

# Centre for Excellence

# in Teaching and Learning for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA)

Report to HEFCE: Interim Evaluation  
July 2007

# **Interim CETL Evaluation**

**Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy**

**Sheffield Hallam University**  
**July 2007**

# Interim Evaluation of The Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA)

## 1.0 Executive Summary

The report follows the guidelines set out by the HEFCE, and uses the RUFDATA evaluation framework (section 4).

Section 3, '*The aims and scope of the CETL*', provides details of the core team with day to day responsibilities for operation and planning, the Programme Board with its oversight of the activities of the University's three CETLs, and a listing of the 19 research and development projects funded in the first two years.

Half the report is devoted to section 5 '*Findings addressing key evaluation foci*'. The student experience is illustrated through a brief commentary on 7 projects which draw out a number of themes: the importance of engaging whole course teams in a project and its outcomes; how CETL supported project affect around 100 teaching staff and the strategy used to support these staff; the emergence of a new collaborative project with other universities; how single module development is able to impact widely in an institution because of novel features which have a very positive impact on student motivation; the value of collaboration with the Student Union.

This section also illustrates the substantial strategic impact of the CETLs in the University in terms of University values and its LTA strategy, the Course planning and validation process, Faculty roles and responsibilities, and the LTA career pathway.

The CPLA CETL change model is discussed - the value of additional funding in enhancing the bottom up contributions is emphasised. There are substantial sections on the '*Effects on Teachers*' from cultural and practice stand points. Two examples of large scale cultural change are given. One is at the Divisional Level and the other at Faculty level.

The key role of funded projects in developing experience, expertise and ownership at the grass roots level is demonstrated. This is also the case for several Special Interest Groups which have successfully engaged staff from across the University in discussion and reflection of topical issues such as *Transitions into and through higher education*.

Section 6, '*Lessons learned and future developments*', is a wide ranging commentary. It focuses on 'Research methods & dissertations', and 'Assessment and feedback' under '*Emerging Teaching Practices*', and covers LTA career path, Quality Enhancement, Validation, Teaching Teams and Staff Development, Learner Autonomy Framework, Research & Evaluation under '*University Systems and Practices*'.

'*Future Plans*' focus on the Future Funding Model, Special Interest Groups, Placement Students, Group Work, and Student Motivation, and concludes that CETLs, appropriately established and operated, provide a catalyst for real and lasting change.

## 2.0 Introduction

### 2.1 Structure and audience

The structure follows the guidelines from HEFCE and uses the RUFDATA evaluation framework. Section 5, 'Findings', makes up 40% of the report, and includes a lot of cross-referencing to aid clarity – for example research and development projects are used to illustrate facets of the findings which appear under different headings.

The audience for the evaluation includes HEFCE, the broader CETL community in the UK, researchers and scholars interested in autonomous learning in Higher Education. A key audience is the LTA lead community within the University.

### 2.2 Connection with other reports

The University's Learner Autonomy and Employability CETLs work in collaboration with each other and hence the evaluation reports have some similar features and make reference to the other.

The research and development projects have been evaluated by a CETL researcher, and this interim CETL evaluation draws heavily on her report.

### 2.3 Purpose of the evaluation

To ensure the current and future work of the CETL is highly successful, with well informed adjustments and decision made and implemented.

### 2.4 Overview of the evidential base

#### ***Evaluation of activities focusing upon the impact of CETL activity***

The aim of these studies is to evaluate the effect of CPLA activities on the student experience, staff engagement with autonomous learning, course development, and institutional processes. They include:

- (i) An assessment of impact on validation through discussions with of each of the four heads of Faculty<sup>1</sup> Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) and the chair of the University Standing Panel for the validation of undergraduate courses.
- (ii) An evaluation of process interventions, e.g. course planning/workshops through discussions with the four Faculty Heads of Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA), and a Head of Division (Applied Social Science)
- (iii) An evaluation of Special Interest Group (SIG) activity with an assessment of impact through discussions with the Director of the CPLA, an Associate, and a leader of two SIG Groups.

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<sup>1</sup> D&S - Faculty of Development and Society  
O&M - Faculty of Organisation and Management  
ACES - Faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and Science  
H&W - Faculty of Health and Wellbeing

- (iv) Gauging the impact on other SHU processes e.g. SHU LTA strategy, Faculty LTA action plans
- (v) An assessment of the progress made against the CPLA annual operating plans 2205/06 and 2006/07.
- (vi) Review of minutes of the University's CETL Programme Board,
- (vi) Evaluation of CETL funded projects (Practice research, undertaken by a CPLA researcher)
- (vii) Findings from interviews with:
  - Pro Vice-Chancellor, Academic Development
  - Head, Learning and Teaching Institute
  - Assistant Dean Academic Development (D&S)
  - Heads of LTA of each Faculty x4
  - Chair of the University Undergraduate Standing Validation Panel
  - CPLA Associates x 4
  - Placement Student
  - CPLA researcher

### **3.0 Brief description of the aims and scope of the CETL**

#### **3.1 Purpose**

The overall purpose of the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA) is to promote the development of learner autonomy across the University. It does this through its main theme of empowering students to acquire responsibility for their learning, and to work in partnerships with tutors and other students.

Learners demonstrate transformative approaches to constructing their own knowledge; they integrate into academic communities. CPLA brings together excellence in developing learner autonomy, pedagogic innovation, staff and educational development for the benefit of the sector.

