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Creativity in higher education: what's the problem?

Norman Jackson, University of Surrey and University of Hertfordshire

Why is creativity important to higher education?

Creativity is a fundamentally human characteristic that is central to our well-being, our productivity and our prosperity, yet we seem to barely acknowledge its existence in higher education. In a previous article (Jackson, 2003) I described the early work of the Imaginative Curriculum network: a community of interest that is developing knowledge about creativity in higher education and campaigning to raise awareness of its importance in complex learning and problem working.

The teaching and learning process, with all its complexity, unpredictability and endless sources of stimulation from the subjects that are taught, is an inherently creative place, and there are many potential sites for creativity embedded in the professional act of teaching. Creativity emerges spontaneously through the relationships and interactions of teachers with their students in highly specific and challenging situations. Lesley Saunders provides a helpful synthesis of how creativity features in both teaching and academic research (Saunders, 2004: 163); the latter helps us make connections to the critical thinking which features so prominently in students' higher education learning:

> '…teaching is a highly complex activity – it needs both ''the appliance of science'' and the exercise of humanistic imagination; it demands scholarship, rigorous critical enquiry, the collective creation of secure educational knowledge, on the one hand, and it requires insight, inspiration, improvisation, moral sensibility and a feel for beauty, on the other …. Similarly, we are often encouraged to think about research mainly in terms of systematic and reliable ways of gathering and analyzing empirical data. However, research is also much more than empirical data gathering: it includes theory-building, hypothesis-testing, critical analysis and appraisal, evaluation, and the synthesis of concepts and evidence from a range of different disciplines – all of which are crucial for informing practice at deeper levels – research in this sense also happens to be rooted in imagination, intuition and aesthetic awareness… as well as cognition and disquisition.'

This association of creativity with higher education teaching is endorsed by a recent survey of National Teaching Fellows; only three out of ninety Fellows who contributed to the survey believed that they were not creative! (Fryer, in press.) Perhaps you cannot have teaching excellence without creativity?

Creativity in students' learning

But the main focus for the Imaginative Curriculum project is not on celebrating the creativity of higher education teachers, important though that is, rather it is on helping and enabling students to develop, experience and understand their own creativity. Here are some reasons why creativity is important in students' higher education learning.

If, the moral purpose of education is to make a positive difference to students' lives (Fullan, 2003: 18) and higher education is about helping students to develop their full potential, then helping students to understand and develop their unique creativities is an important and worthwhile educational goal. Enabling students to be creative should be an explicit part of their higher education experience.

If creativity is integral to being an historian, biologist, lawyer, engineer or any other disciplinary field of endeavour (Jackson and Shaw, 2005), then we need to ensure that we develop our understandings about what it means to be creative in different disciplinary and professional working contexts and help students appreciate this.

If creativity is necessary for grappling with complex, indeterminate problems, then we need to see creativity in the context of other abilities and capacities that are developed for complex learning through a higher education. Sternberg and Lubart (1995) argue that we need three different sorts of abilities to be successful: analytical abilities – to analyse, evaluate, judge, compare and contrast; practical abilities – to apply, utilise, implement and activate; and creative abilities – to imagine, explore, synthesise, connect, discover, invent and adapt. Successful people do not necessarily have strengths in all areas, but they find ways to exploit whatever pattern of abilities they may have in any given situation or context.

At the heart of the imaginative curriculum project is a deep concern for the development of students' potential in a more holistic sense than most higher education experiences currently provide. One of the most important messages to come out of the research studies we have undertaken so far is that creativity lies at the heart of a student's own identity:

> 'even where creativity was not taught, not considered teachable and not valued in assessment, it was still relevant in defining how the students saw themselves.' Oliver *et al.* (in press).

This helps us to anchor our claim that promoting students' creativity will make a difference to their lives, and it provides a wonderful insight into the potential role of higher education in helping students develop their own understandings and awareness of their own creativities as part of their construction of self-identity. The capacity of the traditional higher education curriculum to support identity-building has been heavily criticised by Barnett and Coate (2005) and a concern for students' creativity would help address this weakness.

What is the problem with creativity in higher education?

The fact that creativity does not tend to feature in everyday conversations about students' learning, or surface as an important topic of debate in most curriculum review and design processes, and is more or less absent from criteria for assessing learning, means that there is a 'problem'. But the problem is not chronic, in the sense that something is wrong and needs fixing. Indeed, the vast majority of teachers don't even recognise that such a problem exists. Rather, for those who care enough to want to do something about it, the problem is more a sense of dissatisfaction with a world that seems, at best, to take creativity for granted. The problem is not that creativity is absent but that it is omnipresent and subsumed within the analytical and critical ways of thinking that dominate the academic intellectual territory.

Furthermore, although teaching and designing courses are widely seen as sites for creativity, teachers' creativity and creative processes are largely implicit and are rarely publicly acknowledged and celebrated . (The public celebration of creative/innovative teachers through Teaching Fellowships and Awards is beginning to change this.) This is partly a reflection of academic cultures that place higher value on critical analytical thinking, and partly the cultural norms of a society that tend not to overtly celebrate creativity outside the artistic fields in which it is traditionally recognised. It is compounded by the fact that many teachers find it hard to translate the generic concepts of creativity grown from these cultural norms into their subject-specific and teaching contexts. The Imaginative Curriculum has begun to address this issue through conversations about creativity in different disciplinary contexts (see Working Papers for history, engineering, earth and environmental sciences, social work and medicine at **http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/2762.htm**).

These cultural barriers extend into the learning process itself, although most higher education teachers expect students to be creative, creativity is rarely an explicit objective of the learning and assessment process (except for a small number of disciplines in the performing and graphic arts). Many academics believe that creativity is inhibited by the need to produce course designs and assessment strategies that set out what students will be expected to have learnt with no room for unanticipated or student determined outcomes. The Imaginative Curriculum network has produced a series of guides to encourage the designs that provide more opportunity for students to be creative (**http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/3018.htm**) and there has been a lively debate on the assessment of creativity on the mail list (see discussions and resources at **http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/2841.htm**).

It is hard to imagine a more difficult set of conditions to work with and we will not make much headway with changing these conditions unless we can influence the regulatory and procedural structures of our system (like, for example, Subject Benchmarking Statements that make no reference to students' creativity or the features that we associate with creativity), (Jackson and Shaw, 2005, Shaw, 2004) and the thinking and behaviours of the organisations in which we work. It is not enough for teachers to overcome such organisational barriers through their own ingenuity and persistence. Ultimately, organizational systems and cultures themselves have to be changed. Such changes have to be led through sympathetic, inspiring and energetic leaders. The problem of creativity in higher education is also one of leadership at many different levels. Our message to higher education leaders and managers is to seize the opportunity for leading higher education into a world where students' and teachers' creativity is valued, encouraged and recognised. But leaders need to be inspired and what better words to inspire than those of Alfred Whitehead, who when writing in 1929 (p139-140), saw the university in this insightful way:

'The university imparts information, but it imparts it imaginatively ... A university which fails in this respect has no reason for existence. This atmosphere of excitement, arising from imaginative consideration, transforms knowledge. A fact is no longer a bare fact: it is invested with all its possibilities. It is no longer a burden on the memory: it is energising as the poet of our dreams, and as the architect of our purposes.

Imagination is not to be divorced from the facts: it is a way of illuminating the facts. It works by eliciting the general principles which apply to the facts, as they exist, and then by an intellectual survey of alternative possibilities which are consistent with those principles. It enables men to construct a vision of a new world, and it preserves the zest of life by the suggestion of satisfying purposes...

Thus the proper function of a university is the imaginative acquisition of knowledge… A university is imaginative or it is nothing - at least nothing useful.'

What does creativity mean in higher education?

One of the problems with creativity is that it is difficult to understand and explain. Over the last four years the network has engaged in lots of conversations about creativity through the events we have organised, the personal accounts of teaching for creativity that have been produced, the surveys we have undertaken and the research studies we have commissioned. Out of these interactions we are beginning to recognise that there is widespread agreement amongst academics on key features that are associated with creativity or with being creative regardless of the disciplinary, pedagogic or problem working context. For example:

- *Being imaginative:* generating new ideas, thinking out of the boxes we normally inhabit, looking beyond the obvious, seeing the world in different ways so that it can be explored and understood better

- *Being original:* this embodies:
  - the quality of newness, for example: inventing and producing new things or adapting things that someone else has invented; doing things no one has done before; and doing things that have been done before but differently

  - and, the idea of significance: there are different levels and notions of significance but utility and value are integral to the idea

- *Exploring, experimenting and taking risks* i.e. processes for searching in order to find or discover often involve journeying into the unknown

- *Processing, analysing, synthesising* data/situations/ideas/contexts in order to see the world differently and thinking critically in order to understand it better

- *Communicating* - often through the telling of stories in ways that help people see the world that has been created.

These characteristics bear a striking resemblance to the characteristics of creativity being promoted in schools. QCA (2005) suggest that creativity involves pupils in: questioning and challenging; making connections, seeing relationships; envisaging what might be; exploring ideas and keeping options open; reflecting critically on ideas, actions and outcomes.

