultures in Community-based FE



Jim Gallacher,
Glasgow Caledonian
University

Emphasis on user engagement requires researchers to reflect on how a project can be genuinely collaborative and engage a wide cross-section of relevant practice and policy communities. Based in the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRL) in Glasgow Caledonian University (joint centre with the University of Stirling), strong links with policy and practice communities requires time and good networks.

Fieldwork is based in community learning centres attached to two colleges, chosen to provide different locations. One is attached to Anniesland College located in Glasgow, while the other is a centre attached to the North Ayrshire campus of James Watt College, in a small town. Both locations have experienced high levels of social and economic deprivation.

The choice of these colleges has been based on their capacities to provide suitable locations for our research and also on strong working relationships colleges with respect to FE/HE links and previous research. These links enabled us to establish initial contact at the level of college management, and staff with responsibility for community-based provision. Following a series of meetings of a joint planning group which included representatives of both colleges and the CRL team, the programme for the project has been approved, and college-based research fellows have been appointed. A joint research team has now been established responsible for fieldwork, and meets regularly

to discuss planning and implementation. Meetings with college management staff are less frequent, but they are kept abreast of developments through regular email update.

The project is also embedded in the wider community of practitioners and policy makers in Scotland through the work of CRL. The Centre has an Advisory Committee which takes a close interest in this project, and the other three TLRP projects in which CRL is involved through colleagues based in the University of Stirling. The Advisory committee has a wide cross-section of members, including representatives of the Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC), the Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU), the Scottish Executive, Communities Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, the voluntary sector, Universities Scotland and other bodies and individuals.

Extensive discussions regarding the TLRP projects have already taken place at Advisory Committee meetings. A sub-committee of the Advisory Committee is also being formed with a remit to advise project team members, dissemination of outputs from it. The SFEU is an organisation with which we can work closely in developing our dissemination strategy.

This strategy will in part build on the already well-established dissemination programme established by CRL, based on a number of events. First, we have a regular series of Forums on Lifelong Learning, usually attended by between 70–100 people representing policy and practice as well as research. We will make

sure that outputs from all of the TLRP project associated with CRL provide the basis for these Forums over the next few years. We also organise a regular series of CRL seminars, which are smaller events, with 20-30 participants. Issues arising from the TLRP projects will form the basis of some of these seminars. The final element in the CRL programme of events is the bi-annual conference series. The third of these conferences is planned for June 2005 in Stirling. It will focus on researching learning and teaching across post compulsory sectors. This will provide an opportunity for TLRP projects to report on their work, alongside researchers working in this field across the world. The first two CRL conferences have been successful in attracting almost 200 participants from a wide range of countries in all five continents.

The TLRP team in GCU have been seeking to develop close links with the colleges with whom we work, and the wider lifelong learning community in Scotland. But we have also been reflecting on the challenges which this raises. In particular, there is a potential tension between partnership and systematic analysis of an organisation's work which may be critical, albeit constructively. We have raised this potentially important issue with our Advisory Committee. We welcome comments and advice from other members of the wider TLRP community.

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Higher Education (HE)

Engaging Staff and Students



Noel Entwistle, co-director of the
Enhancing Learning Environments
in Higher Education project at
Edinburgh University

The ETL Project is working with university teachers in four subject areas to find ways of enhancing contrasting teaching-learning environments. We are currently still collecting data from students and continuing our discussions with teaching staff and so our user engagement is focused mainly on the collaborative initiatives developed with staff. However, we have begun the process of disseminating our initial findings through symposia at EARLI and BERA conferences in 2003 (mainly reaching other researchers, but also staff developers who are an influential group of users). We have also described our work at subject-specific conferences for university teachers. As we move into the final phase of the project we shall be working with the new Higher Education Academy and its constituent parts. We shall continue to

develop links with the Learning and Teaching Subject Centres (LTSNs) and the LTSN Generic Centre to set up or contribute to seminars and workshops for the four subject areas and also bring together our more general conclusions for discussion with staff developers, management teams and policy makers. The following sections provide specific illustrations of engagement and impact from our four subject areas.

Biological sciences

The collaborative initiatives in this area have been designed to build upon and fine-tune existing practices in ways that will enhance the quality of student learning. A large first-year biology course illustrates this approach well. There we have worked with staff to help students recognise the purpose of developing

the skills associated with biologists' ways of thinking and practising. We have also devised ways of raising students' awareness of what counts as high-quality work in undergraduate biology, and what sorts of study strategies are likely to be called for. Finally, we have been strengthening feedback to students in various ways. One is to develop proformas for marking and commenting on specific coursework assignments to help students see the links between the assessment criteria and the grades awarded by tutors. In courses with large numbers of students enrolled, we have found that this can help in achieving greater consistency across correspondingly large teams of markers.

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User Engagement...continued from page 7...