#### **3.2 Specific goals**

1. To inspire, support and resource Sheffield Hallam staff and students to undertake a coherent programme of investigation that will:
  - Inform and gain recognition for the development and success of learner autonomy, and
  - Guide others in the successful development of learner autonomy as a legitimate, even a necessary, learning outcome and educational process.
2. To enhance staff and student capability in undertaking, valuing and using pedagogic research and evaluation.
3. To develop better understandings and conceptualisations of learning and educational change as well as the inhibitors/barriers and promoters of change i.e. more holistic understandings of the nature of educational change and its impacts.
4. To model the principles of learner autonomy by engaging with students as partners in the research and evaluation for shared learning, development and further inquiry.

5. To further articulate the voice of students.

6. To inform the formative and summative evaluation of CPLA through the ongoing application of a linked model of activity, research and evaluation

### 3.3 Activities

In order to achieve the goals of the CETL, the following *modus operandi* has been adopted.

#### 3.3.1 Core Team

A core team was set up to develop strategy, participate in development work, and guide CPLA activities such as workshops and newsletters (*CETLview*).

- two Co-Directors
- six Associate Directors
- one Placement Student
- a Research Assistant (0.5)
- an Administrator, an Administrative Assistant and a Finance Officer, joint with the Employability CETL

The core team meets monthly and monitors activity against the annual operating plan. It also employs an external 'critical friend' whose role focuses on improving the breadth and depth of the self-reflection of the CPLA core team and associates, through, for example, group and individual discussions.

The team has worked with course planning teams in all faculties (e.g. through awareness raising workshops) to encourage engagement with the autonomous learning agenda in the context of course and curriculum design, and to provide advice, guidance, inspiration and support to further this aspect of provision. They have worked closely with senior staff in all four faculties - Faculty Heads of LTA and others with LTA responsibilities (e.g. CETL Associates) have been key drivers of change and organised away days for planning teams, run workshops, and published extensions to the University's guidance documents. Project work also impacts on course planning. For example, in the Faculty of O&M the work of the Teaching Fellow (project - **Promoting learner autonomy through assessment**) has resulted in validated changes across the entire level 4 curriculum. The project **Promoting learner autonomy in Engineering** produced a very high level of student motivation. This has been recognised in other areas of the University (e.g. the Faculty of H&W) and is influencing current course planning in the health professional areas.

#### 3.3.2 Associates

The CPLA has appointed and funded a number of Associates (8 in the first year of operation, 7 in the second), to undertake project work in enhancing, integrating and embedding autonomous learning within courses and modules. Associates are members of staff from Faculties or Central Departments who are keen and interested in the autonomous learning agenda within SHU. Their work has led to new learning designs, which together with the associated evaluation and dissemination, provides outputs for other staff to explore and adapt as appropriate.

### **3.3.3 Financial Support**

The CPLA has provided financial support for staff to carry out research and development projects (listed in section 3.4.2). The Co-Directors made their selection from the submitted proposals. Their aim was to ensure coverage of a range of autonomous learning dimensions within the student experience. In the first two years the main investment (as articulated in the bid) has been in the Faculty of D&S with some in the Faculties of ACES and O&M. In the coming year this will change to ensure a balance of investment across the University. All Faculties have, of course, been engaged with the learner autonomy agenda through other means such as, for example, the course planning process.

### **3.3.4 Special Interest Groups (SIGs)**

The CPLA, in conjunction with the University's CETL in Employability (E3i), has established and funded a number of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) which operate across the University.

The SIGs operate as communities of practice, have open membership of interested colleagues, and act as a focal point for debate, sharing of ideas, collaboration, project and development work. They are an important way of engaging colleagues with the missions of the CETLs, developing and disseminating innovative practice, and building a sense of community around the curriculum and LTA change agenda within the University.

Of particular relevance to CPLA are:

- PDP
- Transitions into and through HE
- Scholarship, research and evaluation
- Staff and autonomy

## **3.4 Roles and participants**

### **3.4.1 Programme Board**

The Programme Board has responsibility for providing advice, direction to the CETLs, and accountability to the University Executive as well as recommending reports for publication. The Board also monitors and reviews project delivery, quality and impact, and ensures opportunities for cross CETL collaboration are exploited. Meetings are held bi-monthly.

The membership of the Programme Board is as follows:

Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic Development (Chair)  
Head of the Learning and Teaching Institute (LTI)  
Co-Directors x 2 - Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy  
Director - E3i CETL  
Co-Director - Centre for Inter-Professional elearning  
Associate Dean Academic Development  
Director of Student Affairs *or* Head of Academic Standards and Quality  
Enhancement  
President of the Students Union

Head of Faculty HR Services  
 Assistant Director, Strategy & Management Reporting, Finance  
 Assistant Director Business Services and Facilities Operations  
 Head of Internal Communications

### 3.4.2 Staff Roles

The CPLA has formulated a number of staff roles, the responsibilities and activities of which are outlined through the mechanism of role descriptors, produced jointly with the University's Human Resource Department. Co-Directors, Associate Directors, and Associates all receive honoraria of between £2k and £1k per year.

| Title                    | Designation   | Roles and responsibilities   |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Co-directors             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professor Social Science Education, D&amp;S</li> <li>Head of Strategic Development, LTI</li> </ul>   | Leadership   |
| Associate Directors      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professor of Educational Research, D&amp;S</li> <li>Head of LTA, ACES</li> <li>Head of Humanities research Centre (also leader of the 'Transitions' special interest group) D&amp;S</li> <li>Professor of Education, D&amp;S</li> <li>Principal Lecturer in Real Estate</li> <li>Professor of Economic History, D&amp;S</li> <li>Head of LTA, H&amp;W</li> </ul> | <p>Emerging strategy of the CETL and its implementation.</p> <p>Individual project work (see tables below)</p> |
| Associates yr 1 x 11     | See table below   | Individual Projects  |
| Associates yr 2 x 7      | See table below   | Individual Projects  |
| Placement Students yr 1  | X 2   | Support of project work - e.g. organise student led conference; analyse questionnaires; administration         |
| Placement Students yr 2  | BSc Hons Business and Marketing   | Support of project work<br>Joint-Editor CETLview   |
| Research Assistant yr 2  | X 0.5   | Evaluation of projects   |
| Administrator            | X 1   | These are shared roles with the CETL for Employability   |
| Administrative Assistant | X 1   |  |
| Finance officer          | X 1   |  |

