

End of Award Report

ESRC

Teaching and Learning Research Programme

March 1999 – April 2002

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report covers the period March 1999 through April 2002, a period which has mainly been occupied in consultancy towards research specifications, commissioning and networking. By the end of the award very little substantive research had been completed.

1.2 **Background** The Programme's main aim is to conduct research in support of improving learning for people across the age range and in all settings, formal and informal, across the UK. The aim reflects the position of education in national government priorities and is reflected in the scale of resourcing (£25m) and the range of funders (HEFCE, DfES, Welsh Assembly, Scottish Executive and DENI). Policies require increased efficiency and effectiveness of education and training enterprises at all levels. This in turn has led to a call for an enhanced knowledge base for teaching and learning to provide a basis for increased levels of evidence informed practice.

1.3 **Scope of commissioning.** Commissioning has taken place in 2 phases (with a third pending) each phase being preceded by extensive UK wide consultation exercises with researchers and users. Phase 1 (commissioned in 1999) comprises 4 research networks (3 school based, 1 workplace based) with a total allocation of £2m. Phase 2 (commissioned in 2000) comprises 9 major research projects (6 in the schools sector, 1 HE, 1 FE and 1 work based) with a total allocation of £6.9m. In addition a research capacity building network was funded in 2001 at approx £0.5m.

The Director's contract was due to end on 28 February 2002 but to aid the transition process of installing the new Director during a particularly extended commissioning process for Phase 3 an extension was agreed to the end of April 2002.

- 1.4 **Major achievements.** It is too soon to offer major research outputs as achievements. None of even the earliest funded network has yet completed their research work. Nevertheless, significant foundational achievements are a plenty.
- 1.4.1 During the period of the award the scale of funding for the Programme was doubled.
- 1.4.2 Major investments have been made in the essential task of building research capacity through a ground-breaking virtual college, the Research Capacity Building Network.
- 1.4.3 Extensive user engagement has been achieved with some programmes oversubscribed with would-be collaborators.
- 1.4.4 Extensive connectivity has been established with high profile, high leverage organisations (DfES, LTSN, LSDA, GTC, CIPD for example).
- 1.4.5 A vibrant range of international contracts with direct research benefits have been established. An EU funded project across several countries has been jointly lead by the Director; a bench marking report on research management has been prepared by a leading US scientist; connections to enhance methods development and research training have been established with the US NSF.
- 1.4.6 A unique exercise of capacity building during commissioning has been conducted with considerable beneficial effects on the quality of bids.
- 1.5 **Major difficulties.** There have been scientific, personnel and management difficulties.

- 1.5.1 The field is difficult because it is undeveloped in terms of theories and reliable measures. These problems have been engaged with, rather than yet overcome, through a sustained series of seminars and Director's papers.
- 1.5.2 Personnel difficulties were overcome through the application of a great deal of sustained, professional work.
- 1.5.3 Management difficulties (including financing difficulties) have been largely overcome through last minute effort.
- 1.5.4 Perhaps the greatest difficulty is that involved in imposing some coherence on such a large and disparate Programme. The major source of these difficulties lies in the Programme model and its related commissioning practices and will not be overcome. The new Director will be left with the challenge of identifying 'emergent themes' on which to weave coherent outputs at the Programme level.

2 The Director's role

- 2.1 **Adding value.** In efforts to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts of the Programme, persistent attention has been paid throughout the life of the Programme thus far to the following issues: capacity building; focus on key R and D concepts; impact planning; and international connections. These are matters running across all projects.
 - 2.1.1 Investment was made in conceptualising, designing and commissioning the Research Capacity Building Network. The RCBN has a remit to build capacity system wide but its key task is to use the capacity within the Programme and beyond to build capacity within the Programme especially at the level of senior and post doctoral competencies. This includes the development of advanced methods (e.g. design experiments). The RCBN stands to bring advanced collegiality to the Programme with potential for cross project pooling of results.

