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Staff Development for a more Inclusive Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Universities are developing more inclusive curricula in order to widen participation in higher education (HE). Initiatives typically include partnerships with employers designed to turn workplace training schemes into higher education programmes for professional development. Principles governing academic quality and standards emphasise the importance of ensuring that staff teaching on these programmes should be qualified to teach in HE, and that they should have sufficient development opportunities to maintain their dual teaching and professional status.

This paper asks what we might learn about how to provide appropriately for partnership staff new to HE by considering the experience of a team of professional trainers who moved into a university to teach a new foundation degree. Their preparation as HE teachers is a particular problem, since conventional postgraduate certificates in this area are designed for those already in post. We consider how enhanced staff development for individuals and for a whole team new to HE might be offered through a university's Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT). Although this study is based on the experiences of a specific team, it raises common issues relating to the integration of new groups of staff into academe, and the development of lecturers involved in building inclusive curricula within partnership programmes and workplace learning.

Introduction

The drive to make UK higher education more inclusive has led to the development of a wider range of partnerships with employers. Funding has been made available to support collaborative programmes which increase employer engagement and enable more people to combine professional education with their working life. The collaborative programmes often take the form of foundation degrees, which are a recent concept introduced in the UK. Foundation degrees are characterised by vocationally-focused content, direct involvement

of employers in delivery, and admissions policies that do not rely on previous academic attainment. They usually take two years to complete, and they carry accreditation equivalent to two-thirds of an undergraduate honours degree. Typically, such collaborative programmes specify learning outcomes that address both the occupational needs of employers and HE benchmark standards. A balance has to be struck between the principle of greater access and flexibility and the need to maintain HE quality and standards.

This study is based on one of a number of initiatives in England in which universities have formed partnerships with their local police force. The brief is to provide initial training to enable completion of the national occupational standards (assessed in the workplace) alongside campus-based study of policing in communities. The teaching team consists of police trainers experienced in delivering in-service initial training, and they have been appointed as associate lecturers to work in teams based on three university campuses (two at the University of Brighton and one at the University of Chichester). The majority of these staff have completed a Certificate in Education designed for lecturers in further education (FE). None of them has previous experience of teaching in HE and only a small number have first degrees.

This particular course is based in the University of Brighton's Business School because of its similarity to other professional development programmes within the School, including law. In other parts of the country, content links have been made with social sciences or criminology. The Business School is located on one campus, but the staff delivering the police course are based on three different campuses, all some distance apart. This is in order to provide convenient geographic locations for the main areas covered by the partner police force. The course caters for significant numbers, with approximately 240 students recruited per annum. They are admitted four times a year in cohorts of 60, divided into groups of 20 on each of the three campuses. The Foundation Certificate level of the programme spans 43 weeks for each cohort. While we were concerned to provide an equivalent experience for students in each location, there are inevitable differences between the facilities and environments.

The structure of the course involves blocks of time spent on the university campuses alternating with work placements in which the recruits carry out selected activities as a graduated introduction to the policing role, with one-to-one support from tutor-constables. Assessment takes place both in the workplace and on campus.

The dual focus of the course has created tensions in managing communications and practical arrangements alongside the usual issues that arise when a new area of study is introduced into HE.

Although this paper is based on the experiences of a team working on a specific partnership programme, we believe there are generalisable insights to be gained for similar inclusion schemes. There are significant implications for the preparation of staff to teach on such schemes, since the usual in-service model of Master's level Postgraduate Certificate provision excludes staff until they have begun teaching in HE. Working in the university environment has brought significant challenges, not only the need to build confidence in teaching at HE level but also some tensions between professional identities. There have also been numerous practical difficulties, which can be viewed retrospectively as teething problems. However, many of them could have been avoided if university structures and systems had been better able to accommodate a curriculum that includes a range of subjects and teaching approaches, and which crosses campus and university boundaries. For example, although office accommodation is provided for the teams, the teaching takes place in pooled rooms rather than dedicated premises.

