

CPLA

Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy

A Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Case Studies : Faculty Projects

Edited By:

Mike Bramhall, Christine O'Leary and Chris Corker



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Sheffield Hallam University

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Preface

The Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA) at Sheffield Hallam University is a recognised Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). The CPLA CETL was funded for 5 years from 2005 to 2010 with a rationale that empowers students at Sheffield Hallam University and beyond to acquire responsibility for their learning and to work in partnerships with tutors and other students. Learners can then demonstrate transformative approaches to constructing their own knowledge. Central to the university's LTA strategy is also the need for students not only to become autonomous learners, but also to acquire the skills and knowledge needed for employment, research and continuing professional development. In this context it is imperative that students are increasingly able to manage their own learning, formulate their own lines of enquiry and develop flexible approaches to their studies - the essence of acquiring student learner autonomy. It is also important that students can work across discipline boundaries, often in a team context, tackling problems that are essentially multidisciplinary.

This booklet describes the evaluation of four large scale faculty projects that were developed in the last 2 years of the CETL; one project in each of the four large faculties that make up the university. The central aims of these four projects were to strategically change and enhance teaching and learning practices across the four faculties in order to promote learner autonomy within their students.

In this work reported one of the central themes is the strategic use of Enquiry Based Learning (EBL) in areas that involve students working together in small groups. Two of the four faculties took this approach resulting in a large number of students participating in exciting EBL activities that had a significant effect on their learner autonomy. The other two faculties took slightly different approaches. One faculty concentrated on postgraduate level courses and Masters dissertation support, whilst the other took a research approach, considering data gathered to find out about what motivates learners and their learning strategies, in order to develop guidelines for good practice and to provide a 'toolkit' of interventions to enhance the students' learning experience and their autonomy.

We hope that the four reports give you some ideas on how large scale change can be effected across a large university, and stimulate you to consider ideas for strategic change within your own contexts.

Mike Bramhall

About the editors

Mike Bramhall

Mike is one of the Associate Directors of the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy at Sheffield Hallam University. He is a Professor of Engineering Education and is the Head of Learning, Teaching and Assessment for the Faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and Sciences within Sheffield Hallam. He is also the Associate Director of the UK Centre for Materials Education, a Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), based at the University of Liverpool. As well as being a National Teaching Fellow he is also one of the few Senior Fellows of the HEA. Mike has interests in not only learner autonomy, but also in enquiry based learning, the use of media and technology in teaching and learning, and the personal and professional development of engineers. He has published widely in all these areas.

Christine O'Leary

Christine O'Leary is a Principal Lecturer in Sheffield Business School (SBS), at Sheffield Hallam University, where she teaches Languages and Business. Since her appointment at Sheffield Hallam University in 1993, she has held a number of leadership and management roles including programme leadership, Learning, Teaching and Assessment Co-ordinator, and more recently Associate Director for the Centre for Excellence in Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA), Teaching Fellow and Director of the SBS Centre for Pedagogic Research and Innovation. Outside the University, she is a member of a number of professional associations, including the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the British Educational Research Association and the Association for Language Learning whose French Committee she chaired between 2006 and 2009. She is currently vice-president and treasurer of the Western Commission of the International Federation of French Teachers (CEO-FIPF). She is an active researcher and participant in local, national and international research networks in her area of interest, the development of learner autonomy. She has presented papers at both national and international conferences, and published articles in refereed publications in this area since the mid 1990s.

Chris Corker

Chris is the CPLA student intern. He is a Sheffield Hallam University graduate, having completed his BA in History in 2008, and his MA in History in 2009. He is currently a PhD research student with an interest in business history, exploring the British armaments industry from 1900 to 1939. Chris began working with the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy in 2008, and has been involved in providing project support, events planning and conference administration for CPLA. One of his interests in teaching and learning is the development of students as collaborators. He is also an Ambassador for the Student Learning and Teaching Network.

Contents

Principles and practice of Learner Autonomy	7
The CPLA faculty project scheme - an overview	11
Case Studies:	
Faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and Sciences	13
Enhancing student Learner Autonomy by the use of Enquiry-Based Learning Allan Norcliffe and Justin Lewis	
ACES Appendix 1	35
Enquiry-Based Learning: A guide for staff	
ACES Appendix 2	55
An approach to measuring the development of student Learner Autonomy	
ACES Appendix 3	61
Publications associated with the Faculty Learner Autonomy Project	
ACES Appendix 4	63
Raw feedback data: Small Scale Project leads	
Faculty of Development and Society	79
Developing and embedding effective practice in Enquiry Based Learning in the Faculty of Development and Society Phil Askham	
D&S Appendix 1	97
Impact of discrete projects included in the Faculty Project	
D&S Appendix 1a	99
Impact of additional activities	
D&S Appendix 2	101
List of interviewees	
D&S Appendix 3	103
Details of small projects	
D&S Appendix 4	107
Manifestations and possibilities in Enquiry-Based Learning	

D&S Appendix 5 Summary of dissemination activities	113
Faculty Of Health and Wellbeing Encouraging and enhancing Learner Autonomy Claire Craig and Karen Booth	115
Sheffield Business School Developing and embedding Learner Autonomy within the Postgraduate Curriculum Godfrey Craik	121
SBS Appendix 1 Developing and embedding Learner Autonomy within the Postgraduate Curriculum research methodology Godfrey Craik	129
SBS Appendix 2 Developing and embedding Learner Autonomy within the Postgraduate Curriculum to enhance learning and professional development Tatiana Gorbuntsova	161
SBS Appendix 3 Motivating International Students: An action research study into the effective use of electronic platforms to stimulate greater levels of student engagement and autonomy in Sheffield Business School Andy Cropper and Jeanette Baker	179
SBS Appendix 4 An evaluation of dissertation research and Learner Autonomy across the Postgraduate Programmes in Sheffield Business School Sarai Barton	197
SBS Appendix 5 The use of E-Case Studies for MSc Total Quality Management course Malihe Shahidan	223

Principles and practice of Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is recognised as an important, but often misunderstood concept, and for this reason this booklet aims to clarify the term in relation to how it is interpreted and promoted at the individual and institutional level. The Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA) conceives an autonomous learner to be one who has developed the capacity to take at least some control over their learning. They can identify their own learning goals (what they need to learn), their learning processes (how they will learn it), and how they will evaluate and use their learning. The concept of learner autonomy involves addressing a student's stance towards their learning, reflecting a move away from the idea of simply memorising or learning to apply knowledge to being able to synthesise and contextualise the learning in a way that creates positive learning transfer (Knowles 1990). Key to developing learner autonomy is enhancing the learner's metacognitive and reflective skills and processes.

In other words, the aim is to enable students to graduate with a holistic set of skills, aptitude and motivation to learn in a rapidly changing world: they will have the ability to recognise what they need to learn, and how to learn fast (Baume, 1994). Holec (1981:3) defines learner autonomy as 'the ability take charge of one's own learning'. The emphasis here is on the learner and developing their capacity for self-directed learning (Lee, 1998), with an emphasis on having control over their learning process.

Fazey and Fazey (2001:345) describe autonomous learners as people who are:

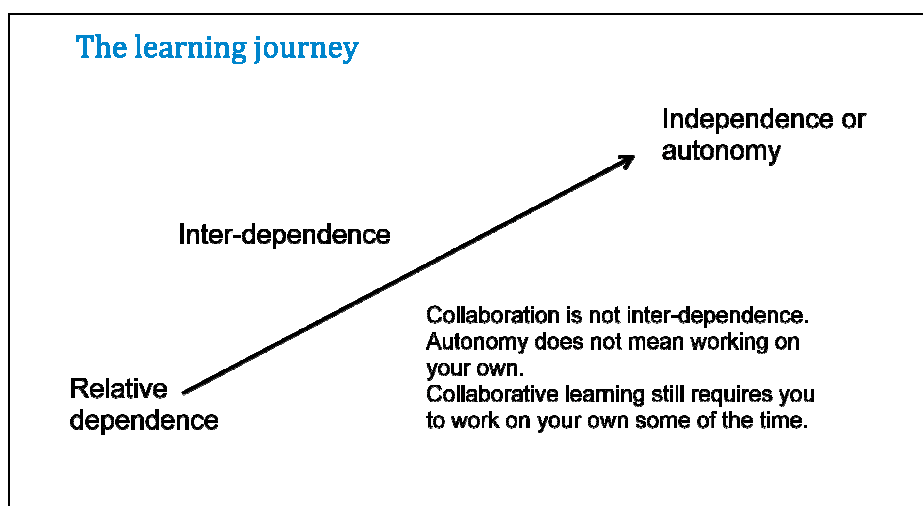
- intrinsically-motivated, perceive themselves to be in control of their decision-making,
- take responsibility for the outcomes of their actions, and
- have confidence in themselves.

In order to learn effectively and independently, it is necessary for students to have good information processing skills. They need to be able to develop strategies for finding, evaluating and using relevant information. Finally, they need to be able to manage their learning. These four concepts (a conceptual stance towards higher learning; a willingness to learn; information skills; and ability to manage their learning) are summarised in the table below and form the acronym SWIM. This is a useful metaphor as it implies that students must learn to swim for themselves, but that we will not let the students drown. The amount of support we provide will depend on how effective they have become at taking responsibility for themselves and how well they have developed relevant learning skills.

STANCE TOWARDS LEARNING Orientation to learning (what and why, reflective) A range of appropriate learning strategies Know how they learn and how to improve how they learn	WILLINGNESS TO LEARN Balance of vocational, academic, personal and social motivations to learn Intrinsic motivation Extrinsic motivation Goals Short - Medium - Long Confidence
INFORMATION Can identify what they know Can identify what information they need Develop a strategy for finding it (different resources) Can get the information Evaluate different sources of information for relevance and credibility Can use the information and add it to their knowledge base	MANAGEMENT Study Skills Planning and problem solving Evaluation & Metacognition Self-assessment Focus & 'stickability' Time and project management Balancing social, work and learning needs Assessment

In short, the learner possesses ownership of their own learning process, which in turn is manifested in changes in their knowledge, ways of conceptualising the world around them, skills and even emotional development. At an institutional level, the Centre strives to encourage effective orientation and a deeper approach to learning. Additionally, it promotes a culture of reflection and engagement that support students in developing an appropriate conceptual stance towards their learning in a Higher Education environment.

The process of developing autonomy is not quick. We can conceptualise the student experience as a journey from relative dependence to independence or autonomy as a learner. An interim stage may well be one of inter-dependence. Students will clearly need some form of support from tutors, but they may well rely on other students. Indeed, it is often desirable for students to work and learn collaboratively so as to encourage the development of teamwork and other professional skills. However, collaborative work still requires students to accept individual responsibility for their contribution to group work and for their own learning.



Engaging with principles of learner autonomy allows academic staff to rethink their role in supporting the learning process. Learner autonomy is in part about partnerships between learners and tutors, and as students make more decisions about their own learning processes, the more lecturers will become facilitators for that learning rather than directors of it and the source of relevant information.

The focus thus shifts the very balance of power and responsibility from the institution and the teacher to the learner, and ideally the learner should have full responsibility for their own learning. What this means in practice is that:

The teacher acts as a facilitator and a resource-person. Students are responsible for choosing and planning the curriculum, or at least they participate in the choosing. Learning is self-initiated, and often involves the process of enquiry and discovery; the learner is also responsible for evaluating the results. A difficult concept to grasp, at first, is that each individual is 100% responsible for his [or her] own behaviour, participation and learning. (Brandes and Ginnis, 1986: 12)

Baume (1994:3) argues the idea of learner autonomy encompasses two main elements:

As a goal of education, the goal being to help students become effective self-directed learners, and as an education method, introduced for a variety of education, philosophical and economic reasons, perhaps operated alongside other teaching and learning methods, within more or less conventional types of course structure and organisation.

There are various active learning and teaching approaches which certainly foster the development of skills and aptitudes that characterise an autonomous learner - such as enquiry based learning (EBL), problem based learning (PBL) or work-based learning (WBL). While 'learner autonomy' has occasionally been equated with the idea of 'independent learning', the concept itself is also very much related to the concept of collaborative learning

(Kohonen, 1992). Hence, group work or peer assisted learning can therefore be an effective way of fostering learner autonomy. This publication will give you some ideas of teaching and learning practices that allow students to learn more autonomously. It will also provide some concrete examples of teaching methods that staff at Sheffield Hallam University have engaged with in view of enhancing learner autonomy, and how this has affected staff's teaching experience, not to mention the effects it has had on the students' learning experience.

Incorporating elements of learner autonomy in a higher education teaching and learning environment has been recognised as good practice by HEFCE, and far from being a completely new development many lecturers are already engaging with some of these principles in their teaching practice. Paul Ramsden's report on the future of teaching and the student experience in HE to the Secretary of State John Denham highlighted the *need to maintain and enhance student engagement* (2008), and to counter the view that students should be treated as customers who have a sense of entitlement. Rather, he argues that they should be perceived as partners who are provided with opportunities to learn. This all highlights the need focus on the student as an active participant in the learning processes.

On a positive note, students who become autonomous learners are much more fun to work with: they ask interesting and often unexpected questions; they are motivated and often imaginative in their approach to tackle questions put to them (or ones that they have set themselves); they grow in confidence to express their views - and you might even find that your own students will put extremely interesting questions to you that you might want to research further. The case studies included in this book will demonstrate the positive enhancements to learning *and* teaching experiences for both students and staff engaging with concepts around learner autonomy.

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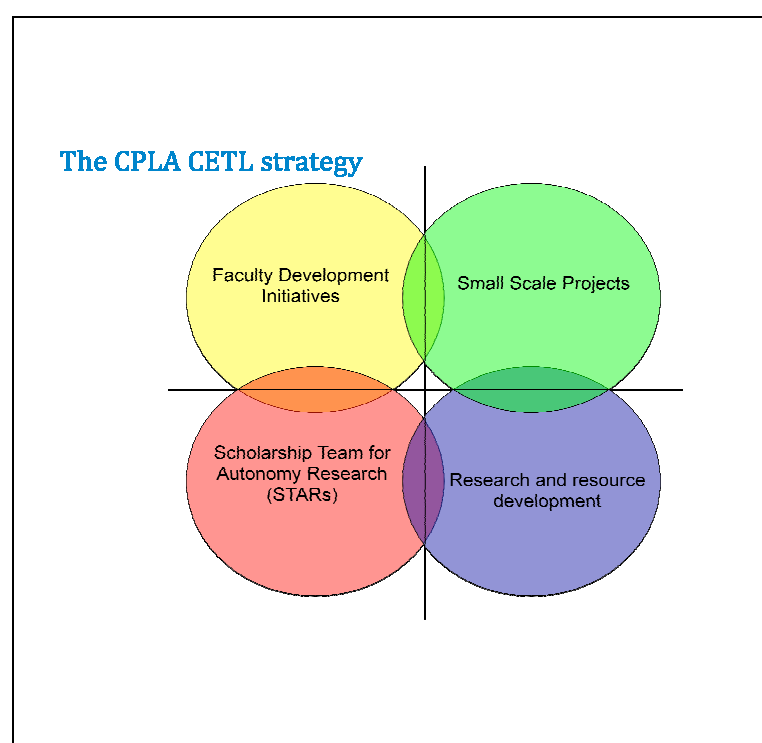
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The CPLA faculty project scheme - an overview

The overall purpose of the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA) is to promote learning and teaching practices which empower students to acquire responsibility for their own learning through promoting and innovating ways of enabling students to construct their own knowledge in partnership with tutors and other students. The CETL thus operates as a hub to foster innovative developments in actual teaching practices, and to promote a cultural change that aims to put the student at the heart of teaching and learning practices in profound and effective ways. To this end, the centre worked very closely with all four faculties of the university on large scale faculty wide projects. These projects were developed in collaboration with them to target those areas connected with learner autonomy (LA) which are currently either under-developed or otherwise fit well into the Faculties' existing strategic learning and teaching objectives.

The faculty projects arose as a result of our strategy, which involved four interlinked areas of development as shown in the diagram below. Through these activities:

- we facilitate the implementation of strategic initiatives in each of our four faculties;
- we stimulate, direct and support the development of a range of innovative teaching practices through our small scale project scheme;
- we enable a scholarly approach to the learner autonomy agenda;
- we develop and provide resources, supported by thorough research, evaluation and capturing the outcomes of supported development projects.



These projects were strategic initiatives to raise profile within faculties of how aspects of learner autonomy can be incorporated and embedded within learning and teaching practices. The key aims therefore were to develop evaluated practice and for this to be sustainable and embedded in teaching and learning processes. The key objectives were:

- To increase awareness and understanding of staff of the nature and benefits of promoting Learner Autonomy.
- To gain commitment from the Faculty and its staff to continue to develop LA practice in the Faculty.
- To determine the nature of good practice in LA in the context of the subject pedagogies of the Faculty.
- To produce evaluated case studies of large scale LA practice, which is founded on evidence and scholarship.
- To develop practice that is worthy of external publication and that will enhance the reputation of the university in a global community.

The projects ensured a significant impact on the student experience across the institution and provided a rich source of information for dissemination across the sector.

These CPLA funded projects commenced in January 2008 and ran until June 2010. Each project was managed by a team who developed, supported, evaluated and disseminated the outcomes of these projects. This booklet contains the evaluation reports of these four projects.

This publication serves to support the work of CPLA in disseminating its work across the Higher Education sector. We hope that it will provide a source of ideas, all of which are evidence-based, for academic staff, support staff, educational developers, and senior managers. We also believe that it will be an inspiration for those throughout HE who believe in the value of active learning, enquiry based learning, and collaborative learning as a means of developing learner autonomy.

Enhancing student Learner Autonomy by the use of Enquiry-Based Learning

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Report Overview

The following report provides a description and evaluation of the work completed in the faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and sciences (ACES) during the period February 2008 to July 2010 on enhancing student learner autonomy through the use of enquiry-based learning.

Funding for the Faculty Project (some £45k) was made available from the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA), a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) within the University, which is gratefully acknowledged.

Work undertaken on the Faculty Project includes work carried out by Faculty staff on several small-scale projects (SSPs), reports of which are contained within the body of the report.

The appendices contain a guide for staff on how to develop enquiry-based learning activities as well as methods for measuring the development of learner autonomy.

1. Rationale

1.1 Aims

The overall aim of the ACES CPLA Faculty Project was to enhance student learner autonomy (LA) through the use of enquiry based learning (EBL). For students this overall aim was to be achieved as follows:

- providing EBL activities within the curriculum of existing courses where this was appropriate
- ensuring that EBL activities were embedded into new courses, again where this was appropriate.

For staff, this aim was to be achieved by:

- producing an approach to the development of student learner autonomy, through the use of EBL, that module leaders and course planning teams could use
- developing staff in their LTA practice with regard to EBL
- producing case studies in order to disseminate practice
- providing a bank of resources and support to encourage staff to introduce EBL into the curriculum
- collaborating across faculties, with D&S in particular, in the development of EBL and its impact on student learner autonomy.

1.2 Identifying key priority activities

The rationale for the Faculty Project lay in the strong resonance that exists between the characteristics and benefits of EBL and the development of student learner autonomy.

Staff members were invited to identify suitable EBL activities (small-scale projects or SSPs) and how these should be managed at two consultation meetings (held at the Psalter Lane Campus and City Campus at the beginning of the Project). Following this it became clear that staff needed support in understanding the EBL process and how to implement it.

We therefore trained small-scale project staff in the following EBL characteristics and benefits.

Characteristics:

- learning is student-centred, with an emphasis on group work and use of library, web and other information resources
- lecturers are facilitators, providing encouragement and support to enable students to take responsibility for what and how they learn
- students formulate their own research topics, converting that research into useful knowledge
- complex real-world problems are typically tackled requiring the need for knowledge development and leadership skills
- Project goals facilitate multiple potential avenues of investigation.

Benefits:

- Students are more engaged. Learning is perceived as being more relevant to their needs and thus they are enthusiastic and ready to learn. There is greater ownership
- Students can expand on what they have learned by following their own lines of enquiry and research interests
- EBL allows students to develop a more flexible approach to their studies, giving them the freedom and the responsibility to organise their own pattern of work within the time constraints of the task

- Self-directed learning not only develops key skills for postgraduate study, but also leads to original thought that can contribute to larger research projects, papers and publications
- Students are encouraged to actively engage with the processes of hypothesising, experimenting, concluding and evaluating during the course of their investigation.

1.3 Building on existing experience and good practice

Within the Faculty EBL-like activities such as group work, integrative project work, mentoring and case study work, were already part of the curriculum on several courses. These activities were part of delivery to enhance students' key personal and employability skills. This experience was used as the starting point on which to base the Faculty Project and to determine the component SSPs. Viewing these existing activities in terms of the vocabulary surrounding EBL and its impact, particularly on the development of student learner autonomy (as established by the CPLA) would, it was hoped, be a useful vehicle to encourage further implementation of EBL in the curriculum and the further sharing of good practice.

A curious observation relating to 'existing experience' was made concerning the area of art and design. A senior lecturer in art and design was asked if they were interested in embedding enquiry-based learning within the curriculum. The lecturer voiced some concern at this proposal, saying that, "we waste a lot of time trying to understand what you people mean when you talk about this EBL idea of yours, and when we finally understand you, we realise that most of what we do would already be classed as EBL".

Perhaps then the conclusion from this observation would be that art and design is an inherently enquiry-based exercise and a natural place to observe Enquiry-Based learning in practice.

2. Strategy

2.1 Engaging staff

Members of staff were involved at the start of the Faculty Project as outlined above. Staff essentially determined the broad areas where EBL activities would be developed and helped to determine the support which they would require. As mentioned, existing EBL-type activities helped in this respect as exemplars of good practice. Staff were also aware of Faculty business priorities (e.g. retention), which helped to determine the kind of areas to be developed, for example the inclusion of EBL on Foundation Year courses, which had areas of poor retention.

There were two bidding rounds for the funding of SSPs – one for the start of Year 2 (September 2008) and one for the start of Year 3 (September 2009). The project ran over two and a half years, starting in February 2008. Project funding was used to provide staff buy out (as opposed to appointing new staff) so that dissemination and implementation

would be ongoing after the funding for the Project ceased. An EBL guide was produced by the Project Managers early in the Project to support those staff engaged in the small-scale projects. The guide was sanctioned at the initial staff workshop consultation and its production funded by the Project. The guide, though essentially complete, has always been regarded as work in progress, to be modified as appropriate by staff in the future.

A noteworthy point of evaluation here is the importance of clarifying with staff during the bidding phase how realistic they are being in their assumptions that their time can be bought out and also whether they understand how much commitment is required of them.

2.2 Project Management

Two Project Managers were appointed, one operational and one strategic. The Operations Manager met with all SSP leads regularly to discuss progress and to facilitate the smooth running and monitoring of the SSPs. The Strategic Manager reported to the Project Leader on the development of the Faculty project in the context of the Faculty's business and LTA priorities. The Project Leader was the Faculty's Head of LTA.

From an operations point of view, several important lessons have been learned; Firstly, the importance of not allowing schedule slippage. This is important due to the compartmentalised nature of the academic year. It is important therefore to communicate to staff relevant deadlines, e.g. minor modification boards and timetabling solutions for collaborative modules.

Another important lesson is that where a small-scale project is intended to be run as a collaborative venture between two inter faculty courses, all staff involved must have bought into the process, be empowered to run the process, see the processes as a win/win situation, have free time and be committed to the project from the outset.

2.3 Enabling Activities

Enabling activities during the Project have included the production of Project Guides (manuals) on embedding EBL in the curriculum (for the start of Year 2 of the Project) and on measuring the development of student learner autonomy (for the start of Year 3). As mentioned above, consultation workshops were held initially to determine the broad areas to be funded and there have been other University workshops (organised by the CPLA) to disseminate what has been achieved.

Various staff members associated with the Faculty Project have given presentations and workshops at each of the last two HEA Conferences and at this summer's (2010) Enquiry, Autonomy and Graduateness Conference held at the University. The Project Leader has also given presentations at several international conferences, during the funding period, on the work of the Faculty Project. An EBL workshop was also run in 2009 at the Royal School of Military Survey, a partner college of the University, by the Project Leader and Strategic

Manager. Valuable insight into running project-based group work over short timescales was gleaned at this workshop.

SHU hosted EBL/LA workshops allowed staff to ask questions and discuss solutions to problems they had encountered. For example, one staff member noted that some students became angry when a clear line of enquiry was not presented to them. Problems such as this led to the recommendations that are made in the staff EBL guide; the student buy-in and student understanding should be achieved on day one of an EBL module.

Project management carried out by the Operations Manager has been a key enabling activity and staff members carrying out SSPs have been well supported by the Operations Project Manager. The regular collection of information and feedback for monitoring purposes, especially in Year 3, has helped keep the SSPs on track and given encouragement to the staff involved. Presentations given by students carrying out new EBL activities have also been attended by both Project Managers. Valuable student feedback has been collected at these events, thus enabling future improvements in student preparation and facilitation.

2.4 Developing a Community of Practice

The Faculty Project was designed to build on existing staff experience of using EBL-like approaches to deliver aspects of the curriculum on various course modules. Thus, the idea of students learning in groups, or communities, from each other and facilitated by staff, was already established in the Faculty on some courses. The EBL Guide that was produced at the start of the Project showcased some of the applications of these approaches and contained links to appropriate websites. It also listed the names of those staff involved. Thus, staff wishing to try out an EBL approach on their modules not only had the Guide, but also had a list of colleagues to whom they could turn for practical advice.

The Guide helped to provide a vocabulary for genuine communication, enabling staff from different disciplines to talk to one another about key learning issues and to see the merits of social interactions in fostering student learner autonomy. The Guide, for example, concentrates on the important issues of setting up student groups to ensure that they are productive and provides several hints for staff, and aids for students, on how best to manage interactions in the student groups. The Guide also promotes the lecturer's role as that of facilitator, further fostering the idea of learning as a genuine collaborative partnership between students and staff, more than simply the transmission of knowledge from lecturer to student.

For example, one lecturer noted that during an EBL project students were invited to explore a piece of software beyond the functionality that was taught during lectures. When the students fed back on their discoveries, the lecturer grew in their understanding of the software.

As the Faculty Project has evolved, and EBL has been tried out on different student groups, the need to prepare students properly for what their enquiries might involve, has become

paramount. If students are to become autonomous learners, they too need to be familiar with the associated vocabulary and to understand what learner autonomy means. The use of the so-called radar screen model, developed by the Director of the CPLA at Sheffield Hallam, we believe, will be very useful in this respect. The radar screen model, and its use by students to measure their own development of learner autonomy, is described in the second Guide (on measuring learner autonomy) developed by the Project Managers. This Guide also suggests that the radar screen model could be used in staff development as part of the appraisal process, but its use in this context has yet to be developed further. However, this Guide and the EBL Guide, we believe, are key resources in helping to create the community of practice needed for enhancing student learner autonomy in the ACES Faculty.

Finally, from observing students carrying out their EBL activities and presenting their findings, it has become clear that technology and virtual learning spaces to support EBL are important. One Year 3 SSP addresses this aspect of developing communities of practice.

3. Discrete Projects

3.1 Rationale for SSPs in Year 1 and Year 2

At the start of the Faculty Project the areas identified by staff as candidates for the use of EBL between February 2008 and September 2009 (Year1 and Year 2 of the Project) included the following:

- Foundation Year courses in Engineering and Design
- Sustainability
- Databases on Computing courses
- Creative Media Practice courses
- Cross Faculty activities e.g. mentoring, Faculty newspaper and TV channel.

The rationale for these areas was their suitability for adopting an EBL approach and the need to address the priorities contained in the University's recent Corporate Plan regarding recruitment, retention, inspirational delivery and the development of excellent employability skills. However, there were other factors which were considered such as Faculty business priorities and the particular need to meld together all Faculty students and staff in the wake of Faculty staff moving from Psalter Lane to City Campus.

Thus, it was felt that the inclusion of EBL activities on Foundation Year courses would possibly prepare students for degree level study better than had previously been the case by improving their learner autonomy and study skills. This in turn would improve student success rates and hence help with retention.

However, one small-scale project leader noted that students who were not engaging with a course very much seemed to become even more adrift when they were given an EBL activity. It was also noted that whilst students who were low on engagement tended to be weaker students, weaker students who did engage with EBL activities became stronger.

With regard to the area of sustainability, the Faculty had already been instrumental in developing an Eco House as a resource for student project work in Engineering. It had also been asked to develop option modules in sustainability for use across the University. The vehicle of EBL seemed an excellent way of developing the Eco House further (e.g. with the inclusion of Design students and possibly Architecture students from the faculty of Development and society, D&S) as well as delivering the curriculum in sustainability, given the diversity of students wishing to study such modules. The area had Faculty -wide potential and would thus help to further integrate Faculty staff and students.

The area of Databases on the Faculty's Computing courses was traditionally an area that some students found difficult. Initial module failure rates were high and database modules are often referred to as "killer modules". Providing E-learning material for these modules, developed by students for students, it was felt would help improve module pass rates, thus helping address retention. The E-learning Materials would also have good legacy as they would be reusable.

The new creative media practice area (which included BA Games Design, BA Animation, BA Film and Visual Effects and BA Digital Media Production) incorporated EBL modules on all three years, but at the start of the project only Year 1 of the courses had run. It was felt important to include this area, simply to monitor the success and problems of using EBL as the courses developed and to feed any good practice back into the Project.

The cross-Faculty areas such as mentoring, developing a Faculty newspaper and TV channel were included to provide activities that would help integrate students vertically across years and horizontally across discipline boundaries, thus helping to meld together the Faculty's staff and students.

3.2 Individual SSPs funded in Year 1 and Year 2

The following table indicate the projects that were funded in the first half year, i.e. in Year 1, together with the associated initial funding allocations.

Project	Staff involved	Allocation(£)	Brief Description
Project management	Allan Norcliffe Justin Lewis	3948	Project managing and writing the EBL Guide.
Foundation Years	Frank Burgin(AL)	1548	Looking at the feasibility of developing EBL project work across Engineering and Design Foundation Year courses and updating relevant module descriptors.

Databases	Elizabeth Urachurtu (AL)	1548	Looking at good practice in developing E-learning materials in the broad Computing area.
Carry over to Yr 2 of the Project		1956	
Totals		9000	

With regard to this table the following points are relevant.

The work on the Foundation Years and the Databases projects was carried out by two ALs in the Faculty. Most staff had full work plans and the earliest they could start, via the use of buy out, was on Year 2 of the Project.

It was impossible to justify spending all £9000 of the pro-rata funding for the first half year, and consequently £1956 was carried over to Year 2.

The next table shows the small scale projects that were initially funded in Year 2 following the first bidding round which was fully integrated into the 2008/09 work planning process.

Project	Staff involved	Allocation(£)	Brief description
Project management	Allan Norcliffe Justin Lewis	4730	Project managing.
Sustainability	Andy Young (Lead) and Justin Buxton	3440	Production of Faculty-wide option modules in sustainability and focussed EBL work on Eco House project and Energy Engineering for Sustainability course.
Databases	Matthew Love (Lead) with Keith Burley and Elizabeth Uruchurtu (AL)	3182	Yr 4 Computing students on the Designing and developing E-learning module will develop, via an EBL approach, E-learning material for use by 2nd Yr Computing students in the databases area.

Creative Media Practice	Jeff Baggott (Lead) with Alan Robinson, Debbie Ballin and Justin Lewis	860	Research on existing CMP EBL projects and implementation of any enhancements.
Cross-Faculty	Jeff Waldock (Lead) with Sue Featherstone and Jeff Baggott	3870	Establishing mentoring of second year Mathematics students by final year students. Developing a Faculty newspaper and TV channel for future EBL-type activities across the ACES Faculty.
Foundation Years	Frank Burgin	2150	Developing and implementing EBL activity on case study work on the Faculty's Foundation Year courses.
Dissemination		1724	National and international conferences as agreed together with workshops
Yr1 Carry forward		-1956	
Totals		18000	

With regard to the above table the following points are relevant.

It should be noted that the amount carried forward (£1956) from Year 1 is entered as a negative amount because it represents income and not an allocated cost. When combined with the total cost of the projects (of £19956) it brings the total to the pro-rata spend of £18000 for Year 2 of the Project.

The spend in the 3 years was planned to be £9000, £18000 and £18000.

As Year 2 evolved, problems arose due to the inability to free up key staff to carry out some of the projects. In the event, monies had to be redistributed away from the areas of Sustainability and Databases to Project Management (to write the Guide on measuring student learner autonomy), to the Creative Media Practice area, and to the Cross-Faculty area.

3.3 Rationale for the SSPs in Year 3

The projects funded in Year 3, to some extent, reflected the success of those funded in Year 2. Although the Databases project did not run in Year 2, it was deemed to be a strong project and one that was needed in the Faculty. It was therefore decided to defer this to Year 3. The Year 2 Sustainability project was never started due to the inability to free up a key member of Engineering staff. Details of the problems encountered are given in section 4 below where an evaluation of the various SSPs is presented. On the advice of the Sustainability team members it was decided not to make any funding available for this area in Year 3.

Because of the success of the projects in the Creative Media Practice area, further projects in this area were funded. However, it should be noted that all projects that were funded were the outcome of the open bidding round during Year 2 in which all staff from across the Faculty were free to participate. The selection of projects for funding was determined by the two Project Managers and the Project Leader after discussion with those submitting bids.

3.4 Individual Projects funded in Year 3

The following table gives a brief description of the SSPs funded in Year 3.

Project	Staff involved	Allocation(£)	Brief description
Project management	Allan Norcliffe Justin Lewis	4000	Project managing
Harnessing EBL for Digital Media Arts I: Museum Project	John Hayes, Chris Hall and Claire Strike (Millennium Galleries)	2000	First year CMP students are given the responsibility for developing the Museum's collection around a digital framework to enhance the collection through the use of digital media (animation, games, video, audio, streaming media and 3D).
Harnessing EBL for Digital Media Arts II	Oskana Fedotova Dean Summers Debbie Ballin David Williams Katy Carroll and Richard Hill	2000	Integrates creative practice, critical analysis and academic writing skills at level 4 (CMP) through EBL via Research Methods and Critical-Studies modules that assist students' development as

			active, independent and digitally-literate researchers.
Dialogue	Hester Reeve Helen Blejerman	2000	The objective of this project is to activate in the student new ways of autonomous thinking about the relationships between the Institutions that make up the 'art world' and their position within such a matrix. Dialogue facilitates students to creatively engage in thinking processes together as a group of autonomous individuals and seeks to expose assumptions and belief systems that are at play.
Developing LA in Group Work using Collaborative Technologies	Cheryl Middleton Helen Rodger Mike Gibson	2000	Technologies to facilitate meaningful, satisfying and autonomous group work experiences such as virtual classrooms (Elluminate), VOIP (Skype), instant messaging and synchronous wikis are evaluated by Computing students on the final year Collaborative Technologies module using an EBL approach.
DDEL: Designing and Developing E-Learning	Cheryl Middleton Mike Gibson	3000	Yr 4 Computing students on the Designing and developing E-learning module will develop, via an EBL approach, E-learning material for use by 2nd Yr Computing students in the databases area.

Dissemination		3000	Workshops, national and international conferences as agreed.
Totals		18000	

The relatively high dissemination allocation reflects the expected high level of dissemination during this final stage of the Project.

4. Outcomes and Impact of the SSPs

4.1 Approach to Evaluation

All Year 3 small-scale projects were closely monitored by the Operations Manager and any problems encountered were discussed and addressed, more or less as they happened. Small scale project staff members were asked to evaluate their project findings at the end of the Faculty Project by addressing the following questions.

1. Quantitative questions:
2. How many students and staff were involved?
3. How many student hours on the curriculum does the project occupy (20 credits correspond to 200 hours of total student study time)?
4. How many staff hours were involved in planning and how many staff hours were involved in delivery?
5. On how many courses does your project impact?
6. What data do you possess that demonstrates any benefit in: grades/marks, student retention, student attendance, student experience (e.g. feedback/questionnaires) and recruitment? Please send any provisional analysed findings.

Qualitative questions:

1. Have you done what you set out to do?
2. In what way has your project evolved?
3. How have students perceived their own growth/lack of growth in learner autonomy?
4. Do you feel the curriculum has been enriched? Please explain your answer.
5. How has your legacy plan evolved?

Project staff were also invited to add any additional comments about their project regarding staff development, support received and impact of the project on future course developments.

4.2 Individual Year 3 project evaluations

Harnessing EBL for Digital Media Arts I: Museum Project

The project involved 90 students, 3 University staff plus one external member of staff from the Millennium Galleries Museum. The project occupied approximately 180 hours of total student learning time. 20 staff hours were involved in the planning and 100 hours of staff time were involved in delivery. The project impacted on 4 courses: BA Animation, BA Games Design, BA Digital Media Production, and BA Film and Visual Effects. There is positive anecdotal evidence to suggest benefits, but questionnaire results have yet to be analysed.

John Hayes the project leader says that the project has achieved what it set out to do. He believes the curriculum has been "very much" enriched by the project. This project has run twice with two rounds of funding and significant evolution (it ran in the first year as the Creative Media Practice Project, where students worked on a fictional advertising campaign). John says "For the students to work on a real brief, something that will have real world relevance, and therefore enhance their portfolio, is very worthwhile. In addition, students have grown in confidence, and were clearly not afraid to run with creative ideas and sometimes complex technical problems to produce their final piece."

With regards to students' perception of their personal learner autonomy development, John says, "In comparing last year's assignment brief (which was the fictional advertising campaign) with this year's, it has made a real difference to the engagement of students with the module. Students were very excited about the collaboration and future potential use of their assets, resulting in a number of student groups producing really excellent work."

Concerning legacy, John's evaluation is that, "The anticipated potential legacy was merely to have a series of assets created by students, and used by the museum. However, because of the positive nature of the project, the museum wished for us to continue the relationship and to run the project next year. So in effect the funding has inadvertently provided seed funding for a very exciting collaboration which I'm sure will expand to cover other areas of our provision and therefore enhance the student experience across the department."

Dialogue Project

The Dialogue Project involved 2 staff and 19 students. The project was run as part of a module occupying 33 hours of curriculum time. Planning of the module took 10 hours of staff time and each staff member contributed 33 hours to the delivery. The Dialogue Project was trialled on the four Creative Media Practice courses, namely BA Animation, BA Games Design, BA Film and Visual Effects and BA Digital Media Production. Feedback from students attending the Dialogue Groups is still being analysed, but Hester Reeve says that she "saw the benefits directly" in students who attended her project.

When asked if the project achieved what it set out to achieve, the project leads said, "Yes. We ran regular Dialogue Groups and the methodology of open creative discussion guided by the 4 Principles of Dialogue always fostered an in-depth shared conversation where new ideas and perspectives were shared. Inevitably students reflected upon their identity as students and artists and their relationship to the University and wider art world landscapes.

Regarding project evolution it was noted that, "This has been very marked. We started the groups this year with no framework or pre-posed question, in line with 'pure Dialogue,' i.e. no agenda. Although this did not affect the students' engagement or ability to think together, we realised through the facilitator training course that we undertook that actually an appropriate framework within the University Dialogue framework allows for students to mainly engage in the concrete situation of their learning specific to their course. We re-introduced such a framework in the last 2 Dialogue meetings and got some new students and, we felt, richer dialogue in terms of the community that the conversations created, i.e. the conversations were more 'site-specific.' "

Concerning curriculum enrichment, the leads say, "This year Dialogue was strictly speaking not part of the curriculum. However, this is its value to the students and paradoxically to the curriculum. There is a greater sense of students owning the developments within the department: Dialogue creates a distance from the scheduled learning and hence a space for student's critical reflection and an admittance of responsibility for learning experience and activating their role in allowing teaching to be successful."

The leads sum up legacy thus: "We gave a few presentations about Dialogue outside of the Fine Art Department and were met with a strong response - other departments seem to understand Dialogue's potential value in their own areas, particularly in regard to activating students as agents of their own learning and members of the University. The experience this year - including the training and a special meeting with Peter Garrett (who worked with Bohm to turn his philosophy into the practice and now directs Prison Dialogue) to discuss what we had developed so far within the University and to get his advice on where the next steps should/could be - has lead us to our current position that Dialogue will work well as an 'induction methodology' for all new L4 students. In this instance attending the Dialogue group would not be voluntary as it has so far been run. It would not run as part of Induction Week, when things are too 'busy,' but 1 or 2 weeks after induction week when students need to feel part of a community, trust each other, feel encouraged to speak their minds and reflect upon the ideas of others and to realise that they have permission to stand up and take risks as students. We would then follow this up by running one longer and 'special' Dialogue Day at the very end of the academic year which would be voluntary and for any student from any year to attend in order to explore their identity and ideas in relationship to the framework of 'Artist-University-Gallery-Funding Bodies.' "

Final remarks by Helen and Hester are: "Our training with the charity Prison Dialogue was particularly helpful. We met other facilitators of the methodology and shared experiences etc. We participated in Dialogue groups in 2 prisons and, as mentioned above, met with

Peter Garrett to get feedback and advice on what we have been doing in the University context."

DDEL and Collaborative Technologies Projects

The two projects have been evaluated together by the Project leads. They concern 37 students on a 20 credit modules at level 6. Total student time is therefore 200 hours. Staff hours included 50 hours for planning and 90 hours for delivery. The projects impacted on four Computing courses. Cheryl Middleton and Mike Gibson, the project leads, begin by pointing out that the average student mark "has increased by 1% since the introduction of EBL" as well as an increase in the number of 1st class awards (6 more than last year).

Regarding achievement of initial goals, Cheryl says, "Yes, resources have been planned, designed, developed and an EBL approach has been adopted for the delivery of a complete module at Final Year level. Student experiences in the use of EBL have been evaluated and a staff blog recording reflections of process/project has been recorded."

Concerning the evolution of the two projects, Cheryl says that this "includes the use of collaborative synchronised and asynchronised technology to support an EBL process. The project now recognises the challenges and explores practicalities of the use of EBL at SHU. It has provided insight into how to evaluate the potential benefits for staff and students.

When asked if they felt that the curriculum had been enriched, the project leads said, "Definitely in terms of consideration of group work and the challenge/variety of the learning process."

When asked how their legacy plan had evolved they added that there was "planned future use on a first year undergraduate module called Business Analysis in the Workplace, a new second year module called Business Modelling for Enterprise Systems plus ongoing research and development of DDEL to underpin effective group work and use of EBL."

Project leads conclude, regarding staff development: "Need to consider challenges in effective design and development of group working including how to select initial groups, how to organise groups to work effectively, how to manage students/groups when difficulties are experienced such as non-attendance, imbalances with group contributions, assessment options such as different ways to carry out peer assessment."

"It would also be useful to consider the use of the EBL approach in light of the technology/tools/services/environments that are emerging (within and external to SHU)."

"The project challenged the existing learning space and technology available to support an EBL approach. In particular the support available for staff to facilitate collaborative learning and the learning space and technology available/emerging to facilitate this process. This is

one potential innovative area that would be interesting to continue research/course developments in."

Harnessing EBL for Digital Arts Media II Project

The project occupied approximately 400 hours on the curriculum and involved two staff and 80 first-year students across four courses - BA Animation, BA Digital Media, BA Film and Visual Effects and BA Game Design. The main focus was on theory modules at level 4, which aim to equip new students with skills and attitudes appropriate for a higher level independent enquiry in future years of their University study. These are Research Methods (semester 1) and Critical Analysis (semester 2). Historically, students found it difficult to engage with the modules, due to the separation of the 'study skills / academic writing / critical analysis; elements from their chosen creative practice. The project aimed to bridge the gap between 'theory' and 'practice' by redesigning the learning, teaching and assessment activities on both modules according to the principles of EBL.

Student feedback data from 71 questionnaires and 4 focus groups fully endorse the innovations, report high motivation, and suggest areas for further fine-tuning. The first pass rates were comparable to previous years in one module and higher than before in the second module. Frank Abbott, the External Examiner, commented on how impressed he was by student work delivered during this project. Students commented that the video walk through allowed them to gather their thoughts in a visual way, which suited their learning style. Students went on to say that in order to produce a professional quality video they had to map out a general script prior to production. This script could then be used as a structure for an essay.

When asked if the project had done what it set out to do, Oksana Fedotova said: "All the planned objectives have been addressed, although some with more success than others (due to timescale and structural limitations). The project has successfully piloted new assessment methods aimed at bringing closer together theoretical research and media production, and resulted in a clear increase of student engagement."

Regarding project evolution, Oksana said that "Initially, we planned to focus mainly on academic writing and produce an issue of Enquiry (ACES UG research journal) as one of the main outcomes. Since the departure of Richard Hill (the editor of Enquiry), and with the late funding, the journal element was temporarily withdrawn from the project. However, nearer the end of the project, this element re-emerged in the new format. We had a meeting with the new editor of Enquiry in March, and secured our own 'sandbox' journal 'Virtually Real' which will publish student work from Media Arts."

With regard to how students perceive their learner autonomy development, focus group feedback suggest that the main benefits of using EBL were in motivation, engagement, pursuing own interests and in acquiring transferable skills such as research and independent work skills.

With regard to legacy plans, one of the offshoots of the project was an idea to engage with Machinima as one of the new modes of digital media production, and to use this in future for educational purposes. This would involve the need for further funds, but the process has already been started within the current project. This summer the two student assistants will produce a draft script and a storyboard, and record some extracts using the World of Warcraft environment and screencapture and Machinima software (FRAPS, MovieStorm, WoW-Model-Viewer and Windows Moviemaker). This work is planned to start on 1 July and finish on 15 July, at an appropriate milestone to be picked up and continued in future. The new resources would be used in teaching on the 'Research methods' module, simultaneously to illustrate common methodological issues, and to show students a concrete example of how creative audiovisual work can be used for theoretical purposes.

Oskana also pointed out that: "In 2011, the Media Arts and Communication Department will host a conference. The current project team members are on the organising committee and will be using the insights gained in this project to fully involve undergraduate students into the conference as contributors. Using the experience of EBL reports and screencast production within level 4 modules, we will structure future assessment in the way that it can feed into a 'conference fringe', with audiovisual posters and research trailers produced by students displayed on University screens and ShuffleTV, themed issues of Virtually Real produced specifically for the conference, and student-led panels and debate sessions."

4.3 Outcome and Impact of Year 1 and Year 2 Projects

Projects during the first and second years were not formally evaluated against a series of quantitative and qualitative questions, as above for the Year 3 projects. The approach was very informal noting outcomes against project aims.

Foundation Year Projects (Year 1 and Year 2)

Frank Burgin began by discussing with relevant Design staff the feasibility of having both Engineering and Design students work on a common group-based project across both the Engineering and the Design Foundation courses using an EBL approach. Whilst in principle this was seen as possible and desirable, timetabling constraints prevented this from ever being implemented without major modification to both of the Foundation courses. In the event it was decided to modify the present Engineering project module to enable an optional group-based (EBL) approach to be taken. This modification is in place and the module is now running. No formal feedback exists at this stage regarding uptake or how successful the EBL approach has been. There are typically 50 students on the Engineering Foundation Year and the project is a 20 credit module. Not all the funding allocated to this project was used and it was moved into the Creative Media Practice and Cross-Faculty areas.

Database Projects (Year 1 and Year 2)

Elizabeth Uruchurtu successfully completed the Year 1 study of good practice in developing E-learning materials, from the point of view of material being written by students for

students. This was Elizabeth's PhD research area and the report she produced was to have been taken on board by those running the Databases project in Year 2. In the event it was not possible to free up time on work plans for those wishing to carry out the Databases Project in Year 2 and the project was actually run as the DDEL Project in Year 3, as described above. The Year 2 funding allocation for Databases was used, instead, to fund more Cross-Faculty projects.

Sustainability Project (Year 2)

Andy Young, the project lead, could not find time on his work plan to engage with the project. After several attempts to reschedule the project it became clear that the project was not going to run in the funding period of the Faculty Project and, very reluctantly, the project was aborted. Funding was transferred to further support the Creative Media Practice and Cross-Faculty areas. Links with the Faculty of Development and Society (in the Architecture area), therefore, never materialised. With the demise of this link, the other suggested links with D&S, in the area of Performance Arts, also never materialised.

