



National Foundation for Educational Research

Mid-Term Review of the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme

Final Report

**Mark Rickinson
Matthew Walker
Peter Rudd**

March 2005

Contents

| | page |
|---|-----------|
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 Background | 1 |
| 1.2 Review Aims and Foci | 2 |
| 1.3 Review Methods | 3 |
| 1.4 Structure of the report | 6 |
| 2. QUALITY OF RESEARCH | 7 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 7 |
| 2.2 Academic rigour | 7 |
| 2.3 Relevance and utility | 11 |
| 2.4 Summary | 13 |
| 3. USER ENGAGEMENT | 14 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 14 |
| 3.2 Practitioner involvement | 14 |
| 3.3 Liaison with national user and policy organisations | 17 |
| 3.4 Summary | 20 |
| 4. RESEARCH SYNERGIES AND ADDED VALUE | 22 |
| 4.1 Introduction | 22 |
| 4.2 Programme-project relationships and expectations | 22 |
| 4.3 Cross-programme themes | 24 |
| 4.4 Coherence and synergy | 26 |
| 4.5 Summary | 27 |
| 5. CAPACITY BUILDING | 29 |
| 5.1 Introduction | 29 |
| 5.2 Research Capacity Building Network (RCBN) | 30 |
| 5.3 Other capacity building activities | 32 |
| 5.4 Future strategy for capacity building | 35 |
| 5.5 Summary | 36 |
| 6. IMPACT ON POLICY AND PRACTICE | 38 |
| 6.1 Introduction | 38 |
| 6.2 Strategies and approaches to impact | 38 |
| 6.3 Impacts on Practice | 40 |
| 6.4 Impacts on Policy | 41 |
| 6.5 Summary | 43 |
| 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 45 |
| 7.1 Introduction | 45 |
| 7.2 Key findings | 45 |
| 7.3 Respondents' suggestions for future priorities | 47 |
| 7.4 Recommendations | 50 |
| REFERENCES | 53 |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) has been described as 'the largest coordinated research initiative in education that the UK has ever known' (Pollard, 2004, p. 11). It is a nine-year initiative, managed by the ESRC with £26 million of funding from a range of organisations including the Higher Education and Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The Programme's overall objective is 'to lead to significant improvements in all sectors and contexts of education and training, including informal learning settings, throughout the UK' (TLRP website).

ESRC research programmes have tended to include 20 to 25 projects and run for a period of four or five years: TLRP is a new development in the sense that it is much larger and is continuing for a longer period of time than previous programmes. TLRP comes under the theme of *Knowledge, Communication and Learning*, one of seven broad themes promoted by the ESRC.

The TLRP's first projects began work in 2000, and some continue until 2007-8, with impact work during 2008-9. Thus far the Programme has involved three phases covering a range of different educational sectors and geographical locations. The Programme has also supported a Research Capacity Building Network (RCBN) at the School of Social Sciences at the University of Cardiff. Recent Programme developments have included a new phase of capacity building activities, and the commissioning of a number of Welsh and Northern Irish extension projects and several Thematic Seminar Series relating to cross-Programme themes.

With the Programme approaching the mid-point in its lifecycle, the ESRC commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake a mid-term review of the Programme. This work was carried out by

a team of three NFER researchers (Dr Peter Rudd, Dr Mark Rickinson and Mr Matthew Walker), supported by two consultants (Professor Sally Tomlinson and Professor Lesley Saunders). This document outlines the review’s findings and recommendations.

1.2 Review Aims and Foci

The review was intended to provide ‘formative input to the future development of the TLRP based on an independent assessment of the progress of the TLRP towards the achievement of its key objectives’. More specifically, the review had two main aims:

- To assess the progress made by the Programme to date in five key areas: (i) quality of research; (ii) extent of user engagement; (iii) development of research synergies and added value; (iv) contribution to capacity building; and (v) impact on practice and policy.
- To suggest, in the light of the review’s findings, recommendations for the future development and management of the Programme.

A brief outline of the five review foci is given in Box 1 below, and further details are provided about each of these in subsequent chapters of the report.

Box 1: The Five Review Foci

Quality of research – This concerned the extent to which the Programme had commissioned research that is seen as rigorous, relevant and useful.

Extent of user engagement – This focused on the nature and quality of user engagement within the TLRP in terms of ‘practitioner involvement’ and ‘liaison with national policy and user organisations’.

Development of research synergies and added value - This focused on the effectiveness of the various cross-Programme thematic initiatives, and the extent to which the Programme as a whole adds value to the products of the individual projects.

Contribution to capacity building - This concerned the effectiveness of the RCBN and the Programme’s other capacity building activities in helping to improve UK capacity for high-quality research into teaching and learning.

Impact on practice and policy – This focused on the extent to which the Programme and its projects have created the conditions for impacting positively on teaching and learning practice and policy.

1.3 Review Methods

The review used documentary analysis, semi-structured interviewing, and email proformas to collect data from a number of sources within and beyond the Programme. An overview of these various data sources is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 - A Summary of Data Sources

| Data Sources | Details |
|--|--|
| Documentary Analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme publications and conference papers • 5 Phase I end-of-award reports (and anonymous reviewers' reports) • 16 Phase II, Scottish extension and Phase III 2003 progress reports |
| Programme Level Interviewees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 members of the current Directors' Team • 1 member of the former Directors' Team • 2 representatives of the RCBN • 6 current or past members of the Steering Committee |
| Project Level Interviewees (and email proforma respondents) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Project Director, 1 senior researcher/research officer and 1 user representative for each of six case-study projects (18 interviewees in total) • Plus: Email proformas from 10 Project Directors and 5 RTFs/CDAs |
| Beyond Programme Interviewees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 representatives of funding organisations • 3 university or government researchers • 4 representatives of policy organisations • 4 practitioner representatives |

Documentary analysis – The review team analysed all of the major Programme publications and conference papers and all of the available 2003 project progress/end-of-award reports (and the anonymous reviewers' reports for the Phase I Research Networks). Project progress/end-of-award reports were available for five Phase I projects/networks, 15 Phase II and Scottish extension projects and one Phase III project. The analysis of project reports was carried out using a pre-designed review framework structured around the five review foci. Each report was reviewed by at least two members of the review team (one from NFER and one external consultant), after which findings were shared and emerging messages discussed.

The purposes of this documentary analysis, which was undertaken in the early phases of the review, were to:

- gain a deeper understanding of the nature and development of the Programme and its various elements, in order to inform subsequent data collection and analysis
- build up an overview of the projects across the various phases and sectors
- look for documentary evidence of progress and/or impacts relating to the five review foci.

Interviews and Email proformas – Semi-structured interviews (both face to face and by telephone) were carried out with individuals involved in the TLRP at the level of the Programme and individual projects, as well as representatives from beyond the Programme. At the level of the Programme, interviews were undertaken with five members of the current and former Directors’ teams, two representatives of RCBN and six current or past members of the TLRP Steering Committee. These individuals were selected through discussions with colleagues at ESRC and the TLRP Director and Steering Committee.

At the level of individual projects, similar kinds of interviews were undertaken with three representatives (the Project Director, one researcher and one user) of a sample of six projects. The six case-study projects represented a disproportionate random sample of the 30 Phase I, II, III and Scottish Extension projects on the TLRP project database at that time. The sampling was carried out in such a way as to ensure an appropriate mix of: programme phases (two from each of Phases I, II and III); educational sectors (school, higher education, workplace); and geographical locations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and/or Wales). In addition to the interviews with representatives of these six projects, a request for written comments was sent by email to all the other Phase I, II and III Project Directors, and to all the Research Training Fellows (RTFs) and Career Development Associates (CDAs). Completed proformas were received from 10 Project Directors, four RTFs and one CDA.

These Programme and project-level interviews and email proformas were designed to:

- gain a deeper understanding of the nature and development of the Programme and its various elements
- explore the views of Programme staff, Steering Committee members and project researchers on progress and impacts relating to the five review foci and the future development of the Programme

- look in more detail at the progress and impacts of particular projects across the various phases and sectors.

In order to explore the views of individuals and organisations beyond the Programme, a series of telephone interviews were undertaken with up to four representatives of each of the following groups: research funders (both TLRP funders and other organisations), researchers (in universities and government departments), policy-makers (civil servants in education/employment departments) and practitioners (representatives of school, post-compulsory and national bodies/unions). These were all individuals who had some familiarity with the Programme, but who were not directly involved with its work. They were selected from databases of users provided by the TLRP Directors' Team and care was taken to ensure coverage of a range of educational sectors and geographical locations. These interviews provided an opportunity to:

- explore the views of a range of potential users and beneficiaries on the Programme's progress and impacts in the five key areas
- collect comments and suggestions relating to the future development of the Programme.

The three NFER researchers also attended the **TLRP Annual Conference**, held in Cardiff on 22 to 24 November, 2004. This provided useful opportunities to attend presentations and roundtables on the various projects and networks, to talk informally to programme participants, and to obtain updates on developments within the Programme.

Data Analysis – The data emerging from all of the interviews were transcribed and/or written up in full. The transcripts and completed email proformas were then analysed qualitatively along with the completed document review frameworks in relation to the five review foci. Throughout this process, the research team was mindful of the fact that the degree of relevance to individual review foci varied for different sets of data and groups of respondents. The telephone interviews with policy-makers and practitioners, for example, were expected to be important in assessing 'extent of user engagement' and 'impact on policy and practice', while the interviews and email contact with researchers within and beyond the Programme were seen as more likely to provide insights into 'contribution to capacity building' and 'development of research synergies and added value'. Care was also taken to draw distinctions between the views of Programme/project staff and

those external to the Programme, and between actual impacts and potential impacts.

1.4 Structure of the report

Chapters 2 to 6 of this report set out the review's findings relating to each of the five review foci: quality of research; extent of user engagement; development of research synergies and added value; contribution to capacity building; and impact on practice and policy. Chapter 7, the final chapter, draws together the key messages of the review and presents a series of recommendations for consideration regarding the future development of the Programme.

