PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY RESEARCHER-IN-RESIDENCE PROJECT

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Year 1 Report (2016-7)

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1. Introduction

This project has the long-term aim of developing established relationships between Plymouth University (PU) and a number of its partnership schools into a richer association modelled on university practice schools (UPSs). These are used widely in such countries as Finland, Japan, Czech Republic and Hungary (Burghes, 2011), and support initial teacher education (ITE) students' theoretical understanding and practical application by offering them teaching placements in which they receive support from a high number of expert teachers and mentors. UPSs also benefit university staff through offering regular school-based work such as demonstration lessons, which enables lecturers to keep their own practice up to date. A third potential benefit is the opportunity for school and university staff to collaborate in research projects that focus on different aspects of teaching practice within the schools (Burghes, 2011, p.49).

In this report we focus on the Researcher-in-Residence (RiR) aspect of this developing partnership model, drawing on data from the project evaluation that was set up in the Autumn term of 2017. We discuss different RiR models, the aims for the Plymouth University model, our research methods and project findings. We end this report with recommendations for the future.

2. Researcher in Residence models

Our first research task was to examine different RiR models. A literature search of Primo, (Plymouth University's search portal), Google Scholar and internet-based grey literature (unpublished or published in non-commercial form e.g. student doctorates, government policy papers) revealed the following six models:

1. Researcher embedded in front-line delivery

This model is based on the principles of participatory research, involving collaboration across a range of stakeholders including service users. Rather than working solely in an academic institution, the researcher spends much of their time as a member of a service-based operational team, working on and solving practical problems. There is clarity about the expertise that the researcher can offer, which includes a secure understanding of the research evidence in their area of work and of the theoretical and conceptual basis of that field. There is an emphasis on negotiating expert knowledge, as opposed to informing or imposing it on their collaborators (UCL, 2016).

- o *Case study*: Clapton and Daly (2015) report a case of a social worker academic-in-residence in which the researcher spent a day a week for 12 months in a third-sector children and families social work agency. The residency aimed to develop an engagement with research amongst practitioners and within the agency, with a longer-term view of helping the agency to become a centre for teaching, learning and research excellence. It was also hoped that the arrangement would result in firm links between the agency and the university staff, ultimately benefiting teaching and learning. Activities included conversations between teachers and researchers and mini-pedagogic conferences.

2. Researcher working with individual teachers to enrich pupils' learning experiences

This model is one in which the researcher collaborates with individual teachers. The nature of the collaboration may vary considerably, and is determined by the needs of the partners and institutions involved. It may involve teachers engaging with research findings, or collaborative engagement in research between teachers and researchers (Creaby et al., 2017).

- o *Case study:* the US National Center for Science Education's 'Scientist in the Classroom' programme has a basic two-visit model as a minimum commitment. The first visit is a "get-to-know-you" visit, with the scientist introducing him or herself, explaining their research in terms the students can understand, and telling the students the story of how they became a scientist. During the second in-class visit, the scientist works with the teacher to carry out some science activity work with the students that is related to climate change or evolution (https://ncse.com/scientistinclassroom). In practice, many collaborations extend beyond this minimum expectation.

3. Prominent researcher is invited into practice contexts

This model follows a consultancy format whereby expert researchers, likely to be senior academics, are invited in by an organisation and provide an advisory role, typically via a short series of visits. The information flow is largely unidirectional and there is little element of 'residency' in the sense of a continued relationship.

- o *Case study:* a programme in North Carolina, sponsored by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, invited prominent academic researchers to make brief technical assistance visits to treatment clinics. They presented research-based information about specific practice improvements, which providers then tried to adopt. Qualitative analysis of interviews concluded the programme was successful, largely due to its on-site nature (Hilton, 2002).

4. Researchers are mobilised to encourage change in schools

Research and undergraduate students gain practical experience relevant to their research training and can act as a conduit between the university and schools. The researchers add capacity to already-full teacher workloads, and skills and knowledge can be coordinated and disseminated broadly and consistently.

