

TLRP Meeting of Minds Fellowship Report
Dr. Jaswinder Dhillon, University of Wolverhampton

My award under the second round of the TLRP Meeting of Minds fellowships scheme ran from September 2007- June 2008. During this period I met with Professor John Field, University of Stirling, to develop my ideas for research and to discuss potential publications linked to my PhD on partnership working, especially the role of social capital in partnerships. John Field's experience in conducting ESRC funded projects and his research interest in social capital provided an excellent basis for mentoring my development as a researcher and potential principal investigator in future ESRC projects. Our discussions during the mentoring period helped to deepen my understanding of the theoretical concept of social capital and to extend my knowledge of its practical application to different contexts by researchers and policy makers.

I applied for the mentoring scheme because of my lack of experience in applying for funded research projects, particularly those funded by the ESRC. Having recently completed my PhD in which I had drawn on the concept of social capital to theorise and explain my findings on partnership working in the field of post-16 learning in England, I had developed a keen interest in the role of social capital and had an idea which I believed was worthy of investigation. In my application for the MOM fellowship the anticipated outcomes were stated as follows:

- Proposal for research project on social capital developed and submitted to ESRC through small grants scheme;
- Jaswinder Dhillon's skills and experience in bidding for ESRC funding improved through mentoring support from Professor John Field;
- Networks with researchers in other universities working on social capital strengthened, including international links;
- Potential ideas for a publication on social capital and partnership working explored.

Progress against outcomes

During the period of the fellowship I developed my initial ideas for a study of the contribution of social capital to the economic and educational success of migrants from Sikh families in Britain over the last 50 years. My discussions with John Field during my visits to Stirling University helped me to focus my thoughts to develop a plan for a research project and to interrogate my theoretical understanding of dimensions of social capital. My ethnic background as a Sikh who came to Britain as a young child and my professional and research experience had prompted my initial idea of focussing on Sikhs as they are a very small but highly visible minority community that has achieved considerable economic and educational success in Britain and elsewhere. John Field's mentoring helped me to reflect on my analysis of the situation and to consider other perspectives and explanations, including the work of Professor Yaojun Li.

I contacted Professor Li and attended a conference on ethnic differences at the University of Manchester and through further discussions over a number of months we have developed a proposal for a two year study to be submitted to the ESRC through the Standard Grants Scheme entitled 'Unpicking the success stories - ethnicity, religion and social capital in the Indian and Chinese communities in Britain'.

This proposal is a development and extension of my original idea and combines Professor Li's expertise as quantitative researcher, principal investigator and sociologist with my skills and experience in qualitative educational research. The bid also draws on our combined cultural capital as we are members of the ethnic groups that we plan to research and so can contribute unique insights to the study based on our knowledge and experience of Chinese and Sikh communities in Britain and in their countries of origin. In the process of developing my ideas and the various draft versions of the research proposal I have learnt a great deal about bidding for ESRC projects both from my mentor Professor John Field and from Professor Yaojun Li and look forward to learning more if our bid is funded.

In summary, I can report that the anticipated outcomes of the fellowship have all been achieved. The funding from the MOM Scheme enabled me to travel to Stirling for discussions with John Field and funded my attendance at the conference on ethnic differences which led to contact with Professor Yaojun Li. Both John Field and Yaojun Li have given very valuable time to support my development as a researcher and I am most indebted to both of them. As a capacity building scheme it has achieved its aim in my case. In addition to developing a proposal for ESRC funding, I have been able to increase my ability to publish in leading education journals and have had a paper accepted for publication as detailed below:

Dhillon, J.K. (2009 forthcoming) The role of social capital in sustaining partnership, (accepted for publication in *British Educational Research Journal*).