Research “... is like a voyage of discovery into unknown lands, seeking not for new territory but for new knowledge. It should appeal to those with a good sense of adventure.”

Frederick Sanger, OM, CH, CBE, FRS
British biochemist.
The only double recipient of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry.

This bulletin focuses primarily on the work and achievements of the final tranche of HELP CETL Award Holders as well as the recently awarded UPC PhD scholarships. In doing so it also provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the current situation of research and scholarly activity (RSA) across Plymouth University partner institutions and to consider the opportunities and potential for the future.

The Higher Education Funding Council considers research to be an aspect of scholarly activity and makes the observation that, “Colleges offering HE generally have a broader definition of what constitutes scholarly activity than HEIs.” It then goes on to list some of the wide range of activities that might be considered “scholarly”. These include: keeping up to date with the subject; curriculum development; updating ICT skills; taking higher qualifications; research and publications; attending staff development events within the college, and personal development … including reading. (HEFCE, 2009, p145). This “broader definition” relates to the more vocational aspects of FE colleges; the different levels of expertise and experience of the staff; the different levels of subject specialism amongst the staff; and an institutional orientation and culture that is more inclined to teaching than to research.

In addition to the work of individual staff highlighted in this report, there are (despite today’s financial constraints) some impressive examples of RSA provision by our partner colleges. The range and depth of RSA conducted at some of the larger colleges such as Truro and Cornwall have resulted in impressive in-house reviews of staff research. Other colleges are taking steps in the same direction however. Bridgewater, for instance, has just produced its first journal which publicises and encourages research activity, with the hope and expectation that it will be the first of many. The work by Cathy Slaughter in establishing a Higher Education Scholarly Activity Group at Petroc (described in her award report below) has been enthusiastically received by the college who are providing for its continuation and development. Many colleges are establishing and developing programmes of internal conferences and presentation days which have been extremely useful, for both staff and students, not only in highlighting the value of research but also in raising awareness of the benefits of dissemination and the sharing of ideas and experiences. It is obviously invidious to identify individual colleges and miss out on others when there is so much good work going on across the partnership so I hope you will forgive me if some of your own initiatives haven’t been mentioned. Suffice to say that we recognising, and are impressed by, the levels of engagement and the range of innovative ideas that are coming from the college network in support of RSA. It is not always an easy thing to do, especially in the smaller colleges. We will look to assist and develop these ideas and opportunities, aiming for greater cooperation and integration of all our efforts to mutual benefit in the future.

In my work to support Award Holders and coordinating research, I interviewed staff across the partnership and conducted a questionnaire to assess the experiences and attitudes of partner college staff towards research and scholarly activity at their institutions. Whilst the results cannot claim any statistical significance, they do provide (alongside a range of informal interviews) some interesting insights into staff perceptions. The wide interpretation of “scholarly activity” certainly confirmed the perceptions in the HEFCE report. The greatest challenges for HE in FE staff undertaking research and scholarly activity remain the same across the sector:

- Limited remission from high teaching loads for RSA in support of HE delivery
- Non teaching time being taken up by FE related staff development and operational practice briefings
- Limited funds available to support RSA costs including conference attendance and travel to other events that connect staff with their subject peers
- Where there are small groups of HE staff in a College it can be hard to develop and maintain an HE RSA culture within the team
- RSA not being built into staff appraisals or targets

Of all the activities undertaken in the HELP CETL 2005-10, I am particularly proud of the work undertaken by the Award Holders and therefore, I was extremely pleased that UPC was able to extend the scheme for a further year into 2010-11 including PhD scholarships. Again, the focus and dedication of our Award Holders in developing work that takes forward the student experience has been of an extremely high standard. As in previous years, I am sure that this work will prove to be an effective springboard for further personal and professional development.

Mark Stone
Associate Professor, Head of UK Partnerships
Academic Partnerships
Plymouth University
Research and Scholarly Activity across the Partnership

It has long been noted that additional time and funding will be needed if FE lecturers are to develop the levels of scholarly activity required by their increasing involvement in HE delivery (Jones, 2006). However, Plymouth University remains committed to working with partner institutions to deliver strategies and practice that means that Colleges are well placed to deliver increasing volumes of HE. This includes HE developments at level 6, where the need for enhanced levels of RSA are required to deliver both a high quality student experience and offer motivation and professional development to the staff that prepare students for work or further study.

The work highlighted in this report and previous reports (see below) outline the value that is derived from supporting staff to develop their subject knowledge and to exchange their experiences/understanding, both within programme teams and between institutions.