- o *Case study:* In Atlanta, USA, the Elementary Science Education Partners programme developed kits in support of new science curriculum modules. Lead teachers were trained to deliver curriculum elements, and were supported by a team of undergraduate students from regional universities who were, in turn, mentored by experienced research academics at their respective institutions (National Academy of Sciences, 2005).

5. Early career researchers gain professional development by working in an applied environment

This model aims to develop early career researchers' awareness of the practice context and thus shape research studies to support implementation of evidence. Although the host organisation will benefit from the outputs of the ECR's work, the emphasis is on the researchers' personal and professional gains that arise from the experience.

- o *Case study*: Young digital humanities researchers spend six months in Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB), the National Library of the Netherlands. They access KB data for conducting research and have data experts on hand to provide knowledge and experience. In return, the institution benefits from the information gathered which can help to improve services (KB, undated).
- o *Case study:* Researchers in Schools is a UK programme for PhD graduates to become teachers. The aims of the programme are to champion university access, increase subject expertise and to promote research http://www.researchersinschools.org/.

6. Researcher as facilitator

One example from the University of Limerick arguably incorporates elements from several of the above models, with the researcher acting as a facilitator between different individuals in different roles in both the school and university.

- o *Case study:* Young et al (2015) investigated the impact of having a RiR embedded in the school environment to facilitate the implementation of a structured democratic partnership model. The project involved a Partnership in Learning between University and School (PLUS) champion from the University of Limerick taking up 'residence' in a local school one day a week for a six-week period that coincided with second year student teacher placements. The champion scheduled and facilitated a range of conversations between student teachers, teachers, principals and university tutors, creating 'dialogic spaces between policy actors' (p.37). The key findings were the significance of pedagogy-related conversations that supported student teachers, and collaborative planning between teachers and student teachers. The initiative was viewed as successful in developing new professional relationships of learning between different university and school-based actors.

Taking evidence from the literature as a whole, we can see that a RiR programme can have a number of outcomes that, depending on the model adopted, include:

- o pupil learning from direct researcher engagement in support of teacher, e.g. in-class presentations/discussions of topical research (knowledge transfer).
- o pupil learning from direct researcher engagement as teacher (research-informed teaching; knowledge transfer).
- o collaborative research and/or scholarly activity (practitioner research; systemic research; pedagogic research; evidence-based practice; research-informed teaching; knowledge exchange).
- o teacher skill development from collaborative working with university staff (practitioner research; pedagogic research; participatory reform; evidence-based practice; knowledge transfer).
- o researcher skill development (pedagogic research; knowledge transfer).

3. Plymouth University model

Drawing on information from the literature review, our knowledge of University Practice Schools and our own context, we set the aims for the Plymouth University RiR project. These were to:

- support school staff research skills development.
- identify and promote mutually beneficial activity (such as project evaluation, curriculum projects, continuing professional development (CPD)).
- undertake collaborative research linked to the school development plan.
- support the dissemination of research within the school or more widely
- close the gap between knowledge production in the university and practice in schools.

Drawing on the notion of a 'third space' (Moje et al, 2004), we wanted to create a 'democratic and inclusive' relationship (Zeichner, 2010, p.89) in which school and university staff were equal participants in furthering knowledge, developing practice and disseminating research findings. University researchers were allocated 50 hours for this work during the academic year 2016-17.

Fifteen schools and fifteen corresponding researchers-in-residence (RiRs) expressed interest in taking part in this scheme at the project launch. Nine of these partnerships did not progress, with five ending due to changes in university staffing that were outside the RiR scheme and the remaining four sustaining little contact between partners after the initial stages of approach.

Six schools/RiRs have developed partnerships that have continued into the academic year 2017/8. Two of these RiRs left their university employment at the end of the academic year 2016/7, but have continued with their projects in 2017/8. One new partnership was set up, with the result that there are seven ongoing RiR-school partnerships in the academic year 2017/8.