When the characteristics of creativity are operationalised in disciplinary practices (Jackson and Shaw, 2005) they begin to resemble the features seen in generic models of creativity such as the well known 'Snowflake' proposed by David Perkins (1981) which includes the traits of:

- High tolerance for complexity, disorganisation and the messiness of life
- Ability in problem-finding and discovery modes of being
- Mental mobility and ability to change perspectives
- Willingness to take risks and the ability to accept and learn from mistakes
- Skill in critical thinking enabling ideas to be evaluated
- Strong self-motivation and self-determination to accomplish goals.

Watchful anticipation

Higher education has been slow to examine for itself the idea of creativity: but perhaps this is not surprising given the nature of the problem.

Government thinking about an enterprising economy, the establishment of NESTA (National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts – an organisation that invests in UK creativity and innovation) and other initiatives to stimulate enterprise and innovation in business and industry are all signals that the Government believes we need to create a more creative society.

In schools, DfES and the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) initiatives have had significant impacts on teaching and the curriculum and have led to the progressive development of the concept of 'life-wide creativity' (Craft, 2002; Craft in press). This is a sort of 'personal effectiveness' needed to cope well with the unknown; a type of resourcefulness that enables people to chart a course of action by seeing opportunities as well as overcoming obstacles. Every day of our lives we are confronted by new situations requiring us to respond. Our imaginations and creativity increase possibilities and extend our choices:

> *'Between stimulus and response there is a space. In the space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In those choices lie our growth and our happiness.'*
> (cited by Covey, p42)

Similarly, business and industry need employees with these sorts of attitudes and capabilities who can work creatively with uncertain situations and complex problems. Higher Education occupies a privileged position in providing educational opportunities that engage people in complex learning and problem working - ideal conditions for the development of creative human potential. Yet all too often we squander the opportunity to help students develop their creative talents, preferring conformance and compliance to more radical and less predictive responses and penalising mistakes rather than seeing 'mistakes' as important lessons for learning.

The imaginative curriculum project is challenging the *status quo*. In the past four years members of the network have pooled their talents and knowledge of teaching methods that encourage students to be creative. They have contributed to conversations about what creativity means in different disciplinary or pedagogic contexts and developed a range of resources to help teachers think about their own practices and teaching situations. They have engaged with the difficult issue of assessing creativity and recognised the need for a revolution in assessment practice. All these resources and debates can be found in the Learning and Teaching part of the Academy's web site **http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/creativity.htm**.

An exciting year ahead

2006 will be an important year in our journey to encouraging higher education to take more seriously its responsibilities for promoting students' creativity. The network will continue to be supported by the Higher Education Academy and the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA), because they believe that students' experiences of higher education and their future lives will be enriched if they can recognise, experience and develop their creative potential.

Earlier this year, the Higher Education Academy and NESTA commissioned Dr Marilyn Fryer to undertake a study of National Teaching Fellow views on creativity. A report of this study will soon be available on the Higher Education Academy and NESTA web sites. This and other imaginative curriculum studies are being brought together in a book *Developing Creativity in Higher Education: an imaginative Curriculum,* to be published by Routledge.

Cardiff School of Art and Design (University of Wales Institute, Cardiff), in partnership with the Higher Education Academy and NESTA, is organising a major three-day international conference on Creativity in Tertiary education early in 2007. The conference aims to bring together educators, educational and curriculum developers and consultants, researchers, educational managers and institutional leaders, policy-makers and funders to exchange ideas and engage in significant debates about creativity in higher education learning (information about the conference will be posted on the Higher Education Academy events web page and circulated through the SEDA mail list).

Why not join us?

If anything I have written resonates with you then we need you to add your voice to our network. You can join the network and contribute to the growth of knowledge about the meanings of creativity in higher education and how students' creativity might be promoted at **http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/1778.htm**.

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Flexible learning needs flexible buildings

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This is a short version of a paper given to the Higher Education Design Quality Forum at Universities UK recently (HEDQF, 2005). The presentation reflected on the way in which university managers, architects, engineers, educational developers, staff and students worked together to plan and construct buildings which are a flexible framework for encouraging and developing future learning and teaching. It outlines some of the thinking we used about current and future students and how we tried to weave this into the planning and future proofing of our buildings.

Changing students - demography and design

So, what do we know about our future students? Firstly, there will be more of them. The DfES remains firmly of the belief that higher education is still a desirable destination for young people. 'There is no evidence to suggest that the progressive reduction of maintenance grants, the introduction of student loans, and the advent of tuition fees in 1998 has deterred people from pursuing higher education' (DfES, 2005). The government is still committed to the target of 50% participation.
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/uploads/WAddressing%20the%20concerns%2020University%20Expansion.doc

However, this does not simply mean larger lecture theatres, larger seminar rooms or even larger refectories.

Looking at our students' patterns of residence, paid working hours and modes of enrolment it seems likely that attendance will become increasingly flexible and individually negotiated. Over 65% of students at the University of Wolverhampton live locally. This may mean fewer Halls of Residence, but more high quality drop-in study facilities available at all times of the day – and night. Our students 'engage' with the university in a wide variety of ways. Flexible learning needs flexible buildings. It is increasingly difficult to make long-term predictions about the stability of recruitment to particular subject areas or even to particular Schools and therefore new buildings have to be seen as 'learning based' rather than 'subject based'.

Changing student-staff relationships

Increasing staff-student ratios have implications for buildings. Gone are the one-to-one tutorial facilities within individual staff rooms. Rooms now commonly have four or five staff in them. Feedback says that with fewer phone calls and more emails this can work and can lead to less isolation, especially for new teaching staff. However, we still need spaces where we can talk individually or in small groups with students and so what once would have been a corridor of individual staff rooms becomes a building of joint staff rooms with a few bookable 'interview rooms', enabling us to make more efficient use of our space.

Changing student perceptions

Recent research regarding the influences of buildings on students stated three main areas of influence. 'First, they helped to motivate students in their work. Second, they facilitated inspiration amongst students, and finally they provided key facilities critical to the course content' (CABE, 2005, 39).

The University of Wolverhampton has the highest number of students traditionally under-represented in Higher Education. Getting them there and keeping them there means emphasising the 'wow' factor of our buildings. It is important to involve students in design, as there is often difference between staff and students as to exactly what constitutes this feeling (CABE, 2005, 24).

In order to keep our young students at university – and these are also the most likely to drop out – we have to provide them with a work environment which is at least comparable and preferably superior to conditions they would have been working in if they had not come to university.

We also have a strong commitment to raising the participation rates in future generations. That means we are now working with school students – in some cases primary schools – to raise the level of aspiration in some of the most deprived parts of the West Midlands. When we bring very young potential students onto the campus we have to compete with the latest funky office environment, while at the same time providing the appropriate discernment which says that this is about learning – not an easy combination. Barnett has stated that 'a balance had to be struck between giving students what they wanted as consumers and stretching them intellectually' (Lipsett, 2005). The same is true of our buildings.

And what about the gender balance? Women are now 56% of the total student population. Women overtook men as a higher proportion of undergraduates in 1996-7. We are attempting to appeal to male underachievers who may be influenced in their study habits by state of the art technology and females who may appreciate areas where they can discuss and use technology in a way that is not flashy and all pervasive. Recognising that many of our mature students will have families, we may want some child-friendly areas, particularly in our social spaces.

Other aspects of the diversity of our student population are important to take into account when planning and not just from a legislative point of view. We have increasing numbers of students who may be physically disabled, hearing or visually impaired and the learning environment has to cater for all these. We have students from a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds and we want to reflect this - not just because we have to, but

because we really want these students to have an inclusive environment in which they can perform to their best.

Changing Planning Relationships

In planning our latest building we had several groups working on the same building from different perspectives. Many different kinds of people are needed to plan, design and maintain a successful learning building. We didn't just hold business meetings; we held workshops. We didn't just sit in boardrooms; we met in learning and teaching venues. We didn't just work on paper or even just on screen; we went and looked and measured the reality. We said: 'Looks good, but what does it feel like?' We asked: 'Could you see the base of the screen from the back of this room?' 'What about this pillar for the student sitting on the far right?' We weren't just interested in drawings: we were interested in ideas. There were sub sub-meetings of different groups of staff looking at different learning and teaching environments across the building.

Some of our new layouts involved us in teaching in new ways, so part of our building projects involved mockups of rooms and equipment, and planning training programmes for new technology use. We worked with the designers and architects in discussing how beautiful pictures would work in reality with new concepts of learning and teaching.

Personalised learning

Sir Howard Newby, former Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council, speaking in November 2005 about the future of Higher Education in general and about the introduction of top-up fees said, 'Students are consumers in other spheres of their life, which universities are going to have to match. The idea that students should jolly well be grateful for what we do no longer works. We need to be responsive to students and not say we know what they ought to want' (Lipsett, 2005).

We are learning more about learning styles, conceptions of learning, conceptions of teaching and learning outcomes. However, at the same time

as being effective teachers, we have to recognise the economic reality of being efficient teachers and treat some of the practice driven by devotion to learning styles with 'healthy scepticism' (Moseley, 2005). We cannot provide 23,000 individual physical learning environments, but we can offer spaces which can be personally customised.

