teachingmatters
teaching and learning support and development

Rob's reflections

Welcome to a new and exciting decade and the early prospect of party manifestos being brandished, election leaflets popping through our letter boxes and prospective parliamentary candidates on the streets, kissing hands and shaking babies. Frankly, I can't wait. I know that there are a few small issues to be debated e.g. regional wars, global warming, financial meltdown, bonkers bankers' bonuses, not to mention moats and duck houses, but surely the big flashpoint of the campaign must be education? Do you remember the slogan 'Education, education, education' and the past era has certainly been an education! Let's consider how things have changed over the last 20 years or so in HE alone. Yes, there is more money coming in, but the policy that more and a greater diversity of people should 'experience higher education' has resulted in a real fall of funding for each student from £9,000 to £7,000 from the late 80s to today. The staff student ratio has increased in the UK from 8:6 to 16:4. Intensive learning experiences such as science labs and small tutorial groups have been cut. These are things that staff and students really notice at the coal face. It would be quite inappropriate for me to take sides on any forthcoming debate but even if I wanted to, the sad thing is that there aren't different sides. All parties are signed up to the same agenda. All one seems to hear is universities being picked on for offering 'Mickey Mouse degrees', 'dumbing down' standards, not delivering skills employers need, not telling the public what they do, being elitist and denying access to leading institutions. No politician seems to have the guts to stand up and raise a dissenting voice and say, 'no, for the long-term future and sustainability of this country, for its ability to influence the world positively, we must increase, not cut, education budgets. Our universities can raise a new breed of ethical, loyal, globally-aware, and concerned graduates and future leaders. 'Yes, we can'. Let's institute the Robin Hood tax on investments transactions and let's tax bankers' bonuses at 100% over £100,000 and if they don't like it, well let them clear off to Hong Kong or Switzerland, and good riddance. We all know that the future lies not with the busted systems and greed-driven culture but in nurturing the talent and enthusiasm and sense of social responsibility that we see every day in our students'. Oops, that sounded a bit like a political manifesto!

Professor Rob Robson
Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching & Learning)

Pathfinder reflections: Managing expectations, the key to student satisfaction

'As students who go into higher education pay more, they will expect more and are entitled to receive more in terms, not just of the range of courses, but in the quality of experience they receive during their time in the higher education system […] I hope, that without rejoining our student population to take to the barricades, that they become pickier, choosier and more demanding consumers of the higher education experience.'
Lord Mandelson, CBI Higher Education Summit, 20 October 2009

Lord Mandelson's speech at the CBI Higher Education Summit last month encourages students to become 'pickier' and 'choosier' consumers. Mandelson's language depicts the relationship between students and their universities as a purely financial transaction contributing to one end of the spectrum of a much wider debate. During our first year in the Pathfinder team, we've had the opportunity to hear what students think about their learning experience, and where they position themselves within this debate. In Pathfinder surveys and focus groups, students reveal that they do regard themselves as consumers, but much prefer to be considered part of an academic community. They are enthusiastic about their learning experiences, appreciate the high standard of teaching they receive from leading academics, and recognise that they are privileged to study at Reading with the opportunities that this provides. In short, even though they may acknowledge that they are education consumers, to characterise their relationship with the University as a financial transaction significantly devalues their unique and personally
fulfilling experiences.

Nonetheless, the advent of tuition of fees has produced a more assertive group of students, with the financial costs of studying inevitably at the forefront of their minds. Our conversations with students reveal that attitudes such as the following are not uncommon: 'in comparison to other courses we seem to have considerably less teaching time. Each hour that we get lectured on costs over thirty pounds.' Such students seem to conform to Mandelson's student consumer, demanding more product for their pound. However, we believe that the motives behind such comments perhaps derive less from student desire to assert their purchasing power and more from student misunderstanding about what they can, and should, expect from their learning experience. Mandelson argues that students should expect more, but this assumes that student expectations are informed by a clear understanding of what the optimal university experience actually is.

However, new students at Reading do not arrive equipped with a yardstick with which to measure their experiences. Instead they develop their own set of untested assumptions to measure their learning experience. They may generate expectations from their parents' descriptions of university life, a friend's story about a different course at another university, or even media portrayals of students (the glamorous student lifestyle in Channel 4's *Hollyoaks*, for example). They may also compare their university experience with sixth form, where extensive formal class time is the main method of learning and homework is often returned in a week. None of these sources provide a reliable measure of the realities of university life or the variations in learning experiences across

the disciplines. It is only by grounding student expectations in a subject-specific higher education context that we can help students understand what it actually is that they should be 'picky' and 'demanding' about.