4. Research methods

All school staff and RiRs were sent a link to an online survey in December 2016 to find out participants' expectations and priorities for the scheme, and a second in July 2017 to ask if/how these had been fulfilled. Nine school staff members and nine RiRs responded to the first survey (with returns from both school staff member and RiR in seven partnerships); six school staff members and five RiRs responded to the second (with returns from both members of two partnerships).

Survey data and partnership developments were explored further through interviews with a small sample of RiRs and school staff in July 2017. Researchers interviewed one school staff member and the corresponding RiR from the three case-study schools in which the RiR relationship was established (i.e. three school and three university staff members), and one further interview was conducted with a school staff member who was about to start a new RiR relationship in the following academic year. The aim of the interviews was to explore, in detail:

- participants' expectations of the scheme
- ways in which the scheme was working in practice
- successes
- challenges.

The research was conducted in the spirit of an Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987), which builds on the strengths of an organisation to shape future sustainability and development; the research 'should begin with appreciation, should be collaborative, should be provocative, and should be applicable' (Bushe, 2011, p.87).

In the next section, we examine the findings from this research. All responses and quotations are reported anonymously to protect individuals' identity. Quotations from the surveys are presented 'in inverted commas' and from interviews *'in italics and inverted commas'.*

5. Research findings

This section has five sub-sections that explore participants' motivations for joining the project, if/how expectations have been met, models of practice, project successes and project challenges. In the following, final section we summarise and conclude this report.

5.1. What were the motivations for joining the scheme?

5.1.1. Survey responses: schools

Nine teachers responded to the first survey, and the data show that expectations for the project were high. From a total of 25 responses to the question (most respondents listed three objectives), 'What would you say are the top three objectives you hope will be achieved through participation in this scheme?', school staff focused on:

- improving learning and teaching in the school (8 responses).
- undertaking research and/or keeping up to date with available research (7).
- collaborating with the university on different aspects of practice (6).
- a particular school agenda (e.g. developing school staff awareness about Pupil Premium) (4).

The next question asked participants, 'On the following scale, please rate the importance of these three objectives to your school (1=very unimportant, 10=very important)'. Most responses (n=21, or 84 per cent) rated the importance of their objectives to their school at nine or ten, with the remainder (n=4, or 16 per cent) rated between five and eight.

The following question asked, 'On the following scale, please rate the likelihood of each of these three objectives being achieved during the life of the scheme (1=very unlikely, 10=very likely)'. In this case, school staff were less optimistic, with eight (32 per cent) responses rated at nine or ten, with the remainder (n=17, or 68 per cent) rated between two and eight.

5.1.2. Survey responses: Researchers-in-Residence

RiRs' expectations were slightly different. Of the 27 responses from nine survey participants, the most frequent was related to research. This is shown below:

- developing research projects in schools; raising awareness of research in schools (10).
- supporting the partner school (8).
- gaining a better understanding of school issues (3).
- raising the profile of schools and the university (3).
- developing closer links between the university and schools (2).
- enhancing the initial teacher education (ITE) experience for students (1).

Answers to the next question, 'On the following scale, please rate how important you feel these three objectives are to you (1=very unimportant, 10=very important)', had

lower ratings from RiRs than school respondents. Fourteen objectives (52 per cent) were rated at nine or ten; three (11 per cent) were rated at eight; three (11 per cent) at seven; three (11 per cent) at five or six; four (15 per cent) at three or four.

RiRs were more optimistic than school respondents about the potential of the partnership work. The question, 'On the following scale, please rate the likelihood of these objectives being achieved during the life of the scheme (1=very unlikely, 10=very likely) had 13 responses (48 per cent) that rated the likelihood of objectives being met at nine or ten; six (22 per cent) at eight; five (19 per cent) at six or seven; and three (11 per cent) at four or five.

These results, although from a very small sample, suggest that school staff rated the importance of the project highly, while university staff were more optimistic that the project objectives would be met.

5.1.3. Interviews

Interview data came from a total of seven interviews; three partnerships (school staff member and RiR) and one staff member who was setting up a partnership for 2017/8.

