

Academic Practice

The academic practice network, founded by Professor George Gordon, exists to share perspectives and research findings on the evolving and changing nature of the academic role. While the phrase 'academic practice' is increasingly used within higher education, a shared intellectual meaning should not be assumed. Therefore, this network is important in developing an understanding both of the changing nature of academic practice and its effects on students and wider society. There are a range of research interests and perspectives reflected by the network. These include colleagues with an interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning, particular roles in academic practice such as leadership and service, socio-cultural aspects of academic work, and the complex nature of academic identity. The shifting nature of 'academic practice' means that the network also includes a number of colleagues in learning support roles. Regular events are a feature of the network in providing opportunities for discussion, dissemination and networking.

During 2009, the network held four events. In *Writing as Professional Practice*, Lesley Gourlay (Coventry University), Mary R. Lea (The Open University) and Barry Stierer (University of Westminster) explored the writing of university lecturers based on their ongoing research. Their interest is in routine, everyday writing, as opposed to more prestigious or scholarly writing. They argued that the focus on lecturers' experience of producing and working with workplace documents in specific institutional contexts offers new ways of framing the relationship between academic practice and academic identities, as textual, communicative and situated. This event stimulated considerable discussion around the way that 'routine' writing needs to be better understood as an important, but neglected, aspect of professional practice. Thanks go to Lesley Gourlay for organising this event.

In April, the network held two events. The first of these was at the University of Portsmouth and entitled *Exploring intellectual leadership* led by Paul Blackmore (Kings College, London) and Bruce Macfarlane (University of Portsmouth). The presentations sought to challenge the way that conceptions of leadership in higher education have become virtually synonymous with formally defined managerial roles and responsibilities. By contrast, the role of senior academics as intellectual leaders is comparatively neglected. This role includes monitoring ideas and trends, developing and supporting a strong faculty and acting as an influential disseminator of knowledge across disciplinary boundaries. This meeting of the network debated the way intellectual leadership could be understood based on research funded by the Leadership foundation for higher education.

The second event held in April was jointly organised with the Postgraduate Issues Network and the development organisation Vitae (formerly UK Grad). In *Evaluating the Impact of Newer Researcher Training and Development: Which Direction Forward?*, the challenges facing the future of research training were explored through presentations by Tony Bromley (University of Leeds), Robin Humphrey (University of Newcastle) and Martin Gough (University of Kent and Postgraduate Issues Network convenor). The event provided a forum for debating and sharing information about how universities have sought to develop and adapt their research training in the light of so-called 'Roberts' funding and associated demands to broaden the range of skills covered by such work including personal and career development.

Glasgow Caledonian University was the venue of our final event in 2009 convened by Karen Smith. The four contributors to this event were Darren Comber (Aberdeen University), David Gosling (University of Plymouth), Allison Littlejohn (Glasgow Caledonian University) and Lorraine Walsh (Dundee University). Their presentations, and the discussions they stimulated, examined the way that educational development practice within higher education has expanded and shaped itself in response to the changing higher education environment over the last forty years. Discussion centred on whether 'educational development' now represents a profession or a discipline in its own right, as claimed by some. The position of educational

development, between management and practitioners, represents a particular challenge for academics (and para-academics) working in this area. A number of possible 'futures' were outlined by the presenters.

Members of the network have again been active in helping to review abstracts for the forthcoming SRHE Annual Conference in the closely allied research domain of 'Academic Practice, Work and Cultures'. There were 60 abstracts submitted to this stream demonstrating the continuing depth and range of interest in this research area. I would like to acknowledge the support of Karen Smith, Joelle Fanghanel, Paul Blackmore, Ian Kinchin, Sue Clegg and David Hay who helped me with the reviewing process this year. I would also like to thank everyone who came to one of our events and the various speakers for giving their time freely. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the support of Lesley Gourlay and Karen Smith in organising two of the events this year.

In 2010 Paul Blackmore and Joelle Fanghanel will take over from me as network convenors and will bring fresh ideas and a new direction to the network. During the 5 years I have led the network I have sought to ensure that we engage with as many members as possible through a variety of themes and geographic locations for these seminars. This work will be taken forward by Paul and Joelle who would welcome suggestions from SRHE members with ideas for future seminars. Details of each event upcoming in 2010 will be available through the SRHE website.

Bruce Macfarlane, Convenor