Increasingly, all our learning environments are beginning to coalesce via the ubiquitous computer. It provides visual stimulus, audio provision, read-write materials and increasingly a virtual world which means that a student can appear to be umbilically connected to life via a screen. Access to technology is at the centre of much of our planning.

Changing students - technology

Paul Ramsden, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Academy stated in June 2005, 'Gone are the days when assessing the quality of the student experience focused almost exclusively on undergraduate teaching quality. Today's students expect a certain level of computer and information technology provision, and library and administrative support' (Ramsden, 2005). For most of our students, modern technology is not an add-on - it is an integral part of their existence.
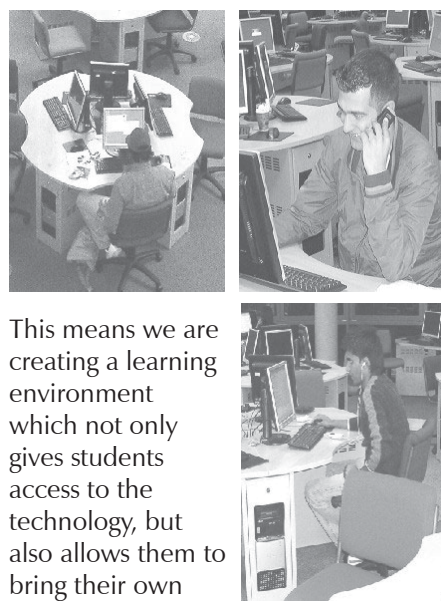
This means we are creating a learning environment which not only gives students access to the technology, but also allows them to bring their own experience to it. We don't therefore divide up the 'teaching' areas from the 'learning' areas in ways in which we might once have done. The technology is not in a

separate 'IT lab'; it is in a walk-in learning space. Our current students want less of the individualised 'study carrel' existence. This is not to say that we don't provide quiet non-technical spaces for those who want this, but we are moving more and more to the other end of the continuum where the space is open, flexible and technical.

Changing study patterns - student perceptions of learning

When designing our buildings, we have also looked closely at the way students want to study in terms of their behaviour. When they are not in a formal teaching situation, which spaces do they choose? There are no longer huge separations between eating and drinking and working. We have not got rid of our traditional spaces entirely, but they are getting fewer and fewer and the flexible study/eating/wireless/laptop space is getting larger.

Spot the difference?

The refectory

The social learning area

A flexible life style means that students want to drop in and have breakfast and do some work before a 'lecture' … or they may want to do some 'work' before 'work'. They may be employed in the city centre, but as students they have access to the campus facilities. Hence this is the place to eat, drink and study around their paid employment hours. They

may have nipped out to do some shopping and then come back to study, meet friends, attend some formal learning, pick up children from school, feed them, come back ….. If we are serious about lifelong learning, then the barriers which we used to put around learning, both physical and virtual, must be challenged.

We set group work assignments, so isn't it logical to design the learning space to accommodate this kind of learning? Research in this area reported on the way in which space begins to match student perceptions of learning (Brett and Nagra, 2005). Social learning areas have more chairs than computer screens and tables where groups of students could deliberately work comfortably together around a single screen. John Biggs points out that for learning to function at its optimum level there should be student interactivity (Biggs, 2003). If this is to be so, then we have to design the space and the furniture to take account of pedagogical principles.

Designing for teaching

Larger screen takes conventional presentations or links directly to reproduce smaller screen

*Small electronic whiteboard for taking write-on student feedback*　　*Flat surfaces for laptops*

Designing a lecturing space involves consideration of the lecturing 'voice' (Light and Cox, 2001). Good teaching involves providing a variety of student experiences. This learning space can be used for conventional presentations. The seating also allows students to talk to those in front and behind during group activities. The lecturer (or student) can write feedback on the smaller electronic whiteboard. This then appears on the larger screen and is converted to text.

This design has already moved on - and it only came into use last year. Staff are now encouraged to make use of 'tablets' which they can write on, which appear on the large screen. Working again on the principle of student engagement, the tablet can be passed around the students who can add their contribution. This obviates the need for a second projector and a second, expensive board. These rooms are also equipped with sets of 'zappers' – personalised responses systems – enabling another form of student engagement with learning.

From walls to no walls
If we are to have the ultimate flexibility in our learning and teaching environments, then we have to stop creating what may be artificial boundaries.
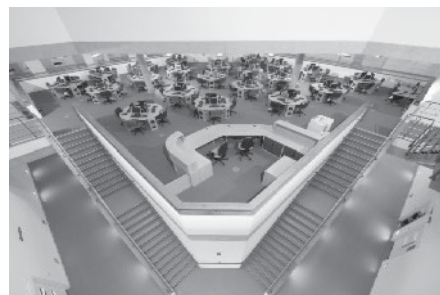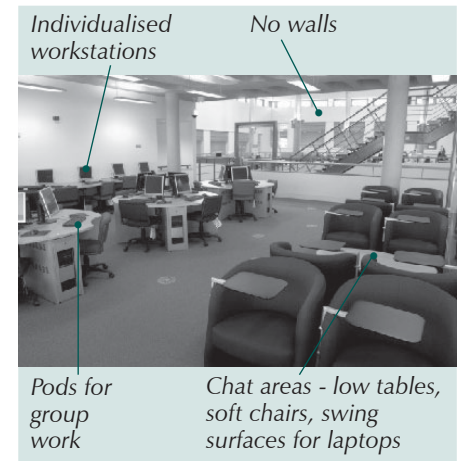

Our understanding of students, staff, technology and the learning process has to be integrated. In the area pictured above, staff are not booking rooms, they're booking 'pods' according to the number of students they might have in a particular group. The staff are wired and miked. The students use headphones. The member of staff is able to control pods 1, 3, 7 etc. with the learning materials which they are using and the student is not able to use other software or check their email unless the member of staff releases that part of the system.

There are many good reasons why current university teaching rooms are not always used to capacity. It is better

to design buildings to make use of this phenomenon and to accommodate flexible numbers. It's not easy. We haven't been trained to teach like this, but we're good learners and the students seem to be encouraging us to make it work.

Redrawing the boundaries between work and play

Individualised workstations　　*No walls*

Pods for group work　　*Chat areas - low tables, soft chairs, swing surfaces for laptops*

If students are to make the most of their time, internal design has to stop drawing artificial boundaries. For staff, the time spent at a conference talking over coffee may be just as valuable as the workshop - in some cases more so. So we have to stop pigeon-holing the learning experiences. The picture above shows where we have created a variety of environments. Students can work on the screens on the far left, facing the wall, very private and probably quieter. The middle area has 'pods' for group working. The area to the right has easy chairs with 'hostess trays' for use with laptops, or low tables for papers, or just for conversation. This kind of area is replicated at different points throughout the building.

We see it as our role to introduce our students to the idea of professionalism. In their move from the world of school or college to the world of work, they pass through our university. By giving them a learning environment which aspires to match some of the best and most inspirational working environments which they will find outside the university, it is hoped to give them professional aspirations, whilst at the same time enthusing them about studying.

The Educational Developer's Environment

And what does the educational developer's area look like? In this futuristic world, I would be able to plan the learning environment as flexibly as I can plan my thinking. I would like to be able to punch into the computer the size of my group, the makeup of that group in terms of inclusiveness, the learning outcomes I hoped to achieve …. and the computer and the building would give me an environment customised to my needs and my students' need for that particular learning experience on that particular day at that particular time. So the 'training area' is wireless, has tables which fold away, chairs which are robust, but which stack and laptops which are available for any configuration. Add to that electronic whiteboards, data projectors and other flexible technology and we hope to mirror what we believe about flexible environments.

It is a world where the School of Humanities may not look any different from the School of Computing; where recruitment to Chemistry or Engineering may decrease this year, but grow next year; where Foundation Degrees and regional agendas mean that we have to plan space for our FE partners and employers. So our buildings have to provide the ultimate in flexibility, inclusivity, collaborative learning opportunities, be technologically future-proofed …… oh, and they have to be affordable!

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Professional standards: reflections from a cross-cultural perspective

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The current development of a 'standards framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education' triggers some important questions at a time when academic development, along with higher education in general, is becoming increasingly globalised. If standards inevitably reflect the teaching and learning cultures in which they are developed, to what extent can standards developed in one cultural context apply in another?

At one level, the answer would seem to be 'considerably'. Western frameworks, including SEDA's PDF and its underpinning values, have been applied productively to a number of Asian programmes. In proposing guiding principles for a new graduate diploma in professional and vocational education at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Chinese colleagues and I turned to Western sources - SEDA, Lifelong Learning UK and its 'Standards for teaching and supporting learning in England and Wales', and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the USA. Our guiding principles which emerged from this process would resonate with academic developers world-wide.

Perhaps this is not surprising. Are not teaching and learning, at their core, much the same wherever they occur? Certainly the notion that Asian students are significantly different to their Western counterparts has been well-and-truly debunked. Asian high school students consistently outperform UK, Australian and American students; innovative teaching and assessment strategies have taken root in Hong Kong universities; and it is now well accepted that the notion of the Asian student as a passive rote learner is based on a failure to appreciate the complex relations between memorising and understanding.