Creative Media Practice Project (Year 2)

Modest funding had been earmarked to monitor the performance of students on the level 4 Integrating Project module, as it ran for the second time across the four new CMP degrees. This module was delivered via EBL activity and the idea was to feed back good practice into the Faculty Project, and to make enhancements to delivery on the CMP degrees. With the additional funding made available by the Year 2 projects that did not run it was possible to make considerable enhancements to delivery. John Hayes was able to plan new level 4 activities (e.g. with the Millennium Galleries) for implementation in Year 3 as the Museum Project. It was also possible to work with Jeff Baggott, who had been allocated funding (see below) to develop the ACES TV Channel (Shuffle TV), to develop and run new level 5 integrating project work around the Shuffle TV concept.

Cross-Faculty Projects (Year 2)

In the event, two of the three suggested projects, were eventually allocated funding and ran. The Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme was planned and implemented by Jeff Waldock on the Mathematics degree, and Jeff Baggott was able to set up and see used Shuffle TV, the ACES TV Channel.

The PAL scheme trained final year Mathematics students to become mentors, who then facilitated second year Mathematics students working on a second year module. Student feedback suggests the scheme was successful. The mentors were able to enhance their CVs, via this mentoring activity, and the second-year students gained much by being assisted by students who had direct experience of the module content they were engaged with. Funding was used to pay mentors and to get the scheme off the ground. Students now are happy to volunteer as mentors because they see it as a positive and CV-enhancing activity.

Mentoring offers the Faculty a considerable resource, providing benefits to all students involved.

Shuffle TV is the new ACES TV channel. Its set up was assisted by Creative Media Practice (CMP) students on their level 5 Integrating Project module, which runs across the four degrees of the CMP programme. The potential of Shuffle TV is enormous for the Faculty and offers students the opportunity to showcase their work via the medium of television.

5. Evaluation of the Faculty LA Project Overall

The Faculty Project is essentially the sum of its small scale projects, whose evaluations have just been presented above. However, an evaluation against the original aims, in light of the above evaluations, is appropriate.

5.1 Evaluation against the Overall Project Aim

The overall Project aim was to enhance student learner autonomy through enquiry based learning. Clearly, as evidenced above in section 4, we feel this has been achieved. Students who have experienced EBL on their modules have grown in confidence as learners and there is some evidence of increased performance. Students and staff now have a better knowledge of what is meant by learner autonomy and the students now have an approach to enable them to reflect on their development in this respect.

5.2 Evaluation of the Student-related Aims

The first of the subsidiary aims for students was to provide EBL activities within the curriculum of existing courses. This has clearly been met, for example on the Mathematics degree via the PAL scheme, on the four Creative Media Practice courses, on Computing courses and on the Engineering Foundation Year. The EBL Guide has also given staff the vocabulary to view and recast many group-working activities as EBL - such as on the Faculty's Engineering degrees where group work is a common feature of the curriculum.

The second subsidiary aim for students was to ensure that EBL activities were embedded into new courses. As evidenced in section 4, in the light of experience gained on the Project, resubmission of the Faculty's Computing courses, for example, will include new EBL modules. The EBL Guide and the Guide to measuring the development of student learner autonomy provide the basic toolkit for staff to embed EBL in the curriculum of new courses. There is therefore no excuse for students to not be able to experience EBL on their course, if EBL activity is deemed appropriate.

5.3 Evaluation of the Staff-related Aims

The first of the staff-related aims was to produce an approach to the development of student learner autonomy using EBL, for module leaders and course planning teams. This has been

achieved. The two Guides produced by the Project Managers are contained in the Appendices to the report. The Guides have provided all staff with a common framework and vocabulary for delivery and course planning purposes.

The second aim was to develop staff in their LTA practice with regard to EBL. This has been achieved through various Faculty- and University-run workshops on EBL. The two Guides have also been important along with the constant support and help provided to SSP staff by the Operations Manager. As stated earlier, the radar screen approach to identifying and measuring what is meant by student learner autonomy is a tool that could be used in staff development. Staff could identify delivery approaches that would help students develop learner autonomy skills. They could then evaluate their own practice against these approaches, thus identifying their own development needs. This could be a powerful staff development mechanism, especially if this were carried out with a peer.

The third aim was to produce case studies in order to disseminate practice. This aim is being achieved as staff members write up and publish their experiences and findings working with the EBL approach. A list of some of the publications by staff associated with the Project is given in the Appendices. There is ample evidence, contained in section 4 above, that staff (and some students) are preparing articles for publication based on the work of the Faculty LA Project.

The fourth aim was to provide a bank of resources and support to encourage staff to introduce EBL into the curriculum. We feel this aim is being achieved. Staff have access to the two Guides, relevant publications and, importantly, the CPLA CETL resources. The Faculty has an LTA website and it is hoped that this report and all related publications will be assembled on the site as a (growing) resource for staff in the EBL area.

The final aim was to collaborate across faculties, with D&S in particular, in the development of EBL and its impact on student learner autonomy. Sadly, this aim has not been achieved regarding linkages with D&S. However, it is clear (from LA workshops within the University) that mentoring is an approach that is being embraced by several Faculties to enrich the student experience and to develop those students involved in mentoring. There would seem to be scope for further inter-Faculty collaboration, especially around the development of University-wide option modules in mentoring.

5.4 In Summary

In summary we feel the aims of the Faculty LA Project have been met. The hypothesis that EBL does enhance LA, we believe, is true. We feel also that seeking to enhance the development of student learner autonomy effectively works towards meeting the precepts of the University's Corporate Plan. The vocabulary has been established for further meaningful EBL and LA developments. Staff have increased their ability to deliver EBL activities and courses have been enriched with EBL in a sustainable fashion.

6. Continuation Plans

Continuing the developments that have been engendered by the Faculty LA Project is going to be a major challenge for the University and for the Heads of LTA at Faculty level. Within ACES each of the Year 3 SSPs have indicated that developments will continue into the future, either on existing courses, or on new courses. Some have indicated the need for further funding, which at this stage is not guaranteed.

Although projects have been asked about their legacy and continuation plans, it has not been possible to analyse these in any detail at this stage to come up with a continuation plan for the work of the Faculty Project. As Project Managers our recommendation is that all project leads be debriefed by the Head of LTA to formulate such a continuation plan to ensure that the excellent work carried out by them continues into the future in a sustainable way.

7. Concluding remarks

The following is simply a list of points and issues arising from the work carried out on the Project. Some may not be relevant for continuation of the work of the Project, but will be of use in other contexts.

7.1 Practicalities

Funded projects need to be delivered by staff. In the ACES Faculty Project the conscious decision was taken to involve as many Faculty staff as possible (as opposed to buying in staff) to ensure that the experience gained would reside within the Faculty and there would be continuity after the Project funding ceased. However, the issue of buying-out Faculty staff was problematic and resulted in some SSPs not running, or having to be deferred by a year.

Most of the EBL small scale projects sought to create mixed communities of students – either by having remits tackled by students from different discipline areas, or by mixing different years on a particular course. As it soon became clear this had its problems. It was not always easy to timetable students across different courses. The integrated project work on the Creative Media Practice courses only ran smoothly because the courses all had their Integrated Project module at the same time - by design. Introducing innovations into the curriculum is not always easy and ideally needs to be planned in at the course design stage.

7.2 Staff support

Staff need to be well supported and have the right tools if innovation is to be introduced in a systematic way. The CETL LA focus was excellent as a starting point in raising awareness. The two Guides produced to support staff relied heavily on the resources already available on the CPLA website. There is now a growing pool of staff using EBL and this should continue to grow as dissemination of the work of the Project continues. To this end there needs to be effective dissemination of this work by, for example, workshops, seminars and

the Faculty's LTA website. Staff development tools and mechanisms related to EBL and the development of learner autonomy also need developing and formalising systematically.

7.3 Student support

Students learning in communities of practice need to know clearly what is required of them and why. Before any EBL activity is carried out students will need to be very well briefed. They will also need to know that the EBL activity they are involved in is designed to develop them as autonomous learners. Again, students will have to be introduced carefully to what is meant by learner autonomy and be coached in ways of enabling them to reflect on their own development in this respect. They should take well to working with technology that is designed to enable them to work in groups and staff will need to be aware of how best to create appropriate virtual learning spaces for a given particular EBL activity.

Students do appear to enjoy peer assisted learning and mentoring. Staff should be aware of the potential for this on their module.

7.4 About EBL and the development of LA

All staff engaged with the Faculty Project have reported positively on the EBL activity on which they have been engaged. They have enjoyed running their particular module and student feedback has generally been positive. However, enthusiastic staff easily generate enthusiastic students and perhaps more research is needed on the efficacy of EBL. EBL is not appreciated by all students and there is the observation that disengaged students are further alienated by EBL. At the Royal School of Military Survey, where the curriculum is delivered in fortnightly blocks, students do not like working in groups because of the very compressed timescales.

EBL activity invariably leads to having to assess students as members of a group. Many problems remain regarding the assessment of group work, but much good practice now exists. Assessing the development of LA, however, is a new area of research. The approach suggested in the second of the Guides produced by the Project Managers is that students take charge of measuring their own LA development using the radar screen model. It is their reflections on their own LA development that is then assessed by staff.

ACES Appendix 1

Enquiry-Based Learning: A guide for staff

Foreword

Context

The Challenge

What is Enquiry-Based Learning?

Recognisable forms of EBL

Current examples of EBL implementation in ACES

Engineering

Sustainability

Creative Media Practice

Focus Group feedback

Opportunities for Faculty-wide Projects

Template for a typical EBL Project

Choosing a suitable project

Choosing and enforcing suitable project boundaries

Choosing a team using Myers Briggs psychology and Belbin team theory

Strategy for ethical implementation

Obtaining Student buy-in

Weekly Team Management Sheet (for use by Team Leader)

Engaging Students

Useful Tips

References

Foreword

As a member of staff, would you like to see your students develop a strong set of life-skills alongside their technical skills? Would you like to see your students exceed their own (and your) expectations? Would you like to see your students working on projects with students on other degrees and having fun?

Ivan Moore, Director of the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CPLA CETL), tells us from his experience that all of these are possible through Enquiry-Based Learning (EBL). Indeed, staff in the Faculty who have implemented EBL ideas into their teaching, confirm Ivan's findings.

This guide will help you to establish an EBL approach within your modules. The guide sets down strategies and structures that facilitate enquiry-based learning based on experience, best practice and research. The guide contains hyperlinks to online resources and support, centred around the CETL team and on Faculty staff who have experience using EBL.

As editors we hope you find the guide extremely useful. We are confident that you will see significant changes in your students' ability to manage their own learning as a result of implementing an EBL strategy in your teaching.

Justin Lewis

Allan Norcliffe

Context

The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy emphasises the need to develop within our students, learner autonomy - in other words the ability of students to manage their own learning. Students with heightened learner autonomy are more likely to meet deadlines ahead of time, attend classes consistently and achieve grades in line with their potential.

The University is designated by the Higher Education Funding Council as being a Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in learner autonomy, the focus for which is the Learner Autonomy CETL. Recently the CETL has made available funding to both the Faculties of ACES and D&S to enable students to enhance their learner autonomy through engaging in enquiry-based learning.

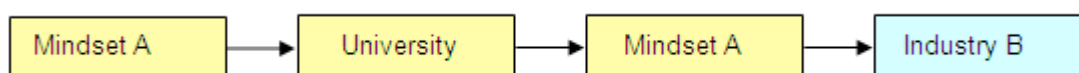
EBL represents a shift away from passive teaching methods, which involve the transmission of knowledge to students, to more facilitative methods through which students are expected to construct their own knowledge and understanding by engaging in supported processes of enquiry.

The Faculty's EBL funding from the LA CETL is for two and a half years and is aimed primarily at helping to embed EBL ideas into the curriculum. Initially funding will be used to develop selected EBL projects in new areas, drawing on best practice and experience of using EBL on existing modules. Many courses in the Faculty already use EBL approaches, although module descriptors might not refer explicitly to the term. Funding in later years will be used to assist with implementation and evaluation, and for the development of further projects.

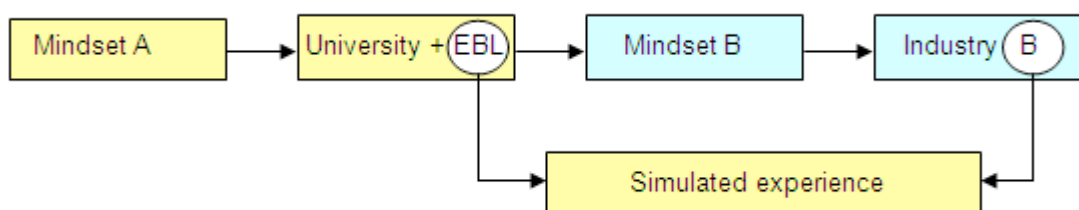
The EBL project started in February 2008 and one of the first outcomes has been the production of this guide. Much of the funding for the 2008/9 academic session has now been allocated to develop EBL content. Ideas for the 2009/10 session are welcome and will, in any case, be canvassed.

The Challenge

Industry tells us that there are problems with students entering work, from HE with a techno-centric world view (Mindset A), where their core skills are not supplemented with solid life skills. For example, university engineering students may refuse to engage with activities that lie outside of their subject.



Enquiry-based learning seeks to supply a simulated experience that helps prepare these students for industry (Mindset B). The ingredients for the simulated experience can be discovered by observation of the target industry and collaboration with industry leaders.



What is Enquiry-Based Learning?

<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/cetl/cpla/resources.html>

- Enquiry Based Learning is a natural form of learning, borne out of our innate sense of curiosity and desire to understand
- It is generically applicable, and has grown from modelling learning in a number of subjects
- It promotes inter-professional and interdisciplinary learning

- It helps develop student autonomy and employability.

EBL is particularly good for developing a range of key skills that transcend subject knowledge:

- Academic skills of research and information processing
- Intellectual skills starting from knowledge acquisition and manipulation, moving through application and analysis, culminating with synthesis and evaluation
- Professional skills including leadership, and project management, through the practical application of theory in a team context
- Personal skills of accepting responsibility, being creative and time management.

EBL enhances student motivation by socialising their learning and engaging with authentic real-world problems.

Recognisable forms of EBL

Enquiry-based learning activities include

- Design
- Problem-based learning
- Case-based learning
- Field trips
- Dissertations and project-based learning
- Research.

The defining feature of EBL is that once students have been given an open brief, they go on to determine their own lines of enquiry and identify what information they need.

Current examples of EBL implementation in ACES

Engineering - SHU Racing

"All Sheffield Hallam students are invited to join the team. If you feel that you have the enthusiasm and dedication to work on an exciting motorsport project from start to finish, then you could make an ideal member of the Formula Student team."

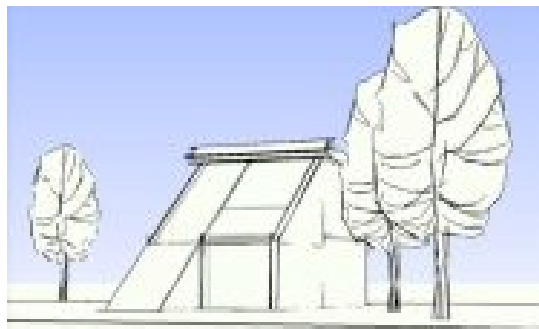
<http://www.shu.ac.uk/shuracing>



Sustainability - Eco-house - a project for sustainable living

"The 'eco-house' project funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), has helped students learn about sustainability...."

<http://materials.shu.ac.uk/e-news/issue6/ecohouse.html>



Creative Media Practice

"All students on the BA Digital Media Production degree work with students from the BA Animation, BA Film and Visual Effects and BA Games Design to carry out an integrated project where an EBL approach is used."

http://prospectus.shu.ac.uk/op_UGlookup1.cfm?id_num=526&CurrTab=4

Focus Group feedback

The funding from the LA CETL started in February 2008 and much of the early activity has been used to carry out a scoping exercise to determine those EBL projects to be funded in the 2008/09 academic session. The total funding was some £45k, to be spread pro-rata over the two and a half year period. To determine the possible project areas all staff in the Faculty have been invited to workshops at City Campus (22 Feb 2008) and at Psalter Lane (27 Feb 2008). At these meetings ideas were put forward by staff and discussed. The possible project areas for the 2008/09 academic session include the following:

- Creative Media Practice
- Sustainability
- Foundation-Year courses
- Databases/IT
- Faculty-wide areas.

Creative Media Practice

EBL project work is already embedded in the four new degree courses in this area (BA Animation, BA Games Design, BA Film and Visual Effects, BA Digital Media Production). A small amount of funding is being used to review the success of this project work and to capture best practice. The writing of this guide has been influenced by feedback from students and staff associated with these courses.

Sustainability

The Faculty wishes to make available to all courses (within ACES and across the University) option modules in sustainability. Funding is being used to develop an EBL approach on these option modules.

Foundation-Year courses

A significant number of students enter the Faculty at Level 3 on Foundation-Year courses. Funding is being used to embed EBL activities on these courses in order to help students improve their learner autonomy skills and thereby to increase retention and success rates.

Databases/IT

Students often find the study of databases difficult. EBL approaches for such students are being devised to enhance their success rates and to support them as they make good any initial poor performance in databases and other areas of IT.

Faculty-wide areas

Funding is being used to develop EBL activities that are genuinely Faculty wide. Mentoring (by students for students) and producing articles for the Faculty newspaper were identified for the 2008/09 academic session.

Opportunities for Faculty-wide Projects

EBL does not need to be restricted within the confines of a single subject area. Indeed, staff are actively encouraged to bring students from different subject areas together to work on joint EBL projects. The funding that has been provided by the LA CETL specifically supported and emphasised this kind of cross-Faculty venture.

Template for a typical EBL Project

Choosing a suitable project

The focus of an EBL project is not typically to impart subject-centric knowledge to students but to develop more general, real-world life skills, such as the ability to manage one's own learning in a team context.

Many of the projects developed using the LA CETL funding will also be cross-Faculty, where students from different degree courses (or different years of a course) work together on a given problem. In such situations imparting subject-centric knowledge is not practical and focussing on the development of general skills is appropriate.

Projects should therefore seek to enable students to synthesise the subject knowledge they have acquired up to that point.

Choosing and enforcing suitable project boundaries

Below is a list of typical areas where EBL can be used:

- Design
- Problem Based Learning
- Case Based Learning
- Field Trips
- Dissertations, projects
- Research

All of the above areas, being open ended, may lead to situations that may conflict with:

- Values and standards of the University
- SHU regulatory frameworks
- Societal ethics
- British and EC law
- Health and safety
- Internal student group values
- Safe financial practice

You need to be aware of this and make sure that students adhere to these boundaries.

Some tasks are unsuitable for enquiry-based learning. For example, students cannot be expected to discover how to use certain engineering machinery. This is because engineering machinery has to be used in one way only, which is the correct way, and cannot be improvised. Improper use of machinery can result in massive financial losses and student injury. This type of knowledge is best taught practically by an expert to enable student

proficiency through supervised use. In this document we shall refer to the aforementioned knowledge category as tutor-imparted critical knowledge.

When choosing a project it is also advisable to consider the consequences of student failure within a project task, when students adopt a particular line of enquiry. Ideally such failure should only be of an academic nature and one where students can learn from this failure. An example of a poorly selected project task would be one requiring students to repair laptop computers without insurance cover, as this would conflict with safe financial practice.

When working in groups, students need to be sensitive to each others values and perspectives. You should ensure that any conflict be resolved.

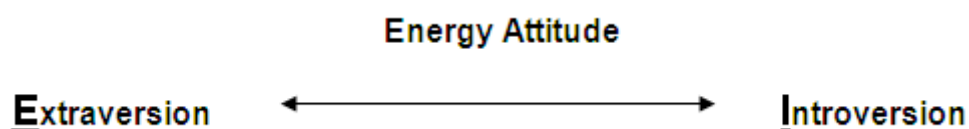
Choosing a team using Myers Briggs psychology and Belbin team theory

What is Myers Briggs psychology?

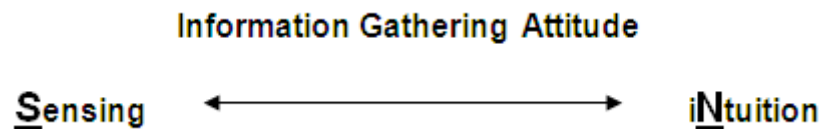
Myers Briggs (MB) psychology involves the students filling in an online questionnaire licensed to the University. The questionnaire seeks to highlight personality differences and promotes appreciation on differing world views. The questionnaire also suggests (but never imposes) typical roles that would suit an individual's preferences. Myers Briggs is particularly useful for identifying natural team leaders.

Myers Briggs psychology identifies four key attitudes that describe major areas of an individual's personality. The four attitudes are: energy, information gathering, decision making and lifestyle.

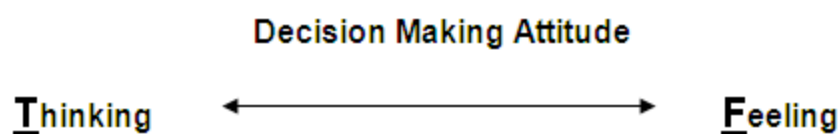
Each attitude represents two opposing preferences. The energy attitude represents both extraversion and introversion. Extraversion (represented by the letter E) is defined as time spent interacting with other people or the outside world. Introversion (represented by the letter I) is defined as time spent alone and the inner world of concepts and ideas. Everybody spends time during the day practising both introversion and extraversion; the two cannot be practised simultaneously. Key to the MB theory is the suggestion that everybody has a clear preference for one side of the attitude over the other, but can choose to use their weaker preference. A useful analogy of this is a person's ability to write using either hand, but almost everybody prefers (is more skilled) one hand over another.



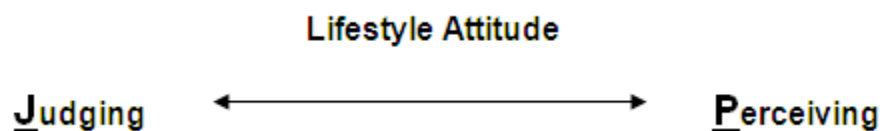
The other three attitudes are: information gathering, indicated by the preferences of sensing (S) and intuition (N); decision making, indicated by the preferences of thinking (T) and feeling (F); and lifestyle, indicated by the preferences of judging (J) and perceiving (P).



Sensing is concerned with facts, details and the reality of the present moment as perceived through the five senses of touch, smell etc. Intuition is concerned with future possibilities, inferred abstract connections and theories.



Thinking is concerned with objective decision making, where the individual steps out of the situation to acquire an impartial perspective. Feeling is concerned with values-based decision making, where an individual steps into the situation in order to empathise with those affected and also to live out a practical expression of strongly-held inner beliefs.



Judging involves a timetabled, pre-planned approach to life and deadlines. Perceiving involves a spontaneous approach to life and pressure-prompted, last-minute dash towards deadlines.

From these four attitudes an individual can represent the combination of their personality preferences by a four-letter code. For example, an individual who prefers extraversion, sensing, thinking and judging would be represented by the code ESTJ.

The on-line MB questionnaire will indicate an individual's personality code (type).

What is Belbin team theory?

Belbin team theory is a trait indicator as opposed to Myers Briggs, which is a type indicator. The central difference being that Belbin strongly identifies and suggests team roles based on an individual's historically-proven strengths and abilities.

There is a Belbin questionnaire; however the University does not have a licence to allow its use. Therefore students need to identify their Belbin team roles from an explanatory lecture, which clearly articulates the qualities of each role

The archetypal team roles, as identified by Belbin, are: co-ordinator, shaper, monitor-evaluator, team worker, company worker, completer-finisher, plant, and resource investigator. There is a ninth, supplementary role, that of specialist.

Shaper is slave driver (e.g. factory foreman)

Co-ordinator is synthesiser of experts (e.g. board director or head teacher)

Monitor-Evaluator is the team analyst, typically characterised by a quiet demeanour. However, they have a meticulous internal thought process that constantly compares the work currently being done with the original work plan. They are quick to vocalise work-plan deviations, and are sharply critical in their approach to quality control

Team Worker is a jack of all trades, happy to help out where they are needed

Company Worker is similar to Team Worker, but has a heightened sense of responsibility, duty and proactive loyalty to the company and their role within it (e.g. John Lewis Partner)

Completer-Finisher takes great satisfaction from completing a job and becomes frustrated when tasks are left unfinished

Plant has creative ideas that help a team to occupy new territory. Many people mistakenly consider themselves to be plants, especially leaders/managers. A true plant does not typically direct others, rather they seek regular solitude in order to comprehend new concepts without reference to past or present practice (for example, Einstein)

Resource Investigator is a typically extravert personality, excited by the prospect of exploring the world at large and bringing back new discoveries in order to benefit the team (for example, Marco Polo)

The **Specialist** is defined by their ability to do a task of critical importance that requires significant training.

Strategy for ethical implementation

The University practises an equal opportunities value system. The ethical considerations within the University's values are mirrored in the ethical guidelines set down by Myers Briggs and Belbin tools. Fundamental to the implementation of these ethics is the rights of the individual to choose their role and the appreciation of the ability of the individual,

within that role, without prejudice. In other words, the individual can transcend their preferred way of working through choice.

It is therefore important to take into consideration the following points:

- Racial and gender integration
- No pigeon-holing. Choice of role, informed by psychometric tools and consensus is crucial
- Avoiding type-A personalities being overly represented within a group. Type A personalities are typically ENTJ and ESTJ as identified by Myers Briggs and embody the roles of shaper and co-ordinator as identified by Belbin. There is robust information that shows that teams with too many type A personalities remain static due to individuals pulling in different directions.

Obtaining Student buy-in

As EBL is an unfamiliar concept to many of the students it is vital to obtain student buy-in from the outset. The following is a list of techniques that may be helpful in motivating students to engage with their EBL project.

- Ensure students are taken through that part of the module descriptor that involves the EBL activity and introduce the ideas behind enquiry-based learning
- The use of video clips that show students engaging in EBL may be useful in gaining student buy-in, especially if the clips show students speaking positively about EBL
- Get all students to think about working in teams by having them use Myers Briggs software to determine their personality type. This could be a pre-module exercise to open up new possibilities to students rather than pigeon-holing them
- Initiate a dry-run EBL exercise in order to introduce EBL concepts and terminology. The use of Yomp and idea-opoly resources will prove useful. They are a University-owned resource that facilitates teambuilding. Yomp is a way of constructing and presenting a visual business plan and timeline for tackling any real-world project. This exercise promotes team building and also provides a visual presentation for the wider student body to critique. Student criticism (as opposed to staff criticism) is a key part of EBL and this is a dynamic that should be stressed to students

Weekly Team Management Sheet (for use by Team Leader)**Date:****Team name:****Team Leader's name:**

Team members							
Attendance							
Apologies							
Apols accepted							
R/Y card given?							
Tasks met							
Tasks not met							
Time spent on project tasks							
New task sheet completed							
Tasks and times agreed							
Date of next management review meeting established and communicated							

Begin the meeting by entering the team members' names in the top row of the table. Place a tick or a cross in the attendance row for each team member to indicate their presence or absence. For those members not present indicate whether an apology has been forwarded. Proceed by filling in the rest of the table as guided by the headings in the far left column. Use this sheet to fill in an electronic version of this table for emailing to your tutor.

Weekly Individual Management Sheet (for use by each team member)

Date:

Name of individual and team:

Hours per week:

Task	Description	Expected time	Progress	Extension?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

List the tasks that are to be achieved for the coming week; do this as a team under the supervision of your team leader. Agree with the team the expected time in hours each of the tasks should take. The total time of the weekly tasks should approximately equal the hours per week stated above. At the end of the week, note progress made and whether any extension needs to be agreed with your team leader.

Weekly Tutor's Group-Management Sheet (for use by Tutor)**Date:****Name of module:**

Team name	Submitted weekly team management sheet?	Action needed?	Action taken?	Notes

Use this table to monitor and reflect upon the progress of team leaders and associated team members. Issues may arise in this reflection that may influence the content of your module review

Project Evaluation Sheet (to be completed by the student)

The following sheet is not mandatory, it is anonymous and the results will be stored as a statistical study in order to enhance course quality.

Assertion	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No strong feeling	Agree	Strongly agree
The project has engaged my interest					
During the project I have been innovative					
During the project I have defined my own lines of enquiry					
My time management skills have improved during this project					
The project has helped to stretch me in my team-member capacity					
I have enjoyed working with my fellow team members					
I feel respected and utilised by my fellow team members					
The project was fun					
I feel better equipped to carry out real world projects					
My ability to manage my own learning has improved					

Engaging Students

Bloom's taxonomy of learning is a useful tool for understanding how to motivate students. Students, according to Bloom, learn by first acquiring knowledge and manipulating and applying it. Having become skilled in this they can then analyse and synthesise this knowledge. Finally by evaluation they can exercise judgement. This taxonomy of learning is shown in the triangle below. The goal in EBL should be to ignite students' creativity and intuition by allowing them to define their own lines of enquiry as they synthesise their skills and evaluate their work.

The red zone in the figure below is known as the "intellectual playground". The goal of an EBL project, therefore, is to lead student into this intellectual playground.

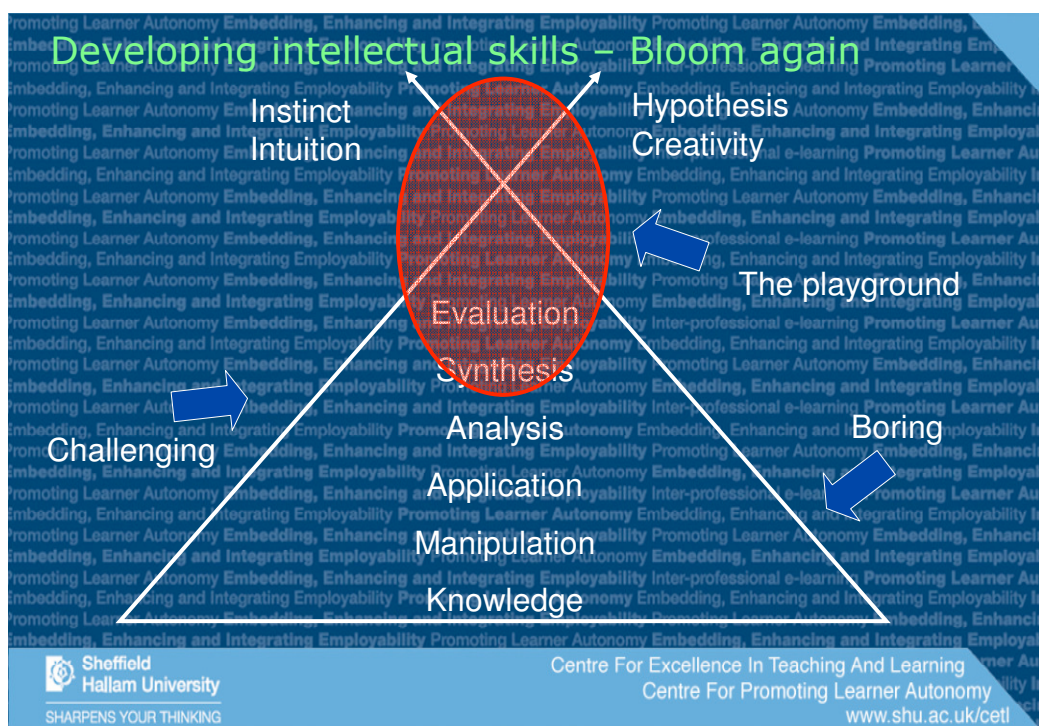


Figure 1: Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning

Useful Tips

Support for staff: Delivering the curriculum via EBL projects may be new to some staff. Where possible you should work in pairs or teams to deliver any pre lectures and lectures. This will emphasise the multidisciplinary nature of the project and help you feel supported. It is the intention to hold regular workshops where staff can share experiences and network. This experience will be useful in establishing best practice and refining future versions of this guide.

Course quality issues: Some modules in the Faculty already contain EBL projects. If you are thinking of developing new modules or modifying existing modules to enable EBL activities to be introduced into the curriculum, you must do this within the University's quality guidelines. This will include the submission of a minor modification proforma to your programme area quality subcommittee. You will therefore have to liaise with your Subject Group Leader and the appropriate Course Leader(s)/Programme Director(s). These individuals will vet the suitability of the EBL project and sign off successful submissions for subsequent forwarding to the quality subcommittee. The Faculty's Head of Quality and Enhancement, Roger New, will be able to advise you on any quality issues.

Contracting: EBL projects may involve several students from different courses working together and may therefore require the input of staff from different subject groups. It is vital for the success of the project that the time spent by staff is properly recognised and accounted for when working out the FTEs (income) accruing to the different subject groups and for work planning purposes. If you plan to deliver part of your module using an EBL approach, ensure that you alert all relevant Subject Group Leader in a timely way so that they can agree on the resources required and green light the EBL project.

Identifying a failing team early and responding quickly: One of the challenges of EBL is that because students are identifying their own lines of enquiry it can be difficult to monitor group progress accurately, especially so in the early weeks of a project. Accurate monitoring is important in order to identify failing teams and proactively address the root causes of this. If a team is failing due to fundamental incompatibility of team members, or due to a lack of attendance, or through a high proportion of weak students, it is important to redistribute its members across the other teams and to do this early.

A good strategy for identifying weak teams is to set them clear deadlines and to monitor the success of meeting those deadlines with the consequences of failure established at the outset.

Replacing Team Leaders: The success of a team can often hinge on the ability of the Team Leader to manage their team. Therefore it is imperative to quickly re-elect and replace the Team Leader if they are struggling to fulfil their role. It should be made clear to Team Leaders that their appointment is provisional and that they will be moved into a different role if they fail to excel in their responsibilities or show poor attitude. The American motivational speaker, John Maxwell, points out that "attitude is an outward expression of an

inward feeling". Poor attitude shows that the student is not feeling good about the project and is not in the right state of mind to lead others. By placing them in a new role they are given a second chance to explore their strengths. The Team Leader is responsible for maintaining high levels of attendance amongst team members.

Implementing management structures: A possible EBL line management structure is illustrated in the figure below:

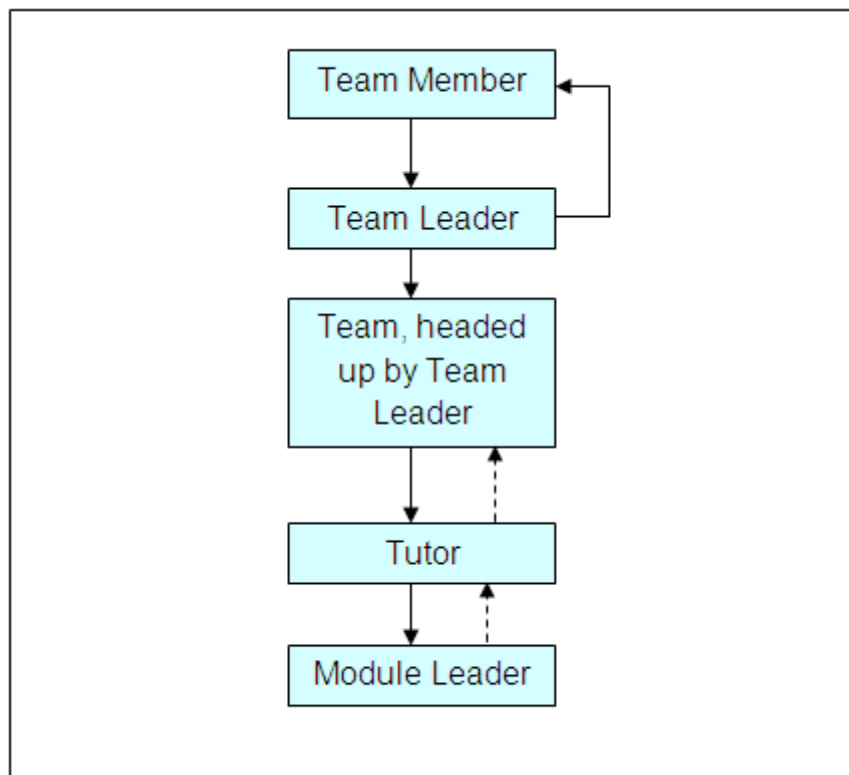


Figure 2: Diagram illustrating suggested EBL line-management

Team members should report to the Team Leader, the team as a whole, headed up by the Team Leader, should report to the Tutor and the Tutor should report to the Module Leader. The Module Leader analyses the broad progress of teams, and acts as an accountability partner for the tutor(s).

This reporting would encompass the following dynamics that can be recorded using the work sheets attached to this document:

1. Team member to Team Leader - this establishes the core tasks at the operational level and gets the Team Leader up and running with their managerial responsibilities. The Team Leader is a student and has Team Member responsibilities as well as managerial duties. Use the Weekly Individual Management Sheet for this purpose

2. **Team to Tutor** - this holds the Team Leader to account for the progress of the team. A traditional problem at these meetings is for the Team Leader to mask their shortcomings by offloading all the team's problems onto the Tutor and expecting solutions from the Tutor. This is a particularly serious problem because it moves the onus of responsibility for the Team's success onto the Tutor, which completely undermines the skills that EBL strives inculcate. The following technique usually solves this problem: make it abundantly clear to the Team Leader, in the presence of the entire team, that the leadership position is probationary. The next step is to engender a mind set within the Team Leader of a 'managing director to chairman' relationship between himself and the Tutor. The outworking of this encourages the Team Leader to resolve problems with the team and to report on successes and progress. Use the Weekly Team Management Sheet to facilitate this process.
3. **Tutor to Module Leader** - This is primarily to motivate the Tutor and to inform the Module Leader about possible enhancements and changes for subsequent years. This is also a time where the Tutor can ask the Module Leader about questions that the students have raised. Use the Weekly Group Management Sheet as part of this reporting.

Waypoints and presentations: Throughout the project you may have several student presentations. This is a way of the students feeding back to other teams, which will facilitate the sharing of ideas and highlighting to teams that may be falling back in their work that others are pulling ahead. The presentations act as 'waypoints' along the journey for the students in that the presentation criteria requires the students to feedback on their anticipated progress.

Celebrating student achievements: There should be an expectation that remarkable project work will emerge from EBL activities. As and when it does every opportunity should be taken to publish the results of this work in national and, where appropriate, international journals and fora.

Marking issues: In marking the students' work it is important to establish a fair split of marks both between group work and individual reflection, and also inter-team marking that allows some form of peer assessment. For relevant marking formulae see Anne Nortcliffe who is currently the ACES teaching fellow for assessment.

Review issues: A central aim of EBL project work is the development of learner autonomy skills within students. When reviewing the success of an EBL project it is important to keep the pre-defined project goal in mind. For example if students have been asked to create and run a profit-making small business, the review would consider whether an unacceptable number of student teams had failed to make a profit. The review would not focus on the unique lines of enquiry undertaken by the student teams. However, the review should be informed by student feedback facilitated by the enclosed evaluation sheet provided in the appendix.

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ACES Appendix 2

An approach to measuring the development of student Learner Autonomy

1. What is Learner Autonomy?

To measure the development of learner autonomy we first need to know what it is. At Sheffield Hallam University a student is regarded as being an autonomous learner when they have the confidence to take responsibility for managing their own learning. This in turn (see CPLA January 2009 Newsletter) is taken to mean that such students

- Can identify their learning goals (what they need to learn), their learning processes (how they will learn) and how they will evaluate and use their learning
- Have well-founded conceptions of learning
- Have a range of learning approaches and skills
- Can organize their learning
- Have good information processing skills
- Are well motivated to learn.

In his paper on Conceptualizing Learner Autonomy in Higher Education, Ivan Moore views and expands upon the above attributes in terms of his so-called SWIM model. In the SWIM model a student, to be an autonomous learner, must have developed an appropriate stance (S) to their learning. They must have a willingness (W) to learn. They must have good information (I) skills, and must be able to manage (M) their learning. This view of learner autonomy is particularly convenient when it comes to measuring the development of student learner autonomy.

1.1 What do we mean by an appropriate stance to learning?

This means that students should have an understanding of the learning process as it applies in Higher Education. Students need to know that they have to take responsibility for their learning. They need to know that they will be supported in this endeavour by their tutors and by the wider learning resources available, but recognizing where responsibilities lie is important. They should know that they will need to acquire high-level intellectual skills (as defined in Bloom's taxonomy, for example) and develop their own approaches to learning, including a culture of reflection and engagement. They should understand the benefits of adopting a deep approach to learning.

1.2 What do we mean by a willingness to learn?

This is about motivation and engagement. Students should possess a natural curiosity about their subject and its wider context. They should understand that there are vocational, academic, personal and social imperatives in relation to their learning and be able to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. They should know the value of

setting goals – short, medium and long-term. They should know that by tackling challenges and stretching themselves they will develop self confidence.

1.3 What do we mean by good information skills?

A student with good information skills should be able to accomplish the following according to the Standing Conference of University Librarians:

- Recognize a need for information
- Distinguish ways in which the information gap may be addressed
- Construct strategies for locating information
- Locate and access information
- Compare and evaluate information obtained from different sources
- Organize, apply and communicate information to others in ways appropriate
- Synthesize and build upon existing information, contributing to the creation of new knowledge.

1.4 What do we mean by managing one's learning?

Students need to be able to manage themselves and relationships in ways that will maximize their ability to learn successfully. This will involve

- Developing study, planning, problem-solving and time- and project-management skills
- Demonstrating focus and resilience
- Balancing social, work and learning needs
- Having the meta-cognition to balance the demands of assessment, self assessment and evaluation of their learning.

2. Stakeholders involved in Measuring the Development of Student Learner Autonomy

There are two important stakeholders to take into consideration when measuring the development of student learner autonomy. These are 1) the student and 2) the lecturer.

The student needs to be able to measure their own development along the journey to becoming an autonomous learner in a way that is simple, flexible and personal to them. They need to be able to use this measurement for the purposes of development and improvement. They need also to be able to pass comment on the opportunities they have been given, and the resources that have been made available to them, to develop their own learner autonomy.

The lecturer, in turn, needs to be able to measure the student's grasp of the issues involved in developing student learner autonomy and be able to satisfy themselves that their students are becoming autonomous learners. The lecturer also needs to know that they are providing students with the opportunities needed for the development of student learner autonomy and have mechanisms to develop themselves as lecturers in this respect.

3. Measuring the Development of Student Learner Autonomy from the Student Perspective

Most learning activities develop within a student several of the attributes mentioned in the SWIM model. Before tackling a learning activity the lecturer might encourage the students to discuss the attributes that they feel are going to be most relevant to the activity. Assume it is decided that the particular learning activity is to have a significant bearing on the following attributes:

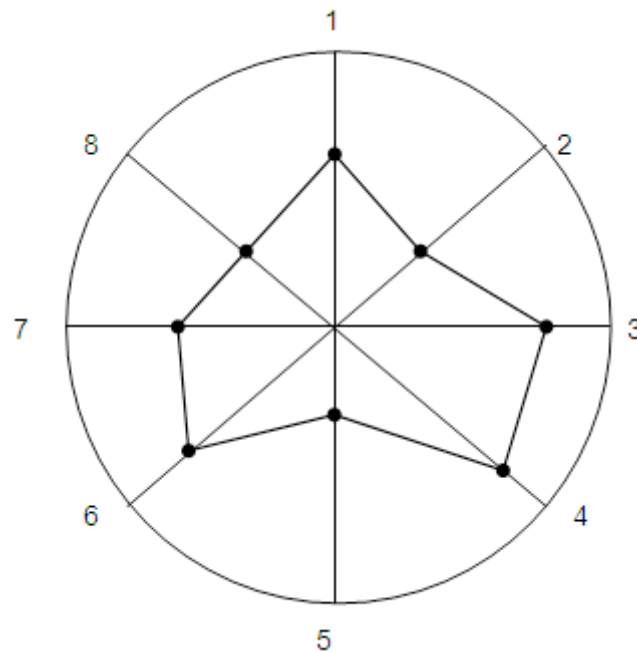
1. Taking responsibility
2. Developing cognitive skills
3. Adopting a deep approach to learning
4. Developing self confidence
5. Setting goals
6. Evaluating information
7. Time management
8. Managing relationships.

Students should be invited to score themselves between 0 and 10 as to where they feel they are with regard to each attribute. Initially students may find this difficult. It should be emphasized that there are no absolutes and that their measurements are personal to them. Alternatively, the lecturer may give some indication as to what a 6, or an 8 or a 4, for example, might mean. A student may well come up with the following scores before tackling the learning activity:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Taking responsibility | 6 |
| 2. Developing cognitive skills | 4 |
| 3. Adopting a deep approach to learning | 7 |
| 4. Developing self confidence | 8 |
| 5. Setting goals | 3 |
| 6. Evaluating information | 7 |
| 7. Time management | 6 |
| 8. Managing relationships | 4 |

After the learning activity, students should again be invited to score themselves using the same scoring system. In this way the student can log the development (or not, as the case may be!) of their perceived learner autonomy, as far as it is characterized by the attributes deemed relevant to the learning activity in question.

The Radar Screen model is a good model to use for the purpose of capturing the measurements in a visual way. E.g. for the “before” measurements the Radar Screen plot would be as follows, where 1, 2, ..., 8 refer to the learner-autonomy attributes and the heavy dots to the scores (the centre of the radar screen being 0 and the circumference representing a score of 10 for each attribute):



With this model the student is able to capture where they are on their journey to becoming autonomous learners. It is easy to see that the web plot will move to the periphery of the circle as a student becomes more autonomous. Further, if students are to be working in groups on some EBL activity, for example, the students could log the best individual scores, for their group, for each attribute in turn and observe that the resulting plot is closer to the periphery than is any individual plot – demonstrating the benefits of working in groups and pooling expertise.

By plotting where they feel they are after the learning activity is complete (possibly on the same radar screen) a student can obtain a visual record of their learner autonomy development, thus providing a vehicle for reflection and personal development.

In any evaluation of the learning activity students should also be encouraged to comment on how the activity provided them with opportunities (or lack of, as the case may be) for developing their learner autonomy, thus providing valuable feedback to the lecturer.

4.0 Measuring the Development of Student Learner Autonomy from the Lecturer’s Perspective

To measure how students are getting to grips with the process of acquiring student learner autonomy, the lecturer can ask students to carry out a reflection on the learning activity

with specific reference to their own assessment of where they see themselves with respect to the attributes that have been identified. Students might usefully be asked to

- Explain their assessment of where they feel they are prior to the learning activity
- Explain their assessment after the learning activity, accounting for any changes
- Suggest in an action plan how they propose to improve each attribute score by one point, say
- Comment on the opportunities that were available to them for developing their own learner autonomy.

The reflection can be marked and contribute to the overall assessment of the module.

Just as students use the Radar Screen model to chart their own development of learner autonomy, lecturers could use the same model to chart their own progress in providing opportunities for students to develop learner autonomy. Discussions with colleagues, for example, could be used to produce a list of such opportunities. For example, it could well be the case that staff feel the following list of opportunities is appropriate in a particular discipline area:

- Dialogue
- Engaging with feedback
- Reflection
- Peer assessment
- Self assessment
- Authentic activities
- Presentations
- Role playing.

Staff might score themselves against each activity, the criterion being how far in relative terms they utilize each of the above opportunities in their teaching, and plot the results on a radar screen plot. As part of peer-supported review of teaching and learning, they might usefully formulate an action plan that states how they could improve each score by one point, for example. In this way the process could feed into appraisal and staff development, helping to provide an additional mechanism to help the lecturer become a reflective practitioner.

ACES Appendix 3

Publications associated with the Faculty Learner Autonomy Project

Journal/ Book contributions:

Bramhall, M. D., Lewis, J., Norcliffe, A., Radley K. and Waldock, J. (2010), 'The strategic development of learner autonomy through enquiry-based learning: a case study', *Industry and Higher Education* 24(2): 121-125.

Bramhall, M. D., Radley, K. and Metcalf, J. (2010), 'Promoting Learner Autonomy in engineering by students using media', in Moore, I., Elfving-Hwang, J., Garnett, K. and Corker, C. (Eds.), *Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy Case Studies: Volume 1*, (Sheffield: Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy) ISBN: 978-1-897851-17-3.