**Yr 1 project and development work** was as follows:

| Designation of Associates        | Division, Faculty | Project Title                                       |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Co-Director                      | Sociology, D&S    | <i>Using iPods with Sociology students</i>          |
| Senior Lecturer in ICT Education | Education, D&S    | <i>Developing the virtual learning environment</i>  |
| Teaching Fellow and              | Sociology, D&S    | <i>Working with students to develop e-Portfolio</i> |



|  |                        |  |
|--|------------------------|--|
| Senior Lecturer                                      |                        | <i>as an integrated learning environment</i>   |
| Senior Lecturer                                      | Criminology, D&S       | <i>Changing assessment cultures</i>  |
| Senior Lecturer                                      | Social Policy, D&S     | <i>Enabling enquiry based learning</i>   |
| Teaching Fellow                                      | Languages, O&M         | <i>Promoting learner autonomy through assessment</i>   |
| Teaching Fellow for E-learning and Flexible Delivery | Education, D&S         | <i>Personal and professional development planning using e-portfolio</i>  |
| Teaching Fellow                                      | Sociology, D&S         | <i>Working in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University Students Union on the 'Just Ask' peer mentoring project</i> |
| Head of LTA  | Engineering, ACES      | <i>Promoting learner autonomy in Engineering</i>   |
| Professor of Economic History                        | History, D&S           | <i>Historians and Research - numeracy and the History undergraduate</i>  |
| Principal Lecturer in real estate                    | Built Environment, D&S | <i>An inter-disciplinary autonomous learning resource for the Built Environment and The European Challenge</i>         |

**Yr 2 project and development work** is as follows:

| <b>Designation of Associate(s)</b> | <b>Division, Faculty</b>    | <b>Project Title</b>  |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Co-Director                        | Sociology, D&S              | <i>Professional Learning Week</i>   |
| Lecturer                           | Criminology, D&S            | <i>The teaching, learning and application of undergraduate research skills within the Criminology discipline</i>    |
| Principal lecturer                 | Economics, D&S              | <i>The development of work planning systems which support pedagogies which encourage student and staff autonomy</i> |
| Senior Lecturer                    | Communication Studies, ACES | <i>Promoting an autonomous stance to researching workplace issues</i>   |
| Senior Lecturer                    | Engineering, ACES           | <i>Problem-based learning in Engineering, Design and Technology</i>   |
| Teaching Fellow                    | Languages, O&M              | <i>Staff and autonomy SIG</i>   |
| Senior Lecturer                    | Education, D&S              | <i>Autonomous student evaluation: engaging students in enhancing their courses</i>                                  |
| Principal Lecturer                 | Psychology, D&S             | <i>Increasing confidence in mathematical ability through online guidance and activities</i>                         |

## **4.0 Evaluation framework and approach**

### **4.1 RUFDATA**

**4.1.2 Reasons and purposes of evaluation**– to ensure the current and future work of the CPLA is well informed and ensure optimum adjustments and decision are

made. The engagement of all parties in the evaluation of the totality of the work of the Centre ensures a high degree of sharing of ideas and high levels of critical and supported reflection. The interim evaluation has provided an opportunity to the CPLA to profit from employing an independent evaluator. This evaluation at the end of the second year of operation is based on a substantial body of activity that provides significant new insights. These are informing the re-assessment of the implementation strategy to be adopted in the coming three years.

**4.1.3 Uses of the evaluation** – the evaluation will be used as a basis for strategy development and operational planning.

In terms of strategy, key questions that have been considered are:

- Does the focus on course planning and development continue to be the strategic priority?
- How does the guidance on learner autonomy need to be developed?
- How best can the CETL encourage curriculum and pedagogic development related to autonomous learning outside of the course planning cycle?
- What are the most appropriate ways to demonstrate and evidence that autonomous learning is embedded in the curriculum?

Operational planning for the coming year will address the above in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the core CPLA team, to ensure

- Optimisation in the allocation of resources to priorities,
- Identification of key channels and individuals with whom to work in the faculties and central departments,
- Enhanced approaches to research and evaluation,
- More effective dissemination both within and outside SHU, and
- The continued development of the external network.

**4.1.4 Foci of the evaluation** – the foci of the evaluation will be a number of key evaluation questions:

(i) Of the projects that have been carried out, what are the features that have best improved the experience of students and the development of their autonomy?

(ii) Have the autonomous learning aspects of programmes and courses, in which projects have been carried out, been enhanced? Have the majority of the course team responded and in what ways? - Do the developments impact across a single year of the course, the whole course, or a single module?

(iii) To what extent has autonomous learning as a key theme and approach been embedded and integrated within core university processes?

(v) What are the learning points which will guide the operation and further success of the CPLA in the next two or three years?

**4.1.5 Data and evidence used in the evaluation**

The independent evaluator has drawn upon a wide range of sources listed in section 2.4. The most informative have been the following:

- The report produced by a CPLA researcher and follow-up discussions. Her report was produced from structured interviews with all staff who led development projects, many of whom demonstrated the results of their own evaluation. This work provided an excellent overview of the range and level of activity, with sufficiently detailed knowledge to identify key issues for sharing with other projects, those areas of greatest success, and pointers which would help in the next stages of the operation of the Centre.
- Discussions with the staff listed in section 2.4 have, without exception, provided opinions rich in information and insight which has been both full and frank. Many produced documents to evidence their statements, e.g. Faculty validation guidance. Claims made by individuals were substantiated by others without being asked direct questions - the messages were consistent and provide weight to the recommendations given in the final section. Much of sections 6.5 (*Adjustments and future plans*) and 6.6 (*Reflections etc.*) stem from their enthusiasm, comments and suggestions.