2. Quality of research

2.1 Introduction

It is clear from a number of recent publications that concerns over the quality of UK educational research in the 1990s played a significant role in the establishment of TLRP (see, for example, CERI/OECD, 2002; DfES, 2002; Desforges and Kanefsky, 2002; Pollard, 2004). The current Programme Director has described the emergence of TLRP in relation to various political factors, not least ‘a feeling in high places that “something should be done”’ about the quality and relevance of educational research (Pollard, 2004, p. 12). This depiction was supported by the review team’s interviews with senior civil servants who were involved with educational research and policy at the time of these developments. They made clear that a perceived lack of relevance, lack of impact on policy and practice, and insufficient focus on teaching and learning, were key precursors to the development of a dedicated programme of research on teaching and learning.

In view of this historical backdrop, the mid-term review has examined quality of research not only in terms of academic rigour, but also in terms of relevance and usefulness. As explained earlier, the review’s findings are based on three main sources: documentary analysis of the 2003 project progress/end-of-award reports and (where relevant) anonymous reviewers’ reports; interviews with two researchers and one user for each of six case-study projects; email proformas from 10 other project directors and five RTFs/CDAs; and interviews with researchers and users beyond the Programme.

2.2 Academic rigour

While not all individuals consulted felt able to comment on the academic quality of the Programme’s work, this review found no evidence of individuals or organisations wanting to challenge or call into question the rigour of the research being undertaken within the TLRP. A view expressed by many was that ‘*the quality of the research is by and large good*’ and, in some cases, ‘*beyond much of what has been seen before in educational research*’. This

description corresponded with our analysis of the 2003 project progress reports, which also raised no significant concerns about the robustness of the Programme's work. Some interviewees commented that this was as you would expect for major ESRC-funded research in education: *'The quality debate was never actually about ESRC work particularly ... I don't think the ESRC has compromised one iota on the quality of what's being funded'*.

In discussions about academic rigour, interviewees from within and beyond the Programme pointed to a number of characteristics as evidence of quality. These included:

- the rigour of the commissioning process
- the quality of the researchers involved in the TLRP
- the combination of different methodological approaches and expertise
- the large-scale and multi-institutional/multi-disciplinary nature of the projects
- the ESRC evaluations of the Phase I networks.

The rigour of the commissioning process – Two members of the Steering Committee commented on the *'extraordinarily rigorous commissioning'* of Phase III and the Welsh and Northern Ireland Extensions, and expressed confidence that the system *'is spotting and funding the highest quality proposals'*. From the perspective of two of the Programme's funding organisations, it was the competitive nature of the commissioning process that had helped to enhance quality: *'The Programme has used different methods to ensure quality: networks, themes, seminars – these meet the main challenge of finding a way of getting the best people together and then dangling the carrot of funding in front of them'*. One Phase III Project Director, however, described how the commissioning procedures, especially the large number of reviewers, had presented significant challenges for project teams in the early stages of the process.

The quality of the researchers involved in the TLRP – The fact that the Programme has been successful in attracting the active involvement of *'very well known educational researchers who themselves have excellent track records'* was a positive indicator of quality in the minds of two Steering Committee members and one representative of the Directors' Team. As one of them said, *'I think another kind of informal proxy for quality has been the*

really rapid acceptance by the research community that this is one of the key areas where the action is'. The reputation and previous work of specific TLRP Project Directors was also significant in building users' trust in project outputs. In the words of one headteacher referring to one of the Phase I Networks, *'The quality of [this team's] research is something I feel I can rely on and I find it interesting'*. A similar point was made by a policy-maker in Scotland about the *'impressive quality of the early work'* of one of the Phase III research teams.

The combination of different methodological approaches and expertise –

There was praise for the way in which individual projects and the programme as a whole were demonstrating powerful integrations of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For example, one former Steering Committee member felt strongly that: *'There are projects that seem to me to be methodologically much stronger than average previous educational research [...] particularly I would say the integration of qualitative and quantitative, which is not easy, and it's very well done in some of the projects'*. This corresponded with comments from interviewees in the case-study projects, who described how *'the mixture of qualitative and quantitative expertise has worked really well'* and *'there is a genuine opportunity for the different research traditions and disciplines to converge'*.

The large-scale and multi-institutional/multi-disciplinary nature of the projects –

What was significant about TLRP projects for many respondents was their size and scale, which brought positive implications for research quality. From the perspective of one of the Phase II Project Directors, for example, the most important factor in the strength of their work was having a *'truly cross-disciplinary team in the sense that there are people with a range of interests and experiences, and bringing those to bear on educational problems is challenging but has resulted in some really good work'*. From the perspective of practitioners engaging with project outputs, an important advantage of large-scale projects was the reassurance that *'it is based on extensive evidence and seems to have sufficient depth and scope to be reliable'*.

Another benefit of scale was seen in terms of the way in which TLRP was helping to foster *'multi-institution, multi-partner engagements [that] have the potential for creating some real longitudinal relationships, which has not been*

a very good feature of educational research in the UK'. An example of this came from a policy user on the advisory group of a Phase III project. Her interest in this project stemmed from its '*relatively unique combination of the technical, the clinical and the pedagogical*' within one research team.

The ESRC evaluations of the Phase I networks – The fact that the Phase I networks had been judged positively by anonymous ESRC reviewers as either 'good' or 'outstanding' was seen as further evidence of the Programme's high academic standards. This was commented on by both Steering Committee members and Phase I project directors.

Relative to these various endorsements for the rigour of the TLRP's research, there were very few comments of a critical nature. Moreover, when issues were raised they tended to be in the form of critical reflections by Programme participants, rather than criticisms from users or researchers external to the TLRP. One area of concern, though, was based on the question of whether there was enough multi-disciplinarity within the Programme's work. The End of Award Report by the first Programme Director pointed out that 'multi-sector work is more evident than multi-disciplinary activity' (Desforges, 2002, p. 9). The same observation was noted by the current Director who acknowledged that '*we would have been happier with a bit more multi-disciplinarity being drawn in*'. This was echoed by a researcher external to the Programme who felt that there was insufficient evidence of collaboration with disciplines such as management studies, business studies and architecture and buildings.

The second area of concern was that of research design and the extent to which TLRP had generated new approaches to large-scale educational research. The suggestion from one member of the Steering Committee was that '*the projects that are being funded are not qualitatively different from conventional projects funded between £100,000 and £200,000. They may have a few more strands but they are still recognisable as the sorts of things I've seen before*'. In a similar way, the current Director made the point that while there were some very effective research designs (particularly in terms of interventions), '*there is probably further to go in research design; I don't think we've really fully exploited the potential of having such large projects*'.

2.3 Relevance and utility

Questions of relevance and utility are central to a research programme that seeks not only to build new knowledge, but also to facilitate its use in policy and practice. The current Director has stated clearly that ‘to be convincing, to claim authority, we have to demonstrate both the relevance and quality of our work’ (Pollard, 2004, p. 17). So what progress has the Programme made in developing projects that are seen as relevant and useful by user groups?

The general picture that emerged from the documentary analysis and the interviews with policy-makers and practitioners was an encouraging one. The following comments from representatives of national policy and practitioner organisations are illustrative of this:

There are some people within [my organisation] who feel that some academics continue to set their own research agenda. I think Andrew Pollard and the rest of the team have turned this around to produce something that is policy-relevant.

My feeling is that TLRP has touched on a lot of what is relevant to teachers and of practical use in the classroom.

With respect to the early development of the Programme, several interviewees underlined the positive contribution of the consultation exercises undertaken by the first Programme Director and Deputy Director. A research manager in a policy organisation who had first-hand experience of this work, welcomed this ‘going out to users’ as a ‘radical departure from what had gone before’. Others were similarly enthusiastic, seeing the process as helpful in terms of identifying research priorities from the perspective of different groups within education.

There was also positive feedback expressed in relation to the work of particular projects. One of the Phase I networks, for example, was described by a representative of a national curriculum development organisation as ‘building on (i) strong connections with the community of practice; and (ii) a consensus about what questions were important to research’. Likewise, a Phase III project was welcomed by a policy-maker responsible for training within a particular work-based sector: ‘What they are doing now is applicable across many different settings [...] This project is addressing a fundamentally important question and a cost-effective method of training’.

The process of inviting, and drawing up specifications for, proposals for Programme projects has always involved a good deal of user consultation. Some respondents, however, raised the question of whether the Programme's research agenda was being driven primarily by researchers or by users. The issue can be summed up as, whose questions are being researched? Those asking this question were not arguing that TLRP's decision-making 'Steering Committee' had selected no projects or research foci of interest and relevance to research users, but rather that the directions of the Programme could have been better focused on areas of agreed need and importance. The following extract from an interview with an individual involved in Higher Education (HE) policy development provides a good example of this perspective:

Although they [i.e., the Programme] had consultations to try and identify what those research themes may be in HE, I don't think anything was explicitly focused. There was no real focus given and I wonder whether TLRP in the future could try and spend a bit more time trying to identify some thematic areas where there is need of the practitioner community so that the research is more responsive to common areas of need.

This raises the central issue of the TLRP being funded and managed as an ESRC 'programme'. For, to quote from the first Programme Director's End of Award Report, 'commissioning on the basis of research excellence following an open competition to a very wide ranging specification provided an extremely disparate range of projects' (Desforges, 2002, p. 13). The potential shortcoming of this in terms of coverage of issues of most interest to research users was raised by several interviewees, including at least one member of the Steering Committee. One respondent spoke of how the ESRC's principle of '*science first [...] may have reduced the range of projects*', while another user argued that '*the criteria for quality make it extremely unlikely that a bid from anyone except a high-rated academic source would be successful*'.

The key point emerging from this is that for some projects there may be an ongoing challenge of '*achieving [a] balance between what the researchers want to do and what is relevant to a practitioner and policy audience*'. This challenge exists in a context where the interests of both users and researchers are changing over time.