Sector-wide, there is increasing recognition that students need to be better informed about what to expect from higher education teaching. However, our experiences of reviewing information available to prospective students across the sector indicate that it is easier to find out how much a pint costs at the students' union than it is to establish weekly contact hours. *The Times Good University Guide 2009* notes that some universities are becoming more transparent, for example, Lancaster University and the London School of Economics now publish extensive information about the learning experience in their course prospectuses. This ensures students arrive with a more accurate idea of what will happen when they arrive, and feel more satisfied with that experience since their expectations will have been managed from the outset. Some of the Schools that have recently undergone the Pathfinder process in preparation for their Periodic Review have reflected on examples of good practice and are now exploring how to be more explicit about students' teaching and learning experiences.

Effectively managing expectations has much to do with ensuring that there are consistent standards throughout a programme, department or school. Responding to the idea that students benefit from being told what to expect from the outset, and receiving an experience consistent with that, several Pathfinder-hosted Away Day discussions have led to plans to improve consistency. This can be achieved by creating a short document, serving as a quasi-teaching and learning charter, which clearly outlines student and staff responsibilities. Discussions about what should be included within the document often help staff to reach a consensus about what is appropriate baseline practice. Good communication is often the underlying solution. For example, sometimes heavy workloads delay the return of feedback, but keeping students informed of changes and their causes can reduce the likelihood of complaints.

Students' comments in surveys and focus groups have persuaded us that one of the most effective ways of raising satisfaction levels is to understand the student perspective, and to openly and explicitly address expectations from the outset. By including students more in discussions about teaching and learning, they are likely to feel more involved, which is surely more valuable than equating the student experience with an economic transaction. In a scenario where students are fully informed about what is appropriate to expect and what it is expected of them, then students who are 'pickier' and 'more demanding' can only be a good thing since they will also be striving to raise standards, leading to a unified endeavour between staff and students that firmly places students within their academic community.

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Heading to follow

Those who aren't familiar with Twitter probably won't be surprised to hear that it's the latest popular something-or-other to hit the 'interweb'. It was bound to be, what with all the press it's been getting. But it turns out even the kids aren't down with this one. On Twitter, you can change what your profile looks like to an extent but there isn't much opportunity to create a strong identity. Instead of gathering 'friends', you 'follow' other users. Virtually all Twitter consists of is a box in which you can put what's called a 'status update'. This update is normally a record of what you're doing, or thinking, though it's equally likely to be a link to a website you've been looking at. The catch is that the box only allows up to 140 characters – essentially then, no longer than a single text message sent from a mobile phone, which is sort of the point as it turns out. If you've got a mobile you can tell Twitter what you're doing from anywhere with a decent signal.

With Twitter of course there isn't a one-way conversation, there are several. What Twitter says to us, implicitly like blog tools in general, is that the things you do or think or say as an individual are important. But on Twitter, it's on one forum and there are no distinctions between 'posts' and 'comments' as you get with blogs. As a result, everyone talks at each other. While it's possible to send messages to one another, either in public or privately, this isn't 'the point' of Twitter. It's designed so that you can

announce what you're doing. There's a big give-away to this effect above the box where you enter your updates – it says: 'What's happening?'

Twitter isn't necessarily intended for dialogue therefore. Dialogue might be a side-effect of using it, in the same way that two people might talk to each other while watching *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*.

In its simplicity, there is at least an honesty to the design of Twitter that one doesn't find with, for example, Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Hi5, or any other social networking site you might care to think of. On Twitter at least, the word 'followers' instead of 'friends' or 'fans' keeps the 'voyeuristic' aspect that seems to have become part-and-parcel of the social networking game up front and intentional. Although, as David Foster Wallace once said of television, true voyeurism depends upon the 'voyeuee' being unaware of their being watched. The main purpose of Twitter, it seems, is to encourage a kind of exhibitionism or performance art. At least, those that use Twitter best seem to manage to make what they're doing or saying or thinking sound entertaining, even when it may be the most mundane thing – they therefore get larger numbers of followers.

I suspect this is why some people have said they didn't understand Twitter before they used it and now they've started they can't stop. It can be entertaining, especially when you can

take part in putting on your own text-based show, replete with hyperbole, self-deprecation and post-ironic witticism. That isn't to say Twitter can't be useful. If you sign up and follow the right people, you give yourself access to a wealth of resources, not to mention potential contacts. I personally use it as a way of sharing bookmarks and occasionally commenting on what I've been doing or will do (but never while I'm doing it).

Other ways of using Twitter in teaching and learning include 'backfeeding'. This has been done at a few of the conferences I've been to lately, where the speaker will load Twitter on a screen behind them and all the tweets relevant to the talk will appear for everyone to see. This seems useful when it comes to the 'questions and answers' section of the talk but there might even be scope, in the future, for such feeds to change the direction of a presentation – depending on how brave presenters feel in the future. But it hardly feels like the solution to concerns about disengaged and disconnected learners. To find out what that is, we're going to have to stop talking at each other first, no matter how much it sounds like we're having a conversation.