**4.1.6 Audience for the evaluation** – the audience for the evaluation includes HEFCE, the broader CETL community in the UK, researchers and scholars interested in autonomous learning in Higher Education. The National network of Subject Centres are likely to be particularly interested.

A key audience is the LTA lead community within the University who have been, and are likely to continue to be, the most influential in enhancing the learner autonomy agenda across the University -

- Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic Development
- Head of the Learning and Teaching Institute
- Director of the CPLA
- 4 X Faculty Heads of LTA
- CETL Associates

Through these staff the LTA agenda will *continue* to feature at most, if not all, agendas of the University Academic Development Committee and of the four Faculty Academic Boards.

**4.1.7 Timing of the evaluation** – the evaluation took place between April and July 2007.

**4.1.8 Agency conducting the evaluation** – an independent evaluator who was until recently a senior member of the University staff with a particular interest in autonomous learning.

## **5.0 Findings addressing key evaluation foci from RUFDATA**

### **5.1 Student experience:**

#### **5.1.1 Research and Development Projects**

Students (so far around 990) on courses or studying modules associated with CPLA projects have gained immediate benefit. This is evident from the individual project

evaluations which have taken place. Several examples are given in this report as follows:

- The Project '**Research Skills in Criminology**' is covered in section 5.1.3 to illustrate the importance of engaging whole course teams in a project and its outcomes
- **Promoting learner autonomy through assessment** is introduced in section 5.4.1 to illustrate change affecting a large number of teachers and the strategy of staff support which has been put in place. In 2007/08 over 1,000 students will experience the changes
- The Project '**Working with students to develop e-Portfolios as an integrated learning environment**' illustrates the effects on teachers (section 5.4.2)
- The Project **Historians & Research - numeracy and the History undergraduate** is used to illustrate changes to practice in section 5.4.2, and to show the emergence of a new project in collaboration with other universities concerning numeracy
- '**Promoting learner autonomy in engineering**' illustrates how a research and development project involving a single module taught by three tutors is able to impact widely in an institution because the novel features of the new module (producing a DVD etc.) have such a positive motivating effect on students (section 5.5)
- **iPods with Sociology students** is used to illustrate the motivating effect of using novel approaches to the use of technology in section 5.5 - *Effects on learning designs*
- **Just Ask** illustrates (i) the value of collaboration with the Students Union and (ii) the high motivation level of students which comes from them identifying a direct relevance and value to their career needs (section 5.5).

### 5.1.2 Divisional Approach

The Division of Applied Social Science is an exemplar of innovative, creative and lateral thinking in the context of learning, teaching and assessment, and the approach adopted in the re-planning of its portfolio in 2006. In this case the lead person is the Head of the Division of ASS who has an outstanding grasp of LTA including employability and learner autonomy, as well as the vision to look at the changing nature of students including their expectations of flexible learning environments.

From September 2007 the students on the Applied Social Science degree programme will immediately experience a programme which, for example, features the development of student autonomous learning in a planned and coherent way from year to year. The impact of the integrated approach to resource development and deployment will also become more influential over time - this approach is considered later at the end of section 5.3.4 '*Contribution to the educational change model within SHU*'

### 5.1.3 Focus on whole courses and teaching teams

There have been a range of projects with almost all focussing on *either* whole years of courses *or* one or two modules which are of interest the whole course team. This supports one of the main goals of the CPLA of focussing the development of learner autonomy at the teaching team.

This has resulted in extensive ownership of a project and its outcomes by many staff. For example, the project '**Research skills within the criminology discipline**' focused on a level 5 module taught by one or two staff. However, its relevance to building learner autonomy in support of the final year dissertation ensured engagement by almost the entire course team who are individually involved in dissertation supervision. Changes to the research skills module are now embedded in the portfolio of undergraduate criminology courses. A similar Project '**Historians and Research**' is considered in section 5.4.2 '*Effects on teachers through funded projects*'.

## 5.2 Connections with external partners

Dissemination in the wider HE community so far has been fairly limited and is due to grow over the coming year. To date CPLA has engaged with six Subject Centres: Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP), Education (ESCALATE), Engineering, Materials, Built Environment (CEBE), Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS).

Three partnerships have been developed so far: :

- The Project '**Numeracy and the History undergraduate**' has led directly to a partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) which has been successful in its bid for a collaborative National Teaching Fellowship Scheme Project '*Every Student Counts*', based at UCLan.
- The project, '**Working with students to develop e-Portfolios as an integrated learning environment**', has been very successful and the impact of this project has led to membership of the National Coalition of Electronic Portfolio Research (USA) which requires the University to carry on this research for a further three years. There is only one other UK member.
- The Students Union has developed links with students at the University of Wolverhampton as a result of its work on the students mentoring other students Project '**Just Ask**'. They are now working together on exchanging experiences and developing the project further.

## 5.3 Internal strategic impact

### 5.3.1 Introduction

The CPLA together with the other two University CETLs (Employability; Inter-professional e-Learning) have been hugely influential in the broader context of learning and teaching and has resulted in major changes to the University's Core Values based on Forward Thinking, Employability, and Supportiveness. In introducing the new values the Vice Chancellor stated that

*"We must balance our interventions alongside our promotion of **autonomous learning**, to make sure we're providing our students with exactly what they need, when they need it"*

They have also led to significant revision of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (2006 -10) with its focus primarily on improving students' experience of learning in higher education.