Subject-centered research, tailored to one’s personal teaching and research specialisms is traditionally the means for maintaining subject currency in HE, but for colleges primarily concerned with FE provision (especially in an environment in which staff are more generalists than specialists), providing for these opportunities can be expensive both in terms of time and money. However, as members of the Plymouth University partnership, colleges can take advantage of numerous opportunities provided by the links that they have with the University. These include opportunities such as those provided by Academic Partnerships, or through the University research clusters and networks, and also the links that college programmes have with their University faculties via their Academic Liaison People (ALPs). These are all described in more detail below in: “Opportunities for Research and Scholarly Activities”.

Dr Robert Cook
Faculty Partnerships Manager (Education)

The HELP CETL Award Holder Scheme

2010-11 was the final year of the Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre of Excellence in Teaching & Learning (HELP CETL). At the end of the CETL, UPC took on support for the programme for a further year.

The Award Holder Scheme was one means by which Plymouth HELP CETL linked with University of Plymouth Colleges faculty to promote research and scholarly activity in the partner colleges and thus to encourage an appropriate culture of Higher Education within the colleges of Further Education. In order to achieve this, the Award Holder Scheme aimed to:

1) Build a supportive environment for scholarly activity and research to be undertaken, and
2) Integrate Award Holders into Communities of Practice to enable them to share their ideas, expertise and practice throughout UPC to enhance the HE in FE culture across a dispersed network of professionals.

The Award Holder Scheme comprised four types of award:

1. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Award – Between £500 and £3,000 for specific personal/professional development.
2. Teaching Fellowship (TF) – Up to £10,000 to conduct a substantial research or development project relevant to both UPC and the wider HE in FE context.
3. Mini Teaching Fellowships (MTF) – Up to £3,000 where work was not sufficiently developed for a TF or for a smaller research project.
4. Continuity Award (CA) – Existing CPD Award holders could apply for a CA of between £5,000 and £7,000 to develop their work into a Teaching Fellowship. All UPC lecturing and support staff were eligible to apply for an award, and these were allocated through a rigorous review procedure. Only the most well formulated applications with the greatest potential received funding.

Over the five years of the Award Holder Scheme, 75 staff received funding for a variety of research and scholarly activities. This has not only enriched the knowledge and experience of the staff but has also been of direct value to UPC students and enhanced the provision of teaching within the partnership.

The final group of Award Holders, whose work is presented in the following pages, have explored a fascinating variety of useful areas of enquiry, many of which are perennial regions of concern to HE practitioners, not only in the FE context, but also within traditional HE provision. The reports given here are necessarily brief, but the email addresses of the award holders are included, so that answers to any questions or further information can be obtained by contacting them directly.

Previous Award Holder showcases are available in the repository at:-

2005-6 Award Holders – http://uplace.org.uk:8080/dspace/handle/10293/201
2006-7 Award Holders – http://uplace.org.uk:8080/dspace/handle/10293/386

References:
Available at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_05/
The Use of eBooks on Foundation Degree Courses

CONTINUITY AWARD
Sue Caporn (Sue.Caporn@cityofbristol.ac.uk)
City of Bristol College

This research project, undertaken at City of Bristol College during 2010-11, looked at the perceptions and usage of eBooks by students on foundation degree programmes. The research followed the Business and Early Childhood Studies students who were subjects of a previous project in their second year, to find out if their attitudes to eBooks had changed. The project replicated the survey methodology used in the original project with two Technology foundation degrees: Automotive Business and Engineering.

Data was collected from two questionnaires completed by these students, one immediately after an introductory workshop and the other two months later and staff teaching on the programmes were interviewed. The research found that the usage of eBooks by the 2nd year Business and Early Childhood students had decreased by September 2010, and that the students were less satisfied with eBooks and less likely to use them in future, with technical problems cited as a factor. The Technology students were found to be more positive about eBooks than the Business / Early Childhood students, to have used more eBooks in relation to print books, and to be much happier to read directly from the screen. However, some of these students found eBooks difficult to navigate and search and in all groups many students still preferred print books. The Technology lecturers commented on the poor image quality of the eBooks, but believed them to be a useful resource. All participants valued the ability to access eBooks remotely, as well as the additional access to relevant titles offered by eBooks. Significantly, the eBooks workshops were found to have had an impact on both the way in which students intended to carry out research and on confidence levels in relation to eBooks.

This subject has important implications for the ways in which we implement eBooks solutions within HE and I have delivered several presentations on this research topic and have been invited to speak at the JISC Turbo Enhanced Learning Event at Somerset College.