A great deal of investment was made in capacity building during commissioning to help bidders focus on Programme wide objectives and to submit designs appropriate to their achievement. The results of this investment have been evident in the high quality of bids. It also ensures that commissioned projects have, from the outset, a focus on Programme wide objectives.

- 2.1.2 The Director has persistently focussed, through a series of papers, presentations, discussions and conversations, on a Programme wide concentration on key concepts in R and D in the field. These concepts are (a) those emergent in conceptions of interactive social science which lie at the heart of a proper understanding of researcher/user engagements (b) those embedded in various approaches to cause-effect modelling or scientific designs which might generate findings warranting policy or practice applications (c) conceptions of knowledge transformation which are essential to the conversion of research produced knowledge into practical actions (d) theoretical advances attempting to integrate developments in learning theory with developments in teaching theory thus leading to a more comprehensive pedagogy. This is essential but difficult work necessarily conducted at the cutting edge of theoretical and methodological development with Project Directors who, at this state of the Programme are necessarily occupied with the practical business of getting projects up and running with the intellectual tools to hand.
- 2.1.3 **Impact planning**, Programme wide, has had a very high profile. Extensive time investment has been made in developing good connections with high leverage potential mediators of impact. A Programme wide impact strategy was build in comprehensive consultation with users and Project Directors and based on literature reviews in the field.
- 2.1.4 **International connections** have been build with organisations with or developing Programmes with a family resemblance to TLRP. (NSF, PROO, Finnish

Academy). These connections have been fostered Programme wide through conferences, seminars and electronic media. They afford the enrichment of methodologies and the potential for benchmarking TLRP against best quality practice. The work has been accomplished through discussions, visits, mutual representation at conferences and in the commissioning and production of a benchmarking report from a U.S. expert in the field of research management.

2.2 **Intellectual leadership** is implicated throughout in the section on added value. It has involved contributing to and pressing for developments in the fields of pedagogic theory, research methods, research management and impact planning.

2.2.1 Attempts to develop theory in pedagogy culminated in a series of papers and presentations (see publications). At the heart of this work was an attempt to integrate contemporary perspectives on learning and then to link these with emerging perspectives on teaching.

2.2.2 Developments in methods have, in essence, focussed on the improvement of research designs which better allow conclusions which afford implications for policy and practice. This work has been mainly carried out by the RCBN following the Director's conception and commissioning of this network. It has been further enhanced through working connections with the NSF which have afforded TLRP involvement in workshops on the methodological advancement of design experiments.

2.2.3 The management of major research programmes has itself been an important issue. In some respects TLRP has itself been seen as exemplary in conception and has been influential in influencing programme design in Finland and in Holland. At the same time the Director has looked for enhancements in design and management through the commissioning of the benchmarking report.

- 2.2.4 Leadership in impact planning has been essential and significant. Project Directors have tended to take the view that impact should wait on results. It has been necessary to raise the profile of impact to involve (a) the building of early and strong relationships with users and their leaders (b) develop conceptions of research ‘goods’ which go beyond results and involve conceptions (of teaching, learning, assessment, educational change), methods, reviews and discussions of knowledge transformation. Leadership was enacted through the development and installation of a Programme impact plan together with its early embodiments (including building connections with high leverage users, appropriate and targeted publications, and investing in impact planning activities).
- 2.3 **Engaging users** has been at the heart of much of our early work and evident throughout in pre-commissioning consultations, the Programme specification, commissioning, research management and impact planning.
- 2.3.1 Prior to publishing the Programme’s research specifications, extensive consultation with users and researchers were held UK wide using a range of media.
- 2.3.2 The research specification required user engagement through all phases of the research process starting immediately with the issues of research objectives and research designs.
- 2.3.3 Extensive advice was given throughout the commissioning process on, amongst other things, user engagement in all aspects of research management.
- 2.3.4 As noted earlier, the issue of user engagement is at the heart of the Programme’s impact plan in which the Programme’s position is focused on best theory and practice in the field.