Yet there still may be some important differences in how teaching is seen in Western and Chinese contexts. A useful starting point for comparison is Kember's distillation of research into conceptions of teaching, according to which teaching can be seen as 'imparting information', 'transmitting structured knowledge', 'student-teacher interaction (in relation to what is being studied), 'facilitating understanding', and 'conceptual change/intellectual development' (Kember, 1997). The important thing to note here is that these conceptions are all concerned with knowledge and understanding - the focus is on teaching (and learning) as an essentially intellectual process.

Contrast this with two studies of Chinese teachers' conceptions of teaching. Firstly, Lingbiao Gao identified five conceptions of teaching, admittedly of high school science teachers, but illuminating nevertheless (Gao, 2003). Two of

his conceptions, 'knowledge delivery' and 'ability development', are about transmitting knowledge and facilitating learning and directly parallel similar conceptions noted by Kember. A third conception, 'exam preparation', reflects the emphasis on assessment in Chinese education. 'Attitude promotion' introduces a new conception — helping students to develop good attitudes to learning itself. (Elsewhere, Jin Li cites Confucius on this: 'Knowing it [insight, wisdom, understanding] is not as good as liking to know it; liking to know it is not as good as loving to know it!' (Li, 2003).) Gao's fifth conception, 'conduct guidance', also moves beyond Western conceptions:

> *'The "conduct guidance" conception emphasizes the exemplary role of teachers in students' behaviour. Teachers should behave well and act as a conduct model for students. Good teachers should be excellent in teaching and should conduct themselves well in other aspects of life. They should be enthusiastic about teaching, love their students, and be their role models and friends.'* (Gao, 2003, p. 181.)

Secondly, Daniel Pratt has identified comparable conceptions amongst Chinese adult educators: 'teaching as the delivery of content'; 'teaching as the development of character'; and 'teaching as a particular kind of relationship' based on a parental model of nurturing and guidance (Pratt, 1992). His study with Kelly and Wong comparing conceptions of teaching held by Chinese and Western expatriate teachers at four Hong Kong universities shows similar results: 'our respondents consistently said that effective teachers must be more than efficient transmitters of knowledge; they must also demonstrate "heart", that is, the ability to care about students as individuals, to understand their difficulties and to guide them in their learning and personal development.' (Pratt, Kelly and Wong, 1999, p. 255.)

These findings have helped me to make sense of some of my own experiences in working with Chinese colleagues. These have included observing the difficulties of a group of Chinese teacher educators in constructing a simple definition of 'teaching' ('teaching' is clearly seen as a complex and multi-dimensional construct that cannot be simply and quickly defined) and participating in a project team that baulked at equating 'good teaching' with pedagogical practices (perhaps since the latter does not include the modelling of moral behaviour or relationships).

It would be facile to draw conclusions here about the implications of these findings for academic developers.

Working across cultures is too complex, and our understanding of the issues too embryonic, to allow for simple advice. We clearly need to be cautious, sensitive and self-questioning in working with colleagues from cultures other than our own, and reluctant to impose our own standards or those of our professional organisations. Cross-cultural encounters provide rich opportunities for reflection and learning, for being challenged, and for extending our own conceptions and understanding. Perhaps Pratt, Kelly and Wong should have the last word:

'As a result of our study, we are all the more convinced that conceptions of effective teaching are deeply rooted in specific cultural values and social norms. The evaluation of teachers' work, therefore, must acknowledge their role as architects and exemplars of those values and norms, rather than simply assess their pedagogical proficiency.' (Pratt, Kelly and Wong, 1999, p. 257.)

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Doctoral Level Study: options for educational developers in the 21st century

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Educational developers taking the decision to engage in doctoral study today are faced with a wide range of choices about which type of programme to pursue. Two decades ago the choice would have been relatively easy.

Back in the 1980s the road to a doctorate usually ended in the award of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). The journey started with the decision to do a doctorate, a department in a university related to the chosen discipline was found, the entry requirements (usually a 2:1 or above for a first degree, or a master's degree) were examined and if met, credentials, in the form of a CV accompanied by a short project proposal were submitted. An interview followed and if successful three to five years of research activity began, culminating in the submission of the 'thesis' and the *viva voce*.

That is not to say that the PhD in all its traditional glory is extinct. Indeed, if in a spare few minutes you search on 'PhD' followed by 'education', you rapidly find evidence that it is alive and well. But by delving down to deeper levels it becomes obvious that in a number of cases, although the title remains the same, the process is much more diverse. Yes, the traditional 'research only' route to a doctorate is still there, but it has been joined by others where there is a taught element to the programme (Part 1) followed by a project (Part 2), which if one reads carefully allows/requires for research to be applied to practice.

This bears some resemblance to the doctoral qualification that emerged during the 1990s, the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree. Gregory (1997) identifies that 'the EdD generally differs from a PhD in that there are taught elements, where students complete researched assignments before going on to design and write a thesis'. It is hard in the year 2006 to identify the differences between this and the more contemporary version of the PhD. Undertake another internet search inserting EdD and it is obvious that the numbers of degrees of this type have at least doubled since Gregory wrote his article back in 1997.

The late 1990s saw the emergence of a third type of doctoral study in the form of the generic Doctor of Professional Studies or Professional Practice (DProf). This form of doctorate was developed by Middlesex University in 1998. By using a generic framework it enables students to construct a customised and

largely self-managed programme focused around their work. It incorporates recognition of acquired learning (RAL), thus enabling students to make claims for credit based on previous learning experiences gained through work or previous study. The purpose of the DProf is the development of professional practice rather than the provision of a research apprenticeship (Rounce *et al.*, 2005).

Two years ago, having spent some time looking for a doctoral programme that would enable me to develop and build on my experience and practice in educational development activities, I explored the option of the DProf. At that time I was employed in the School of Health and Social Sciences at Middlesex, as Head of Learning Development, and was seconded to the Centre for Learning Development for half of my time as University Learning and Teaching Strategy Co-ordinator. I had just been awarded a University Teaching Fellowship. So, I started the programme with a vague idea that the title of my programme would somehow reflect these roles.

The Middlesex DProf is divided into two parts. Part 1 commences with the Review of Learning. This required me to carry out a reflective evaluation of learning throughout my career and to identify three themes which formed the basis for the RAL at level 4 and 5. These were the development and implementation of curricula, project management and enhancement of learning and teaching.

Each of these themes was developed into a RAL claim. The theme of the development and implementation of curricula formed the basis of my claim against the learning outcomes identified for Professional Learning. Examples of selected development and research projects I had carried out in the course of my career provided evidence of learning and capability for Research and Development. Following a discussion with my consultant, I made a claim for RAL against Advanced Developments in Professional Practice based on evidence of learning and development of capability in the enhancement of learning and teaching activity.

Research and development for professional practice is a directed study package that focuses on project planning, the design, identification and use of an appropriate research approach and specific research techniques for the proposed project to be taken in Part 2 of the programme. It includes analysing the role of the worker as a researcher and giving consideration to ethical issues that can emerge when taking on this role.

It is taken at the same time as the final module in Part 1, Programme Planning. This involved developing a case for how all the components of the programme link with the proposed project in Part 2 to reflect my chosen title, Doctorate in Professional Studies (Educational Development). In order to proceed to Part 2 (the project phase), I was required to make a presentation to the Programme Approval Panel and to participate in a discussion with the panel.

I am currently in the middle of carrying out my project work which is an evaluation of an educational development I led as Head of Learning Development. Did I make the right decision in choosing this form of doctoral study? The answer is categorically yes. So what have I gained from the DProf that I would not have got from another form of doctoral study?

Top of the list has to be the opportunity to use a number of experiences since I started work to demonstrate what I have learnt from them and the activities I have engaged with at work. This process helped me to see how I had unconsciously developed a career trajectory that had led me into educational development.

Provided with the DProf framework, I was able to design and name my own doctorate. With the exception of the module on research and development for professional practice, I had the freedom to provide evidence of achievement of the identified learning outcomes in any way I chose. This allowed me to feel in control of my own learning. Whilst some ways that I have chosen have proved more successful than others in meeting the

learning outcomes, feedback from internal and external assessors has been useful in understanding this.

I have been able to combine my final project work with a target I had to achieve in my working life. This has enabled me to manage my time effectively, as I have been able to focus both on my doctorate and work rather than having to deal with two distinct and separate projects at the same time. It has also developed my professional practice through the study of evaluation research techniques, the theoretical basis and ways of communicating and implementing change in a large organisation. It has provided the opportunity of applying these to the project and receiving immediate feedback from students, staff and other stakeholders as to the effectiveness of the educational change. This has proved invaluable in developing other educational development projects in my current position as Director of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Mental Health and Social Work.

From my point of view there is a lot to recommend this work-based approach to doctoral study, and it appears to fit well with educational development practice. However, there are benefits to be derived from other approaches and we are fortunate in 2006 to have a choice to make.

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Teaching HE in FE: whose Professional Teaching Standards?

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Summary

Higher Education provision in Further Education Colleges has expanded rapidly in recent years, perceived by many Higher Education Institutions and government as crucial to their Widening Participation agenda. However, for many Colleges, HE provision is relatively small, and falls outside many of the cultural and organisational norms governing mainstream FE provision. Staff in the Further and Higher Education sectors may be unaware of the diversity of ethos and expectations.