The same but different: A comparative study of preschool provision in England and China

CONTINUITY AWARD
Janet Harvell (HARVELLI@bridgwater.ac.uk)
Bridgwater College

The research was carried out as a result of previous trips to early years settings in the People’s Republic of China. The contacts made have supported a better understanding of early years provision in China and developed awareness of some of the cultural implications for early years providers.

Extended visits were made to three different kindergartens located in Beijing, all of which were delivering a curriculum, based either on Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence theory (Gardner, 1993) or the Montessori curriculum as these approaches had been identified in a number of settings during previous visits.

There are a number of similarities between the Chinese and English early years curriculum, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, DCSF), the former being divided into five key areas, as opposed to six areas, although there is a clear focus in the Chinese curriculum on love and respect for parents, elders, teachers and country.

A clear difference within the Chinese guidelines is the compulsory sleep time for all children and the expectation that they will participate in two hours of outside activity each day, although this was only observed in the government settings.

Visits have continued and in June 2012, I led the first HE Student Residential to Beijing. These were then followed by group discussions where Chinese and UK staff were able to ask questions and explain different practices. It is hoped that the residential programme will continue and this has also led onto the validation of an optional International Education module, where students can elect to carry out a placement in an overseas setting, which will be offered from September 2012.
Exploring barriers to Foundation Degree student use of University e-Resources in three colleges in South-west England

CPD AWARD
Amanda Isaac (amanda.isaac@petroc.ac.uk)
Petroc

This CPD Award enabled me to continue with the workshops and dissemination that Karen Foster (Yeovil College Learning Centre Manager) and I had been involved in, following our HELP CETL funded research project, from July 2007.

We had looked at the barriers experienced by foundation degree students in accessing the e-resources provided through the Plymouth University portal. This became a major influence on how we, ourselves, supported students in our colleges and we were invited to several dissemination events to talk both about our project and the effects it had on our student support. The culmination really was the CoFHE Conference workshop in June 2010 which was great fun and seemed to go down well with the delegates. We also ran a workshop at the UWE Partnerships for HE in FE conference, but decided that that would be the last, and to move on to new things. I have continued to attend various Library networking events since the CPD Award, building on my personal and professional interests, and using ideas to develop our HE support provision for students at Petroc.

I also completed my PGCE in June 2011, and am currently preparing my QTLS application. The CPD activities such as the observation visits to Exeter College and Yeovil College were used for a PGCE module (Independent Study, focusing on my subject specialism) as well as for my own development. The Award funding allowed me to attend the international LILAC Conference 2011 for my poster presentation. This is the best forum for information literacy developments and was a really worthwhile three days.

Unfortunately I was not able to visit other UPC colleges as I’d originally planned, however, some of the most helpful of the new professional contacts I’ve made during the Award period have been teaching staff here at Petroc.

Designs for Health

TEACHING FELLOWSHIP
Imelda Hughes (Imelda.Hughes@somerset.ac.uk)
Somerset College

This research was based on seventeen collaborative projects undertaken between 2003 and 2010 by Textiles and Surface Design students at Somerset College and Musgrove Park Hospital Taunton NHS Trust. It was based around the Trust’s “Arts for Life” project which had been established to explore the value and use of art in the recovery of patients.

Engagement in the project has become an established part of the undergraduates’ degree programme. The students worked to a brief, and the resulting works were displayed in pre-defined locations within the hospitals, particularly in corridors and publicly accessible areas.

The purpose of the research was to assess the significance and value of the students’ work to those involved; to patients, visitors and to the staff, but also to the students themselves. Of the patients, staff, and 67 visitors who were interviewed, the overwhelming response was that the artwork made the hospital “more welcoming” and “less institutional”, with many comments relating to them being “fun”, “friendly”, “calming” and “attractive”. Any improvements to recovery times can at this stage only be conjectured!
International placements enhance the personal and academic development of Widening Participation students: Is it Thomas Cook or Lonely Planet; educational tourism, or personal learning?

TEACHING FELLOWSHIP
Lee Hurrell (lee.hurrell@petroc.ac.uk)
Petroc

This dissertation examined the experiences of a small cohort of undergraduate Foundation Degree students on an international work placement. It aimed to record their perceptions of the work placement and evaluate their experiential learning. International placements are costly and in the current financial climate there is a need to consider aspects such as value for money.