The main motivator for the four school case-study interviewees was to develop closer links with the university, with the aim of improving different aspects of school performance. These included:

- the potential for **staff development**
  'CPD is generally conducted in schools; anybody you bring in you tend to have to buy in, nobody's got any money, so we're looking at doing a lot of it in-house. [The RiR] *came in and I'd said to her the areas I wanted her to work with staff … She came and she did a brilliant CPD session for staff … I think budgets are going to be tight for a while and the emphasis is on schools training themselves, which was part of the reason I wanted to get involved in this. Because it is a good way of seeing what's around and seeing what you can do'.*
- **engaging parents** with the school to raise attainment levels
  'in certain year groups, in pockets, we still have low-level parental engagement. So it is still quite a big factor for us … [The RiR] *has been doing lots of work around it'.*
- developing staff **research skills**
  'We recognise that we probably got the kids highly attaining for arithmetic but when you look at the reasoning and you dig down a little bit deeper, fundamentally that's much harder to teach. And the curriculum's changed about developing reasoning skills and mathematical ability to problem solve … We know that we're not there. Having this chance to research what we're doing, is it working? have we made it better? it fits nicely with that. It's something we have a passion for, maths!'.

RiRs reported that their expectations were:

- to maintain contact with **real-life settings**: *'we should not be siloed'.*
- to ensure that **research does not become disconnected** from real-life settings: *'you get the contact with the issues that are real to them* [schools] *instead of the sort of things that you get involved in thinking about if you're working at it because of a theoretical interest or because you found yourself doing some research because there was money in it, which isn't necessarily what schools are interested in. You find out what's really important there at the schools'.*
- To give schools a space to **consider practice** outside the *'external regulatory gaze'* of Ofsted, and to engage in conversations about practice in ways that are not necessarily aligned to the standards agenda: *'There's a difference between having a conversation as a mentor where you've got to slot it against the standards, versus just looking at a piece of practice and seeing how it's helping children learn without necessarily having to show why that's a good thing. It can be good for its own sake'.*
- To engage in **practical work** that supports school development, such setting up a parent/child maths club, promoting the use of research to examine teacher practice and engaging children in research. Part of the aim here was to develop positive working relationships with teachers in the partnership school.
- To develop RiR's own research skills, their **research projects** and to publish papers: *'My little bit of interest. This is how I got involved'.*

5.2. Have these expectations been met?

5.2.1. Survey data

Six school staff responded to the follow-up survey, of whom three were totally positive about their experience, and two reported that no progress had been made. One stated that progress had been slower than initially hoped:

> 'It has been a positive experience to have a RiR in school. There have been lots of positive aspects. However, there have been a few issues which have slowed our progress slightly'.

Five RiRs responded. Three reported that little or no progress had been achieved with their partnership, and two that it had developed positively. These low rates of response reflect schools' busy timetables in the summer term, university staff restructuring during the 2016/7 academic year, and the fact that some partnerships did not, for a variety of reasons, develop beyond an initial contact.

Nonetheless, RiRs and school interviewees from the three schools in which the partnership was established were positive about the quality of the relationship they had developed and the work that they had done. These are examined more closely in the following sections, drawing on data from the six interviews from three established partnerships (three school staff members and three RiRs).

5.3. Models of practice and working negotiations

Initial arrangements generally involved setting up formal meetings and days in which the RiR would spend time in the school. **Taking time** to discuss the project and the school's priorities, and getting to know each other's educational approaches was seen as a critical element in building the foundations of a positive working relationship: '*We've worked really well together … We've spent quite a lot of time talking things through together*' (school interviewee)*.* One RiR commented that her school partner's approach was '*child-centred, child-driven*' which aligned with her own educational beliefs; not only did this make future research projects more likely to be successful, but contributed to her ability to work effectively with the school: '*I'm recognised as being, in this point in time, part of where this school is*' (RiR). At the same time she suggested that it was important to keep the work focused: '*I think one of the things that worked was actually me not allowing it to just be fluffy. I got hold of it*' (RiR).