On both sides there are implicit differences in perception- the nature of learning and teaching; the role of the teacher; the scope of pedagogic activity. Different approaches to professional teaching standards further complicate this- the Higher Education Academy is still developing a framework, while Further Education National Training Organisation standards are longer-established and, being detailed and mandatory, fulfil a different function.

This article draws on the experience of developing a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education module entitled 'Teaching HE in FE'. It considers the experiences of Further Education staff on the course and draws on previous research on teacher identity (Malcolm and Zukas, 2000). It considers the following questions: What considerations affect collaborations between FE and HE? What are the implications of mixed economy teaching in relation to the practice and identity of FE teachers working at HE level? (Zukas and Malcolm, 2002) Are professional teaching standards context-dependent? How can staff and educational developers help practitioners apply the messages from the debate to their work?

In 2003 HEFCE published a good practice guide (Blackie, Moseley et al., 2003) which, among other things, identified six key prerequisites for successful partnerships between HE and FE institutions:

- Clarity of purpose- a clear and shared understanding of why the partnership should exist and what it seeks to achieve
- A genuine willingness to be involved
- A corresponding commitment to collaborative working
- Real benefits for all partners
- An informed awareness of the costs of working in partnership, especially in terms of time
- Some central co-ordination for multiple partnerships.

Although there are clearly differences in the assumptions underpinning the HE and FE contexts, their institutions and activities, it is timely to recall common ground. Student intake in each is now broader, for example in terms of age, socio-economic range and previous participation in education. Patterns of provision are similarly varied- full- or part-time, daytime or evening, intensive, face-to-face, blended or distance learning. Nor are levels of qualification exclusively associated with a specific type of institution; universities offer sub-degree provision and Further Education Colleges have for many years offered Masters level and professional qualifications.

Nevertheless, to meet the key prerequisite of *clarity of purpose*, each partner needs to understand what informs and drives the other. Mutual incomprehension – of practitioners' perceptions of their role, of the experience which each brings, of identity, of the nature of professionalism - is clearly a major stumbling block to developing any fruitful collaboration. Limited (or no) understanding of key areas such as ethos, policies, structures and approaches to curriculum development can lead to frustration and sap the willingness of even the most enthusiastic. Manifestly different working practices – for example, research activity and teaching loads – create further potential for division. Even when these are more clearly understood, the actual encounter between institutions can be problematic- for example, where the nature of the engagement is chiefly procedural rather than academic or personal, or where the relationship is perceived as unequal. Where several institutions are involved, recognition that each college is distinctive is important. Similarly, FE staff teaching HE programmes report a profound sense of responsibility as they prepare ('toughen up') students throughout the transition from FE in FE to HE in FE to HE in HE. Recognition (from their college or the university) that each stage of this journey is distinctive, and that teachers' practical and academic support needs (for example, being observed teaching) vary, is central to their sense of professionalism. Teachers' sense of identity – their perspective on teaching (Pratt, online article) – in these different contexts (Pratt and Collins, 2000) needs to be recognised so that they do not feel relative outsiders in both the FE and the HE settings.

At their most fruitful, partnerships tend to develop through individual links, sustained and nurtured over time. Any professional development support offered needs to reflect this. Within a college, such support could include time, resources, dedicated space, financial and professional recognition for their HE role within the institution. Ideally colleges and universities try to ensure that staff teaching HE in FE have equitable access to HE staff development opportunities, including chances to network with colleagues from other colleges and universities. However, this happens very rarely. It is critical to create a developmental climate,

rather than one in which staff development is compulsory, procedurally driven and alien to teachers' own needs. This fosters a culture in which communities of practice can develop. One aim of the HE in FE module is to provide a framework for teachers to develop practical strategies for creating such a community within and beyond their own institution – a community of which they have ownership and from which they benefit.

Although the development of Professional Teaching Standards is relatively new to HE, the concept is ingrained in FE. FE college staffs, compared to many new university lecturers, have a wealth of teaching experience. Although FENTO standards deal with many more areas (crucially, locating learning and teaching in their broader context) than teaching skills, such skills are clearly identified. The fact that the PTS framework is only now approaching its final form gives potential for shared interpretation across both sectors as it evolves. For FE practitioners, such resemblance as Professional Teaching Standards have to FENTO standards may foster a sense of continuity and provide a vital sense of context for practitioners across the post-compulsory sector. And our role as Academic Staff Developers? We need to consider how we can support practitioners in their multiple roles within their own institutions, help practitioners in FE and HE make sense of different and shifting landscapes and broker networks and contacts between individuals and institutions to build a new and dynamic community.

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Supporting part-time and other teaching staff

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Since 2002 the SNAS programme, initially under the LTSN Generic Centre but now part of the HE Academy, has been building a database of resources to help those new to the role as an academic in the daunting task of finding out about appropriate teaching methods for their own disciplines. This programme has been described in greater detail by Sue Burkill (2005), one of the prime movers of the project. The great majority of higher education institutions now have Postgraduate Certificates that are accredited by the Higher Education Academy, and increasingly, all new academic staff are expected by their institutions to complete such a programme. However, feedback from the participants on these courses showed

that they wanted more support on learning and teaching in their own particular discipline, in addition to generic information about learning and teaching. The SNAS project has brought together leaders of such programmes and staff of Subject Centres to define essential materials to go into an online database. The database and associated web pages have been publicly available since last June and the website also has some illustrative case studies about its use.

The project has just started on a new phase with several new lines of development. In addition to two new strands of activity, we are engaged in looking at how the resources can be made appropriate for a wider range of staff. In some disciplines part-timers

take on a very substantial part of the teaching, yet their needs can often be overlooked or neglected. Many of us do run programmes for some of these staff (for example see Emma Williams and Liz Elvidge (2005)), but it can be equally, or even more, important for them to be in touch with the pedagogy of the discipline. As the first stage in this process, I have been looking at the range of 'part-time' roles that might be involved in teaching or facilitating learning. I will then be moving on to look at the characteristics of these roles so that we can identify their needs and check to see how, and whether, SNAS can meet them. The list, so far, is long and fascinating (Table 1).

Table 1:
Part-time teaching roles

Part-time academic staff	Part-time Peripatetic Honorary Visiting
Teaching staff	Teaching fellows Language teachers PBL facilitators Instructors Performance tutors Online tutors
NHS etc staff	Clinical tutors Clinical facilitators

Workplace-based staff	Practice educators/
	  teachers
	Practice supervisors
	Long-arm practice
	  supervisors
	Workplace mentors
	Work experience
	  supervisors

Casual	Casual Visitors Hourly-paid

Learning support	Learning
	  technologists
	Educational
	  developers
	Learning support
	  advisers
	Computer support
	Librarians
	Careers staff
	Special needs staff

Other staff who teach	Post-doc/research
	  staff
	Scientific/
	  experimental
	  officers
	Writers-in-residence
	Artists-in-residence
	Technician skills
	  instructors
	Technician
	  demonstrators

Partner institutions	FE staff Overseas staff
Students supporting learning	PG demonstrators PG seminar leaders PG teaching assistants Peer mentors

At the same time, I have been involved in discussions on the POD discussion list (POD is SEDA's sister organisation in the United States) about the nature of development for their 'adjunct' or 'contingent' faculty. From her experience in the US, Diana Kelly (1990) categorises part-time staff as:

- New and old part-timers
- Hopeful full-timers
- Vocational and academic faculty
- Day and evening faculty
- Moonlighters
- Freeway fliers.

These categories overlap considerably, but give an idea of the motivations for undertaking a part-time teaching role. However, they do not reflect the different contexts of teaching and facilitating learning so well, and so are probably less useful for our particular exercise.

I would welcome additions to, and observations on, the list in Table 1 and, as we progress, any material on the development needs of these particular groups of staff.

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Building Bridges – the Luton CETL

Mark Atlay, University of Luton

Staff and educational developers are often caught in the middle – trying to lead or coordinate developments, and meet the often conflicting expectations and aspirations of senior management and staff on the ground, whilst being under resourced and under appreciated. Why do we do it? Many of us, I suspect, like to believe we can make a difference and can't resist a challenge. So, after many years of struggling, what do you do when you suddenly find that you have resources at your disposal that might really make a long-term difference? The University of Luton was recently awarded a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) for its work around Personal Development Planning (PDP) and Employability. This article outlines the CETL's approach to building a sustainable curriculum model, informed by a pedagogic approach, across a range of subjects.

The Big Picture

UK universities are implementing national expectations[1] for Progress Files, including those for PDP, in a variety of ways. Some view PDP processes as an additional and optional part of the student experience or as a vehicle for delivering aspects of career development. At Luton, PDP is seen as integral to the learning process with three inter-related dimensions:

- Developing students' academic knowledge and understanding through a structured learning process based around a simple Plan, Do and Review model
- Developing students' career management and lifelong learning skills
- Developing students' academic and generic skills.

It was for its initial work in this area that Luton was awarded the CETL, which is known as 'Bridges'[2] since its key themes are about building bridges between:

- The student's past experiences and the subject
- The student and the 'experienced curriculum'
- The student's outside interests and activities, and their development
- The student and future transitions into employment, further study and life in general
- Academic staff and the application of their subject (in the context of a vocational university)
- Academic and support staff.

