

Collaborative work on Academic Practice

This is a record of the seminar organised by the SRHE Postgraduate Issues Network jointly with the Academic Practice Network and Vitae, details in the flyer reproduced below. A report of the seminar is published elsewhere, in the *International Journal for Researcher Development* (ISSN 1759-751X, vol.1, no.2, Nov.2009, <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/cppd/researchers/journal/>). The event was supported by a project funded by the Centre for Excellence in Preparing for Academic Practice. The second part of this document is a critical review article of the first of the series of international conferences organised by this CETL:

Martin Gough, Jon Turner and Janet Metcalfe 'Preparing for Academic Practice: sites of integration and disruption'.

Evaluating the Impact of Newer Researcher Training & Development: Which Direction Forward?

30th April 2009

University of Leeds (Medical Teaching Centre, Room X)

- 12.30 Lunch on Arrival
- 1.30 Tony Bromley, University of Leeds:
Evaluating Researcher Training and Development: History, challenges, methodology and implementation

followed by discussion
- 2.45 Tea Coffee
- 3.00 Robin Humphrey, University of Newcastle upon Tyne:
Research Training, Researcher Development and Assessment

Martin Gough, University of Kent:
Update from the project – 'Evaluation of Researcher Support Programmes: Assessment within Development Events, and the Attitudes and Experiences towards Academic Careers Provision, of Early Career Academics (ECAs)'

followed by discussion and wrap-up plenary
- 4.30 Close

About the event:

This is an expert seminar jointly organised by Vitae (Yorkshire and North East Hub, of which Tony Bromley is Co-ordinator) and the Society for Research into Higher Education Networks for Postgraduate Issues (convened by Martin Gough and others) and for Academic Practice (convened by Bruce Macfarlane, Professor of Higher Education at the University of Portsmouth). More information about the SRHE Networks can be found on the Society's website - <http://www.srhe.ac.uk/>

Tony will start the day by providing an update on the practice of evaluating impact of researcher development programmes, to include higher education staff with research roles as well as postgraduate researchers, with suggestions about how this activity will develop in the future. (See the pdf file alongside this one in the Archive section of the web page, 'Evaluating Researcher Training and Development: History, challenges, methodology and implementation, Dr Tony Bromley, University of Leeds'.) His recent activity with the Vitae Rugby Team has been to lead the debate about levels of impact. Tony has authored a new Guide, *Evaluating Training & Development Programmes for Postgraduate & Newer Researchers*, in the SRHE series 'Issues in Postgraduate Education: Management, Teaching and Supervision'. This Guide is launched at the seminar.

The second session will focus on impact in the form of participant learning and attainment. Robin Humphrey will give an account of how he integrates the Roberts-funded researcher skills development provision into an interdisciplinary research training programme in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Newcastle. Modules, for instance on managing a PhD, information skills and presentation skills, are assessed in various ways. He will consider prospects for assessment of all of the generic skill areas for newer researchers. (See the pdf file alongside this one in the Archive section of the web page, 'Research Training, Researcher Development and Assessment, Dr Robin Humphrey – Newcastle University'.) Martin Gough, Lecturer in Higher Education & Academic Practice at the University of Kent, will complement Robin's presentation by presenting some interim findings, on the question of the appropriateness of assessment in development events which do not lead to an award, derived from the research project "Evaluation of Researcher Support Programmes: Assessment within Development Events, and the Attitudes and Experiences towards Academic Careers Provision, of Early Career Academics (ECAs)", a joint sponsor of the seminar and funded by the Centre for Excellence in Preparing for Academic Practice.

The discussion sections will be audio-recorded in order to help move further the debate in this domain of practice about 'Which Direction Forward?', with a view towards implications for both academic and non-academic career paths for researchers. Contributions from expert discussants will be incorporated into a report of the seminar, which will serve to inform the ongoing research under the aegis of the project. There will be an option of remaining anonymous in the reporting but attendees should be willing to agree to being recorded.