Refereed Conference presentations/ proceedings:

Bramhall, M. D., and Radley, K., 'Promoting Learner Autonomy in students by using media to stimulate their learning', presented at the TARC International Conference on Teaching and Learning: Enhancing Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, Malaysia, 2008.

Bramhall, M. D., Norcliffe, A., Lewis, J, and Waldock, J, 'Enquiry-based learning: Strategic development in to the curriculum', presented at the fourth Learning Through Enquiry Alliance (LTEA) Conference, University of Reading, 2009.

Bramhall, M. D., Radley, K., Norcliffe, A., Lewis, J, and Waldock, J, 'The strategic development of enquiry-based learning into the curriculum', presented at the HEA Annual Conference, Manchester, 2009.

Bramhall, M. D., Radley, K., Norcliffe, A., Lewis, J, and Waldock, J, 'The strategic development of learner autonomy', proceedings of the 5th International conference on New Horizons in Industry, Business and Education, pp 10-16, ISBN 978-960-88785-8-7, Greece, 2009.

Recent Workshops

Moore I. and Bramhall, M. D., University de Autonoma, Madrid – 4 Workshops on Enquiry Based Learning (EBL), June 2009.

Moore I. and Bramhall, M. D., University of Zaragoza, Spain – 2 Workshops on EBL, February 2010.

Bramhall, M. D., Radley, K., Norcliffe, A. and Lewis, J, Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy International Conference – Sheffield Hallam University, Workshop on "Enquiry based learning and learner autonomy", June 2010.

Bramhall, M. D., Radley, K. and Lewis, J, HEA Annual Conference, University of Hertfordshire, Workshop on "Inspirational teaching and learning: Developing and encouraging autonomous student learning through enquiry and using digital media", June 2010.

Moore, I., Bramhall, M. D. and Radley K., EE2010, Aston University, Workshop on "Enquiry Based Learning", July 2010.

Moore, I., Bramhall, M. D. and Radley K., EE2010, Aston University, Workshop on "Inspirational teaching and learning: Developing and encouraging autonomous student learning", July 2010.

ACES Appendix 4

Raw feedback data: Small Scale Project leads

John Hayes: CMP

Quantitative Questions:

1. How many students and staff were involved?

90 students, 3 staff, plus one external (museum client)

2. How many student hours on the curriculum does your project occupy (e.g. a 20 credit module occupies about 200 hours of student time)?

180 hours

3. How many staff hours were involved in planning and how many in delivery?

20 / 100

4. On how many different courses does your project impact?

four courses - BA Animation, BA Digital Media Production, BA Film and Visual Effects, BA Games Design

5. What data do you have that demonstrates any benefit in: grades/marks, student retention, student attendance, student experience (e.g. feedback/questionnaires), recruitment? Please send any provisional analysed findings.

Positive anecdotal evidence - yet to analyse questionnaires.

Qualitative Questions:

1. Have you done what you set out to do?

Yes

2. In what way has your project evolved?

The project went to plan.

3. How have students perceived their own growth/lack of growth in learner autonomy?

In comparing last year's assignment brief (which was a fictional advertising campaign) with this years, it has made a real difference to the engagement of students with the module. Students were very excited about the collaboration and future potential use of their assets, resulting in a number of student groups producing really excellent work.

4. Do you feel that the curriculum has been enriched? Please explain your answer.

Very much so. For the students to work on a real brief, something that will have real world relevance, and therefore enhance their portfolio is very worthwhile. In addition, students have grown in confidence, and were clearly not afraid to run with creative ideas and sometimes complex technical problems to produce their final piece.

5. How has your legacy plan evolved?

The anticipated potential legacy was merely to have a series of assets created by students, and used by the museum. However, because of the positive nature of the project, the museum wish for us to continue the relationship and to run the project next year. So in effect the funding has inadvertently provided seed funding for a very exciting collaboration which I'm sure will expand to cover other areas of our provision and therefore enhance the student experience across the department.

Please feel free to add any additional comments about your project. We would be particularly interested in your views on staff development, the support you have received to carry out your project and its impact on future course developments.

DIALOGUE: Evaluation

Hester Reeve & Helen Blejerman: June 21st 2010

Quantitative

1. 2 x staff, 19 x students (voluntary participation, not every student came every meeting)
2. None -this was not run as part of a module; it occupied 33 hours in total.
3. Planning = 10 hours between 2 staff Delivery = 33 per staff member
4. 4 x courses

5. This is harder to supply especially since attendance was not as large as we had hoped (student schedule issue/staff schedule issue meant Dialogue could only run on Friday afternoons, not perfect). We of course saw the benefits directly in students who did attend and from feedback (we were too busy at the end of term to think to give our feedback forms the final Dialogue meeting, we have emailed some of the students though and will forward these on to you).

Qualitative:

1. Yes, we ran regular Dialogue Groups and the methodology of open creative discussion guided by the 4 Principles of Dialogue always fostered an in depth shared conversation where new ideas and perspectives were shared. Inevitably students reflected upon their identity as students and artists and their relationship to the University and wider art world landscapes.

2. This has been very marked. We started the groups this year with no framework or pre-proposed question, in line with 'pure Dialogue,' i.e. no agenda. Although this did not affect the students' engagement or ability to think together (as stated in 1.) we realised through the facilitator training course that we undertook that actually an appropriate framework within the University Dialogue framework allows for students to mainly engage in the concrete situation of their learning specific to their course. We re-introduced such a frame in the last 2 Dialogue meetings and got some new students and, we felt, richer dialogue in terms of the community that the conversations created, i.e. the conversations were more 'site-specific.'

3. Please see quotations from student feedback.

4. This is tricky to answer, this year Dialogue was strictly speaking not part of the curriculum. However, this is its value to the students and paradoxically to the curriculum. There is a greater sense of students owning the developments within the department: Dialogue creates a distance from the scheduled learning and hence a space for student's critical reflection and an admittance of responsibility for learning experience and activating their role in allowing teaching to be successful.

5. (If we understand the term legacy plan): We gave a few presentations about Dialogue outside of the fine art department and were met with a strong response - other departments seem to understand Dialogue's potential value in their own areas, particularly in regard to activating students as agents of their own learning and members of the University. The experience this year - including the training and a special meeting with Peter Garrett (who worked with Bohm to turn his philosophy into the practice and now directs Prison Dialogue) to discuss what we had developed so far within the University and to get his advice on where the next steps should/could be - has lead us to our current position that Dialogue will work well as an 'induction methodology' for all new L4 students. In this instance attending the Dialogue group would not be voluntary as it has so far been run. It would not run as part of Induction Week, when things are too 'busy,' but 1 or 2 weeks after induction week when students need to feel part of a community, trust each other, feel encouraged to speak their

minds and reflect upon the ideas of others and to realise that they have permission to stand up and take risks as students. We would then follow this up by running one longer and 'special' Dialogue Day at the very end of the academic year which would be voluntary and for any student from any year to attend in order to explore their identity and ideas in relationship to the framework of 'Artist-University-Gallery-Funding Bodies.'

Final remarks: Our training with the charity Prison Dialogue was particularly helpful. We met other facilitators of the methodology and shared experiences etc. We participated in Dialogue groups in 2 prisons and, as mentioned above, met with Peter Garrett to get feedback and advice on what we have been doing in the University context.

Project title:

Integration of Creative Practice, Critical Analysis and Academic Skills at level 4 through Enquiry-Based Learning

Project Team:

Oksana Fedotova, Dean Summers (Media Arts and Communication)

Summary

The project occupied app. 400 hours on the curriculum and involved two staff and 80 first-year students across four courses - BA Animation, BA Digital Media, BA Film and Visual Effects and BA Game Design. The main focus was on theory modules at level 4, which aim to equip new students with skills and attitudes appropriate for a higher level independent enquiry in future years of their University study. These are Research Methods (semester 1) and Critical Analysis (semester 2). Historically, students found it difficult to engage with the modules, due to the separation of the 'study skills / academic writing / critical analysis; elements from their chosen creative practice. The project aimed to bridge the gap between 'theory' and 'practice' by redesigning the learning, teaching and assessment activities on both modules according to the principles of EBL.

What were we planning to achieve?

- To align module activities with EBL approach, appropriately for the level of study and module learning outcomes
- To increase opportunities for undergraduate research and the levels of digital literacy and information skills
- To improve student experience, motivation and attainment
- To bridge the gap between 'theory' and 'practice' within the programme
- To assess the feasibility of incorporating new activities into the learning and assessment process, such as conference participation, production of themed issues

of 'Enquiry' (ACES journal of undergraduate research), poster exhibition and 'essay-film'.

Have we achieved what we set out to do?

Yes. All the planned objectives have been addressed, although some with more success than others (due to timescale and structural limitations). The project has successfully piloted new assessment methods aimed at bringing closer together theoretical research and media production, and resulted in a clear increase of student engagement. The first pass rates were comparable to previous years in one module and higher than before in the second module. Student feedback data from 71 questionnaires and 4 focus groups fully endorse the innovations, report high motivation, and suggest areas for further fine-tuning. The project had some inherent limitations due to the timing of the funding (which was too late to minor mod's, making independent research projects and collaborative work optional) but this can be fine-tuned in future. The external examiner has looked at a sample of students' audiovisual research work and evaluated this initiative very highly. The project work has not finished yet and some important forward-looking aspects are still carried out by two paid student assistants under the guidance of Oksana Fedotova, but will be completed by the end of July. (See the legacy section)

Preliminary results

EBL Focus groups:

The main benefits for using EBL were identified by students as follows:

1. Motivation: "Because we pitch our research questions our self we are interested, we are motivated to do it, if you gave me a research question I was not interested in it would be a poor outcome."
2. Engagement : "It kind of depends on how you define hard work as well, because you can define hard work as the amount of time you put into it, but what you two are saying and I agree with, is that if it is something you are interested in then it is not hard work. I would rather do 10 hours of something I find interesting than 1 hour of something I find mind numbing boring. "
3. Pursuing own interests: "So I have obviously chosen something I find interesting and also something that I might use in my professional life, it's an area of expertise that I can essentially pitch myself for jobs in the future. "
4. Acquiring transferable skills such as research skills and independent work skills: "Some people might feel not comfortable with coming up with their own idea at first, because you come into it like [...] , but when it comes to second year they would be more confident with picking up their own kind of stuff". "I think that at first it seems like you get thrown into the deep end, but I think that in the end it is better because it seems like, at university, it is a style we will be carrying through a lot , and it is stuff we need to learn how to do, so doing it in the first year will definitely help us in the future ".

All the participants of the focus groups agreed that they enjoyed and preferred the EBL structure of the course and that it lends itself to this strand as “I think most people, I mean if you push it to come up with their own idea, especially in courses like games, which are creative, supposed to be creative people, so coming up with your own idea, you should be very passionate about it”. However they did say that it might not suit all students and there should be a choice between traditional set questions and the more open ended structure of EBL. When it comes to the question of imbalanced workloads, the students said that a “good” student would put just as much work into a set question as to an open question, the difference would be motivation on perusing either the set or the self defined question depending on own personal learning style. The worry expressed if there is options like this is with the fairness of marking “[...] the more options you have the harder it gets to mark, incredibly hard to mark. If you set an essay question, then you almost know what the perfect essay looks like, at least you can compare the other ones. We have the assumption when doing this course that we will be marked fairly [...] if it is not feasible to mark things completely fairly across the board then I think it almost makes things...” and that the only way around this would be to fully opt in to either traditional teaching or EBL: “There cannot be two marking schemes, so I think you can either do it or not.”

What can be problematic is defining and “fleshing” out the research question, and it is at this stage that the students think that other students would have most difficulties, but it can be worth persisting, or as a student said ““I can understand that some people would find it hard to try to define what they want to do, and that’s all good, but honestly it is good to explore something you enjoy”. It can place the lecturer in a difficult spot, as it pushing the students can lead to opposite effects, non-engagement and the lecturer must find a way to “encourage to come up with your own idea, not necessarily force them”. A possible solution would be to encourage the students to start thinking about the research question as early as possible, to start the process in Research Methods in semester one, and carry this through: “I think that if you at the beginning of the research method to start think of something to do for critical analysis and that, in that amount of time at least everyone should be able to come up with an idea or question if they put the effort in” and aim the diagnostic assignments towards their own project, however this would also require reworking of the assignment regime for Research Methods as well as Critical Analysis.

Another area of insecurity was about choosing an un-researchable topic. This should be cleared up with guidance of the tutor, but there is only so much guidance a tutor can/should give, as one student explains: “I think that if they put the effort in they should get an degree, but if they put the effort in and it is really outstanding they should get a high degree, you know that’s how it is, but if they put no effort in, then you know, it is not up to you”. Another point was about “dead ends”. Students suggested two ways for dealing with this problem, both focusing on this being a research module and that learning how to do research is part of the learning outcomes. The first was to learn how to retrace the project find workable solutions: “it is the line of enquiry, you start at a point and it branch out and you find yourself in a dead end, you can always go back down the branches”. The second solution

was that the marks should be based not on the results, but on the process: “Yeah, but that’s the point of the module; that you are doing the research; that you’re trying to analyse something you don’t understand. So if you come to a dead end and explain that, and you have done the work, then you pass the module”

Screen cast results

The focus groups concerning the use of screencast were coded in NVivo by 4 independent coders. Almost all students were in favour of using screencast as an assessment option. The three main advantages for using this option identified by the coding were:

Visual form of assessment: The students are very visually oriented and can find it easier to express themselves with pictures and moving images:

“You know it’s just depressing really as every time we get an essay I get 40 or 50% because I can’t you know get my words across when I write down and I lose track and I go all over the place and it doesn’t flow. If you’ve got a picture and this goes for the teaching as well if you’ve got a picture to look at you can get your point across.”

“The visuals that I used in the screencast acted as evidence which supported what I was talking about, whereas, with an essay it is very hard to describe in paragraphs what the visuals were. I needed sound to describe my point instead of words.”

“It’s really hard to describe a game in words and you’re going to waste unnecessary words whereas in a screencast you can say show that in 10 seconds”

Not “live”: It was generally seen that producing a screencast is in many ways similar to holding a presentation, but without the worry of standing up and showing it “live”. For many this was a relief from the “stage fright” they feel in these situations and they felt they were able to produce a more coherent piece of work in this fashion.

“With presentations as well if you’re not good at doing them you’re going to worry about them and you’re going to get up there and forget things but with the screencast you can take your time over doing them”

“Yeah and you can play it back to see if you’ve gotten it right but with a presentation you’ve only got one chance to get everything across but with a screencast and you can make sure you’ve got everything in before you hand it in with a screencast”

Helps focusing: Most of the students found that producing the screencast helped them in focusing on the assessment and create a structure in the arguments they have not been able to do before when writing essays or holding presentations. This comes from the strict time restrictions on the screencast, the ability to replay the work several times when making it to make sure it “flows” and the need to create a working script.

“I did enjoy doing the screencast more than the presentation because we did the scripts as we thought out our ideas and then we were able to swap them around into a proper order so it made more sense and it flowed better and we’ve got everything that we wanted. If we’d been doing a presentation I might have waffled and stalled and not got everything in the right order.”

“Yeah because we’ve improved it loads as we could sort a script out and we sorted what we were saying out and switch bits round as the way we’d done it before it was in two massive chunks and it wasn’t very coherent but then we could chop and change it.”

“Because the time [of the screencast] is short you really have to think about what you want to include which cuts quite a lot out, in essay you can tend to waffle on but with a screencast you really have to be concise.”

Other advantages that came up during the focus groups – students found that the screencast helped them in creating a written work on the same subject later, even though they did not choose to continue with screencast as final piece of assessment. The fact that it is multidisciplinary were also mentioned and that it created a more “ease” of reporting which in the end made the assessment more “fun” and “different” which engaged the students.

There were some disadvantages, the largest of which were to deal with technical difficulties. These were mostly related to not having any training in using the software needed, uncertainties about formats and problems with hardware (c.d. burners, microphones, HD space etc.). Some found it difficult to capture the images, either from a film or a game, to use in the screencast. When using images from other sources, such as internet, they could have problems finding appropriate images for their arguments. This leads to screencast becoming more time consuming than most students expected, and they felt that the weighting for the screencast should be larger for the amount of work put into it:

“I found with the screencast that [...] you have to write a script in which case you might as well write a report - and you may as well just submit the report rather than record yourself reading the report so you can mess it up and not read it as well as you would’ve done. Also if you’re going to include all the pictures and everything then you may as well just do an oral presentation which is live and actually develop on it more.”

Another problem with the were that some students felt very self conscious about their own voice, and the screencast became frustrating because of the iterative way it is produced: “I just don’t like hearing myself talking and when I was recording my voice was a bit

frustrating and I had to keep recording it again and again.” The way that a screencast can create a very unnatural flow and way of reporting was also commented, but this is related to this being an experimental assessment and some students were not sure about the nature of the screencast and what audience they were making it for; they felt a stronger need to be entertaining than informational (“TV-style”).

These results are reflected in the questionnaire given to all students at the end of the module. This questionnaire was on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 and there were 71 respondents. The use of screencast was fully supported, and the students advised the tutor to continue with screencasts in the future. There is an agreement through the questionnaire that the screencast should not be replaced with essays, reports or presentation. What came out of the questionnaire is that they found that watching examples of others previous screencast, and watching others students “work in progress” screencasts were helpful.

Project evolution and legacy

Using an undergraduate research journal as a focus of module work (and a version of peer-assisted learning). Initially, we planned to focus mainly on academic writing and produce an issue of Enquiry (ACES UG research journal) as one of the main outcomes. Since the departure of Richard Hill (the editor of Enquiry), and with the late funding, the journal element was temporarily withdrawn from the project. However, nearer the end of the project, this element re-emerged in the new format. We had a meeting with the new editor of Enquiry in March, and secured our own ‘sandbox’ journal ‘Virtually Real’ which will publish student work from Media Arts. Two student assistants are currently getting to grips with the journal management software, producing and populating a prototype issue and conducting a SWOT analysis for using this in level 4 modules. If we continue, the intention is that the two student assistants will continue working voluntarily as editors and mentors for future student volunteers.

Alternative to the journal (a website depository). Mindful of potential technical snags and the bandwidth issues, the two assistants were also asked to investigate an alternative way of online dissemination of student work. A rough prototype website has been created and the student assistants will populate it and compare with the journal option, in terms of applicability for level 4. You can visit the website [here](#)

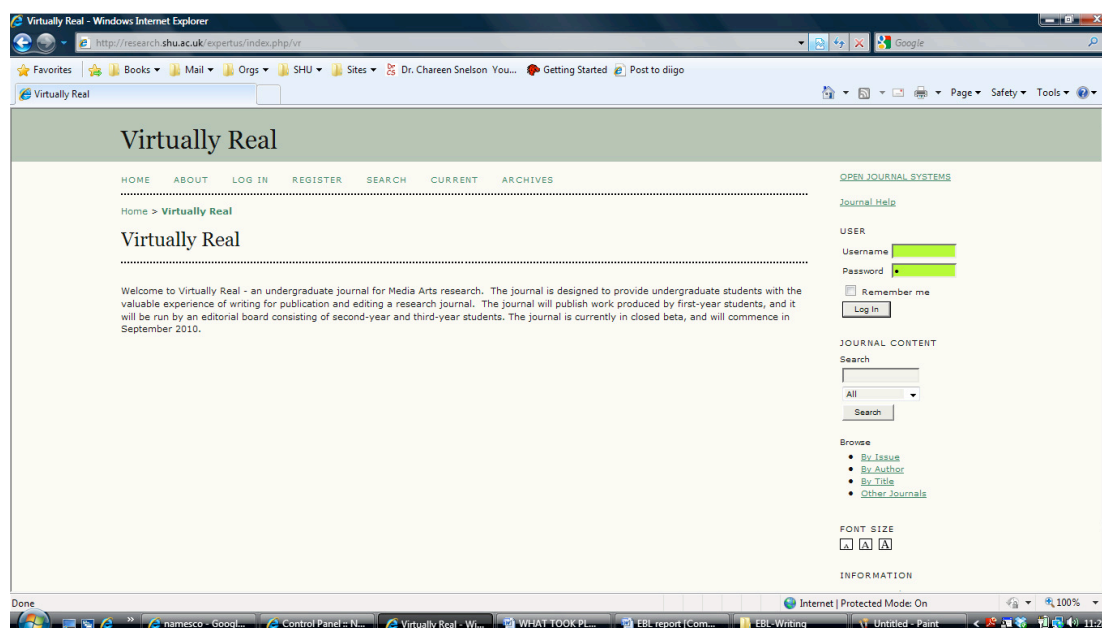
Data analysis and publication of results. The members of staff involved have completed preliminary analysis and have a rough overall picture, but the focus group data needs recoding and triangulating to achieve a finer and less subjective interpretation of the results. The two student assistants have been trained by staff to use NVivo software and are currently working on the new codes (deadline 1 July). The preliminary results were reported at the CPLA conference in June 2010, and we intend to submit a collaborative paper based on the new results, with one or both student assistants included as co-authors.

Producing a new audiovisual teaching resource. One of the offshoots of the project was an idea to engage with machinima as one of the new modes of digital media production, and to use this in future for educational purposes. This would involve the need for further funds, but the process has already been started within the current project. This summer the two student assistants will produce a draft script and a storyboard, and record some extracts using the World of Warcraft environment and screencapture and machinima software (FRAPS, MovieStorm, WoW-Model-Viewer and Windows Moviemaker). This work is planned to start on 1 July and finish on 15 July, at an appropriate milestone to be picked up and continued in future. The new resources would be used in teaching on the 'Research methods' module, simultaneously to illustrate common methodological issues, and to show students a concrete example of how creative audiovisual work can be used for theoretical purposes.

Conference participation. In 2011, Media Arts and Communication Department will host a conference. The current project team members are on the organising committee and will be using the insights gained in this project to fully involve undergraduate students into the conference as contributors. Using the experience of EBL reports and screencast production within level 4 modules, we will structure future assessment in the way that it can feed into a 'conference fringe', with audiovisual posters and research trailers produced by students displayed on University screens and ShuffleTV, themed issues of Virtually Real produced specifically for the conference, and student-led panels and debate sessions.

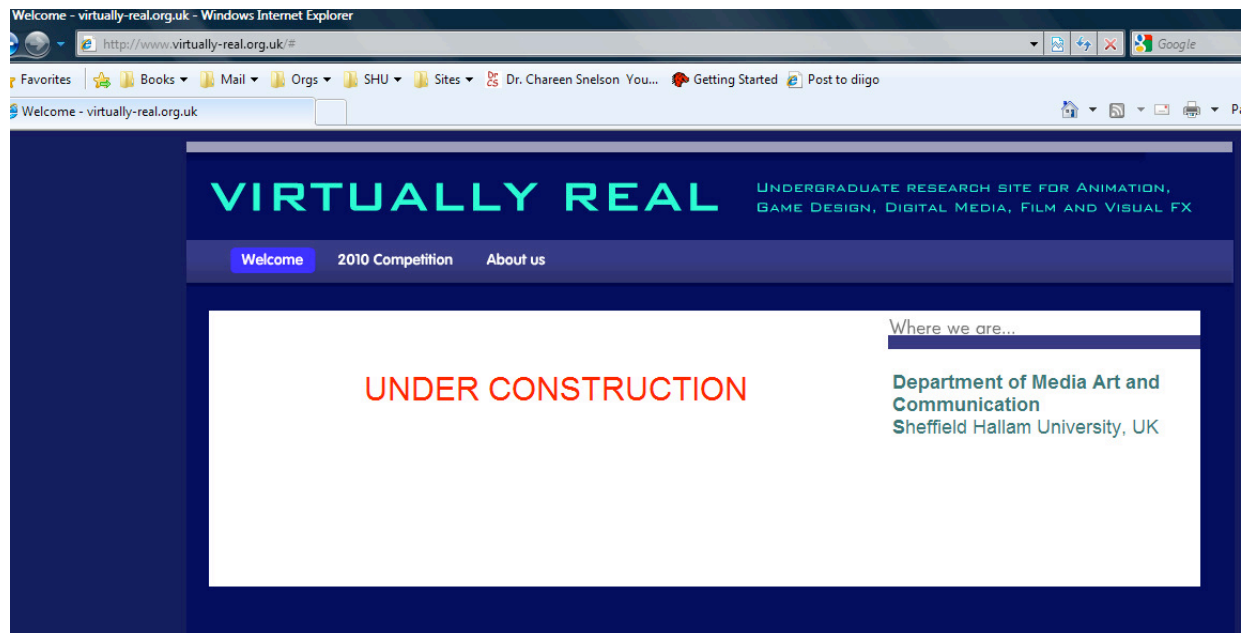
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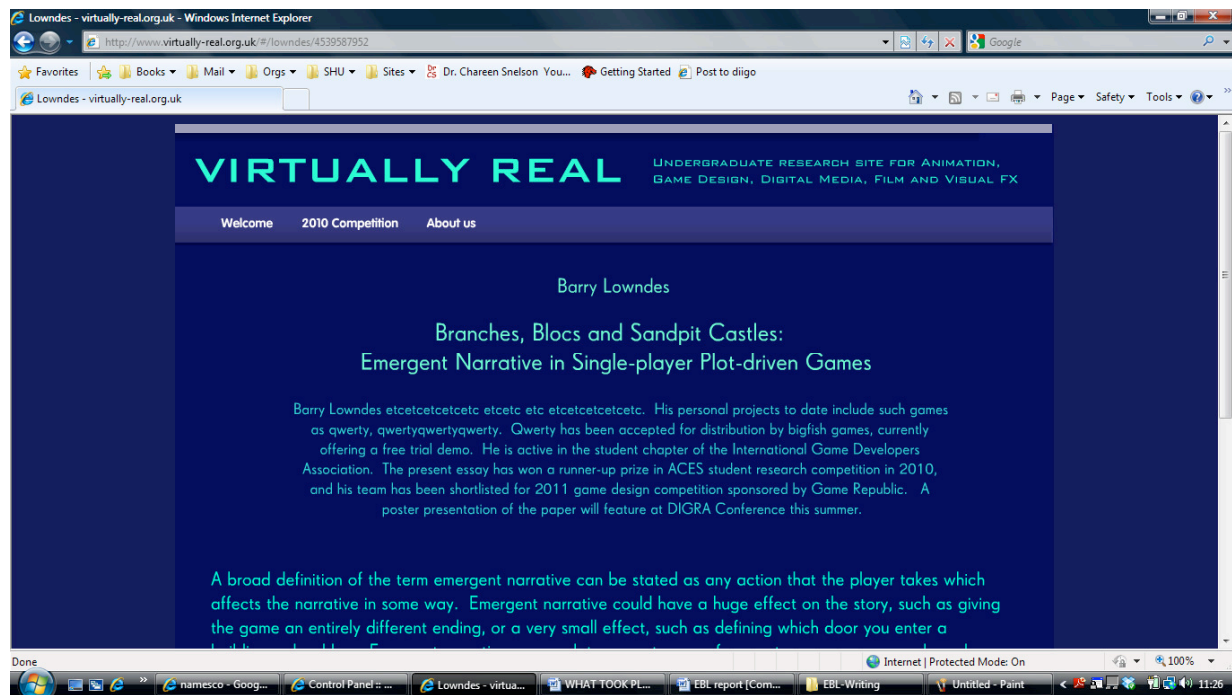
Appendix A – Virtually Real journal prototype



Appendix B– Virtually Real website prototype

www.virtually-real.org.uk





Appendix C - Preliminary results

Name	Sources	References
Advantages of Screenc	0	0
Visual	5	14
Use as introuctory b	4	5
Tangible product	2	2
Relaxed format	2	2
Practical	4	7
Not written	5	13
Not live	3	10
Multidisciplinary	2	2
Help focusing	5	16
Fun	3	6
Ease of reporting	2	2
Different from other	3	4
Ability to 'polish'	2	3

Questionnaire results (please note - some of the questions sound odd as they were reversed for statistical purposes, e.g. 'the screencast was not frustrating' was in the initial questionnaire phrased as 'the screencast was frustrating')

	Question	Count	Avrg.	S.Dev
a	Screencast can be useful for teaching and learning	71	4.06	0.71
b	I do not prefer doing an oral presentation of making a presentation	71	3.76	1.09
c	It was easy making a screencast	71	2.86	1.10
d	I have used the written brief as a guideline when making a screencast	69	3.87	0.84
e	Making a screencast helped me to reflect on my topic	71	4.03	1.01
f	I had the right tools for the screencast	71	4.15	1.01
g	Presenting my screencast in class was useful	64	3.39	1.12
h	I would not prefer writing an essay instead of making a screencast	71	3.44	1.32
i	I enjoyed the process of making the screencast	71	3.73	1.08
j	Watching screencasts from previous years was helpful	70	4.10	0.90
k	I am happy with the screencast I produced	70	3.77	0.90

l	Presenting my draft screencast in class was enjoyable	65	3.14	0.92
m	Making a screencast was not frustrating	71	2.99	1.16
n	I had no technical problems making a screencast	69	2.81	1.33
o	Watching other students' draft screencast was helpful	70	3.90	1.05
p	I am considering screencast for my final assignment	69	3.14	1.32
q	The screencast brief was clear	71	4.06	0.83
r	I advice the tutor to continue with screencasts as a final assignment option in the future	69	4.09	0.82
s	Diagnostic screencast should not be replaced by presentations	71	3.28	0.99
t	Diagnostic screencast should not be replaced by essay/report	71	3.54	0.97
u	Diagnostic screencast should be individual assessment	71	2.86	1.11
v	Diagnostic screencast should be given more weighting	69	3.43	0.99

Cheryl Middleton & Mike Gibson: DDEL & E-learning

Quantitative Questions

1. How many students and staff were involved? 37
2. How many student hours on the curriculum does your project occupy (e.g. a 20 credit module occupies about 200 hours of student time)? 200 hours

3. How many staff hours were involved in planning and how many in delivery 50 hours planning/ 90 hours

4. On how many different courses does your project impact? 4

5. What data do you have that demonstrates any benefit in: grades/marks, student retention, student attendance, student experience (e.g. feedback/questionnaires), recruitment? Please send any provisional analysed findings.

The average mark this year of 59 is comparable with the valid submission average of 58 from last year. However there were a number of very strong group work performances this year and also some well motivated and impressive individual submissions. This is evidenced by an increase in the number of firsts that were achieved this year. (6 more than last year)

Qualitative Questions

1. Have you done what you set out to do? Yes, resources have been planned, designed, developed and an EBL approach has been adopted for the delivery of a complete module at Final Year level. Student experiences in the use of EBL have been evaluated and staff blog recording reflections of process/project has been recorded.

2. In what way has your project evolved? Includes the use of collaborative synchronised and asynchronised technology to support an EBL process. The project now recognises the challenges and explores practicalities of the use of EBL at SHU. It has provided insight into how to evaluate the potential benefits for staff and students.

3. How have students perceived their own growth/lack of growth in learner autonomy? Please see questions 5, 6, 12, 35 of DDEL end of assessment evaluation for consideration of attributes of learner autonomy.

4. Do you feel that the curriculum has been enriched? Definitely in terms of consideration of group work and the challenge/variety of the learning process.

5. How has your legacy plan evolved? Planned future use on first year undergraduate module called Business Analysis in the Workplace, a new second year module called Business Modelling for Enterprise Systems plus ongoing research and development of DDEL to underpin effective group work and use of EBL.

Please feel free to add any additional comments about your project. We would be particularly interested in your views on staff development, the support you have received to carry out your project and its impact on future course developments.

Staff Development: Need to consider challenges in effective design and development of group working including how to select initial groups, how to organise groups to work

effectively, how to manage students/groups when difficulties are experienced such as non-attendance, imbalances with group contributions, assessment options such as different ways to carry out peer assessment.

It would also be useful to consider the use of the EBL approach in light of the technology/tools/services/environments that are emerging (within and external to SHU).

The project challenged the existing learning space and technology available to support EBL approach. In particular the support available for staff to facilitate collaborative learning and the learning space and technology available/emerging to facilitate this process. This is one potential innovative area that would be interesting to continue research/course developments in.

Developing and embedding effective practice in Enquiry Based Learning in the Faculty of Development and Society

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1. Background and Rationale

1.1 Project Outline

The focus of this Faculty based project was the use of Enquiry Based Learning (EBL) as a vehicle for introducing and embedding learner autonomy at module, course and programme levels. In planning this project, it was recognised that the practice of EBL or IBL (Inquiry Based Learning) is arguably quite widespread across the Faculty but may not always be identified as a distinct approach to learning and teaching in its own right. The first phase of the project therefore sought to identify existing EBL practice in all its diverse forms, across the Faculty and support specific activities across different Departments which had identified themselves as having an EBL flavour. This work was designed to impact on a wide range of staff and students with the long term aim of supporting the creation of a culture where EBL is widely recognised and practised and becomes embedded into the learning culture within the Faculty. By investigating existing pockets of EBL activity across a diverse range of subject areas, the aim was to work closely with existing champions of EBL within the Faculty to explore and draw together strands of existing practice. As the first phase of the Faculty project moved into the second phase (roughly approximating to year one and year two) the project developed its own interventions with a focus on supporting curriculum development. These included a pilot intervention within the course planning for the Real Estate Subject Group's revalidation of its undergraduate Real Estate programme; further support for the subsequent reviews of the undergraduate and postgraduate Built Environment programmes, as well as three Curriculum Advocacy projects, designed to support embedding of enquiry-based learning across courses through the validation process. The project commenced in September 2008, running for two years until the middle of 2010.

1.2 Defining EBL

Definitions of enquiry-based learning are varied. For some, enquiry-based learning is an extension of problem-based learning which, deriving from medical education in the 1960s, involves students in working collaboratively to identify and solve problems deriving from real-life scenarios (Duch et al, 2001). Re-casting this model as enquiry-based learning, Savin-Baden et al (2004) argue that students should engage in 'progressive enquiry' when faced with scenarios, arriving at deepening understandings through a cyclical process of enquiry. In this model, the intention is not to arrive at a single solution but an increasingly considered examination of the assumptions and implications associated with possible solutions. Others have seen enquiry-based learning as an overarching category which

includes a number of approaches based on constructivist models of learning. Fosey and McDonnell (2006), for example, identify six approaches associated with enquiry-based learning including: problem-based learning; action-based learning; reflective learning; experiential learning; group/peer/collaborative learning; and research-led teaching/learning. Recognising the varied ways that even these sub-categories are defined, the faculty project adopted an inclusive definition of enquiry-based learning which encompassed any activity involving student-centred learning driven by enquiry. This drew on a list of key characteristics of enquiry-based learning, developed by the University of Manchester "Enquiry-Based Learning CETL (CEEBL) which sees EBL as an approach to learning which "inspires students to learn for themselves, bringing a real research-orientated approach to the subject." CEEBL set out a helpful list of the characteristics of EBL:

- Learning is essentially student-centred, with an emphasis on group work and use of library, web and other information resources.
- Lecturers become facilitators, providing encouragement and support to enable the students to take responsibility for what and how they learn.
- Students reach a point where they are not simply investigating questions posed by others, but can formulate their own research topics and convert that research into useful knowledge.
- Students gain not only a deeper understanding of the subject-matter, but also the knowledge-development and leadership skills required for tackling complex problems that occur in the real world. (CEEBL, 2009)

These dimensions are usefully summarised by Roger Lloyd Jones in an internal paper which explored the earlier adoption of EBL across the History subject group between 2006 and 2008. He concluded that EBL needs to be seen as a partnership between tutor and student. This is not independent learning but interdependent learning where students can learn from each other. At the same time it helps tutors gain the confidence to wean students away from over-directed teaching and assessment, which tends to turn students into passive recipients of knowledge. Tutors are encouraged by greater participation and activity in seminars to offer a significantly more varied assessment portfolio and this is reflected in student work and performance. This requires a significant investment in support and 'scaffolding' including Blackboard as a means of supporting the partnership between students and tutors. Benefits claimed for EBL approaches can be set out as follows:

- Fundamentally, students are more engaged with the subject. Learning is perceived as being more relevant to their needs, thus they are enthusiastic and ready to learn.
- Students can expand on what they have learned by following their own research interests.
- EBL allows students to develop a more flexible approach to their studies, giving them the freedom and the responsibility to organize their own pattern of work within the time constraints of the task.
- The skills associated with enquiry-based learning, such as collaborative skills, project management and communication, are closely linked to the employability agenda.

- Self-directed learning not only develops key skills for postgraduate study, but also leads to original thought that contributes to larger research projects, papers and publications
- For teaching staff, developing an EBL module helps to develop an understanding of the learning process and the changing needs of students.

1.3 Aims, objectives and anticipated outcomes of the project

The broad aim of the project was to introduce student-centred learning approaches across a wide range of modules, thus providing enhanced learning opportunities for students and more explicit LTA engagement for module and course leaders. It aimed to impact on a large number of staff and students across different subject groups in terms of extending delivery practice to incorporate EBL and an enhanced student learning experience. In doing so, it aimed to achieve a closer alignment of academic and central services such as Learning and Information Services (LIS) as well as cross Faculty collaboration and dissemination supported by the CPLA CETL.

Objectives were identified that related to three inter-linked strands of activity: reviewing existing practice; sharing and developing practice; and curriculum development:

Reviewing existing practice

- identify and harness existing good practice as a means of extending EBL
- identify common barriers and opportunities associated with using EBL

Sharing and Developing Practice

- disseminate and share good EBL practice
- develop staff in their LTA practice with regard to EBL

Curriculum Development

- develop the curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment methods to support student development of learner autonomy & develop skills in students to become autonomous learners
- provide resources and support for Programme leaders, Course leaders, Module leaders to introduce EBL in the curriculum
- provide opportunities for course leaders/modules leaders to work closely with colleagues in LIS in developing EBL and embedding this within course design
- produce a methodology/ pedagogy of the development of learner autonomy in courses and programmes that course planning teams can use
- to collaborate across faculties in the development of EBL.
- to produce case studies in order to disseminate practice

2. Methodology

The faculty project was led by the faculty teaching fellow in enquiry-based learning from September 2008-July 2010. It built on an earlier phase of CPLA work which had focused on developing EBL in the History Subject Area. The project was supported by a steering group including representatives from the Faculty, Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA), Learning and Information Services (LIS) and chaired by the Head of Student Experience for the Faculty. This group met regularly throughout the two years of the project providing direction, reviewing progress and offering guidance on future developments. Project progress was monitored by the CETL management team through regular progress reports. In the first year, support was also provided by a 0.2 secondment for enquiry-based learning.

The project took place at a time when a series of major new developments were occurring in the faculty in relation to learning, teaching and assessment. Firstly, following re-structuring, departmental LTA leads were appointed at principal lecturer grade. Secondly, a new LTA strategy was produced which identified key LTA themes to drive developments across the faculty. Thirdly, the faculty began work on a Curriculum Development Resource designed to support teams in preparing for validation/re-validation by providing a series of prompts and case studies. This was planned as a key vehicle to promote embedding of the principles identified in the LTA strategy. The enquiry-based learning project aligned itself with these developments, feeding into the development of the strategy, working alongside departmental LTA leads and contributing to the Curriculum Development Resource. In order to complement work relating to these strategic initiatives, however, the project also sought to learn from and raise the profile of existing practice in the faculty relating to enquiry-based learning. As previous work has suggested (Easthope and Easthope, 2000), staff can become disengaged and disenfranchised when faced with top-down approaches to developing teaching and learning and the project aimed to engage colleagues in debates around enquiry-based learning which recognised their experience and expertise. As explored below, the project objectives were therefore operationalised in ways that both sought to recognise and build on existing practice and provide support through newly established faculty systems. These approaches, linked to the project's three strands, are described in the following three sections.

2.1 Reviewing enquiry-based learning across the faculty

The review of existing practice was designed to:

- capture existing and developing practice in enquiry-based learning across the faculty
- explore the barriers and opportunities that staff associated with this work.

In order to gain insights into work across different disciplines, interviews were conducted by the EBL teaching fellow and faculty secondee with 37 members of staff. This enabled insights into work across the different discipline areas represented by the 18 subject groups within the Faculty.

Interviews were carried out with 18 subject based LTA co-coordinators. It should be noted that during the course of the project the Faculty was re-structured from 18 discrete subject areas to 7 Departments. At this time, the role of LTA coordinator in each subject area was replaced by the new role of LTA Lead in each department. This introduction of this new role was designed to achieve a more strategic approach to the development of LTA. At the time of the review, however, the Faculty LTA coordinators had a key role in promoting and supporting small projects and in most subject areas were identified as the individuals best placed to provide local subject based knowledge.

Interviews were also conducted with the leaders of 13 small scale projects which had identified EBL as a main theme. These included five CPLA funded small-scale projects and a further six LTA projects funded by the Faculty. They were located within different levels and types of provision and included subjects framed by external constraints such as professional body and central government agency regulation. In addition, two further development interventions within the Real Estate and Primary and Early Years subject areas were also included. The interviews took place within the broader context of support for the projects; the intention was to provide direct support for project leaders whilst gathering feedback to inform conclusions about the adoption and development of EBL. In most cases two interviews took place; an initial fact finding interview and then about six months into the project a second interview to assess progress on the project.

Finally a number of interviews were carried out with other staff with more strategic roles across the Faculty and from central departments. These included representatives from the Learning Hubs, Learning and Teaching Institute, E-Learning Development Team and EBL projects in the faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering & Sciences (ACES). A full list of interviewees is set out in Appendix 2. In all, 37 staff were interviewed, including Faculty Teaching Fellows, Faculty LTA Coordinators, Small Scale Project Leaders, staff from the then Learning and Teaching Institute, HUB managers and others.¹

2.2 Curriculum Development

The lessons learned from this review of activity were used to support work with course planning teams to embed EBL and Learner Autonomy strategies into the process of course planning, review and validation. In order to support this work, two strategies were developed:

- Curriculum Development Projects
- Curriculum Development Resources.

¹ Numbers of interviews do not = 31 because some of the staff have dual roles such as HUBs manager and LTA coordinator or LTA coordinator and Small Scale Project Leader

2.2.1 Curriculum Development Projects

During the second year of the Project, funding was used to support course/programme planning teams from three departments in beginning the process of embedding enquiry-based learning across a course or programme. These were drawn from the Department of Architecture and Planning (Planning and Housing), Early Childhood and Inclusion (Early Years Foundation Degree) and Teacher Education (Primary and Early Years Programme). All were at the very early stages of preparing for validation or revalidation during 2010/2011. The intention was to provide support at this early stage in the course planning process to enable colleagues to consider new ways of structuring their courses before the work on writing programme and module specifications began. Due to the timing of the pre-validation work, the work on these projects took place in summer 2010 and the impact of this will not be felt until later in the validation process. Monitoring and support for these three programmes however will continue if funding permits into 2011/12. The outcomes of this work will be summarised and presented as a series of programme-based case studies to support similar curriculum development elsewhere in the Faculty.

2.2.2 Curriculum Development Resources

In order to achieve maximum impact from its work, the project aligned itself to an existing initiative within the Faculty, which aimed to produce an online Curriculum Development Resource for course planning teams. This involved working closely with the Faculty Lead (Curriculum Development). The resource includes prompt questions, online support and exemplar case studies of practice to support the course planning process across the Faculty. In contributing to this Faculty resource, the EBL project drew on knowledge gained about existing practice gained through the review of enquiry-based learning.

Two further activities were planned to provide further support for curriculum development:

- The LTA Faculty Intranet pages were reviewed and updated to include greater support for developing learner autonomy and EBL in particular
- All those involved in CPLA funded small-scale projects completed a full case study of their work. These were made available on the CPLA website and linked to the faculty LTA site.

2.3 Sharing and developing practice

In supporting staff development around enquiry-based learning, the strategy focused on recognising and building upon existing expertise. Strategies included:

- mentorship of small-scale projects
- supporting the development of learning communities
- other workshops and events.

2.3.1 Mentorship of small-scale projects

The EBL teaching fellow and secondee provided mentorship to those undertaking small-scale projects funded by the faculty or by CPLA. In doing so, they supported project leaders in reflecting on and developing their projects whilst providing practical guidance, for example, in reviewing draft conference papers and raising the profile of their work.

2.3.2 Supporting the development of learning communities

During the first year of the project, an EBL Special Interest Group (SIG) was established. This was one of a number of groups supported by the Faculty to develop key development themes (such as assessment and feedback, employability and internationalisation). It was intended that this would lead to the development of a community of practice including Faculty and other staff with an interest in enquiry-based learning. The development of the Community of Practice was further supported through a one day workshop designed to explore how the Community could be developed and supported and what its purpose would be – The Learning Common Room. In response to discussions held at this event, and in recognition of the difficulties associated with convening a group on a regular basis, a series of informal lunchtime themed networking events were held in 2009/10 to enable colleagues to meet together, discuss concerns and share examples of practice. The themes chosen reflected common foci that had arisen from the small scale projects and review of practice.

2.3.3 Other staff development work and events

Outcomes from the project were disseminated during internal and external conference presentations as well as informal staff development sessions and CPLA poster sessions and other events.

3. Outcomes

Much of this project has been developmental in nature and it will not be possible to begin to measure its impact until 2010/11. This section therefore reports on progress to date. Where possible, interim data is provided which relates to staff engagement.

3.1 Reviewing enquiry-based learning across the faculty

Details of the 13 discrete projects that formed the basis of the first year's analysis of Faculty Based Practice are set out in Appendix 1. The six CPLA sponsored projects were evaluated by the CETL and appear as full case studies on the CPLA web pages. Each of the Faculty sponsored projects was subject to its own internal evaluation. This evaluation is not replicated here. However, the key results of the review are detailed below.

3.1.1 Existing and developing practice in enquiry-based learning across the faculty

The analysis explored how enquiry-based learning is manifested in different contexts across the faculty, both within the small projects and the more established work described by the LTA co-ordinators. There are some consistent features across the wide range of examples encountered. These are:

- group work: opportunities are provided for dialogue between students, formal and informal mentoring and peer learning
- reflection: students are expected to reflect on their own performance and practice and this is often formally assessed
- employability: there seems to be little distinction to be drawn between overtly vocational programmes and those which might be seen more as pure subject disciplines. Most subject areas seem to be aware of the need to address the employability agenda and most make links with employers and professional bodies. EBL is seen as making a significant contribution to the development of employability skills
- support: colleagues emphasised the importance of providing support in developing the skills of reflection and critical review identified above, as well as need support to help them to be able to map the process of enquiry and support for transition
- formative feedback: progressive formative assessments are used often where they feed into final summative assessment for an individual module. This generates early feedback, which in turn needs to be sensitively constructive, but when done well can be an effective intrinsic motivator. Portfolios are often used as the vehicle to achieve this
- detailed planning: session by session planning enables a gradual process of development through the module using careful integration of classroom activities and assessment tasks.

Despite such common features, discussions suggested that there were differences in the role and significance of enquiry-based learning. Whilst different subject areas used similar approaches, they seemed to see the significance of these in different ways. It is unclear whether these differences are related to the nature of disciplines or the particular culture of course or module teams. Differences, however, related to both the focus of enquiry and its purpose. Regarding focus, there seemed to be a distinction between academic enquiry and professional/vocational enquiry. Regarding purpose, some seem to focus on the application of enquiry to achieve particular outcomes, whilst others focus on the process of enquiry. These distinctions are represented in figure 1 (Foci for enquiry-based approaches).