- 2.3.5 The Director has been involved in an extensive programme of proselytising activities at both grass roots and senior executive level to encourage user engagement in educational research generally and Programme activities in particular. This has involved conference presentations to targeted audiences of LEA leaders, advisers and head teachers and a programmatic series of conversations with leaders of key agencies in the field.
- 2.4 **Input to public policy debates** has been enacted nationally and internationally. The Director has been a member of NERF and has played a leading role in debates on research capacity and research priorities. Invitations to speak at national and international conferences have also afforded opportunities to discuss issues in research management, training and, especially, knowledge transformation. It could not be claimed that these matters are of ‘public interest’ but they are at the heart of the interests of the public in education since they are key issues in the issue of evidence based practice which in turn serves to promote educational achievements
- 2.4.1 In regard to matters of public interest in practice, the Director has been heavily involved in discussions about raising achievement through the transformation of teaching practices in schools. This contribution has been made nationally through conferences of national organisations (e.g. NCSL) and parochially through contributions to LEA and Headteacher conferences.
- 2.5 ESRC policy debates have been engaged in through Programme Directors’ conferences and through the research priority exercise and the channel between the ESRC and the research community has operated through the Steering Committee in the form of extensive consultation exercises.
- 2.6 Providing advice to research teams has operated at several levels. There has been a strong commitment to capacity building in commissioning involving working in an advisory capacity with respect to research design. Following commissioning an

advisory exercise has continued in correspondence and conversations. In the case of 2 projects the advice has been critical in moving them forward from a conditional to a full award and in one instance this issue became a critical battleground.

2.6.1 Advice to the ESRC operated entirely through the Steering Committee.

3. **The Programme's objectives** It should be emphasised that by the end of the award of this Director very little substantive research output had been generated. The early years have been predominantly a period of consultation and commissioning. With that in mind the following progress towards Programme objectives can be reported.

3.1 **Objective:** to enhance the achievement of learners at all ages and stages in education, training and life-long learning.

3.1.1 The commissioning of phases 1 and 2 produced a set of projects very skewed towards the years of compulsory schooling. There was no fundable work on community learning, adult education or life-long learning as this is operationally understood. As the Programme stood, there can be no across-the-board progress.

3.1.2 In regard to the projects as funded, there is extreme variation in regard to progressing this objective. In part this is because some projects have very narrowly focussed objectives whilst others have a much broader remit. Nunes et al, for example, is testing specific hypotheses about links between specific teaching activities and well defined pupil outcomes. On the other hand, Sutherland, for example, is exploring the broad field of creativity in learning platform development in ICT. It is perhaps not surprising that the tighter of the projects, in these terms, have found it easier to operationalise processes and outcomes, identify appropriate measures and secure early results. Millar et al, Nunes et al and Newman have each recorded significant achievement for learners

on well theorised grounds. For most of the Phase 2 projects it is simply too early to expect any such outcomes.

3.1.3 The degree of focus of the project is, however, not the only variable in considering differences in progress towards enhancing learning. At a given level of specificity of focus, different project teams have made very different progress in conceptually linking their research to learning enhancement. James et al (on learning to learn), McGuinness et al (on metacognition) and Rudduck et al (on pupil voice) each have the very challenging task of linking their variables to pupil learning outcomes in complex interacting systems awash with change. Very considerable progress has been made conceptually and instrumentally by the James and the McGuinness teams using design experimental or quasi experimental approaches. Progress seems to elude the Rudduck team who are meeting determined resistance amongst teachers to think beyond the exercise of pupil empowerment into actual achievement. The latter link is seen to be self evident to participants. The differences in conceptual power in the projects reflects, to a very large degree the level of theoretical development in their respective fields.

3.2 **Objective:** to develop the capability for transforming the knowledge base relevant to learning into effective and efficient teaching practices.