Information about the project:

So, amongst other things, in effect you are being invited to take part in a research study, as conveyed in the initial invitation to you. Before you decide whether or not to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The project aims to inform the enhancement of programmes and other processes directed towards supporting the development of early career academics. It aims to do this by raising discussion and developing an evidence base of people's considered views on the issues, amongst other data. The research project is being directed by Martin Gough, of the University of Kent, and is entitled: "Evaluation of Researcher Support Programmes: Assessment within Development Events, and the Attitudes and Experiences towards Academic Careers Provision, of Early Career Academics (ECAs)".

For the original full proposal please see -

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/academic-practice/support-for-teaching/externally-funded-projects.html>

The project is sponsored and funded by the CETL - Centre for Excellence in Preparing for Academic Practice, directed at the University of Oxford:

<http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/cetl.php?page=54>

The project will treat contributions as confidential: participants and their institutions will not be directly identified in and will not be identifiable through the reporting of the project findings, nor through subsequent use made of the data, unless they give permission to acknowledge their contribution; particular views expressed by them will not be attributed to them individually by name in reporting. The files and media recording (such as audio) of the confidential data will be stored securely and viewed only by the project's researchers or will be anonymised. If you have any queries, please feel free to contact the project director – I shall be handing out a consent form for people to sign as willing participants:

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Preparing for Academic Practice: sites of integration and disruption

Martin Gough, Jon Turner and Janet Metcalfe

Introduction

The first in the series of international conferences organised by the CETL took place on 19 December 2006 at St Anne's College, Oxford. We co-authors of this review of the conference, plus Liz Barnett of the London School of Economics, were given the brief by Conference Chair and CETL Director Lynn McAlpine to summarise, as a panel of speakers at the end of the day, the different parallel sessions in which we had participated. We were structuring our observations about the examples and explanations presented by the conference presenters through the opposing themes of integration and disruption, and in light of the five theoretical Lenses through which to view academic practice:

- a) a bundle of skills or competencies that academics may use in skilful ways in carrying out activities (for instance, in the doctoral context, or as listed in the Joint Skills Statement);
- b) a series of activities that academics can engage in to varying degrees (such as writing a research proposal, research supervision);
- c) the production of knowledge, well characterized in Brew's trading conception of research; this is often described in terms of productivity and the consequences for reputation and career;
- d) identity and membership in a community and encompassing taking on the discourse and behaviour of the discipline (for example, being a 'geologist');
- e) the embodiment of academic values, that is, understanding, subscribing, and being defined by a set of values; this view goes beyond adherence to ethical standards and is concerned with the fundamental and personal commitment to the academic enterprise. (Gibbs 2006; cited in McAlpine and Hopwood 2006, 4)

It is important that academic developers are aware of these perspectives, in terms both of planning suitable development and of the expectations of the early career academics. But they need also to be alert to actual and causes of disruption, or failure in integrating perspectives and components, with regard to the development process.

A framework for analysis

To provide a pointer to theorisation about the sites of integration and disruption across the domain of preparation for academic practice, we draw from a framework influenced by Harold Silver. Silver provides an analytical framework for the history of innovation in higher education, which is an apt starting point to approach an overview of the work in the new-ish field of academic development, and what is emerging from the work of the CETL. He suggests: 'A typology of innovations in higher education could consist of: (a) organisation and management, (b) curriculum and (c) teaching and learning.' (Silver 1998, 9) He also points out that the calls for innovation in higher education have arisen out of industry and politics, taking root not in the same shape but nonetheless reflecting similar concerns (Silver 1998, 6). This link to the world outside the academy is emphasised by the adaptation of Silver's typology by academic research work on professional training in chartered accountancy (Hoskin and Anderson-Gough 2004). The framework we adopt, likewise changing the order of Silver's three types, is to take the situations and phenomena within the domain of

academic and researcher development from three perspectives, or three interrelated levels: content, delivery and infrastructure.

We favour ‘content’ – what is taught or needs to be learnt in actual development of academics – instead of ‘curriculum’, because curriculum would imply too broad and too deep formulations of the field of knowledge required and which could be made explicit in programmes of study. This is not on balance what happens in academic development provision as a whole, because so much of it, as with workplace learning generally, is currently learnable vicariously and informally, rendered relatively easily into tacit knowledge; furthermore, what would be in a curriculum would be highly contestable.