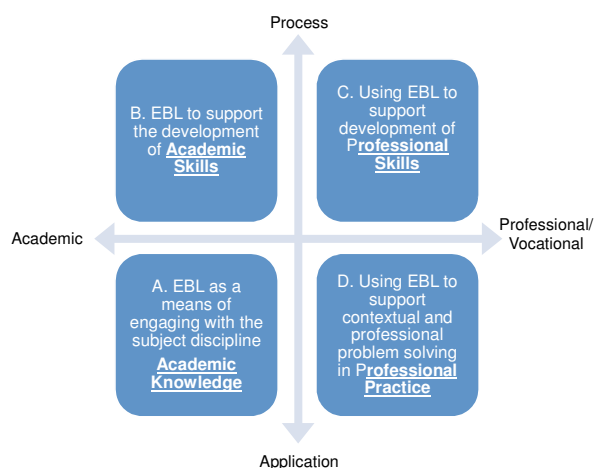


Figure 1: Foci for enquiry-based approaches

It is recognised that these distinctions are problematic. Many subject areas have a strong professional/vocational focus and would argue for a reflexive relationship between theory and practice, for example professional contexts may be used as the starting point for academic enquiry, which in turn informs understanding about that professional context. At the same time, however, these distinctions do reflect different possible emphases regarding the development of enquiry-based learning. For further details, see Appendix 4 which draws on examples of practice from across the Faculty to explore these different foci in greater detail.

Whilst noting the substantial collective experience of enquiry-based learning across the Faculty, it is worth noting that in many areas EBL exists as a discrete pocket of activity which is often module based. In these cases EBL may be practised discretely and may not be identified or labelled as such because it is not seen as in any way remarkable. There are exceptions. For example, in History there was a conscious effort at a more strategic approach at wider embedding of EBL methods through the piloting of a number of modules to develop an enquiry based approach to the whole subject area. Here there was a clear intention to use individual modules as exemplars to encourage more widespread adoption. This approach was more widely supported across the subject group and was also recognised by students as a distinct approach to learning. This approach seemed to be dependent on at least one individual champion working with the support of a number of other key subject group members. Similarly, in Architecture, EBL approaches appear to be widespread and well integrated within the established studio culture. This may in part reflect the way tutors themselves have been trained within their discipline area, and may be characterised by the existence of a rich pedagogy which recognises the need for exploration beyond the facts.

3.1.2 Barriers and opportunities associated with enquiry-based learning

The Interview data suggested a number of concerns related to the implementation of enquiry-based approaches. Some of these are based on perceptions that could be challenged, but they need to be acknowledged and addressed if EBL is to be more widely adopted. Importantly, the small projects revealed how some myths surrounding barriers had been successfully addressed within particular contexts. These are important findings because they do help to overcome some of the resistances to the development of more learner centred approaches. The concerns are summarised as follows:

- In places, there does appear to be a tension between vocationally based and academic disciplines, and concern was expressed that EBL approaches are promoted at some cost to the development of the discipline. Given however that employability is an increasing theme across all provision in the institution, it may be that EBL is a means of developing a range of academic and personal skills which are relevant to all disciplines and can be applied in diverse contexts.
- We encountered a widespread assumption that students require extrinsic motivation to provide incentives for engagement in learning activities. Promoters of EBL were able to challenge this with notable examples within modules, where the careful structuring of formative learning encourages a more intrinsic set of motivations for students.
- Some colleagues suggested that, in introducing EBL we need to recognise the need for a transition stage. This is focussed especially around assessment expectations. There is a perception that students need to be "de-schooled" and will happily regress into passivity if we do not offer a coherent strategy across programmes of learning.
- It appears to be well established that for enquiry based methods to be effective, students need high levels of support. In some cases this is achieved through highly structured delivery, supported for example by highly structured Blackboard sites. There is perhaps a danger that over structured and prescribed support may itself detract from the concept of autonomy, but freedom, creativity and flexibility need to be framed because students do need clear guidance on what is required of them.
- Reflection has been rightly identified as an important characteristic of EBL approaches, but this can be resisted by students who need support in developing this important skill.
- There is an assumption that EBL approaches require more development time than more traditional approaches. However, it may simply be the case that they require more upfront development, for example in providing appropriate levels of support.

In addition to these concerns relating to the process and value of enquiry-based learning, further concerns related to university-based systems and structures:

- Curriculum structures are based on the module as the main building block. This does create difficulty in adopting EBL approaches where there is a need to cross discipline boundaries
- There is some evidence that newer staff are more ready to adopt EBL approaches, but there is also a danger that where individuals are promoting module based projects they may not be sustainable.
- Some staff may resist more collective working practices because they fear some loss of personal autonomy and flexibility.

Tutors also highlighted a series of factors that could impact positively on the development of enquiry-based learning:

- Practical approaches to supporting transitions into and through enquiry-based learning in higher education and within specific disciplines
- The need to plan for progression in enquiry
- Consideration of the role of tutors and other practitioners in facilitating enquiry
- The need to focus explicitly on the skills of enquiry, for example question-setting, methods of enquiry, collaboration (learning to learn)
- The need to emphasise, promote and develop relationship between reflection and enquiry
- The need to problematise the relationship between enquiry, academic literacy and employability
- EBL needs to be established as soon as possible with students at level four and then used consistently across all subsequent levels.

3.2 Curriculum Development

The review of practice described above provided rich insights into the development of enquiry-based learning across the faculty and multiple examples and lessons to feed into curriculum development work. Much of this work is still ongoing and has yet to be fully evaluated. However, significant progress has been made as outlined below.

3.2.1 Mentorship of small-scale projects

The 13 discrete projects that formed the basis of the first year's analysis of Faculty Based Practice are set out in Appendix 3. The six CPLA sponsored projects were evaluated by the CETL and appear as full case studies on the CPLA web pages. Each of the Faculty sponsored projects was subject to its own internal evaluation.

An analysis in terms of the numbers of staff and students involved is set out in appendix 1 and 1a. Some numbers are taken from our own record of events whilst others are based on estimates provided by small-scale project leaders. The numbers refer to direct impact. So for example, the History programme shows 150 students even though the report on this project suggests that there may be a wider impact affecting all students involved in the whole

programme. For individual modules we also only record students who are current at the time of the EBL intervention and ignore subsequent cohorts, as we have no means of assessing future impacts. Finally, there will be some overlap in some areas: for example, some students shown in the History programme may also appear in the discrete projects based on individual modules and some staff may appear more than once in relation to projects and staff development activities.

In overall terms we estimate that the range of activities drawn into the wider Faculty based EBL project have impacted on some 170 staff and approximately 1100 students.

3.2.2 Curriculum Advocacy Projects

The Curriculum Advocacy projects are supporting work which has the potential to embed enquiry-based learning in innovative ways within three departments. As these projects are designed to support validation/re-validation work in 2010/11, work began at the end of the academic year 2009/10. Early evaluative feedback from participating programmes, however, has suggested that this intervention promises to have a significant impact on course design

Department of Teacher Education (Primary and Early Years Programme)

Funding for the Primary and Early Years Programme was used to release teachers, head teachers and school-based mentors to work alongside SHU tutors and students to explore the relationship between enquiry and professional practice. The day was used to explore how the strand of enquiry can be strengthened across the programme in order to support trainees in taking increased responsibility for their professional development and encourage innovation, creativity and problem-solving. The day was attended by 39 colleagues. Representative comments on the day included:

"Really inspiring day- exciting to be part of this team."

"The participation of individuals with real passion ensured vibrant professional discussion."

"An enjoyable thought-provoking day with the opportunity to discuss enquiry with others from a variety of professional backgrounds."

"Revitalisation of philosophy of high quality teaching."

"Inspiring and exciting - it's great to have several different experiences and viewpoints shared. There have been lots of exciting ideas raised for future development."

"Stimulating, challenging, exciting - the beginning of a community of enquiry."

"Wonderful opportunity to reflect on what we are about - very important to have a strong identity in a climate of ever changing curricula and demands."

Colleagues were particularly enthusiastic about the importance of developing enquiry across the programme, identifying various ways in which an increased focus on enquiry may strengthen the programme:

- The chance to develop reflective creative teachers who will develop creative reflective and involved pupils keen to explore learning for life
- Leads to a stronger teaching force adaptable to change and able to sustain quality teaching
- Students may be given opportunity to take more control of their learning and follow pathways personal to them
- Enquiry approach essential for the development of professional reflective teachers who are learning continually
- To empower learner through a process of learning through ownership

A working group has been established to use these discussions to develop a series of possible recommendations and curriculum models to inform the re-validation process in 2010/11. This will inform the design of the following courses: BA (Hons) Early Years Education with QTS; BA (Hons) Primary Education with QTS; PGCE Early Years with QTS; PGCE Primary Education with QTS.

Department of Early Childhood and Inclusion (Early Years Foundation course)

The Early Years Foundation course is taught collaboratively by tutors at SHU and in local FE colleges. Colleagues have used funding to release FE tutors to work alongside SHU tutors to explore ways of embedding enquiry across the curriculum to achieve greater levels of student autonomy and manage transitions to higher education.

An away day held in June 2010 was used to investigate approaches to enquiry-based learning and consider ways in which this could be used to support learning across FE and HE contexts. Feedback from this event was extremely positive. Participants felt that the event had been a significant development in partnership working and were enthused by the possibilities for using enquiry-based learning. Sample feedback comments include:

"It provided a deeper understanding of the purpose and the value of the process rather than the end product to develop vital learning skills."

"Very interesting EBL session – seeing it being incredibly useful at levels 3, 4 & 5."

"I have gained a much better understanding of enquiry based learning."

All committed to trialling enquiry-based approaches in existing modules during Autumn 2010 and then reviewing how such approaches can be embedded within the course. Clear procedures were established for taking this forward.

Department of Architecture and Planning (Planning and Housing)

Funding for an away day was used in Planning and Housing to support early discussions about the re-validation of undergraduate provision. Staff arrived at key principles related to ensuring provision across the programme, including greater attention to key skills and support for developing research. This was seen as extremely useful in opening up debate and establishing an agenda for the revalidation process. As the programme leader commented:

"There was some very useful sharing of ideas which helped to identify the commonality across the 4 subject areas. We still have a lot of work to do but we are definitely making progress."

Initial evaluation of this work will be completed in the spring of 2011 upon completion of the next round of validations, identifying how the project work has impacted on the re-design of the three courses/programmes. This evaluation will inform three case studies exploring the processes of embedding enquiry-based learning and the lessons used to inform further curriculum development work in this area. The impact of any programme changes on the student experience, however, will not be known until the first cohorts of students have completed the programmes. Monitoring, evaluation and review will therefore be ongoing.

3.3 Curriculum Development Resources

Findings from the review of existing practice in enquiry-based learning have been used to support the development of a series of generative questions and associated prompts which are now included as part of the Curriculum Development Resource. A series of case studies have been developed to illustrate possible responses to these questions. Further case studies are under development.

A number of resources have been developed as a direct result of the Faculty EBL project. These include links to the small-scale projects, case studies, evaluations, interviews with students, papers and internal and external links. These can be found on the pages of the LTA intranet site. These can be found at: <https://staff.shu.ac.uk/fds/student/lta/learning/stpa/eb1.asp>

The Curriculum Development Resource is still under development and has not yet been subject to evaluation.

3.4 Sharing and Developing Practice

3.4.1 Supporting the development of learning communities

The Faculty-funded EBL Special Interest Group had two initial meetings attended by 15 staff. However, given departmental changes and some staff confusion about the nature and purpose of the SIG, the EBL SIG was eventually abandoned. The review of existing practice however did help to identify a series of colleagues within the faculty who were actively engaged in developing enquiry-based learning. In order to review progress to date and explore how Faculty staff would like to see support developing in the future, a "Learning Common Room" event was held in June 2009 towards the end of the first year of the EBL project. This was attended by 25 staff and provided an opportunity to share approaches to using enquiry-based learning and discuss ways forward in developing networks amongst staff to develop practice and share concerns. One of the main outcomes of this workshop was the development of a series of themed lunchtime networking events.

Seven networking events were held during the year to provide an informal opportunity for sharing current practice and discussion of issues related to the promotion of learner autonomy and enquiry-based learning. Themes reflected key strands of work developed through small-scale projects and issues that had arisen during the review of practice, focusing upon:

- Encouraging students at level 4 to engage as autonomous learners.
- Using problem-based/inter-disciplinary learning to promote student engagement
- Providing opportunities for collaborative and peer-supported learning
- Promoting critical thinking and reflection through discussion
- Evidencing Enquiry

Staff comments on the sessions suggested that these events had provided a valuable forum for exchange of ideas: one found them to be *"very informative, insightful and useful"*. They were seen as a way of exploring and sharing and practice across and beyond the Faculty: *"a great opportunity to really begin to examine the premise of learner autonomy in our institution"*. The informal, open-ended format of these events was felt to be particularly useful: *"excellent opportunity for changing mode, discussion and reflection and learning with colleagues."*

These networking events were attended by a variety of colleagues: overall, 32 different members of staff attended, including 3 from the Learning and Teaching Institute, 3 from CPLA, 3 from central services and tutors from 15 subject areas. This approach was less ambitious than the original plans to develop the kind of learning community envisaged by the original SIG and the Learning Common Room event. However, it did help generate connections between colleagues working in different parts of the faculty: one commented on the opportunity to, *"find out about other work in D&S and identify synergies /people we need to be talking to."*

3.4.2 Other staff development activities

Other staff development activities have included the following:

- The EBL Teaching Fellow was invited to attend a Real Estate away day to run a workshop on Authentic Learning. This was used to focus on the application of practically based learning and assessment activities and generated a series of examples of authentic learning used by a wide range of staff.
- Findings from elements of the project were also shared through the LTI lunchtime Practitioner Seminar series during a workshop held in November 2009. This was attended by a range of staff from across the institution and provided an opportunity to explore emerging themes and ideas from the project within a fairly informal setting.
- A discussion paper was produced for the Professional Development Programme in Education based on interviews with tutors on the programme. This explored different tutors' perspectives on the role of enquiry and was used to generate discussions about teaching approaches and progression.
- Findings from the project have been explored and reported in a number of workshop and conference presentations (see appendix 5).

3.4.3 Curriculum Development Resources

Two further activities are planned to provide further support for curriculum development:

- The LTA Faculty Intranet pages have been reviewed and updated to include greater support for developing learner autonomy and EBL in particular.
- All those involved in CPLA funded small-scale projects completed a full case study of their work. These were made available on the CPLA website and linked to the faculty LTA site.

4. The Broader Impact Of The Project

4.1 Impact on Faculty strategy

It is difficult to isolate the impact of the project itself on the culture in the Faculty as this is only one of a number of LTA related initiatives during 2008-2010. In one sense the only way to evaluate any intervention in learning teaching and assessment is how this impacts on the learning environment. This is complex and is influenced by so many different factors that it is difficult to tease out the impact of any one different initiative. The fact that this project aligned itself specifically with broader faculty developments makes it particularly difficult to isolate its impact. What is clear however is its relationship to the development and operationalisation of the Faculty LTA strategy, which contains a clear commitment to the development of learner autonomy. Learner autonomy has remained central to the four enhancement themes embedded into the LTA strategy, most notably in supporting 'student-centred and active approaches to learning.' Given that this strategy will continue to be

promoted as the key driver shaping the development of curricula across the Faculty for the next four years, the commitment to enquiry-based learning would seem to be embedded and sustainable.

4.2 Continuation plans

Against the current uncertainty about future funding it is difficult to make predictions about how the Faculty will be able to continue to support the development of EBL and the development of learner autonomy, even though this remains a major part of the Faculty LTA strategy. Early indications are that some Faculty based TESS (Teaching Enhancement and Student Success) funding will be available, but it is unlikely that this will be used to for further continuation of the funding for a Faculty Teaching Fellowship. This was in any event a temporary appointment and was part funded by the CPLA CETL and was always planned to end in August 2010.

Even against this background, learner autonomy has been identified as a key Faculty LTA priority and is embedded within the Faculty LTA strategy for 2010-2014. This means that continued support for the development of enquiry-based learning will take place through the Curriculum Development initiative which ensures that 'student-centred and active approaches to learning' remain a key focus for consideration in course planning review and validation. Case study materials and generative questions relating to learner autonomy are now established within the LTA intranet pages for the Faculty and these will continue to be developed and maintained as part of the Faculty's ongoing commitment to the support of curriculum development. Case studies based on the three Curriculum Development projects will provide exemplars of the development of enquiry-based learning across courses to supplement those case studies that provide exemplars of practice at module level. Other faculty strategic developments, such as the renewal of peer-supported review and the development of institutional frameworks relating to professional standards and graduate attributes, offer further opportunities to embed enquiry-based learning more firmly within policy and practice across the faculty. Moreover, the acquisition of employability skills has been identified as one of the key objectives for all students in higher education. The development of learner autonomy is very clearly aligned to this agenda and the skills and attributes supported are very much those which are linked to the employability agenda.

At the same time, as findings from the review of practice illustrate, enquiry-based learning is manifest in different ways across the faculty and colleagues have varied understandings of the challenges and opportunities it offers. It would seem therefore that any continuing funding for this area should support more tailored support for individual subject areas and draw on the considerable expertise and experience of colleagues from across the faculty. In the absence of a Teaching Fellow with an explicit overriding EBL role, it will be the responsibility of the individual Departmental LTA Leads to promote this along with the other main themes contained within the LTA strategy, through interventions in the course planning and validation process.

If resources permit we should explore the development of a robust framework for gathering objective, reliable and in depth qualitative data on the student experience and extend this to more explicit involvement of students in the development of EBL.

5. Conclusions

The multi-stranded approach to this project has enabled work to progress on a number of levels: at module level, course and programme level, and in terms of strategic development. Whilst the embeddedness of this approach has made it difficult to analyse the precise impact of project work, initial evaluation would suggest that it has provided foundations on which future developments can build. Re-designed courses, curriculum development resources, and emerging networking opportunities amongst staff offer the potential to support continued work in the future.

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D&S Appendix 1

Impact of discrete projects included in the Faculty Project

Title	Main Contact	Subject Group	Project Ref	Staff Nos.	Student Nos.
Disciplinary Investigations	Ann Robinson	Criminology	CPLA 1	7	80
Independent Learning Module	Craig Paterson	Criminology	D&S 1	5	25
PCASO dissemination project	Mark Boylan Terry Hudson	Education	D&S 2		
On line journal for student projects	Sue Drew	Education	D&S 3	10	100
Promoting EBL using the Philosophical Enquiry Approach	Fufy Demissie	Education Primary Early Years	CPLA 2	5	50
Developing Enquiring Teachers through Peer Group Learning	Mark Boylan	Education Secondary	CPLA 3	10	70
Developing Student Autonomy thorough the Production of a Public history resource	Emma Robertson	History	CPLA 4	5	100
RiT & EBL exploring the potential	Emma Robertson	History	D&S 4	5	100
Introduction to Academic Skills	Cathy Morse	Law	CPLA 5	8	250
Innocence Project	Colleen Smith	Law	D&S 5	1	6
Introducing EBL at the course planning stage	Jill Fortune	Real Estate	FS 1	8	60
Students as producers and co deliverers	Emma Heron	Sociology	D&S 6	5	20
Dissertation conference	Cathy Burnett	Teacher Education	D&S	6	170

D&S Appendix 1a:

Impact of additional activities

	Staff Nos.	Student Nos.
Real Estate PG Authentic Learning Workshop	10	25
Networking Events	32	
Staff Development Seminar	10	
EBL in History	7	200
SIG Meetings	15	
Learning Common Room Launch	25	4

D&S Appendix 2

List of interviewees

Name	Role
Nicky Harris	Student Union
Alison Twells	Teaching Fellow
Angela Maye Banbury	LTA Coordinator
Ann Robinson (2)	Small Project Leader
Cathy Burnett	Faculty Seconded
Caroline Bath	LTA Coordinator
Julia Myers	LTA Coordinator
Tansy Hardy	LTA Coordinator
Helen Atkinson	LTA Coordinator
Ros Garrick	Principal Lecturer, co-ordinator of interdisciplinary project
Alison Ryan	Course leader
Cathy Morse	LTA Coordinator/ Small Project Leader
Chris Hill	LTA Coordinator
Colleen Smith (2)	Small Project Leader
Craig Paterson (2)	Small Project Leader
Eamonn Cronnelly	LTA Coordinator
Emma Heron	Learning Hub Manager & LTA Coordinator
Emma Robertson (2)	LTA Coordinator & small project leader
Fufy Demissie	Small Project Leader
Jill Fortune	LTA Coordinator/ Small Project Leader
Paul Helm	Asst Director - QE & Student Success
Ranald Macdonald	LTI
Julie Evans	Learning Hub Manager
Perry Else	LTA Coordinator
Rob Furby	LTA Coordinator
Sue Bamford	E learning Development Team
Sue Parkinson	LTA Coordinator
Graham Holden	Head of Academic Practice LTI
Sabine Little	Head of CILASS Sheffield University
Tom Rutter	LTA Coordinator
Sue Drew	Small Project Leader
Louise Thorpe	Head of Academic Innovation LTI
Mike Bramhall	ACES Head of LTA
Allan Norcliffe	ACES Faculty EBL project lead
Rebecca Hodgson	LTA Coordinator
Mark Boylan	LTA Coordinator
Roger Lloyd-Jones	CPLA CETL AD
Will Reader	LTA Coordinator

D&S Appendix 3

Details of small projects

Project Ref	Title	Summary
CPLA 1	Disciplinary Investigations: An EBL Approach to Engaging Learner Autonomy at level 6	This project aimed to use an enquiry-based approach to enhance the partnership between students and staff in the discipline of criminology (Brew, 2006). The objectives of this were as follows: • Create an investigation that provides an opportunity for students to articulate key issues and a future direction for the discipline. • Use an enquiry based model (Wood, 1994) to plan for student learning within the module so as to build engagement and motivation.
D&S 1	Independent Learning module Special Police Constable Vocational Education work with SY Police.	This project was concerned with the development of a module to provide students with the opportunity to work in policing as reflective practitioners. This coincided with an opening up of police training to HE and getting students working as Special Constables.
D&S 2	PCASO dissemination project	This project aimed to review and synthesise and disseminate internally and externally existing knowledge on collaborative learning and assessment that had been developed through previous development in the programme.
D&S 3	On line journal for student projects	This project aimed to set up an on line journal where students could publish reports produced for a final project. The aim was to provide an added incentive for producing high quality outputs, provide an ongoing resource for students and staff, raising the profile of the subject group and providing a prototype for other subject areas.
CPLA 2	Promoting EBL using the Philosophical Enquiry Approach	This was a collaborative project across two subject groups (ASECC and Primary /early years), involving 5 tutors. The aim of the project was to help tutors trial an enquiry based approach in their teaching to encourage student engagement and participation.

CPLA 3	Developing Enquiring Teachers through Peer Group Learning	This project aimed to develop cross subject approaches to developing ITT students' enquiry skills through collaborative practice across subjects. It also aimed to extend the use of independent peer group study and to make existing uses more effective.
CPLA 4	Developing Student Autonomy through the Production of a Public history resource	This project aimed to develop, implement and support an innovative piece of assessment in which students autonomously produce a public history resource (e.g. website). The specific objectives included: • To generate networks between staff, and partnerships between staff and students, which enhance student autonomy. • To identify, monitor and evaluate the emerging skills (subject-specific and generic) of the students. • To liaise with the LTI to develop appropriate levels of IT/media skills for tutor and students.
D&S 4	RiT & EBL exploring the potential	This initiative aimed to introduce students in level 4 to research informed teaching and enquiry based learning in a supportive environment, particularly through the Making History 1 module and thus to encourage students to make the transition into university level work.
CPLA 5	Introduction to Academic Skills	The project was aimed at Level 4 Law students and consisted of a voluntary set of online 'exercises' or activities together with suggested 'model' approaches to be offered to students, in an easily accessible format, from the point at which they become Unconditional Firm in the Admissions process. The proposal is in line with other developments in Orientation within the University, in recognising the increasing importance of establishing positive and engaged relationships with these students from this early point.
D&S 5	Innocence Project	The innocence project at SHU forms part of the UK network for Innocence Projects (INUK) which provides support and training to members. The project is offered as an assessed module for 6 undergraduate students who work on a real alleged miscarriage of justice case where the client is in prison serving a life sentence.

FS 1	Introducing EBL at the course planning stage	This project examined an attempt to introduce EBL through a cross disciplinary project at level 4 using, among other things, PDP as a promotional vehicle.
D&S 6	Students as producers and co deliverers	This project explored the possibility of students becoming producers of teaching material.
FS2	Dissertation conference	A conference was integrated into the Educational Enquiry module for BA QTS primary/early years students. Students presented the results of their dissertations at a conference including key note lectures from practising teachers focusing on enquiry and their professional role.

D&S Appendix 4

Manifestations and possibilities in Enquiry-Based Learning

The following uses examples from different subject areas to illustrate the four different ways in which enquiry is integrated into courses:

- Academic knowledge: EBL as a means of engaging with the subject discipline
- Focusing on the academic skills of enquiry
- Using EBL to support the development of professional skills
- Using EBL to support contextual and professional problem-solving in professional practice

Academic knowledge: EBL as a means of engaging with the subject discipline

The most commonly cited example of student-led academic enquiry was the individual dissertation or final year project. The foci for such projects varied considerably, from those which built upon empirical or secondary research to those which had a greater emphasis on practitioner enquiry or personal reflection. Some areas, however, have focused upon embedding opportunities for academic enquiry throughout their courses.

In History, the role of enquiry-based learning has been strengthened throughout undergraduate courses. For example, at level 4, tutors generate enthusiasm for research and model the process of historical enquiry through presenting summaries of their own research. Students then work in groups to investigate related topics and return with questions for tutors. In a level 5 undergraduate History module, focusing on developing a regional identity through creating public history resources, students worked in teams to investigate an aspect of local history and draw from this to produce a film that can be used as a community history resource.

Whilst all LTA co-ordinators felt that enquiry was an important dimension of their courses, some LTA co-ordinators saw enquiry as central to the nature of the subject. In History and Secondary Mathematics, for example, the subject was not only supported by enquiry but about enquiry. For these colleagues, early work with students necessarily involves challenging students' prior assumptions about the nature of the subject itself. Enquiry-led approaches are used to help students in re-define their perceptions of the subject and see knowledge as contingent rather than fixed:

In undergraduate Secondary Mathematics courses, the focus is on enquiry and collaboration and all assignments involve enquiry-led project work. For example, students on the second year of an undergraduate course design a mathematics investigation for their peers and guide them through this.

In other areas, attempts are being made to raise the status of student enquiry through providing audiences for outcomes. The PCET online student journal project, for example, is a publication outlet for completed student projects, whilst students on primary and early years education courses present the outcomes of their final year dissertations to peers at a half-day conference.

These examples suggest that academic enquiry, or enquiry related to a subject or discipline, earns its place within courses in two main ways. Firstly, it is associated with those activities that involve students in identifying areas of interest for independent investigation. Secondly, it has a more embedded relationship with the subject: enquiry is not just a means of engaging with the subject but is part of the very nature of the subject itself. In each case, tutors face challenges in both tackling prior assumptions and supporting the development of skills and attitudes to support enquiry.

Focusing on the academic skills of enquiry

A number of teams have recently strengthened the level of structure and support for enquiry skills across programmes.

In TESOL, there is a greater emphasis on the process of research within the distance-learning only postgraduate route. This is supported in various ways, including increased peer support via a virtual learning environment and the introduction of self-study activities on research methods to support the induction to enquiry at Masters level.

In Criminology, enquiry based learning is used to support the Contemporary Issues in Criminology module. Students are expected to demonstrate increasing autonomy by undertaking research into chosen topic areas. The results of this research are formatively assessed and then this builds into a summatively assessed portfolio. Feedback and peer review are used extensively and the module is highly structured using the Blackboard virtual learning environment in order to focus on the ongoing development of enquiry skills.

In a number of modules the development of enquiry skills is addressed explicitly such as:

In Sociology and Politics, as part of the Global and Local Module, students are encouraged to contribute resources and formulate their own research projects.

In a Psychology module a poster exercise on mental illness is used as the focus for the development of academic and personal skills, especially information skills. Having commented on and explored assessment criteria for themselves, students investigate high profile celebrity cases (e.g. Stephen Fry) and share information with peers through the poster medium.

In law pre-enrolment students are encouraged to prepare for the transition into HE by undertaking Blackboard based activities to develop their generic academic skills such as reading critically.

Others have worked within existing course structures to explore alternative modes of delivery, designed to support students in developing the skills of enquiry.

In foundation degree for early childhood professionals, a community of enquiry approach was used during induction to engage new students in asking effective questions and critical thinking. An image was used by students as a stimulus for identifying, refining and evaluating questions that then formed the starting point for discussion. Importantly this activity was open-ended and only loosely related to the content of the module. Consequently students felt confident in contributing and could focus more closely on the process of enquiry. As students began work related more closely to module content, they referred back to this activity and were encouraged to use similar approaches within focused academic inquiry, e.g. investigating the ideas within academic papers in the same way that they had done with the image.

In other contexts, strategies were used to encourage students to challenge assumptions about knowledge and enquiry they may have brought from other courses. In postgraduate courses of initial teacher education, for example, students may have used very different methods of enquiry to those they use when researching classroom practice. Again, induction methods activities are used to support such transitions:

During induction week for Primary and Early Years Postgraduate Certificates of Education, students work collaboratively to examine and critique a series of papers related to the role of talk in learning. They investigate the nature of constructivist approaches to learning, through reflection on both the papers and their own experience of working together, and generate questions to pursue through reading and early classroom observations. They also consider the kinds of research methods that have informed findings in the papers and later construct their own investigation into their use of talk in the classroom.

Using EBL to support the development of professional skills

In some areas, enquiry-based learning is used to encourage the development of the kinds of skills students will need in the workplace. Enquiry here seems related to problem-solving: investigating, sorting and synthesising information in order to devise professionally appropriate solutions to real-life situations.

In TESOL, students analyse the linguistic achievements and difficulties of a selected ESOL learner and make recommendations for future study based on their linguistic analysis.

Within this professionally relevant activity, the skills of enquiry are directly relevant to those students will need in their teaching career. Whilst such activities involve individual enquiry, others involve collaboration.

In initial teacher education, PGCE students work in learning groups that meet on a regular basis to collaborate on investigations relating to aspects of their professional practice. Students are given timetabled slots for this activity and encouraged to review and reflect on both the outcomes and process of this collaborative working. Whilst tutors specify the focus of some investigations, students identify others in response to professional needs.

In this example, support for collaborative work is integrated into planning for the module, both in terms of time and supported reflection and evaluation of the process.

Using EBL to support contextual and professional problem-solving in professional practice

A number of subject areas have recently explored the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration around enquiry, in which students from different disciplines work together to tackle a problem with professional relevance.

A current project involving HWB and D&S has designed case study materials to be used as stimuli in an enquiry-based learning project involving students from a variety of courses across both faculties (e.g. law, social work, health, early childhood, initial teacher education, etc.). Students from different courses will adopt the roles of different professionals, work collaboratively to consider how best to support the needs of children, and afterwards reflect upon the effectiveness of the process and their contribution.

In History, developmental work is ongoing to produce a virtual museum. Once the museum is complete, there are plans for History students to work alongside those from other disciplines, e.g. education, conservation, business, urban regeneration, design, to design, create, curate, design and promote an exhibition in the museum.

In Built Environment property management and technical architecture students work together to create a solution to the problem of how to realise development of a specific city centre site, usually within an international context.

In these kinds of activities, students must not only search for information to address problems but work alongside others and explore situations from a variety of perspectives. Analogous to professional, commercial or industrial contexts, colleagues see these activities as having positive implications for motivation, engagement and employability.

In these examples, personal and/or professional development seems related to the acquisition or application of particular skills and knowledge. The significance of enquiry therefore is in investigating a particular context in which such skills and knowledge can be applied. In some areas, however, personal or professional development is itself seen as a process of enquiry; the focus is on using enquiry to support critical reflection on personal or professional practice. Such work encourages students to problematise themselves, their practice and the contexts in which they are placed. This approach is particularly apparent in professional courses where the link between reflection and professional development is explicit and students are continually required to reflect on their practice and assess their own progress against externally prescribed standards.

In Playwork, students begin by identifying their own needs in relation to personal and professional development, then using these as the starting point for asking questions and critical analysis. This approach draws from an increased focus on critical analysis during the course, as evidenced within their professional development portfolio.

In Early Childhood Studies, the work of Glenda MacNaughton has been used to support thinking about how best to support the development of students as 'critically knowing early childhood professionals'. Tutors have worked with students using enquiry-led approaches to support them in adopting a critical stance to their practice and thinking. The emphasis on enquiry here is aimed at asking questions about the assumptions underpinning established practices.

The Community Policing module in Criminology is a supported independent learning module which makes extensive use of reflective practice. Students work in conjunction with South Yorkshire Police on a short placement which is partly designed to challenge students' perceptions about the realities of practical policing.

URS uses profile assessment across the subject area where the rigidity of course 'components' has been replaced by a more flexible menu of 'elements'. This involves the facilitation of critical reflection with a strong vocational dimension and employer and professional body links.

These examples suggest that, just as the focus of academic enquiry seems to vary, so there seem to be different manifestations of professional enquiry. Professional/vocational enquiry may be outward looking, providing students with real-life opportunities to develop the skills needed to solve problems in professional, industrial or commercial contexts. Alternatively it may be more inward-looking, used to support critical reflection on personal/professional development.

D&S Appendix 5

Summary of dissemination activities

Internal papers and publications

Askham, P. (2009), 'Authentic and Simulated Learning in the Built Environment', Staff Learning and Teaching Institute lunchtime seminar, Sheffield Hallam University.

Askham, P. and Burnett, C. (2009), 'The role of enquiry in the Faculty of Development and Society: manifestations and possibilities'. Available at:

<https://staff.shu.ac.uk/fds/student/lta/learning/stpa/eb1.asp>

Burnett, C. (2009), 'Promoting Enquiry Through the Professional Development Programme', internal discussion paper.

Lloyd-Jones, R. (2008), 'Disseminating Good Practice through Learner Autonomy and Enquiry Based Learning on a History Programme', in Moore, I., Elfving-Hwang, J., Garnett, K. and Corker, C. (Eds.), *Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy Case Studies: Volume 1*, (Sheffield: Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy) ISBN: 978-1-897851-17-3.

Internal events

The Special Interest Group was provisionally renamed "The Learning Common Room". This was launched in June 2009 at a workshop held at the EEF Centre on Broomgrove Road, Sheffield. Details available at:

<http://learningcommonroom.wordpress.com/2009/06/15/eb1-learning-common-room-workshop-june11th-2009/>

December 2009-April 2010: Series of networking events held in Faculty of Development and Society to support networking and dissemination of practice between CPLA project members and other Faculty members. (Linked to themes: promoting learner autonomy at level 4; problem-based learning and inter-disciplinary learning; peer mentoring and collaboration; facilitating critical thinking; evidencing enquiry).

External events and conferences

Askham, P., 'Enquiry Based Learning: Creating a Community of Practice', Paper presented at Learning Through Enquiry Alliance conference, University of Reading 2009.

Askham, P., 'Authentic and Simulated Learning in the Built Environment', Paper presented at the All Ireland Symposium for Built Environment Education, University of Ulster, Belfast,

2010.

Askham, P. and Burnett, C., 'Tell me what I need to know: learning to address the challenge of changing student expectations', Paper presented at Higher Education Academy Conference, University of Manchester 2009.

Askham, P. and Elfving-Hwang, J., 'Enquiry Based Learning: Creating a Community of Practice', Paper presented at the PROBEL Conference, Tampere, Finland, 2009.

Burnett, C., 'Promoting Learner Autonomy', invited presentation at Personalised Integrated Learner Support CETL final conference, Open University, Milton Keynes, 19 March 2010.

Demissie, F., Burnett, C., Haynes, M. and Sharpe, S., "'Now I feel like I am at university": using a community of enquiry approach to promote engagement and academic literacy amongst undergraduate students', Paper presented at learning Through Enquiry Alliance conference, University of Reading, 2009.

Encouraging and enhancing Learner Autonomy

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Background and rationale to the Faculty project

The university-wide strategy for enhancing learning, teaching and assessment includes a strand for embedding strategies which enhance and support learner autonomy. This is a requirement both for graduateness, as defined by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA 1997), and for employment. (NCIHE 1997).

The Faculty of Health and Wellbeing provides a wide range of undergraduate courses, mainly vocational, encompassing a number of professions. The diversity of student entry across the Faculty indicates that students' past educational and life experiences will vary considerably. Their transition into HE, and their journey through it, will depend to some extent on their previous experiences and their responsive approaches to learning. As a result, their readiness for autonomous learning will vary and a common approach may hinder rather than enhance learning for some.

The project will investigate and establish the meaning and nature of learner autonomy and will develop evidence-based LTA strategies both at programme/course and module levels which support the students' journey towards autonomy.

Project aims and objectives:

The overall purpose of the project was to develop an effective strategy for facilitating learner autonomy. The project sought:

- To define learner autonomy in the context of skills and attributes to gain a clear understanding of learner autonomy in all relevant contexts.
- To explore current understanding of LA and how it is embedded within courses
- To determine the readiness of students for independent, self-regulated learning on entry to their course
- To develop a framework, at both programme and modular level, for facilitating the development of the identified skills and attributes
- To embed models of development within courses across the Faculty (interprofessional learning)
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the models/strategy at levels 4, 5 and 6.
- To disseminate the findings in a variety of formats

However, during the early stages of the project it became apparent that the study was too complex. This, together with the Corporate Plan which highlighted the importance of the transition phase for students moving into HE led us to modify the original aims and to concentrate predominantly on year 1, with particular emphasis on transition. Regrettably, as a result less focus was placed on strategies to promote the development of strategies at levels five and six, although close work with the employability CETL meant that issues facing students at level six were explored.

Strategy

The project was extremely ambitious. The Faculty of Health and Wellbeing is spread across two sites and it was therefore decided to work strategically with subject areas (as identified by teaching fellows) in the subject areas of:

- Sport (Rob Wilson)
- Bioscience (David Crowther)
- Health and social care (John Cleak)

To work at module level with groups in:

- Occupational therapy
- Operating Department Practice
- Bioscience
- Sport and leisure management

Also, to work in partnership with students, in the ongoing development and evolution of the project. It was decided that participating students should be rewarded either by linking the experience as a part of a module, such as the Occupational Therapy Independent Study module, or embedding the experience within their portfolios of personal and professional development, as well as direct rewards through payment.

This was achieved in the first year of the project. In year two a more generalised approach was adopted, where staff were given the opportunity to engage in a number of professional development opportunities, with the intention that this would enhance their knowledge and skills in developing learner autonomy. This started early in the project and was a continuous building process as outcomes and best practice were identified.

This was achieved through:

- meeting with named staff groups
- lunchtime seminars
- poster presentations through CPLA
- closer links to the Employability and Inter-Professional CETLs.

The project was managed by the joint project leaders. Initially the project was planned and developed through a negotiated process to establish the project within the Faculty and to ensure co-operation. An advisory group provided guidance and advice in the first year of the project.

Discrete projects - these are detailed below:

I. Literature review

The aim at the start of the project was to establish current evidence and to guide the data collection. This was achieved in the form of an extensive literature review. This has been disseminated across the Faculty and to staff in other Faculties when requested and has formed an element of the final autonomy toolkit.

II. Data Collection

This aimed to investigate students' perceptions of their early experiences of University and to provide their perceptions of the transition phase. The data provided some insights into what hindered and what helped their transition. This data was collected by:

- interviews with students in their first semester
- questionnaire providing quantitative data to establish readiness for learning
- photo-elicitation interviews
- focus groups on specific issues around developing learner autonomy

The findings have been disseminated within the Faculty through a seminar at the annual LTA conference and lunchtime workshops; and more widely through the University staff development programme and individual staff have used the report for specific purpose within their own groups.

III. Embedding of autonomy into inter-professional learning module

Using Knowledge and Evidence to Support Study and Practice (UKESSP) is a level 4 inter-professional module. It is a common module and is delivered by nine subject groups to their own students. It is the first in the evidence strand of inter-professional learning and forms a foundation for students to find and use evidence within their academic studies and as part of their professional practice. The module is part of a newly validated programme being delivered for the first time this year.

The module content and design was developed in collaboration with the Centre for Inter-professional e-learning (a CETL in HWB).

The module aims to develop students' study skills, enabling them to locate, and reference, literature to support their studies and to understand the value of evidence from a variety of sources. The underlying learning and teaching strategy is to build confidence in working with other students and in their own abilities as part of an overall strategy to build an autonomous approach to learning. Course material included activities and approaches which would encourage autonomous learning.

A parent Blackboard site was set up and populated with content, which included lesson plans, digital resources, activities and student and tutor support materials. A staff handbook, which outlined the underlying philosophy of building autonomy, supported course tutors in planning approaches and activities which encouraged active and collaborative learning. A workshop prior to the delivery of the module enabled tutors to discuss the teaching and learning strategies and to gain peer support from their academic colleagues.

Ongoing engagement and evaluation has been undertaken. Data collected from students was extremely positive and over one thousand students were engaged in learning within the module.

Project outcomes

Overall evaluation

This was an ambitious project, the impact of which was limited largely to specific subject groups across the faculty; the most significant concentration being in health and social care where subject groups have taken many of the findings of the project and embedded strategies to promote learner autonomy into their learning and teaching practice.

The real test of the project will be in a final evaluation of the autonomy toolkit which pulls together the learning and developments captured over the last two years. This will take place after the project has finished and will be part of on-going work in relation to this initiative.

However we have been able to successfully evaluate the inter-professional learning module.

Evaluation of the Inter-professional learning module

The module was evaluated by students through a quantitative questionnaire. This incorporated questions which looked specifically at aspects of learner autonomy. The module was positively evaluated in all areas.

This module is delivered by nine different subject groups to approximately one thousand five hundred first year students, with the involvement of around twenty staff, including both academic and learning centre staff. The module provided an opportunity for a partnership between academic and learning centre staff in developing and supporting study skills for students.

Staff also evaluated the module through a focus group or individual interviews. They found the emphasis on building skills as a foundation for learner autonomy useful and welcomed the suggestions for approaches and activities to support this.

Continuation plans

1. Strategy developed by Sue Walsh (Associate Director) and Karen Booth (Project Lead)
2. Evaluation and modification of UKESP. Following staff and student evaluation, the module has been modified slightly to make the design simpler and to have more interactive activities. This module will remain a foundation for study skills within the curriculum of approximately 1500 students each year. Planning remains a partnership between academic and learning centre staff.
3. The investigation of the student has led to the development of a series of resources for staff in the form of electronic flip books which can be accessed via the staff intranet. These flip books relate to good practice in learner autonomy in relation to:
 - Managing first transitions
 - Developing scholarship skills
 - Assessment and feedback

There is also a small introduction to learner autonomy with links to the extensive literature review, which defines and explores the concept of learner autonomy.

Each book provides:

- An overview of the topic
- Outlines what the literature says in relation to learner autonomy in the context of the topic
- Includes quotes from students in relation to their experiences at the university
- Offers ways to promote autonomy in relation to best practice as identified by the literature
- Shares good practice happening in the university

It is envisaged that these books will offer a mechanism for continued staff engagement and development as well as a resource for staff interested in practical ways of promoting autonomy at course and modular level.

An audit of definitive documents in relation to individual courses has indicated that courses are committed to the promotion of learner autonomy and are mindful of strategies to develop this.

However, for any long-term sustainable developments to take place this work must be embedded into an overall Faculty Strategy and must form part of either the new staff course or staff induction.

Conclusions

Learner autonomy is a broad concept with wide ranging implications for learning and teaching practice. The Faculty project has highlighted that for a learner autonomy strategy to be effective it must:

- Be embedded across all elements of learning and teaching (e.g. assessment and feedback, employability)
- Recognize and respect staff autonomy
- Develop close ties with staff from associated support services
- Be reflected in the environment and infrastructure of the university (e.g. timetabling)
- Recognise that students have a range of needs, including academic, social and professional, and that a holistic approach to supporting these is needed.

In many ways defining and placing learner autonomy as a distinct entity has been more of a hindrance than a help. The moment it is defined in such a way it is regarded by staff as something discrete and separate from an overall learning and teaching strategy, for example from feedback and assessment. This has in some respects led to the communication of confusing and contradictory messages. This must be recognized and taken into account in the development of any future initiatives in relation to LTA and learner autonomy.

References

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Developing and embedding Learner Autonomy within the Postgraduate Curriculum

GODFREY CRAIK (G.H.CRAIK@SHU.AC.UK)

SHEFFIELD BUSINESS SCHOOL,
SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

Rationale

This was a holistic action research based project involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The research projects were carried out from May 2008 - May 2010 with two still in progress.

The research team developed a framework model based on the life-cycle of a postgraduate student to explore their experiences as students on SBS programmes from the point of application through to graduation and further study. The team used focus groups, interviews and surveys to develop the findings into six areas linked to learner autonomy and intra-dependent learning. A number of initiatives have been introduced as a result of the research which includes the setting up of a research methods forum and review of the induction process for postgraduate students.

- Key Priorities:
- To deliver outcomes in line with SHU & SBS corporate / business objectives;
- To engage with PG students, academics and support staff;
- Priorities agreed through an inductive research framework;
- To develop recommendations to inform the PG Curriculum;
- Provide research outputs that inform the development of learner autonomy initiatives;
- Translate research into teaching;

Strategy

Staff Engagement and Dissemination Activities

Through developing a collaborative framework for academics, support staff and postgraduate students. Dissemination was achieved through a number of fora which included:

- CPLA symposium
- Subject Group Level
- Postgraduate Programme Leader Group
- Academic Development Committee
- SBS academic board

- LTI research forum
- Staff & Student Focus Groups

Project Management

As Project Leader, I have had some feedback from colleagues, heads of department; students and the research team which suggests that the project has been well managed. Ultimately the real test will be that we can apply and implement the research and develop students which are more confident and autonomous in their approach to learning (see the recommendations).

Enabling Activities

- Support and Guidance for research colleagues;
- The development of a research forum;
- Access to students and staff to carry out research;
- Resources
- A forum to share practice and provide feedback opportunities

The Development of a Community of Practice

By adopting an action research methodology which helped facilitates an open and constructive forum. The philosophy is that of the learning organisation which forms part of the discussion in the research methods paper. The SBS project was based on developing a holistic framework in which the concept of learner autonomy could be researched.

Discrete projects

1. Project Research Methodology

There is separate paper which records and evaluates the management of the projects, the development of the research framework, overview of findings and recommendations and implementation strategy. (See SBS Appendix 1.)

2. Rolling Induction for International Students: Enhancing Student Engagement and Learning

For full research paper see SBS Appendix 2.

Evaluation criteria: feedback on the quality of pre-arrival materials linked to early engagement and understanding of the demands of master's level courses; monitoring student performance and engagement during the early period of study.

Actions: Review of pre and post Induction process; Using the Employability research to inform the design of promotional material; A project at an early stage to develop 'talking heads' to help support potential and existing students;

3. MSc International Marketing: Development of Virtual Course Community

For full research paper see SBS Appendix 3.

At the foundation of all the operational objectives set, the underlying drivers fell from the two key strands. To:

1. Create / enhance the community feeling of belonging (to improve student satisfaction/engagement and, by default, performance levels);
2. Drive up levels of autonomy and engagement (with a particular interest in increasing adherence to tasks set), essentially raising overall performance levels by providing much more effective secondary support material to help support poor speeds of comprehension.

Specifically, the following observations have been drawn:

- Once indications of value/benefit began to be demonstrated through use of Blackboard tools, there was a wider degree of engagement and experimentation amongst Subject Group staff and the general quality of this support medium increased across the Group as a whole. Setting aside any movement towards the hypotheses, this development alone has been felt to be a major benefit of this research programme.
- Simply creating and populating a blackboard platform will not, in itself, draw students into regular engagement. They will, as with all study activities, select when and how to engage but the important observation seems to be that when that need arises, the solution is there, ready and waiting for them. The initial perception, from staff, was that the effort and resource required for the creation of sites was disproportionate to the student use / appreciation of what is provided. This development seems to suggest that this is a flawed view and that a correctly designed site will reduce the occasions when students seek assistance rather than to attempt to find the solution themselves.
- To date it has not been possible to assess the final pass rate of the test module students and compare it with the 2009 rate. From the interim work completed and the formative assessment opportunities throughout the module, the indications are that a similar effect to that experienced last time might be apparent. This remains a crucial indicator though and this statistic, when available, will dictate how this project is progressed.
- The site integration, with module sites being embedded within course sites, has been shown as an effective model for presenting material to students and IT are now

encouraging others to adopt a similar platform in their own reviews of blackboard use as it is felt to offer a much more 'professional' image for students.