Economics

One of our collaborative initiatives in this area has focused on preparing students more systematically for the assessment demands in a final year module by using a panel discussion, an idea which has since been used by the department with all students in the final year. The notion of a *threshold concept*, which is part of the larger conceptual framework developed by the ETL Project, proved to be equally engaging. Students' developing understanding of two threshold concepts was the focus of another collaborative initiative. One partner institution has submitted a bid for a curriculum development project focusing on embedding threshold concepts in first year Economics modules, and has successfully passed the first phase of the bidding process.

Electronic engineering

In this area, we have focused on the teaching of analogue electronics at different levels and in contrasting contexts, and also on an introductory module on microprocessors. In analogue electronics we have tried ways of encouraging students to reflect more consciously on the processes involved in problem-solving by asking them to keep a 'log-book' in which they note difficulties and successful approaches. We have also been encouraging group working on tutorial problems where possible. To reach a wider audience, we described the work in two

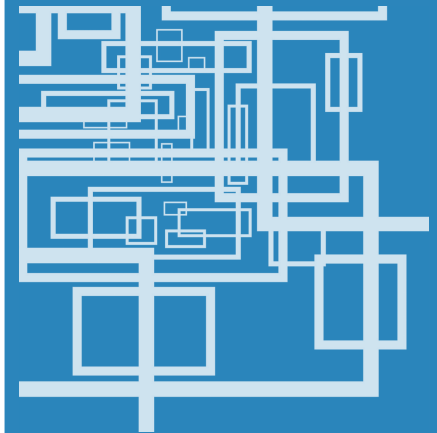
newsletters of the LTSN and will be presenting three joint papers with departmental collaborators at an international conference on engineering education in June 2004, sponsored by the LTSN.

History

In addition to the ongoing collaborative initiatives, two somewhat different types of user engagement have had mutually beneficial impacts. The first kind has involved us teaming up with collaborative partners to present a session about our work at the annual History Teaching Conference organised by the LTSN Subject Centre and attended by lecturers from across the UK. This year we are joining with departmental collaborators for a keynote plenary about the role of sources and approaches to their use, from the perspectives of teachers and learners. The second kind of user engagement - more local but nonetheless valuable - has been the internal dissemination of our detailed reports concerning specific modules beyond their original course-team audience. As a result, in one institution we have been invited to participate in a department-wide workshop to consider the overall course design of the special subject modules which students take in final year.

For further details of this project, please contact:
ett@ed.ac.uk

Teaching and Learning Research Programme



TLRP is the largest education research programme in the UK, and benefits from research teams and funding contributions from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Projects began in 2000 and will continue to 2007/8 – with dissemination and impact work extending through 2008/9.

Learning: TLRP's overarching aim is to improve outcomes for learners of all ages in teaching and learning contexts within the UK.

Outcomes: TLRP studies a broad range of learning outcomes. These include both the acquisition of skill, understanding, knowledge and qualifications and the development of attitudes, values and identities relevant to a learning society.

Lifecourse: TLRP supports research projects and related activities at many ages and stages in education, training and lifelong learning.

Enrichment: TLRP commits to user engagement at all stages of research. The Programme promotes research across disciplines, methodologies and sectors, and supports various forms of national and international co-operation and comparison.

Expertise: TLRP works to enhance capacity for all forms of research on teaching and learning, and for research-informed policy and practice.

Improvement: TLRP develops the knowledge base on teaching and learning and collaborates with users to transform this into effective policy and practice in the UK.

TLRP is managed by the Economic and Social Research Council. Its research mission is to advance knowledge and to promote its use to enhance the quality of life, develop policy and practice and strengthen economic competitiveness. ESRC is guided by principles of quality, relevance and independence.

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DfES Post-16 Standards Unit

Sue Cousin
DfES

The idea of 'evidence-based policy making' has become prominent in education. In post-16 education, policy makers in the DfES Standards Unit recognise its importance. Here, Sue Cousin, programme leader for the Unit's teaching and learning transformation programme outlines how the unit is addressing evidence-based policy through engaging with research.

Before publication of the Success for All strategy in November 2002 and before the Standards Unit was set up in January 2003, we recognised the need to hear messages from research into all aspects of post – 16 provision. We set up a research working group with a remit to:

- Identify research relevant to the Unit's work
- Collate messages to inform policy development and implementation
- Identify research gaps
- Commission research
- Take emerging findings from researchers (via presentations at meetings or written summaries)

The group meets approximately quarterly and its members include representation from:

- DfES Analytical services

- Success for All theme leaders and programme managers from the DfES and Learning and Skills Council (LSC)
- TLRP programme
- Director of research from the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA)
- OFSTED
- Adult Learning Inspectorate

The research gaps identified included:

- Improving methods of accessing learner progress
- Assessing which interventions work for improving success rates
- Post-16 pedagogy
- Potential EPPI review on employee engagement
- Ways to improve evidence in e-learning

In addition to research projects outside the TLRP, the Unit is engaging actively with key projects in the Programme.

If you have research evidence relevant to the work of the Success for All team, please contact Sue Cousin via:
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