Bridges is seeking to work across the whole of the University's undergraduate curriculum embracing a diverse subject mix and, in the context of an institution committed to widening participation, a diverse student body in terms of nationality, ethnicity and prior academic attainment. Thus Bridges does not have a narrow subject or thematic focus - its structures and approaches have to embrace diversity in a variety of forms. Its priorities in relation to PDP and employability are:

- Identifying, promoting and evaluating effective practice
- Researching the effectiveness of the approaches in supporting student learning
- Exploring their transference within and beyond the University.

Structures

What structures do you put in place to sustain institution-wide development? It was clear that a model for Bridges that involved only a small group of staff who became the acknowledged experts was not going to support the developments expected. After consideration of a number of alternatives a pyramidal structure was proposed designed to engage as many staff from across the University as possible:

- A small core team (part-time Director, full-time manager, part-time careers adviser, research fellow, administrator and work placement student)
- A group of academics (five CETL fellows seconded part-time from different departments to work with the core team)
- Funding to academic departments to promote activities in line with Bridges' objectives
- Funding to individual member of staff to engage in projects and activities.

The core team and CETL fellows meet regularly to discuss and support the implementation of the Bridges plan. One of their first tasks was to agree a set of core values around what 'excellence' meant and to provide a platform for development and cooperative working. These are:

A shared vision 'We are strongly committed to a vision for teaching and learning at the University of Luton that builds on existing academic excellence, recognises subject differences, and which is student-centred, innovative and sustainable.'

A commitment to experiential learning 'We seek to enhance ways of grounding teaching and learning in real contexts, supporting efforts to relate the curriculum to the realities of students' current and potential needs, and valuing learning whenever and wherever it occurs.'

A scholarly and professional approach 'We work to identify and address issues affecting the student learning experience, adopting an evidence-based approach and drawing on sectoral best practice.'

Equity and equality 'We strive to ensure that our activities acknowledge and respond to equality and diversity issues, and that there is broad equity in the manner in which we work across the University.'

Communication and support 'We communicate effectively and openly with all our constituencies, supporting colleagues in implementing our vision.'

Implementation

When discussing Bridges with staff across the University it has been helpful to have three simple criteria which define what the CETL is about and against which proposals for funding can be assessed (beyond contributing the Bridges' overarching aims). These are:

- Student centred – will it make a difference to the student experience?
- Sustainable – will it have a long term effect once the funding ends?
- Innovative – is it supporting innovative practice (sectoral, institutional or local)?

Each department has developed an action plan for implementation with a view to the long-term, five-year, development of the curriculum. Whilst some subjects had well-developed views about how best to proceed, in other areas initial work led to the recognition that there was a need to re-evaluate how PDP processes could best help support student learning.

As well as working on departmental initiatives, the CETL fellows also work on cross-institutional themes related to the Bridges' objectives.

Bridging back Bridging between the pre-university and university curriculum so that students can progress onto programmes which build on their skills and abilities and which integrate with their prior experiences.

Bridging through Strategies, resources and approaches which assist with reflection (or more broadly metacognition) and how students' learning needs can be identified and addressed – and regularly monitored.

Bridging out The development of employability skills and attributes through supporting experiential learning activities within the curriculum, and the use of Assessment centres for the final 'certification' of skills and the preparation of students for employment.

Assessment and recording In an environment where students are increasingly becoming focused on assessment, Bridges will consider how assessment can be linked to PDP processes and how the rich outcomes can be recorded – going beyond just module grades.

Bridges learning space A curriculum based around PDP and employability requires a specific skills' set for the academic as the facilitator of the learning process, and a different learning environment to the lecture and seminar spaces which currently exist. The capital money associated with the CETL is being used to create a space which encourages innovation and creativity in the teaching process and where academics can refine their skills and consider how they want to teach an employability-focused curriculum to their students.

Research and evaluation PDP processes are currently under researched and a strong research and evaluation dimension is important to validate the curriculum model (for staff and students) and to provide the basis for an evidence-based approach to development.

Laying foundations

Bridges has ambitious plans for the development of teaching and learning and implementation of these is only just beginning. The University's teaching and learning strategy has been revised to be more closely aligned with the Bridges' objectives ensuring that it is central to the strategic direction of the institution as a whole. Thus the approach embraces top-down, middle-out and bottom-up models of change and in five years time we will be able to make a judgment about the success of the strategy. Whatever happens, success and failures, these are 'interesting times'.

Further details

Bridges would like to work with other institutions in validating the transferability of its approach to similar student groups, and explore with dissimilar institutions the adaptation of the approach to different contexts with differing student backgrounds. For more details go to http://www.luton.ac.uk/bridgescetl or email mark.atlay@luton.ac.uk

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[1] http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressFileguidelines/progfile2001.asp

[2] Further details of the curriculum model can be found on the Bridges web site http://www.luton.ac.uk/bridgescetl

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Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange - the Oxford Brookes CETL

Rebecca Bryant, Oxford Brookes University

What's it all about?

ASKe, the Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange, is the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning based at Oxford Brookes University's Business School. Its work focuses on ways of helping staff and students develop a common understanding of academic standards, and it will build on and promulgate established good practice. Initially, ASKe will concentrate on the Business School, gradually at first, then, accelerating from year three onwards, it will provide increasing support for development across the whole University and ultimately beyond.

The three strands of ASKe

The work of ASKe divides into three separate but interrelated strands.

Strand 1 focuses on practices, developed out of original research, that have been proven to improve student understanding. The aim is to disseminate and embed current good practice more widely, both inside and outside Brookes.

Strand 2 moves beyond the established practice of strand 1, inviting bids for research projects from both inside and outside Brookes that extend practice as well as supporting and rewarding staff involved in groundbreaking work. These projects must be (a) evidence-based and innovative, (b) involving and inclusive and (c) practical and transferable.

Strand 3 experiments with ways of cultivating a *community of practice*, this community including teachers, past and present students, and practitioners or employers. Pertinent questions for this strand include: How might members come to know assessment standards through tacit as well as explicit means? Through informal as well as formal engagement with members of a learning

Fireworks herald the launch of ASKe

community? Currently, little is known about how academic communities develop and even less about how, if at all, they can be cultivated. However, there are suggestions that a vital ingredient is an environment that provides physical and virtual space and so encourages interaction and communication between members (Wenger *et al*., 2002).

Why assessment?

It is generally agreed that assessment drives student learning (e.g. Brown and Knight, 1994; Ramsden, 1992). In any one course or module, students will tend to concentrate most of their efforts on assessed tasks. However, despite their best efforts, students sometimes misunderstand the standards used to assess their work, which can lead to a lower mark or less recognition than they feel they deserve. Consequently, students' motivation and self-esteem suffer and, worse still, if they misunderstand what is expected of them sufficiently, they may even be accused of cheating.

Assessment standards are not only problematic for students, of course. Communicating and aligning expectations can be challenging, even within an experienced teaching team. Communication becomes even more difficult the further the standards

extend - external examiners, employers, government, the general public.

What have we achieved so far?

Work is progressing well in all three strands.

Vis-à-vis *strand 1*, pre-assessment workshops are already running in the various departments of the Brookes Business School - Hospitality; Accounting; Economics; Tourism; and Business, Marketing and Retail. These workshops involve first-year students working in groups using exemplar assignments, marking practice and discussion, thereby enabling the sharing of tacit knowledge about assessment. At the end of a workshop, students should be able to (better) understand the marking criteria and feedback system employed on a particular course or module. Previous research and practice in the Business School has shown that students who attend assessment workshops demonstrate significant improvements in performance, with those improvements sustained at a significant level one year later.

Over the next year, we will be extending these pre-assessment workshops to three further Schools within Brookes - Built Environment, Health Care and the Westminster Institute of Education.

We have also extended the peer assisted learning (PAL) scheme to eight modules within the Business School. This scheme involves senior and 'expert' students facilitating 'novice' students' learning. Previous reviews have shown that PAL helps students attain learning outcomes, while feedback shows that students value the scheme highly.

We already have several research projects running, or about to run, under the auspices of *strand 2*. One project involves developing a prototype Web-based course to raise student awareness of plagiarism using the existing Web-based e-learning environment of Oxford Brookes University, WebCT. A second project, entitled 'Supporting Associate Tutors in the Assessment of Distance Learning

Dissertations', aims to gain a deeper insight into and understanding of the impact that 'virtual working' might have on the assessment of Distance Learning MBA dissertations. Currently, the associate lecturers who support the dissertation process have little or no face-to-face contact with students, their interactions rarely go beyond the concerns of the dissertation process, and they are reliant on electronic and telephone communication.

Other imminent projects include a study of assessment feedback in the Business School, a colonisation study of a newly-opened café-cum-learning-space on the Brookes Wheatley campus, and research into the employability of graduates of the Business School.

The work relating to *strand 3* is, at first glance, more disparate than that relating to the other two strands. Early in 2006, construction of the new ASKe building commences. This is a new student learning centre which will provide much-needed 'social learning space' to underpin collaborative learning, networking, and personal connectivity. Experience tells us that today's student has moved away from a traditional learning environment, seeking instead a place to grab a cup of coffee and a bite to eat, sit with friends and discuss ideas, work on group assignments, practise presentations, or brainstorm ideas for projects - all supported by the latest technology. The ASKe building (scheduled to open in March 2007) will therefore provide space for students to study collaboratively,

centring on a café, which we hope will be used as much by staff as students.