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An uncut version of this article appears on
http://yarnandglue.blogspot.com

Customised textbook: *Landmarks in History*

In conjunction with Pearson Publishers, the Department of History has developed a dedicated textbook for use in Part 1 teaching. Pearson Education offers a customised textbook service, which was deemed of great benefit as no single other text was suitable for the core course 'Landmarks in History'. The customised textbook consists of specific chapters selected from other monographs and textbooks, allowing it to address the particular requirements of the course. History's Part 1 convener, Dr Esther Mijers, was responsible for compiling the textbook, also entitled *Landmarks in History*.

The book has been a great success and sold out twice.

At the start of the spring term, all 'Landmarks' students were asked to fill in a questionnaire on how they felt about the book. Feedback was largely positive and, in response to student response, next year's edition may be supplemented with lecture outlines, to strengthen the link between course text and lectures. The Department of History may also follow up this pilot with customised textbooks for other core courses.

Landmarks in History is exclusively available at the Blackwell's bookshop in the Students' Union.

Esther Mijers
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Exploring 'learning power' with foundation degree students

Dr Geoff Taggart

The Institute of Education has begun a collaborative project with two partner FE colleges to trial the use of an online learning tool with new foundation degree (FD) students. The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI), developed at Bristol University (**www.eloise-online.com**), is an online tool for measuring 'learning power', that is, the attitudes, values, motivations and dispositions required to be an effective lifelong learner. Once a student has completed ELLI's 90 item questionnaire they receive a profile showing their strengths and weaknesses in relation to ELLI's seven dimensions of learning power. These have high face validity and are:

- changing and learning – sense of myself as someone who learns and changes over time.
- critical curiosity – orientation to want to 'get beneath the surface'.
- meaning making – making connections/seeing that learning 'matters to me'.
- creativity – risk-taking, playfulness, imagination, intuition.
- interdependence – learning with and from others and also able to manage without them.
- strategic awareness – being aware of

thoughts, feelings and actions as a learner and able to use that awareness to manage learning processes.
- resilience – readiness to persevere in the development of my own learning power.

In 2007–2008, fourteen HEIs were involved in the ELLI in HE project. This saw the ELLI tool being used in a wide range of contexts, particularly in examining the use of the language of learning dispositions. This work suggests significant value can be placed on developing a student's sense of learning, through an understanding of their personal learning journey and their development as a self-regulated learner.

The aim of the trial is to determine the usefulness of ELLI in deepening professional reflection within PDP of students on the FD Children's Development and Learning, and preliminary findings are due in June 2010. Enquirers can contact Dr Geoff Taggart (details below) for further details.

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E-learning and languages: New approaches for existing tools

Once again the annual e-learning symposium organised by the LLAS (Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies) at Southampton managed to impress.

Contributors to its fifth edition presented a wide range of projects: studies on the challenges the production of wikis present; linear thinking processes and traditional essay writing (Carolin Esser, University of Winchester); explorations on the effectiveness of the use of Second Life as a virtual English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class (University of Leicester) or as introduction to university life in Britain for visiting students (University of Southampton).

The symposium also offered the possibility to showcase the blended learning project for distance language students pioneered by the University of Worcester with the support of the Wimba Classroom and Wimba Voice software. Wimba was also at the core of the 'English as a Lingua Franca' project (York St John University), this time with its authoring tool Wimba Create: online tutorials on the use of English as a linguistic medium in mixed nationality groups of students and based on analytical work submitted by the students themselves are created and embedded in the university VLE with the help of the Wimba software.

Particularly worth flagging up are the two key speakers' interventions. Russell Stannard (University of Westminster), shared his secrets on how to create almost overnight (and

sustain!) a powerful and effective network of language teaching professionals and online resources using Twitter. His award-winning website, **www.teachertrainingvideos.com** is a wealth of online tutorials and links for language (particularly EFL) teaching professionals. Highly informative and stimulating was also Professor Wendy Hall's talk (University of Southampton) on the history of the web and its future ramifications, including semantic web.

Web 2.0 and cutting edge educational software are now well established as teaching tools in many HE institutions. What makes the symposium extremely valuable at this stage is the evaluation work that is being carried out of the existing tools and the dissemination of innovative uses of what is on offer in the field.

Watch the symposium at:

http://southampton.mediasite.com/mediasite/Catalog/catalogs/default.aspx

A date for everybody's diary:
Russell Stannard will be talking on feedback here at the University of Reading on 18 September 2010.