4. An Evaluation of Dissertation Research and Learner Autonomy: A Faculty Wide Project

For full research paper see SBS Appendix 4.

- There are detailed findings in the research paper which will be made available as part of the final project. The research did highlight some key issues that need to be addressed and some areas have already begun to be (See SBS Appendix 5 for further details), such as:
- RM module leaders will be reviewing their module specifications, handbooks and teaching delivery;
- a research methods forum is being established which will try to share best practice, debate
- underpinning values, share resources and seek consistency in approach wherever it is appropriate;
- a programme of supervisor development sessions is being established to support dissertation supervisors across SBS
- A review of the allocation of hours for dissertation supervision is being undertaken.

5. Developing E-Learning case studies on the MSc TQM programme

For full research paper see SBS Appendix 5.

Extracts from the research study.

Case Study 1: The first output demonstrated that learners' goal for development of case study was to achieve solution to his business problem. While his goal was relevant and important, it was highly unrealistic to achieve all of them (given the level of information available to learner).

After some talking about his goals and his current experiences, the learner decided to focus initially on theories he knows while expanding his knowledge on different techniques and tools. This change in goals enhanced his motivation, by ensuring that he experiences additional skills and moving towards his more long-term goals.

Case Study2: The second case study was purely applying his past experience and trying to learn that on new circumstance. While there was nothing new in that case study but, he demonstrated clear understanding of how to apply theories on the different environment. This can be considered as enhancement of knowledge.

A number of interviews with learners demonstrated that they have good experience on goal settings, monitoring or evaluating their learning, and that they were unlikely to acquire extensive supported practice. This can be result of the nature of this group of students work experience and responsibilities.

The result of research demonstrated that the list of outcomes from the case studies are combination of one or more of learner needs, knowledge within the field, their awareness of the field , their interests and goals for the study.

Further Projects

There are two additional research projects will come to fruition later in 2010. These are;

6. Using Reflective Practice in Assessment

This will help in understanding how reflective practice can be used as an assessment tool but more importantly how students view and value the process in terms of a formal assessment. This is a critical issue for curriculum design as more modules seek to embed this in the TLA strategy. There is a danger of 'overkill' and this will devalue the learning from reflection.

7. Peer Mentoring Level 7

There is a project which involves developing mentoring skills in a volunteer group of international students. This has support from staff from the Coaching & Mentoring Research Centre.

Overall Evaluation:

There was a cross section of Academics, Support service staff and students involved across the six projects. The breakdown is as follows;

- CPLA Team: 10
- Academics: 15
- Support Staff: 5
- PG students: 97

At this stage certain steps have been taken to implement the research findings and recommendations. These are in line with the research projects methodologies which are designed to focus primarily on '**Improving the Student Experience**' and to have some impact on '**Raising our Profile.**' which are SHU and SBS corporate objectives.

The main initiatives and actions which have been instigated as a result of the research are;

- Review of pre and post Induction process;
- Using the Employability research to inform the design of promotional material;
- A project at an early stage to develop 'talking heads' to help support potential and existing students;
- Embedding the use of Blackboard as a virtual community across a subject group;
- A clear policy statement on developing research capability;
- A commitment to review dissertation supervision leading to recommendation for supervisor training;
- The formation of a Research Methods Forum in SBS

The projects will contribute to **Improving the Student Experience'** through facilitating the way SBS embeds learning into the fabric of the organisation. This can be evidenced in a number of ways from the findings e.g. research forum starts its work or the course leaders redefine how we approach the whole process of engaging with new students. We are looking to discontinue using the term induction to focus on a process which provides support over a longer period of time. This will provide the space in which students can be given the support to allow them to understand how to become more autonomous in the learning processes. The research into employability and the student experience of pre-post arrival has been disseminated to the management support team with responsibility for publicising and promoting postgraduate courses. A representative sample of SBS PG students have engaged with the research and in doing so become more aware of the research process that they may themselves use in their studies.

There are a number of measures that might allow us to test the success of the projects over a period of time. These include;

- Student progression and achievement;
- Feedback from staff student committees;
- Results from student evaluation if designed to explore the issue of learner autonomy;
- Feedback on the quality of pre-arrival materials linked to early engagement and understanding of the demands of master's level courses;
- Monitoring student performance and engagement during the early period of study;
- Enhanced research capability and quality research outputs;
- Enhanced tutor/student relationships;
- Annual evaluation of the student experience through focus group set up as part of research methods modules;
- Reviewing the quality of submission documentation in terms of applying the research findings to the design of the curriculum i.e. student engagement, learner autonomy, employability, reflective practice and E-Learning;
- Involvement of students in the design of the curriculum;
- Building on the research as part of Peer Supported Learning activities.

Project Outcomes

Culture Change In Sheffield Business School

This is a longitudinal process and any cultural change will be measured by how the curriculum is developed to reflect any of the findings from the projects. For example the research forum may well influence the design and teaching of research methods. The culture of cross-disciplinary working and collaboration has been enhanced by the work of the CPLA team as evidenced by the setting up of the research forum.

Professional Development of Staff

The CPLA had provided professional development opportunities for the project team members and associated researchers. I hope to persuade the SBS executive to look at the funding of staff to develop their research capability in terms of taught research methods. This long term aim would contribute to improving the quality of research supervision with the aim of enhancing learner autonomy in research students.

Conceptual Changes as a Result of the Project

The concept of this project was to take a holistic view of the student experience in order to foster the development of autonomous learners which translated into a conceptual model that formed the basis of the projects.

Impact On Faculty Strategy

The project impacted on faculty strategy in terms of three areas;

1. In meeting the objective to clarify the nature of research methods teaching in SBS;
2. In developing a strategy for rolling induction;
3. In developing the employability agenda for marketing SBS masters courses.

Impact on the Students Learning Environment

The project has changed the learning environment for students by creating awareness across SBS of the inter-relationship between all the stakeholders who have an active role in recruiting, supporting, advising and teaching postgraduate students. The collaboration and involvement of a large number of students has already impacted on the environment by demonstrating our commitment to improving the learning community through active involvement of students and staff.

Continuation plans

Sheffield Business School plans to continue this initiative in the following ways:

- Through the research methods forum;
- Through subject group involvement in developing modules on BB;
- In the changes being planned for the induction process;
- In supporting and advising on curriculum development for validation;
- In developing the student representative process at PG level.

Conclusions

The change process was holistic, involving all the stakeholders in the research process and in considering solutions to current problems and issues. The student "voice" has a prominent place in the research, together with the staff involved in both the teaching and curriculum design. Changes will therefore be owned by the community of practice/learning which should ensure more effective complementation.

SBS Appendix 1

Developing and embedding Learner Autonomy within the Postgraduate Curriculum research methodology

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Abstract:

This was a holistic action research based project involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The research projects were carried out from May 2008 - May 2010 with two still in progress.

The research team developing a framework model based on the life-cycle of a postgraduate student to explore their experiences as students on SBS programmes from the point of application through to graduation and further study. The team used focus groups, interviews and surveys to develop the findings into six areas linked to learner autonomy and intra-dependant learning. A number of initiatives have been introduced as a result of the research which includes the setting up of a research methods forum and review of the induction process for postgraduate students.

The main challenge to be addressed in terms of the outputs and recommendation to come from the research is how to sustain initiatives in the future as part of the SBS student engagement strategy. This paper makes a number of recommendations as to how this might be achieved over the next two years.

Sheffield Business School / Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy Research Projects

Title of the Project

Developing and Embedding Learner Autonomy within the Postgraduate Curriculum to enhance learning and Professional Development.

As a result of a review of its postgraduate curriculum, the Sheffield Business School (SBS) is planning to develop a more student-centred approach to learning to both enhance the learning experience and the professional development of an increasingly diverse student population. The development of autonomy implies students taking greater responsibility for their own learning through active and independent/ interdependent involvement in the process as well as in the subject content of the curriculum (Little, 2000). In addition, the ability to influence one's own learning has been associated with improved academic performance (Findley and Cooper, 1983; Bandura, 1977 and 1986). Although postgraduate students may have developed a degree of autonomy within their chosen profession and/ or previous learning experiences, their autonomy in the context of their current studies needs to be fostered in order to enhance their learning and improve their performance.

The project will focus on the development of module activities and assessment within SBS Business and Management programmes which focus on process of teaching and student support as well as content of courses to facilitate the co-construction of knowledge between students and their tutor(s), and support the development of relevant skills and attribute, including reflective and reflexive aspects. These developments will be closely integrated at course level with a rolling induction and a PDP process. They will aim to maximise the input of students in their learning through, for example, the negotiation of learning outcomes, and an opportunity to choose or design activities and/or assessment tasks including assessment criteria, working collaboratively with peers without or in partnership with tutor(s).

Methodology:

The research methodology for the project as a whole is based on an action research methodology with action research being defined as;

... a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 162).

The focus of action research can be defined as follows;

- Action research's aim is to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration (Rapoport, 1970)
- Action research must possess an aspect of direct involvement in organizational change, and simultaneously action research must provide an increase in knowledge (Clark, 1972)
- Action research is characterised by a partnership between three prime actors:

Client ----- Researcher ----- Subject

The client in this research is the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy, the researchers are academics and research assistants from the Sheffield Business School and the subjects are a representative sample of master's students and SBS academic and support staff.

In this case the team of researchers include academics and research assistants (see appendix 1) who are working collaboratively to deliver a series of small and interconnected research projects. The projects started in a discrete way and at the early stages were seen to be 'small research' activities that needed to be placed into a broader context of the development of the Sheffield Business School and University corporate plans. As the projects evolved there was an opportunity to widen out the focus of research and to connect into other research projects which had related themes. This fits well with the concept of the

learning organisation (Senge 1992) which one might expect the business school to model in terms of team learning and systems thinking.

"There are several different definitions and concepts of organizational learning, and there is no universal agreement on the phenomenon. However, most researchers consider that organizational learning is the product of organizational members' involvement in the interaction and sharing of experiences and knowledge. This shared form of knowledge is bigger than the simple added of the individuals' learning capacities. This implies that individual learning is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for organizational learning to occur. The information distributed through the organization's members is shared and interpreted in an organizational way. Even though, individual learning and organizational learning are some how of different essences; the former is essentially a cognitive process, and the last is mainly a social process. "(Tetrick and Da Silva, 2003).

Over the last decade universities have been subjected to various forms of academic accountability designed to maintain or improve the quality of their teaching and learning. A shared perspective of many of these accountability processes is that universities should become skilled at creating knowledge for the improvement of teaching and learning, and at modifying their behaviour to reflect this new knowledge. In short, those universities should become learning organizations. Dill (1999).

Dill reviews a number of universities to research "the architecture of the academic learning organization: An analysis of the university case studies highlights the conflict between the requirement to meet quality standards to 'tick the boxes' and the need to encourage a sea change in the way the organisation embeds learning into the fabric of the organisation.

"there is a danger that a focus on conforming to external assessments may encourage a "culture of compliance" in which the production of high quality documents, policies, and procedures substitutes for the development and dissemination of new knowledge designed to improve the core processes of teaching and learning." Dill (1999).

He argues that a true learning organisation would;

"In contrast to this activity of organizational control the activities of a learning organization focus on developing and implementing new knowledge that will improve the core processes of an organization." Dill (1999).

At the outset of the research project there was a dilemma to be resolved in terms of the outputs and application of the research. From the funders perspective some expectation arises that the research will have an educational pedagogic focus leading to dissemination through published research papers. From the institutional standpoint the research objectives point towards improving the core processes of an organisation. This raises the

question about the philosophical discourse that may be required before the design of any academic degree or development activity. There was an interesting paper from Ruona & Lynham (2004) that explores the world of Human Resource Development (HRD) from the perspective of an individual trying to decide on what should inform the design of a diversity programme. They argue that not enough time is allowed for this philosophical discourse which can result in the wrong choices being made in terms of the options. They conclude with a powerful image of 'stuck conversation' which are described in the following quotation;

"Warren Topp (1998) introduced these authors to the concept of a 'conversation having us' – that is, of a conversation that is ongoing and becomes the prominent focus such that little else actually happens except the having of the conversation (Bohm 1994). In the context of these 'stuck' conversations, very few new thoughts are generated, positions are defended, tradition weighs heavy and very little progress is made in understanding and creating new meaning. Some would say that HRD is currently engaged in a few of these kinds of conversations."

Ruona & Lynham (2004)

The project leader was not involved at the point of creation of the CPLA research project and therefore missed the philosophical discourse which it is assumed was carried out by the research management team. In the strategic human resource development literature this would typify the lack of 'fit' or 'congruence' between corporate / business strategy (in this case the CPLA project objectives) and the involvement of those who will deliver the objectives in the decision making process.

This led to the decision to adopt the action research methodology and for this to be an inductive process. There are limitations which will be discussed later to this approach which revolve around the nature of evaluation.

The research team tried to avoid these 'stuck conversation' referred to above by trying to ensure that there was a clear understanding of the purpose of the individual research projects and how they fitted 'holistically' with the framework which was jointly derived by the research group. This led us the projects evolving, being modified, in one case significantly redesigned to make sure they have value for the business school and the outputs of the research can be applied.

Action Research and Corporate Objectives

Eden & Huxham (1996) argue that "Action Research demands an integral involvement by the researcher(s) in an intention to change the organization. In this research the objectives are linked directly to the university corporate plan 2008 -2013 and are outcomes will be used to inform the design of the curriculum, teaching practice and student support mechanisms.

The Corporate Plan states that by 2013, we will be recognized nationally and internationally for the excellence of our learning and teaching, for the outstanding quality of the student experience, and as an exemplar in innovation, applied research and knowledge transfer. These interlinked projects are designed to deliver on this key objective. It is expected that the outcomes and findings from the six research projects which cover the areas of teaching, learning and assessment will inform the design of the post graduate curriculum.

The University Purpose:

- To provide a high quality, vibrant and challenging learning experience.
- To create, develop and transfer knowledge through research and innovation.
- To have a significant impact on the development of the region and to contribute to meeting national and international priorities.

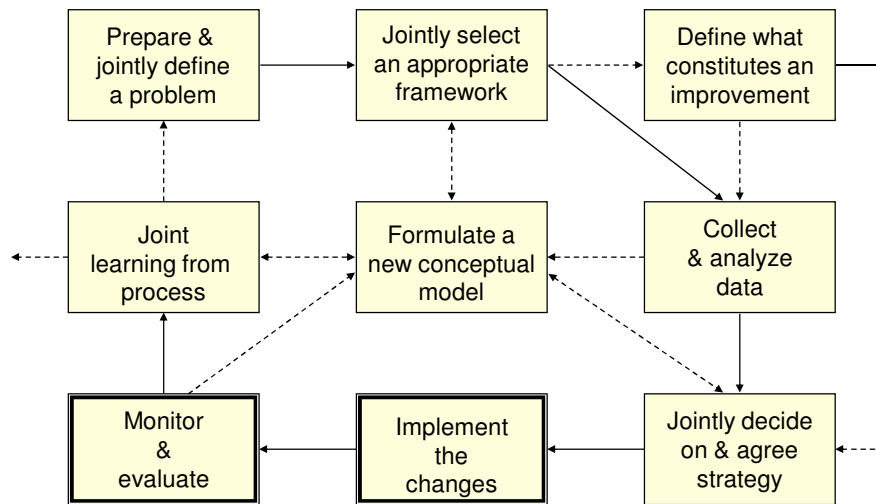
Key Themes

The four key themes which constitute the central focus of the Plan:

- Developing our Education Portfolio
- **Improving the Student Experience**
- Excelling in Innovation
- **Raising our Profile**

The research projects methodologies are designed to focus primarily on '**Improving the Student Experience**' and to some extent this will impact on '**Raising our Profile.**'

The following model shows the action research process and will be followed through in terms of developing the research studies.



The Action Research Process

Source: Warrington, 1980

5AR

Step 1: Prepare and Jointly Define A Problem.

The philosophy of action research outlined above and the framework that follows from Warrington (1980) are predicated on the research leader being involved in preparing and jointly defining a problem that is step 1 above. On reflection those commissioning and funding the research did not meet the first of the stages that is the implications of pre-understanding of all those to be involved in a multi-layered research project. The understanding of the 'designers' and the theoretical and conceptual debates should have formed part the action research and formed part of theory exploration. For example in the context of the 'explication of pre-understanding' the meaning and understanding of the term 'learner autonomy' was not explored at an early stage to help in the design of the methodologies of the individual projects. The systematic and formal defining of the term learner autonomy evolved through informal and disconnected conversations amongst the researcher's, academics and support staff.

"You could, however, argue that this is a strength as well perceived weakness. The CELTs were intended to fund initiatives that involved risk. The idea is that some projects/approaches to LTA work and some don't. In some sense then, not defining LA allows for multiple definitions to emerge from which a shared one, in the specific context of SBS, can be formulated to be applied in the next AR cycle." (Joanne Elfving-Hwang - CPLA Project Evaluator).

Step 2: Jointly Select An Appropriate Framework.

At the stage the project leader assumed responsibility for the 'small' CPLA research projects there was one research project in progress which has its own methodology and learning outcomes. On of the learning points to come from the process of managing this research is

the need to be clear about the evaluation and methodologies used by individual projects and how these are linked to the SBS and university corporate objectives. It was clear that an initial weakness in the design stage was not to view all the projects holistically and ensure they are integrated with the SBS postgraduate business plan. Anecdotal evidence from academics was that they viewed previous small scale research projects with some scepticism and saw no evidence of their contribution to learning, teaching and assessment strategies. This is the perception but in reality pressure of work, teaching and marking loads and individual interest often conspire to limit the dissemination of the research. Workshops and briefing are provided but often only attended by the 'converts' and these projects need to find a mechanism by which we can disseminate as widely as possible across the business school.

At an early stage (May 2008) the project leader and individual researchers met to discuss the various projects that might lead to meeting the research objectives. As the discussions unfolded it was clear that some theme was required to help model all the projects and give them an overarching theme. This led to the creation of a 'storyboard' which revolved around the 'life cycle' of a post graduate student. So an early model was formed which is outlined below;

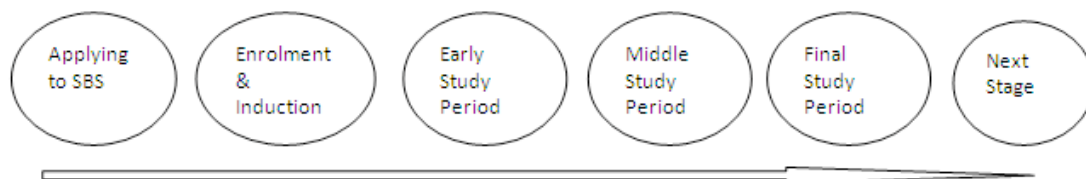


Figure 1: Student Life Cycle

The initial design of the five research projects was linked to this model as outlined below:

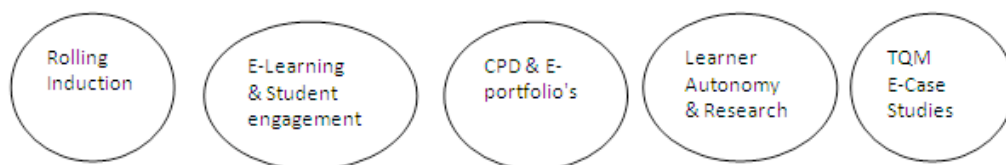


Figure 2: SBS early research projects programme

Subsequently this model has evolved and changed with the intervention of other and the additional of more research objectives.

Step 3: Define What Constitutes An Improvement

At this step we start to identify some limitations on the action research model. As the research team were not instrumental at the design stage there was no clear vision or understanding of how these projects will improve the level of student engagement. This comes back to the lack of a clear set of evaluation metrics that are clearly linked to the CPLA

project criteria and SBS post graduate business plan 2008 -2013. It is also not immediately apparent what constitutes an improvement in the context of the *'development of module activities and assessment within SBS Business and Management programme which focus on process as well as content to facilitate the co-construction of knowledge between students and their tutor(s).'* The outcomes from the research will seek to bring a clearer focus to this area so that more guidance can be given to those developing masters' courses.

The five projects have specific but interlinked objectives which have evolved over the 12 months since the inception of the research. These can be defined as follows;

Rolling Induction for International Students: Enhancing Student Engagement and Learning

To evaluate the quality of the existing support and guidance for students and to consider modifications and improvements to the Induction Process

Intended outcomes: to enhance student engagement and ensure support over the early and middle study periods. This links to a study of when and how students become independent learners.

- **Evaluation criteria:** feedback on the quality of pre-arrival materials linked to early engagement and understanding of the demands of master's level courses; monitoring student performance and engagement during the early period of study.

MSc International Marketing: Development of Virtual Course Community

To provide an electronic resource that is support by the student and academic community and Intended outcomes: provides an alternative resource to develop learner autonomy.

- **Evaluation criteria:** student progression and achievement; enhanced research capability and quality research outputs; measuring take up on the site in terms of reducing demands of academic staff

MSc HRM_D Programme: Exploring Collaborative and Autonomous Working using E-Learning

Janette Hurst / Rachael Woodcock MSc HRM/D

The project is designed to support an enquiry based module Individual & Organisational Learning. The methodology of the module is designed to promote learner autonomy but for the part time master's students this has proved problematic in terms of time, attendance and collaborative working. The project focuses on the design of an e-learning site which facilitates and enables students to carry out research before the start of the module. It will also provide access to an on-line learning community and support reflective and reflexive

practice. Finally it provides an additional level of support in terms of the tutors can give to the student group.

- **Evaluation criteria:** reviewing the quality of submission documentation in terms of applying the research findings to the design of the curriculum i.e. student engagement, learner autonomy, employability, reflective practice and E-Learning;

An Evaluation of Dissertation Research and Learner Autonomy: A Faculty Wide Project

The research is designed to identify how dissertations are managed across the faculty as there is no evidence that there has been an audit of this assessment task. This is of critical importance in terms of quality and enhancement as the dissertation accounts for between 45% - 60% of the credit required to reach the masters level.

Intended outcomes: this research will provide benefits in terms of providing a coherent and faculty wide strategy for dissertation research and research methods teaching. This however must be in the context of developing and embedding learner autonomy.

- **Evaluation criteria:** results from student evaluation if designed to explore the issue of learner autonomy; enhanced research capability and quality research outputs; annual evaluation of the student experience through focus group set up as part of research methods modules;

Developing E-Learning case studies on the MSc TQM programme

This research aims to investigate the impact of the development of autonomous learning on performance and behaviour of group of Distance Learning students.

Intended outcomes: to develop a format of e-case studies and that can be accessed by other students for feedback and further discussions.

- **Evaluation criteria:** Involvement of students in the design of the curriculum; enhanced research capability and quality research outputs;

The 'improvements' must lead to a set of critical success factors which are the measures by which the projects can be assessed in terms of developing the post graduate curriculum.

Step 4: Joint Learning From Process

As the research projects were in the process of formulation it was clear that the MSc HRM project was not practical and overlapped with the MSc International Marketing programme.

This is to be replaced with a study into the nature of reflective practice which explores the issues students faced in critically reflecting on their practice.

One of the outcomes from our discussion and in review how other faculties approach research was to look at all the projects holistically and link them directly to the university and SBS objectives. This resulted in an interim report (24/04/2009) designed to show how the projects would be evaluated and disseminated in line with the corporate plan. As part of the dissemination process the project leader briefed SBS subject, post graduate leaders and academic committee about the rationale for the research. As a result of the briefing it became clear that there were opportunities in the Business School to extent this to include other research projects which impact on student engagement and support. These included research on employability and assessment processes which are designed to look at how the post graduate courses are marketed internationally. Of particular interest is the language used in our publications and the extent to which it leads to unfulfilled expectations and a lack of understanding of the learning environment.

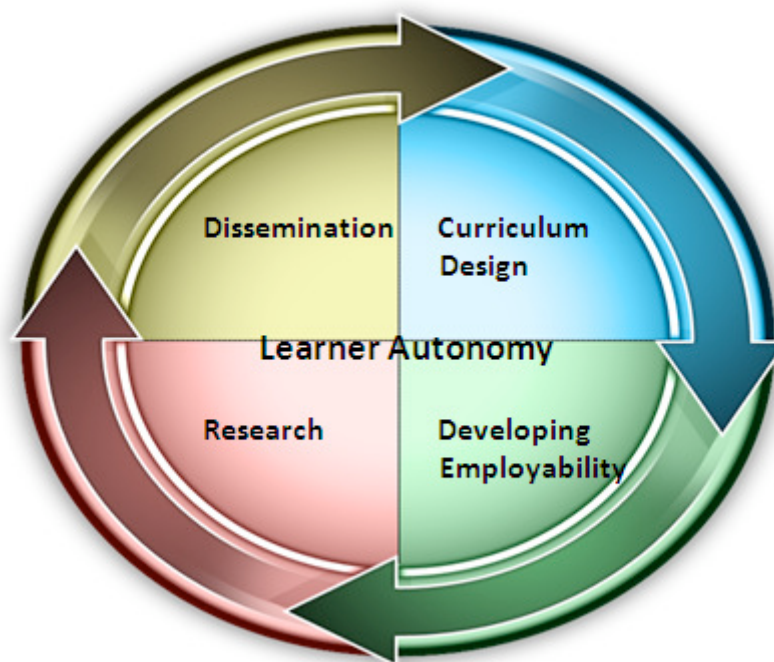
One key example of joint learning was the decision to develop a series of school wide focus groups involving a representative sample of students from all masters' courses in SBS. Using funding from the CPLA and Employability projects we organised two focus groups and arranged from payments to students as an inducement to take part in the research. More detailed information on the research methodology will follow under the section on data collection and analysis.

A second example of joint learning was an initiative with the MBA full time students which came out of a discussion of the programme leader for the MBA. One of the issues about student engagement in research is a) time b) student engagement and c) value to the student. It was clear that any focus group would have to be scheduled to sit within the current MBA timetable and that students would need to be clear as to the value and learning that they could take in participating in the focus group. More detailed information on the research methodology will follow under the section on data collection and analysis.

Since the inception of the research we have commissioned a further research project which is about the contribution of peer mentoring in supporting master's students in becoming more autonomous learners.

Step 5: Formulate A New Conceptual Model

The SBS CPLA research projects have been conceptualized in a poster which is to be used at a symposium in July 2009. The model has at its core 4 specific objectives which link to the main focus of the research developing learner autonomy.



There are six projects which are linked to the model. These are;

- Project 1: Rolling Induction
- Project 2: Virtual Course Community
- Project 3: Developing Reflective Practice
- Project 4: Peer Mentoring (at design stage)
- Project 5: Research Methods & Dissertation review
- Project 6: TQM & E-Learning Case Studies

(See appendix 1)

Each of the four quadrants has a specific outcome that can be influenced by the findings from this research.

Dissemination: the research seeks to identify the various fora in which effective dissemination of the research might take place so that we can demonstrate how the research might improve teaching, learning and assessment design and application.

Curriculum Design: In terms of the outputs from the projects the findings could be used to help in the early stages of the re-validation of masters' level courses. The faculty of Development & Society are also taking this approach in how they use the research. The business school is in the process of reviewing the validation process and this work may contribute at the stage where course teams are discussing the underlying philosophy of the course.

Research: In its broadest terms the findings are designed to understand the students experiences of carrying out research, the delivery of research methods teaching, and the quality of dissertation research and outputs.

Developing Employability: The research projects have been aligned to current research being carried out into employability in the business school. This will inform the design of materials, induction processes and to some extent the requirement for students to become autonomous learners and researchers.

There is an additional theme which explores the tutor role in moving from teaching to a facilitator of learning.

While the poster provides a useful marketing tool for the projects it does not show in details how the six projects map on to a conceptual model. At a review meeting of 14/07/2009 the research team agreed on a model which they believe can illustrate and explain the relationship between the projects and the one year cycle of post graduate master's study.

Figure 3 which follows is a visual representation of how we might see the relationship between the projects, the year programme and the development of learner autonomy.

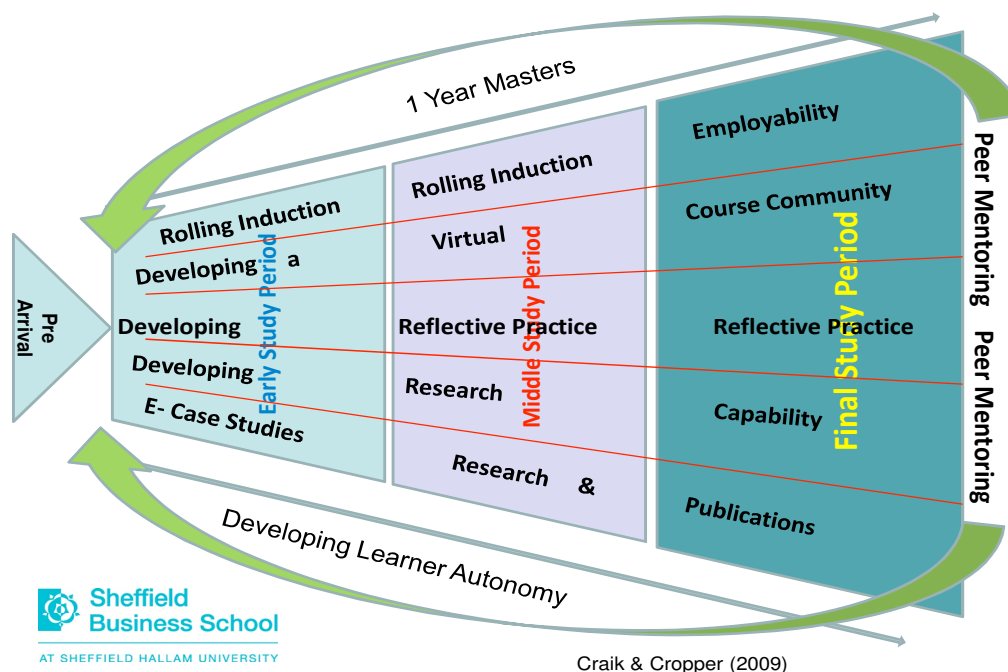


Figure 3: Relationship between projects and the development of learner autonomy

Step 6: Collect And Analyze Data

There are a number of data collection methods being employed by the various projects. These include;

Student Focus Group 1: we have a focus group with a representative sample of 21 master's students. We used iPod recorders and note takers to record the views and experiences of the students. There were three research objectives which were the focus of the study these were employability, induction and learner autonomy.

Student Focus Group 2: we have two research assistants tracking a group of MBA students during the period January - December 2009. There has been an initial focus group session in March which explored three themes with students. These were induction, research experience and learner autonomy. The findings from this study will be used in conjunction with the research findings from focus group 1.

Survey: a survey on learner autonomy was used at the start of the focus group session.

Desk based research: a review of research methods and dissertation module guides and marking criteria is being carried on and the findings will be used to inform the study on learner autonomy.

Staff Focus Group: we are inviting a sample of academic staff that at master's level to take part in the research.

Individual Interviews: These will be with academic and support staff.

Findings:

The findings and recommendations from four of the projects are available as research papers and will form the basis of the CPLA conference workshop in June 2010. As part of the methodology for this paper the main findings will be discussed in terms of their implications for the SBS wide project and the design of the postgraduate curriculum and developing learner autonomy.

Rolling Induction for International Students: Enhancing Student Engagement and Learning

The following discussion is drawn directly from the research and includes extracts that highlight the main issues and subsequent findings.

This research carried out by Tatiana Gorbuntsova has been developed to explore the experience of two groups of international students mainly from China and India. These two

countries continue to provide the main sources of students for the master's programmes in the Faculty. The main objective of the research is to track both groups over 12 months measuring their experiences of studying in the faculty and certain points in the programme. The main areas for research is to identify what degree of autonomy the student are achieving in managing and taking control of their own learning over this period, and to evaluate the role of the tutors in it. This will require the students to understand at an early stage in the research what is meant by learner autonomy. The main output from the research is to develop a rolling induction programme that will provide the support for students in becoming independent learners.

- The main research objectives are:
- To identify the extent to which the two groups understand the term learner autonomy;
- To track the development of learner autonomy in the groups over research period;
- To evaluate any potential differences in the two group's academic performance;
- To recognize the main factors that will enhance learner autonomy in the groups;
- To develop an outline framework for a rolling induction programme.

Qualitative techniques, such as focus group and semi-structures interviews, were used on the basis of the researcher's acceptance of the concepts, terms and issues defined by the subjects not by the researcher in advance (Lancaster 2005). These techniques allowed researcher to focus on a particular aspect and to gather a large amount of relatively detailed information on it (Adams et al 2007). Focus group discussion was employed to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in a group setting as listening to others' verbalized experiences stimulates memories, ideas, and experiences in participants (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). (Gorbuntsova 2010)

Extracts from the research study.

The understanding of the meaning of Learner Autonomy (LA) among international students and lecturers is almost similar. International students (Focus Group 2, 18 May 2009) see LA as:

- A set of actions designed to activate the process of Self-Paced learning. This means that the learner is allowed independent thinking and study with support from a tutor and the learning group;
- A study with the right to determine the direction of own learning plus taking help and suggestion from tutors; freedom for choosing the contents but with tutors' support;
- A sense of betterment and wellbeing through learning for enhanced knowledge;
- Some kind of freedom in making choices, deciding what, how and when to study;
- Learn by myself with teacher. Teacher corrects direction and makes the learning process clear;

- Working independently with tutor's guidance; new techniques of learning and working on our own.

(Gorbuntsova 2010)

International students do not possess a clear understanding of what it will be taught during their course, what kind of modules they will have, how they will be examined and assessed (Focus Group 1, 8 May 2009). Answering the question *"Was there any information that you would have liked to receive that you did not receive during Pre-arrival period?"*

That is to say the information which is considered to be the most important one which is able to prepare the students to the process of study is not provided. Moreover, the students are not supplied with this information even during Induction. The position of staff and the lecturers on this matter is straight opposite to the international students' expectations.

Having experienced all the above mentioned issues, international students, as a result, consider time for the modules, for reading, for writing down assignments as insufficient. They do not have time to think autonomous and to produce something original (Focus Group 1, 8 May, 2009). Thus, some of them plagiarize ("they just "cut and pass" (Lecturers 1, 2, 3). This situation gets worse due to the weak support from some tutors (their incapability to give a response via email on time, to check the drafts, to supply students with a clear guidance on the module and assignments guidance and requirements) (Focus Group 1, 8 May 2009). All these factors lead to the poor quality of assignments and dissertations and, as a consequence, to the low marks/results or failures. Failure in assignments in turn leads to the low self-esteem. (Gorbuntsova 2010)

Recommendations:

- It is highly recommended to re-consider the process and deadlines of the applications;
- International students should be able to trace their applications online;
- The provision of pre-course materials should be reviewed;
- English course should be developed in accordance with international students needs and be interconnected with the courses taught;
- During study international students should be differentiated into different groups in accordance with their abilities;
- Training sessions for staff on how to deal with the international students, what kind of teaching methods and strategies (for tutors) to use are highly advisable;
- Self-reflection of the lecturers on the quality of their teaching is vital;
- It is recommended to conduct course evaluation surveys at the end of each course. The information can be used for faculty and program evaluation;
- It is also suggested to measure "employability" statistics (to conduct surveys of graduates 4-5 months after graduation), and to measure employers' satisfaction with the University and with the graduates they recruit as employees or interns from SHU.

MSc International Marketing: Development of Virtual Course Community

The following discussion is drawn directly from the research and includes extracts that highlight the main issues and subsequent findings.

This study was conducted by Andy Cropper and was concerned with overcoming observed barriers to learning experienced by international students within masters programmes delivered through Sheffield Business School and focussed upon two core themes, improving engagement through the fostering of an increased degree of 'belonging' and stimulating autonomy by providing a guided route to becoming autonomous.

The focus was upon the effective utilisation of an electronic support platform, blackboard, and the approach adopted was via an action based research project that essentially developed organically around pre-formed hypotheses that were grounded in a belief that radical change was not the solution, but the better utilisation of existing resources was the key. To this end its fundamental direction was around altering, testing, reviewing and re-testing ideas and this process will clearly continue beyond the extent of this particular paper. However, the key observation that can be drawn is that students do respond, and in a positive way, to independent and, to an extent, anonymous support platforms and that their performance and learning experiences can be enhanced as a result.

Extracts from the research study.

Great care is exercised to ensure that recruitment practice leads to students joining the courses with the right level of English language skills; however the ability to achieve a language qualification has proven to not always be a good measure of the preparedness of individuals to actually put this into practice. It is not uncommon, therefore, for a tutor to be presented with a class that encompasses a wide variation in reading speeds, listening comprehension levels, strength of spoken English and differing academic and vocational experience as well.

"Alongside this potential barrier to learning, with the mix of students having been drawn from such a wide range of cultural backgrounds their developed educational learning styles and expectations do vary; a phenomena that is widely recognised (e.g. Ladd & Ruby, 1999). This impacts upon how they act in class and also on their expectations from the tutors."

(Cropper 2010)

Exploring the literature, compliance with pre-session activities has long been seen as an issue. Taking a 30 year timeline, for example, in 1976 (Karp & Yoels) we can ground the acceptance of pre-reading as having value as it was noted by students as "*.. one of the most important contributing factors to class participation..*".

Despite student perception, however, Clarkenord (1994) observed, possibly prophetically, that “*..motivating students to read .. articles can be difficult..*” and this position appears to be deteriorating rather than improving if later observations are to be accepted. In 2000, Burchfield & Sappington highlighted an overall decline in reading compliance since 1984, by 2002 Sikorski *et al* reported 'most' students admitting to doing less than 3 hours per week reading and in 2004 a US study by Clump *et al* observed that “*..students read, on average, 27.46% of the assigned readings before class..*”. (Cropper 2010)

Irrespective of the limitations of the later study, the general trend to minimise the preparatory work does appear to be a reality and there is ample evidence to support this view (Johnson, 2007).

In September 2008, the co-authors independently identified these apparent barriers to engagement and considered two potential routes to minimising them.

- Firstly; alongside a hypothesis that by strengthening the degree of belonging to the University/Course and stimulating a more integral peer support system, the expectation would be that this might help to settle students into the learning environment more rapidly and effectively, thus improving their study practices, engagement levels and performance.
- Secondly; against a second hypothesis that in order to stimulate independent learning, if a 'soft' route could be found that would allow students an 'easy' way to take the first independent steps towards autonomy within a structured framework, then they would be more likely to follow that route.

Between September and December 2008 these two hypotheses were explored independently as both researchers sought to identify possible ways of intervention that might achieve the desired outcomes, yet acknowledge the probable resource implications of so doing.

As a result, an action research approach was devised that would enhance the role performed by blackboard, both in a support and reference capacity.

This took the form of a proposal to completely re-position blackboard content and use for the international students and an initial outline working model was devised against which work could commence. Cropper (2010).

The basis of a way forward, therefore, was to:

1. Re-model the way in which the Course blackboard sites fitted together, to make access and migration smoother for both students and staff;
2. Seek a more prescribed content map for both Course and Module sites, ensuring they had firmly defined and communicated purposes which were overtly relevant to the students' requirements of teaching and learning;

3. More closely integrate the module site with module teaching and learning practice and incorporate clear and identifiable ways of developing independent exploration around the subject;
4. Explore new practices and, in particular, attempt to 'humanise' the experience for students in order to help them understand why they are being asked to undertake various activities.

At the foundation of all the operational objectives set, the underlying drivers fell from the two key strands. To;

1. create / enhance the community feeling of belonging (to improve student satisfaction/engagement and, by default, performance levels)
2. drive up levels of autonomy and engagement (with a particular interest in increasing compliance to tasks set), essentially raising overall performance levels by providing much more effective secondary support material to help support poor speeds of comprehension.

Specifically, the following observations have been drawn:

- Once indications of value/benefit began to be demonstrated through use of Blackboard tools, there was a wider degree of engagement and experimentation amongst Subject Group staff and the general quality of this support medium increased across the Group as a whole. Setting aside any movement towards the hypotheses, this development alone has been felt to be a major benefit of this research programme.
- Simply creating and populating a blackboard platform will not, in itself, draw students into regular engagement. They will, as with all study activities, select when and how to engage but the important observation seems to be that when that need arises, the solution is there, ready and waiting for them. The initial perception, from staff, was that the effort and resource required for the creation of sites was disproportionate to the student use / appreciation of what is provided. This test seems to suggest that this is a flawed view and that a correctly designed site will reduce the occasions when students seek assistance rather than to attempt to find the solution themselves.
- To date it has not been possible to assess the final pass rate of the test module students and compare it with the 2009 rate. From the interim work completed and the formative assessment opportunities throughout the module, the indications are that a similar effect to that experienced last time might be apparent. This remains a crucial indicator though and this statistic, when available, will dictate how this project is progressed.
- The site integration, with module sites being embedded within course sites, has been shown as an effective model for presenting material to students and IT are now encouraging others to adopt a similar platform in their own reviews of blackboard use as it is felt to offer a much more 'professional' image for students.

Cropper (2010)

An Evaluation of Dissertation Research and Learner Autonomy: A Faculty Wide Project

The purpose of the project was to explore the experiences of students at postgraduate level in our faculty of dissertation supervision and the topics surrounding that, which were: learner autonomy; research methods modules; previous dissertation experience; experience of supervision; and barriers to progression. The project also attempted to explore these issues from a supervisor point of view. The findings explored the need, amongst other things, for: a clearer explanation of learner autonomy; greater language support for international students; an audit of research methods modules in the Faculty; and a review of the allowances for dissertation supervision.

The research was carried out by Sarai Barton and Godfrey Craik. The final paper was written by Sarai Barton.

Many authors suggest that learner autonomy is difficult to define, with Little (1991, p4) proposing that this difficulty arises from the fact that *"the behaviour of autonomous learners can take numerous different forms, depending on their age, how far they have progressed with their learning, what they perceive their immediate learning needs to be, and so on."* Therefore, there are numerous definitions of learner autonomy ranging from the most simple to the highly complex. However, Holec's definition has been used by many. He defined learner autonomy as, *"to say of a learner that he is autonomous is to say that he is capable of taking charge of his own learning"* (1980, p4). The CPLA (2010, online), the funding body for the research, also provides a similar definition, *"The Sheffield Hallam definition of learner autonomy starts with the premise that an autonomous learner takes responsibility for his/her own learning."* There are clearly visible links between these two definitions, with both suggesting that an autonomous learner takes responsibility for their own learning. The purpose of the research was to investigate what student views are on the term 'learner autonomy' and how they related it to themselves. Barton (2010).

The literature around research methods mainly focuses on research methods themselves and subjects such as philosophies and methodologies, for example Johnson and Duberley, 2006. It has been difficult to find research that attempts to examine the actual teaching of research methods, which is what this project was attempting to achieve. However, Benson and Blackman undertook a study into how research methods were taught within their school. They found that, *"it had become apparent, from both staff and student feedback, that the perceptual link between learning research methods as a subject, and its use for future study, was poor."* (2003, p 39).

Extracts from the research study.

An investigative focus group was undertaken to explore how students early on in a course are coping and what their expectations are. The participants then took part in a later focus group which explored how their expectations and experiences had developed. The initial

focus group informed our questioning in further focus groups and interviews. Only notes were able to be taken in order to protect the confidentiality of the students. Barton (2010).

Semi-structured interviews were held with academic supervisors to explore more deeply their thoughts and feelings about the supervision process and how students perform at dissertation stage. The interviews were informed by the focus groups and therefore able to be exploratory. In all cases, recordings of the interviews were made, the interviews were fully transcribed to aid data analysis and thematic analysis was used.

The interviews and focus groups provided views from both supervisors and students on learner autonomy:

"Doing things on your own with direction from a tutor, you own work with support from a teacher" (Student).

"I think it's about students being, sort of taking responsibility for their learning. Which I mean that they take responsibility for the processes that they use for the learning and the things that they want to learn" (Supervisor).

"I think also there's a thing about responsibility in that as well...It's not my dissertation as a supervisor, it's not my job to make it happen, so along with that ownership and that freedom comes responsibility" (Supervisor).

Based on these findings, both students and supervisors identify with the idea that learner autonomy surrounds ownership and responsibility. Barton (2010).

There are detailed findings in the research paper which will be made available as part of the final project. The research did highlights some key issues that need to be addressed and some areas have already begun to be (see appendix 4 for further details), such as:

- RM module leaders will be reviewing their module specifications, handbooks and teaching delivery;
- a research methods forum is being established which will try to share best practice, debate;
- underpinning values, share resources and seek consistency in approach wherever it is appropriate;
- a programme of supervisor development sessions is being established to support dissertation;
- supervisors across SBS;
- a review of the allocation of hours for dissertation supervision is being undertaken.

Developing E-Learning case studies on the MSc TQM programme

Malihe Shahidan course leader for the TQM carried out research with a sample of students from the programme. This research provided an opportunity for examining and developing learner autonomy by using case studies on group of distance learning students.

This study has outlined factors associated with learner autonomy as well as factors enhancing student's learner autonomy.

Methodology:

The research sample are group of Post Graduate Distance Learning students who have been involved with study for more than one year and already passed number of modules. This gives an opportunity to evaluate and benchmark the performance of students prior and after this research. The sample group have experience on how to manage the traditional approach of handling course works, (as they have already submitted more than half of their course works). They are self disciplined and have considerable amount of experience on managing projects. Therefore, it was expected to receive a positive feedback and attitude towards the proposal from the sample group.

Why E-Case Study?

It has been suggested (Bonwell and Eison, 1991; Sivan et al, 2001) that students can learn more effectively when they are actively involved in the learning process. Therefore, use of the case study approach was selected as a way in which active learning strategies can be implemented in the MSc TQM course. Fry et al (1999) describes the case study as complex examples which provide context knowledge of a problem as well as illustrating the main point.

How to use Case study to achieve learner's autonomy:

Case study has been identified as a mean of interactive learning strategy which is shifting the focus from teacher to more student-centered activities (Grant, 1997). On addition case studies have increased student motivation and interests in a subject (Mustoe and Croft, 1999). As the Claire Davis and Elizabeth Wilcock outlined their experience of using case studies proved that case studied can be used as:

- Bridging the gap between theory and practice;
- Encouraging active learning;
- Providing an opportunity for the development of key skills;
- Increasing the students' enjoyment of the topic.

Extracts from the research study.

Case Study 1:

The first output demonstrated that learners' goal for development of case study was to achieve solution to his business problem. While his goal was relevant and important, it was highly unrealistic to achieve all of them (given the level of information available to learner).

After some talking about his goals and his current experiences, the learner decided to focus initially on theories he knows while expanding his knowledge on different techniques and tools. This change in goals enhanced his motivation, by ensuring that he experiences additional skills and moving towards his more long-term goals.

Case Study2:

The second case study was purely applying his past experience and trying to learn that on new circumstance. While there was nothing new in that case study but, he demonstrated clear understanding of how to apply theories on the different environment. This can be considered as enhancement of knowledge.

A number of interviews with learners demonstrated that they have good experience on goal settings, monitoring or evaluating their learning, and that they were unlikely to acquire extensive supported practice. This can be result of the nature of this group of students work experience and responsibilities.

The result of research demonstrated that the list of outcomes from the case studies are combination of one or more of learner needs, knowledge within the field, their awareness of the field , their interests and goals for the study.

There are two additional research projects will come to fruition later in 2010. These are;

Using Reflective Practice in Assessment - this will help in understanding how reflective practice can be used as an assessment tool but more importantly how students view and value the process in terms of a formal assessment. This is a critical issue for curriculum design as more modules seek to embed this in the TLA strategy. There is a danger of 'overkill' and this will devalue the learning from reflection.

Peer Mentoring Level 7 - There is a project which involves developing mentoring skills in a volunteer group of international students. This has support from staff from the Coaching & Mentoring Research Centre.