We review the experience reported by one of the course teams and raise questions about how the university's Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) could plan to provide appropriate staff development for individuals and whole teams of staff entering higher education from very different cultures in the future.

Properly qualified staff

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK (QAA) Code of Practice places responsibility for staff development in collaborative programmes on the HE institution:

'The awarding institution should be able to satisfy itself that staff engaged in delivering or supporting a collaborative programme are appropriately qualified for their role, and that a partner organisation has effective measures to monitor and assure the proficiency of such staff.'
(QAA, 2004)

The phrase 'properly qualified staff' is used in the discussion which follows this quote. This raises the issue of what 'properly qualified' might mean for a course that is intended to achieve both employment and HE standards. These two dimensions are often addressed in

professional programmes (in nursing, for example) by expecting staff to spend a number of days each year updating themselves in the workplace in their professional role alongside the expectation that they will gain a qualification in teaching in HE.

The partnership staff appointed as associate lecturers in this study were professionally qualified for a training role within their own profession. Trainer skills in the UK in the 1990s emphasised competence (usually meaning the ability to perform competently in an occupational role), with little attention to the notion of applying theoretical knowledge and understanding. The contemporary approach to training and development is more learner-focused and includes aspects such as the identification of learning needs, design of training, assessment, delivery and evaluation of training, and the trainer's own ability to use reflective practice. In preparation for their new role, most of the new associate lecturers studied for a Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) while involved in curriculum development for the new Foundation Certificate. This was somewhat problematical, because the Cert Ed qualifies them for teaching in further and continuing education rather than HE. Teaching in HE has a different emphasis, focusing more on the development of scholarship, the ability to study independently, and the application of theories and ideas in practical situations. The Programme Director worked intensively with the team on curriculum development, inculcating the HE ethos alongside this, and drawing on support from the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

Does the literature help us to address this area of staff development?

The notion of developing HE teachers originated in the 1970s with educational/staff developers in polytechnics, with some notable exceptions such as the universities of Edinburgh and Lancaster, and the Open University. There were very few educational development units (EDUs), and people working on their own created links with others doing similar work, originally through the Standing Conference on Educational Development Services in Polytechnics, (SCEDSIP) which established conferences and publications to support staff/educational developers and which became SEDA (the Staff Educational and Development Association).

In the 1970s and early 1980s the literature on teaching and learning in HE consisted of a few seminal texts, such as Abercombie (1960), Rogers (1969), Bligh (1971), Entwistle (1981), Jaques (1984),

Marton *et al.* (1984) and Rowntree (1987), that began to develop theory informing learning and teaching in HE. Organisations such as SCEDSIP, SRHE (the Society for Research in Higher Education) and UCoSDA (Universities and Colleges Staff Development Association) published occasional papers, and the Open University Institute of Educational Technology published research into students' learning on Open University (OU) courses. Educational developers such as Gibbs & Habeshaw (1984) began to write practical books on HE teaching.

1992 was a watershed in the development of literature on staff and educational development, coinciding with the expansion in student numbers which had to be addressed with little or no additional staffing. The focus moved to issues related to teaching larger numbers. The Committee of Scottish University Principals produced a 'fundamental appraisal and radical approach to' *Teaching and learning in an expanding university system*, popularly known as the 'MacFarlane Report', together with an accompanying volume of *Bibliography*. More recently, literature linking learning in the workplace with HE has emerged, for example, Boud & Garrick (1999), Evans *et al.* (2002) and Boud & Solomon (2003).

The number of journals has increased and extended to accommodate innovative practice in HE. Classics such as *Studies in Higher Education* and *Assessment and Evaluation in HE* continue, as do numerous other well-established titles. Newer in the field are the *International Journal of Academic Development*, *Innovations in Teaching and Learning in HE*, *Education and Training*, *Teaching in HE*, and now *LATHE* itself. There is not yet, however, a coherent domain of literature addressing staff development in programmes involving non-HE partners.