But *strand 3* involves more than just a building. The ASKe team has argued that only a true community of practice will ensure shared understanding, hence we also aim to develop the social environment needed to colonise the physical space, once built. Development of this social environment began on 4 November 2005 with the highly-successful ASKe launch event - a workshop entitled 'Cultivating an Inclusive Community of Practice' followed by a firework party - which was attended by students, staff and local employers. Further events are planned, which we hope will go towards nurturing an inclusive and collaborative environment in which all interested parties may come to a better, more consistent understanding of assessment, standards and indeed learning.

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Information for Contributors

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

Submission of an article to *Educational Developments* implies that it has not been published elsewhere and that it is not currently being considered by any other publisher or editor.

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Towards Inclusive Assessment

Caroline Jackson, Bournemouth University

This article is based upon a workshop of the above title held at the SEDA/AISHE Belfast Spring Conference 'Inspiring Learning: Diversity and Excellence' in May 2005. The aim is to introduce readers to the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning Phase 5 project 'Towards Learning Creatively' (TLC) and to discuss further the issues that arise from developing non or partly written assessment formats. These might include using orals, creating videos, undertaking practicals, designing posters for exhibition or organising events. The project (full title, 'Towards Inclusive Assessment: Unleashing Creativity') has been running since September 2004 as a partnership between Southampton Solent (lead institution), Oxford Brookes and Bournemouth Universities and is initially focusing on the Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism (HoLST) subject area.

The TLC project was proposed out of the recognition of the growing diversification of the student population and therefore the need for more varied approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. TLC focuses on developing *inclusive* modes of assessment with particular attention to the needs of students with dyslexia. Dyslexia is recognised as a learning disability (SENDA, 2001) and the National Working Party for Dyslexia in Higher Education (1999) found that approximately half of all dyslexic students were diagnosed whilst in HE. Moreover about four percent of all students in HE have dyslexia. At Southampton Solent University ten percent of students have dyslexia, especially those on outdoor recreation courses. Dyslexia is not related to intellectual ability or creativity, and creativity is not exclusive to students with dyslexia – many students have 'right brain' skills that are being under-assessed in HE (Bibbings, 2002). The project builds on previous and current work (e.g. MESA, SPACE) to develop and disseminate a more diverse range of assessments using different media which enables students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.

The project also aims through dissemination exercises to assist in supporting and empowering lecturers to develop a more diverse range of innovative assessments to allow students to work in creative, non-written or partly written formats which will in turn feed into institutional policies for more inclusive assessment. Staff development activities and resources are being developed that focus upon issues such as moderation, quality, time, equity, staff and student empowerment, and feedback. Dissemination of activities and resources are initially through cascade partners (buddies), and subsequently through our web site, conferences and publications. The objectives of the project are outlined in table 1 below.

- Audit hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism courses
- Investigate practice in other disciplines
- Support staff and promote change through buddy programme
- Evaluate staff and student experiences
- Produce exemplar briefs and staff development activities
- Disseminate benefits via assessment briefs, resources and student work - workshops, website, publications
- Influence policy change to encourage creative and innovative assessment methods.

Table 1: TLC objectives

Adults with dyslexia may be able to handle complex multi-dimensional problems yet have difficulties with a simple essay structure (Pumfrey, 2000). Are the strengths and weaknesses of these students recognised and considered when lecturers are developing their learning outcomes? Not all dyslexia has the same implications but the strengths and weaknesses can be summarised in the points in table 2 below.

Strengths	Common problems
Strong visual-spatial 'right hemisphere'	Poor organisation skills
Holistic perception	Reading - slow, weak comprehension skills
Lateral thinking	Difficulties putting ideas on paper
Problem-solving ability	Writing and spelling - sequencing of words and structuring of written work
Creativity	Poor memory - forgets recent activities
Interpersonal skills	Confusion with orientation (left/right)
Intuitive	Concentration, attention span

Table 2: common attributes of dyslexia (adapted from CADISE 2000)

So being a student with dyslexia can be a sensitive issue – many students have a history of academic failure and frustration. It means that students are constantly being asked to address their weaknesses and do not have the opportunity to develop their strengths or demonstrate their best abilities when being assessed. The aim is to develop a balance of assessments so that all students have opportunities to develop their strengths as well as addressing their weaknesses and not to single out students with dyslexia.

Is the literature supported by evidence from TLC? A variety of research methods are being used in the development of the project materials. These include focus groups with staff and students and audits of current assessment practices at course level. To date, focus groups have been undertaken with staff and students from three institutions and an audit of six

programmes. The audit has identified that the assessment in the sample tended to be written and done individually. The most common type of assessment is consistently one of five: an essay; an unseen exam; a seminar presentation; a report; and an in-class test. In the focus groups, students and staff were asked to describe their positive and negative experiences of assessment and to consider how these experiences might be enhanced. They were asked to do this visually by cutting out pictures that best described their emotions and to place them under a happy or unhappy face. Figure 1 shows two examples of what they produced in the focus groups.

Figure 1: Students' positive and negative views of assessment

The students praised some forms of assessment, speaking in depth about 'practical' forms of assessment - examples of these included coaching skills, event management and video production (McCafferty *et al.*, 2005). An overall summary of the main points raised by students about their experiences of written and non-written assessment can be seen in table 3. These findings were mirrored by the staff focus groups.

Positives	Negatives
Examinations (written)	
Proof that earned a degree	One session can be downfall
Prefer in-class tests	Students with dyslexia avoid exams if options
Essays/Reports (written)	
Have more time to structure work and express ideas more clearly	Too many of them
Practicals/presentations/videos (non-written)	
Industry related	When this method involves group-work it means some students are 'carried'
Puts learning into practice	
Allows them to 'shine'	
Immediate feedback	

Table 3: students' views of written and non-written assessments

The aim of the project is not to advocate non-written instead of written assessment but to encourage staff to review what and how they assess and to ask themselves whether written methods are the most appropriate to assess the learning outcomes of the unit, and whether they best support the widening participation, employability and equality agendas of Higher Education. As part of this it is important to understand how to encourage this and what barriers exist to lecturers implementing alternative methods of assessment.

A number of workshops have been held with staff at each of the partner institutions, subject conferences (AEME, HoLST) and at the SEDA/AISHE Spring Conference. These workshops asked delegates to propose non-written assignments to a number of unit learning outcomes, identify barriers to implementation and to offer ways of removing these. As is the subject of the workshop, the delegates at the SEDA/AISHE Conference mainly reported their findings back verbally and one creatively as a 'radio' programme where a number of key people were 'interviewed'. The proposals can be seen in table 4 below.

- Choice - ideas e.g. metaphor, 'objects', board game
- Discussion based on reflection
- Incorporate written communication *i.e.* blended
- News item - radio, video
- Vox pox
- Context set ⇒ impacts via newsreel
- Role play
- Oral learning log e.g. blogging

Table 4: Conference workshop non-written assessment ideas

The barriers identified and possible solutions identified can be seen in table 5.

Barriers	Action
Learning outcome terminology	Clarity
Structure important whether words or not (a weakness for students with dyslexia)	Give specific details of what required - underpin all processes
Assessment criteria hard for e.g. aesthetics	Set up examples of other disciplines that have been working on this
Use of new media	Training for staff and students
Resources	Extra funding or access required to e.g. new media and technology
Theoretical underpinning	Understand theory and application
Individual vs. group work	Peer and self assessment
Institutional framework	Examples of working around or changing this e.g. UCE

Table 5: barriers for implementation of ideas in Table 4 and action to overcome them

The three key drivers that would need to be used to encourage change can be summarised as those in table 6. These drivers were currently seen as a reason for inertia and not as a motivator for change. The intention is to develop evidence that will reverse this situation and that will encourage change in the future. However, there is a

difficulty in analysing the validity and rigorousness of non-traditional non-written assessment methods. That is why the project plans to go outside of the HoLST subject area in its third year to bring examples from subjects that have been practising this for a number of years, such as art, design and media. The development of a constructivist approach to assessment is proving challenging in ensuring that our practice is rigorous and valid and a useful base for ourselves and others to learn from.

Drivers	Issues
Students and staff were similar	Limited experience and confidence in using alternative methods. Need for evidence of the need and advantage to change. The rigorousness of other methods in qualifying as 'honours-worthiness'.
Institutional	Quality assurance systems were seen as a barrier to any change. Course validation/revalidation processes were seen as a 'paper exercise' and not an opportunity to review assessment methods.
External	QAA are seen as another reason why the systems are in place and changes are not encouraged. This was also true of those subjects that had external professional and accreditation bodies.

Table 6: common drivers for change and the issues that need to be overcome

The analyses of these issues are being undertaken through case studies of non-written assessment methods currently being developed by project buddies. These address the positive and negative comments identified by students and staff and recognise the issues that arise from their implementation. These case studies are being extended in the second year to include Surrey, Portsmouth and Leeds Metropolitan Universities. The aim is to embed these case studies within the appropriate subject and pedagogic literature and they will be available via the project website later in 2006. If you have any examples and information that will add to the work of this project please contact tlc@creativeassessment.org.uk.