3.2.1 The issue of knowledge transfer or transformation is utterly undertheorised in the social sciences. Some contributions have been made by the Director in conceptualising issues in this area and these ideas are being carried forward elsewhere (in the LSDA for example). Programme response is very varied.

3.2.2 Several are breaking new ground in transforming cognitive science into advanced educational practices. These include Millar, Nunes, Entwistle, McGuinness and James. These projects are at the cutting edge nationally and internationally. The

challenge for the Programme is to ‘go meta’ with these teams to establish what general lessons can be learned for the field.

3.2.3 The projects led by Rudduck, Hughes and by Bloomer are in the business of exploring the transformation of educational knowledge into advanced practices (respectively what to do with pupil voice, parent/teacher information exchange, tutor/learner understandings of teaching/learning cultures). The Ainscow team is working on the transformation of knowledge about education changes to effect development in inclusive practices in schooling. The problems facing the Rudduck, Hughes, Bloomer and Ainscow teams are very different from those working essentially from cognitive psychology. For the former, the knowledge base is much less well formed and validated. It is also much more politicised. At a Programme level success will only be well established (instrumentally and in theoretical terms) when the two schools of challenges are brought together. The way ahead, again, is to invest heavily in progressing theory across these fields.

3.3 **Objectives:** to enhance the capacity for research based practice in teaching and learning.

3.3.1 This is a salient objective for a large number of organisations nationally (DfES, GTC, LEAs for example). It has been the target of some investment, especially by the DfES in terms of reviews, scholarships and dissemination exercises.

3.3.2 The Programme’s distinctive contribution is best marked by the RCBN which has adopted a virtual college approach to building research skills, first within the Programme and then beyond. The current RCBN focus is on researchers rather than users. A national audit of skills available and training needs expressed was in progress at the end of the award.

3.3.3 At the project level, several teams have clear capacity building plans for their local participants in which they have invested resources. These include the teams

- led by Millar, Ruddock, Bloomer, Eraut, Hughes, James and Nunes. Other teams have found it difficult to conceptualise research capacity in terms sharp enough to invest in and are, in effect, operating diffusion models of training. Programme seminars are attempting to promote best practice.
- 3.4 **Objective:** to promote and extend multi-disciplinary and multi-sector research in teaching and learning.
- 3.4.1 This is perhaps the most limited area of progress. Multi-disciplinary and multi-sector work is hardly evident in the domain. Except in minor respects, few bids for commissioning had any evidence of meeting these criteria and most of those offered little by way of intellectual rationale for their design and had less prospect of achieving their goals.
- 3.4.2 Multi sector work is more evident than multi-disciplinary activity. There are projects operating across HE/FE (Entwistle), schools/FE (Sutherland), HE/work (Eraut), home/School (Hughes) but as yet none has reported on progress.
- 3.4.3 Whether there is progress on a multi-disciplinary sort depends to some extent on whether 'education' is deemed a discipline. Most teams claim it as such although the predominant source of theories and methods is either psychology or sociology (never both).
- 3.4.4 Little, if any progress then can be reported here. Progress is likely to come when further investment is made in advancing theory and methods in the field.
- 3.5 **Summary on progress towards objectives** A cautious summary would have to note that it is very early in the life of the Programme to expect evident progress in meeting objectives at the project level. Certainly there are enormous difficulties in conceptualising teaching and learning and their linkages, identifying or/and developing appropriate research instruments, managing research in a maelstrom

of educational initiatives and conceptualising and investing in impact on an enduring basis. It seems however that a good if inconsistent start has been made across the board. Properly debated the inconsistencies should prove the toe-holds for further progress. Such debate however is extremely demanding in terms of time amongst scholars who are fully occupied at their project level.

4. Contribution to Priorities Themes It is too soon to lay claim to a contribution to the Council's Thematic Priorities. The Programme has relevance to several of the Themes and contributions can be expected, particularly to the theme of Knowledge, Communication and Learning. The Programme focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and skilled performance. The research work will seek to promote understanding of effective contexts for teaching and learning and, of necessity, will explore challenges and opportunities afforded by new technologies.