2.4 Summary

Overall, the review team found the quality of the Programme's work in Phases I, II and III to be very high. No serious criticisms were raised in relation to academic rigour, and several projects were seen to go well beyond previous work in this field. This was reflected in the rigour of the commissioning process, the quality of the researchers involved in the Programme, the integration of different methodological approaches, the large-scale and multi-institutional/multi-disciplinary nature of the projects and the ESRC evaluations of the Phase I Networks. There was, however, the suggestion that the Programme could have been stronger in terms of engagement with different disciplines and development of new research designs.

With regard to relevance and utility, the feedback from policy-makers and practitioners was generally positive. There was high regard for the early consultation work undertaken by the Programme, as well as strong support for the work of particular projects. There was some concern about the difficulties of maintaining a balance between researcher and user interests as projects progressed. It needs to be stressed, however, that user needs do feature prominently in the TLRP Steering Committee's considerations when decisions are made regarding the initial selection of projects for the Programme.

On balance, though, there were several researchers both within and beyond the Programme who suggested that the TLRP was helping to raise the profile of educational research and to give *'the research community back its own confidence that they can do high quality work'*.

3. User Engagement

3.1 Introduction

A recurring theme in TLRP literature is the importance of ‘*user engagement throughout the research process*’. User engagement has been conceptualised at two levels within the Programme: practitioner involvement in research projects ‘*to enhance relevance, authenticity and validity*’; and liaison with national user and policy organisations ‘*offering high-leverage systems of dissemination*’ (Pollard, 2004, p. 17).

The review team was interested to explore the nature and extent of user engagement at these two levels, in relation to both the overall Programme and its individual projects. In order to minimise the potential overlap with Chapter 6 (on impacts), this chapter looks at all engagement activities carried out by the Programme and projects *except* those targeted at engaging users with project findings and outputs. It deals separately with practitioner involvement and policy-maker liaison, and seeks to identify strengths, challenges and possible weaknesses for each.

3.2 Practitioner involvement

The review team found evidence of a number of positive signs of practitioner involvement, both in the analysis of project documentation and in the interviews with project researchers and participants. These were underpinned by a mixture of (often overlapping) motivations. One strand of thinking was in terms of the role that practitioners can play in identifying the questions worth investigating: ‘*the questions you ask need to be discussed with and come out of practitioners’ and policy makers’* [concerns]’. Another focus was in terms of enhancing the validity of interventions: ‘*Authentic, ecologically-valid educational research in schools must have teachers centrally involved*’. Similarly, a workplace learning researcher spoke of the benefits of ‘*getting soundings from people at the design stage of the research, [and] helping with access and giving early feedback from findings*’. Others stressed the need to

move beyond an approach to research based on the idea that *'We'll do the research [first] and then think about who might use it [afterwards]'*.

Beyond supportive comments about the Programme's early consultation exercises (discussed in Section 2.3), the clearest examples of practitioner engagement came in relation to specific projects. One of the Phase I Networks, for example, was praised by a former member of the Steering Committee for working with several Local Education Authorities (LEAs) which were *'fully integrated in the whole of the research process and there was a really good interchange and discussion between the local authorities, the schools and researchers, and they got practice by meeting together and arguing things through'*.

A similar picture was painted by a policy-maker who had a working knowledge of another Phase I Network:

User engagement has been pretty high. The team have got out and about talking to curriculum developers and teachers. They are not the sort of people to stay in their ivory towers, but rather are willing to get their hands dirty doing curriculum development work.

A research fellow and a participating practitioner from a Phase II project outlined a range of ways in which they, along with other project colleagues, had *'become a team and developed very open and constructive relationships'*. The participating practitioner spoke of learning a *'massive amount about research'* as well as being able to facilitate various research-related initiatives within her own institution (discussed further in Chapter 6).

As well as successes, there was also evidence of challenges. One issue highlighted by users and researchers alike was the possibility of practitioners' involvement being *'tokenistic'*. Several project researchers stressed that *'Users should be able to make dynamic, continuous contributions to the research, not isolated half-hearted gestures'*, while a practitioner advisor warned that *'practitioners have to make sure that they have the time and dedication to become involved'*. Another practitioner, who had helped to review project proposals during the commissioning process, described how it was difficult to know if what was written *'was just a nod towards user engagement because people had to put something in'*. Amongst the six

projects examined in detail for this review, however, there was no evidence of superficial consultation or engagement.

Another challenge stemmed from the diversity of institutional contexts and professional interests encapsulated by the term ‘practitioners’. A Phase III researcher, for example, distinguished between engaging other HE lecturers (as the practitioners in the context of an HE research project) and *‘communicating with groups of people who have very little in common with you and so you have to adapt your language etc.’*. Added to this were competing institutional pressures that in some cases had constrained the level of involvement by practitioner partners. Examples included time pressures on attending meetings or undertaking project activities through to deeper-seated structural constraints on particular ways of thinking and working. To quote from one project report: ‘It was our perception that the pressure schools and teachers are currently facing make it increasingly difficult to carry out collaborative research that involves implementation and evaluation of new approaches’.

A view held by some researchers was that progress in this area had also been held up by a lack of clear thinking about the notion of user engagement. One interviewee saw the focus on user engagement as an insufficiently thought-through *‘response to being beaten by the public discourse about educational research’*. This individual argued that it was all too easy for user engagement to be seen as an easy panacea for improving the relevance of educational research:

The whole programme when it was first set up got whipped up with this idea that somehow you could fairly simply produce this different animal that would be applied research and it was an easy job to do and you just had to shove a few teachers there or put a few policy makers in at key points.

Another respondent warned that, while there were many benefits to be gained through partnerships with practitioners, *‘We have to, as researchers, constantly keep in mind that we don’t represent [only] practitioner interests’* (in the sense that you wouldn’t *‘try to understand the health service by only listening to doctors’*). This highlights the complexity of working with different groups of practitioners, learners and other user groups and the potential ethical complications that this might entail.

One user interviewee raised the question of project teams following up on proposed commitments. This came from an individual who had been named within several TLRP bids, but, in some cases, had not been contacted subsequently by successful project teams. In her view, this suggested that *'There is the demonstration of wanting to use teachers but it is not necessarily followed up in practice'*, which led her to ask *'Is this happening a lot?'*. It is not possible for this review to answer this question conclusively. All that can be said is that there was no other evidence of this difficulty from the interviews with other users who took part in the review. That said, the importance of sustained engagement with user colleagues named within proposals is clearly critical for the maintenance of trust and cooperation over the longer term.

3.3 Liaison with national user and policy organisations

It is clear from interviews with members of the Programme Team that liaison activities with policy-makers and politicians have been considerable and varied. These have included:

- regular meetings with government ministers, politicians, civil servants and representatives of other policy organisations and professional bodies throughout the UK
- participation in strategic committees, networks and fora
- convening policy seminars focused on sector-specific issues connected with one or more TLRP projects
- inviting relevant policy-makers and politicians to TLRP Showcase and Launch events throughout the UK
- producing special publications, briefings and policy responses on related educational issues.

At the level of projects, it was evident from the 2003 Progress Reports that most teams had advisory groups with relevant policy representatives, and some had impressive lists of policy partners/advisors and liaison activities. There were also examples of projects benefiting from members of the research team moving into posts (either permanently or on short-term secondment) within policy organisations. It was suggested by one project director that there had been learning between the Programme phases in this area, in the sense that the later Phase III projects were all very aware of the importance and role of

advisory groups. This was also the impression of the Programme Director, who felt that *'the extent of user engagement has grown with every phase because people have seen that it's part of the Programme's rationale'*.

In relation to ongoing liaison with senior policy-makers, at least one project director made the point that this task was made a great deal easier by being part of a larger programme with central support for dissemination activities. Firstly, the fact that there was a clear programme expectation for liaison work was helpful *'because if there hadn't been, these things might have been left or been allowed to be done in a smaller way'*. Secondly, the brokerage role of the Associate Directors in establishing links and arranging meetings has also been significant *'because this is something the project couldn't have done on its own'*.

From the perspective of policy-makers consulted as part of this review, there was positive feedback in relation to several aspects of this work. One respondent familiar with the English situation commended the Directors' Team for having *'the right idea about getting in with the grain of policy and speaking to senior people'*. Another welcomed the Programme's attitude towards *'wanting to engage with partner bodies where there are common agendas and common synergies'*. This was echoed by a representative of the National Assembly for Wales who reported that *'TLRP has been good at engaging high-level policy-makers'*. A user from Scotland was impressed by the way in which the Phase III launch event *'brought together such a diverse range of stakeholders in post-compulsory education [...and provided...] an outline of the post-16 education landscape which included devolution'*.

There was also evidence of the Programme and its projects generating insights into the processes and challenges of working with policy colleagues. One project director observed how the skills of working with policy-makers were distinctive and *'many researchers are more at ease with talking to practitioners and doing talks for teachers'*. There was at least one project research officer who expressed concern about trying to balance high levels of communication with users, on the one hand, with high standards of methodological rigour on the other.

Even for those who were well-practiced in this kind of work, there were still difficulties such as negotiating the different time-scales of policy and research.

One problem stemming from this was the need to talk about project findings before clear findings and conclusions had become available. As the Programme's Deputy Director pointed out, *'Policy-makers don't want to be told "Hang on, we haven't analysed all our data, you're going to have to wait for another two years to do that"'*. A member of the Steering Committee described this in terms of *'the dilemma that yesterday's research is today's common sense and there is a window of opportunity [...] but it is a narrow window of opportunity'*. In the context of a large-scale research project across several institutions, contributing to the policy process can then present very real challenges, particularly in terms of securing agreement within the project team against very short deadlines. The setting up of 'Policy Task Groups' and the production of TLRP Commentaries, for example on Personalised learning and 14-19 Education, were indications that the Programme Directorate were trying to address this issue.

The politics of working with different kinds of organisations and user bodies represented another area of tension. One project director talked of:

the danger that you get hijacked into public relations and the needs of the user bodies that we're working with, who are themselves necessarily in the business of needing to demonstrate their success to whoever is actually funding them.