*“The University wants to achieve this by, amongst other things, providing vibrant and challenging learning opportunities. For staff this means embedding courses with enterprise, e-learning, employability, **learner autonomy** and personal development alongside academic and/or professional components”*

This has been particularly influential across the teaching community in the University.

### **5.3.2 The next few years**

The majority of the University's students will benefit over the medium to long term, depending on the influence of the University's new LTA strategy (2006) with one of its main features learner autonomy, and the course planning process which now has a requirement for planning teams to specifically address learner autonomy.

The CETL support for planning teams has been particularly good since September 2006. There are University requirements in place for learner autonomy to be addressed, and these are emphasised at the Preliminary Meeting between the chair of the University Standing Panel for Validation and the leader of the course planning team. Core members of the CPLA actively provide course planning teams with workshops and/or support for Faculty workshops.

Faculties are active in supporting their own planning teams to ensure they address all the issues required of them. For example, the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing have a six person academic planning support team of their own which is headed by the Faculty's Head of Learning, Teaching and Assessment. Each member contributes particular expertise - Learner Autonomy and Retention; Assessment; e-learning; Inter-professional learning; Employability and Enterprise; Professional Development Planning. The team have, amongst other things, produced a course planning guide which is an expanded version of the University guide. This asks, for example, that planning addresses '*the way in which students gradually/systematically acquire the skills required to learn autonomously*'.

The impact of the University's new LTA strategy and the associated changes made to course planning has been substantial, and particularly so in the last year. It involved around half the University's course provision which covers the future learning experience of over half the university's students. For example:

- The undergraduate revalidation work in 2005/06 in the Faculty of Development of Society centred on courses associated with several CETL Associates (e.g. criminology, sociology, politics). PDP / e-portfolios featured strongly at all three academic levels, compulsory work-based learning at level 5, and both work-based learning and dissertations at level 6. The intake to this programme is around 300 student per year.
- The undergraduate programme in business and management was revalidated in 2006/07 and all level 4 modules have been developed as a result of the Project

**Promoting learner autonomy through assessment.** Around 1,000 students will experience the changes in 2007/08.

### 5.3.3 Faculty roles and responsibilities:

Since the award of the CETLS, the place of LTA in the staffing structures of the University has been transformed. There are now posts with LTA responsibilities at all levels in all Faculties. The example for the Faculty of Development and Society, which is similar to that in all four Faculties, serves to illustrate this. It shows in a simplistic way the major cultural shift which has taken place, particularly at the principal lecturer and lower grades, as highlighted below.

Dean of Faculty

Assistant Dean, Academic development

Head of Quality and Chair of the Faculty LTA Committee  
(senior academic grade)

3 x **Divisional LTA Coordinators**  
(Principal Lecturer grade)

3 x **Teaching Fellows**  
(Principal Lecturer grade)

16 x **Subject Group LTA Coordinators** (no specific grade)

Faculty Heads of LTA are senior staff with significant responsibilities and influence. Their roles and responsibilities are drawn up by each Faculty. That for the Faculty of Development and Society has ten elements, and the first two, which show the level of importance given to the work of the CETLs, are as follows:

- To widely disseminate CETL findings and enhance the overall quality and learning experience for students
- To embed CETL activity and delivery of University core values

### 5.3.4 Contribution to the educational change model within SHU

The established model is a mix of top down and bottom up. The award of CETLs resulted in a change to the University's Vision and Values, the LTA Strategy, and modified specifications for new and revalidated courses.

There has also been a shift towards bottom up. Project work has involved a range of senior and junior academic staff, and the results of this work have been / are being widely disseminated in the University. The setting up of Special Interest Groups (see section 5.4.3) has been a notable bottom up success. There has been good progress in developing a new teaching career path which will provide further incentives for innovative ideas and suggestions to come from the grass-roots staff.

There is a new change model being developed in the University called the *Learning Hub Concept*, and the Division of Applied Social Science is an example of bringing together all agendas and issues to improve the student experience.

The Division is innovative, creative and lateral thinking in the context of learning, teaching and assessment. The lead person is the Head of the Division of ASS, who has an outstanding grasp of LTA including employability and learner autonomy, as well as the vision to look at the changing nature of students and their expectations of flexible learning environments. The University is exploring the concept of the 'Learning Hub' and the Division, through its Head, has seized the moment to engage with this agenda which focuses on the integration of resources (space and people) and pursue the involvement all Divisional staff are part of the learning and teaching team. A Co-Director of the CPLA together with several Faculty Associates have focussed much of their research and development on the theme of '*students taking increasing responsibility for their learning*'. Some of these Projects are considered briefly elsewhere.

### **5.3.5 The role of students**

The University and the Student body (through the Students Union) have for many years had a close working relationship. In part this has involved many aspects of student learning and guidance such as the joint development of the Union-University *Hallam Award*.

The CETLs have taken collaboration with the Union to a new level with a joint project on peer mentoring called '**Just Ask**'. This was carried out with 20 volunteer students from applied social sciences. This project now poses the question - "*what is it about Just Ask which managed to inspire students to engage with a voluntary module?*" Other sections of the University such as Education Guidance and Student Services are exploring how this project can influence some of their future work.

### **5.3.6 Impact on learning environments**

The University refurbished the former City Campus bookshop with capital funds from the CETLs. This has resulted in 3 CETL rooms located in the heart of the Atrium and a CETL space highly visible to students and staff. The three rooms provide innovative space and equipment to support CETL activities.

An extension to the Adsetts learning Centre is under construction, and a major part of the design brief was that the space should support autonomous learning. Part of the extension will have a student managed space to support group work and peer interworking, once again with the tools for these approaches readily available. The University has purchased software (IPTV) to enable student generated rich media content to be shared and displayed around the campus.