The findings indicate that there is considerable need for preparation that goes further than language classes and access to pedagogic statements of the country to be visited. The sending institution and the receiving hosts should carefully choreograph a consistent programme that meets both parties’ expectations and the cultural contexts. It was clear that the participating students gained some degree of cultural appreciation and sensitivity. They believed the programme raised their personal confidence and presented them with opportunities for mobility that had not previously been considered or available to them as Widening Participation students. The full immersion approach could be easily transferred to a variety of situations if personal learning is the aim rather than one of educational tourism.

Deeper reflection on my working life has illustrated that this project is congruent to my life’s work both in England and Africa in that it sought to empower women. The many learners I have worked with have grown in emotional stature as they have recognised the learning that has contributed to their identity and esteem. With a clear recognition of their own identity, learners are able to seek to understand others and to be sensitive to diversity.

The need for cultural sensitivity has assumed importance for me having worked in different cultures and contexts and has been acknowledged by this research project. This sensitivity is now recognised as being vital for employment in the globalised twenty first century.

Exploring the transition from Foundation Degree to Honours Degree from the inside

TEACHING FELLOWSHIP
Darren Moore (darren.moore@petroc.ac.uk)
Petroc

This research explored the experience of transition for students who have progressed from Foundation Degrees studied at an FE college to Honours Degrees taken at a University. A paucity of research in this area has prompted the approach taken.

The methodology chosen employed an ‘insider approach’, with current Foundation Degree students in the second year of their programmes interviewing students who had already made the transition to Plymouth University. Foundation Degree ‘researchers’ provided data on their anticipation of transition which shaped the interview schedule used. They also provided reflections after conducting the interviews; allowing the analysis to be grounded in the interviewer’s interpretations of the data.

The findings shed light on the relatively unique transition that these students undertake, one that was often viewed positively. Analysis demonstrated that the decision to move or commute was a key issue for students. Students had variable experiences settling in, but often the experience was more positive than originally anticipated. Starting the final year at University was typically one part of an extended transition for students. The methodology appeared successful, with the production of rich data and the experience of conducting interviews having the effect of reassuring foundation degree students about their own progression. The research builds upon other studies that have explored transition by re-framing it as a largely positive experience, although noting key differences between college and University HE experiences.

The paper has implications in terms of effective support for students transferring to stage 2 and 3 undergraduate degree programmes and provides insight into the often unfounded concerns that Foundation Degree students typically hold ahead of this transition. Findings have been shared with colleagues at the University and FE College involved. This research was presented at the PedRIO conference Plymouth in April 2012 and will be written up for journal submission.

If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?

Albert Einstein
Evaluation and further development of a college’s approach to sustainable development through critical reflection on practice, particularly in relation to the Higher Education curriculum

TEACHING FELLOWSHIP
Pauline Osborne (pauline.osborne@somerset.ac.uk)
Somerset College

Ten years after the start of the journey towards sustainable development at Somerset College, this research project set out to establish how far progress has been made, particularly with regards to embedding sustainability principles into the Higher Education curriculum.

Using action research to stimulate discussion and action on the topic and critical reflection on practice as well as traditional research techniques, this project triangulates the data against appropriate benchmarks. The International Association of Universities (still current) Kyoto Declaration of 1993 and the Sustainable Development Education Network’s knowledge, skills and attitudes (‘sustainability literacy’) required for Education for Sustainable Development are key indicators in this field. The result is the identification of a significant amount of good practice. Additionally, the research identifies the different interpretations of sustainable development held by academic staff and the implication this has on how they deal with the subject. It also indicates the challenges they face, their views on what would assist them with these challenges and the approaches they are currently taking.

A baseline survey of all 34 HE programmes at the College reveals that the staff on all but one of the programmes are explicitly addressing sustainable development.

The research also summarises the views of previous sustainability champions and former leaders of sustainable development at the College, providing opinions on the way forward and advice for those engaged in leading this agenda, which is useful for those in other institutions. The project culminates in a set of recommendations for how the College can move forward on its continued journey towards sustainability.

Clarification and effective implementation of sustainability with HE Art and Design

TEACHING FELLOWSHIP
Eileen Rosamond (Eileen.Rosamond@somerset.ac.uk) and Philip Hawkins (Philip.Hawkins@somerset.ac.uk)
Somerset College

The CETL funding was a lifeline to us as we were able to step back and reflect upon our teaching practice and context within a community framework. The research enabled us to engage with Art and Design teachers across UPC which provided professional networking opportunities at an informal, yet insightful, level. This project reinforced the value of reflection as a tool for developing confidence and autonomy in developing research identities and re-engaged our own interests in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Specifically, the research project explored the ways in which ESD has relevance for Art and Design education. It reviewed:-