There were also challenges of a more practical nature. Several project reports highlighted difficulties with policy colleagues not being able to attend previously-agreed advisory group meetings. One project advisory group member explained how she had had to resign from this role due to competing pressures in her own core work. Such instances serve as a reminder not only of the realities of policy partners' professional roles and contexts, but also of the need for the relevance and potential benefits of projects to be made clear to advisory group members from the outset. In the words of one interviewee: *'Those people are incredibly busy, and they don't see the value of research in the same way that academics do'*.

Similar sorts of issues, it seems, were experienced with the Programme Steering Committee. A point made about this by two policy interviewees concerned the difficulty of travelling to meetings held outside London, and of dealing with the amount of paperwork circulated beforehand. It would seem, then, that the structures, processes and mechanisms for effective policy liaison

and ‘buy in’ are not necessarily obvious or straightforward. Having said this, there is also an important need for policy colleagues and the organisations they represent to take seriously their commitment to research engagement.

Despite TLRP’s commitment to early and sustained user engagement, one criticism that was levelled at this aspect of the Programme’s work was that partnerships with national policy or user organisations tended to be for very particular purposes only. This came from one interviewee, who felt that the collaborations he had seen were solely about dissemination, and not about research design or execution. In his view this reflected the fact that, *‘Academics always ask, “How can we spread our message?” And not, “What can we learn from them? What could we do together?”’* Furthermore, user involvement in advisory groups was seen to be about *‘commenting on or agreeing with, not seriously formulating what was going on’* within a project. It is important to emphasise that these complaints were not echoed by other policy/user interviewees. Furthermore, one project director stressed the importance of *‘drawing a distinction between user engagement and user ownership in the sense of [...] making it clear [to user bodies] that on all sorts of things, we make the decisions as the research team, not them’*.

3.4 Summary

There is evidence of considerable progress in the area of user engagement by both the Programme and its projects. Across TLRP projects, the review team found a variety of forms of practitioner involvement at different stages in the research process. On the basis of the small number of interviews that were possible with project users and researchers, the picture was a largely encouraging one of productive relationships and shared benefits. In terms of liaison with policy-makers and user organisations, the degree of activity of this kind was seen by several researchers as a distinctive strength of TLRP relative to other similar research programmes. There was also positive feedback from policy interviewees for the Programme’s willingness to engage with partner bodies and work with *‘the grain of policy’*.

This work, though, has not been without its challenges for research teams and others involved with the Programme. The risk of tokenistic forms of engagement, the competing pressures on users’ time and capacity to engage,

the particular kinds of skills and understandings that this kind of work requires of researchers, as well as deeper-seated issues relating to the politics of user engagement, user roles and research ownership, were manifest to different degrees across the Programme. The two areas of criticism highlighted by two user interviewees concerned the question of project teams failing to follow up on proposed commitments and/or engaging users only for particular kinds of activities such as dissemination.

Overall, it would seem fair to conclude that the TLRP has been successful in facilitating a great deal of activity and development relating to the engagement of users in and with the research process. The challenge that remains now will be in ensuring that the learning associated with this activity and development is explicated, synthesised and shared both within and, more importantly, beyond, the Programme.

4. Research Synergies and Added Value

4.1 Introduction

In the context of a large-scale programme, with over 30 projects and the involvement of many universities and other organisations, operating on a number of different timescales, there was an early recognition of a need for ‘joined up’ thinking as the Programme developed. Indeed, the development of *research synergies* has been an important aim of the TLRP from the outset. The development of *added value*, in the sense of making the whole add up to more than the sum of the parts, has also been a fundamental goal for the TLRP and can be linked with the idea of creating synergies: ‘*The goal of any ESRC programme is to add value to the products of individual projects*’ (Pollard and James, 2003).

The Programme Directors anticipated that added value and synergy within the TLRP would be achieved through the analysis of key issues across the Programme, theorising of general principles, and the identification of applications for policy and practice. The belief here is that ‘*the Programme presents a unique opportunity to attempt to construct a meta-analysis of teaching and learning through the lifecourse*’ (Pollard, 2004, p. 15).

This chapter examines the contribution of the Programme to educational research generally and explores how the TLRP is (or could be) adding value over and above the contributions of a collection of individual projects. Linked to these broad questions are three more specific issues, concerning: (i) the relations between the Programme as a whole and individual projects; (ii) the effectiveness of the cross-Programme thematic initiatives; and (iii) the extent to which TLRP projects and activities are seen as ‘interlocking and cumulative’.

4.2 Programme-project relationships and expectations

The majority of project-based respondents were positive about the support and encouragement they had received from the Programme Directorate. Many

mentioned, particularly, the usefulness of having a ‘critical friend’ who acted as a link with the Directors’ Team and who could guide the project team when difficult issues or questions arose. Positive views were also expressed about the ways in which the Programme was trying to influence policy-makers and practitioners (see Chapter 6 on impacts). These were the two most commonly-identified ways in which the Programme was perceived by project staff, to be adding value.

In this broadly-positive context, however, a number of issues were raised regarding programme-project relations and expectations. Firstly, a small number of project-based interviewees expressed concern about the amount of work they had to do at Programme level. They accepted that the projects in some ways should make a contribution to the Programme, but found that fulfilling Programme commitments could be time consuming. According to one or two respondents, there may have been issues of communication and expectations here, based on whether Project Directors were made sufficiently aware of potential Programme requirements at the initial stages of the projects. [The Programme Director, however, has pointed out that the importance of being part of a Programme is made clear in both the proposal specification and in the offer letter to Project Directors]. The following point was made by one of the interviewees from the Directors’ Team:

I think the programme-project relationship is something the ESRC needs to work on. During the commissioning phase, I don’t think the ESRC makes it clear to project teams what being part of a programme means. The result being that project teams later feel reluctant to participate in umbrella activities. Nevertheless, above all other programmes, TLRP has been most successful in this regard.

The same interviewee took the view that: *‘I think our job as a Directors’ Team is to try and show people that being part of the programme can develop benefit for their project’*.

Secondly, a small number of respondents expressed concern about the high numbers of senior academics or project managers that could be working on any one project. One Project Director summed this up by saying that there were: *‘too many chiefs and not enough Indians’*. The difficulty here is for one individual, the principal award holder, to maintain a unified approach and direction and a sense of project ‘community’. In some ways this concern

reflects the tensions that could be revealed when researchers and practitioners had different goals or different approaches.

A third concern related to issues arising from working across a number of institutions. Although many respondents appreciated the benefits of multi-disciplinary and cross-institutional working, there were also a number of practical problems that had to be dealt with. One Project Director, whose research teams spanned several institutions, talked, for example, about the need to '*carve projects into smaller manageable bits*', to have a clear division of labour, and to hold regular, monthly meetings.

Linked to this, another Project Director said that whilst the Directors' Team had provided much useful support in terms of capacity building and training in the use of methodological techniques, what was lacking was an input on '*how to manage large projects*' (though the RCBN did provide a course on 'complex project management'). This individual was not used to running a multi-institutional project of this scale, and felt that the Directors' Team could have usefully added value by providing training and advice on project management, which, after all, was an issue relevant to all projects. Another Project Director supported this view when he commented that: '*There is not a strong steer on project management issues from the TLRP Directorate. Perhaps this could be made more explicit*'.

4.3 Cross-programme themes

Since 2002-03 five TLRP Thematic Groups have been in operation, each coordinated by a member of the Directors' Team. These are:

- Learning outcomes
- Learning through the lifecourse
- International synergies
- ICT and research development
- Transformation and impact.

The work of the RCBN on capacity building (considered in the next chapter) is regarded as a sixth area of integrated work. From early 2005 cross-cutting work has been extended through the launch of further seminar activity (developed on the basis of an open Thematic Seminar Competition). All of

these themes/initiatives have been mapped against a conceptual framework of the major factors affecting teaching and learning.

On the whole, most interviewees made few direct comments about the cross-programme themes. This was often because the individual interviewees had not been involved in these themes or seminars. Where comments were made, however, they were positive in nature. A Research Training Fellow, for example, noted that the thematic groups and learning networks had been very useful as a mechanism for sharing good practice in school-based lessons: *'The research synergy is created through the close association of learning networks as new forms of innovation and transfer of practice... This has led to co-authorship of papers examining the use made by networks of schools of the research lesson study'*.

A user interviewee noted that the attempt to identify broad themes had to be made in a context of educational research being *'very widely dispersed, fragmented'*, but the Programme had succeeded in this: *'by its scale and careful thought in terms of consultation, discussion and debate about what areas the Programme should focus on and taking seriously the idea that the research should be more strategic'*. The identification of cross-cutting themes, said this respondent, was one of several ways of approaching educational research which had been flagged up by the TLRP.

A member of the Directors' Team supported this view with his comment that, with regard to the cross-cutting themes: *'I really see [the Programme Director] working on them really strongly now. If anyone is going to make something of a whole out of it, more than some of the parts it's going to be [the Programme Director], he is actually working very effectively'*. This individual felt that the TLRP had gone much further than any previous programme in terms of identifying shared themes and synergies between projects. As well as praising the cross-cutting thematic work, he also pointed to the use of seminars, the development of an IT infrastructure, and attempts to make contacts and build networks across Europe: *'There was a real energy in trying to conceptualise this thing as a whole and to make something out of it in terms of a programme rather than just a collection of individual projects'*.

4.4 Coherence and synergy

Coherence could occur at a number of different levels, including *within* projects, *between* projects, and across the Programme. It needs to be borne in mind that most of the TLRP projects were large-scale in nature, and several respondents provided examples of intra-project, as well as inter-project, synergies. Several respondents noted that even within a project there could be a considerable number of institutions involved, and the coordination required could be very considerable.

Respondents were also asked about any links that had been made with other TLRP projects and/or with the Programme itself, and what synergies these had produced. Such links were identified and described by a number of Project Directors. One of these respondents emphasised, for example, that the *‘Potential synergy from TLRP group work activities is extremely helpful. The way it is being channelled together is something we haven’t seen before’*.

