Undergraduate experiences of the research/teaching nexus across the whole student lifecourse

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Research / Teaching Nexus

Association between research outputs of staff and teaching evaluations


The experiences of students and staff


Differences between institutional types and disciplines

Research and teaching in the literature are treated unproblematically. The link or indeed links are inherently political.

There is a taken for granted assumption that research can, and should, be better integrated.

Lack of recognition that multiple interpretations and realisations are possible - and that outcomes are not always beneficial

‘The possible dysfunctions of integrating the two functions, and the potentially difficulties of this task are given very restricted attention.’

(Wareham & Trowler, 2007: 2)
Dysfunctions in 7 dimensions

**Learners do Research:** learning too slow to cover curriculum; low-quality research with poor ethical control; resistance from learners; modularisation makes this impractical

**Teachers do Research:** they spend most of their time and energy on research to the exclusion of students; teaching assistants employed to replace teachers

**Teachers and learners research together:**
Learning too slow to cover curriculum; Students effectively unpaid research assistants

**Research embedded in the curriculum:** Patchy coverage of curriculum; Transmission of essential knowledge poorly implemented

Research culture influences teaching and learning: Research prioritised over teaching, leaving non-researchers among the staff as well as students feeling abandoned

**The nexus, the university and its environment:**
The needs and priorities of employers and others take precedence in the academy. Pure research and critical approaches to society and become marginalised

**Teaching and learning influences research:**
Substantive disciplinary research becomes sidelined. Low quality pedagogical research begins to predominate because of lack of training in methods and relevant social scientific disciplines

(Wareham & Trowler, 2008: 4-5)
Sheffield Student 2013
Longitudinal Tracking Project
The ‘Sheffield Student 2013’ project follows the **undergraduate cohort of 2013** throughout their studies at the University of Sheffield in order to gain information about their **experiences during their studies**. Through employing a longitudinal research design, and following the same individuals through their undergraduate university life, a **deeper understanding can be gained of the multiple transitions** they make whilst at university, the **changes they experience**.

**Research design & methods**

- **Longitudinal design based on mixed-methods data**
- **Diverse interview sample across all faculties, a total of 12 departments**
- **Administrative data to understand the diversity of the 2013 cohort**
- **Qualitative data collected from a subset of 40 students x 4 throughout and after UG**
- **Oversampling the poorest 10% of the full-time Home undergraduate population**
- **Fee waiver eligibility as measure of relative poverty (< £25,000 household income)**
I have changed, I don't know how to describe it. I'm not the same person I was when I first initially started, I think, personality wise; but I've got so much more self-confidence in me as well which I've never had and I've learned so much over the past three years. I've changed massively, I myself can notice that I'm not the same person that I was when I first started this degree.

Amina, 3rd year
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of disciplinary knowledge</th>
<th>Phase one</th>
<th>Phase two</th>
<th>Phase three</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Selecting</td>
<td>Narrow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship with researchers</td>
<td>Distant</td>
<td>Personable</td>
<td>Close</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience of research practise</td>
<td>Guided</td>
<td>Problem-based</td>
<td>Generative</td>
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<td>Nature of independent learning</td>
<td>Answering</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Discovering</td>
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Basically, with A-Levels you know exactly what you have to know for what exam, and you know the style of questions that are going to come out, and you know what words to write for each question in order to get the marks. (...)

Whereas at uni they say we’ll learn about the liver, go and read about the liver and then we’ll ask about the liver. So you sort of don’t really know what you have to learn and in what depth. But in a way it’s good because you’re actually understanding it more, instead of just learning it parrot fashion, which is really good.

Emilia, 1st year
...you get to know your lecturers and tutors and stuff more because you’re more based in [building] where the [department] is [located]. Also, you get to do more practical stuff as well in terms of research. Last year it was more like listening to lectures on research.

Aina, 2nd year

So you struggle at first ‘cause you’re like, ‘well I’ve got to find this bit of information’ and I had to really think like where am I going to find it from. But now you know where everything is, so it’s pretty easy. I didn’t even know where most of my books are, or what I needed, and now you do.

Lizzy, 2nd year
(... you get to third year [and] you’ve taken one huge area of psychology and gone into a domain of that professor’s area of research. They know more about it, they have more passion about it. They teach it better because it’s something they’re really interested in and I think basically in that sense you get to know them a bit more because you get to see like their particular area of interest and what they can do and what they know.

Mary, 3rd year

I just basically looked up my grades from last year and I thought well I do the best in [area of science]. (...) I know I sound really mixed but it just doesn’t irritate me like the second year did, where it was just writing down information.

Mo, 3rd year
Constraints on development

**Diminishing interest in the nature and utility of research over time**
- Changing/emergent career goals
- General education fatigue
- Too much effort

**Insufficient scaffolding around experiences of research and teaching**
- Competence
- Problems of planning and organisation
- Unconnected curricula

**The perceived distance between students and researchers**
- Interest
- Enthusiasm
- Personality

**Issues associated with participation in HE**
- Class related identities
- Ethnic background
- Gender
- Disability
He’s the only lecturer I’ve ever had [who] has basically told me what is coming up in the exam, what we knew what was coming up in the exam. So he was like ‘I don’t really understand, you know, I don’t believe in surprising you in the exam’ so that, I think that was partly very, very helpful.

I wish more lecturers were like that but I, kind of, feel like here is... ‘we’re a Red Brick, we’ve got a reputation to uphold, well we’re going to be snobby’.

But I just feel like other universities you can get more help, and it’s not spoon-fed as such, but you just get more support, more like a college than a uni, you just get more support.

Natasha, 3rd year
I think the fact that I have never really learnt the laboratory techniques that you use in science. So I want to find how much protein is in whatever..., then I don’t know what to do because I’ve not... which it’s just hard for me to remember them.

So yeah, I think that’s why, ‘cause I don’t really know the actual techniques for what you are doing in the lab. So it doesn’t just come naturally to me to think, “Oh yeah, you do that and you do this.”

Sandra, 3rd year
Conclusion

RTN can be very positive: Enhances abilities, capacities, and identities
- Expertise
- Active engagement
- Critical reflection
- Independence

Changing society: Responsive or reactive?
- Combat the bullshit
- Flexible and competitive workforce
- Artificial Intelligence
- Civic and academic connections

BUT: Benefits cannot be assumed
- Meaningful not marketing
- Reflective and non-normative
- Teaching-led research?
Discussion