Dr Enza SicilianoVerrucio
Department of Italian Studies

Mrs Pilar Gray-McGrath
Insitution-Wide Language Programme

The University and workplace interface programme

As part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme, students are required to both attend lectures at the University but also undertake placements in schools. In this way, they are able to learn about the pedagogy of teaching and learning, and then put that learning into action in the school. On the PGCE Primary programme this involves three placements, one a term. The first placement lasts three weeks and is a shared experience where the student works alongside the teacher, observing, supporting and teaching small groups or parts of lessons. In the spring term the experience lasts seven weeks, and is a guided one where the student plans independently with scaffolding provided by the mentor. Students work from the school's plans but are expected to personalise these and create their own weekly and daily plans. The final school experience occurs in the summer term and lasts eight weeks. This is when the student really has to demonstrate their ability and take on the full role of the classroom teacher.

Since 2002, the programme has also offered students with A level French or above the opportunity to take part in a four week placement in Paris, observing and teaching alongside a French teacher. This has not only been very effective in enhancing the students' French language skills, but also seen as a worthwhile intercultural experience, enabling the students to come back with knowledge they would not have otherwise gained. This can then be shared across the programme, into schools and be taken with the student into their teaching roles.

This year, we are piloting a new placement running in SEN (Special Educational Needs) schools. Nationally this is a unique initiative. SEN schools want this placement to share their expertise and knowledge, to ensure a knowledgeable workforce for SEN and mainstream schools and to become part of the skilled and specialist team here at Bulmershe. Students want this placement to enhance their mainstream teaching ability with a view to becoming SEN specialists either in mainstream or SEN schools. All in all, it's a win-win situation which all participants are really looking forward to. In the next edition of *Teaching Matters* we can let you know how they got on!

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The French group

Illuminating images to enrich teaching and research

Students often struggle to find good quality, copyright-cleared images for inclusion in assignments and projects, but the Library is on-hand to help! We currently subscribe to a number of key databases that contain galleries of digital images, which can be searched or browsed by topic. These databases offer a valuable alternative to free online equivalents, showcasing superior referencing and search capabilities. Both students and staff in all subject areas will find them a useful resource for adding to presentations and other documents to improve visual impact as well as academic content.

Bridgeman Education, our most recent acquisition, is a digital image database containing nearly 300,000 images relating to art and architecture. Users can select individual images for inclusion in a slideshow, which can then either be viewed online or saved for future use. Bridgeman also contains a search index, through which users can browse for images across a number of specialised subject areas. Images within Bridgeman are copyright-cleared for educational purposes, but under the terms of our licence can only be accessed by members of the University.

The Library also subscribes to Education Image Gallery, an image database covering all subject areas, including the sciences. Like Bridgeman, Education Image Gallery has a simple search interface, as well as a more advanced option for limiting your searches more effectively. There is also the option to browse an exhaustive A–Z list of subjects. Images from Education Image Gallery are copyright-cleared and free to download for use in learning, teaching and research. Any downloaded images should be properly credited with the source.

It is not only these image galleries which provide access to useful sources of pictures and other multimedia. Some of the other databases to which the Library subscribes contain both text and images, but allow you to search for images only. Examples include Oxford Art Online and Credo Reference.

For further information on any of these databases, including how you can access them, please see the Library's list of databases: **www.reading.ac.uk/library/databases**. Alternatively, contact your Liaison Librarian, ask at one of the Library's Information Desks or for further information on multimedia issues contact Natalie Picken, Multimedia Manager. Contact details at **www.reading.ac.uk/library/contact/Library-contact.aspx**

The Library has a number of other multimedia options, including film and sound resources, more details of which can be viewed here: **www.reading.ac.uk/library/eresources/image-sound/lib-image-sound.aspx**

The University has published advice on using images in teaching and learning: **www.reading.ac.uk/internal/using-images/img-home.aspx**

There is also guidance available on copyright, which includes a section on using images: **www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Copyright/imps-copyright_1.aspx**

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www.reading.ac.uk/library/contact/staff/d.b.-brown.aspx

University of Reading-developed resource goes global!

A German-language edition of the highly-successful LearnHigher year planner is being created for use by students at the University of Vienna in 2010–11. These innovative folding planners were developed by Study Advice at Reading as part of their research into time management for the LearnHigher CETL. Already popular with University of Reading students since their introduction two years ago, the planners have also been adopted at a number of other Higher Education Institutions in the UK. Having read about this success on the LearnHigher website, the University of Vienna were keen to have the planner and its helpful study tips translated into German. The Study Advisers are currently working with the University and the planner's designers on this exciting international development. We hope this will inspire the production of planners in a range of languages, to help students globally to plan their study time in the future.