We have also invested in an immersive virtual reality environment, once again student managed, to provide the idea of students as producers of content and knowledge.

Many more areas of the campus are now wireless to enable autonomous learning to happen in informal learning spaces.



## 5.4 Effects on teachers

### 5.4.1 Culture

The effect on teachers is becoming profound. Influences are present everywhere - from the University Vision and Values statement, to the course planning process, new LTA roles and responsibilities and a sustainable career path for excellence in teaching.

Faculties are responding to learner autonomy and its development in ways they view to be most appropriate for them. This provides a good level of ownership amongst staff.

Two examples of large scale changes are given in this report:

The first is from the Faculty of Organisation and Management which has, through the lead given by their Teaching Fellow, a particular interest in assessment for learning and they are using their cross-faculty research and development work in this area as a vehicle to embrace the development of student learner autonomy from academic level 4 to level 6 and beyond. This has been supported through the funding, by the CPLA, of an Associate to lead this work. The Associate has received recognition by the Faculty through promotion to a Teaching Fellow post (principal lecturer grade).

The development of the cultural change in a large number of academic staff (around 100) is particularly interesting. The revalidation of all level 4 modules within the Faculty was used as a vehicle for reform on the back of an ongoing research project on assessment and feedback. Staff motivation was then enhanced by a number of means: The strong backing of senior management of the Faculty was up-front. In addition it was made clear to staff that issues of particular concern to them, such as student retention and the needs of a diversity of students, could be dealt with more adequately through the implementation of the assessment for learning approach. Finally an evaluation strategy was developed and disseminated.

The second illustrates a completely different approach adopted by the Division of Applied Social Science which is described earlier in section 5.3.4 'Contribution to the educational change model within SHU'.

Both these examples illustrate the well known point that the way in which any cultural change is made is dependent on circumstances and existing culture, and requires visionary leadership to make the right decisions and carry change through.

The CETL funded projects have largely been directed at the Faculty of D&S, as was planned at the outset. Nevertheless the impact of learner autonomy has spread across all sections of the University, and has been substantial. This is due to a number of factors: All Faculties have been involved in the CETL through membership of the core group and engagement with the Special Interest Groups. Furthermore, the course planning and validation process at SHU ensures that the University's LTA Strategy is taken seriously. The Strategy was, of course, updated at the same time that the award of the CETLs was announced. Around half the University's course provision has been validated since the LTA Strategy was revised.

The Faculty of H&W, a lead partner in the Centre for Inter-Professional e-Learning, has not yet had CPLA funded projects. It is, however, engaged in further developing learner autonomy in all its courses. The Biomedical Sciences programme (450 students) was the first with validation recently completed. The Sport Programme (600 students) is next with validation in September 2008. The Health and Social Care Programme (4,000+ students) has commenced planning with validation due in September 2008. In this latter case academic staff are already at ease with the learner autonomy concept and will readily build up their expertise from the workshops and seminars which will support their planning.

#### **5.4.2 Practice - changes through funded projects**

A range of projects have been supported with priority given to those which would lead to changes in teaching practice of many staff. Several have already been considered in other sections of this report. For example, the changes to the module '*Research Skills in Criminology*' are now embedded, and will better support student autonomy and the associated supervision of the final years dissertation which involves most of the course team. Two additional examples are given below:

The key role of student Personal Development Planning (PDP) to support the development of learner autonomy formed the basis of a project led by two staff. One is the course leader for the Sociology Degree course and now a Faculty LTA Teaching Fellow. The leader of the project, '***Working with students to develop e-Portfolios as an integrated learning environment***', reports that it has been very successful with student engagement greatly enhanced. This Project has, of course, been of particular interest to the PDP Special Interest Group, details of which are given below.

The project '***Historians and Research***' addressed autonomy through student-led enquiry in a module at level 5. Initially students developed a group project, which then led to the development of an individual project. Ownership by students was evident at the outset, with peer and tutor feedback providing good support. An indication that student motivation and the benefits of the approach were both high is that over 60% of the students took their individual projects further for developing their final year dissertations.

Whilst projects have largely engaged course teams in one way or another and should, therefore, continue to make ongoing impact on substantial numbers of students, there are many courses which have not yet engaged in learner autonomy research and development projects. However, around half the courses in the University have been validated over the last two years, and will have enhanced elements of learner autonomy within them. In order to ensure the changes are embedded and of good quality there will be funded projects over the next three years which will extend the 'reach' of the CETL and support these course developments still further and inform practice 'on the ground'. See section 6.2 '*Emerging teaching practices*'.

### 5.4.3 Changes through Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and the wider community within the University

Four SIGs of particular relevance to learner autonomy have been a vehicle for engaging with staff from across the University whether or not they have been directly involved in the project work supported through the CPLA. Their impact is outlined in turn below:

#### **Professional Development Planning (PDP)**

The Faculty of Development and Society project, *'Working with students to develop e-Portfolios as an integrated learning environment'*, has been very successful with student engagement enhanced. Dissemination through the PDP Group has led to widespread interest amongst grass roots staff in two other Faculties to adopt a similar approach. This is a particularly noteworthy success since PDP tends to have negative connotations amongst students and staff.

**Transitions into and through HE.** This has probably been the most successful Group since it has 'captured the moment' with many staff - work in this areas has been fascinating and informative and 'transitions' is very relevant to the ongoing retention agenda in which the development of the autonomous learner is a key component. The lead person has been carrying out her research and evaluation with students on 'her own course'. Hence she has recently set up a steering group with cross-university membership to encourage more course teams to engage with this important agenda.