We favour ‘delivery’ rather than ‘teaching and learning’, since, whilst programmes and courses are put on, the style of delivery is often more like facilitation than traditional teaching in the ways more commonly employed in award-bearing higher education modules. Degree programme modules will all have assessment which aims to gauge the learning of participants, whereas the more typical staff development style workshop does not try to determine whether participants have attained certain levels of understanding.

We favour ‘infrastructure’ rather than ‘organisation and management’, to convey that the structures effective in defining the possibilities of actual development are not all organised and managed in intentionally designed purposive ways. Furthermore, where there is purposive management, there are different organisations and interests at work which generate cross-cutting and not necessarily integrated influences on the processes in question. So, whilst we can promote the importance of taking an holistic approach to the organisation of doctoral studies, it is easy to react in a fragmented and piecemeal fashion in response to various external pressures on HEIs such as the multitude of central government initiatives, demands from employers for ‘employability’, demands for standards from the Quality Assurance Agency and the Bologna Process, alongside ongoing fluxes in the forms of the diversity of cohorts of postgraduate researchers and of the supplies of lecturers and other teaching staff.

Looking more closely at the substance of the conference presentations, we take a cue from the first keynote, ‘Preparing Future Faculty in the USA’ (PFF) by Daniel Denecke, of the Council of Graduate Schools, Washington, DC. One interpretation of his presentation is that it is explaining how institutions can and have translated their practice from a position of disruption to integration. His observation is of the relative success of the PFF programme in getting buy-in by working through disciplinary groups, especially subject associations, insofar as they also view mastering pedagogy as part of what it is to be expert in the discipline, as opposed to viewing expertise solely in terms of knowledge of subject content (basic and state-of-the-art) and of capacity to push the boundaries of that knowledge through research. Denecke argues that this in turn requires ‘disciplinary stewardship’ by senior staff to bridge the gap which may otherwise remain between pursuing research and developing pedagogical competence. So the main factor in success in integration here is at the infrastructural level concerning the role of senior people in the different disciplines.

Preparation for the teaching role

The conference comprised largely of smaller seminars organised in parallel sessions. Deesha Chadha & Simon Lygo-Baker, both of King’s College London Learning Institute, reporting on their CETL funded project in ‘Theoretical frameworks underpinning programmes preparing graduate teaching assistants for academic practice’, explored the question of underpinning theory that guides the development of graduate teaching assistant (GTA) programmes and the evaluation of how teaching staff on these programmes interpret and apply theory in their courses, taking into account consideration of the possible philosophical conflicts

between teaching and research. The main question they wished to pose was about whether a best practice model exists for GTA programmes and what this might actually look like.

We highlight a main site of integration, therefore, at the level of content. This would be the foregrounding of theory itself, in that, to be a theory worth its salt, it can extend its explanatory power over disparate situations. Furthermore, it would add value by posing problematic questions to the assumption that there is simply easily digestible knowledge to convey to participants, such as those on a PG Cert. in Learning & Teaching course. We suggest that this is integration at the level of content but it will be to some extent driven by concern about delivery too, for instance how to open up questions for participant discussion as an end in itself rather than aiming just to transfer practical knowledge about teaching for participants to try out.

A site of infrastructural disruption may nonetheless persist in the approaches adopted by the teachers of GTA programmes who purport to be working together. If the approaches are different then they are potentially conflicting, in such situations for instance where they insist on different theoretical starting points about how to understand teaching, and so reflected in how to deliver programmes, standpoints emerging from the different disciplinary backgrounds of those teachers. A corollary of this is the potential problem of linking your, as deliverer, teaching style (adopted from your disciplinary background) with the expectations of teaching approaches associated with the various disciplines of the GTA participants in your programme cohort.