Another Project Director said that linking processes had been: *‘very effective – we have linked to a range of other projects and have also been funded by the ESRC for video-based research’*. Another indicated that: *‘There were synergies from within the project because it was multidisciplinary, so we got some from very useful things out of that’*, adding that, *‘there were some interesting synergies coming out of meetings where ideas that originally came out of one project were taken up by others’*. This latter respondent felt that, *‘if it wasn’t for the Programme we wouldn’t have had the opportunity to talk at length with other project members’*.

This view was echoed by a Project Director who said that she thought the greatest strength of the TLRP was: *‘getting a large number of researchers from different interdisciplinary and methodological backgrounds to engage in conversation and to sustain that’*. She also thought that TLRP conferences had been better organised and planned out in recent years, and that this had facilitated greater mixing and sharing of ideas between project teams. It was recognised that although the Programme could help to directly facilitate links and meetings between researchers, on occasions the links were indirect:

Sometimes the advantages are through things like interesting plenary talks at conferences... that make you think, people mentioning other bits of literature that you haven’t heard of, a lot of it is serendipitous,

it's finding the projects that have points of contact that interest you in terms of the method or the questions or whatever.

It should be noted that, despite these positive comments, there were a few respondents who suggested that more could be done in terms of promoting the cross-cutting themes and summarising the overall messages emerging from the TLRP. These comments were made, however, with a recognition that this work needs to be sequenced, and that thematic work will intensify as the Programme progresses and projects are completed. One Project Director said: *'There is a huge body of evidence and huge body of new thinking that can be capitalised on, that would help us understand what we have learnt from the whole programme. More work needs to be done in this area'*.

4.5 Summary

Whether the links between projects were direct or indirect, interviewees were clearly positive about the benefits of such links. More than one respondent took the view that the TLRP had gone further than any other programme in terms of progressively promoting cross-institutional working and thematic synergies, though this is not to say that improvements could not be made with regard to particular projects or themes.

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, much of the synergy and added value may come towards the latter stages of the Programme's work. In this sense it is extremely important that these matters should be given further attention in the final stages of the work. In particular, there should be attempts to 'weave together' the key findings of the Programme:

Again I think it comes back to scale and the fact that rather like weaving together the patchwork quilt or putting together the jigsaw, given that you've got a wide range of people from the educational research community involved, it does mean that they can actually be involved in thinking about the ways in which different pieces of research inter-relate. (Member of Directors' Team).

It is also important that the Directors' Team and Directorate should take stock of the generic messages emerging from the various studies of teaching and learning in a range of different contexts. In other words, they should maintain the drive to produce the 'meta-analysis' of teaching and learning across the

lifecourse, something that has already been identified as a key potential output by the Programme Director.

5. Capacity Building

5.1 Introduction

Capacity building is an intrinsic part of the TLRP's work (Pollard, 2003, p. 10) and '*helping to build UK capacity to conduct high quality educational research into teaching and learning is an extremely important commitment of TLRP*' (TLRP, 2003, p. 2). The purpose of this chapter is to explore what respondents thought of the progress made so far in this area, and to suggest how capacity building activities can be moved forward in the future. More specifically it examines:

- the perceived effectiveness of the RCBN
- the impacts of other capacity building activities including the work of the RTFs and CDAs
- respondents' views of the recently-launched strategy for the future development of capacity building exercises.

The chapter aims to provide an independent assessment of the progress of the TLRP towards the achievement of its capacity building commitments, based on the testimony of expert informants.

The 'history' of the development of capacity building within TLRP, including the work of the Research Capacity Building Network (RCBN), can broadly be divided into three phases:

- a *technical* phase based upon the setting up of the RCBN
- an *engaged* phase, involving a change of emphasis for the RCBN
- an *embedding* phase, involving new strategies for capacity building.

These phases, to some extent, represent changes in direction (including the change of Director in 2002) which were responses to meeting changing capacity building needs. It should be noted that a number of the interviews for this mid-term review took place before the third phase commenced (including the announcement of a number of new strategies at the 2004 annual

conference), so interviewees may not have been aware of the more recent developments.

5.2 Research Capacity Building Network (RCBN)

The purpose of the RCBN is to support the research capacity building activities of the TLRP and, where possible, extend these to the wider educational research community. In particular, the RCBN was established to facilitate the sharing of research skills, knowledge and expertise, largely by providing and brokering needs-directed research capacity-building activities on a voluntary and career-development basis (RCBN, 2005).

Broadly speaking, the capacity building exercises of the RCBN were perceived by Programme participants to have emerged from what was described by many researchers as ‘*an initial confrontational framing*’, to a more positive position in terms of raising methodological issues within the field of education.

The RCBN’s initial ‘technical model’ of research-capacity building (Boyask *et al.*, 2004, p. 4) was widely questioned. Characterised by a perceived preoccupation with the skills and competencies associated with the conduct of empirical research, there were mixed views about the extent to which the RCBN’s early work had appropriately and effectively targeted researcher capacity building activities.

In terms of positive feedback, the following were seen as important achievements:

- Some belief that the RCBN had made educational researchers question their own skill strengths and shortages (although once identified, it is unclear whether these shortages were always addressed).
- Recognition that the RCBN had provided ‘*off the peg*’ training provision, while also facilitating more customised skills training.
- Belief that the quality of training provision had increased since the start of the Programme.
- Recognition that ‘*relationships have been built in very positive ways*’ across teams as a result of the RCBN activities, especially amongst less experienced researchers.

- The majority of project directors interviewed thought that junior research colleagues had experienced and benefited from the training activities provided by the RCBN.
- There was some acknowledgement amongst academics that the RCBN had contributed to improved *'methodological theorising'* within education.

However, there were also some criticisms of the RCBN. There was a strong body of feeling that, at least early on in the Programme, quantitative forms of research were being more highly valued than qualitative. Several senior academics said that the Network had not provided any *'directly relevant activities'* to the projects they were engaged in. One project director suggested that it was the larger, multidisciplinary and multi-skilled research teams that could benefit most from RCBN training provision: *'It's not that there's been a lack of activities that I've found interesting, just that as a small research project we already possessed the skills needed'*.

Three research officers commented on the variable quality and relevance of the training offered by the RCBN. One of these indicated that: *'some activities were more valuable than others. I've tried almost all of them, but I've realised that quantitative research is not my area'*. Another young researcher said she had never been given the opportunity to attend an external training course, while another thought that experiences where she had deepened, rather than broadened, her expertise had been more beneficial.

Some respondents expressed concern that the benefits stemming from Network activities were derived at the individual, as opposed to the project, level. One project director said that some members of her team thought *'in terms of individual learning'* as opposed to learning at the project level. One user associated with the TLRP saw this as a consequence of the Network's model of training provision. He felt that RCBN training was focused on the individual learner and argued that in order to enhance research capacity the Programme needed to focus on the systems *'both within and between organisations'*. This focus on individuals did appear to be evident in at least one project team where the project director reported that participation in RCBN training was *'something that people decided on an individual basis'*. However, a research officer who had been quite heavily involved with RCBN felt differently:

I think the RCBN has had a direct influence on all the projects. I have met with many researchers working on other Phase II or III projects and I can't imagine that bringing together researchers like that did not impact on the methodology of the projects they were involved in.

The perception that the RCBN was too focused on skills training was common amongst many senior academics. As one project director said, *'I think you build capacity not just by sending people on courses at RCBN, although our researchers have done that and many of the team have found some of those activities very helpful'*. However, the RCBN has made attempts to support researchers in other ways, as testified by a researcher from the Network: *'The Network also has an interest in capacity building as an area of research, and is looking at how new researchers respond to capacity building, and identifying obstacles to learning and training'*.

The same respondent described how the *'last phase of RCBN is geared towards awareness and moving people forward methodologically speaking, and so there is less need for technical skills provision'*. Moreover, the RCBN was moving towards 'embedding expertise' and carrying more dissemination activities as it was drawing towards the end of its life-span, mainly to *'leave people with a sense of ownership and effectiveness rather than a change'*.

5.3 Other capacity building activities

There was a consensus amongst respondents that capacity building impacts were difficult to judge, particularly at the project level. However, there was broad agreement that building researcher capacity should be an important if not a vital focus of educational research. A member of the Directors' Team said that he thought *'the whole concept of capacity development has been hugely powerful for the educational field'*, while another wanted to pressurise the ESRC to consider capacity building as *'one of its criteria for the judgement of research policy excellence'*.

As described in Section 2.2, one of the greatest achievements of the Programme was said to be the success of bringing together a large number of researchers from different disciplinary and methodological backgrounds to engage in conversation and to exchange ideas. The potential for enhanced

research capacity at both the level of the project and the researcher is clear, and perhaps unique to the TLRP. One project director explained:

TLRP is quite unique in so far as it has a lot of multi-disciplinary and cross-institutional projects... we might be shot down for not being faithful to a particular paradigm, but I think we're taking a fairly pragmatic view on [one another's] ideas and concepts.

One of the reasons for the projects' diverse range of capacity building activities is the lack of a single definition of the term from which to operate. While there have recently been a number of reports and papers concerned with capacity building (see for example: McIntyre and McIntyre, 2000; Furlong and White, 2001; Dyson and Desforges, 2002; and Boyask *et al.*, 2004), across the Programme there were some varying interpretations of the term, the result being that project teams engaged in a variety of capacity building activities. A research training fellow described the terminology as '*non-specific jargon*', and it is evident that many project staff would benefit from further clarification, possibly coupled with greater guidance on the subject from the Programme Directorate.

A project director commented on his project's success in building practitioner-researcher capacity, saying that by their own declaration they had undergone a '*fundamental development*' in their knowledge and use of research and research techniques. However, the same respondent acknowledged that capacity building '*in the bigger sense*' had been less successful. Moreover, one practitioner-researcher reported learning '*a great deal about research*'. As she explained: '*I do feel more comfortable with the qualitative and so learning about quantitative and its relation to qualitative has been hugely useful*'.