Michelle Reid
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Using Twitter – The PowerGen Library at Henley Business School

The PowerGen Library launched its Twitter in March 2009 and currently has 120 followers. We were the first library to launch a Twitter amongst our immediate competitors and have led the field ever since. We get an average of 400 clicks per month from a variety of countries including Mozambique, Canada, South Korea and New Zealand.

We started with a very clear vision and swiftly established a protocol for usage. Our intention was to provide a forum of interaction with our programme members that didn't fall into the often formal and potentially intimidating environment of a library.

We also wanted to provide programme members with another learning resource and, as part of this, regularly post links to items which may of useful to them. These can include anything from interactive graphs, podcasts and online debates.

We don't automatically 'follow' people as many Twitterers do. This allows us keep a level of professionalism and impartiality. We only follow accounts that offer further resources to our students e.g. Harvard Business Review, the Guardian and BBC Business News.

After becoming comfortable and confident with using Twitter, we added a TwitPic account. This is linked to our Twitter and allows us to post pictures which give a 'flavour' of HBS. This has been used to allow distance learners the opportunity to feel connected with our environment and feel part of the Henley community.

We are always very conscious of trying to improve and enhance the experience of our learners. This is at the heart of everything we do and our Twitter has proved a hugely successful step for ourselves and our customers.

You can view our Twitter at:
www.twitter.com/uorhenleylib
and our TwitPic account at:
www.twitpic.com/uorhenleylib

Daisy Johnson
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Career Management Skills now on Blackboard

In order to give greater depth to students' career learning, the Careers Advisory Service has followed the trend in higher education in using virtual learning environments. We have therefore devised a Blackboard site to accompany our Career Management Skills module, which serves as a one-stop shop for all information relating to CMS. As well as the usual logistical information on timetabling and 'Why take CMS?', we also have developed online learning activities. These help students build on what they are learning in the CMS taught sessions and prepare them for their assignments.

The first stage of the project was to devise a generic shell suitable for all subjects. Then careers advisers worked with academics to customise each site to include careers information specific to their subject and develop it to meet the learning needs of their students.

Another feature we are particularly pleased with is the ability to provide all students undertaking CMS with a pre- and post-course questionnaire. The aim of this is to measure how students' attitudes, behaviour and knowledge have moved on as a result of completing the CMS module. Results have shown that the majority of students have made a very positive shift on the factors that we have measured. They are more likely to undertake work experience, have a clearer idea of their options after their degree, know where they can find careers, course and vacancy information, and how to produce an effective application. Students also commented on how well tailored the sites were to their courses.

Future developments will include seeking more sophisticated methods of gaining feedback from students as they work through their online tasks. CAS is also in the process of launching more detailed subject specific information for all degree subjects, which will feature on the Destinations website. More information on this is available from Sandhya Patel, **sandhya.patel@reading.ac.uk**

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Engaging with global challenges

Are you interested in helping University of Reading students to make a difference to the world in which they live?

Much emphasis is currently placed on the employability of our students, indeed the third target in our corporate plan is to 'be in the top 20 Universities for graduate employability by 2013' Yet we all recognise that whether our graduates have a graduate job six months after graduation is a very crude measure of the quality of our students and their educational experience while at University.

The University's vision for teaching and learning is that ' … we aspire to produce graduates who have developed skills and knowledge of life-long value, have the confidence and enthusiasm to fulfil their personal ambitions and seek to make a difference in the world in which they live'. In light of this, perhaps an alternative and more meaningful measure of success would be to quantify whether and how our graduates have made 'a difference'. This would, of course, be impossible to do, but a cross-University working group has been exploring how we could use the flexibility of the University of Reading degree structure to further expose students to the key challenges facing the world 'in which they live' and to how these are explored and tackled through different disciplines. Although it may be difficult to conceive of what the world will be like in 20–30 years time we do know that university students of today will be the decision makers and influencers who will be key to making that difference. The aforementioned working group is therefore exploring the development of a suite of interdisciplinary modules which would (in theory) be available to any Part 1 student. The vision is to develop a number of broadly scoped interdisciplinary modules consisting of some lecturers/seminars provided by colleagues from different disciplines and for students to design and undertake a significant multidisciplinary group project on a related topic of their own choosing.

Students who have been consulted have expressed interest in modules on covering topics such as: Climate change, human rights, power, greed, poverty, social justice, trade, energy, and conflict.

The benefits of such an initiative could be immense. Not only would students have the opportunity to enhance their understanding of critical global issues, but teaching and learning literature tells us that where students can connect their learning directly to real life they become more engaged and motivated. Also the emphasis on enquiry-rich learning (student designed and led projects) as both a learning and assessment tool is well known to enhance effective learning and substantial research skills. There are also benefits for the University. As far as our investigations can tell, a suite of such modules would be entirely unique in the HE sector. They also offer the potential to heighten the visibility of our research-led teaching, especially to new and prospective students.