4.1 The project led by Ainscow (Inclusion) can be expected to contribute to the Theme 'Social Inclusion and Exclusion' whilst the project led by Sutherland (ICT Platforms for Learning) will make a contribution to 'People and Technology'.

4.2 Given the central place of education in the rhetoric of political development, the Programme, through its impact on achievement, should contribute to 'Economic Performance and Development' but only at several removes.

5. Overview: Significant achievements to date

5.1 **Research achievements.** It is too soon to expect many research achievements in the form of specific results. With that in mind the following activities are worthy of note.

5.1.1. A Delphi study of the expert science community's priorities for teaching about science (Osbourne et al, 2001) has been extensively cited as a significant

contribution to the debate on teaching the ‘nature of science’ and has had an impact on the QCA review of the UK science curriculum.

5.1.2 In relation to learners’ attainments, significant findings of differences between comparable groups of learners under different conditions have been reported in projects run by Millar, by Nunes, and by Newman. The findings have considerable pedagogic importance.

5.1.3 The installation and operation of the RCBN is a significant development both in terms of capacity building and methodological development (see papers by Gorard on identifying causal processes, and a warranting practice from research).

5.1.4 Contributions to theory have been initiated (see papers by Desforges on knowledge transformation and on integrating theories of learning).

5.2 **Communications highlights**

5.2.1 The Programme has developed a widely regarded impact plan based on best theory and practice in social science related fields.

5.2.2 Several projects are oversubscribed in terms of the volume of requests from users to participate or engage in active communications.

5.2.3 The consultation processes related to commissioning attracted very wide support and engagement and its commitment to building capacity in the field through design consultancy has attracted positive feedback.

6. **Programme Activities**

6.1 Networking activities have been pursued in three domains (a) within the Programme (b) nationally and (c) internationally.

6.1.1 Within Programme networking has comprised an annual Programme conference, regular Programme seminars and bespoke meetings with individual directors and teams. The annual conference has changed in structure and form to meet emerging needs and issues. The first conference was intended to allow project directors to get to know each other, to meet key partners and to confront the range of intellectual and management challenges of the Programme. Accordingly a wide range of external agents were present from the UK and beyond. The second conference was intended to afford conceptual development within the research field. Accordingly it was largely in-house with the addition of a small number of external keynote presenters.

In-Programme seminars have been held on a regular basis in part to create opportunities for project mixing and mutual support and in part to press for conceptual, theoretical and methodological advances. Each has been a 24 hour intensive. Bespoke meetings with directors, or project steering groups, have been held either by invitation or to meet specific challenges. Most ‘challenge’ meetings were held with a single project in pursuit of a better alignment with Project goals.

6.1.2 National networking has mainly taken the form of an extensive programme of meetings with leading people in a range of research, education or training organisations. The effort here has been to create alliances, keep the profile of the Programme high, keep the Programme at the policy cutting edge and position the Programme with related developments elsewhere.

6.1.3 International networking has been intended to share and enrich theory and practice in research and to benchmark the Programme against best practice. Work with PROO, NSF, Finnish academy and the EC has gained the Programme and international standing in structure, aspiration and organisation. It has opened the door to international collaboration. The work has proceeded through mutual

invitations to conferences and seminars, mutual consultancies and, particularly significant, the production of a benchmarking report on research management.

6.2 **Communications activities** have taken the form of papers, Programme newsletter, seminars, a Programme website and meetings in pursuit of strategic alliances with impact in mind. A great deal of investment has been made in personal presentations (to grass roots workers through in-service continuing professional development activities and to chief executives of, for example, the GTC, OFSTED) with a view to developing both ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top down’ activities in research based practice. Connections established have been passed on to Project Directors towards the development of project impact plans.