Still at the infrastructural level, the gap will be ever present in the starting point for many GTAs (more so than with lecturers) between research function and teaching function, since the main concern of most postgraduates, at least as stressed by their supervisors, will be progression and timely completion of their doctorate, the teaching being a supplementary activity to gain experience or as a source of income. Postgraduates, being relative novices, are often the most concerned about issues around teaching but may also expect a lighter touch, such as embodied by the basic generic teaching skills of Lens (a), consonant with less formal responsibility, by comparison with lecturers, for delivering whole modules and programmes. This situation in turn highlights the infrastructural disruptions of differential staff status, GTAs and lecturers being employed on their respective different contracts, which may or may not dictate what sort of teaching they are asked to do. That said, learning to teach would benefit more from cross-over of delivery from the PhD-like models of learning, involving deeper reflection, but directed more at practice. However, these infrastructural disruptions as a whole will tend to obstruct attempts to make a course integrated through, at the levels both of delivery and content, the act of imposing a chosen theoretical starting point.

Karen Clegg, Director of Graduate Training at the University of York, in 'Preparing Future Academics: an accredited route for Postgraduates who teach', described how her PFA programme has been developed and reported on the initial experience of postgraduate researchers and supervisors. PFA is introductory and award-bearing, for postgraduate researchers who intend to pursue an academic career in higher education. It provides postgraduate researchers with skills, expertise and an opportunity to explore aspects of academic practice, enabling them to make best use of their teaching experience. It acts as a preliminary qualification for potential university teachers. All postgraduate researchers at the University of York are encouraged to take advantage of the skills training provided to them via the central unit and departments, with the PFA as additional provision. Although this is how universities in the UK tend typically to operate, we can see that there is yet further infrastructurally defined potential for disruption in the experience of the postgraduate researchers between the research and the teaching role, as a result of the formal training for each tending to be set up as embodying separate concerns.

The question of the potential for integrating the teaching and the research roles as a focus for problematising approaches to design of preparatory courses for the academic career arose also in 'Aiming for "excellence"? Initial preparation for academic practice in Sweden and England and the usefulness of PhD-like modes of learning', presented by Rosalind Duhs, of the Educational Development Centre for Learning and

Teaching at Stockholm University. Ultimately, the question to be addressed is: are the central aims of the PhD similar enough to the aims of preparation for academic practice to justify the use of PhD-like modes of learning during preparation for academic practice? Researchers' experiences need to be foregrounded but are illuminated by the three theoretical frameworks, Eraut's work on professional knowledge and competence, Fuller's work on teachers and their concerns during development, and Reischmann's development of Knowles' notion of andragogy. The characteristics of supervision and contested conceptions of the PhD constitute a further dimension. We note that there is a clue to integration of the roles here in that, although many academics see supervision as part of their research agenda and not as 'teaching', at the level of delivery supervision is a form of teaching and is also comparable to the project manager role in research activity. We should note that this is also premised on integration at the infrastructural level in the expectation that to be granted the teaching role of research supervisor, the academic needs to be active in research as part of their job.

Research study as apprenticeship in academic practice

The foregrounding of experience in the academic role, rooting support for developing academic practice in the actual day to day experience of postgraduate researchers and academic staff, showed its importance in 'Research on Faculty Development: A View from Geography', presented by Dr Michael Solem, Educational Affairs Director of the Association of American Geographers. He provided a forum for sharing and discussing the research activities and practical resources of two major faculty development initiatives in American geography: the Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA) and the Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education in Geography (EDGE) project, funded by the National Science Foundation. The GFDA has, since 2002, provided summer workshops for early-career geography faculty, and has conducted annual surveys and interviews to track the experiences, concerns and achievements of new faculty entering the discipline. EDGE is a three-year research and outreach project focusing on the current state and future needs for professional development training in geography and related social and environmental sciences. Of special interest is the influence of academic climate and departmental environments on performance in graduate school. Together, GFDA and EDGE are providing a solid research foundation for the development of practical resources that will be disseminated broadly to graduate programmes and faculty development workshops. Here again we see the importance for integration, at the infrastructural level, of initiatives reaching out across the discipline nationally constituted.