- research literature from both creative and ESD contexts around sustainability
- current facets of innovative ESD practice in some UPC colleges as well as reviewing some staff and student attitudes to ESD in art and design
- potential future actions for curriculum and pedagogic development

The impact on our own module delivery has been has been:

- An innovative first year ESD fine art module, set outside the institution, was trialled with significant benefits registered.
- An extensive working bibliography of art and design texts and a list of practical suggestions have been made for consideration across UPC.
- Studio context of recycling, using sustainable materials and working outside in the environment and with agencies and local communities.
- Eileen has continued to research and develop ideas about ESD within HE Fine Art specifically and has taken this theme forward in working towards completing an MA.
- The research-inspired Philip to begin to build a forum – Circus – that seeks to bring together artists with environmental or ecological organisations in the South West.

A conference and a blog – visualculturesomerset.wordpress.com/about-2/ – is in nascent form.
An investigation into the feasibility of a science journal for a college’s partnership by consideration of student and staff views on research activity and publication. (Mini Teaching Fellowship) and Evaluation of the Sports Science Research Methods Toolkit

CONTINUITY AWARD
Cathy Schofield (cathys@truro-penwith.ac.uk) Truro College
The aims of the MTF research were to establish what HE in FE students’ perceptions were of research-active lecturers and their interest in contributing to a university college’s partnership science journal. Half of the students questioned believed that research-active staff had enhanced credibility. All of the students and staff involved in homogenous focus groups indicated an interest in contributing to such a peer-reviewed journal and were excited by the opportunities of being part of an editorial board. Based on these results, a feasibility study will be conducted into the production of such a publication to develop the student identity as early career researchers.

Since completing the research it has been presented at the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) conference in December 2011 and a poster has been presented at the UPC Summer Conference 2011 and the PedRIO Inaugural Conference in April 2012. A paper has been written and is undergoing revisions before submission to Innovations in Education and Teaching International.

The Continuity Award followed the development of a sport science research methods teaching toolkit and was intended to evaluate its effectiveness. This was conducted jointly with Dr Francesca Burton of the School of Biomedical and Biological Sciences at Plymouth University.

Responses from staff and students led to modifications and additions but general approval for the continued value of the toolkit.

Developing an HE Scholarly Research Group at Petroc

TEACHING FELLOWSHIP
Cathy Slaughter (cathy.slaughter@petroc.ac.uk) Petroc
The aim of this project was to set up and monitor the development of a Higher Education Scholarly Activity Group at Petroc, a College of Further Education in Barnstaple, North Devon.

It was envisaged that sharing of subject knowledge within broad cross-disciplinary themes would enable colleagues to benefit from each other’s expertise, helping inform teaching and learning in various specific and general ways. Another central aim was to foster a stronger ‘knowledge community’ amongst the college’s HE teaching staff, as well as contributing to a perceptible sense of their identity as an HE faculty.

Academic staff were invited to attend half-termly meetings where up to three of their peers delivered papers on agreed themes related to an aspect of their discipline, followed by a plenary discussion. The project aimed to engage as many members of staff as possible, from as wide a range of disciplines as possible, and to create a ‘community of practice’ which by definition would be perceived as useful by its members.

The research reveals that participating staff valued the group highly as a source of emotional support and HE identity. There was enthusiasm for future development of the group, including more traditional forms of scholarly activity, such as academic publication. Independence from college management structures, however, was seen as intrinsic to its continued existence, and the need for careful negotiation of this fine line formed a significant element of the recommendations of the report.

Since the research was completed, Petroc has recognised the need to support scholarly activity as part of its strategic plan to develop Higher Education and created the post of “Scholarly Activity Co-ordinator” to which I have been appointed. The challenge for me will be to maintain the enthusiasm of staff for an informal ‘below the radar’ Scholarly Activity Group as described above, whilst implementing college policy.

I am currently preparing an article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal for wider dissemination.
Developing interactive locative narratives for mobile technologies within arts education

TEACHING FELLOWSHIP
Emma Whittaker (emma.whittaker@plymouth.ac.uk)
South Devon College
Exploration of narrative is pertinent to many disciplines within arts education. Interactive Locative Narratives (ILNs) set stories in geographic locations, using GPS systems, QR tags or paper-based maps. The audience becomes a participant as their choices affect the narrative trajectory. This research considered the creative potentials and practical strategies for the development of ILNs, placed within the critical contexts of media, literary and dramatic theory and practice. It considered the relationships between a coherent narrative diegesis, interactivity, narrative form and the participant experience. Drawing upon the case study of an undergraduate module it sets out guidelines and provides accompanying resources for ILN development with undergraduate art students. It is proposed that ILN Development can provide opportunities for students to create alternative forms of narrative for mobile and analogue technologies that can be placed within the critical contexts of their subject specialism.