There was a widespread recognition that less experienced researchers should be a focus for capacity building efforts, and several respondents argued that more could be done by the Programme in this area. However, one project research officer said that he thought the message from the TLRP was very clear, and that '*building a research community, sharing skills, and developing, in particular, a young researcher community*' was very important. He went on to say: '*I can't imagine any Project Director has missed these strong signals from TLRP, and yet junior researchers are given so few developmental opportunities*'.

Several project directors reflected on their disappointment at not being able to bring research officers to TLRP events, including the Annual Conference, owing to pressures on workloads and financial constraints. Two less experienced researchers from different projects said that they did not have contact with educational researchers beyond their respective institutions, and expressed a feeling of isolation from the Programme. One researcher called for the TLRP Directorate to look at the internal communication structures within projects, believing that if he had not been associated with the project from an early stage, *'I don't think I would have any feeling or even any idea of what was going on at the Programme level'*.

There were mixed views on the roles of RTFs, ranging from comments relating to them being *'expensive'* and a *'waste of time'*, to *'successful'* and an *'innovative use of TLRP funding'*. There were different views regarding the perceived benefit they could bring to the educational research community. One respondent remarked that *'the idea that there is this body of people out there who were practitioners who could be turned into researchers is just wrong'*. However, there were others who valued their contribution. One senior academic suggested that *'whether RTFs were mid-career practitioners who wanted to become researchers, or whether they were practitioner-researchers who wanted to become research users'*, the educational research community would benefit.

Four RTFs and one CDA¹ reported gaining additional skills and competencies as a direct result of their involvement with the TLRP. In addition to developing an in-depth knowledge of their respective topic areas, respondents reported broadening their skills in methodology and research design, as well as in project management and academic collaboration. One RTF said:

Being part of a research programme has meant that I have gained additional skills and knowledge over and above the project specific benefits; in particular [with regard to] the opportunity to join and be part of a wider education network which helps in the process of social acculturation and acceptance into the academic community.

All but one RTF agreed that the level of support from both the Programme and the respective research teams had been very good, with one describing the effectiveness of support as *'excellent in every respect'*. One respondent,

¹ Hereon also referred to as an RTF or *'training fellow'* to preserve anonymity

however, was dissatisfied with the level of support received from the host institution, while another reported feeling *'quite isolated from Programme-level developments'*.

Within the confines of the expected outcomes and the resources available, all of the training fellows surveyed felt that their work had impacted or at least had the potential to impact on teaching and learning policy and practice. Nevertheless, they also said that they found it challenging finding time to honour their various work and research-related commitments. One RTF said that *'the expectation, as an RTF, to simultaneously maintain a full-time role in employment; to study for a PhD; to work as a project team member; to conduct the agreed research; and to fulfil the endless administrative requirements'*, was one of the most significant challenges involved in his work. However, the same respondent acknowledged what he called the *'appropriate support'* received from the TLRP Directorate. Echoing the sentiments of the other training fellows, he said that he felt the Directors' Team understood the demands of the RTF role and that they had made efforts to allow him to *'get on with the project'*.

5.4 Future strategy for capacity building

Some senior academics commented on the *'ageing profile'* of educational research, and pointed to the importance of the TLRP's research capacity building activities in engaging younger researchers. As discussed earlier, the need for further recruitment and development of young researchers in the field was a commonly-suggested priority. One senior academic went so far as to say that educational research was in *'serious trouble'*: *'There aren't many people around to replace my generation. ESRC need to build the capacity of younger researchers'*.

Those people who felt able to comment on the Programme's more recent strategy of building upon the work of existing UK organisations concerned with developing capacity building, and working with professional associations such as BERA, felt that such a strategy had the potential to better embed capacity building. One senior researcher commented: *'I think [the new 2004-8 strategy] will bear fruit and I think it does make a difference. I would definitely say it has the potential to move things forward'*. However, at least

one less experienced researcher was unhappy with one particular aspect of the new strategy - the move towards more online capacity building provision: *'I am concerned about this...I would prefer to meet people face to face'*.

Respondents were generally unaware or held no strong view of the Programme's new strategy of engaging with the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) in delivering the Programme's future capacity building activities. The NCRM consists of a co-ordinating Hub at the University of Southampton, to be joined in April 2005 by a series of Nodes around the UK, currently being commissioned (NCRM, 2005).

One project director said that he would like to build capacity across countries, suggesting that he enjoyed finding out about research being conducted overseas: *'We do like to hear from colleagues in other countries, and it is important that we hear what they are doing from the network of countries that we heard about at the [TLRP] Annual Conference'*.

5.5 Summary

Respondents reported many variations on what research capacity building should constitute, and the NFER team would agree with the OECD (2002, p. 22) report that it might be helpful to think more about 'research capacities' when planning provision in this area. Project teams reported engaging in a variety of capacity building activities. The '*capacities*' being built included those of researchers, practitioners and practitioner-researchers. It is our recommendation that many project staff would benefit from further clarification, possibly coupled with greater orientation with regard to the purpose and aims of the TLRP's capacity building activities.

While it is acknowledged that the Programme has the objective to 'enhance the system-wide capacity for research based practice in teaching and learning' (Gorard and Taylor, 2001), there was some evidence that Programme participants still preferred to develop skills and competencies in areas in which they were already familiar; deepening rather than broadening expertise.

There was also a near Programme-wide recognition of the need to address the challenge of the ageing profile of educational research by encouraging and

investing in younger researchers. While there were mixed views about the quality and utility of the training provided for research officers, most agreed that the training experienced through their involvement with the TLRP had been valuable. The research training fellows agreed that while it had been difficult balancing work and research commitments, they had gained useful additional skills and competencies as a direct result of their involvement with the TLRP.

The changes of direction made indicate that the Programme Directorate has displayed an appropriate degree of responsiveness to changing capacity building requirements. It is also clear that the level of success of the new strategy, to be implemented in the final four years of the TLRP, will be an important component in the overall success of the Programme.

6. Impact on Policy and Practice

6.1 Introduction

A focus on impact has been central to the TLRP since its inception. In 2001 the then Deputy Director emphasised that ‘We must maximise Programme-wide long term influence on research, policy and practice. All our activities are designed with this in mind’ (Kanefsky, 2001, p. 1). This is reflected in the Programme’s *Communication and Impact Plan* and *Outputs Review*, both of which stress the importance of ‘a much broader range of activities than just undertaking and disseminating research’.

Bearing in mind the fact that significant parts of the Programme have not yet reached a dissemination/impact stage, the review sought to examine the extent to which the Programme is creating the conditions for ‘significant improvements in outcomes for all learners throughout the UK’. In particular, we have explored the strategies and approach taken by the Programme in relation to impact, and the extent to which Programme participants, users, and stakeholders feel that TLRP projects and other activities have impacted (or will impact) positively on teaching and learning practice and policy.

6.2 Strategies and approaches to impact

The Programme’s approach is based on an understanding of impact ‘not as a simple linear flow, but as a much more collaborative process: interactive, iterative, constructive, distributed and transformative’ (*Communication and Impact Plan* on TLRP website). The strategy for outputs is described as a mixture of targeting and collaboration where the aim is to ‘encourage and support targeted diversity, whilst also specifying minimal coordinated expectations and maximising the benefits of collaboration’ (*Outputs Review* on TLRP website).

The review team was interested in how the Programme’s approach to work in this area was viewed by researchers and users within and beyond the Programme. From the interviews carried out, there were positive

endorsements for several aspects of the strategy. Firstly, several researchers commented on how the extent of impact work undertaken by the TLRP was far greater than in other comparable research programmes. One project director who had experience of a number of EU and UK research council programmes described how *'none of those had the massive emphasis on dissemination and impact that this one has ... This is in a different league altogether'*.

Secondly, there was support for the way in which the Programme was communicating with policy-makers. A research funder, for example, welcomed the way in which the TLRP was approaching this *'creatively but with due regard to the findings'*. Another interviewee praised the Programme for *'being good at explaining to policy makers what they're trying to do, but also emphasising the independence of the work and the Programme'*.

Thirdly, the role played by the Programme in negotiating the wider politics of educational research was welcomed by several project directors. One praised the way in which the Directors' Team was *'helping to nurture educational researchers in their own world [whilst also] talking to senior politicians, civil servants, in their world'*. One respondent likened this to *'riding two horses'* with a *'constant risk of losing credibility with both groups'*. This was seen as a necessary and important service to educational research more generally.

Another area commented on positively by some interviewees was the way in which the current Directors' Team had helped to develop a broader conception of learning outcomes. One member of the Steering Committee talked of how the Programme had moved from a view of outcomes as equated with testing to one which saw outcomes as qualitative as well as quantitative (see James and Brown, 2005).

Finally, there was also recognition for the efforts made by the Programme in the area of dissemination and communication. This included references to the appointment of a Media Fellow, the convening of events such as policy seminars and launch events, publications such as the newsletters and research summaries and the Programme's website.

At the same time, there were some respondents who expressed caution in relation to:

- the degree to which the Programme is focusing sufficient effort on managing expectations about impact – As one senior TLRP researcher argued *‘If [the Programme] can’t develop amongst policy makers at the most senior level a more sophisticated understanding about how research contributes to the development of policy and practice, there is a chance that we will end up being beaten by this big investment...’*.
- the sophistication of the Programme’s thinking and practice relating to impact - This was raised by a user from beyond the Programme who felt that while the TLRP’s impact/dissemination work represents a significant step for an academic research programme, there could be much to learn from the practices of, for example, other research organisations, communication specialists and the private sector.