7. **Publications at the Programme Level** These consists in the main of conference papers prepared by the Director and presented to major conferences nationally and internationally. One theme in the papers represents a sustained programme of work attempting to advance theory and method in teaching and learning. Concepts central to the Programme’s objectives have been worked up from their theoretical setting, through operationalisation and onto their application in research and practice. Papers in this category have examined theories of learning, classroom processes, integrating theories of learning and teaching and knowledge transformation. Theory on transformation is beginning to have increasing impact most notably in developments in the LSDA.

A second theme in the papers has treated research agendas appropriate to raising attainment. Here the focus has been on identifying those R and D issues closest to attainment, i.e. those likely, through pedagogic manipulation to bring greatest returns on effort. These papers have made a contribution to discussions of research programme agendas in the UK and beyond. They have drawn extensively on research on teaching and learning. Perhaps their weakness, thus far, is that they are not well connected with research on educational change.

8. **Virements**

The office of the Director was called upon to work with the Programme for an extra 2 months beyond the end date for the original award. The costs of this extra work was mainly in the form of salaries for the Director and support staff. No additional award was necessary since the costs were met by virement from the original travel budget which was underspent.

9. **Major difficulties**

Several major difficulties were met in the managements of these early phases of the Programme. Some are fundamental to the nature of research and in that sense are emergently unsurmountable. Others were of a managerial nature and, with hindsight, might have been avoided.

9.1 Scientific difficulties include limitations of theory and methods in the field in respect of the vaunting ambitions for the Programme.

9.1.1 The Programme is properly ambitious. It is committed to excellent research with manifest impact. This ambition draws in a vast range of field of theories relating to teaching, learning, organisational processes (at various levels from front line to senior management) and educational change. The scope of relevant theory and the weakness of theory at every level was and is perhaps the most difficult and challenging aspect of the Programme. Weak theory weakens the specification of research questions and the operationalisation of measures. This challenge is always evident (and definitive of cutting edge research) but the scope facing TLRP has made it particularly daunting. It has been worked on (but by no means overcome) by the Director persistently challenging project directors for theoretical clarity, integration and operationalisation.

- 9.1.2 Research cultures in education form a very broad church. The Steering Committee recognised this from the outset and, committed to impact and capacity building, determined to work with researchers across the board. Sadly, some sections of the community do not share a taste for objective evidence, measurement or cause-effect modelling. Some are zealous in their antipathy to these concepts. Large amounts of time and energy had to be devoted to sustaining the catholic approach of the Steering Committee whilst working towards research findings and implications properly warranted by the research process. Fundamental to this challenge is a view of CPD as research strongly held by some leading people in the field.
- 9.1.3 As anticipated, it was soon evident that relevant research capacity was very skewed across the Programme domain. This was manifest in the weak bids (in research terms) in commissioning from the FE, work based, adult and community learning sectors. Properly basing commissioning decision on research quality left the Programme portfolio heavily skewed towards compulsory schooling. When funding for Phase 3 was acquired there was a commitment and determination to redress this imbalance but the only tool available was through capacity building in the commissioning phase. Much effort was expended here but the out-turn will only be evident at the point of Phase 3 commissioning decisions.
- 9.1.4 Commissioning on the basis of research excellence following an open competition to a very wide ranging specification provided an extremely disparate range of projects from, for example, home-school connections in the primary age range to the transfer from HE to professional work. This spread threatens the capacity of the Programme to add coherently to a knowledge base and to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. Of course, at some level of generality coherence can always be imposed but the price paid is a loss of contextual specificity. The issue of coherence was persistently addressed in Programme seminars through debates attempting to focus on core common issues but the countervailing force of

project directors' taste for within sector research cousins proved hard to withstand. Working practices are hard on theories.

9.1.5 Two management issues took up a disproportionate amount of time and energy and in that sense dogged the Director's office.

9.1.5. (a) The first arose from the offer of conditional awards to two phase 2 projects. The problem with each of these was that whilst the designs clearly had scientific merit they were not entirely in alignment with achieving the key Programme objective of securing impact through the development of warrantable implications for practice or policy.