Now for the hard bit! To transform this vision into reality we need some dynamic colleagues who are willing to take a lead in developing and co-ordinating such modules. The plan is to draw together interested parties to sketch out some potential modules so that we can make a strong bid for funding to support the development and piloting of the modules. If you are curious and interested in finding out more (perhaps what the rewards might be for getting involved) please contact me using the email address below.

We firmly believe that colleagues from any and all disciplines have a valued contribution to make to this initiative, whether your subject is meteorology, biology, history or anything else.

Paddy Woodman
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ASSET Project Assembly

Rod Cullen

The ASSET Project Assembly was held on 14 January 2010 at the University of Reading. Throughout the day, there were a number of presentations from JISC Institutional Innovation Projects (Strand 07/08) alongside a number of talks from colleagues based at other HEIs who are exploring the use of video, audio and other e-resources for enhancing staff and student engagement with feedback.

The day ended with an open discussion looking at the pros and cons of using these technologies for feedback provision and included an exploration of the challenges faced when adopting new technologies at an institutional level. Colleagues agreed that there was a need for institutions to maintain their desire for innovation, which was felt to be particularly important in the current financial climate.

The ASSET team are now looking to the future and are hoping to work closely with existing networks to support innovations in feedback provision. Further details of the Project Assembly, including downloadable copies of the presentations, are now available on the ASSET website: **www.reading.ac.uk/asset/ Dissemination/asset-ProjectAssembly. aspx**

Robyn Drinkwater
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ASSET Moving forward through feedback

University of Reading

For staff and students feedback can sometimes be …

- ☑ time consuming
- ☑ repetitive
- ☑ frustrating
- ☑ inefficient

- ☑ unhelpful
- ☑ confusing
- ☑ too late
- ☑ inconsistent

www.reading.ac.uk/asset

The ASSET project works to explore and develop ways to improve feedback provision by:

- exploring the use of video for timely, quality feedback provision through the development of a Web 2.0 resource, 'ASSET'
- encouraging deeper engagement of staff with feed-forward elements of feedback
- enhancing the feedback experience for staff and students

ASSET works as follows:

1 Staff set assignment
2 Staff record video to support assignment preparation
3 Students view video which they can store in a personal playlist
4 Students submit assignment
5 Staff upload video feedback on assignment
6 Students view feedback video and can share comments with peers and staff

ℹ For more information, please contact:

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www.reading.ac.uk/asset

Policy matters

Policy changes

Periodic Review of Programmes

The Requirements for the Periodic Review of Programmes – Section 3a of the Guide to policies and procedures for teaching and learning (Internal monitoring and review) – have recently been updated to reflect a number of administrative changes to the policy and related annexes. These amendments reflect recent changes in the Pathfinder process, the timing of Periodic Review visits and an increased emphasis on providing Periodic Review documentation electronically. The revised policy can be viewed on the Quality Support Office website at: **www.reading.ac.uk/internal/ qualitysupport/guide**

More detailed guidelines have been produced to assist subject providers in preparing their self-evaluation document (SED). They incorporate short illustrative extracts from recent SEDs, included with the consent of the relevant Schools. Subject providers should contact the Quality Support Office if they wish to receive a copy of the guidelines (Jennie Chetcuti: **j.l.chetcuti@reading.ac.uk**).

Schedule of Periodic Reviews 2009–2013

A schedule of the Schools that will be undergoing Periodic Review during the academic years 2009–10 to 2012–13 will be available on the Quality Support Office website.

Collaborative provision

In relation to the provision of learning resources for students on collaborative programmes, University Board for Teaching and Learning (UBTL) has approved a draft annex to the policy and procedures for the design, approval and quality management of collaborative provision. The annex sets out access to University learning resources for students following collaborative programmes, based on the nature of the collaboration. It also sets out restrictions on provision due to licence agreements with providers of resources and access to learning resources for staff at partner institutions. The revised policy will be published on the Quality Support Office website.

Extenuating circumstances

In addition to the main changes to the procedures for the consideration of extenuating circumstances which were implemented in the autumn term 2009, UBTL has approved a proposal that specific deadlines be introduced, with immediate effect, for the submission of extenuating circumstances forms.

The deadlines are:

- one week following the end of the examination period for the relevant Part in May/June;
- the Monday following the end of the re-examination period in August/ September.

Specific dates will be given in the guidance notes on the form. Students will be encouraged to submit the form early, even if supporting evidence is not available at the time of submission. Forms submitted after the relevant deadline will be considered only in exceptional circumstances, which are defined as insurmountable circumstances which prevent the student from submitting the form, such as: incarceration in prison without means of communication; incapacitated in hospital without the possibility of communication; and kidnapped or held captive without consent. The new procedures will be communicated to staff and students shortly and further consideration will be given to the specification of deadlines for taught postgraduate students.