A copy of the full report and accompanying resources is available at: http://www.expandednarrative.org

http://tinyurl.com/bnz6a5t

Following on from this research, I received a Plymouth University Teaching Fellowship to develop an on-line resource in Expanded Narrative (practices that extend conventional forms interaction with narrative, such as, reading, listening or watching). The above site makes available resources that include interviews with international developers and researchers in narrative from diverse fields and staff from across disciplines have expressed an interest in developing a community of practice. For further information, or if you would like to become involved, please contact me.

My current project, Locating the Archive, involves the development of virtual storyworlds and investigates the embodied perception of dynamic spatial sound in physical locations. I am now an Associate Lecturer in Media Arts at Plymouth University, a member of the art + sound research group and hold a PhD studentship award. www.culturedebate.org

PhD Scholarships

With the end of the HELP CETL some remaining funds were available that were allocated to the award of two PhD scholarships.

An invitation for research proposals was extended and a wide range of applications were received. The decision was not easy, but through a review of the applications which replicated that used to identify HELP CETL award holders, the two successful applicants were identified.

They have not been engaged in their tasks for very long, but as their reports overleaf demonstrate, they are making good progress towards producing useful contributions to our understanding of the operation of providers of Higher Education.

Psychological Contracts in Education

Julie Osborne
City of Bristol College

Last year I was awarded a PhD bursary from UPC, working with supervisors from the Directorate of Teaching and Learning. The focus of my research is student psychological contracts. Psychological contracts have mostly been used to explore employment relationships. This framework allows an exploration of the implicit understanding that develops between an employee and their employer. What is it that employees expect from their employer in exchange for their input and what do they believe they have to offer in return? When an employee feels that their expectations have not been met then they can withdraw their labour. Psychological contracts therefore have a significant impact on behaviours which can impact on an organisation's overall efficiency. I am adopting this framework to explore the "real deal" between universities and students. This research is taking place at a time when Student Charters are being implemented and higher tuition fees introduced. Over the next few years I will interview academics and students and explore their psychological contracts as they develop and evolve. I hope to explore student expectations and consider how much these expectations are exceeded or if there is disappointment.

Exploring what the "real deal" is between students and universities through the lens of psychological contracts, will allow me to develop a greater understanding of the student experience and explore ways to enhance this for the future. If students feel disappointed following psychological contract breach then how might this impact on their behaviour? A key consideration is how academics and other staff might influence student psychological contracts so that they are realistic and can be maintained.
The Teaching-Research Nexus of “HE in FE” Institutions

Cathy Schofield  
Truro College  
In October I commenced a UPC funded part-time PhD within the Teaching and Learning Directorate with a view to investigating the teaching-research nexus in institutions that traditionally are not research active, namely through the provision of Higher Education in colleges of Further Education.  
During the year I have read extensively around the topic, but have also sought to better understand the identities of different types of HE provider through analysing welcome messages in the 2013 Prospectus of a range of institutions. Having found some interesting results from this exercise, I presented them at the Teaching and Learning Directorate Inaugural Conference this year at Plymouth University and will also be presenting the findings at the Society for Research into Higher Education Conference in December. In addition to these opportunities, the article is currently being reviewed for potential publication.  
I have now returned my focus to the research question, having received ethical clearance to commence data collection this year. Data will be collected from lecturing staff at colleges and universities via questionnaires regarding their perception of teaching and research; through student experiences in the classroom of these elements of delivery, and their awareness and experiences of their lecturers’ research activities.  
It has been a great year, and I feel my knowledge and skills have been expanded hugely, primarily due to the amazing support of all of my supervisors and the extensive range of opportunities offered by the Graduate School. I am now looking forward to the new challenge of convincing lecturing staff that they want to complete my questionnaire!