A wealth of material now exists for practical and theoretical aspects of learning and teaching in HE, and this forms the literature base for postgraduate certificate programmes in teaching and learning, and academic development. In the early 1990s staff developers conceived the idea of certificate courses based on specific objectives and values. A small task force refined the definitions, and SEDA pioneered a nationally recognised accreditation system. This functioned very effectively and became the basis for the subsequent accreditation schemes of the Institute for Learning and Teaching (1999-2003), ushered in by the Dearing Report of 1997, and the Higher Education Academy (established 2004). The principle that staff teaching in higher education should be qualified is becoming widely accepted, as indicated in the *UK Professional Standards Framework* for teaching and supporting learning in higher education.

The fact that the members of the course team teaching the first year of this new foundation degree had no prior experience of teaching in HE cuts across the pattern of staff development for teaching at this level, which is almost always in-service, with courses designed to interact with participants' current teaching. This course team had been trained and developed within the environment of workplace learning, training and development. Whilst their former experience had embraced student-centred approaches and an appreciation of some of the theory of adult learning, there was little experience of learning in higher education. This group represents a recent variant of need within HE teacher development, with an integral work-based professional element. A comparable example is nursing, which came into HE over a decade ago, and for which some institutions have developed specialist postgraduate certificates.

The experience of this team in the first six months

This research was prompted by our concern about the staff development needs of this group. We held a focus group with six of these colleagues, who work as a team on the same campus. At the time of this study the second course intake had recently started and the first cohort had progressed approximately six months into a year-long programme. Consequently, the staff had not yet seen a full course completion, but were already delivering the early stages of the course for the second time.

The group were asked a series of questions focused on what had gone well, what had not gone so well, and how they felt about their personal experience. Frank discussion was encouraged and digressions from the question line were allowed. The session took approximately an hour and a quarter, and the data discussed here are drawn from the transcript of the audio recording.

Learning and teaching

More sustained contact with smaller numbers of students was considered a benefit compared to delivering short training inputs to large groups:

'having some personal responsibility for a group of individuals ... so if they've got a problem they know they can call me.'

'I actually know the students, which makes a lot of difference to the way you can talk to them in the class and interact with

them and last week, five of them came up to me and ... said we really liked that, can you keep doing that sort of thing ... Now we're almost working together and we can take on board those comments ...'

They also valued having been involved in developing the teaching materials, whereas in their previous training roles these had been provided:

'... when you go in and deliver stuff that we have written ourselves, if it works that is a really nice feeling ... and they really enjoyed it.'

They identified their main concern as assessing and giving feedback on assignments, both in terms of time and content:

'Definitely assessment, how to mark, how much detail we need to do, time management in terms of the marking ... and then what we give the students back, bearing in mind we only pass or fail.'

'... it has taken me away from ... the classroom'.

The team's lack of experience of marking written work had previously been identified as a staff development need and the CLT had provided two half-day workshops on assessment, but this preparation was not mentioned at all in the focus group. Assessment was taking individuals much longer than they had expected. They were also conscious that much of the course had not yet been delivered and teaching materials remained to be developed. Given that changes in the law occur, materials would also need to be updated on a regular basis.

There were some drawbacks to teaching a long course rather than the short inputs they were used to:

'one of the things I've learnt is that it's hard work when you are running a course the length of [this] ... the reality sort of hit me the other day that it could possibly take me two years before I've delivered some sessions twice ... if you ... repeat it twice, that's quite nice because I really felt the second time around wow yeah, this is all singing all dancing now, I'm comfortable and happy with this ... I sometimes think, oh gosh, can I know it to the level that I need to know it.'

The staff are expected to teach a course which they have designed to be almost entirely face-to-face, and which runs in overlapping cycles

throughout the year. As with many staff in FE colleges, their working conditions may not be compatible with the expectations of how an HE lecturer's time may be spent. In addition, the course team had been meeting other university staff and seeing them apparently spending much less time teaching than they were. This suggested the need to look for ways of reducing contact time:

'We need to rethink the course to detach ourselves from this student contact ... I have to say that the juggling that went on and the amount of time that we put in was bordering on the ridiculous and we've continued professional development ... how on earth can I fit doing a Master's in with this?'

This question is important if they are to have time to develop to meet HE expectations.