In each case the conditions surrounding the award required, it seemed, relatively simply alterations to the proposed research design. In one case this was achieved easily and quickly. In a second case the design-revision debate was rejected in favour of ideological posturing. In the end, sufficient trim was achieved to merit the award but the time cost was out of all proportion to the benefit.

9.1.5 (b) The second managerial problem was much more serious. Following the Director's first annual report the RPB altered the terms of the award effectively to challenge the continued employment of the Assistant Director. This decision was taken on no evident data basis. It was made without a word of consultation with the Director, the Steering committee or the Chair of the Steering Committee. The decision created a crisis of morale in the Director's office and led to a collapse of trust between that office and, on the one hand, the Steering Committee and on the other, the ESRC managing office. A great deal of emotion, angst and sheer distracting work was created for the subsequent managing of the office. A balanced out-turn was achieved but not without sapping energy and health, costing lost momentum in the intellectual life of the Programme.

9.1.6 Some difficulties arose in the Council's finance office following commissioning ratification. A great deal of time was taken in finalising the small print of some awards – so much time that there was a threat of putting start dates back a whole academic year in some cases. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that some of the projects engaged partners across many institutions and organisations each of which had their own financial planning schedules. The day was saved in each case following some frantic appeals but when large grants are to be awarded across many different sectors for research projects which must respect the integrity of the teaching years, a sense of urgency and context must obtain in the Finance Office.

10. **Other issues**

Perhaps the most significant outstanding issue was the international impact of the Programme. The initial conception and ambition attracted significant attention. Major educational research Programmes were under consideration in Scandinavian and EU countries. The basic aspiration and structure of TLRP had considerable impact on these programmes especially in Holland and Finland. This opened the door for collaboration on a grand scale and raised the possibility for extensive international sharing of ideas, resources and research training. The EU funded pilot project, 'Learning Space' was set up under the joint leadership of TLRP and the Finnish Academy to explore further these possibilities with the expectation of mounting bids to the EU for cooperative international studies.

11. **Implications for future ESRC investments**

11.1 TLRP is unique in some important ways which make it unwise to generalise from this experience to other ventures. First, the funding comes not directly from ESRC coffers but from several other public bodies each of which has a significant vested interest in the outcomes of the Programme. These interests are manifest in the Membership of the Steering Committee and in the ambitious specifications –

that of research for direct impact. This research and development ethos is not common in the ESRC. Second, the focus of the research has been subject to extensive criticism for its lack of quality and lack of accumulated knowledge base. Third, the research work was committed to having impact in a context awash with other initiatives sharing the same aim. Research in this context has been likened to flying a glider made of jelly. Designing interventions, adding to a knowledge base and identifying warrantable policy/practice implications was bound to be difficult. Limitations in research capacity served to exacerbate this.

- 11.2 In hindsight and, given the educational context and limitations on capacity, it would have made more sense to sharpen the focus of the Programme by, for example, leaving out the school-age sector. Second, a Centre rather than a Programme model might have been a better approach to the management of so large a venture. A centre would have allowed for much greater coherence in recruiting studies to the banner and much tighter central management following commissioning. These points are implicit in the benchmarking study of Professor Kelly where their implications are extensively examined.
- 11.3 Impact costs money. Commonly conceived as dissemination it has a very poor track record in educational research. Cast, more properly, as a research and development activity it is an expensive exercise. It is an exercise essential to the success of the Programme yet the ESRC rules for resource allocation do not recognise this. In general the ESRC finance book is not well in tune with the ambitions of TLRP – nor surprising given the Programme’s unique position.
- 11.4 The lines of responsibility as between the Director, the Steering Committee and the RPB seemed clear at the outset but the man-management problem exposed frightful fault-lines in this structure. Further thought needs to be given to these responsibilities and to making them much more explicit.