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TLC Project, http://www.creativeassessment.org.uk

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'Challenging the Orthodoxies - alternative approaches to educational research'

Conference organised by the Centre for Learning Development, Middlesex University, 8 December 2005

Julie Hall, Roehampton University

This very popular conference brought together a range of people from across the UK - educational researchers, educational developers, lecturers and project workers. It employed an interesting format, which drew us together in a range of discussions to challenge some of the orthodoxies in educational research and the scholarship of educational development.

Papers by most of the contributors had been posted on the conference website in the weeks before **(http:// www.mdx.ac.uk/events/cld/)** and a discussion list was set up to facilitate pre-conference discussion. These papers represented an eclectic mix of the angry, the bizarre, the tentative and the thought-provoking, bringing with them ideas and theoretical frameworks from the worlds of science, social theory and mathematics.

As the papers had already been published, each presenter was expected to contribute no more than ten minutes focused on their theme. This aspect worked very well. The delegates were assembled around tables of ten, the contributors hosted many of the tables, and the discussions got going after each set of three papers were presented. There was a high proportion of discussion over presentation.

Discussions helped to clarify issues associated with each paper. The delegates debated the popular theories which educational developers employ to understand their practice and sometimes propagate to assist others in creating effective learning environments, and then moved on to the background of recent criticisms of some of the orthodoxies (Haggis 2003, 2004; Malcolm and Zukas 2001;

Webb 1997) and some of the frustrations of seeing theories used uncritically. The delegates on my table were particularly concerned with those that simplify the complexities of learning or seem to pay scant attention to matters of context, power and purposes of HE.

These discussions helped us reflect on our relationship with educational theory, to consider the bridges that might be built between theories and between our experiences and less orthodox theories.

For me one of the highlights of the day was the paper by Monica McLean and Paul Ashwin which aimed to develop a model of engagement to reconcile concerns of phenomenography and critical pedagogy – taking into account a broader range of contexts that impact on students' and teachers' experiences of higher education than is usual in phenomenography – while retaining a closer focus on teaching and learning than is usual in critical pedagogy. I also enjoyed Sarah Mann's position piece which argued against the reduction of individual subjective experience of learning and teaching: 'We have to get close to the roar that lies on the other side of silence of the classroom, for it is only in that roar that we can begin to develop an understanding of the lived experience of individuals within classroom contexts.' In addition, Tamsin Haggis's presentation caused lots of interest as she modelled the use of complexity theory as a way of looking at the differences between things, at original contexts, time and process and a range of variables.

The final discussions considered the theories which have helped us understand our worlds and the sets of tools we have to judge what's

happening. We also considered the hierarchy of research methods which suggest that some approaches are of more value than others, and our role as researchers as well as practitioners.

A day like this can often finish with few conclusions, leaving one feeling a little dissatisfied or with too many questions still hanging. Glynis Cousin from the HE Academy performed a key role at the end in bringing together the views of each of the groups while still leaving us ready to continue to debate and discuss the approaches which chime with our values.

Congratulations to the team at Middlesex. We need more of this kind of thing!

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Book Review

This is an excellent 'starter pack' for anyone who needs to explore this increasingly important issue. Gosling sets out the rationale for the Paper, observing that:

'There is little doubt that teaching in higher education is becoming more challenging and more complex…. These challenges mean that staff need to talk about their teaching. But for them to do so there must be the right context which supports dialogue, encourages open debate and allows risks to be taken. One important tool for providing a context that encourages constructive talk about teaching is peer observation of teaching - or POT for short' (p. 5).

The issue of the 'right context' for talking about teaching is of fundamental importance. Examples exist of what can only be described as 'abuses' of POT schemes which are more inspectorial, even inquisitorial, rather than a genuine dialogue between peers. POT is not meant to be a management tool, although the issue of whether it should be a mechanism for holding staff accountable for the teaching is certainly raised for discussion in these pages. And this Paper is designed to do just that: to facilitate discussion about POT to help the reader come to a decision about what style of POT would best facilitate top quality teaching.

The Paper has two main parts, the first of which has seven chapters exploring key themes: observing teaching as a social practice; objectives of POT; departmental planning; professional development for staff; three stages of observing teaching; action planning and evaluation; and some thoughts on sustaining POT over time.

It is a matter of personal style and preference as to how one approaches a Paper like this. Certainly it is rewarding to read it from cover to cover to gain the full impact of the range of issues involved. But some – the 'dippers' among us – may prefer to launch straight into a 'nuts and bolts' approach by starting with chapter 5 which explores and discusses the three stages of POT. These are: 1) the pre-observation meeting, 2) the actual observation, and 3) the post observation meeting. There are some very useful approaches outlined here to help colleagues reflect on their teaching, and some good prompts to facilitate discussion about teaching (p. 35). Equally valuable are the suggested protocols which, if followed, will guide us towards best practice (p. 36).

The issue of how to sustain POT over a period of time is becoming an increasingly important question. How do we keep the process fresh? How do we ring the changes? Essentially, Gosling argues that:

'The value of POT depends on the quality of the conversation between the peers involved… but it will happen only if leaders expect it, invite it and provide hospitable space for the conversations to occur' (p. 49).

In other words, it is not so much the 'nuts and bolts' of the scheme, but the 'mind-set' of those taking part and the level of commitment which they bring to what is essentially a qualitative exercise. The abiding problem is what to do when this spirit and eagerness is not present.

Part Two consists of five case studies from UK HEIs which have been grappling with POT for some time, and the lessons which have been learned. These come from Buckingham Chilterns University College, the University of Gloucester, Queen's University Belfast, the University of Salford, and Staffordshire University. Each HEI has its POT champions who have contributed these case studies. Four of them set out to describe the institutional context; the general principles they have adopted; the structure of their scheme; the training and staff development issues, and an evaluation. The case study from Belfast explores the topic of how to enhance self reflection through writing, describing a small-scale research and development study which investigated methods for increasing reflection in a POT cycle (p.59f).

These case studies are commendably succinct and enable the reader quickly to gain the feel of what is being undertaken in each setting and what lessons can be learned from them.

At one level these 72 pages can be quickly skimmed to gain a useful overview, but this is deceptive. The authors draw you into a potentially rich dialogue about POT, and it should come as no surprise if on every page you find yourself challenged and encouraged to apply these insights to your own situation.

Bernard Moss, NTF 2004, Staffordshire University

Welcome to the world of the ACU!

John Kirkland, Association of Commonwealth Universities

Avid readers of Educational Developments will have noticed that SEDA has acquired a new address recently. Since 1 August, the secretariat has been based at the offices of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, at the heart of the University of London in Gordon Square.

Although its relationship with SEDA is a new one, the ACU is far from a new organisation. It is, in fact, the oldest inter-university organisation in the world, having been established back in 1913 to bring together the universities of what was then the British Empire. Indeed, for the first fifty years of its existence, the British universities operated as a section of the ACU, before splitting off to become the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, and then Universities UK.

The modern ACU is very different to the organisation envisaged by its founders. Membership has grown beyond all recognition – the ACU comprises almost five hundred institutions from throughout the world. About two-thirds come from 'developing countries' – mostly in Africa and Asia – the balance from 'developed Commonwealth' countries such as the United Kingdom (where over 90% of universities are members), Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Some activities of the ACU have remained intact. The *Commonwealth Universities Yearbook,* which has just produced its 80th edition, is still regarded as the definitive guide available in its field. Recently, an online version, CUDOS – the Commonwealth Universities Database Online Service was launched and is available free of charge to staff and students at member institutions. Major conferences – of which two are held in each five year cycle – provide exceptional opportunities for interaction between university leaders. We have managed scholarship programmes – most notably the prestigious Commonwealth

John Kirkland, *SEDA Secretariat*

Scholarships and Fellowships – for the UK government for over fifty years. Our long standing Advertising and Recruitment service assists academic mobility by negotiating a range of discounted rates for advertising job vacancies.

In recent years, these activities have been joined by several new ones. In 2005, the Association played an important role in ensuring that higher education remained prominent in the thinking of the Commission for Africa and G8. Other recent innovations include the development of new tools for benchmarking university activities, the establishment of a policy unit and gender equity programme, active networks for university staff in the areas of research management, public relations and human resources management, and a programme to improve access of developing country universities to academic journals.

The Association has also provided services to outside organisations for much of its history, and the new arrangement with SEDA is the latest

Roz Grimmitt, *SEDA Administrator*

manifestation of this. It is a role that we are particularly looking forward to, since the two organisations have the potential to develop much wider areas of collaboration. ACU's international membership, for example, could provide an excellent base through which SEDA could further develop international activities, and gain additional publication sales. Likewise SEDA could contribute to the debates underway within the ACU, for example through the forthcoming conference of the HRM network, scheduled for September 1-3, 2006 in Malaysia.

Most of all, the two bodies share a genuine commitment towards higher education, and in particular the staff working within it. In this context, we look forward to a long and mutually beneficial relationship.

Dr John Kirkland is the Deputy Secretary General (Development) of the Association of Commonwealth Universities.