**Scholarship, research and evaluation.** This Group has had an active programme of engagement with staff including a day long programme for staff whose experience in LTA research and evaluation was limited. This Group is valued by many staff in the University, and for those engaged in Projects an essential resource and forum. It is recognised as essential to maintain research and scholarship in LTA in order to provide credibility and reputation for LTA work - both inside and out with the University. A senior member of the Learning and Teaching Institute has a responsibility for promoting practise based research and evaluation within the University, and the work of the SIG complements this and other pedagogical research in the University.

**Staff and Autonomy** - The concept of learner autonomy is one which is neither well understood nor easy to define; and one which provides a challenge to some staff. This merits a staff development forum for exchange of ideas. A focus for learner autonomy developments over the last two years has been on the student acquiring more responsibility for learning. The 'Staff and Autonomy' Group thus has the potential to widen the debate.

### 5.5 Effects on learning designs

**The practice that stems from 2006/07 validation** of course changes will commence in the coming session and continue year on year as the new course rolls out. However, the CETL will continue to fund development projects to support the practice itself and help in the ongoing and vital development of staff experience and expertise.

### **Practice that stems from research and development projects.**

The brief details of a selection of projects given in this report illustrate that changes to practice are taking place. The extent of their year on year success will be evaluated through the University's annual review processes. The University has recently developed an assessment and feedback template to aid the evaluation of impact of changes that take place in this area. Similar templates may aid the ongoing evaluation of the success of the new learning designs for learner autonomy. The results of the assessment and feedback evaluation are of particular interest to learner autonomy with the interdependency of the student and tutor such a key factor.

The Faculty of O&M have prioritised assessment & feedback as the prime vehicle for developing good practice in the development of student learner autonomy in all undergraduate courses. More details of the project are given in section 5.4.1.

The completely different and commendable approach adopted by the Division of Applied Social Science is described earlier in section 5.3.4 '*Contribution to the educational change model within SHU*'. The developments focussed on collaborative learning which is a widely used vehicle for student learning, with the goal of students taking increasing responsibility for their learning.

A key feature of the CPLA is to enable the development of integrative learning design strategies which promote autonomous learning because the students and the tutor work together on strategies which are motivating through the feeling of joint ownership and personal relevance.

The lead person of the Project '**Promoting Learner Autonomy in Engineering**' in which students developed an engineering learning package in DVD format, said "it was fantastically motivating for the students", so much so that the course team have now developed the module for the final year of the course. A notable feature of the module is the single point of assessment - the student presentation. The Division of Computing and the Faculty of H&W are now very likely to adopt a similar module in their courses.

The Project ***iPods with Sociology students*** sought to integrate the use of digital technology into the learning process to provide new ways of engaging with learning through the spoken word. The model of *delivery* was informal and conversational which helped to promote reflective thought. Students expressed the need for a higher level of interactivity by being able to create their own content with the iPods. Other projects in which students responded well to the use of a technology medium were ***Working with students to develop e-Portfolios as an integrated learning environment*** in which the use of PDP software PebblePad was found to be very popular.

Unlocking real **student motivation** is an ongoing challenge. These examples show that an innovative approach employing a media theme appeals to students, whilst providing an excellent vehicle for developing learner autonomy at the present time.

Another feature of a module/course which also unlocks students' latent motivation is relevance, and where a work-based element is present this is often, but not always, achieved. This has been identified in the projects ***Just Ask, Increasing confidence***

*of psychology students in their mathematical ability*, and *Problem-based learning in Engineering, Design and Technology*, where the challenge is motivating a whole group of students.

## **6.0 Lessons learned and future adjustments**

### **6.1 Overview of new knowledge about how student learning might be enriched**

In 2007/08 the whole of the newly designed English degree course will commence following a re-design of the curriculum and the associated LTA strategy based on research of the last few years looking in depth at the transition of students of English into and through higher education, and designing strategies to support the academic challenges they face as they move between the different stages of their education.

### **6.2 Emerging teaching practices**

Improved links and changes to the teaching/student support for *research methods* and *dissertations*, in order to develop improved student skills, confidence and motivation for carrying out their own dissertation proposals.

The use of custom designed software to enhance student motivation for PDP.

The use of digital technology (iPods; DVD production and presentation) is in its early stages but the take up beyond the DVD Project may, in the near future, be substantial.

Changes to the whole of level 4 assessment and feedback in the business and management programme have been made after a considerable investment of time and expertise. The evaluation of the 2007/08 implementation is critical.

### **6.3 Implications for university systems and practices**

The following are identified as important implications for University systems and practices at SHU arising from the work and experience of the CPLA; many of these would apply more broadly across the UK HE sector:

#### **(i) LTA career path**

The University's CETLs have had a pronounced effect on the HR Department response in this area and serious attention has been given to the career paths for staff whose main interest is in learning and teaching and its development.

There are a number of roles and posts available and these include Head of LTA, LTA Co-ordinator, Teaching Fellow, SHU LTA Fellowship holder, TQEF project leader. The CETLs, through the Associate Director and, in particular, the Associateship roles, add another set of opportunities.

**(ii) The Quality Enhancement Operation Group** has oversight of the ongoing work of the CETLs in the context of the overall University learning, teaching and assessment agenda. It meets bi-monthly to review progress and provide guidance on issues that may arise, and ensures opportunities for cross University collaboration

and dissemination are identified. It also keeps under review the nature of the expenditure to ensure value for money. The QE Operation Group consists of

Head of the Learning and Teaching Institute

Director of the CPLA

Director of E3I

4 X Faculty Heads of LTA

1 Assistant Dean Academic Development

**(iii) Validation.** Course planning for validation underpins course change, and targeting this process will continue to be a priority for at least two further years. Never the less it does not necessarily change practice without other mechanisms - some of these, such as staff development, are also considered in this section (6.3).