For meeting the needs of postgraduate researchers more widely at the levels of delivery and content, such facilities allow for the adapting of support or training into the culture and community of a department, for example mapping training courses on to local PhD programme milestones. When using scarce or over-pressed resources, be they academic and other staff time or financial (such as 'Roberts' funding in the UK), it is important to come up with creative approaches that complement these cultures and communities, to avoid disruption at the infrastructural level of the national initiatives not linking in with departmental practices. This point was highlighted also by Jane Pritchard, of the Learning and Teaching Centre at the University of Glasgow, in 'The Responses of Physical Science postgraduates to training courses and their relation to their PhD studies'. Training in both employability and discipline-specific skills has been provided and expanded over a number of years for PGRs in the Faculty of Physical Sciences administered by the Physical Sciences Graduate School at the University of Glasgow. A project has explored the training currently provided with a view to further developing a programme that postgraduate researchers and faculty alike consider appropriate, timely and developmental for the needs of postgraduate researchers, in the context of the wider goals of Roberts' recommendations with respect to employability and postgraduate researchers' own professional

development plans. Some postgraduate researchers thought courses that they had been told they had been on bore no resemblance to the reality, even if they remember them.

One explanation is the disruption at the level of delivery between research as ‘learning on the collective level’, in that the knowledge developed in research is in some sense ‘new’ to humans, a notion promoted by supervisors, but also as ‘learning on the individual level’, i.e. for the researchers involved. Apart from that, we need to emphasise that preparation for academic practice, indeed the Roberts agenda itself, is meant to be more than just skills development bolted on to the PhD (c.f. Pearson & Brew 2002, 137; Cargill 2004, 84+96). The development of personal and professional skills through these initiatives is part of the wider employability agenda, but is also part-and-parcel of developing as a researcher in the disciplinary context. The challenge is to integrate employability concerns with the PhD process effectively. The infrastructural level disruption of having the national initiatives imposed on the level of individual practice in delivery has caused the impression that there is separate content between the skills agenda and the traditional supervisory process when in reality the content can be integrated.

Clare Saunders, Subject Co-ordinator (Philosophy) for the UK HE Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical & Religious Studies, also addressed the postgraduate researcher perspective, in ‘Research development “training” for doctoral students in Philosophical & Religious Studies - lessons from a pilot programme’. Increasingly, postgraduate researchers have access to a range of structured support for the development of their generic, transferable skills (e.g. the UK GRAD, which in 2008 became Vitae, Programme, underpinning ‘Roberts’ funding). However, the development of subject-specific research skills often relies on departmental resources or individual supervisors, particularly in the Arts & Humanities, where there is too little critical mass of postgraduate researchers or Roberts funding for standard ‘research training’ programmes. In response to this challenge, the Subject Centre has been piloting an AHRC-funded regional programme for postgraduate researchers in Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies in Yorkshire and the North-East of England. The key feature of this programme is that it brings together researchers from neighbouring departments, thus providing truly in-depth, discipline-specific expertise and support; and giving postgraduate researchers access to a wider, richer research environment than they might otherwise have opportunity to experience. This collaborative approach enables the Centre to deliver the programme’s stated primary objective, to provide practical, subject-specific support for sharpening skills in researching, writing, presenting and publishing.

We can see that an infrastructural disruption is already the identified premise of the pilot programme, the relative scarcity of ‘Roberts’ skills development money attached to postgraduate researchers in Arts & Humanities compared with other fields, both in terms of overall numbers on doctoral programmes and in terms of the proportion of those with research council rather than other sources of funding. There is also a disruption in that there is no uniform Humanities research methodology to deliver via research training programmes, i.e. a disruption at the discipline level of content amounting to the claim that the generic is inapplicable and subject specific competence needs to be developed. The pilot has been aiming to overcome at the infrastructural level the lack of critical mass of postgraduate researchers in an institution by facilitating pooling regional resources. This aids also integration under the heading of Lens (d), facilitating development of a community of practice of newer researchers in their discipline (where otherwise the research study experience can be more isolated for the individual and failing to foster community), which in turn supports development under Lenses (a) and (b).