6.3 Impacts on Practice

It was clear from various project reports, as well as interviews with project participants, that there are examples of TLRP projects (particularly the Phase I research networks) having yielded impacts on teaching and learning practices within a range of educational settings. Examples emerging from the interviews conducted for this review included:

- an FE college tutor explaining how the development of a peer shadowing initiative and a college research group within her institution had *‘grown out of my talking frequently to college managers about the TLRP project’*
- a headteacher reporting how the research findings of two of the Phase 1 Research Networks had contributed to pupil voice and inclusion work in her school and several other schools she knew
- a research user involved in science curriculum development outlining a range of ways in which ideas, concepts and assessment materials from the Phase I Research Network on science education had fed into a range of large-scale curriculum development initiatives, including the new network of Science Learning Centres, the new Twenty First Century GCSE Science curriculum, and the QCA Programme of Study for key stage 4 science.

However, there were also cases where the potential for wider practitioner/institutional impacts was questioned by project researchers and practitioners. A concern expressed by some project directors was whether more localised impacts, often within the organisations or networks of practitioners who were involved in the research, could be extended to other practitioners more generally. Along these lines, two research officers who worked on one project were unsure as to whether their project was going to be

able to produce a publication that would be both accessible and useful to practitioners within their sector of work. From a user perspective, there was at least one complaint about project websites not being as helpful as they might for practitioners:

Most users don't want lists of publications that they can download. It would have been better to have had: webpages that summarise the research progress and main findings; and short downloadable articles and reports, not just selected conference papers.

In thinking about wider impacts on practice, however, it is important to bear in mind the complexity of the settings and the multitude of other often competing influences that are in operation. With regard to schools, for example, one researcher interviewee suspected that:

Many schools feel they can't fully benefit from research at the moment because they've got too much on the agenda and they can't cope with the additional layer of a project, unless it's been very very canny in building in to strategy developments so that people can see how it can help them do what they've got to do anyway.

These kinds of barriers to research engagement and use were evident from the progress reports of projects working in a whole range of formal and non-formal educational and workplace contexts.

6.4 Impacts on Policy

As with practice, there were indications that several projects had yielded an influence on aspects of current policy. An interviewee with in-depth knowledge of the educational policy situation in England judged that *'there have been certain projects that have had a significant impact on policy'*. This concurred with the views of others in terms of a number of examples:

- the fact that *'policy people know about and use'* the outputs of the Phase I 'Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning' Research Network
- the embedding of ideas from the 'Evidence-Based Practice in Science Education' Phase I Research Network within the key stage 3 national strategy for science as well as a number of other curriculum developments
- the wide-ranging ways in which the Learning to Learn Phase II Project has inputted into policy developments relating to, for example, assessment for learning within the primary school strategy

- the Programme’s publication and policy seminar on Personalised Learning in the school sector.

Alongside these examples, however, there were more mixed views about policy-makers’ awareness of the Programme generally. Two respondents with considerable experience of educational policy in England felt that awareness of the TLRP in such settings was still quite limited: *‘Policy makers aren’t jumping up and down about the TLRP’*. A project director responsible for one of the Scottish projects, however, was more optimistic about the situation in his country: *‘There is no lack of awareness of the TLRP north of the border amongst those that matter’*. A senior policy maker in Wales said that he thought there had been less research engagement in Wales, but said that he understood the *‘broader engagement commitments’* of the TLRP.

It is notable that there were perceived to be marked differences between the potential to foster links between policy-makers and academics within Scotland and Wales. While both countries host a relatively small number of research institutions when compared with England, there was a perception that Scotland’s framework for engagement possibly allowed more access by academics to senior politicians than in Wales. A respondent from the Welsh National Assembly said that he hoped the *‘TLRP could help develop that capacity here’*, suggesting that the Programme could act as a broker to *‘facilitate discussion about evidence-based research between academics and policy-makers’*.

More generally, there were a number of suggested improvements in the area of policy impact:

- A point made by one policy observer was that impact as a programme (rather than as individual projects) could be strengthened. The risk was seen to be that individuals or specific projects are consulted, but there is no profile for the overall programme.
- Another suggestion was that, as well as seeking to influence local and national policy development, the Programme ought to be also engaging with research funders. One interviewee from a funding organisation argued that *‘What we would hope is that TLRP influences and improves the strategic thinking of other funders. I’m not sure that it has been yet’*.
- An argument from a research user in Wales was that *‘the TLRP has been good at engaging high level policy-makers but we need to engage more with middle and low level policy-makers’*.

- Finally, there were calls from policy-makers for TLRP to provide information of particular kinds. Examples included *‘advice from experience in other parts of the EU – what is going on, what’s been tried and what works across Europe’* (Northern Ireland) and *‘analysis that can inform the bigger picture of what the Welsh Assembly should be focusing its efforts and resources on’* (Wales).

Many of the above suggestions were tempered by an acknowledgement of the likely barriers and obstacles. The attitude of individual civil servants and policy-makers within government departments was one example of a potential barrier. As one respondent described, *‘The barrier to TLRP as a programme really getting through to government has been about individuals and their stances’*. The question of findings that are critical of policy was another. The view of one project director was that *‘there is a lot of evidence that if policy-makers don’t want to hear the messages they won’t listen to them’*.

6.5 Summary

Amongst those consulted for this review, there was positive endorsement for much of the way in which the Programme has approached the area of impact. Researchers commended the strong emphasis on dissemination and impact, as well as the manner in which the Directors’ Team was responding to the challenges facing educational research by working sensitively with the research community and the policy community. Users and researchers were positive about the way in which the Programme was communicating with research users whilst also emphasising the independence of the Programme and its findings. Notwithstanding this, criticisms were voiced by some respondents about how well the Programme was managing policy-makers’ and funders’ expectations of impacts, and how deeply projects were theorising their communication and impact work.

In terms of progress, the review found evidence of TLRP projects having yielded impacts on teaching and learning practices. Not surprisingly, given the (mid-term) stage of the Programme, these were often linked to the Phase 1 research networks, and were mainly seen within organisations that had been directly involved with these projects. In the realm of policy, there were similar indications of projects having made significant contributions to the policy process in specific areas. It was also clear than impact work in both the

worlds of policy and practice was beset by a number of widespread challenges, including competing pressures, vested interests and negative attitudes towards research.

In terms of possible improvements, researchers and users highlighted the following priorities:

- a stronger focus on impacting upon practitioners beyond those participating within particular projects
- renewed efforts to raise policy makers' awareness of TLRP as a programme rather than as individual projects
- increased attention on sharing learning with other research funding organisations
- enhanced communication with policy-makers at the local and regional level.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the key findings from the mid-term review, organised around the five key foci. In addition it summarises comments made by interview respondents regarding suggested future directions and priorities for the Programme. Finally, a set of recommendations relating to the possible future development and management of the Programme is presented. These have been compiled by the review team on the basis of all the evidence collected.

7.2 Key findings

Quality of Research

The review team found the quality of the Programme's research to be very high. No serious criticisms were raised in relation to academic rigour, and several projects were seen to go well beyond previous work in this field. With regard to relevance and utility, the feedback from policy-makers and practitioners was generally positive. Questions were raised, however, about the selection of the project portfolio, and whether it fully met the needs of users. It was also suggested that the Programme could have been stronger in terms of engagement with different disciplines and development of new research designs. On balance, though, there was a view amongst several respondents that the Programme was helping to raise the profile of educational research.

User Engagement

There is evidence of considerable progress in the area of user engagement by both the Programme and its projects. On the basis of the small number of interviews that were possible with project practitioners and researchers, the picture was a largely encouraging one of productive relationships and shared benefits. In terms of liaison with policy-makers and user organisations, the degree of activity of this kind was seen by many as a distinctive strength of

TLRP relative to other research programmes. There was also positive feedback from policy interviewees for the Programme's willingness to engage with partner bodies and policy debates. The two areas of criticism highlighted by two user interviewees concerned the question of project teams failing to follow up on proposed commitments and/or engaging users only for particular kinds of activities such as dissemination.

Research Synergies and Added Value

The majority of respondents who commented upon these aspects of the Programme made positive comments, reflecting a view that it was useful to link up with other researchers and to see the overlaps and lessons learned from other projects. Cross-Programme themes were being promoted appropriately, but a minority of respondents took a view that more could be done in this area. The Programme was seen to be adding value in terms of encouraging a broader identity for the research work, offering support via 'critical friends', and promoting the work to policy makers and others. These are areas, however, which will need serious attention from the Directors' Team as TLRP reaches its later stages.

Capacity Building

There was broad agreement from respondents that capacity building should be a key focus within educational research, and many interviewees expressed positive views about the benefits arising from the multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional nature of their projects. There was some evidence, with respect to involvement in RCBN activities and training, that Programme members still preferred to develop skills and competencies in areas in which they were already familiar; consolidating rather than broadening their expertise. In addition, project participants talked about building multiple 'capacities', rather than a single 'capacity'.

Impact on Policy and Practice

The review team found that the Programme has a strong emphasis on dissemination and impact, and this was widely acknowledged by project and Programme interviewees. The Directors' Team was seen to be working skilfully and sensitively to forge connections between the research and policy

communities. There were a number of examples of TLRP projects having impacted on teaching and learning practices, though this kind of impact tended to be quite ‘localised’. In the realm of policy, there were similar indications of projects having made significant contributions to the policy process in specific areas. In terms of possible improvements, respondents suggested a stronger dissemination focus on: practitioners beyond those participating within particular projects; policy-makers’ awareness of the Programme (as opposed to individual projects); and research funding organisations.

7.3 Respondents’ suggestions for future priorities

In discussions about the future priorities of the Programme, interviewees from within and beyond the Programme pointed to a number of areas which they felt needed to be focused on in the next five years. These can be summarised under four main headings:

- coordinating the research to assist policy-makers
- increased emphasis on synthesis and thematic development
- continued creative efforts in relation to impact and dissemination
- debate and discussion about desired developments post-TLRP.