Pedagogic developments that enhance autonomous learning are rooted in the course and module experiences of students, and the processes of planning, staff development and the validation itself have well established LTA agendas which include learner autonomy.

**(iv) Teaching Teams and Staff Development.** The concept of learner autonomy is a challenge to some staff, since it requires changes to the traditional role of the tutor expert. It is well recognised in the University that there is an ongoing and substantial amount of development work to be done over the coming years to ensure that the potential of courses validated in the learner autonomy context are realised. This is reflected by recent validation events which have seen a change of focus from 'quality' to 'learning and teaching' issues. There is inevitable variability in teaching teams in delivering learner autonomy in a coherent and planned way across the curriculum. Since this is better in some areas than others, the exemplars of good practice in the University arising out of the work of the CETL will be used as a catalyst for improvements.

**(v) Learner Autonomy Framework.** The course planning process is well supported by workshops and guidance notes etc. However, the *Learner Autonomy Framework* should be re-drafted as a *Guidance* publication. It needs a briefer and more pragmatic design to enable more staff to engage with it. At the same time it, and other statements/publications made by the CPLA, should give greater emphasis to a number of areas. The difference between independent learning and autonomous learning and that they are quite different - and the role of the tutor emphasised in this context; autonomous learning should be developed at a course level, and academic level by level; the benefits that learner autonomy gives to student retention and dealing with a diversity of students. It should also be made clear that professional development planning done well greatly supports the development of the autonomous learner, as does the taking on board lessons learned from the 'transitions' work currently led from D&S.

**(vi) Quality Review.** The annual quality review process has not been looked at as part of this evaluation. It is noted, however, that it has an important role in monitoring and evaluating the development of the autonomous learner.

**(vii) Research and Evaluation.** In order to inform academic staff and the University of the efficacy of the learner autonomy changes, and hence support quality review,

the ongoing funding of evaluation of the implementation of new/modified modules/courses is necessary.

The funding of CETL funded Projects may require funding for more than a single year, albeit at an appropriate level, to ensure this takes place with adequate rigour. This also suggests that a one year Associateship to the CETL may be too limiting in this context.

**(viii) Research network/forum.** It is essential for the network/forum continues to be supported. Staff wish this to happen and many staff, particularly those who lead CETL funded Projects, need support with their evaluation. Many of these staff have a record of research in 'other' disciplines such as engineering and the transition to the education research context is a challenge.

#### **6.4 Any sector wide multiplier effects**

Collaboration with two other universities in the area of '*numeracy for historians*' has led to a National Teaching Fellowship Scheme Group Project '*Every Student Counts*' based at UCLan. (See section 5.2)

The lead of the Project '*Promoting Learner Autonomy in Engineering*' believes that his CETL work made a major contribution to his securing a National Teaching Fellowship (July 2007).

#### **6.5 Adjustments and future plans**

So far the focus of much of the development work has drawn on experienced staff with track records in order to create initial activity and exemplars from the large to the small projects for others to identify with, value and emulate.

It is likely that the current **funding model**, whereby the CETL decided on the projects to be funded, will be replaced in the coming years by a devolved funding model which is designed to give more ownership to Faculties and Subject Groups. Currently individuals apply for project funding as Associates. In future funding will be allocated directly to Faculties for them to determine the means of expenditure. This will allow them to determine priority developments and to identify their own Associates.

It is recommended in future, that one of the conditions of securing funding - *the dissemination of the work, including the evaluation, by the Associates to subject colleagues as well as to the wider staff community* - should be more rigorously applied. Furthermore the dissemination should be multi-faceted - the CETL website, a document available in hard copy, and through means of workshop / seminar / conference presentations.

The setting up of **Special Interest Groups (SIGs)** has enabled a large number (200+) of staff to identify directly with the University's CETLs. Some have been particularly successful (see section 5.3) and enthusiastic staff are looking to lead them in the coming year. This is a valuable bottom up initiative.

The use of **placement students** to support project developments is a feature which it is planned to continue, although the role of these students is to be reviewed.

**Group work** has been identified in several projects as problematic, with the need to develop better forms of assessment which reflect the contributions of individuals. The LTI is to lead a project in this area which seeks out best practice from the HE sector.

**Student motivation** is another recurrent issue, and the insights gained over the last year have led the LTI to take a lead in seeking out best practice and widening the debate in the University.

Section 6.3 '*Implications for University systems and practices*' also includes a number of recommendations for adjustments and future plans.

## **6.6 Reflections on the idea of a CETL as a change strategy**

- The established culture of learning, teaching and assessment at Sheffield Hallam University provided an excellent platform to move forward, and the result was immediate activity at all levels
  - A refocused LTA strategy was produced at University level and adopted by all four Faculties, who then drew up their associated action plans
  - An enhanced course planning and validation process
  - LTA career pathway has been developed, and even before its publication it has probably the most significant change with LTA roles at every level in every Faculty within 12 to 18 months of the CETLs being set-up.
- The new career pathway is widening the LTA agenda at grass roots level
- Additional finance has enabled so much to happen:
  - Changes to the estate
  - Additional senior and junior LTA posts in all faculties
  - The culture is changing and continues to do so because LTA is recognised as a priority investment area for the University.
  - Substantial support for research and development projects many of which are having significant and positive impact and informed practice 'on the ground'.

We conclude that CETLs, appropriately established and operated, provide a catalyst for real and lasting change.

### **Appendix: Projects evaluation report, Ester Ehiyazaryan, June 2007**

This and other information such as publications are to be found in the CETL website at <http://www.shu.ac.uk/cetl/autonomy/>