All interviewees considered the nature of the relationship as **friendly but professional**, with the focus on improving the school's offer for the children:

> '*We haven't felt that the university and [RiR] are coming in and preaching; it's very much organic, we're working together … we are friendly … but she's straight in there as a professional. You know, I don't need a friend. I've gained a friend but I don't need a friend. I need the university to come in and offer something to little Billy, Johnny and Mary. And I think they've done that*' (school interviewee).

> '*You want to be friendly or open enough to develop some sort of understanding to be able to move forward together*' (RiR).

Contained within this open, friendly and professional approach was an understanding of the pressures that each of the partners was under, and most interviewees commented on the **importance of regular communication** between partners to ensure that all were aware of developments (such as absence or other work commitments) that could affect proposed plans. At the same time it was important to recognise, as one interviewee pointed out, that '*people need to be willing to be involved*' (RiR) if the work together were to be successful. School interviewees commented on how the RiRs' **flexibility** was appreciated in managing potentially difficult issues as school refurbishment, impromptu governors' meetings and initially unsuccessful projects. As partners have got to know each other better and as a working pattern has emerged, visiting arrangements between two partnerships for RiR have become less formal: one RiR '*can roam the school and pick up her own trends on top of the ones that I've said, 'Can you help me look at this from a different angle?' And she's come back and said, 'I've looked at this as well and you'll be interested to know …*' (school interviewee). The third case-study school reported a number of different concurrent projects, with the result that the RiR days needed to be carefully planned to accommodate the scheduled work.

All RiRs have been involved in a number of different activities that included teacher observations, feedback to teachers, documentary analysis and comment, discussions with different staff members, undertaking research design with staff and pupils, research ethics discussions, leading professional development sessions, meeting the headteacher, meeting the governors, supported the writing of a report for Ofsted, and undertaking their own research. These different foci seemed to encourage regular contact, enabled partners to work on different aspects of practice and research, and offered the opportunity to develop a multi-faceted relationship in which both partners were able to learn about each other's educational philosophy and expertise. As one interviewed RiR suggested, *'You need to be going for more than one thing'.*

The models enacted in these cases have taken elements from models 1 (researcher embedded in front-line delivery), 2 (working with individual teachers to enrich pupil experiences), 3 (researchers are mobilised to encourage change in schools) and 6 (researcher as facilitator) seen in Section 2. However the individual relationships appeared to be developing in different ways, with both parties adapting and compromising as necessary within their temporal and institutional constraints.

5.4.   Successes

Both RiRs and school interviewees from all three schools were positive about the quality of the relationship they had developed and felt that the initiative was worthwhile. **School interviewees** reported that successes included:

- **CPD**: [The RiR] *'came in and I'd said to her the areas I wanted her to work with staff … She came and she did a brilliant CPD session for staff and I think the staff were kind of swept along with her because she's so enthusiastic and bouncy about things and you know, really, really positive feedback from staff about that. I'm hoping she's going to come in and do another one'.*
- a **student teaching** day: *'She* [RiR] *had a group of Year 1* [ITE] *students come in and do a maths day for Years 5 and 6, which was great … they did some shape and space with origami. It was all very hands-on, practical fun maths with the aim of trying to not change but slightly influence pupils' attitudes to maths … and it was at a time of year when Year 6 were heavily into their SATs revision and were feeling a little bit* [down]*, and they just saw lots of fun paper folding and nice maths. They loved it, absolutely loved it'.*
- **a critical friendship**: *'I've been through most of the strata of the National College of Leadership. I've got that but it really helps to have another person saying 'What about this? What about that? Have you thought about this?'.*
- linking the RiR work to **improving outcomes for pupils** with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Pupil Premium funding, which has raised the profile of these pupils within the school: *'Pupil Premium is absolutely vital and SEND is vital, and actually* [I've] *got this massive entity, as in* [the RiR] *and the University on board to say, 'If you didn't think it was huge already, it really is! Because the*

University are involved with this and really want to see what a difference we are making'.