Student Maternity Policy

UBTL has approved a Student Maternity Policy, effective from October 2010, which requires: a student to inform her School of her pregnancy; a School to undertake a risk assessment following such notification and to implement appropriate measures for managing any risks associated with the pregnancy; and following the risk assessment, the School to consider whether the learning outcomes of the programme could be met by the student during her pregnancy. Where it is not possible to make reasonable and practicable adjustments to permit the student to achieve the learning outcomes, the student may be required to suspend her period of study. It is expected that the number of programmes for which adjustments will not be feasible will be small. Consideration to a paternity policy will be given in the longer term.

Work in progress

Higher Ambitions

A steering group, charged by UBTL to consider strategic issues relating to teaching and learning, will consider Higher Ambitions (the blueprint for Higher Education, published November 2009 by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) and other policy initiatives.

Higher Education Achievement Record

The steering group will also consider the development of the University's Diploma Supplement in the context of the proposals relating to the Higher Education Achievement Record (a 'Diploma Supplement plus', recording the skills, progress and attainment of students, along with any workplace learning undertaken and higher-level skills developed).

Working group on suspended students

Progress in relation to the development of procedures for students returning from suspension and in relation to access to learning materials during the period of suspension is continuing.

Working group on the development of Part 1 University-wide modules focused around major global issues

The group was convened to consider the development of novel interdisciplinary modules focused around major issues of potential student interest such as sustainability, globalisation and citizenship. UBTL has agreed that, given its significant benefits, the initiative should be given high priority. The working party is currently engaged in consultation with Schools on possible topics and other issues.

Working group on use of the summer term

Further consultation is taking place in the review of the structure of, and learning and teaching provision during, the summer term. This also involves a review of the current term structure of 10 weeks–10 weeks–10 weeks and the possibility of adopting an 11–11–8 structure.

Following on from the letter sent by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) to undergraduate students reminding them of their academic obligations, which included remaining at University throughout the summer term, a statement indicating the range of activities available in the post-examination period will be circulated. UBTL has agreed that in cases where students have secured a placement on an internship scheme which starts before the end of the summer term, they may be given special permission to be absent from the University, subject to various conditions.

Thematic Review of work-related and placement learning

The 2009–10 Thematic Review is considering work-related and placement learning at Reading, analysing its role in the curriculum and reviewing the University's provision in relation to external examples of good practice. The final report will be submitted to UBTL by the end of this academic year.

Systems Engineering Student Engagement System

The School of Systems Engineering (SSE) has developed an 'Engagement System' for monitoring the performance of first-year students. It correctly identifies problematic students early on, and since its inception has improved retention rates. This summary briefly explains how it works and how it can be further improved.

Background

To try to improve retention rates, we decided to try to identify early in Part 1 those students who were not working adequately, and a pilot system was tried in autumn 2005. This was refined in 2006 and designed to fit in with the University's policy on student withdrawal before December.

The idea is to assess the extent to which each student 'engages' in each of their modules. Experience from the pilot was that this is best defined separately for each module. Engaging in a laboratory-based module is assessed by work done there; for a maths module it is associated with attendance and work in tutorials; for a module where there is a group project, participation in the group activity is used. This information is put into an Excel file, with a master sheet and a spreadsheet for each module and a macro is used to collate all the information into the master sheet, containing all students in the School, which copes with the fact that different students do different modules.

Overall, the master spreadsheet records for each student the number of modules in which they are engaging and the average mark – though it should be noted that not all modules provide a mark, so the overall mark may not be that useful. As a result of this, students are classified as 'good' (engaging in all modules), 'OK' (engaging in say four or five out of six), 'should do more' (engaging in two or three modules) or 'at risk'.

The data is collected mid-autumn term and sent to all tutors who invite their tutees to a second tutor meeting before the end of November where suitable advice is given. For instance, those 'at risk' are reminded that if they were to withdraw before the end of the month, they would not be charged fees.

In 2008, money from the Teaching and Learning Development Fund was used to employ two graduates. One analysed the scheme, comparing the performance of students in the autumn and at their examinations the following summer; the other successfully improved the macros associated with the spreadsheets to make it less cumbersome to operate.

The analysis showed that although most 'at risk' students improved by the summer, all failed. It was also found that a number of students engaging in all bar one module also often failed: that module remained problematic, and most SSE students have to pass each module to progress.

Discussion

Since adopting this scheme, the pass rate for Part 1 has improved, though this may not be fully due to the scheme. Another bonus is that, as most methods of assessing engagement are based on work done, students receive feedback on their progress in all subjects within the six weeks of the first term. This was commented upon positively when the system was presented to the University Committee on Student Retention.