Step 7: Jointly Decide on and Agree Strategy

At this stage of the project a number of initiatives have been put in place in terms a strategy for implementing the research findings. The project team has widened to include academics and management support staff who are in a position to help make things happen. In

conjunction with the Head of Postgraduate research a paper was presented to the SBS executive making recommendations on managing research methods and dissertation supervision. There is a joint project with the heads of management support to review the induction process and pre-arrival materials. This is linked to a research project on Employability (3iE) which was run in tandem with the CPLA research and can be use to inform the design of materials send to prospective applicants to post graduate courses. The research can be used to inform a project run by the Marketing & Recruitment team which is exploring the redesign of induction and the role of course leaders.

There are additional forums in SBS to which the findings and recommendations of this report can be disseminated. These include;

- Academic Development Committee
- Student Engagement Research Group
- Post Graduate Programme Leaders
- Subject Group Level
- PG Marketing & Recruitment Group [FT/PT]
- Management Support Teams

This collaboration across SBS reflected one of the intended outcomes of the project and that it sustainability will to some extent on maintaining and building on the relationships.

The move to seek accreditation in SBS e.g. EPAS has identified a number of criteria that are required in terms of the application process. One of these is the requirements on the number of staff with PhD's and who are research active in the business school. This will of course require a commitment to develop existing staff and providing research hours and access to our taught research methods modules on the MReS. The development of the research methods forum could provide a vehicle to help with some of the issues over the longer term.

Step 8: Implement the Changes

At this stage certain steps have been taken to implement the research findings and recommendations. These are in line with the research projects methodologies which are designed to focus primarily on '**Improving the Student Experience**' and to have some impact on '**Raising our Profile.**' which are SHU and SBS corporate objectives.

The main initiatives and actions which have been instigated as a result of the research are;

- Review of pre and post Induction process;
- Using the Employability research to inform the design of promotional material;
- A project at an early stage to develop 'talking heads' to help support potential and existing students;
- Embedding the use of Blackboard as a virtual community across a subject group;

- A clear policy statement on developing research capability;
- A commitment to review dissertation supervision leading to recommendation for supervisor training;
- The formation of a Research Methods Forum in SBS

Step 9: Monitor And Evaluate

The research team were conscious of the problems associated with the lack of a clear evaluation strategy at the start of the project. How will we measure the outputs of the research, have the various interventions made a difference in terms of student performance and engagement in the learning process? We should in answering these questions' which some will correctly see as limiting the research in terms of the reliability of the data, remind ourselves of the overarching goal of the CPLA project. The title of the project was Developing and Embedding Learner Autonomy within the Postgraduate Curriculum and this is the objective against which we should measure the effectiveness of the projects.

The projects will contribute to **Improving the Student Experience** through facilitating the way SBS embeds learning into the fabric of the organisation. This can be evidenced in a number of ways from the findings from the research as the communities of practice e.g. research forum starts its work or as course leaders redefine how we approach the whole process of engaging with new students. We are looking to discontinue using the term induction to identify a process which provides support over a longer period of time. This will provide the space in which students can be given the support to allow them to understand how to become more autonomous in the learning processes. The research into employability and the student experience of pre-post arrival has been disseminated to the management support team with responsibility for publicising and promoting postgraduate courses. A representative sample of SBS PG students have engaged with the research and in doing so become more aware of the research process that they may themselves use in their studies.

There are two further studies which will contribute in different ways to helping students become more autonomous as learners. The peer mentoring study will help students to support new PG students as the early stages of study and help in giving that peer support vital to an effective learning community. The study on reflective practice will provide a view from students as to the value and validity of using journals and learning logs as assessment tools. This should enable us to provide guidance to colleagues in designing the PG curriculum for master's courses.

There are a number of measures that might allow us to test the success of the projects over a period of time. These include;

- student progression and achievement;
- feedback from staff student committees;
- results from student evaluation if designed to explore the issue of learner autonomy;

- feedback on the quality of pre-arrival materials linked to early engagement and understanding of the demands of master's level courses;
- monitoring student performance and engagement during the early period of study;
- enhanced research capability and quality research outputs;
- enhanced tutor/student relationships;
- annual evaluation of the student experience through focus group set up as part of research methods modules;
- reviewing the quality of submission documentation in terms of applying the research findings to the design of the curriculum i.e. student engagement, learner autonomy, employability, reflective practice and E-Learning;
- Involvement of students in the design of the curriculum;
- building on some of the research as part of Peer Supported Learning activities.

One of the key requirements for any project is how to sustain the learning, staff and student commitment and evaluation when the funding runs out. The measures outlined above can all form part of a quality enhancement process which leads ultimately to enhancing the student experience, engagement and performance.

However we define learner autonomy it is expected that some of the lessons learnt from these research studies can be applied to helping students realise their potential with support from academic and support staff.

Conclusion:

To return to an earlier theme' that of creating a 'learning organisation' and communities of practice which seek to apply this research across the postgraduate community. One of the challenges is to ensure that all the work and research carried out in the Learning & Teaching Institute, SBS and other faculties can be seen to 'add value' in terms of student engagement and performance. This will ensure that research can be embedded into teaching and to curriculum design and not be seen just as a way of satisfying the need for external benchmark and quality assurance requirements.



www.isg.cs.uni-magdeburg.de

This image was used as the basis for the final posters of a series of three that illustrated the journey of the project. The picture represents the university; business school, the project team; the students and in itself is ambiguous in terms of its interpretation and meaning. It could represent break up and the struggle to keep the organisation in one piece; it could suggest 'all hands' pulling together to achieve the success of the enterprise. It could also illustrate that autonomy is also about support and relations of teacher and student so the outer leaves can flourish and grow.

“At the end of the journey we recognized that learner autonomy requires all the branches to lead to a learning organization focussing on developing and implementing new knowledge that will improve the core processes of an organization.”

SBS CPLA research team

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Reference to the sources from the papers included here can be found in the individual research papers in the following appendices. These papers are;

Barton, S. (2010), An evaluation of dissertation research and Learner Autonomy across the Postgraduate Programmes in Sheffield Business School.

Cropper, A. and Baker, J. (2010), Motivating International Students: An action research study into the effective use of electronic platforms to stimulate greater levels of student engagement and autonomy in Sheffield Business School.

Gorbuntsova, T. (2010), Developing and embedding Learner Autonomy within the Postgraduate Curriculum to enhance learning and professional development.

Shahidan, M. (2010), The use of E-Case Studies for MSc Total Quality Management course.

Appendix

Project Team Researchers:

- Jeanette Baker _ MSc International Marketing
- Andy Cropper _ MSc International Marketing
- Malihe Shahidan _ MSc TQM
- Janette Hurst _ MSc HRM/D
- Rachael Woodcock _ MSc HRM/D
- Sarai Barton _Research CIOD
- Tatiana Gorbuntsova _Researcher
- Gudrun Myers - Employability

An Evaluation of Dissertation Research and Learner Autonomy: A Faculty Wide Project

Sarai Barton - Research CIOD

The research is designed to identify how dissertations are managed across the faculty as there is no evidence that there has been an audit of this assessment task. This is of critical importance in terms of quality and enhancement as the dissertation accounts for between 30% - 33% of the credit required to reach the masters level. While this research will provide benefits in terms of providing a coherent and faculty wide strategy for dissertation research this must be in the context of developing and embedding learner autonomy. The dissertation is the culmination of master's level studies and is the ultimate in learner autonomy, or should be, but this is what the research is designed to investigate. The research will explore the experiences of a sample of master's students at the research stage and their prior experience of carrying out research. We are tracking the experiences of a group of MBA students over the period 2009/10 as part of the research project. The findings will be used along with additional evidence from supervisors and secondary data to allow help us understand how best to support students in developing research skills. The dissertation should represent the stage at which students can demonstrate real autonomy and independent researcher skills and this research is designed to help with this objective. As part of this research project there will be a review of research methods modules and interviews with students and staff.

Rolling Induction for International Students: Enhancing Student Engagement and Learning

Tatiana Gorbuntsova - Researcher

This research project has been developed to explore the experience of two groups of international students from China and India. These two countries continue to provide the main sources of students for the master's programmes in the Faculty. The main objective of

the research is to track both groups over 12 months measuring their experiences of studying in the faculty and certain points in the programme. The main areas for research is to identify what degree of autonomy the student are achieving in managing and taking control of their own learning over this period. This will require the students to understand at an early stage in the research what is meant by learner autonomy. The main output from the research is to develop a rolling induction programme that will provide the support for students in becoming independent learners.

Developing E-Learning case studies on the MSc TQM programme

Malihe Shahidan - MSc TQM

This research aims to investigate the impact of the development of autonomous learning on performance and behaviour of group of Distance Learning students.

Every year there are several indications of interests from MSc Total Quality Management and Organisational Excellence students on continuation of their study to PhD level. In order to be in position to support their interest, they can go through creation of some mini case studies and the outcomes can be used as means for evaluation of their knowledge on move to PhD. Additionally, the out put can be used towards their final dissertation and possible paper to be presented in conferences or journals.

This will motivate students to go through this volunteer work as they can see some benefit out of that for themselves. The selection of area of interest as well as method of managing that would be very flexible and student would be provided with a template and framework to carry out the task.

This final out come would be in a format of e-case study and that can be accessed by other students for feedback and further discussions.

Rolling Induction for International Students: Enhancing Student Engagement and Learning

Jeanette Baker / Andy Cropper - MSc International Marketing

The Blackboard site in place that represents the whole MSc International Marketing & MSc Strategic Global Marketing courses as a one-stop shop for both course and module related issues. Each module is populating its area on this site with module relevant materials including the use of Wikis and Blogs to engage students in dialogue with each other and tutors.

The fundamental key across the whole project though, and this brings us back to Jeanette's focus, is that you need to be consistent and thus you cannot, on a Course, have some modules with good BB sites and some with the usual posting board approach that is, sadly,

not uncommon. The impact is that a student has an early, poor experience and thus never looks at a BB site again. A significant step for us, therefore, was establishing that we can change the way in which BB is constructed for a Course and have a primary, Course site which contains, within it, links out to the individual module sites. This means that students simply need to use one access point and will, we are hoping; make more use of this as an independent study tool.

MSc HRM_D Programme: Exploring Collaborative and Autonomous Working using E-Learning

Janette Hurst / Rachael Woodcock - MSc HRM/D

The project is designed to support an enquiry based module Individual & Organisational Learning. The methodology of the module is designed to promote learner autonomy but for the part time master's students this has proved problematic in terms of time, attendance and collaborative working. The project focuses on the design of an e-learning site which facilitates and enables students to carry out research before the start of the module. It will also provide access to an on-line learning community and support reflective and reflexive practice. Finally it provides an additional level of support in terms of the tutors can give to the student group.

Since this report was written this has been superseded by a project on developing reflective practice in master's students. Details of the specific research objectives are being developed and the research will take place in 2009/10.

Peer Mentoring for International Students

Gudrun Myers

Developing Learner Autonomy

Project Aim

Building on a successful CPLA small scale project¹, this peer-mentoring project aims to develop further and broaden the opportunities for UK and international students to support each other in the development of autonomous behaviours.

¹ Developing Autonomy in UK and International Students, G. Myers, 2008/09

Objectives

- Providing learners studying “Employee Learning and Development” with real life mentoring situations and opportunities to reflect on the mentoring process and their own practice as part of the module assessment package
- Providing international students with a mentor with whom they can explore effective approaches to academic and social integration
- Supporting intercultural learning

Expected Benefits

- Students will develop an appreciation and differentiated understanding of the mentoring process as well as an understanding of the challenges faced when working in an international context
- Personal growth and academic improvement through the mentoring process
- Increased levels of autonomy

Plan Of Activities

1. Selection and recruitment of students via module leader (“Employee Learning and Development”) and PG course leaders
2. Explanation of the project and preparation for the students for the mentoring process at an organised event (project leader and mentoring specialists)
3. On-going mentoring meetings (students), with facilitation, support and monitoring by project leader
4. Evaluation of project (throughout the project and at project end) involving project leader, module tutors, course leaders and students)
5. Making necessary changes for the following year

Evaluation

Evaluation will be ongoing and involve the monitoring of student activities and gathering of feedback with adjustments being made where necessary. There will be a final evaluation based on focus group discussions and qualitative and quantitative questionnaires. Course leaders and the module leader for “ELD” will be asked to monitor progress of those students who are taking part in the project and to comment on performance and the development of autonomous behaviours and attitudes.

SBS Appendix 2

Developing and embedding Learner Autonomy within the Postgraduate Curriculum to enhance learning and professional development

TATIANA GORBUNTSOVA (T.GORBUNTSOVA@SHU.AC.UK)

According to Little (1991:4) Learner Autonomy is an understanding the purpose of the learning programme, explicitly accepting responsibility for the learning, sharing in the setting of learning goals, taking initiative in planning and executing learning activities, and regularly reviewing the learning and evaluating its effectiveness, learners, autonomous learners are expected to critically reflect on and take change of their own learning. As Little (1991) states the autonomous learner takes a (pro-) active role in the learning process, generating ideas and availing himself of learning opportunities, rather than simply reacting to various stimuli of the teacher. In other words, the autonomous learner is a self-activated maker of meaning, an active agent in his own learning process.

However, learner autonomy does not mean that the teacher becomes redundant abdicating his/her control over what is transpiring in the learning process. Instead, teachers help the learners to become aware of and identify the strategies that they already use or could potentially use. In other words, autonomous learning is by no means teacher less learning. Thus, the teacher's role is to create and maintain a learning environment in which learners can be autonomous in order to become more autonomous (Parra, 2009).

This research project has been developed to explore the experience of two groups of international students mainly from China and India. These two countries continue to provide the main sources of students for the master's programmes in the Faculty. The main objective of the research is to track both groups over 12 months measuring their experiences of studying in the faculty and certain points in the programme. The main areas for research is to identify what degree of autonomy the student are achieving in managing and taking control of their own learning over this period, and to evaluate the role of the tutors in it. This will require the students to understand at an early stage in the research what is meant by learner autonomy. The main output from the research is to develop a rolling induction programme that will provide the support for students in becoming independent learners.

The main research objectives are:

1. To identify the extent to which the two groups understand the term learner autonomy;
2. To track the development of learner autonomy in the groups over research period;
3. To evaluate any potential differences in the two group's academic performance;
4. To recognize the main factors that will enhance learner autonomy in the groups;
5. To develop an outline framework for a rolling induction programme.

Methodology

In order to fulfil the aim and objectives Evaluative and Action research were used. Evaluative research arose from the need to make judgements on the success and effectiveness of rules, policies and programmes developed and offered by Sheffield Hallam University to students during Pre-enrolment, Rolling Induction periods and period of study (Veal, 2008) while Action Research was employed with the aim of improving the strategies, practices, and knowledge of the environments within staff' and tutors' practice, and to propose a new course of action to help Sheffield Hallam University (staff and tutors) improve its (their) work practices.

Longitudinal study as “an ongoing method in collection of information about individuals and their monitoring of specific events over an extended period of time” (Young et al, 1991; Cohen et al. 2007:211) assisted in identifying the common issues the international students face from year to year. In order to ensure that the problems the international students and Lecturer face are common a cross-section representation of the international students from different Master's courses from different intakes and Lecturers from different faculties were made.

Qualitative techniques, such as focus group and semi-structures interviews, were used on the basis of the researcher's acceptance of the concepts, terms and issues defined by the subjects not by the researcher in advance (Lancaster 2005). These techniques allowed researcher to focus on a particular aspect and to gather a large amount of relatively detailed information on it (Adams et al 2007).

Focus group discussion was employed to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in a group setting as listening to others' verbalized experiences stimulates memories, ideas, and experiences in participants (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

Semi-structured interview was used as it is designed to be focused in terms of topics covered and yet flexible in that it is possible to steer questions into areas that appear promising from the point of view of providing rich data and / or additional insights (Lancaster 2005). In this research this kind of interview gave the representatives from Sheffield Hallam University's departments and tutors the chance to talk freely to supply the researcher with the depth data. Interviewer had a series of questions that were in the general form of interview schedule but was able to vary the sequence of questions and had some latitude to ask further questions in response to what were seen as significant replies.

In order to provide a more comprehensive research outcome the results obtained from the interviews and focus-groups were triangulated (Denscombe, 2007).

Primary data were collected in 3 stages using the following types of qualitative methods:

Semi-structured interviews with the representatives from Admissions Team and Student Support Team (Figure 1) were carried out in March 2009 in order to identify the issues their departments face during Pre-enrolment and Induction period in relation to the international students, what kind of information their departments send to the applicants during pre-arrival period of time and what kind of information the applicants ask to supply them with. Based on the information obtained and issues identified a set of questions for focus groups was developed (Appendix I).

Name	Department	Date
Matthew Page	Admissions Team, Sheffield Hallam University	20th of March 2009
Carol Saunders	Postgraduate Manager, Student Support, Faculty of Organisation and Management, Sheffield Hallam University	22nd of March 2009

Figure 1: Record of Pre-arranged Interviews

Focus group interviews with a sample of international students (36 students in total) were undertaken in order to identify the group view on the issues they dealt with during Pre-enrolment and Induction period and during period of their study, and how these issues influenced on their study and their ability to become autonomous. The main focus was on the evaluation of the process of application, induction and the process of study, on the service quality of the staff and the quality of support from tutors. In order to successfully use focus groups two researchers were employed. One facilitated and asked the questions while another one noted down the responses. In addition, an audio recording was used to avoid any omissions, to correct the mistakes made in the notes, to double check the ideas expressed by the respondents. After conducting focus group interviews the researcher produced a summary from the recoding and the notes. A group comprised of eight participants. A pilot focus group have been organised on the 23rd of April so as to test the questions prepared, to estimate how informative answers can be gotten in response to them and how much time a focus group takes. The following actual focus groups occurred on the 8th and 18th of May 2009. In both focus groups the same group of students was interviewed. The process was informal but the interviewer still had a role in guiding the discussion and ensuring that all the aspects of the topic were covered and that everyone in the group had their say, and that the discussion was not dominated by one or two vociferous members of the group (Veal 2006; Adams et al. 2007). Each session lasted about three hours.

Semi-structured interviews with the tutors (5 lecturers in total) were assumed in order to spot their vision of the study process, the ways of its improvement and support needed for the students to become independent in terms of learning, and what is/was done by them on

this matter. The interview questions were sent in advance so that tutors could prepare for the interview (Appendix II).

The views of the international students and tutors were compared and the major factors which prevent students from becoming independent in terms of study and which avert them from successful completion of their courses were identified.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of this paper should not be interpreted without taking into account the limitations of this study.

First of all, this research was limited in terms of representativeness and generalizability (only 36 students in total), although, it was not the aim. However, it may be possible to conduct a wider study drawing on the findings here as a basis for future research to enhance generalizability in future.

Secondly, it would be valuable to interview British students as well and to spot the problems they face during the periods highlighted above.

Thirdly, after conducting the first focus group the students were asked to interview their course friends on the topic using the same interview questions and to come to the next focus group with some results for discussion. The major disadvantage of this technique was that the students have brought the same issues discussed in the first focus group and nothing new. In these terms it would be advisable to interview different group of respondents rather than the same twice.

Fourthly, it would be useful to interview those students who applied online and who got an access to the Blackboard before the first term started. This would help to identify the problems they met and compare them with that of students from the focus groups had.

Finally, regarding the interviews with the lecturers initially it was planned to undertake focus-groups with the tutors, however because of the overloading of the tutors and, thus, inability of the researcher to arrange the date and time suitable for all the lecturers who intended to take part in this study the researcher had to change the method and to use semi-structured interviews.

Interpreting the Results of the Analysis

The understanding of the meaning of Learner Autonomy (LA) among international students and lecturers is almost similar. International students (Focus Group 2, 18 May 2009) see LA as:

- A set of actions designed to activate the process of Self-Paced learning. This means that the learner is allowed independent thinking and study with support from a tutor and the learning group;
- A study with the right to determine the direction of own learning plus taking help and suggestion from tutors; freedom for choosing the contents but with tutors' support;
- A sense of betterment and wellbeing through learning for enhanced knowledge;
- Some kind of freedom in making choices, deciding what, how and when to study;
- Learn by myself with teacher. Teacher corrects direction and makes the learning process clear;
- Working independently with tutor's guidance; new techniques of learning and working on our own.

Lecturers understand LA as the ability of the students to manage their own learning (Lecturer 1, 2, 3, 4); to solve the problems by themselves (Lecturers 1, 2, 3); to undertake areas of research, to study in effect, to be self-motivated and independent. However, not all the interviewed lecturers understand their role in it. That is why Lecturer 1 does not help the students at all. In his opinion the students should do everything by themselves (take the topic and go to search the material). He believes that by supplying the students with all the information and material (including copies of the lectures) "we make them more dependent than independent". While Lecturers, 2, 3 and 5, have different opinion and see their role in *general guidance of the students*.

That is why the expectations of the lecturers of international students are as pro-active, always asking questions (Lecturers 1 and 2), mature students of the same level as lecturers to discuss the topic (Lecture 3).

While in reality international students, from China in particular, in lecturers' opinion are dependent rather than independent, they are quiet, passive, and not initiative, their commitment is low, they do not ask questions, they expect the answers from the tutors, they unconsciously do not want to be independent (Lecturers 1 and 2), they are not prepared to study on the postgraduate level (Lecturers 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). As Lecturer 1 and 2 state the students bother about the number of words in the assignments, about the marks (Lecturer 5), Chinese students about seeking the job (Lecturer 1) rather than about the process of study or the process of research. Only a few students can contribute straight away, who ask the questions and ready to do everything (Lecturer 1). The situation gets worse due to the poor knowledge of English mostly among Chinese students which leads to their low concentration (Lecturer 1). They do not understand the explanations given by the lecturers; as a result, lecturers have to spend much more time on them than it is initially supposed, especially in a situation of supervision of dissertations when the lecturer have to spend more than planned 6 hours per student (Lecturers 2, 3 and 5). That is why most of the lecturers express their low interest in the supervision of the current students on their dissertations.

In this context the following question arises: *What prevent international students from becoming autonomous?*

In order to answer this question it would be worthwhile to start the analysis from the beginning that is to say from the moment when an applicant expressed his/her wish to study at Sheffield Hallam University and submitted his/her application.

Pre-Arrival Period of Time

If the definition that a student "can become an autonomous if he/she understands the purpose of the learning programme" (please see above) is accepted for the cornerstone then the reasons why international students cannot be independent become clear. International students do not possess a clear understanding of what it will be taught during their course, what kind of modules they will have, how they will be examined and assessed (Focus Group 1, 8 May 2009). Answering the question *"Was there any information that you would have liked to receive that you did not receive during Pre-arrival period?"* they point out the following:

- Content of the modules/courses and requirements;
- Hand outs of the lectures;
- Course structure; course in materials;
- Reading lists (preferably articles);
- Something about the projects;
- Guidance on how to write assignments (structure and vocabulary to use), how to make presentations, to supply with information on Research Methods and Critical thinking;
- Assessment criteria and marking;
- Information on the validity/quality of the Certificate, Award of SHU in advance. For example, nobody explained what the Distinction is and how it can be reached. In addition, the students do not know exactly the meaning of: 1:1 or 2:1 or 2:2 etc.;

That is to say the information which is considered to be the most important one which is able to prepare the students to the process of study is not provided. Moreover, the students are not supplied with this information even during Induction.

The position of staff and the lecturers on this matter is straight opposite to the international students' expectations. Lecturers (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) doubt whether the applicants will read the material, whether the module guide/book will be ready much in advance before the first term starts and whether the applicants will be capable to use the Blackboard if they get an access to it in advance. Lecturers (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) do not want to "overload" the students with information on their arrival while in reality such position leads to the stress and lack of confidence among international students (Focus Group 1, 8 May, 2009) and, as a consequence, to their "passivity" during the first weeks of their study.

Moreover, the situation is complicated by the fact that:

Failure/late of post delivery provoked by the slowdown in service of Admissions Team leads to late issued visa and arrival of the students and, as a result, missed Induction. The main reason is seen in not well developed process of application;

Postgraduate Student Support Team is unable to respond to all proposed students' enquiries and email failure due to the wrong email addresses input into the SHU system which in its turn triggered by the manually filled application forms;

Some Agencies international students apply through and some of SHU Reps are incapable to supply applicants with required information due to the absence of knowledge about SHU, courses it offers, and rating of SHU among other British Universities. In this case the major cause is seen in the incorrect marketing approach of Sheffield Hallam University;

Communication between Agencies and SHU offices, and between departments within SHU is weak which delay the process of application;

Accommodation office offers unsatisfactory service: high prices, inflexible contract conditions, impolite, not helpful staff employed to solve the students' problems rather than to make them and thus, stress the students;

Finance Department offers a slow service.

All these factors seriously affect the international students' process of study and their self-confidence.

Period of Study

Having experienced all the above mentioned issues, international students, as a result, consider time for the modules, for reading, for writing down assignments as insufficient. They do not have time to think autonomous and to produce something original (Focus Group 1, 8 May, 2009). Thus, some of them plagiarize ("they just "cut and pass" (Lecturers 1, 2, 3). This situation gets worse due to the weak support from some tutors (their incapability to give a response via email on time, to check the drafts, to supply students with a clear guidance on the module and assignments guidance and requirements) (Focus Group 1, 8 May 2009). All these factors lead to the poor quality of assignments and dissertations and, as a consequence, to the low marks/results or failures. Failure in assignments in turn leads to the low self-esteem.

Moreover, assignments, in their opinion, start too early and must be submitted at almost the same date. They are not well prepared to it. In addition, the feedback from the tutors is considered as weak.

English course offered by SHU as an optional one with the aim to improve international students' language skills is characterized by the students as inappropriate as it is not developed in accordance with the different needs of the students and is not interconnected with the courses taught.

Research module is not well explained. The students do not possess knowledge on research methods and on how to be critical due to the different system of education (only half of them had an experience in research methods before). Due to the lack of understanding of research methods they face difficulties with consultancy projects and dissertations.

Group works is considered by the students as useful but not well organized.

Consultancy projects are weak. There are little interconnections between them (some modules as well) and the real businesses. This has a negative influence on the employability of the students in future.

The Ways of Solving Problem From An International Students Point of View

Pre-arrival period

In case of any queries the applicants have (re conditional offer, payment, process of study etc.) it would be worthwhile if they were supplied with all essential contact information.

In order to speed up the process of application it would be advisable to give the applicants a temporary access (a temporary password and log-in) to SHU space in order to enable to trace their applications (whether they are offered a place on the course, whether a conditional offer was sent to them, if "yes" then when and etc.).

All information regarding the courses/modules should be sent out by SHU when a conditional letter was accepted by an applicant, or when £ 1000 deposit was transferred by the applicant to SHU, or one month before the study starts (although, an international student pays big money for the study in the UK and he/she has a right on getting such information in advance regardless of whether the deposit was paid or not).

It would be grate if the students could possibly get in touch with some graduates from the same course (for example, be able to email them), who could share their experience of study on the course, or it could be some visual material like DVD where people share their opinions on each course. For that a Discussion Board on-line could be organized.

Period of study

Regarding the group works, all the students should be divided into the groups by the tutor who in his/her turn should identify strong and weak students in advance based on the

students' background, marks they got before arriving to SHU. The groups must be multicultural and preferably with some British students in them.

Concerning the presentations, it would be helpful to supply the applicants with some visual samples, for instance, to show them DVD with presentations prepared by other students.

Submission dates of the assignments must be different, have some time in between. It is worthwhile to write the assignments gradually. For example, each week the students should write a definite part of their work so that at the end they could have their work done. Tutors should control it.

Feedback on the assignments from the tutors must be more specific as this is a chance for a student to improve its mark next time. The students suppose that it would be helpful if the tutor's comments were written on the right side of the work and throughout the work in simple understandable words.

Tutors must be helpful and supportive.

It is worthwhile to ask students' feedback in the end of each semester on the quality of teaching, content of each particular module, on each particular lecturer/tutor.

The Ways of Problems Solutions from Lecturers' Point of View:

It would be advisable to reconsider the process of selection and entry requirements (for example, for English language to change from 6.5 to 7.0). International students should be re-examined on their arrival.

Chinese students should be broken into the groups and mixed with the students from other countries (EU or India, or Russia) (the communities they organize prevent them from the chance to communicate with the native speakers and, thus, to improve their English language (Lecturers 4 and 5).

However, this approach is not in favour among the latter students (from EU, India, Iran, and Russia) (Focus group 1, 8May 2009). They refuse from working in groups with the students from China as the contribution of the Chinese students is extremely low; in most cases they do nothing at all. In this context, the approach offered by international students and mentioned above, and Janette Baker (MSc International Marketing) is seeing to be the most appropriate one as is based on the identification of the weak and strong students and their separation into the different groups. This approach allows the tutors to approach different students in a different way and, thus, to make the process of study more effective.

It would be highly recommended to reconsider the process of study and develop a special module which will be aimed at building the skills essential for the students in their study (i.e. how to write the assignments, reports, which language style and vocabulary to use, how to

make presentations) (Lecturer 5). This module should be taught before the first term starts, for example, 2 weeks (better 1 month) in advance, by week 5 the students will be diagnosed/assessed and the level of each of the student as well as their readiness to be autonomous will be identified. Then the next module such as "Introduction to the industry" starts. This module is supposed to be the bridging one to convert to the industry knowledge.

Recommendations to Sheffield Hallam University from Researcher's Point of View

It is highly recommended to re-consider the process and deadlines of the applications. The applications should be made on-line as this will allow the University to avoid any mistakes in the addresses, emails and phone numbers of the applicants, and until the definite date (for summer and winter intake respectively) to solve the problems of non-delivery and, as a result, late visa application, late arrival, missed Induction, shortage of time on writing assignments or preparation to the exams and low marks or failures.

International students should be able to trace their applications online. If, for example, one of the Letters with Conditional or Unconditional offer is not delivered to the applicant's address until the definite date pointed out on-line the applicant should contact somebody from the University/from Admissions Team and inform him/her on this matter. This will allow the Admissions Team to re-send the Letters on time. The possibility of postal non-deliveries must be taken into account while re-considering the process of application.

It would be worthwhile to supply the international students with the following material during Pre-arrival period of time: Course and Module Guide and requirements; Assessment criteria and marking; Reading List (Articles); Guidance on how to write assignments, to make presentations etc (on what is supposed to be during the course/module) and their samples; on the process of study in general. The best way to do it is to supply the applicants with an access to the Blackboard. Having got all the material needed in advance the applicants will be able to prepare themselves well to the process of study and the process of study will be more effective.

English course should be developed in accordance with international students needs and *be interconnected* with the courses taught. In other words this course should assist students in building their main language skills: writing assignments, reports, dissertations (structure, content and vocabulary), analysis of practical examples, samples; communication, listening and reading).

Some modules related to the real businesses should be re-considered and re-structured. They should be more based on real directly related to the business situations. For that it would be worthwhile to contact the real companies and make an agreement on mutual collaboration with them. Students can have a practice during, for example, half of the year working for these companies, or make some real life consultancy projects for them. This will increase the employability of the students of SHU.

During study international students should be differentiated into different groups in accordance with their abilities. This will help Lecturers to concentrate most on the weak students, and by using different methods of teaching to help them to improve their skills and, thus, to become more independent in terms of study.

Training sessions for staff on how to deal with the international students, what kind of teaching methods and strategies (for tutors) to use are highly advisable.

Self-reflection of the lecturers on the quality of their teaching is vital.

It needs to carry out open-ended discussions sessions with either class representatives or with the whole student population of a master program if numbers are not too large in the middle of each semester. This will help to correct issues/concerns that may appear with a class or a professor before the end of the semester. These sessions are also an opportunity to get feedback on other aspects of student life such as registration, library, cafeteria etc.

It is recommended to conduct course evaluation surveys at the end of each course. The information can be used for faculty and program evaluation.

Once a year it is required to undertake an extensive satisfaction survey. The whole student population should be surveyed electronically about (1) courses and programs, (2) school services (from registration to wifi access, computer resources, library, assistance in finding internships and jobs, international exchange opportunities, student life, etc.), and (3) perceptions about University strategy, positioning, future, etc. This survey will help to identify and improve weak areas in the University.

It is also suggested to measure "employability" statistics (to conduct surveys of graduates 4-5 months after graduation), and to measure employers' satisfaction with the University and with the graduates they recruit as employees or interns from SHU.

The centralized policy and co-ordinated actions involving all the departments and tutors alike are highly recommended.

It would be useful to advance the interconnections between the departments and between the faculties. Everybody should know who to contact in case of the queries.

In order to disseminate the offer of Sheffield Hallam University abroad it would be valuable to re-consider and improve marketing strategies.

It would be valuable to improve the interrelations with the Agencies (Intermediaries) in China, India and other countries by organizing some training sessions for their staff and by providing them with all detailed information on the courses on offer. This will help to improve the quality of the service of the Agencies and, as a result, the image of Sheffield Hallam University.

All these measurement strategies, procedures and processes with respect to quality control and management will greatly assist in moving forward of Sheffield Hallam University and in getting, for example, EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System) accreditation from EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development).

The Major Measurements of the Progress of Students

1. Their engagement with the Blackboard (frequency of visiting can be traced)
2. The quality of their drafts (will demonstrate the level of understanding of the problem and the format of the work, for example, of assignment/report)
3. The quality of their final work

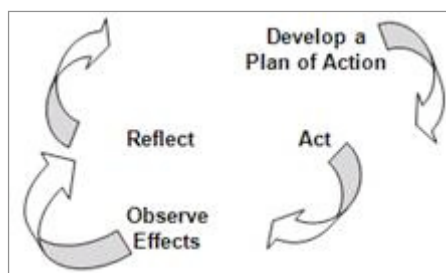
The Major Measurement of Reflection and Self-Examination of the Lecturers/Tutors

Action research (AR) would be useful to provide for a type of research in which teaching, learning, reflection and self-actualization can take place in the classroom. This type of research proffers reflection and self-examination to teachers, a research in which teachers can search for solutions to everyday, real problems experienced in classrooms, or look for ways to improve instruction and increase student achievement (Finch, 2005).

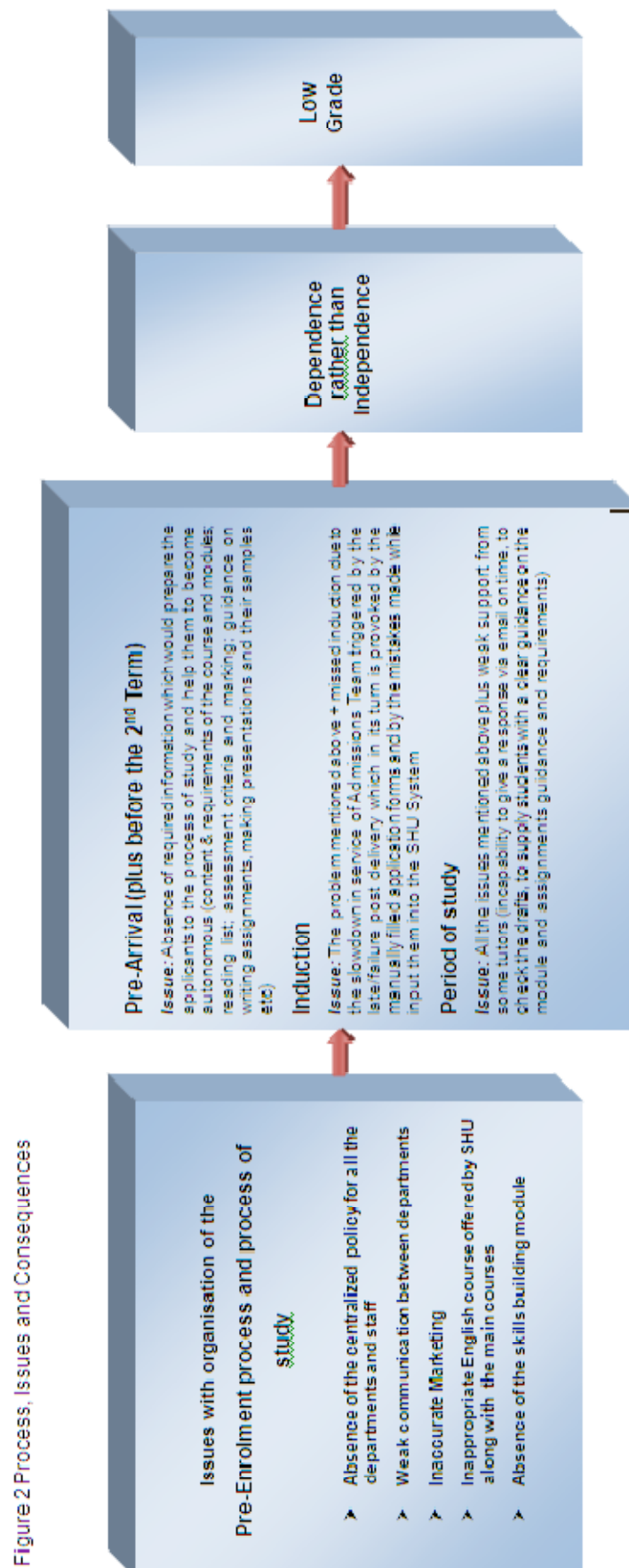
According to Daniel Madrid (2000, p. 22), there are four classic developmental phases of AR:

- Phase 1: Develop a plan of action a) to improve what is already happening or b) to identify and examine a "puzzle" or problem area in your teaching;
- Phase 2: Act to implement the plan;
- Phase 3: Observe the effects of action in the context in which it occurs, and
- Phase 4: Reflect on these effects.

These basic phases can be seen in the following diagram:



Source: Basic Stages of Action Research (Madrid, 2000: p. 22)



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Appendices

Appendix I Focus Group Questions

Pre-Arrival

1. What kind of issues have you faced during Pre-Arrival period?

Process of Application_____

Service of the agencies_____

SHU Reps_____

Post delivery_____

Other_____

2. How informative have you found the information received from SHU?

Emails_____

Pre-arrival pack (leaflets/booklets) _____

FAQ_____

SHU website_____

Other_____

3. Did this information prepare you for your course?

4. Was there any information that you would have liked to receive that you did not receive?

About the course:

Content of the modules/course

Reading lists (choose one option):

Articles

Books

Other_____

About life in Sheffield

Directions/map/how to get to Sheffield

Other_____

5. Please estimate how helpful and quick was the staff of Sheffield Hallam University in solving your issues or in answering your enquiries:

Admissions Team_____

Student Service and Support_____

Accommodation office_____

Financial Department_____

Course leaders_____

Other_____

Induction

1. What kind of issues have you faced during Induction?

prompts: Induction pack (welcome book; course guide; how to use “ShuSpace” and the SHU computer network; guidance for completing the enrolment form)

2. Please evaluate the information received during Induction?

Induction pack (welcome book; course guide; how to use “ShuSpace” and the SHU computer network; guidance for completing the enrolment form)

Information about your course, modules and requirements_____

Other_____

3. Was there any information missing that should be included into Induction?

Period of Study

- 1. What are the major issues you face during your study?**
- 2. What kind of support is needed to you?**
- 3. How the process of study should be organised or how it could be improved?**

Learner Autonomy

- 1. What does the term Learner Autonomy mean for you? (Choose the most important)**

Students taking control over their learning

Taking responsibility for own learning

Working on your own

Collaborative learning (give an example)

Supportive learning (support from tutors or from other students?)_____

Undertaking a task without supervision

Developing confidence

Motivation (having or developing?)

Working at a distance

Other_____

- 2. What do you feel could have helped you to be more independent in your study?**
-
-

- 3. What could have you done in order to be more independent?**

Appendix II Interview Questions for the Lecturers

How would you define the term Learner Autonomy?

What is your first impression of international students in the first 2-3 weeks?

What are your expectations of international students?

What kind of support is needed to help international students to become more autonomous in terms of learning?

How the process of study should be organised?

With what kind of information should international students be supplied by tutors during Pre-arrival period and Induction?

Pre-arrival_____

Induction_____

Have you been on any courses linked to teaching International students?

Does your approach to teaching vary between EU and International students? If "yes" then "How"?

What problems do you experience during the classroom?

What have you done in order to help the students become more autonomous?

Definitions	Number of responses
The right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning	7
Determining and setting your own learning objectives	7
Working independently with support from a tutor	7
Taking responsibility for their own learning	6
A set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning	5
Selecting methods and techniques to be used to study	5

SBS Appendix 3

Motivating International Students: An action research study into the effective use of electronic platforms to stimulate greater levels of student engagement and autonomy in Sheffield Business School

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Abstract:

This study was concerned with overcoming observed barriers to learning experienced by international students within masters programmes delivered through Sheffield Business School and focussed upon two core themes, improving engagement through the fostering of an increased degree of 'belonging' and stimulating autonomy by providing a guided route to becoming autonomous.

The focus was upon the effective utilisation of an electronic support platform, blackboard, and the approach adopted was via an action based research project that essentially developed organically around pre-formed hypotheses that were grounded in a belief that radical change was not the solution, but the better utilisation of existing resources was the key. To this end its fundamental direction was around altering, testing, reviewing and re-testing ideas and this process will clearly continue beyond the extent of this particular paper. However, the key observation that can be drawn is that students do respond, and in a positive way, to independent and, to an extent, anonymous support platforms and that their performance and learning experiences can be enhanced as a result.

1.0 Background:

Within the Marketing Subject Group, the MSc International Marketing has been running since 1994 and throughout that time international students have made up the significant proportion of the student body, averaging between 90 and 100% of all students at any one time. In 2008, in response to changing market dynamics, this was enhanced with a second masters' degree, MSC Global Strategic Marketing, and combined they account for approximately 100 international students at any one time.

The predominant nationalities are Chinese, Taiwanese and Indian; although there continue to be a wide range of other nationalities represented as well and in the current student body alone there are representatives of 10 different nationalities studying away from their home countries.

Whilst this broad exposure to other cultures can be a key advantage of studying this discipline, it has proven to be the source of a number of 'challenges' faced by staff. Great care is exercised to ensure that recruitment practice leads to students joining the courses

with the right level of English language skills; however the ability to achieve a language qualification has proven to not always be a good measure of the preparedness of individuals to actually put this into practice. It is not uncommon, therefore, for a tutor to be presented with a class that encompasses a wide variation in reading speeds, listening comprehension levels, strength of spoken English and differing academic and vocational experience as well.

Alongside this potential barrier to learning, with the mix of students having been drawn from such a wide range of cultural backgrounds their developed educational learning styles and expectations do vary; a phenomena that is widely recognised (e.g. Ladd & Ruby, 1999). This impacts upon how they act in class and also on their expectations from the tutors. For example, some Asian students will actively attempt to avoid any sort of class contribution if it involves asking questions or expressing opinions. Others will expect the tutor to be the source of 'all knowledge' and not even consider going beyond what the tutor introduces in class in terms of the study material they engage with.

To add to what is becoming a complex learning environment there is a more widely understood reticence of students to undertake directed activities between class sessions. Exploring the literature, compliance with pre-session activities has long been seen as an issue. Taking a 30 year timeline, for example, in 1976 (Karp & Yoels) we can ground the acceptance of pre-reading as having value as it was noted by students as *".. one of the most important contributing factors to class participation.."*.

Despite student perception, however, Clarkenord (1994) observed, possibly prophetically, that *"..motivating students to read .. articles can be difficult.."* and this position appears to be deteriorating rather than improving if later observations are to be accepted. In 2000, Burchfield & Sappington highlighted an overall decline in reading compliance since 1984, by 2002 Sikorski et al reported 'most' students admitting to doing less than 3 hours per week reading and in 2004 a US study by Clump et al observed that *"..students read, on average, 27.46% of the assigned readings before class.."*.

Irrespective of the limitations of the later study, the general trend to minimise the preparatory work does appear to be a reality and there is ample evidence to support this view (Johnson, 2007). Inevitably, this will impact not only on the student's learning but also on the ability of the tutor to deliver an effective learning experience within the respective classroom sessions, as the level of what constitutes destructive resistance will reduce student preparedness to engage within classroom discussions (Burroughs *et al*, 1989). The impact of this lack of preparedness manifests itself in the lack of engagement by students when tutors attempt to engage them in discussions of any sort.

With students working in their first language there is some opportunity to recover this lack of preparation as it can be possible to cover background material quickly and be relatively assured that there will be a reasonable level of comprehension against which further class activities can be run within the session. Experience has demonstrated across the international marketing students though that the mix of language skills and preferred learning styles combines to make this in-class recovery very difficult.

In addition to all of the above, three other observed factors are also thought to be worthy of consideration as potential barriers to learning. 1. The limitations in speeds of comprehension and the lower reading rates combine to slow down the volume of work that can be done outside class contact and impact upon the ability of students' to prioritise what should be done. 2. Linked with this is the time it can take to settle to studying within a new environment a long way from home and the effect of the delays this causes upon the ability to prioritise and, finally; 3. Because of the mode of engagement it can be extremely difficult for tutors to effectively gauge individual shortfalls in learning until students reach a point when it is too late to intervene to any great degree.

Outward signs of the 'problem' could be seen in the basic academic construct errors encountered in assignments, the high demand for 'personal' tutor time outside assigned class contact time, the simplistic nature of questions asked around basic elements of course material or pastoral issues and a strong indication of reactivity rather than proactivity with regard to study activities.

The conclusion of all of this was that tutors had grown concerned over the apparent lack of student autonomy and whilst overall completion rates were good, completion at first submission was not and the quality of work submitted (as a reflection of the quality of learning) was lower than desired.

2.0 Research Objectives:

In September 2008, the co-authors independently identified these apparent barriers to engagement and considered two potential routes to minimising them.

- Firstly; alongside a hypothesis that by strengthening the degree of belonging to the University/Course and stimulating a more integral peer support system, the expectation would be that this might help to settle students into the learning environment more rapidly and effectively, thus improving their study practices, engagement levels and performance.
- Secondly; against a second hypothesis that in order to stimulate independent learning, if a 'soft' route could be found that would allow students an 'easy' way to take the first independent steps towards autonomy within a structured framework, then they would be more likely to follow that route.

A number of additional and linked, specific desired outputs were also identified:

- Encourage more independent reading: (identified as a fundamental shortfall in the current learning experience)
- Demystify language confusions: (acknowledging that students studying in a second language tend to work from a limited vocabulary and thus fully interpreting some of the theories and terms can, in itself, slow down comprehension)

- Demonstrate the relevance of directed activities: (in particular those required alongside modules during the course of completion)

3.0 Research Approach:

Between September and December 2008 these two hypotheses were explored independently as both researchers sought to identify possible ways of intervention that might achieve the desired outcomes, yet acknowledge the probable resource implications of so doing. The output of that scoping study qualified that the experiences of tutors were not unusual across tutors working with international students and suggested that a reasonable starting point would be a better utilisation of our electronic support platform, blackboard, as it offered an anonymous back-up that students could tap into without exposing themselves to possible embarrassment around perceived underperformance (an issue with some international students in particular in relation to saving face in front of their peers and the use of 'shame' as a control tool (e.g. Fung et al., 2003)). Another output, however, identified that this was very poorly utilised by the Group as a whole, that student engagement with it (and perception of value) was limited at best and that general tutor belief in any value that blackboard could offer was also limited.

At this point the researchers combined their findings and whilst accepting potential barriers to adoption, reasoned that if there was a way of creating a more holistic learning experience for students from within the resources readily available, then that would be an effective way forward. As a result, an action research approach was devised that would enhance the role performed by blackboard, both in a support and reference capacity.

This took the form of a proposal to completely re-position blackboard content and use for the international students and an initial outline working model was devised against which work could commence (see figure 1 below). Essentially a loose, organic, approach was postulated that would be driven by the researchers themselves as 'champions', on the basis that champions are a critical component of driving change within higher education (Clemmer, 2004; Scott, 2003). The reasoning being that, as this became operational, then student and staff interaction would help provide additional form and development; against a rationale that if both students and tutors could be encouraged to take ownership, then usage levels should increase and content should evolve to be most relevant.

The basis of a way forward, therefore, was to:

1. Re-model the way in which the Course blackboard sites fitted together, to make access and migration smoother for both students and staff
2. Seek a more prescribed content map for both Course and Module sites, ensuring they had firmly defined and communicated purposes which were overtly relevant to the students' requirements of teaching and learning
3. More closely integrate the module site with module teaching and learning practice and incorporate clear and identifiable ways of developing independent exploration around the subject

4. Explore new practices and, in particular, attempt to 'humanise' the experience for students in order to help them understand why they are being asked to undertake various activities

Starting with the main Course site and a sample Module site, with a view to expanding across the remaining Module sites as experience developed and additional tutors became exposed to and familiar with any beneficial effects of the activities.