Accommodation, equipment and support

Problems with the team's working environment were a recurring theme. Initially, this arose from being new to the environment themselves:

'the actual arriving and not knowing where anything is ...'

'having nobody to get immediate answers from ... sometimes we needed the answers a bit more immediately and that was not happening.'

The first intake of students was in April, which is not an easy time of the year for universities to find new office space for staff:

'the first couple of weeks ... essentially we had a shell of a room ... it was more testing than it should have been really ... to open up all the boxes that were stacked on the floor then realising you didn't have something and somebody had to drive to get things ...'

There were also high levels of frustration:

'Oh the printer, I just had to highlight that, the problem we've got with the printer is a daily challenge ...'

Some of the tutors commented that they had not realised how lucky they were in their previous training environment to have equipment and rooms provided for dedicated use:

'the equipment that we had, we knew how to work it, we knew where to go if we couldn't work it, etc. and your classroom would be yours for two weeks and I think what I really struggled with was that we had no ownership of the classroom and nor do the students, so you can't put things on the walls ... if you need a key, you have to know what's happening three days in advance to email IT to get that open and I just find that all quite difficult ...'

At the time of the research, most of the University of Brighton's pooled teaching rooms were equipped with standard provision such as whiteboards, overhead projectors and flipchart stands, but Microsoft PowerPoint® facilities had to be booked. The tutors found they had to teach in a variety of rooms on a number of different sites, and although the rooms would accommodate the students sitting in rows at tables, several of the rooms were too small to allow work in a large open circle or small break-out groups.

Whilst discussing these problems, the group became conscious that there may be different professional standards in HE compared to their former training environment:

'it sounds like a wish list ... [but] when the students turn up on Day 1, they expect a certain standard of professionalism and I certainly felt that during the first cohort when we were telling everybody this day we are here and another day you are in the Hall (which is a gym essentially), I think that isn't professional enough in some respects'.

However, the team considered themselves resourceful enough to overcome the problems, and they were confident in their own teaching ability:

'I've been getting in that classroom and when you shut the door you know what you are doing, I think everything else is just quite difficult.'

Administration for the course is provided from the central offices of each partner organisation. This means that none of the administrators are based in offices close to the course team or even on any of the campuses used by the course.

'I've found it very frustrating ... that our Administrator isn't here ... and we are not responsible for booking things and doing things, so if we've got a problem with something we have to phone someone [in our Headquarters] who then phones somebody at the university, so we never get an answer on our

phone call and then we have to wait for a call back ... but it is just having somebody who is able to offer us the support when we need it.'

There were initial problems over a shortage of course books on each site, but the librarians were praised for their helpfulness. The excellent facilities for student access to IT were mentioned, along with the support of Information Services in helping students and staff to use the university intranet.

Personal experience and learning

A variety of personal learning and experiences were mentioned. There was a strong feeling of contributing to something innovative and successful:

'being part of something more important ... I feel the game is raised by being here.'

'I've certainly learnt that students learn more this way than they did when we were back at Headquarters ... That's my own personal opinion but ... looking at the work that they've produced for us ... that for me is a big positive and their knowledge is a lot deeper.'

But there was also some feeling that their successes were not being recognised outside the course team itself:

'the thing I think which is kind of exciting, I mean obviously we've worked together for quite a long time ... but I don't think we're that bad, I think we are pretty good at what we do and I think it would be nice if people came in and actually see what we do sometimes.'

There was an emerging awareness of the wider resources available on the campus and some surprise and relief at finding they could fit in with university life:

'The university offers masses and masses of stuff to support you but I think we've been so busy we've ignored it. You meet people from other areas and actually you come back and think, good grief, this is so easy now somebody has bothered to tell me how to do it ... you just need to book yourself on and wander across and walk in, it is that easy, and that then opens up masses of doors for your own personal skills.'

'as you start to talk to more and more people around the university performing various roles you actually find that

they are absolutely no different than you ... that was probably highlighted to me when we went to that SEDA Conference when I was talking to some woman who I thought was on a completely different plane to me but actually she was a nurse ... now she was Professor of whatever as well but she started off doing exactly the same as us, which was transferring from her workplace training into a university...'