However, as all 'at risk' students failed, some better action is needed to address them and the others. We therefore plan to talk to the different groups at times like Refreshers' week. The aim of such talks will primarily be designed to help students to learn to learn, plus, for those engaging well, the talk will congratulate and encourage them, for others there will be discussions on how better to engage.

In addition, those not engaged will be encouraged to see the Careers Advisory Service (CAS), who had said they usually meet failed students only after they withdraw. This may revitalise their interest in the degree when they see the jobs they might get, or at least find out what they might do if they withdraw. Also, lack of engagement due to extenuating circumstances may become apparent during the tutor meeting and a visit to a counsellor may be suggested. Otherwise, study advisers may be recommended.

The system was presented at a UK workshop on retention of engineering students. It was felt that assessing engagement was better than just attendance. However, by the time it is run, students may have missed significant academic engagements, so lack of attendance should be picked up and acted upon earlier. In addition, it was suggested that the system may be best for identifying students who are trying to do a module but are having difficulty with it and hence need more specific help.

On RISIS

The Reading Integrated Student Information System (RISIS) office has developed attendance sheets, initially for maths, which can be combined thereby reporting for each tutor the attendance pattern for all their tutees. One such sheet provides us with 'engagement' data. Given the similarities, we feel our system could be moved to RISIS, if a better way of uploading data to RISIS is found. This could enable a combined attendance and engagement system to be used (as per the workshop mentioned above) and allow the system to be used more widely across the University.

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**Centre for the Development
of Teaching and Learning**

University of Reading

Learning & teaching seminars Spring 2010

Learning & teaching seminars are free to attend but please book via CSTD **cstd@reading.ac.uk**. Refreshments will be provided.

Learn to work, work to learn
Enhancing the learning experiences of all students
Professor Stephen Gomez, University of Plymouth
Friday 15 January 2010

Assessment is not up to the mark
Engaging students with assessment and feedback
Dr Chris Rust, ASKe at Oxford Brookes
Friday 26 February 2010

**3.00pm – 5.00pm
Madejski Theatre,
Agriculture Building**
Whiteknights Campus,
University of Reading

0118 378 6250
a.zapasnik@reading.ac.uk

Seminars are video recorded and videos will be available on the CDoTL website:

www.reading.ac.uk/cdotl

Moving forward through feedback: Enhancing feedback provision in the digital age

The aim of this HEA-sponsored event on Wednesday 14 April 2010 is to explore a range of tools and methods for giving rapid and timely feedback in ways which stimulate and support students' learning in the 'digital age'. The seminar will showcase different methods for providing feedback using a range of technologies, including audio and visual media and will explore the pros and cons of using these methods.

The event will be highly participative and will include the following themes:

• How 'good' is my feedback now?
• What technologies currently exist to support feedback provision?
• Can technology enhance the quality and/or efficiency of my feedback?
• Can technology improve students' engagement with feedback?

By attending this event it is hoped that participants will i) have a greater understanding of when and how technology, such as the use of video, may be used to enhance the timeliness and effectiveness of feed-forward and feedback provision and ii) a greater awareness of how technology may be used to support strategic priorities, such as enhancing innovation in teaching and learning.

If you wish to attend please register your interest by Friday 19 March 2010 by visiting **www.reading.ac.uk/cdotl** and going to the Teaching and Learning events section.

Please note: Unfortunately places are limited and as such will be allocated to ensure delegates come from a range of disciplines. Therefore submission of the form will not necessarily guarantee you a place but you will be notified as to the result of your application.

Alysia Zapasnik
a.zapasnik@reading.ac.uk

Transition Mentoring: Supporting new students

23 March 2010 | 3.30 pm – 5.00 pm | Carrington Building | Room 101

Adjusting to a new environment is always challenging, and adjusting to university life presents new students with significant academic, social and practical challenges. This workshop is for staff who wish to learn more about how to support new students, and will explore the purpose, scope and practical aspects of setting up a departmental Peer-to-Peer Transition Mentoring programme. There will be plenty of opportunities for reflecting on your own departmental experience, and for group discussion. The workshop will be led by Kate Ward-Perkins, Peer Support Co-ordinator, from the University Counselling Service, and Liz Tracey, Part 1 Project Officer and Outreach Co-ordinator, from the Department of Chemistry, who have worked together on a pilot programme that has been running in the Chemistry Department for the last two years.

Book via **cstd@reading.ac.uk**

Call for articles

If you would like to submit an article for the next edition of *Teaching Matters,* please contact Dr Elena Bedisti at CDoTL.
e.bedisti@reading.ac.uk
Tel (internal) 8409