4.0 Timetable:

- Site reconfiguring to be completed and tested between January and May 2009
- New test Module site (Reflective practice (renamed: Academic Research and Reflection, at the mid point) to be piloted January - May 2009
- Test Module site initial review in Summer 2009
- New Course Sites (for MSc International Marketing and MSc Global Strategic Marketing) to be built and in place for September 2009
- New structure Module sites (for all modules) to be in place for September 2009 and to incorporate learning lessons from the test site as appropriate. To encourage wider engagement amongst staff and familiarity with the activity.
- Test Module site to be fully operational January 2010 - May 2010 to assess impact against initial test and pre-test experience.
- May 2010 - status review: "Has this made any difference and what might that be?"

5.0 Activities:

5.1 Blackboard Platform: Student View

At the heart of the proposal was a complete rethinking of how blackboard is seen and used by students and the first task was to acknowledge that, on accessing MySpace, a masters' student could potentially see 10 different sites, that each intake of students would have their own set of sites and thus tutors would have more than one course site and multiple module sites live at any one time to manage: Making consistency challenging, making updating a task of memory as much as anything else and opening up a real threat of errors occurring in updating the same thing to multiple sites: Arguably this complexity being a barrier to staff engagement as well.

The simplification of the platform became a priority, therefore, and the following model was devised as a starting point for redesign:



Figure 1: Initial Framework for Blackboard platform

The basic principle being that there would just be one site for each of the Courses, and that all students would be attached to the same site, regardless of intake. That they would be identifiable, for contact purposes, by intake (using the 'group' tool) and that the Course site would be designed to support 'course belonging' and concentrate on wider student support content such as:

- Procedures and Protocols
- SHU student support direction
- Key links to SHU areas
- Employment opportunities
- Broad marketing concepts and models
- Timetable guidance
- Course guides
- Plagiarism
- Assignment guidance
- Course Leader blog

In addition, and key to the model, all Module sites would be 'embedded' within the Course site so that students simply have one access point. Module sites would still exist in the normal way but essentially there would be links from the Course site to each of the Module sites that any, individual student was attached to.

The intent being that the Course sites would never be replaced with each intake but simply updated. Allowing the 'feel' of community to be enhanced by the history of the site and encouraging new students to engage in imitation of engagement by past students.

As regards Module sites, across these two Courses a number of shared Modules are in place and whilst students might not always share classes, the Modules remain constant and so only one Module site per Module would also exist: Again re-enforcing the 'community' nature of being a Marketing Masters student but also helping to enhance the consistency of the learning experience and simplifying the routes to using blackboard as a communications and support tool for academic staff.

This format was trialled in the spring of 2009 and by the summer the technical aspects of construct and attaching students were addressed, albeit attachment required manual intervention but this did not prove to be onerous. Over the summer the format was used to manage the sites for the TARC students on the summer study programme as a live test and this worked without issue. This then enabled the Marketing Masters Courses to start September 2009 on the new platform in a full trial and the only technical issues faced were in the need to manually capture students and attach them to the shared sites, as module codes differed. Whilst manageable, the true test came as the cross-over from Semester 1 to Semester 2 happened and some module sites were carried into the second semester for a new intake of students.

The amount of manual intervention at this point proved complex and maintaining the embedded links within the Course sites, problematic. This highlighted the one and only technical barrier that would need to be carried forward for further review and that will be investigated further following the completion of this study.

5.2 Blackboard Platform: Consistency of Student Experience

From the preliminary investigations it became clear that the use of blackboard as a support tool varied widely between staff, both within the subject group and around the University as a whole. Discussions with students also highlighted this variation and drew out some not unexpected observations questioning what purpose blackboard actually served and quite a number of students stated that after initially looking at their sites they never bothered returning. A practice they then adopted as they moved on through their Modules, with available statistics on site usage clearly showing that most students never even accessed second semester Module sites other than to submit work or view grades.

It was recognised, therefore, that an initial, poor experience would most likely have a negative impact upon future engagement and it was also suspected that a subsequent poor experience following a positive one would also reduce engagement as well; so a need for consistency was clearly an issue.

Once again, initial observations identified that some modules maintained reasonable sites whilst others were used, at best, as a posting board for slides with little additional content.

Indeed, a survey of active sites within the Group revealed a number of blank pages and pages that simply contained instructions for what the page should contain. The question arose, therefore, as to what experience students needed to have from blackboard and a necessity to address this before attempting high levels of consistency in order to pursue change along the most effective route.

From this, it was decided to incorporate, within the test Module site, a high degree of feedback and to use this during the first part of the module test phase in semester 2 2008/9 to inform revisions in the second phase in semester 2 2009/10. The feedback system was initiated during the preliminary exploration phase prior to the initial test module site running, in order to provide a framework for content and structure. One example of this early feedback can be seen in Appendix 1. This then formed the framework for future feedback practices which incorporated in module feedback on key experiences or materials, a reflective blog within the module site and a formal piece of research, incorporated into the learning outcomes of the module but built around personal experiences of studying.

Alongside this, however, it was immediately necessary to bring all the additional sites to a minimum 'experience' standard and all were re-modelled alongside the structure of the test site as a starting point. They were also 'policed' by the Course Leader to ensure that they were populated and guidance given around content, although, initially, it was accepted that until any value could be perceived by staff of the workload involved to develop blackboard sites, during the early stages of testing consistency of imagery, layout, migration and core contents would be the most that could be achieved.

As the test progressed, staff engagement consistently increased and achieving a 'minimum' consistency of experience was quickly reached. In addition, and as discussed below, the use of the module sites in general also began to develop.

5.3 Blackboard Platform: Content

Key to the whole activity was content and the belief of the researchers, in itself, was a good starting point but it was recognised that there would probably be a gulf between this and the demands of the students. The initial concept, however, was that Course and Module sites would have distinct functions and against this premise the following working framework was set up to enable the concept to be operationalised, tested and evolved.

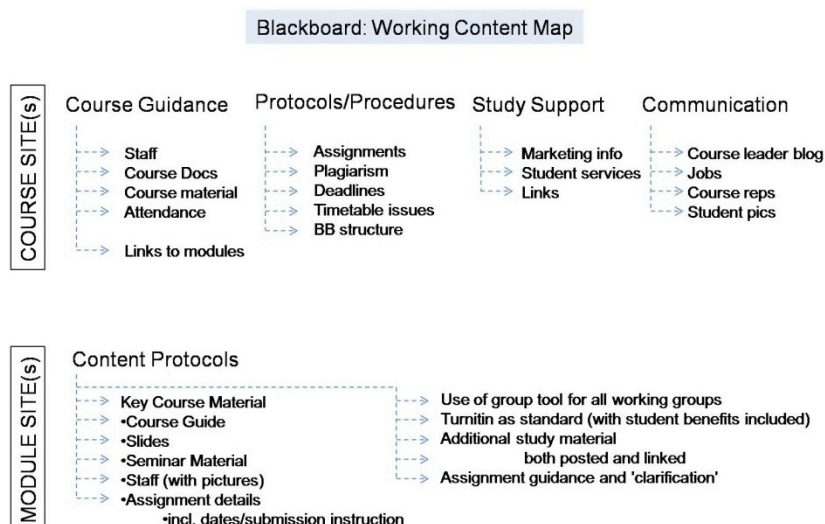


Figure 2: Initial framework for site content

The purpose of figure 2 was essentially to create a starting point and basic framework/experience across all related sites, with the intention that it would evolve as feedback and impact was evaluated. This resulted in a basic Course platform that mirrored figure 3 (note, this is a later image capture but has essentially remained the same throughout the test):

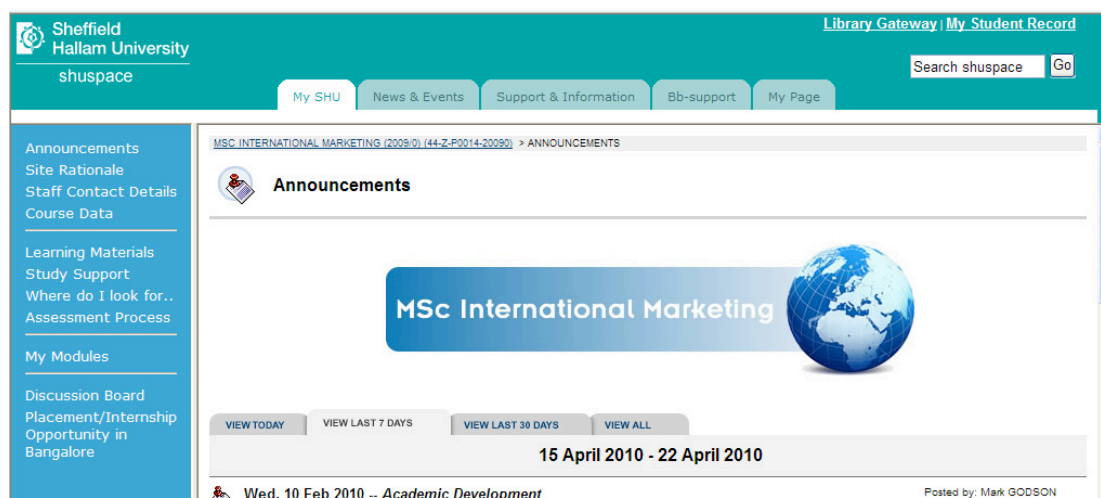


Figure 3: Course Site Layout

With a Module platform that evolved around individual Module needs yet maintained the core content elements. Figure 4 shows the stage the test module site reached by April 2010.

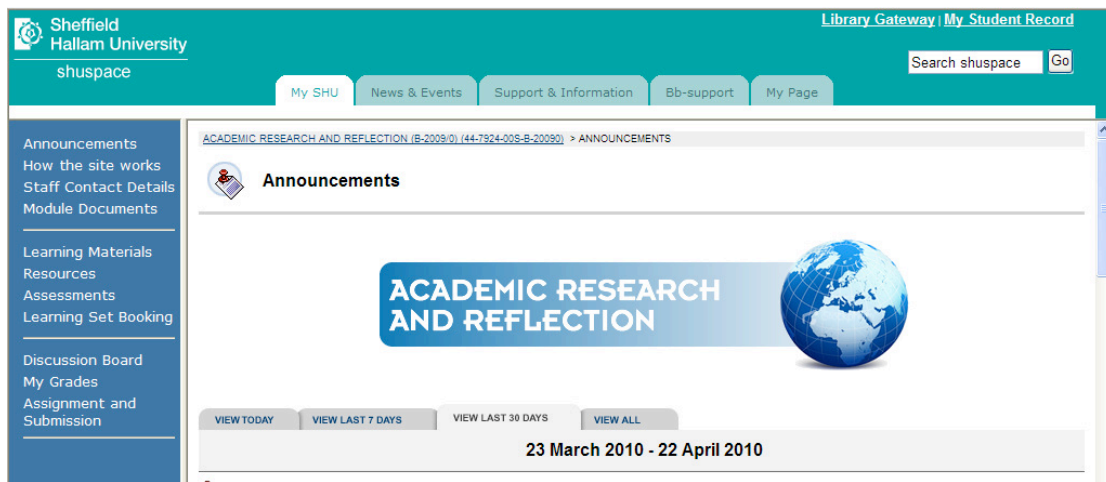


Figure 4: Module Site Layout

Aligned with content elements, all pages and downloads were tagged to establish usage patterns and feedback elements, be it via blog or wiki, incorporated. It was not envisaged that students would actively put down their thoughts or comments as that made them, as individuals, very 'public', but by experimenting with approaches to encouraging comment, by the conclusion of the second phase constructive comments were beginning to be posted.

6.0 Summary of Impact:

At the foundation of all the operational objectives set, the underlying drivers fell from the two key strands. To;

1. create / enhance the community feeling of belonging (to improve student satisfaction/engagement and, by default, performance levels)
2. drive up levels of autonomy and engagement (with a particular interest in increasing compliance to tasks set), essentially raising overall performance levels by providing much more effective secondary support material to help support poor speeds of comprehension.

As a consequence, the measurements of impact have been drawn from student engagement with the blackboard platform, student performance on the test module and the changing nature of student demands on staff.

6.1 Initial test phase:

Semester 2 2009 was essentially a test-bed for content on the Reflective Marketing Practitioner module (renamed Academic Research and Reflection for the later test stage but essentially the same Module with the same content), which is always challenging as this is effectively a research methods module. Site hits were high, particularly towards submission,

and whilst some aspects of the elements introduced went unused, for example the revision tests that were added, others were referred to quite regularly.

Staff reflective blogs were used to demonstrate how to reflect and also utilised as a backdoor route to expressing issues that tutors needed to get across; for example attendance patterns and compliance to inter-session tasks. This aspect was certainly talked about by students and it could be argued to be a partial building block in the community creation objective. A lot of standard approaches were also used, e.g. providing exemplars; but where these were introduced supporting text focused upon why these elements were useful. In the case of exemplars, this was done by overlaying them with performance feedback to explain why, although adequate pieces of work, they were full of errors.

The result was, and this is only an isolated semester so it can be nothing more than indicative, that SOMETHING worked. The pass level was slightly up on 2008 (so no real indication) but the overall quality level was clearly up by 5-10%. This was particularly evident at the lower end and in the formulation of ideas and the structuring and content of the main research section.

As no other changes had been made to the material, tutors or sessions, the only variable was the students. The suggestion being, therefore, that the principle of what we are trying to do is sound and the task in the next semester would be to more soundly test the application.

In preparation, blackboard sites were populated more rigorously by module tutors and care taken to make them engaging and 'live' – not simple posting boards.

6.2 Final test phase:

From September 2009 to May 2010 the task became to try and 'qualify' the indications in terms of engagement and autonomy and to confirm that the technological aspects of the platform were robust enough to support long term use if it were to prove a justifiable model for wider use.

On the latter, no problems were experienced at all until it came to the change of semesters. At this point one major challenge became very evident. The established process operated by the University was based around 'new students - new site', 'different semester - different module code', and whilst this appeared to have been managed, the default position resulted in a number of new module sites being created as copies of the semester 1 modules, but with them having fresh codes they instantly appeared outside the 'embedded' nature of the former sites: Requiring retrospective, manual intervention.

In addition, the need to manually attach and group students to the master, Course sites, proved a time critical task as one of the courses, MSc International Marketing, has a January student intake. The nature of post-graduate registration led to this all needing to be done within a very narrow timeframe and resource implications meant that this could not be

achieved. Whilst being completed within a few days of classes commencing it did cause short term operational difficulties and unless this can be achieved 'automatically', this will not be a sustainable way forward long-term.

Sites were stabilised for semester 2 but a review of processes has now been scheduled for Summer 2010 to see if this can be addressed.

In terms of student community support, alongside this initiative and through the MART team, a range of activities were also introduced and the portal was used as a way of advertising these. It would be inappropriate to draw categorical conclusions around effectiveness of the site itself, however some indicative impacts can be observed; one of which is shown in figure 5 below, where a student used the course site to post a message to colleagues about a Course Facebook site that he had set up.

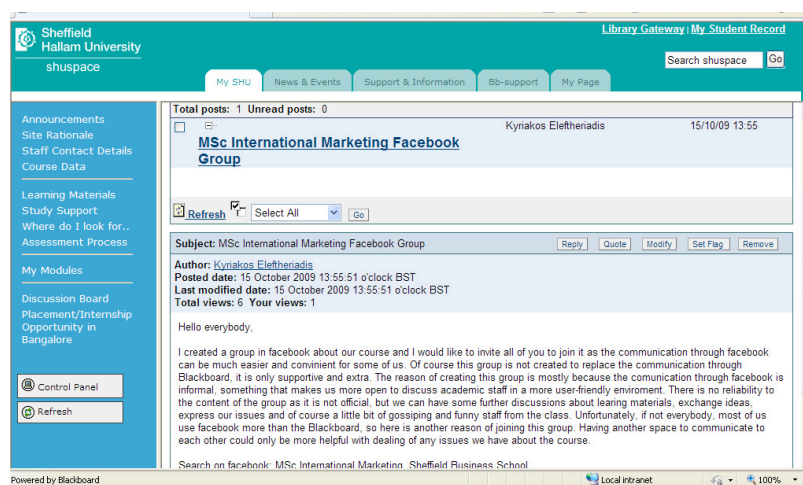


Figure 5: Student social networking

The observation being that the site has become a part of the 'IM Masters' club's' communications options and that messages are posted there because they are expected to be read: In itself an indicator of one tool of community development.

At the point of compiling this document the coursework submissions for the test Module site is yet to fall due and so a comparative performance figure to the first test cannot be drawn. However, access statistics demonstrate regular and frequent site access through support areas and with a line drawn at 1 week from assignment submission, of the 64 students' registered, only 5 had not accessed the site within the previous 10 days. On the previous model, if 5 students had accessed within the previous 10 days then that would have been unusual.

One interesting statistic identified was also around access, but this time in relation to when the site was accessed, which can be seen below in figure 6.

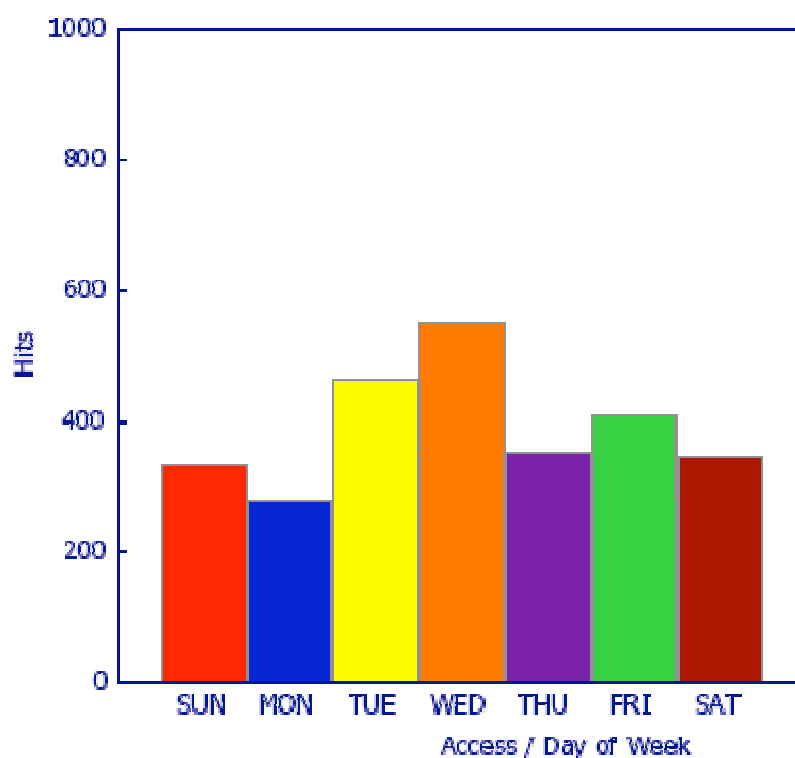


Figure 6: Volume of individuals accessing the ARR site by day (Feb-April 2010)

From this it can be seen that there are fairly standard and regular demand levels across all days, both taught and non-taught: Suggesting, at the very least, that students are reviewing module material and continuing studies outside the tutor contact time.

Linked to this and aside from all the other feedback routes used (both informal in class and two formal module surveys), 8 students posted comments on the feedback blog within the site with comments about the site itself and 21 others actually accessed and viewed these.

In addition, and although unmeasured as this is difficult to assess, the number of requests for meetings with staff on the test module and use of 'drop-in' sessions diminished noticeably. Against this, the use of the content areas of the test module site was high (almost 50% of all access) and the indication is that this first step towards autonomy has actually been taken by a number of students.

One other impact that was observed stood aside from the core hypotheses driving the research and actually related to the Subject Group attitude towards and adoption of Blackboard as a support tool. Over the period of the tests, some of the techniques used within the test sites were drawn on by others and incorporated into their own activities, notably the use of the group tool to manage assessed workgroups within undergraduate modules but wider use of content, both as support material and in connection with assessments, has also been observed.

The net position, therefore, has been that the development work has added to the quality and standards of blackboard use across the Subject Group and has also demonstrated positive enhancements of the student learning experience. The degree to which the hypotheses have been demonstrated is less explicit, but it seems clear that there has been movement towards the underlying objectives.

6.3 Impact Observations:

Specifically, the following observations have been drawn:

- Once indications of value/benefit began to be demonstrated through use of Blackboard tools, there was a wider degree of engagement and experimentation amongst Subject Group staff and the general quality of this support medium increased across the Group as a whole. Setting aside any movement towards the hypotheses, this development alone has been felt to be a major benefit of this research programme.
- Simply creating and populating a blackboard platform will not, in itself, draw students into regular engagement. They will, as with all study activities, select when and how to engage but the important observation seems to be that when that need arises, the solution is there, ready and waiting for them. The initial perception, from staff, was that the effort and resource required for the creation of sites was disproportionate to the student use / appreciation of what is provided. This test seems to suggest that this is a flawed view and that a correctly designed site will reduce the occasions when students seek assistance rather than to attempt to find the solution themselves.
- To date it has not been possible to assess the final pass rate of the test module students and compare it with the 2009 rate. From the interim work completed and the formative assessment opportunities throughout the module, the indications are that a similar effect to that experienced last time might be apparent. This remains a crucial indicator though and this statistic, when available, will dictate how this project is progressed.
- The site integration, with module sites being embedded within course sites, has been shown as an effective model for presenting material to students and IT are now encouraging others to adopt a similar platform in their own reviews of blackboard use as it is felt to offer a much more 'professional' image for students.

7.0 Conclusion

As an organic piece of action research, it was never anticipated that the activity would result in some groundbreaking revelation. What was hoped for, however, was that positive indicators would be observed that would both highlight improved student experience factors and indicate improved student performance.

In general it is felt that these are being seen and that there is justification for continuing with the testing. As a consequence, and following the assessment results from the test

Module becoming available in late May, a further review will be undertaken and the observations disseminated throughout the Subject Group with a view to rolling out the general approach across all Blackboard support platforms managed by the Group; the launch of Blackboard 9 being seen as an ideal opportunity to drive this forward.

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Appendix

Student Feedback on Reflective Practice module from semester 2, 2008/9, leading to ongoing developments in the blackboard site construct.

The presentation below was assembled by students (with the final, action based slide, being added by staff for use with students in phase 2)

Academic Research and Reflection What students have said.....	Where this comes from • In the final seminar of the 2008 module, students completed and then analysed a questionnaire as one of the activities – both in terms of the answers and the quality of the questionnaire itself! • The questionnaire was about their experiences on the module and what they would do differently if starting again • What follows is a summary of their 'wisdom'
What was good about this module? • The module booklet was very clear • Practical instruction on research process • Practice at analysing • Frameworks used • Seminar discussions • Logical process / structure / approach • Seminars and lectures fit together • Helped develop ideas for dissertation 	What was not so good Can you spot a bit of a theme? • Too much time spent in class helping some students to find an idea • Not enough time spent in class helping people find ideas (☹️) • Not enough time to develop ideas between classes • Lectures had too much in them • Seminars not long enough • Some students did not get involved in the seminar discussions  
Where I got confused • Complex terminology • Finding a topic • Managing time (what to do next?) • Constructing a methodology 	What I had to do • Start discussing ideas with others – both friends and in class with tutors • Read more – books, articles, newspapers  

5 Students tips for completing the course

1. **Attend**
 - lectures and seminars
2. **Work through the tasks set**
 - it helps you get through the pain barrier
3. **Contribute in the seminars**
 - if you get involved in the discussion it helps remove some confusion
4. **Start work early**
 - you can't write the assignment in 3 days in May!
5. **Check your progress at every opportunity in class**
 - don't stay quiet even if it is not going well



What has been done to the module since then?

- **Lecture content**
 - has been reduced and 'top-up' sessions have been placed on BlackBoard so you can study them in your own time
- **BlackBoard now includes an 'ideas' blog**
 - to help generate research ideas
- **BlackBoard has been revised**
 - to include more directed learning materials to help with the self-study process
- **Seminar Activities**
 - have been revised to focus on areas of most confusion
- **More practical examples**
 - have been included to help stimulate ideas



SBS Appendix 4

An evaluation of dissertation research and Learner Autonomy across the Postgraduate Programmes in Sheffield Business School

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The research informing this report was undertaken by Sarai Barton at the Centre for Individual and Organisational Development (CIOD) and Godfrey Craik in Sheffield Business School.

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The evidence presented and the conclusions drawn, however, remain the responsibility of the author.

Executive summary

The purpose of the project was to explore the experiences of students at postgraduate level in our faculty of dissertation supervision and the topics surrounding that, which were: learner autonomy; research methods modules; previous dissertation experience; experience of supervision; and barriers to progression. The project also attempted to explore these issues from a supervisor point of view as well.

The project was undertaken using an action research methodology and the research provides a potential framework for others to explore experiences in their own Faculties.

The findings explored the need, amongst other things, for: a clearer explanation of learner autonomy; greater language support for international students; an audit of research methods modules in the Faculty; and a review of the allowances for dissertation supervision.

1. Introduction

The research was designed to investigate student and supervisor views and experiences of dissertations across the Faculty.

The project was broadly defined by the funding providers, the CPLA, as being part of it's: "Developing and Embedding Learner Autonomy within the Postgraduate Curriculum to Enhance Learning and Professional Development" suite of projects (see appendix 1). The objectives were to therefore:

- explore views of learner autonomy
- explore experiences of research methods
- explore experiences of dissertations
- explore the supervisory relationship.

Arising out of the objectives, the expected benefits of the project were:

- improved quality of research outputs
- higher level of student autonomy
- more consistency in supervision
- more consistency in Research methods teaching.

The project was grounded in providing practical solutions to the problems participants were facing.

2.1 Literature review

There are central topics to this debate, namely:

- defining and exploring the role of learner autonomy
- the experiences of dissertation supervision
- the implications of research methods modules and training
- implementing an action research methodology.

2.1 Learner autonomy

There have been longstanding debates surrounding learner autonomy with writers such as Little (1994:432), one of the most well-known academics in this area, suggesting that *"as a general educational ideal it [learner autonomy] has a centuries-long pedigree"*.

The literature on learner autonomy is mainly focused on the debate surrounding language teaching, as Schmeck (2005:107) suggests, *"learner autonomy has been promoted across the globe and, consequently, has gained currency as a buzzword in language learning and teaching."*

Many authors suggest that learner autonomy is difficult to define, with Little (1991:4) proposing that this difficulty arises from the fact that *"the behaviour of autonomous learners can take numerous different forms, depending on their age, how far they have progressed with their learning, what they perceive their immediate learning needs to be, and so on."* Therefore, there are numerous definitions of learner autonomy ranging from the most simple to the highly complex. However, Holec's definition has been used by many. He defined learner autonomy as, *"to say of a learner that he is autonomous is to say that he is capable of taking charge of his own learning"* (1980:4). The CPLA (2010, online), the funding body for the research, also provides a similar definition, *"The Sheffield Hallam definition of learner*

autonomy starts with the premise that an autonomous learner takes responsibility for his/her own learning." There are clearly visible links between these two definitions, with both suggesting that an autonomous learner takes responsibility for their own learning.

The purpose of the research was to investigate what student views are on the term 'learner autonomy' and how they related it to themselves.

2.2 Dissertation supervision

The literature surrounding dissertation supervision typically focuses on self-help style books for students and supervisors, which take them through the stages of a dissertation and what is expected of them for example Bell, 2005. There is limited literature surrounding the experiences of those involved in dissertation supervision, which this project has attempted to address. However, there are some studies on this subject, for example: Todd et al (2006) undertook a study examining the experiences of dissertation supervision at undergraduate level. They look at the experiences of supervisors in the social sciences department and their findings surrounded issues such as: the tension that arises from the 'free' nature of the dissertation; the need to be able to cope with change; and the need to outline the roles of the student and supervisor. Anderson et al (2006) undertook a similar study, *"examining supervisor and student perspectives on producing a Master's dissertation"*. Their discussion surrounded the perspective of supervisors on the supervision and dissertation process with a great degree of focus on the supervision relationship.

Our research aimed to examine the experiences of both supervisors and students at post-graduate level.

2.3 Research methods

The literature around research methods mainly focuses on research methods themselves and subjects such as philosophies and methodologies, for example Johnson and Duberley, 2006. It has been difficult to find research that attempts to examine the actual teaching of research methods, which is what this project was attempting to achieve. However, Benson and Blackman undertook a study into how research methods was taught within their school. They found that, *"it had become apparent, from both staff and student feedback, that the perceptual link between learning research methods as a subject, and its use for future study, was poor."* (2003:39)

Our project aimed to look at: the links between research methods and dissertations; how research methods are taught; and the experiences of both supervisors and students.

3. Methodology and data collection methods

3.1 Methodology

The project was undertaken using an action research methodology. Action research was chosen as the methodology because the project critically relied upon the participation of both staff and students in the process of learning and implementing change from that learning. *“Action research is based on the belief that it is not enough to describe, understand or explain the world, the point is to change it”* (Doherty 2009). The key element of an action research project is that it implements change. The purpose is not (only) to contribute to knowledge but it is to derive solutions to the problems that the participants face, implement the changes and critique the whole process. For those reasons, it was essential that an action research methodology was implemented for this project.

Eden and Huxham (2001:83) outline how it is possible to justify the use of action research over and above any other methodology, *“In order to justify the use of action research rather than other approaches, the reflection and data collection process – and hence the emergent theories – should be focused on the aspects that cannot be captured easily by other approaches. This, in turn, suggests that having knowledge about, and skills to apply, method and analysis procedure for collecting rich data is essential.”* Therefore, the justification for using an action research methodology in this case is that:

- the project requires change to be implemented;
- in order to implement the change, methods that need to be used include:
 - document analysis because the project is about postgraduate education which involves course documents;
 - interviews, these were an important part of the research because they enabled us to gain a greater insight into the thoughts and feelings of the participants;
 - focus groups, these formed the largest part of data collection for the project .

O'Brien (2001:6) supplies a further reason for choosing action research over another methodology, *“action research is chosen when circumstances require flexibility, the involvement of the people in the research, or change must take place quickly or holistically.”*

This project required: the participants to be involved in the research process; the research agenda to not be prescriptive but allowed to develop; and changes to be implemented.

3.2 Research design

There are many methods that could have been used and as Stringer (2007:1) notes, *“Action research is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm whose purpose is to gain greater understanding of a question, problem, or issue.”* Therefore, this provided the grounds for using qualitative methods for the project.

The research programme consisted of seven discrete phases: focus groups with supervisors; focus groups with students which incorporated a student implemented questionnaire; 1-1 semi-structured interviews with supervisors; a research methods module audit; a research methods working group; background reading and meetings; and report writing/presentation. The background reading and meetings were focused on developing the objectives for the research and gaining a clearer understanding of what was happening in this area across the Faculty.

3.2.1 Focus groups

Focus groups were chosen as a method of data collection because they are "*a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment.*" (Kreuger, 1988:18). Also, "*focus groups can be used at any point in a research program.*" (Lewis, 1998:2). Five focus groups were conducted across both the student and supervisor bodies.

Supervisor's focus group

This session was undertaken very early on in the project to gain the views of supervisors. It was structured and run by Murray Clark and Godfrey Craik. Its purpose was to uncover what a supervisor thinks their role is and what they believe a student's role to be. Initial findings from this group were used to inform future sessions. Notes were used as the method of data collection.

Student Focus Group

An investigative focus group was undertaken to explore how students early on in a course are coping and what their expectations are. The participants then took part in a later focus group which explored how their expectations and experiences had developed. The initial focus group informed our questioning in further focus groups and interviews. Only notes were able to be taken in order to protect the confidentiality of the students.

SBS wide student representative focus group

Two focus groups were organised with the student representatives across the Faculty, alongside the other CPLA projects. These sessions were more exploratory and built on the findings from the initial student focus group. The representatives were asked to gather information from fellow peers about their experiences of completing dissertations in the form of a small questionnaire (see appendix 2) between the two sessions. This approach was taken for two reasons:

- as it was felt that students were more likely to give answers to peers,
- to ensure the greatest amount of data possible was gathered.

The focus groups were recorded and transcribed using a thematic approach. Full transcription was not able to be undertaken because of the time constraints for the project.

3.2.2 Supervisor interviews

Interviews were chosen as a method of data collection because *"interviews are an important part of any action research project as they provide the opportunity for the researcher to investigate further, to solve problems and to gather data which could not have been obtained in other ways."* (Cunningham, 1993:93).

Semi-structured interviews were held with academic supervisors to explore more deeply their thoughts and feelings about the supervision process and how students perform at dissertation stage. The interviews were informed by the focus groups and therefore able to be exploratory. In all cases, recordings of the interviews were made, the interviews were fully transcribed to aid data analysis and thematic analysis was used.

3.2.3 Research methods working group

As part of the background to the group, an audit of research methods modules was conducted. This highlighted that there appears to be a multiplicity of modules and approaches to research methods teaching. The research methods working group was then set up to explore the research methods modules and teaching in SBS. The purpose of the group was:

- to build a structural framework for PG research methods modules
- to develop a collaborative approach to research methods teaching
- to create a supportive community of academics involved in the development and delivery of excellent research methods teaching.

3.3 Credibility

Triangulation was used as a method to access the credibility of research, *"triangulation of research data is always important in understanding uncertainty in interpretation or measurement"* (Eden and Huxham 2001:83). Haré and Secord 1976 (in Eden and Huxham (2001:83) add to this by saying, *"Exceptionally, action research provides an opportunity to seek out triangulation between (i) observation of events and social processes, (ii) the accounts each participant offers, and (iii) the changes in these accounts and interpretation of events as time passes"*. Thus, the use of different methods for data collection will ensure that the data collected is credible.

3.4 Ethical issues

There were ethical issues that needed to be considered. O'Brien (2001:10) outlines Winter's principles about ethical considerations in action research: *"Richard Winter (1996) suggests a number of principles to be adhered to:*

- *make sure that the relevant persons, committees and authorities have been consulted, and that the principles guiding the work are accepted in advance by all*
- *all participants must be allowed to influence the work, and the wishes of those who do not wish to participate must be respected*
- *the development of the work must remain visible and open to suggestions from others*
- *permission must be obtained before making observations or examining document produced for other purposes*
- *descriptions of others' work and points of view must be negotiated with those concerned before being published*
- *the research must accept responsibility for maintaining confidentiality.*

Winter draws attention to the need for all participants: to be have some awareness of the research project prior to commencement of the data collection process; to have the opportunity to be able to influence the direction of the project; to have the opportunity to approve work before it is published. Thus it can be seen that the collaborative element of the action research methodology follows through to the ethical considerations also. The project encompassed all of these points, the nature of the action research methodology allowed participants to influence the work and give or refuse permission.

4. Review of findings

Findings from the research indicate there are a number of shared themes, each one is highlighted below.

4.1 Learner autonomy

There were a lot of different views about the concept of learner autonomy, including thoughts on what learner autonomy is about in the context of a dissertation.

In the early stages of the research, the students found it difficult to articulate their thoughts on learner autonomy. Therefore, we created some prompt cards based on the CPLA (2010, online) definition of the term. Based on this, an exercise was undertaken where the student identified statements they thought related to learner autonomy from the prompt cards. The results showed the majority agreed with the following statements, that learner autonomy was:

- *"taking control over their learning*
- *taking responsibility for own learning*

- *working on your own*
- *collaborative learning*
- *supportive learning*
- *undertaking a task without supervision."*

Further to this, the interviews and focus groups provided views from both supervisors and students on learner autonomy:

"Doing things on your own with direction from a tutor, you own work with support from a teacher" (Student)

"I think it's about students being, sort of taking responsibility for their learning. Which I mean that they take responsibility for the processes that they use for the learning and the things that they want to learn." (Supervisor)

"I think also there's a thing about responsibility in that as well...It's not my dissertation as a supervisor, it's not my job to make it happen, so along with that ownership and that freedom comes responsibility" (Supervisor)

Based on these findings, both students and supervisors identify with the idea that learner autonomy surrounds ownership and responsibility.

There were also some views on learner autonomy surrounding self-directed learning: *"a desire for knowledge and understanding not just reading for the assignment and to meet our own objectives" (Student)* Thus, there are some views that learner autonomy surrounds producing a piece of work that is of particular interest to the student themselves.

Further to this a supervisor added: *"I don't see how you can be an autonomous learner unless you've got an ability to reflect on what's happen, on what you've done and draw some conclusions from that."* Therefore, learner autonomy can also be thought to be about being a reflective learner.

In addition to the specific debate surrounding learner autonomy there is another discussion around independent learning, for example Kesten (1987:3) suggests that, *"independent learning is learning in which the learner, in conjunction with relevant others, can make the necessary decisions to meet the learner's own learning needs."* The definition given by Kesten of independent learning shares the thoughts represented in our research by both the students and supervisors alike on learner autonomy, such as meeting a student's own objectives.

Although there are some shared views about the definition of learner autonomy, the students may benefit from the concept, and in turn the implications the term has on what is expected of them, to be outlined in the early stages of their course.

4.2 Research methods (RM) module

The research methods modules were discussed with both supervisors and students, with varying views being raised.

There was a suggestion that research methods does not impact on achievement at master's level: *"even students that have studied research methods do not always achieve at Masters level"* (Supervisor). This may be because of the nature of the module involving difficult concepts and language for people to understand, as one supervisor suggested: *"I think that students do struggle with it but I think that's more a product of research philosophy and research methodology being a difficult subject to get your head round and it's not generally students' primary interest unless they're on the masters for research method"* (Supervisor).

The research suggests that the participants understand the links between the research methods module and their dissertation:

"In the research methods lecture/seminar they gave one presentation about what you need to do, the areas you need to focus on. We also got a handbook the information gave you a brief outline and the deadline for submission. It was very important." (Student)

"...as part of critical thinking we also had 3/4 dissertation sessions." (Student)

"I think the research methods module is good preparation for the dissertation because they're asked to work up a research proposal which can directly contribute to the dissertation" (Supervisor)

However, some writers suggest that students do not make the links between research methods training and completing a dissertation, *"It had become apparent, from both staff and student feedback, that the perceptual link between learning research methods as a subject, and its use for future study, was poor"* (Benson & Blackman, 2003:42). This was supported by some of the supervisors' and students' views: *"On my module 50% of EU students have studied RM and only about 10% of the international students have"* (Supervisor; *"...have started/completed the critical thinking module but it is too specific to the module rather than general to their own research - don't understand the links to their dissertation project"* (Student). A supervisor suggested a reason for this: *"they teach philosophy much earlier in Europe. At Leeds University they teach this at levels 4/5/6"* which proposes that we should be introducing research methods at undergraduate level.

An audit of research methods modules found that there is a multiplicity of modules and approaches to research methods teaching in the Faculty (see appendix 3). This is in line with a supervisors comment, *"why do we have so many RM modules and different credit ratings"*. This could be impacting on the student experience of research methods and also the Faculty's ability to monitor and audit the teaching as it is being taught in various ways. Further to our audit, some interesting points were raised from supervisors about why

students are not engaging with research methods: *"ability to connect with requirements"; "perception of relevance"*. These highlight that there may be several issues that could be impacting on student performance and achievement on RM modules other than the different teaching styles.

The research went on to explore, with supervisors, whether a generic RM module could be implemented. One supervisor commented, *"probably not...we need a coherent offer that makes sense rather than be predicated on one particular discipline."* However, further comments surrounded needing a common understanding: *"we need a shared understanding"; "we need a common understanding of how we explain to students the purpose and process of research."* Another supervisor commented, *"I do think you have can have a generic RM module, think about text books which are generic."* Therefore there are conflicting views as to whether a generic RM module is possible. Perhaps some further research within and outside of the Faculty is needed here to explore ways forward.

There were some interesting comments offered by supervisors about the reason for RM teaching: *"we are producing practitioners in a number of fields, we are not preparing them for PhD."* Anderson et al (2006:155) also share this view, *"it was necessary to be realistic about the extent to which a dissertation could act as a vehicle for research training."* However, another supervisor disagreed, stating: *"We are trying to produce people who are capable of research and target those who want to join the education sector or go on to PhD."* It is clear from these quotations that there is not a shared understanding of the purpose of research methods teaching. Consequently, some further research may need to be undertaken into developing a shared understanding.

In summary, students do not identify with research methods linking to their dissertation and supervisors do not share views as to the extent that it prepares students for further study.

4.3 Previous dissertation experience

There were particular issues surrounding international students and dissertations that were raised by the participants. For example: international students generally have never completed a piece of work, like a dissertation: *"they have not completed a dissertation prior to SHU - their traditional experience of assessment is exams not long written pieces of work" (Student); "Didn't know what a dissertation was, so I 'Googled' it" (Student).*

One student also stated that the dissertation guide was not sufficient to explain to them exactly what a dissertation is: *"have received their dissertation guide but words do not help them to understand or grasp what to do - they would like to see examples of what a dissertation looks like; the structure; layout; length etc" (Student).*

International students have difficulty in understanding what is required of them in order to complete a dissertation. Much of this could be attributed to them having not previously studied in this way and having only experienced exam style assessment. Some extra support

or tuition classes may be necessary for them to understand how to go about constructing, writing and referencing such as piece of work, as it was suggested that the dissertation guides they receive are not sufficient for them to grasp an understanding of what is required of them.

Todd et al (2006:161) describe the purpose of a dissertation, *"It offers the student an opportunity to work independently and submit an extended piece of work. As such, it is seen as a vehicle for promoting autonomous learning and an effective assessment tool."* One participant in our research reported that *"I think it's about ownership, so owning your research, or in this case you know, dissertation research."* (Supervisor) therefore there is some understanding that a dissertation is about producing an autonomous piece of work. However, these views might not be shared by the student body.

4.4 Experience of dissertation(s) at SBS

There are some shared thoughts that it's important for students to identify a topic they are interested in for their dissertation:

"...you need to think about the topic from the beginning and what you're interested in." (Student)

"It's got to be a research question that's intriguing and important and something the student wants to answer the question to rather than an imposed one because the supervisor happens to have an interest in that area." (Supervisor)

This is supported by Todd et al (2006:167) who suggest that it is a supervisor's role to help a student find an appropriate topic, *"the first major task, which the dissertation supervisor undertakes is to provide support for students in identifying and defining the research question."* Todd et al (2006:167) go on further to say, *"students often struggled to define an appropriate focus for their work"* which was also the view of a supervisor in our research, *"...students can't really visualise what form the dissertation is going to take and it takes them some time to recognise what's doable."*

Thus, one of the first tasks a supervisor can be expected to do is to guide a student in finding an appropriate topic for their dissertation.

4.5 Experience of supervision at SBS

There is a consensus between supervisors and students that 6 hours supervision time is not enough:

"6 hours supervision isn't enough" (Student)

"six hours to supervise a full dissertation and mark it and second mark another one, is not probably adequate to have as much input as you might want to or maybe you should" (Supervisor)

"only get 6 hours." (Supervisor)

There is a feeling that 6 hours supervision time is not enough to sufficiently support a student in completing a dissertation. Shannon (1995:12) agrees with these findings suggesting that, *"if there is no workload recognition for the supervisory role, then it may not be done well or it may be avoided expect by the very dedicated."* Later in the same article Shannon goes on to say, *"a thorny issue is recognition of supervision as part of the work load of an academic, and then giving credit for it when teaching duties are allocated."* The research suggests that a Faculty wide consultation on the allowances for dissertation supervision and the expectations from those allowances needs to be undertaken.

There are also concerns from supervisors that students do not what a supervisor's role is in a dissertation:

"I'm not so sure whether students are aware of what they can and should expect from supervisors." (Supervisor)

"[I] have a suspicion that it may be useful to actually, if they don't already, have a session with the students on supervision.... what you should and shouldn't use your supervisor for and how you should and shouldn't manage them and what you should expect or not expect from them, that kind of thing, how to get the most out of the relationship basically. I think maybe something like that would be really useful, not only for the students but for the supervisors as well." (supervisor)

Therefore it may be necessary to exploring implement something more structured around supervision. This could be in several forms, for example: a supervision contract; or simply getting both the student and supervisor to outline and discuss their expectations at the start of the supervision process. As both students and supervisors are unsure of what to expect from each other from the process of supervision, they would benefit from completing some sort of supervision contract at the outset of a dissertation. This would outline what each party could expect of the other during the process of supervision. This is further supported by the following supervisor comments:

"I'm not so sure whether students are aware of what they can and should expect from supervisors."

"have a suspicion that it may be useful to actually, if they don't already, have a session with the students on supervision.... what you should and shouldn't use your supervisor for and how you should and shouldn't manage them and what you should expect or not expect from them, that

kind of thing, how to get the most out of the relationship basically. I think maybe something like that would be really useful, not only for the students but for the supervisors as well."

Todd et al (2006:170) have the same opinion, suggesting that, *"They [the supervisor] and the student wrote down their expectations of one another at that start of the dissertation process and then established the ground rules."* Woolhouse (2002:143) also shares the opinion, *"I now ask students to come to their first tutorial not only with a clear idea for the focus of their study but also to have thought about what they expect from me as their supervisor"*. Therefore, implementing something surrounding the supervision process across the Faculty may alleviate the problems around expectations and help the supervision process to run more smoothly.

Benson and Blackman (2003:43) also examine the boundaries, suggesting that *"although a supervisor can help, only the student can do the actual work"*. Todd et al (2006:169) also state that, *"responsibility for the dissertation belongs to the student."* Both suggest that the dissertation is an independent piece of work; therefore supervisors need to be careful to strike a balance between helping a student and doing their work for them.

4.6 Meetings with supervisors

The research showed there to be a consensus between supervisors and students that face-to-face meetings are the best form of contact in the supervision process and the best way of providing and receiving feedback:

"Once in a while, maybe twice a month meeting face-to-face is useful, but keeping in contact via email is the best way." (Student)

"Send each part to tutor, make appointments to see tutor face-to-face and get some feedback. Best way is face-to-face. Body language is also important." (Student)

"Personally face-to-face meetings should take pace, periodical, so when I've finished a certain portion I make a meeting with my tutor I have his schedule so I can work around his holidays etc." (Student)

"I'd expect to meet with them fairly regularly but bearing in mind the issues around allocation of hours I think you've got to be fairly strict with that. So I'd probably expect sort of 6 face-to-face meetings and email contact, you know sending things through for me to read or kind of immediate questions that can be dealt with via email or telephone." (Supervisor)

Further to this, there was a view that having sight of drafts before meetings was useful: *"Usually I want to actually see them; maybe I don't know four or five times something like that. ...But what I want to do, before I see them, I want to see where they've got to so I expect to be able to read what they've written" (Supervisor)* Todd et al (2006:169) support this, *"Students must come to meetings with something tangible to discuss."* Therefore, students can

be expected to have completed work and sent it to their supervisor prior to the supervision meetings in order for them to be worthwhile and supervisors and students alike can expect to have face-to-face supervision meetings.

4. 7 Training of supervisors

The findings from the research indicated that supervisors do not receive much in the way of support or training:

"supervisors need support and do not always get it, seems to be a part of the culture."

"I would argue we need a supervisor's handbook."

"as a new supervisor, I've not sat down with anybody and talked through, any course leader, and talk through what they expect from me as someone supervising students on their course."

"you're almost let loose to go and start supervising without any kind of guidance I suppose."

This is inline with Todd et al (2006:170) findings, *"None of the tutors interviewed had received formal training, either in the case study or any other institution, on how to approach supervising the undergraduate dissertation."* Consequently, it may be necessary to make some training available to supervisors, particularly new supervisors.

4.8 Barriers

Language was highlighted by many of the participants as a barrier to students progression:

"there is a language barrier for a lot of students (such as Chinese students) who do not understand assignments, which causes confusion for others. SHU should be motivating students to learn English. SHU should be marking attendance" (Student).

"cultural and background differences are difficult at first. See it from the language, which is why we come to the UK, but few UK students in the class" (Student).