The pilot is aiming to achieve more integration in due course by linking with provision to develop teaching competence. This is in addition to explicitly trying to overcome the gap, just concerning research training, between those actual participants who see straightaway its relevance and attend and those only potential participants who do not get the message and have not asked if they can attend. To this end already it can claim some success in highlighting the link in the act of presentation of research, the link that is between

developing sound content and practising delivery, presentation 'skills' being at the same time of generic character and yet also rooted in specific content in the act of presentation. And in the mean time the pilot is encouraging peer buddying up to keep the experience of the conference event in the pilot both being and seeming relevant.

The need to keep it seeming relevant comes up against the disruptive perception, perhaps more for academics rather than for postgraduate researchers, that it is an infrastructural bolt-on to the proper business of being supervised in a one-to-one or few-to-one relation. If higher research performance (c.f. Lens c) is the goal, why does anyone want to lead such a conference, or even lead just one session? They may be reluctant because of a perception that it is an additional pedagogical role for staff (c.f. the obstacle identified by Denecke, above), and might be seen as sub-academic 'training' (and thereby pushing Arts/Humanities into a Social Science mould) rather than 'proper' academic work. So there would be much work to do here even with a resounding endorsement from the experience of existing postgraduate researcher participants.

Two presentations, both by members of the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Oxford, focused more on the PhD itself. Harriet Dunbar-Goddet, in 'The research experience of postgraduate research students at the University of Oxford', started from the premise that the doctorate is now seen in the UK as a period of training for future researchers, part of which involves the development of a range of skills and gave an account of her and Keith Trigwell's quantitative study investigating the way aspects of the research environment are actually experienced by postgraduate researchers. In the same vein, David Mills focused down on the social sciences area and the '1+3 training model' of delivery but in the wider national context, in 'A second-class PhD? UK research training policy in the Social Sciences'. Many of the institutions recognised by the ESRC to receive the funding feel that it has boosted the overall quality of PhD training. But in two-thirds of such departments this model is not the standard route for most postgraduate researchers. There has been a significant growth in part-time and international postgraduate researchers, who do not have funding, time or inclination to follow this full four-year programme. This may be leading to a two-tier PhD-training system, with implications for postgraduate researchers' future academic and career prospects. We can interpret as an infrastructurally disruptive intervention causing disruption in turn at the level of delivery in how the programmes of different groups of postgraduate researchers are conducted.

A different focus for considering the disparate postgraduate researchers and academic workers was investigated by Roberto di Napoli, of the Centre for Educational Development at Imperial College London, and Nancy Turner, of the Educational Development Centre at Royal Holloway University of London, in 'Bringing things together: a model of the University as a model for reflexive enquiry in student supervision'. They discussed the proposal for a developmental tool to be used with and by postgraduate researchers, a tripartite supervisory model that assists postgraduate researchers in bringing together both epistemological reflections and a deeper awareness of the positioning of their own research within the aims and scope of the university, and within current socio-cultural contexts. They proposed to align the two strands of discourse about the aims and scope of the modern university and the parallel discourse concerning the aims and nature of doctoral studies, thus firmly embedding doctoral studies within a conceptual framework for today's university. A university should aim to: a) encourage enquiry into something (knowledge, disciplinary and professional); b) promote enquiry with others (fellow postgraduate researchers, colleagues, peers in the field, wider community, employers etc); and c) support enquiry for the wider society (broadly conceived in terms of economic, social and cultural purposes). Today's academic should embrace, in their work, all three dimensions and should encourage postgraduate researchers to reflect on them, achieved in supervisory contexts through a reflective log. The danger must be avoided, though, to reduce such logs to simple providers of evidence of such learning. If used as a mere assessment tool, the log would lose its intrinsic potential as an instrument for reflection. For this reason, before using the log, one must be clear about its purpose. Reflection can only be nurtured through the continuous engagement between supervisor and supervisees in plotting,

creatively and dialogically, new inroads along the three reflective dimensions, developing a sense of the value of their field of enquiry and of themselves for the wider world while avoiding the temptation to finalise such reflections for assessment purposes.

This is a possible way to build a consciously, socially responsible university that engages, in critical ways, with the wider contexts in which it is embedded. This would promote doctoral studies that relate critical reflections on both disciplinary domains and the aims and scope of the modern university so that, as far as possible, no hiatus is created between epistemologies, ontologies and social responsibilities. If higher education is concerned not only with creating experts and professionals, but also socially responsible citizens, we deem that a discussion on how to bring together academic practices and the mission of the university is both timely and necessary. We can summarise this idea as a proposal to focus on an integrative vision of delivery, how to supervise, to promote integration of content (subject and wider concerns) and infrastructure (what the university does in relation to society).