Opportunities for research and scholarly activities within the Plymouth Partnership

In the introduction to this brochure, the importance of encouraging research & scholarly activity within partner colleges was discussed. Much has been, and continues to be, done by the colleges in this regard. However, there are also many opportunities already available for partner college staff through University institutions and the processes of liaison with colleagues across the University and partnership network.  
A primary resource for any college staff that are interested in developing their research interests is through the research networks and clusters within the University’s faculties and schools. They have different activities and priorities but generally allow for discussion, liaison and seminars within their subject area. You may easily browse through a list (which includes some organised by partner colleges) at: http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/dynamic.asp?page=research. Please contact the appropriate coordinator if you would like to receive further information or would like to join.  
Two new research networks that have a broad appeal across the disciplines are the Centre for Sustainable Futures curriculum (CSF(c)) network and the FE in HE Research Network.  
The (CSF(c)) network seeks to research and develop Education for Sustainability and has appointed “Sustainability Education Developers” (SEDs) within all the faculties and at most of the partner colleges. These will act as a hub for dissemination and coordination of ideas and action between the University and the colleges. Please contact joanna.blake@plymouth.ac.uk for further information.  
The FE in HE Research Network has been launched in order to provide for research concerning HE in FE across cognate areas, whether policy based or pedagogically focused. The group is developing a virtual community to support its activities and to provide a space for discussion. The group convenor is Claire Gray and you can contact Claire (Claire.gray@plymouth.ac.uk) if you would like to know more about the group and can contribute as a member.  

Training and Support for Researchers

Plymouth University Graduate School supports research students and staff through an extensive programme of development activities. The 2012/2013 ‘Researcher Development Programme’ has just been launched and is available at: https://staff.plymouth.ac.uk/postgrad/skillsdev/intranet.htm or http://www1.plymouth.ac.uk/postgradresearch/Pages/Researcher-development-programme.aspx  
Navigating from the Plymouth University homepage:  
Go to ‘Courses and Study’ and click ‘Postgraduate’. From the Postgraduate page click on the link to the Graduate School. Select the ‘Researcher Development Programme’ from the left hand side menu. The sessions are available free of charge for all research students and research staff at Plymouth University which includes staff teaching and supporting PU programmes at partner institutions.  
You can e-mail bookings directly to researchskills@plymouth.ac.uk – please mention when booking that you are a Registered University Teacher (RUT) and work with Academic Partnerships.  

Scholarship Toolkit

The Academic Partnerships Scholarship Toolkit provides a range of information, guidance, links, and activities for partners in developing support for staff in the area of Research and Scholarship. You can access the toolkit directly at: http://www.help-cefi.ac.uk/upc/scholarly/
Opportunities for Research and Scholarly Activities within the Plymouth Partnership

Events and Conferences
The University organises a range of events every academic year. Many of these are provided to support staff in teaching and learning and a full updated summary of these events is provided at: http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=32213
Other events are organised by cognate faculties and the Graduate School and links are provided on the AP website. Most of these events are free of charge, but some do incur a fee, usually when they have a wider national audience.

Forum-based Scholarly Activities
The academic forums, to which all validated college programmes belong can provide valuable interaction and dialogue of a formal and informal nature that can be most useful in developing scholarly expertise and improving personal HE pedagogic standards. This can be especially helpful for new staff and those less experienced in HE teaching.
Visits of individuals or groups of college staff to the University teams to whom their students progress have proved particularly useful for college staff that wish to understand a little more about what confronts their students on progression, or to compare teaching methodologies. It has also provided valuable opportunities for more general informal communication with colleagues at the University and to sit in, or join in, lessons.
Forum gatherings have also proved to be useful venues for staff teaching in related programmes and subject areas to compare experiences and for mutual learning and development. Interaction between staff and the sharing of expertise has also been facilitated by visits of University staff (Academic Liaison People (ALPs) and others) to relevant college programmes or events where they have made presentations to students and staff.
If you have any requests for activities, or ideas that might facilitate the links between staff on partner college programmes and your colleagues at the University, please contact your respective Faculty Partnerships Manager (FPM) (once called “SFC”s!).

Outline strategy for research and scholarly activity within the Plymouth Partnership

(Compiled by Claire Gray, with thanks to: Richard Masters; Claire Eaton; Trudy Russell; John Fitzsimons; Atila Mustafa; Hayley Randle; and Cathy Slaughter.)

Strategic statement:
Plymouth University through Academic Partnerships (AP) aims to strengthen connections between teaching and research. This strategy outlines principles for the recognition of Research and Scholarly Activity (RSA) and outcomes which aim to promote, support and audit the benefit to stakeholder and community engagement and the student HE learning experience.

Plymouth University is on a journey to develop the excellence of its teaching, research, business development and community engagement activity. A key part of this work is undertaken through the partnerships the University has with other institutions in the UK and overseas. The results to date have led to significant enhancements to the University’s reputation as recognised through league table positions and other indices. This strategy is designed to help partner institutions understand the University’s direction of travel and how through a coordinated approach to RSA we can move forward together.