"The first week where are the British students? Most of my learning takes place in the group environment so explore lots of other countries not UK, want to know more about the 1st world" (Student).

"I feel afraid because I am [not] good at English and again my language is not very well" (Student).

"Language support is very important for them to improve their ability in studying their modules/course. Also, make sure students speak English in class" (Student).

"..the English support is not enough" (Student).

"I think the language barrier is a big thing, particularly for international students... when you start getting into research methodology, as you know it's a completely different language to English speakers, so when you are being taught that, not in your first language, I think it's even more difficult to engage with" (Supervisor).

A supervisor also raised the issue of the standard of students' English, *"there is an issue of giving feedback on the standard of English."* This is inline with a student's own statement that they find the English language difficult, and that language support is very important to them: *"language support is very important for them to improve their ability in studying their modules/course. Also, make sure students speak English in class."* The issue of language in dissertation supervision was also explored by Kam (1997) who suggested that University staff regularly supervise students with language difficulties. Therefore, increased language support for international students is needed. There is also a need for subject specific language support to be made available, rather than general language support so that students become familiar with industry terminology for example. Another suggestion, to help alleviate language problems, was raised by a student and suggested that tutors should encourage students to speak English in class, rather than allow them to talk in their native tongue.

Also the issue of plagiarism was raised and there are some cultural sensitivities that are particularly relevant to international students: *"[we] are not allowed to copy others work but in China it is different."* (Student) Therefore, lecturers and supervisors need to be aware of the cultural differences and the importance of explaining why plagiarism work is not allowed.

A further request was for clearer referencing guidelines: *"Harvard way to reference - most students don't know how to use this, no-one to clarify how to do this" (Student);* and *"English was a major hurdle - so took up many university classes to improve English skills and help with referencing."* (Student) International students find this difficult as suggested above, they may never have been required to reference previously. A session on referencing at various stages of their master's programme may help to alleviate the problem and provide the students with the skills required to reference correctly.

5. Recommendations

A lot of the recommendations focus on the needs of international students. Supporting students at an early stage in their courses would help to alleviate problems later on in their University life and ensure that the students get the best possible experience available to them.

5.1 Learner autonomy

There was evidence that students and supervisors alike shared a view of learner autonomy. However, the early research showed that at the outset the students were not as clear about the idea of learner autonomy. As a result, the students may benefit from the concept being outlined in the early stages of their course.

Other topics to be considered are exploring with the students how they can apply learner autonomy to their own learning experiences and how they can go about being an autonomous learner. There could be several solutions to this:

- have a session in the induction stages for the course on learner autonomy,
- a Faculty (or University) wide Blackboard site on learner autonomy.

5.2 Research methods

There is a clear disparity in the understanding of students when it comes to the links between research methods and the dissertation. Clearly explaining the purpose of research methods at the outset is something that needs to be explored. A solution for this could be having a standard explanation of what RM is about across the Faculty and enabling lecturers to include this explanation in module guides, blackboard sites and the first seminar/lecture on the modules. This would also help to alleviate the tensions surrounding the perception that RM is not relevant for students'. The design of the module could also be explored, should RM have a dissertation focus rather than an RM focus i.e. explore how to apply RM to their chosen subject area.

The research found that there are several different RM modules and ways of teaching RM across the Faculty. This could be impacting on the student experience of RM, as there is no consistency, and also the Faculty's ability to monitor and audit the teaching. The research also explored whether a standard RM module could be implemented but supervisors had conflicting views as to whether this was practical or would be successful. Some further research within and outside of the Faculty is needed to explore ways forward. One exploration could be to examine what other Universities are doing in this area.

There are also some inconsistencies between staff in the understanding of the ultimate purpose of the master's level education. Further research needs to explore how a shared understanding can be developed, this could involve further focus groups with supervisors.

5.3 Dissertation

5.3.1 Language support

Some extra support or tuition classes may be necessary for international students to understand how to go about constructing, writing and referencing such as piece of work, as it was suggested that the dissertation guides are not sufficient for them to grasp an

understanding of what is required of them. Another suggestion is for refresher sessions on subjects such as referencing to take place at various stages of the course.

5.3.2 Allowances

The research suggests that a Faculty wide consultation on the allowances for dissertation supervision and the expectations of what those allowances entail needs to be undertaken, as both students and supervisors believe that the time allocated is not enough.

5.3.3 Supervision contract

The research also suggests that it may be necessary to implement something more structured around supervision. Implementing something around what can be expected, by both parties, about dissertation supervision across the Faculty may alleviate the tensions surrounding unfulfilled expectations and help the supervision process to run more smoothly.

5.3.4 Supervision meetings

Both students and supervisors feel that the best way to progress with a dissertation is through face-to-face supervision meetings. Consequently, supervisors should be encouraged to undertake supervision in this way.

5.3.5 Supervisor training

Supervisors also felt that they would benefit from undertaking some training surrounding supervision. This could take the form of a shortened version of the PhD supervision programme that is University wide.

5.4 Barriers

Increased language support for international students is needed as they are struggling to gain the right subject specific language. They are also struggling with referencing and plagiarism. A suggestion to help alleviate some of this is for tutors to encourage students to speak English in class, rather than allow them to talk in their native tongue.

Lecturers and supervisors also need to be aware of the cultural differences and the importance of explaining why copying someone else's work is not allowed. Language specific support on referencing also needs to be given, rather than the general SHU referencing guidelines, as international students struggle to understand these.

6. Conclusion

As the project was undertaken using an action research methodology, the evaluation was carried out by the project staff, as Stringer (2007:163) explains, *"In keeping with the*

principles of action research, evaluation is not carried out by an outside evaluator to make judgements about the worth, effectiveness, success or failure of a project. It is a process that enables those who have been engaged in the research project to learn from their own experience."

The project was undertaken over a nine month period. The limitations of the research are that:

- the research mainly focused on the experiences of international students. However, the majority of master's level students within SBS are international therefore it is a reflection of student experiences in this Faculty;
- only one group of students were followed from start to finish of their programmes and they were only involved in two focus groups;
- limited numbers of supervisors were involved in the research and they were (mostly) only involved at one point in time, not throughout the programme of the research.

The research did, however, highlight some key issues that need to be addressed and some areas have already begun to be (see appendix 4 for further details), such as:

- RM module leaders will be reviewing their module specifications, handbooks and teaching delivery;
- a research methods forum is being established which will try to share best practice, debate underpinning values, share resources and seek consistency in approach wherever it is appropriate;
- a programme of supervisor development sessions is being established to support dissertation supervisors across SBS;
- a review of the allocation of hours for dissertation supervision is being undertaken.

The research aimed to arrive at practical solutions to the problems faced by the participants and this aim has already begun to be realised, as demonstrated by the realisation of some of the action points arising out of the research.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1

The research is designed to identify how dissertations are managed across the faculty as there is no evidence that there has been an audit of this assessment task. This is of critical importance in terms of quality and enhancement as the dissertation accounts for between 45% - 60% of the credit required to reach the masters level. The outputs in terms of publication and opportunities for PhD study are also important at a time when the faculty is re-launching the Sheffield Business School.

There is anecdotal evidence that practice in this area is inconsistent and that quality standards are variable in terms of application of supervision and feedback on research. We have little evidence as to whether opportunities for collaborative research with organisations and managers are being developed. While this research will provide benefits in terms of providing a coherent and faculty wide strategy for dissertation research this must be in the context of developing and embedding learner autonomy. The dissertation is the culmination of master's level studies and is the ultimate in learner autonomy, or should be, but this is what the research is designed to investigate.

The terms of reference for this research are:

- Review the supervision process used by masters/MBA programmes;
- Explore the level and degree of learner / researcher autonomy;
- Evaluate the approach to research methods teaching and design of modules;
- Review the range of assessment criteria used across the programmes;
- Evaluate the range and quality of feedback provided to research students;
- Consider the extent to which dissertation research leads on to PhD study.

There are a number of issues that will need to be considered by those leading the research project. These are as follows:

- The number of research methods modules at present being delivered across the faculty;
- Exploring the student experience of supervision and learner autonomy;
- The extent to which the dissertation module review forms part of the AQR process;
- The number and quality of the assessment feedback matrices;
- How supervision is delivered and how supervisors are supported and developed;
- How feedback on research is disseminated to research students;
- The sampling and moderation process in terms of consistency and quality;
- Student progression to PhD / DBA research

“The funding for the project was available for 18 months commencing in January 2009. The selection of the researcher was of critical importance to the success of this project. There

were potential issues about how staff will engage with this project if not managed sensitively. There was a good case here for employing a research student who would be objective and more capable of getting support across the faculty.”

(Taken from Faculty Dissertation Research, Godfrey Craik - 11/11/2008)

8.2 Appendix 2 - Focus Group questions

The following questions have been derived from the group feedback from the session on defining learner autonomy and exploring dissertation experiences.

If you ask as many colleagues on your course these questions, collect the responses you can report these at the session on the 18th May.

1. What was your experience of study in the first month of the course?
2. What is the impact of the diverse background of students on studying and learning?
3. What is your experience of studying in the UK versus your expectation?
4. What would you want to modify in a better way to make a difference?
5. What is the best way to get information from students?
6. Do you feel you have the ability to study on your own?
7. What was your expectation about the level of study of the course?
8. What do you expect from the dissertation supervisor in terms of support?
9. What problems or issues have you faced in doing your dissertation?
10. How would you build a relationship with the tutors?

8.3 Appendix 3 - research methods module audit

Module code	Masters subject area	Name of RM module	Courses covered	Elective or mandatory	Credit rating	Duration	Delivery mode	Evidence of research methods ethics statement in guide
25-7B11-00S or 25-7E03-00s	Change and consultancy	Research methods		mandatory	15	20 hours		
25-7S02-00S	MA SSRM/PhD	Research design and execution	MA SSRM/PhD	mandatory	30	45 hours	block	yes
25-7A16-00S	Banking and Finance/Risk management and strategic financial management	Research methods		mandatory	10	20 hours		
25-7D13-00S	International Business management and the globalisation of business	Research methods		mandatory	15	45 hours		
	DBA	Research design and execution	DBA	mandatory	n/a	45 hours		no
25-7M01-00S or 25-7M01-00Y	MBA	Critical thinking and research		mandatory	15	30 hours		
26-7U12-00S	Facilities management	Research methods		mandatory	15	30 hours		
	Sport and leisure management	Critical thinking and investigation methods		mandatory	15	24 hours		
44-7975-00S	International events; hospitality and tourism	Research methods				36 hours		
		Reflective marketing practitioner						
	Business and Finance: food manufacturing management	research methods						
	Business and Finance: human resource leadership	research methodologies and research methods		mandatory	15	25 hours		
	Business and finance: HRM - development	research methods and consultancy		mandatory	10	20 hours		
	Business and Finance: leadership and management	research methodologies and research methods		mandatory	10	16 hours		
	Business and finance: MBA Prague	Research methodology and dissertation support		mandatory	15	30 hours		
	Business and finance: TQM and OE	research methods		mandatory	15	25 hours		
25-7B11-00S or 25-7E03-00s	HRM/OB	research methods	MSc OD & Consultancy MSc Charity Resource Mgmt MSc Coaching & Mentoring MSc SE Development		15	21 hours		In Mentoring and coaching
25-7F14-01A	TQM	research methods		mandatory	15	125 hours		
	Finance	research methods	MA Finance MA Banking and Financial Markets MA Accounting and Finance MA Risk Management					yes

8.4 Appendix 4 - outcomes

Sheffield Business School

Research Methods Modules in Masters Programmes

Introduction

At the start of the 2009/10 academic year Liz Doherty and Isobel Doole undertook to conduct a review of the research methods modules currently on offer within SBS. This was in response to general concern that there might be a multiplicity of research methods modules being offered and inconsistencies in our research methods teaching. We also had some concerns that research ethics was not always being covered in modules and that more secure ethical scrutiny was needed for masters' research. At the same time, Godfrey Craik had embarked on a piece of research into learner autonomy which included an evaluation of the management of dissertations within SBS. We were able to influence some of Godfrey's research questions and use some of his findings. The paper below covers the following areas:

- Approach
- Audit of current research methods modules
- Student views
- Staff views
- Conclusions and Recommendations

Approach

We first obtained a list of all the masters' research methods modules and the associated module specifications. Appendix 1 lists all of the modules we have identified, together with some commentary about them.

Godfrey's primary data collection was comprised of three focus groups, two with masters' students and one with staff. The student focus groups were with International Business (21 people) and MBA students (15 people). The staff group was made up of six people who are involved in the delivery of research methods teaching. It had been hoped to assemble a broader range of staff but this was difficult to arrange given other commitments.

Audit of current research methods modules

Appendix 1 contains all of the modules we have been able to identify. It is not possible to produce an absolutely accurate list as this can only be a snapshot at a period in time - modules and courses are often under review.

The first point to note is heartening - there is not a huge proliferation of modules. The MRes modules should be put to one side as they support the PhD programme, and the modules

towards the end of the list with titles such as 'Methods of Enquiry' or 'Critical thinking' are not research methods modules. In most cases these are offered in addition to research methods modules and have broader educational aims, or they support industry-based consultancy projects with clients.

Most of the modules support more than one course and they look efficient (e.g. the module supporting hospitality, tourism and events; the module supporting accountancy, finance, banking and risk management; and the module supporting the change suite). There are only a handful of very small and specific modules - e.g. supporting the Facilities Management MBA - and this appears justified given the specialist nature of the course.

Almost all of the modules attract 15 credits. The exception to this is the module supporting the MSc in Human Resource Management. It is important to consider this in relation to the whole course which includes a research based module 'Perspectives on International HRM' which is intended to prepare students for their dissertations.

There is considerable overlap across modules in the use of research methods texts to support student learning. Some modules engage with underpinning research philosophy far more than others - this appears to reflect the needs of the students on particular courses, though it may also be a feature of the expertise/approach of the module leader.

Coverage of research ethics is patchy - some module specifications make no reference at all to research ethics, where others refer to ethics in the learning outcomes and/or indicative content. Only one module refers directly to the requirement to complete a university ethics form. This is a weakness across SBS and it could be addressed either in our research methods modules or in our dissertation modules.

In most cases the assignment attached to the module is the production of a research proposal which draws on both literature related to the substantive topic and literature related to research methodologies and research methods. In one or two cases the assignment involves the evaluation of academic papers and the critique of research methods.

Student views

The main points relevant to research methods modules arising from the student focus groups were as follows:

- Often students do not know what a dissertation is
- Often students arrive at SHU with no prior experience of using research methods (this is particularly the case with international students)
- Students find research methods sessions helpful and important
- Students like working on research proposals as they help them work on their dissertations

- MBA students appear not to be able to link the critical thinking module sufficiently to their dissertation projects
- Students like one-to-one supervision in their dissertations but feel that 6 hours is not long enough

Staff views

The main points emerging from the staff focus group were as follows;

- The minority of students (especially international students) had studied research methods in the past
- Some students are less equipped than others to handle research philosophy (e.g. students on conversion courses may be more challenged by this)
- Most people thought there wasn't a strong case for a generic research methods module across SBS. This was because specialist modules were geared to specific markets, specific disciplines and specific student needs.
- However there was a case for developing more shared understanding about how we teach research methods. Perhaps a framework which captured some common values and approaches.
- Some people argue that the research methods modules should stand alone and not necessarily be linked to the dissertation.
- There was a general view that dissertation supervisors needed more support and development. In some areas it is difficult to find supervisors. 6 hours was considered insufficient for supervision. Better support for supervisors would improve the consistency of the students' dissertation experience.
- A lot of the responsibility for supporting supervisors lies with the module leaders of research methods modules - it would be good to get them together to share best practice.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We do not have a worrying proliferation of research methods modules - in fact our provision looks reasonably efficient and appropriate. Given the different needs of students on different courses/programmes, differences in emphasis and approach appear to be justified. Any move towards reducing the number of modules would have to be considered in the light of the whole curriculum of a particular course and there does not appear to be a pressing need to do this. It is clear that there is still a strong need for research methods modules given the students' lack of prior skills, particularly amongst international students. The students themselves find research methods sessions useful and they like working on research proposals that will feed into their dissertations.

Coverage of research ethics is patchy and this needs to be addressed. At the very least every research methods course should have ethics covered in both the learning outcomes and the indicative content. A small group has recently been established by the SBS Research Ethics Committee to consider how we ensure that ethical scrutiny is carried within all our student

projects, in both undergraduate and post-graduate programmes. This review of research methods modules underlines the importance of this work.

Whilst there is no strong argument to establish one generic research methods module for SBS, the evidence suggests that we could improve the consistency of our research methods teaching and the quality of our dissertation supervision. This could be done by establishing a research methods forum for module leaders and supervisors.

The following recommendations are proposed:

1. We do not pursue a radical rationalisation of research methods modules at the present time
2. We require every research methods module leader to review their module specifications, module handbooks and teaching delivery to include research ethics within their learning outcomes and module content
3. We ask the small group set up by the SBS Research Ethics Committee to make SBS-wide recommendations about ethical scrutiny in masters (and undergraduate) dissertations
4. We establish a research methods forum for research methods module leaders. This will be to share best practice, debate underpinning values, share resources and seek consistency in approach wherever it is appropriate
5. We establish a programme of supervisor development sessions to support dissertation supervisors across SBS
6. Given the importance of the dissertation in SBS masters programmes (generally 33% of the students' study) we review the hours we allocate to supervision.

Liz Doherty

Head of Research and Doctoral Programmes

9 February 2010

SBS Appendix 5

The use of E-Case Studies for MSc Total Quality Management course

MALIHE SHAHIDAN (S.MALIHE@SHU.AC.UK)

E-Case Study for MSc TQM course:

This research provided an opportunity for examining and developing learner autonomy by using case studies on group of distance learning students.

This study has outlined factors associated with learner autonomy as well as factors enhancing student's learner autonomy.

1) Rational:

Every year there are several indications of interests from MSc Total Quality Management and Organisational Excellence students on continuation of their study to PhD level. In order to be in position to support their interest, they can study independently and develop a mini case study. This output can be used as an assessment and evaluation of their knowledge on move to PhD. Additionally, the output can be used towards their final dissertation and possibly publications to be presented in conferences or journals.

This will motivate students to go through this experiment as they can see some benefits for themselves. The selection of area of interest and method of managing the process would be very flexible and student would be provided with a template and framework to carry out the task.

This final out come would be in a format of an E-case study and that can be accessed by other students for feedback and further discussions.

2) Literature review:

In last decade there has been number of researches on learner autonomy. Cotterall and Crabbe (2008) attempted to define the teacher-learner relationship in autonomy learning. They have identified the relationship between the level of knowledge of learner and selection of tasks. Cotterall and Crabbe (2008) believed that to make any sense of autonomy learning one needs to start with beliefs, understanding and actions that identify the learner/teacher roles. They believe any connection between teacher and learners are dependent on environment and surroundings of learner and this is an important factor on selected research sample.

Many teachers believe on importance of incorporating principles of learner autonomy (Cotterall, 2000) in their teaching strategy. They are convinced students are able to take charge of their own learning into their practice (Holec 1981).

Based on Cotterall et al (2000) research, autonomy has been defined as involving student's capacity to use their learning independently of teachers. This is when autonomy will become a certain goal for learners.

In this case learners are involved and play different roles and their roles would be varied as attitudes, beliefs, strategies of each learner are different. In support of that Lee (1998) has been suggested that voluntary self-directed learning programme will help learners to become autonomous.

Cotterall (2000) has identified that to develop a course which is supporting learning autonomy five principles in designing should be considered:

- learner goals,
- the learning process,
- tasks,
- Learner strategies, and
- reflection on learning.

On addition there are number of challenges on increasing learners' ability to 'take charge of their learning' (Holec 1981). The main issue in design of a course for learner autonomy is to identify how to support learner to transfer the responsibility for decision-making to learner from teacher.

To design an activity to promote learner autonomy one needs to set out goals which the learner consider as important to his/her learning (Breen and Candlin, 1980). Results of many research demonstrated that learners are not learning unless they have an ideas of what they are trying to achieve and what is the reflection of that on their learning. Also they should not considering traditional view of teachers and learners where teacher is the expert and learner is novice (Cotterall et al, 2000).

3) Reflection on learning

The surroundings and environment of learner can play an important role on their learning. Dam and Legenhausen (1999) suggested that to measure the effectiveness of the learning environment you can assess the learners' ability to reflect critically on their learning. On addition it is possible to review past and future learning experiences in order to enhance learning of the future, on the other word in autonomous education the learning experiences of the past are reflected and transformed into plans for future action. Therefore the amount of experience of learner is a key factor in autonomy and it would increases as awareness of an individual's learning grows.

To understanding and measure how the learners feel about such activity researcher decided to investigate the level of interests of sample group on learning autonomy. The following data collection will describes the findings of the research

4) Methodology:

The research sample are group of Post Graduate Distance Learning students who have been involved with study for more than one year and already passed number of modules. This gives an opportunity to evaluate and benchmark the performance of students prior and after this research. The sample group have experience on how to manage the traditional approach of handling course works, (as they have already submitted more than half of their course works). They are self disciplined and have considerable amount of experience on managing projects. Therefore, it was expected to receive a positive feedback and attitude towards the proposal from the sample group.

5) Initial research:

Data for this study was collected over a two phases in period of 2008/10 from MSc Total Quality Management students from two different intakes in time of their study.

The data was collected by a combination of methods including focus group discussions, surveys and individual student interviews. The first survey was completed at the start of Year 1 and was followed by focus group discussions. The second survey took place towards the end of the second year. The level of student participation in the project is indicated in table 1.

This research took place in two years and revealed a mixture of feelings towards the autonomy.

5.1) Research Sample:

Two groups of students were investigated and received a questionnaire and went through some one to one interviews.

Group A has just recently joined the MSc course and they are in full-time jobs. They are in range of 25-50 years old and have been through education and have Degree in different fields.

Group B has got very similar characteristics apart from their status in education. They are in their second year of their study and have more than one year of experience within the course.

The table below demonstrates the population and sample size of the research:

Group	Year of Study	Age	Gender	Job	Background Education	Population size	Respond	% Respond
A	1	25-55	M/F	Full-time job	Degree plus more than 5 years working experience	21	14	66%
B	2	25-55	M/F	Full-time job	Degree plus more than 5 years working experience	14	10	71%

Table 1: Population size and Responds

A numbers of questions were asked and answers to some of the questions are as follow:

a) Students were asked to define their feelings towards the opportunity to plan and design a module to be credited towards their MSc qualification. Responds are demonstrated in the table below:

Group	Number of responds	Feel comfortable	Not sure	Not comfortable
A	14	2 (14%)	1 (7%)	11(79%)
B	10	6 (60%)	2 (20%)	2(20%)

Table 2: Sample feedback on learning autonomy

Next students were asked to select their most desirable style of teacher-students relationship.

Out of six different styles of study the results revealed that 58% of students preferred tutors defining the plan and students make a decision.

On the other hand 23% indicated the least desirable style would be the tutors plan materials and assess students, which is the existing style of delivery and assessment in most all modules.

Student had some doubt and sense of un-certainty on having autonomy to choose area of study and not sure about the outcomes. They were not certain if their inputs would be the most relevant areas and if they have identified and covered the key issues for the area of study.

Meanwhile, some students were enthusiastic as they saw that as an opportunity to select what they believe is the most interesting areas to study.

In second phase of the research students who were thinking of continuing their study invited to write a case study which can be considered as a proposal to their research. Based on student's feedback to first phase a frame work was created and they were asked to create a case study which is answering the following questions:

- Identify an area within the Total Quality management to investigate.
- What do you expect to have as outcomes of that research/study?
- Identify list of aims and objectives of this research.
- How do you plan to achieve those aims and objectives?
- How do you measure /assess your outcomes?

In final part the case studies were edited to be ready to put on-line for more discussion and be evaluated by other students (see figure 2).

The result of initial research helped to use case study as a technique for learner Autonomy.

6) Why E-Case Study?

It has been suggested (Bonwell and Eison, 1991; Sivan et al, 2001) that students can learn more effectively when they are actively involved in the learning process. Therefore, use of the case study approach was selected as a way in which active learning strategies can be implemented in the MSc TQM course. Fry et al (1999) describes the case study as complex examples which provide context knowledge of a problem as well as illustrating the main point.

6.1) How to use Case study to achieve learner's autonomy:

Case study has been identified as a mean of interactive learning strategy which is shifting the focus from teacher to more student-centred activities (Grant, 1997). On addition case studies have increased student motivation and interests in a subject (Mustoe and Croft, 1999). As Claire Davis and Elizabeth Wilcock outlined their experience of using case studies, they proved that they can be used as:

- Bridging the gap between theory and practice;
- Encouraging active learning;
- Providing an opportunity for the development of key skills;
- Increasing the students' enjoyment of the topic.

6.2) Project-based against Problem-based learning:

To understand the role of case study in development and motivation of learner, it would also be important to make a distinction between project-based learning and problem-based learning. Savin-Baden (2003) identified the differences between problem-based learning and project-based learning in table 3 as follows:

Project-based Learning	Problem-Based Learning
Task orientated with activity often set by tutor	Problems provided by staff but students define what and how
Tutor supervises	Tutor facilitates
Students produce a solution or strategy to solve the problem	Focus is on problem-management, not on a clear and bounded solution
Some supporting lectures to assist students to undertake activity, otherwise students use knowledge from previous lectures	Lectures usually used on the basis that students are not expected to define the required knowledge needed to solve the problem

Table 3: Differences and similarities between project-based learning (similar in structure to case study learning) and problem based learning.

7) Creating case studies:

Cotterall (2000) study claims that the main element to learner autonomy would be to identify the goals of learners and her learners were asked to specify their goals and identify appropriate resources, and to put together measures for determining when their goals had been reached. A similar process was applied on case studies for MSc TQM.

To achieve the objectives students were asked to put together the following information:

- Creating list of aims and objectives and rational for the case;
- Creating a list of out comes for the piece of work,
- Creating criteria for measuring and evaluating the outcomes and that can be in a format of a Matrix,
- Creating list of relevant resources which can assist the student on achieving the aims and objectives of the work; and
- List of any empirical work/study they have been through to achieve the outcomes.

In order to experience autonomy a number of learners (students in masters) developed number of case studies.

Case Study 1:

The first output demonstrated that learners' goal for development of case study was to achieve solution to his business problem. While his goal was relevant and important, it was highly unrealistic to achieve all of them (given the level of information available to learner).

After some talking about his goals and his current experiences, the learner decided to focus initially on theories he knows while expanding his knowledge on different techniques and tools. This change in goals enhanced his motivation, by ensuring that he experiences additional skills and moving towards his more long-term goals.

Case Study2:

The second case study was purely applying his past experience and trying to learn that on new circumstance. While there was nothing new in that case study but, he demonstrated clear understanding of how to apply theories on the different environment. This can be considered as enhancement of knowledge.

A number of interviews with learners demonstrated that they have good experience on goal settings, monitoring or evaluating their learning, and that they were unlikely to acquire extensive supported practice. This can be result of the nature of this group of students work experience and responsibilities.

The result of research demonstrated that the list of outcomes from the case studies are combination of one or more of learner needs, knowledge within the field, their awareness of the field , their interests and goals for the study.

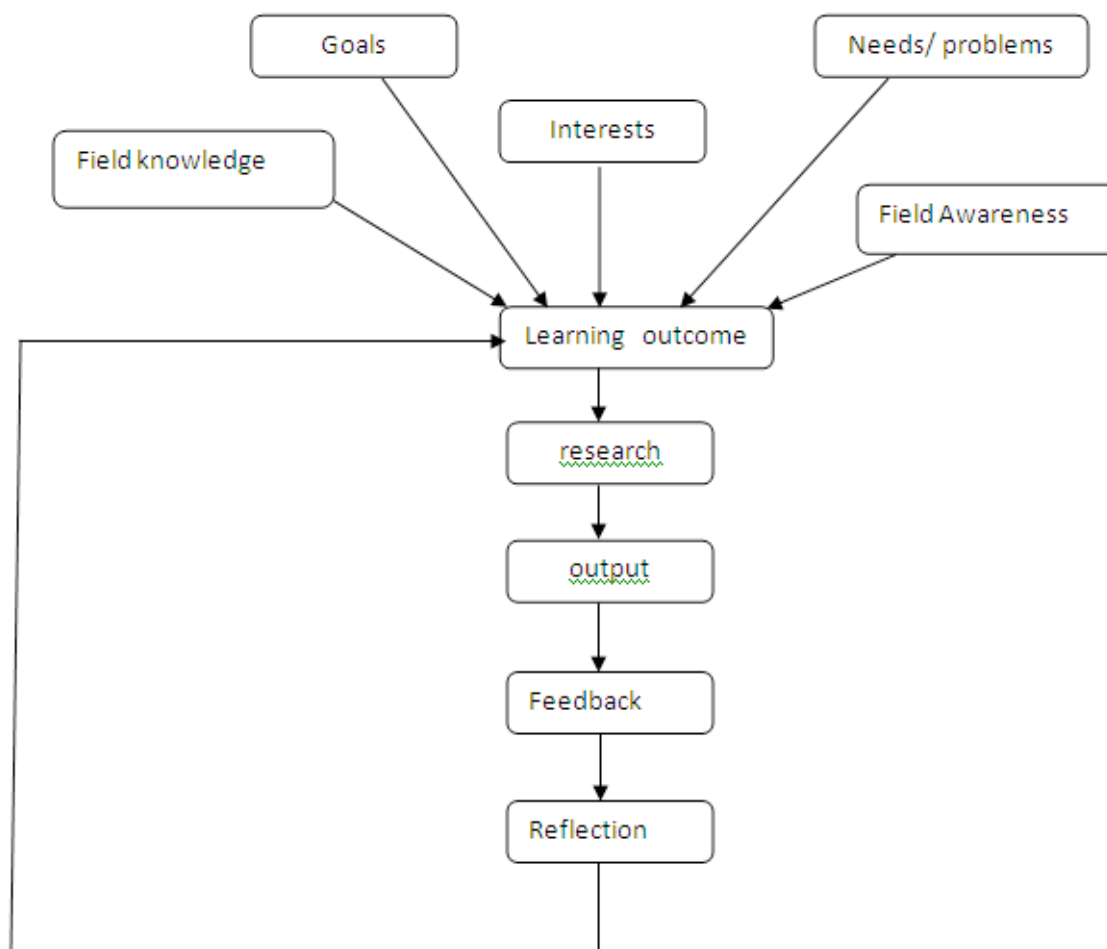


Figure 1: Adopted from: Simplified model of the language learning process (Cotterall, S, 2000)

This is an optional piece of work and timing of introducing this work can be considered as an important factor. This piece of work would be an initiation for those who are interested to go beyond MSc level and moving to PhD level.

As their work would be on-line, it provides an opportunity for students to review their understanding of modules they have already passed and can be considered as an assessment or benchmarking of their knowledge half way through the course by their colleagues as well as tutors.

Additionally, it will open a discussion on line with other students who are not into enhancing their qualification but, still interested on the findings of their colleagues. The below is the picture of Blackboard site for discussion board of MSc TQM course.

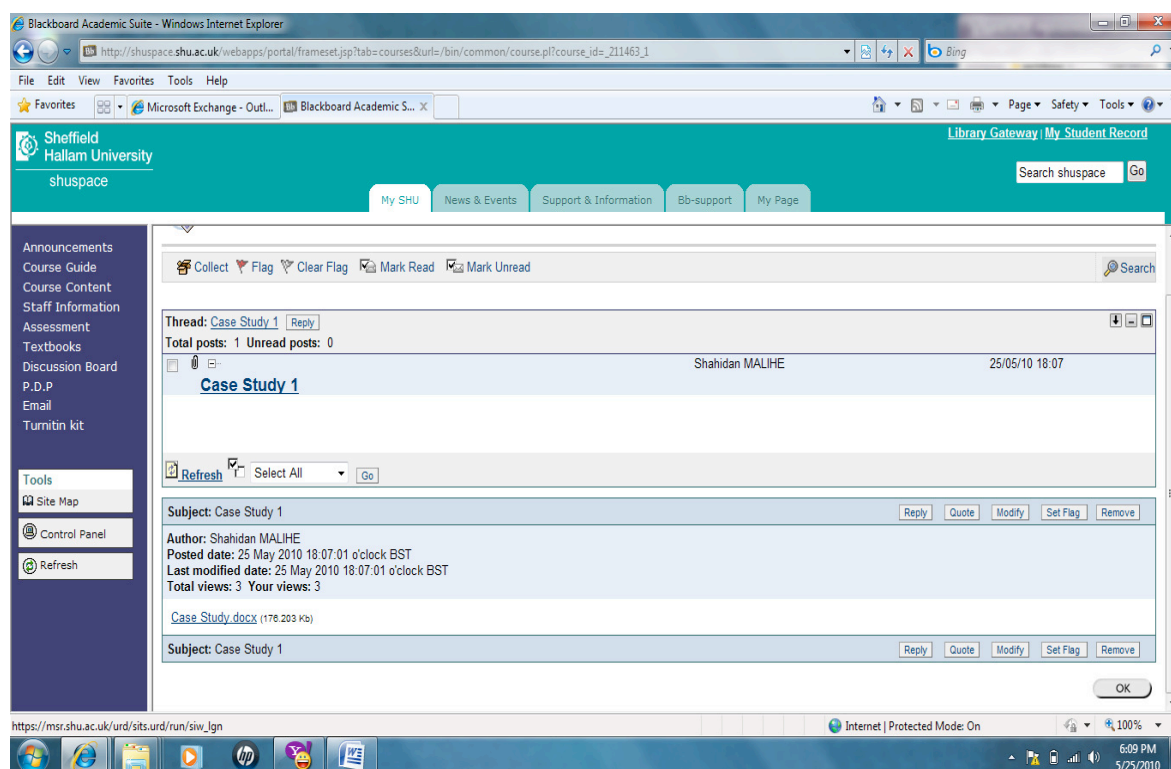


Figure 2: Discussion Board on Black Board site of MSc TQM course

This work can use the existing learning materials or alternatively adopting one of the modules and use different set of resources. It also can be purely empirical work and applying the knowledge on a case study.

The next stage of this research would be to analyse the feedback and discussions of the students on the case studies on line. This can be considered as a measurement and benchmark of the activity while positive and constructive discussion can encourage others to move to creation of case studies and enhance their ability to create and be more active on similar tasks for learner Autonomy.

E-Case Study One

Learner put together a list of aims and objectives as follow:

1. Consider external organisations and what they strive to achieve
2. To make recommendations for company A from the observations of other organisations
3. To consider theories of best practice and identify what can be applied with ease and how this may benefit the organisation and its customer
4. Discuss what other attributes may also be factored in to complement the service and boost profitability of the company

5. Identify future areas for further investigation and make recommendations of the actions required

To look externally and examine how some of the changes can impact company a customer base.

Then learner tried to find answer to following questions:

**1) Identify an area within the Total Quality management to investigate;
(I.e. explain how you identify those areas? what would be the main reason/ motive for selection of that area?)**

One of the biggest issues preventing orders from being completed in full is due to the lack of inventory or incorrect inventory. Inventory currently consists of approximately 2,300 Stock Keeping Units (SKU) all of varying volumes. Each product is unique and not easy to substitute.

There are a number of factors to consider before making an informed decision on what the solution should look like in order that the proposal could offer a 'quality' service, such factors being:

- Minimum order quantities
- Annual demand for the SKU
- Frequency of demand of the SKU
- Supplier lead time
- Suitable alternatives (if applicable)
- Funding requirements to sustain appropriate levels

2) What do you expect to have as outcomes of that research/study?

To develop an improved slicker system that offers a higher level of quality data, that will enable the Purchasing process to deliver a more efficient, time sensitive, robust and reliable inventory at a lower cost to the company.

Create greater communication links between the various members of the value chain.

I.e. Customer > Host Company > Tier 1 Supplier > Tier 2 Supplier

**3) Identify list of aims and objectives of this research.
(i.e. How did you identify those points? what would you study?)**

The improved systems should offer cost benefits to provide a leaner and more efficient method of working, to prove theorists beliefs that 'Quality is free' (Crosby).

- The cost of development and implementation should be surpassed by the cost benefits given through reduction in working capital through reduction inventory, and less reliance on external funding
- A reduction in response times to suppliers less through the development of more efficient methods of working
- Reduction in supplier lead time through having faster more accurate data to assist in their production planning systems

**4) How do you plan to achieve those aims and objectives?
(i.e., Literature review, survey, interview, etc.)**

The research would consider:

- Process mapping of the current processes to identify the key requirements and weaknesses of the current systems
- Appraisal of current stock modelling systems within the host company to give a benchmark for the research to measure against
- Review of host company supplier processes to assess their weaknesses / requirements from the host company
- Research around the current perceived best practice from a variety of theorists that could create greater reliability
- Research current software to assess if there are any "quick" fixes or components / methods that could be incorporated into a 'personalised' model
- Research with other organisations to benchmark systems providing further comparative measures

**5) How do you measure /assess your outcomes?
(i.e., against what criteria do you evaluate your outcomes? how do you select those criteria?)**

- Measurement of the success will come through
- The reduction in the host companies lead time which is measured from Sales Order receipt to Date of despatch, an item offline will generate a part despatch creating delays and duplication of the decoration processes
- Volume of orders completed in full first time as a percentage of total orders
- Number of sku's offline, broken into major, medium and minor categories
- Growth in profitability due to less reworking
- Reduction in working capital
- Through decrease in inventory levels
- Release of cash to fund other projects.

6) Background

The company A was formed in 1988 by Peter Beeby and Richard Jones. Since this date the company has grown to become the largest supplier of '**direct to school**' personalised school wear, supplying to over 6,000 schools nationwide.

The company currently employs 130 people and has an annual turnover of approximately £10M. In 2004 the company became totally employee owned, with each employee being required to hold a minimum stake of shares.

7) Products

The main process of the company is to source plain garments which are manufactured to the company's specification; the company embroider or print each garment with the appropriate school logo. Each garment is then folded and packaged in a presentable format for the school to sell to parents.

Schools are categorised into two sectors:

- Primary Children aged 5 to 11
- Secondary Children aged 11 to 16

The majority of the products sold are held in stock and comprise over 2,600 sku's. Some of the products are detailed below

				
Sweatshirt	Polo Shirt	Reversible Jacket	School Bag	Secondary School Performance Wear

Example products from Company A

Selected Secondary schools also purchase from the company's own branded sportswear range known as 'Performance Wear'.

On time in full within fourteen days

The company fails to achieve its target of 100% “on time in full” delivery.

- What are the factors that prevent this?
- How may they be resolved?

The brochure states that “*all orders are normally delivered within 14 days*”.

To complicate matters further, the company also has the issue of coping with seasonal demand. There is a gradual climb in the spring with a significant step change in May, culminating in peak demand in July due to the school closures for the summer break. September is also a key month with the majority schools placing a lot of smaller orders to replenish their stocks following the start of new term.

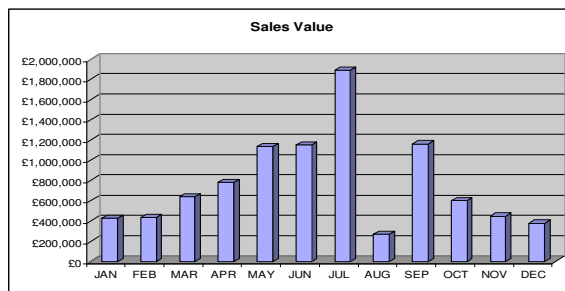


Chart 1.1: Sales value profile

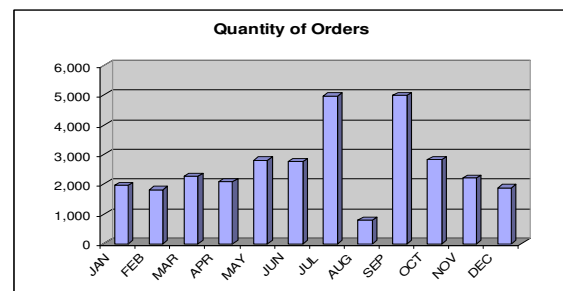


Chart 1.2: Sales orders profile

The turnaround time is calculated for every sales order and analysed into bands of

- 0 to 7 days
- 8 to 14 days
- 15 to 21 days
- 22 to 28 days
- 29 days plus

Chart 1.3 details the performance for the past four years. Whilst there is a sign of improvement, the company still faces the headache of declining performance in the periods of increased demand. The measure for August shows a sharp drop in performance, this is mainly due to a large proportion of schools request delivery in early September, the company takes advantage of this fact and is able to spread the workload over the six weeks holidays.

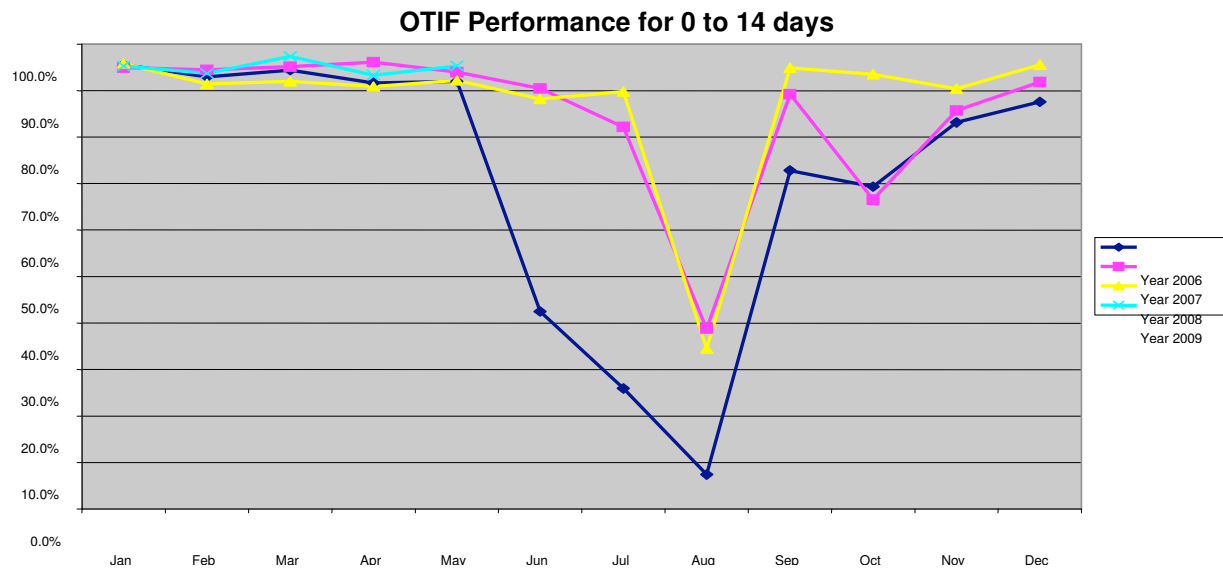


Chart 1.3: Measure of performance within fourteen days

On time in full results within seven days

If the percentage of orders complying with the measure of OTIF is re-assessed on the nought to seven day category, then the performance falls even more dramatically. In medium to longer term the company should be aiming for shorter lead times as one component of delivering competitive advantage.

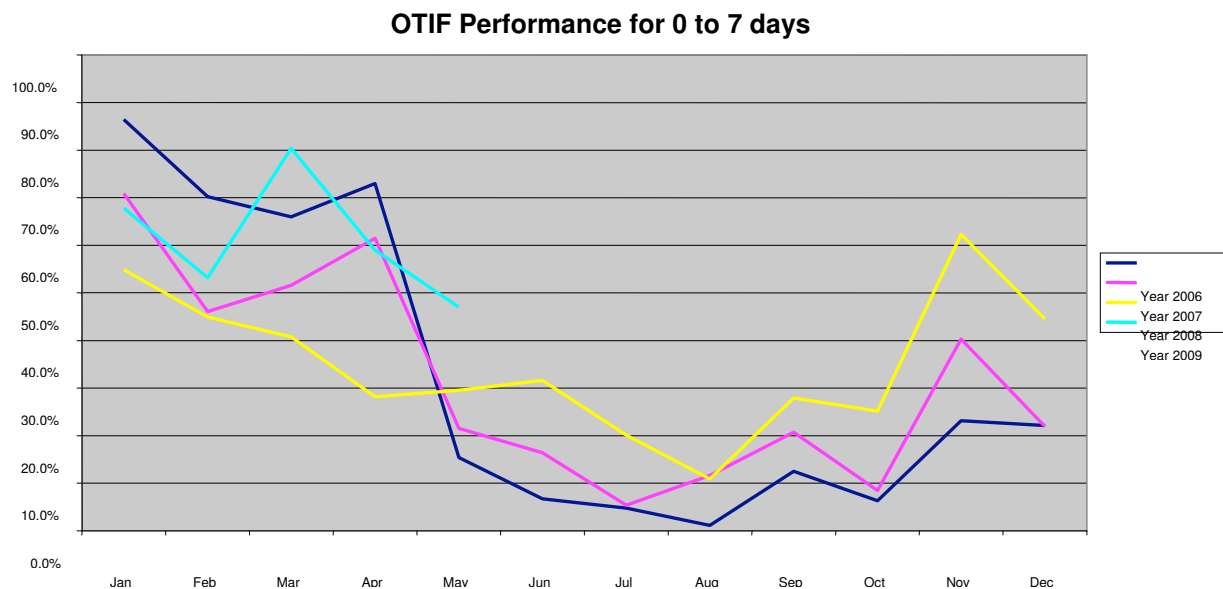


Chart 1.4: Measure of performance within seven days

What are the factors that cause the decline?

All the 'failing orders' have been analysed to ascertain the key reasons for failure, which clearly demonstrates that there are two main factors:

1. Delays in production
2. Inventory being out of stock

	On Time in Full	Production Delay	Out of Stocks
Year 2006	66.9%	23.2%	9.9%
Year 2007	82.1%	13.0%	4.9%
Year 2008	93.3%	1.4%	5.3%
Year 2009	91.8%	4.5%	3.7%

Value Chain Performance analysed by the two main factors

The table shows improvement and then decline over the past four years, actions to reverse the decline and greater focus to attain the target is required.

From further more detailed analysis of the company's 2008 turnaround data, the reasons for failure to meet the brochure quote of "All orders are normally delivered within 14 days" are:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------|
| • Production Process Failures | 383 | 21.06% |
| • Inventory Level Failures | 1,436 | 78.94% |
| • Total | 1,819 | |

Total Orders completed in 2008 (Excl August and Christmas)	26,993	
Orders completed on time, in full	25,174	93.26%
Orders completed in full but over 14 days (Production)	383	1.42%
Orders issued as part orders (Inventory)	1,436	5.32%

Lead Times

Every main process has a lead time allowance, details the time allowed for each process, the physical time to complete the process and the amount of dead (queuing) time. This reveals a high percentage of the works order life where product is stood waiting for the next process.

There may be factors that prevent significant reduction in lead time, but this should not prevent the measure from being challenged. A reduction in the lead time allowance would give each process team further incentive to address the queuing time.

Many of the current measures are returning high performance levels, are they challenging the principles of lean? What would each performance measure be if the allowances were reduced by fifty per cent?

The Future

The 'Direct to school' market is very fragmented with in excess of fifty percent of the market being serviced by local shops. Listed below are some of the larger competitors that offer similar or reduced lead times for the equivalent products.

Company	Delivery Terms	Website
Trutex	Within seven working days	www.schooluniformshop.co.uk
Brigade	Three to Five days November to April Seven to Twenty One days May to October	www.brigade.uk.com
Your School Uniform	Seven to Ten working days	www.yourschooluniform.com
Classwear	Within twenty one days	www.Classwear.uk.com

Recent service enhancements to the services that School Trends offer are:

1. Packing per pupil – schools can input individual pupil orders, the software then consolidates into one school order, and the garments are decorated and then packed per pupil. This process minimises the admin burden for the school to collate and distribute.
2. Parents on line – allows the parents to place orders via the internet. The procedures of PPP then apply.

Through developing a greater understanding of the customer's needs, the company can make further enhancements to the current offerings or possibly adding new services to make the company the preferred choice for supply of decorated school uniform.

Delivering enhanced services as well as meeting a faster delivery promise will give the company a competitive advantage.

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