Research as a staff function

The last identified group considered at the conference was research staff (CRS). Whilst the academic discipline and departmental culture is likely to be the key context for postgraduate researchers, the situation for research staff may be rather different. Maxine Lintern & Vincent O'Grady, of the Staff Development Unit at the University of Birmingham, presented 'How can we develop our Contract Research Staff? A case study from the University of Birmingham'. They developed a new suite of dedicated training opportunities, a 'package' implementing many current opportunities, but re-branding them specifically for the CRS market, focusing on improving dissemination of information and developing a sense of community for the CRS across schools. This included direct contact to individuals by the Staff Development Unit and the production of CRS targeted literature. The opportunities were themed into 'Personal Development', 'Research Support' and 'Learning and Teaching' to reflect the varied nature of the CRS experience, and to help prepare them for future academic practice. The outcomes of this approach started to build up a widened sense of community for the group.

We surmise that the integrating tendency of their programme, involving these three themes of activity as content, comes in the form of its explicit aims to overcome infrastructural gaps, concerning lack of secure prospective career direction generally for CRS and the mismatches of expectations of CRS and the reality about what experience is required for proper academic appointment. We can certainly call for more honesty from academics on the prospects of an academic career for aspiring academics, although we may need to consider whether the main concern is the need for a supply of teachers or a need for researchers. The basis of the Birmingham programme itself is strong under Lens (a) on generic skills, which in turn underpins understanding the work under Lens (b), c.f. the three themes of activity as aspects of the same work, and underpins this under Lens (d) too, since the programme facilitates research staff across the institution to see themselves as a community of practice with common concerns.

In turn this provision highlights various disruptions. At the level of content, the question remains how showing competence with X by achieving X successfully is distinguishable from merely attending a workshop about X, this non-accredited mode of delivery being the basic structure of the programme. The perception that accredited courses are more than what is required for CRS development has an infrastructural root in turn, since anything more is seen as interfering in the 'real' purpose of research staff, i.e. to execute research projects. Other infrastructural factors are the gap between research staff and postgraduate researcher status, meaning differential treatment when concerns of the two groups will in fact have much in common. There is also the barrier to integration under Lens (d) in the tension between belonging to the cross-disciplinary

community of CRS generally and belonging to your discipline-specific community. Lastly, since the job market allows so few actually to attain an academic career path, how does such a programme overcome the gap between the academic and the general career needs respectively of the individual CRS?

Gerlese Åkerlind, of the Centre for Educational Development and Academic Methods at the Australian National University, in 'Postdoctoral researchers and career outcomes in Australia', described a national study which highlighted substantial variation amongst postdocs in their perceptions of the nature of their current position and whether they felt it constituted a research training position. Many were still in contract research positions 10 years out from the completion of their doctoral work. It was common for postdocs to feel substantial concerns about their future career prospects, and while both postdocs and their supervisors could specify the minimum publication and other requirements required for an academic appointment, in general they did not feel that achieving these requirements would ensure such an appointment. Career development and training opportunities were ad hoc and variable across the higher education system, depending largely upon the postdoc's supervisor as an individual. The key contextual factors impacting on the experience of research staff were, in terms both of infrastructure, what sort of research post they have (independent research fellow, a stepping stone position as a project/lab manager or an assistant to their Principal Investigator) and, in terms of delivery, what this means for how they spend their time, along with their motivations as a researcher (e.g. research as an expression of themselves, problem solving, research for the sake of knowledge, research to influence change in society). These factors contribute to a significant diversity of research staff experience and views on career options and development, although postdoctoral researchers and doctoral candidates ultimately share many career issues in common (an infrastructural commonality).