- teaching children about **research ethics** *'is a fantastic skill for a primary school child to have'.*

RiRs echoed the school interviewees' responses and reported that additional successes included:

- that it has been *'really good'* to have **regular contact with a school**.
- the **school's positive attitude** to the project: *'they're just really up for it … it's not just pushing against an open door, the doors have been thrown open and it's exactly what they want to be doing'.*
- **pupils' ethics committee** meeting: *'they were really thinking through issues of confidentiality and how that related to questionnaire design'.*
- A **reciprocal relationship** with the school: *"The school have been very, very accommodating; they've been absolutely superb, finding me a space to work … I'll spend the whole day there … So I'm hoping that as I go in and do my research, as a way of saying 'Thank you' is to give them some pointers in the right direction'.*

5.5. Challenges

The main challenges reported by both school staff and RiRs were related to finding the **time and resources** for partners to meet: *'everyone is just so busy'* (school interviewee). Difficulties with funding were more likely to have an effect on proposed research than on the staff professional development provided by RiRs:

> *'I think what's difficult for teachers in this project is there's no supply money attached to it … it does make it very difficult to do research together … it's a big issue for us because I won't be given any money from the school to have supply'* (school interviewee).

The other challenge raised by **school interviewees** was making sure that current projects were moving forward:

> *'I'm very conscious that the amount of effort and work that Plymouth are putting in, we've got to makes sure that we're able to give staff the time to do enough work in between'.*

RiRs reported a number of additional university-based challenges:

- uncertainty about the notional 50 hours of RiR time; what did this mean in practice?
- lack of clarity of requirements for developing ethics applications for the Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee
- intellectual property rights – how should these be negotiated?

- the apparent low priority of this project in relation to other demands: *'it's the low-level admin that suddenly becomes a priority … The whole research side of it always feels as if it's the hobby and the day job is the important bit … I'm hoping that as the project starts to have publishable outputs, that people will start to take it more seriously … because at the moment it's at the level of a school visit'.*

The final challenges were those of **undertaking particular projects** within the schools:
- finding new ways to encourage parental engagement.
- school staff leaving in the middle of a research project, so that new staff took over without the ethical and research training of those who had left.
- lack of engagement from senior managers: *'I think two or three of the class teachers are very engaged but I think the governors and the senior management team are not; they've got other priorities. Which I can understand'* (RiR).

It is worth noting that interviewees from one partnership reported that the *'positives far, far outweigh the couple of minor hiccups'* (RiR), although the school staff interviewee phrased the sentiment rather differently, saying that the minor challenges *'can be overcome if the impact is viewed as significant'* (school staff).

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This report illustrates how both school and university staff had high expectations of the RiR project, although these were expressed with slightly difference emphases; while the schools placed greater importance on improving the quality of learning and teaching, the RIRs tended to focus more strongly on research. As the interview data showed, these positions can be aligned to mutual benefit, with some partnerships undertaking or starting to undertake practitioner research within the school.

The report also shows how the developing RiR relationship was founded on the will to participate, on taking time to develop secure professional relationships and on having a number of different foci for the time that RiRs spent within the partner school. In the context of partners' busy schedules and tight institutional financing, partnerships seemed to work when a secure professional relationship was developed between partners, both of whom took the time to get to know each other's educational philosophy and expertise. They also had a number of different foci for school visits,

In the light of these findings, we recommend that:
- Schools and RiRs are carefully selected to ensure that, in the current environment of austerity and increasing demands on time, they have the will and the means to commit to a relationship that will develop over the long term.
- There needs to be institutional and/or departmental commitment to the project over the long term. If one person on either side withdraws for any reason, a potential replacement should be found to ensure continuity.
- School and RiR partnerships are carefully matched to enable the development of a secure professional relationship. Building on a previous relationship, that was based on either research or aspects of practice, could be a positive start. Flexibility in approach – in which both partners understand the nature of each other's institutional demands – is essential.
- The RiR visits have more than one focus. This allows partners to develop different aspects of their relationship and has the potential to offer different opportunities for both partners at different times.
- Partners should appraise their work at six-monthly intervals, to ensure that their project(s) are developing to mutual benefit. These appraisals should give rise to direct action to enable the partnership to flourish.

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