Several misconceptions were being recognised:

'Higher education ... I thought it was all lecture, all seminar, all autonomous learning and it is not like that here ... so I didn't feel after a few weeks that it was as remote or as different and awkward as I had anticipated it being.'

'how slowly the university works, or what I perceive to be the whole of academia ... things are supposed to come from ... research and ideas ... everything goes slow time, it really is slow time, which ... frustrates me when something is supposed to be done and then it's a month later. Or is it just a culture change for me?'

They were keen to integrate within the university and to make a contribution beyond their own teaching:

'We were asked to go and speak ... to the Law students. I thought that was just fantastic, actually going into another part of the university, in a different sort of area and do what we do and I came out of that feeling really good because I suddenly realised we were quite good at what we do. It would be nice to do more of that ... the sandwiches and drinks after and people coming up to you and really interested, and they quite liked our presentation as well.'

The change from being in a tightly managed organisation to becoming largely autonomous in a university environment was significant for many of the group:

'I feel that for the first time in ten years I've been treated like a grown-up in many ways as in I don't have to answer to people all the time, justify what I'm doing, clock on, clock off and do that and do this ... that for me has been really refreshing, they certainly have trusted us to get on with it, which is a huge responsibility. But actually if they do give you that responsibility you do just take it up and think ok I've got to deal with it and do it, and I think that's been quite nice.'

There was, however, some tension in having to balance the benefits of delivering the course in a university and developing students able to work in their own professional culture.

Another reflection demonstrated how easy it is to forget former good practice in teaching:

'certainly over the last three weeks I've learnt to remember what I was doing before ... I came here and I started delivering sessions ... I stopped asking questions and stopped putting people on the [spot] and saying 'why is this' and I don't know why I'd changed my approach to teaching ... so I re-introduced some of the better parts of the teaching that I had before ... it is a developmental process ...'

This team seemed to accept shared responsibility for improving communications about the course as part of their role in establishing this new form of initial training:

'how we see the course is still viewed massively differently within the [profession] ... and I find I'm defending our corner sometimes and trying to win people over and I didn't think that that would be the case quite as much as it has been, so I've learnt that the transition from what we were doing to this takes a hell of a long time to sink in with people ...'

It is important that the course is widely understood and supported because more than half of the students' time is spent in work placements designed to develop professional competence.

What helped or hindered?

The informal campus environment and culture was considered to have been very helpful in providing an appropriate learning environment, notwithstanding the many practical problems over rooms and equipment in the early stages. The decision to provide all members of the teams with personal laptops and mobile phones was greatly appreciated. This enables communication between the teams based in the universities and the placement support staff based in many different locations:

'what I've found easy is having a laptop and a phone has meant that I can keep track of people, I can phone people for help and all my work is in one place for me ...'

An unintended consequence, however, was that this may have made it more difficult for the teams to mix informally with other staff, which was a concern. They had encountered some particularly helpful people, including lecturers, administrators, librarians, information services staff and caretakers (and had been able to help the latter

by offering advice over an emerging problem with local youngsters skateboarding on the campus!).

The nature of their own team was important:

'I think being in a team that is very well established and hasn't got a big ego ... it is the easy-going nature of the team though as well ... we can identify that different people within the group have expertise in different areas and we've accepted that and worked with it.'

Workload was perceived to be a problem, although this was linked with a feeling that as they gained experience, preparation and assessment would become less time-consuming.

Implications for future practice and research

The model for the development of staff new to teaching in HE has changed very little since the first framework was developed by SEDA in the early 1990s. This small, local study suggests that for staff joining HE through partnership arrangements there is a need for more responsive approaches to developing both individuals and new teams of staff.