The question of showing competence, at least, overcoming the potential disruption of being unable to demonstrate what you have attained, is addressed by Jim Baxter and Penny Hatton, of the Staff and Departmental Development at the University of Leeds, in 'Developing Research Grant Application Skills', in their consideration of a series of opportunities at the University of Leeds to help research staff in different disciplines and at different career stages to develop their ability to write successful research grant applications. For research staff with little or no experience of applying for research funding there are broad discipline-based courses on writing grant applications. For those who have the potential to become independent investigators or might be co-applicants or involved in helping to write an application for funding, participation in 'mock' grant-awarding panels targeting the different research councils develops a deeper understanding of the skills of application writing and of what can make the difference between a fundable and a funded application. A tailored development programme, which includes seminars, individualised training and coaching helps early career staff to prepare and submit their first grant application to a research council. For staff wishing to take an academic track, an optional module on the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, 'Developing Research Practice', leads participants through the development of a research strategy which considers grant application as an element in developing a portfolio of research activity.

So we can see that research staff can enjoy a properly accredited course on developing as a researcher, for which they need to show attainment and pass (a similar PG Cert module operates at the University of Kent, and accredited courses but which do not happen essentially to lead to the PG Cert qualification run at Keele, Leicester and Reading Universities too). Here the initiative at the level of infrastructure facilitates the mode of delivery which can enhance prospects for meaningful content for the research alongside the teaching role of the developing academic.

Stepping back

Looking from the wider perspective, as well as the conference presentations as a whole, it certainly happens that disruptions arise just at the level of content. There have been programmes, those leading to an academic qualification as well as those not, which have been put together to include disparate elements, some of which just do not cohere together at the most explicit level in the experience of those participating. So this remains a possibility, for instance insofar as statements or the ethos of one component contradict statements of another, at least without contextual explanation of how the contradictions have arisen together, contributing to their perceptions of lack of relevance and memorability. However, in many cases we may find such disruptions have a more underlying cause, initially hidden from immediate view. There may be problematic aspects within the method of delivery generating the internally inconsistent content. But perhaps we have to delve deeper and find infrastructural problems at the root, without the solving of which the explicit disruptions, such as they are, will not go away. For instance, we should certainly take seriously the suggestions aired at the conference and elsewhere that more integration of practice and learning by novice academic practitioners would be fulfilled by properly accredited courses at M-level. But if the institution wishes not to invest in the appropriate staffing and other resourcing of the delivering unit then the coherence and general success of the programme will remain elusive.

One other stark example arose in the other keynote speech, 'Preparing Future Faculty at the University of Washington', by Suzanne Ortega, Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Washington. One of her claims was that the more generic provision, such as research methods, will tend to be more robust, as knowledge, than disciplinary content, insofar as the latest state of the art wisdom of a field goes out of date quicker. She proposed that this is further good reason to bring ethics, as an integrating force, to the fore in the education and training. At the level of content, how to pose research questions which are actually important, the right questions, is where we need to concentrate, in other words we should not just be focusing on how most efficiently to investigate any given question. Ortega identified the root problem as an absence of developed pedagogy of research, for which we need to become more sophisticated in our interdisciplinarity, without which the right sort of leadership will be absent. We can see again that infrastructural disruptions are ultimately at the root of this: academic developers are relatively interdisciplinary and would take that lead if they had the institutionally granted pedagogical power, which normally they do not.

One of the key planks of the traditional UK version of the PhD has been that it is just three years full-time equivalent (although four-year programmes are increasingly being introduced). In this timeframe, rather than a longer one, it is harder on both postgraduate researcher and supervisor to expect them to concentrate on finding and refining the really important question to pose and investigate, on top of paying due attention to the general personal and professional development requirements for the doctoral candidate aiming for an academic career, or, indeed, employment in other sectors. The modest timeframe inevitably impresses on them just to get it done and out of the way as 'efficiently' as possible. This stark example of disruption at the infrastructural level with which we round off our discursive reflections on the conference is perhaps the real elephant on the table in the context of discussions around the overall theme, preparing for academic practice. The overall message arising from the conference and our observations, as regards setting up successful development provision, is that academic developers need to pay attention to and aim to overcome disruptions especially in the infrastructural dimension, as well as to pay attention to integration in content and delivery.

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