Coordinating the research to assist policy-makers

Two policy-makers commented on the need for the Programme to ‘*pull together*’ projects’ findings and to sell this ‘*package*’ to policy-makers, but with the focus remaining on providing answers to issues and questions. One policy spokesperson said: ‘*Policy-makers are not interested in studies x, y and z. They want to know an overview of the research; what has gone on before and how a particular piece of research fits into this. This is something that the TLRP, as a programme, is uniquely placed to deliver*’. A similar comment reinforced the need to look beyond the findings of individual projects: ‘*What we’re interested in is answers to issues and questions. How does the Programme relate to other evidence and other work that has been done or is being done elsewhere?*’

Increased emphasis on synthesis and thematic development

While acknowledging that the Programme had already stimulated a considerable amount of thematic development and networking, there was a strong feeling from Programme researchers and users that more could and should be done. Indeed, this was also the view of the Programme Director who was planning for a progressive focusing of effort on cross-Programme thematic work as TLRP moved towards its conclusion.

One Project Director highlighted the need for *'more thematic work'* drawing on, for example, *'the number of projects that touch on the learning and skills sector or the FE sector'*. Another suggested it would be beneficial to *'spend more time on encouraging substantive synergies/joint papers across projects and less on actually organising meetings and workshops with multiple attendance'*. A member of the Steering Committee stressed the importance of what he termed *'the meta project'*, pointing out that *'there is a huge body of evidence and new thinking that can be capitalised on [in terms of] what do we actually know now from the whole programme?'*

This issue of synthesis was also a priority for Programme users and stakeholders. One interviewee familiar with the needs of policy audiences recommended *'trying to bring [Programme activities] together more because there's too many bits at the moment, and I think that's one of the problems - people don't know which bit to connect to'*.

Continued creative efforts in relation to impact and dissemination

In thinking about the future, both users and researchers highlighted the importance of the Programme's dissemination and impact strategy. While it was acknowledged that publishing in academic journals was *'important for academics' own survival'*, project researchers themselves were keen to go beyond this and to *'focus on dissemination in a big way'*. One Project Director, for example, urged the Directors' Team to *'encourage projects to think outside familiar territories e.g. dissemination to non-academic media using non-traditional means of communication'*. Other ideas included *'a series of programmes that looked at what research tells us about learning through the life cycle'* and *'dissemination events with policy makers, think tanks, journalists, etc. that are smaller and more frequent, rather than larger and less frequent'*.

Associated with these kinds of activities, there was also a recognition from some that impact work needed to be about the development of research cultures within different professional settings: *'I would hope that the Programme's outcome is to tilt things a bit in that direction'*. In a similar vein, a user linked with a Phase III project stressed how the Programme needs to continue to form *'alliances and partnerships because they shift the thinking of organisations, which is what changes cultures'*.

Debate and discussion about desired developments post-TLRP

Finally, there was strong agreement that the Programme needed to be thinking not only about impact over the next five years, but also about potential developments in educational research in the five to 10 years after that. The argument was that sustainability of the Programme was really a question of the future prospects and directions of educational research more generally. The Programme Director expressed the following view:

Through TLRP, we have been exploring new ways of conducting educational research. We've been trying to develop new understandings and knowledge, through combining high quality social science with high levels of relevance, engagement and impact. We've been trying to support the development of capacity and expertise in the field and embed it back within the academic community, and we've been working on the use of new technology for supporting research activity and knowledge management.

By the end of TLRP, we hope we will be able to say that considerable progress has been made... but we do not believe that the job will be fully completed. The new challenge will be to build on the most worthwhile elements of TLRP's work and to construct new strategies for further progression.

There were several ways in which interviewees felt the Programme could contribute to discussions about developments post-TLRP. These included:

- **thinking beyond itself** – One suggestion was that the Programme should recognise the risk of being seen as *'the only show in town'* within educational research. It was also felt that *'there is a lot of work they can do in actually engaging more ordinary researchers [who are currently not within the Programme]. There are things they could do to help the research community even more than they are doing'*.
- **using TLRP as a platform for future planning with user groups** – Two users felt strongly that the Programme must not only think about

disseminating its outputs, but also about how it can *'use what has been learnt as a platform for future work'*. The suggestion was for the Programme to *'use the findings from the TLRP projects relating to particular sectors as the basis for practical workshops/consultation events with partners on the theme of what next?'* A central concern in this was for wide-ranging discussion and dialogue as to the kinds of research priorities that need investigation, both within and beyond teaching and learning.

- **careful thinking about modes of research funding** – Representatives of funding organisations raised questions such as: 'Have the lessons learnt from TLRP been identified in terms of a strategy for research beyond the programme? What would be the key strategy for a Phase IV or Phase V?' Another highlighted the need for the Programme and its partners to take 'a critical look at new models of research funding: networks or centres or locally-based coalitions or subject-specific initiatives or something else?'

7.4 Recommendations

An important part of the remit of this review was to provide formative input to the future development of the TLRP. On the basis of the evidence presented in previous chapters, the research team offers the following recommendations for consideration by those involved in managing and delivering the Programme.

Quality of Research

- Programme and project staff should give further consideration to the ways in which individuals with different disciplinary backgrounds could be engaged in TLRP projects.
- In addition, it would be worth reviewing TLRP project research designs in order to identify and highlight elements of innovation that might be useful for future educational research projects.

User Engagement

- So far, the Programme has a very good record in terms of user engagement, but it is essential that this aspect of the work should be developed further in the later stages of the TLRP.
- It would be worth considering the further steps that could be taken to help to ensure the continuous, authentic and meaningful involvement of practitioners. This may require examination of the various pressures which are operating upon researchers and practitioners, and reducing the barriers to collaboration between these two groups.

Research Synergies and Added Value

- Efforts at ‘weaving together’ the key findings of the Programme should be given a high priority as the TLRP moves towards the end of its timescale.
- The Directors’ Team should ensure that a ‘meta-analysis’ of teaching and learning across the lifecourse is made a key output for the Programme (with appropriate time and resource allocations). This could be part of a general dissemination drive in the later stages of the Programme.

Capacity Building

- It would be useful to further clarify the capacity building and training requirements of participating project teams, and perhaps to compare these with the services and activities on offer from the new capacity building networks (including BERA and the National Centre for Research Methods)
- The TLRP should continue to address ‘ageing profile’ of educational research by involving less experienced researchers in project and Programme work, and ensuring that they feel part of the TLRP ‘community’.

Impact on Policy and Practice

- TLRP participants should develop a stronger focus on impacting upon practitioners beyond those participating within particular projects. The new strategy of working with user partners, such as the Learning and Skills Development Agency, the National Council for School Leadership, NIACE and the General Teaching Council (England) may a useful way of developing this wider approach.
- There should be renewed efforts to raise policy makers’ awareness of TLRP as a programme rather than as a collection of individual projects. This could be assisted by the production of summary papers, drawing from numerous projects, on key educational topics.

These recommendations are offered in the context of many positive findings from the interviews and the documentary analyses. It is clear that the TLRP, by the mid-point of the Programme, had already made major strides in terms of: helping to raise the profile of educational research; promoting interesting forms of cross-institutional working; engaging with significant groups of practitioners and policy-makers; and stimulating and supporting projects of a high quality across a range of teaching and learning contexts.

References

- BOYASK, R., REES, G. and TAYLOR, C. (2004). 'Professional Learning in the Educational Research Community: Reflections on the Experience of the TLRP Research Capacity Building', Paper presented at the 5th TLRP Annual Conference, 22-24 November 2004, Cardiff Marriot Hotel.
- DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS (2002). *Research and Development in England: Background Report Prepared for the OECD Review*. London: DfES.
- DESFORGES, C. (2002). *Teaching and Learning Research Programme March 1999-April 2002. End of Award Report to ESRC*. Unpublished Report.
- DESFORGES, C. and KANEFSKY, J. (2002). 'The ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme', *Children and Society*, **16**, 206-210.
- DYSON, A. AND DESFORGES, C. (2002). *Building research capacity: some possible lines of action*. London: NERF.
- ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL (2005). *Communication and Impact Plan* [online]. Available: <http://www.tlrp.org/manage/admin/caip.html>. [7 February, 2005].
- ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL (2005). *Outputs Review* [online]. Available: <http://www.tlrp.org/manage/admin/outputreview.html>. [7 February, 2005].
- ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL (2005). *Themes* [online]. Available: <http://www.tlrp.org/themes/index.html>. [7 February, 2005].
- FURLONG, J. & WHITE, P. (2001). *Educational Research Capacity in Wales: A review* (Cardiff, Cardiff University School of Social Sciences).
- GORARD, S. & TAYLOR, C. (2001) *Building Research Capacity*, Issue 1, January 2002 (Cardiff, Cardiff University School of Social Sciences).
- JAMES, M. and BROWN, S. (2005). 'Grasping the TLRP nettle: preliminary analysis and some enduring issues surrounding the improvement of learning outcomes', *The Curriculum Journal*, **16**, 1, [pages not known as yet].
- KANEFSKY, J. (2001). 'Research impact and the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme.' Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Leeds, Leeds, 13-15 September.

MCINTYRE, D. and MCINTYRE, A. (1999) Capacity for Research into Teaching and Learning, Report to the Programme, <http://www.tlrp.org/acadpub/McIntyre1999.pdf>, 04/02/05.

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH METHODS (2005) NCRM Website <http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/>, 04/02/05.

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (2002). *Educational Research and Development in England. Examiners' Report* (OECD Review). Paris: OECD.

POLLARD, A (2003) Programme Director's Annual Report 2003, University of Cambridge (Cambridge).

POLLARD, A. (2004). 'The SERA Lecture 2003: what is and what might be? TLRP strategies and the development of educational research', *Scottish Educational Review*, **36**, 1, 11–21.

POLLARD, A. and JAMES, M. (2003). 'Teaching and learning – could we do better?' Paper presented at the Teaching and Learning Research Showcase of Post-Compulsory Projects, London, 25 June.

RESEARCH CAPACITY BUILDING NETWORK (2005) Website <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/capacity/>, 04/02/05.

TEACHING & LEARNING RESEARCH PROGRAMME (2003). TLRP's Future Provision for Capacity Building: a Consultation (Executive Summary). Cambridge: TLRP.