A substantial problem involves the preparation of staff to teach on a partnership programme, since the usual in-service models require participants to be teaching in HE already. Even when staff are qualified as trainers in their field of practice, there is a considerable leap for them to make as they strive to meet the expectations of HE. This study indicates that the differences include having a more long-term and developmental relationship with students, taking more responsibility for the choice and design of content and style of delivery, and taking a new role in assessing and giving feedback. For this group the last of these gave them the most concern, both at the time of this study and subsequently. The worries continued even after the first examination board, when there was not only formal endorsement of the processes and standards set, but the teams were congratulated on the quality of feedback they were giving their students. This continuing unease about making judgements about the content and quality of students' work is interesting. The frequently-voiced perception is that benchmark level descriptors, learning outcomes and academic frameworks are not accompanied by clear enough guidelines, making it difficult for those new to HE to understand and use them.

Many of the problems reported by this team had been exacerbated by practical difficulties, some of which probably arose from different expectations about the normal level of administrative support. Provision of a more comprehensive induction programme for these staff could have reduced the frustrations experienced over accommodation and equipment, and might have increased their confidence and ability to seek help. It may be that programmes of this nature need more than the usual level of initial support, particularly if the whole course team is entirely new to working in HE.

Before this course began we gave everyone a copy of a study pack produced by the CLT on *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. The CLT also held workshops that focused on issues identified as urgent by the team and the Programme Director. These covered assessment and giving feedback, using the intranet, and styles of classroom delivery. A course design team led by the university-based course leader developed the curriculum and took the course to validation. This team became the core of the larger course team, who then became closely engaged in developing the course timetable, planning sessions and developing materials. The course leader's role throughout the planning and early delivery periods included providing significant informal staff development.

Although this course is unusual to date in having such substantial employer involvement, this is likely to be a significant development area for HE. Much of the success of this type of course depends on the quality of teaching and learning, but the usual systems for quality assurance in HE do not fully address the issues encountered in the wide variety of partnerships that can now be envisaged. There is little mention of staff development in the QAA guidelines, and although partnerships with FE are by now very familiar, there is scant evidence of specific staff development for those delivering HE in an FE environment. There is even less evidence of staff development for people delivering HE in non-educational workplaces. The quality of teaching and learning in collaborative programmes is the responsibility of the HE institution, and the centres charged with staff development might now consider how to support this emerging area of work in ways that accommodate the experiential and prior learning of the teaching staff and facilitate their integration into the HE community.

There are a number of ways in which a Centre for Learning and Teaching might develop its provision to support the development of staff in partnership programmes. For example, Brighton is developing a 'top-up' route to enable those who have completed an FE-based Cert Ed to gain SEDA and HE Academy recognition through reflection on their current HE practice. Brighton University's annual Learning and

Teaching Conference could be tailored to include a particular focus on the university's partnership work, with workshops presented by staff from partnership programmes. It might be possible to develop a scheme in which experienced HE staff mentor new staff teaching on partnership programmes. A development in this direction is that we are now employing part-time staff tutors who meet with individuals and the teams to offer feedback on teaching and to discuss development opportunities. The initial series of workshops (referred to above) designed to address specific programme issues was helpful for the course in this study. Future development issues must be determined by the new course team, and the CLT itself needs to continue to consider how to make flexible provision for the diverse needs of staff teaching on partnership programmes. We found that the provision by our Information Services Department of a dedicated adviser to the team for use of the university intranet was very effective in overcoming practical difficulties and developing good practice and expertise.

A partnership programme typically involves learning for professional practice alongside the achievement of HE outcomes, and it is essential that the team are themselves competent practitioners with experience of current practice. Some time has therefore to be devoted to continuing professional development in the appropriate professional area. In order to become fully fledged members of the academic community, many also need to complete degrees, or to progress to study at postgraduate level. It is a challenge to establish a team that brings a well-balanced profile of qualifications and experience and then to provide appropriate development that will enable the team to grow the programme effectively.

There is scope for development of a wider literature that explores the domain of staff development for collaborative programmes in HE, building on and extending the narrower focus of material on supporting workplace learning. This focus might sit within a broader field addressing the philosophy of inclusive curricula, possibly taking an interdisciplinary approach to the development of partnerships to support learning, and the design and management of partnership programmes.

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