What follows, draws upon current and relevant research and literature. It also recognises that the type, volume and level of RSA that underpins HE delivery in partnership with HEIs has been a strategic interest for some years within UK HE in FE and for UK international partnerships (Baskerville, MacLeod & Saunders, 2011). Academic Partnerships recognises that RSA in partner institutions is influenced by differing sector, locality and market demands and so has been developed in consultation with practitioners from partner institutions.

What should the strategy be used for?
College use and development. Indicative uses for this strategy:
• In helping to define an institutional approach/strategy to research and scholarship.
• To inform college strategy in setting clear objectives for RSA.
• The institutional targeting of external funding and work with external organisations.
• Developing a common language and reference points with awarding bodies/partners.
• To align the development of new awards with college RSA strategy and achievements.
• To guide academic staff in the development of their interests and application to practice.
• The support and targeting of CPD, academic promotions and PDR objectives.

University use (AP and cross institution). Indicative uses for this strategy:
• In support of further planning and strategy that relates to the support and expectations of partner institutions.
• In the negotiation and deployment of shared resources to support RSA within partner institutions.
• In creating a shared understanding of the nature of RSA in partner organisations.
• To assist Academic Partnerships in determining the quality and strength of new proposals.
• In the identification of further opportunity to collaborate in joint ventures and projects that relate to RSA.
• To guide academic staff within Plymouth University in providing support for RSA within partner institutions.
Our strategy is based on the following four principles:

1. Theoretical. The work of Ernst Boyer (Boyer, 1990) which promotes the concept of four functions of scholars which equate to differing yet overlapping aspects:
   - discovery
   - integration
   - application
   - teaching

Each of these four types of scholarship has equal resonance for the promotion of scholarship for Higher Education providers and should confer recognition and reward. In employing the principles outlined by Boyer we also recognise the value of RSA as activity intrinsic and consistent with HE practice.

2. Pedagogic. Acceptance of the beneficial link between Research and Teaching and Learning (Jenkins & Healey, 2005; Jenkins, Healey & Zetter, 2007). In fostering an environment where pedagogic strategy can be entwined with research activity the development of higher level academic skills becomes an intrinsic aspect of student development and an approach to knowledge which is the fundamental attribute for achievement in HE (Lea & Simmons, 2012).

3. Organisational. Our partners are diverse and exhibit different institutional footprints. The organisational structures and cultural behaviours of institutions are shaped by such precedent as well as differing missions, funding, size, and entitlements (Garrod & Macfarlane, 2009; Wheelahan, 2009). It is not reasonable or necessarily desirable to expect a non-HEI partner to mimic a HEI, but it is productive to identify what aspects can be shared and adapted from both sides for the mutual academic benefit of the communities that the college and university serve.

4. Commercial. Research and scholarship is increasingly perceived as a quality benchmark for any academic organisation. In providing support for the development and dissemination of scholarship and research activity partners raise the profile of Plymouth Awards as a brand. Conversely this also acts to alleviate risk on the part of the University whilst raising the profile of partner organisations. As part of an ongoing relationship a commitment to RSA demonstrates that partner organisations are travelling with Plymouth and share a commitment to the values of scholarship, if not necessarily the same application of those values. Given the changing nature of research funding (Watson, 2012) partners are wise to develop approaches to RSA which are cogniscent of the commercial benefits of sharing and developing knowledge across sectors and regions (national and international).

Strategy aims

Aim 1. Work collaboratively as a hub to identify and support shared research interests, internally, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Target: To raise the profile of Academic Partnerships at Plymouth University as a leader of innovation in the support and development of collaborative projects.

Aim 2. To support the development and reward of RSA by our partners.

Target: To work with partners in the strategic development and recognition of RSA as central to developing HE provision and communities.

Aim 3. To identify opportunities for collaboration and work across the breadth of AP and Plymouth University to support developments in RSA.

Target: To establish greater collaboration between the university and partners.

Aim 4. To promote the value of RSA as an indicator of quality in the development of collaborative provision and feed into regulatory and review processes.

Target: To review, recognise and support the promotion of RSA within:
   - The approval and review of Plymouth University programmes at partner institutions.
   - Institutional Review.

Aim 5. Work collaboratively as a hub to identify and support shared research interests, internally, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Target: To raise the profile of Academic Partnerships at Plymouth University as a leader of innovation in the support and development of collaborative projects.

5. In providing support for the development and dissemination of scholarship and research activity partners raise the profile of Plymouth Awards as a brand.
To talk in public, to think in solitude, to read and to hear, to inquire and answer inquiries, is the business of the scholar

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)