

ESRC TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR PHASE III

1 Introduction

This £25m Programme is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Department for Education and Skills, the Scottish Executive, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Executive. It supports research projects and related activities designed to lead to significant improvements in outcomes for learners at all ages and stages in all sectors and contexts of education and training, including informal learning settings, throughout the United Kingdom. Learning outcomes are broadly conceived and include: the development of positive learner identities; the acquisition of qualifications; the acquisition of skill, understanding and bodies of knowledge; the development of attitudes and values relevant to a learning society; and the broader values and commitments relevant to individual and community development and civic concern.

Phase III of the Programme will focus on teaching and learning in **post-compulsory education and training** including higher and further education, community education, work-based learning (including continuing professional development) and lifelong / adult learning. Developing research capacity in these fields is also a key objective of this Phase. The remit also covers people moving between different sectors (including transitions from school) and teacher / trainer education. Phase III will build on previous and current work including the Programme's existing projects and the ESRC Learning Society Programme.

Approximately £9 million is available to support research projects under this Call for Proposals. Applications are invited for projects led by researchers based at Higher Education Institutions and independent research institutes recognised by the ESRC in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Steering Committee envisages supporting a number of major research projects (up to £1.25 m each) plus a range of complementary smaller projects (over £100,000 but below £500,000) which include a significant element of research capacity development in under-researched areas. Projects are expected to start from mid-2003 onwards and to run for up to five years until the current scheduled end-date of the Programme in December 2008.

As with the earlier phases, research as a partnership between policy makers, practitioners and researchers will be a continuing theme of Phase III. Funded projects will be required to have detailed Communication and Impact Plans showing how they will transform research evidence collaboratively to maximise its impact on practice and its contribution to policy-making.

The commissioning process will involve two stages. Short **Outline Proposals** will be due by 15 April 2002. Shortlisted projects will then be asked to submit **Full Proposals** by mid-October 2002. Further details of the Call for Proposals and the 'Guidelines and advice for applicants' may be accessed through the ESRC website - <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/fundingopps.htm>.

In line with the Programme's capacity building objectives, support is available to applicants in preparing their proposals. This includes a series of workshops organised by the Programme Director's office to discuss the aims and scope of the Programme and the Phase III commissioning process with potential applicants. In addition the Programme Director's Office and the Research Capacity Building Network will be happy to discuss ideas for research with potential applicants and answer any queries regarding these matters. Further information on the support available is provided in section 12 below.

2. Programme Objectives

The core objectives of the Programme are to:

- enhance learning at all ages and stages in education, training and life-long learning.
- develop the capability for transforming the knowledge base relevant to learning into effective and efficient teaching and training practices.
- enhance the system-wide capacity for research based practice in teaching and learning.
- promote and extend multi-disciplinary and multi-sector research in teaching and learning.

3. The Current Programme.

The Programme was established in 1998. Early in 1999 a Programme Director was appointed to lead and represent the Programme and to build networks and strategic partnerships appropriate to securing its successful impact. The Programme Director is Professor Charles Desforges, (School of Education, University of Exeter). He is supported by an Assistant Director, Dr John Kanefsky, who has particular responsibility for the development of the Programme's Communication and Impact Strategy, and a small office of support staff (see section 12 below for contact details). Professor Desforges reaches the end of his period of appointment in early 2002 and a new Programme Director, Professor Andrew Pollard, will take over the management of the Programme Office from 1 March 2002. There will, however, be a period of managed transition between the two Programme Office teams, to ensure the service given to Programme stakeholders is not affected and in particular that the support for Phase III commissioning is seamless.

Phase I was commissioned in 1999. Four Research Networks and two Career Development Associates started in early 2000 under this Phase and will report in early 2003. Phase II Projects were commissioned in 2000. Nine major research projects commenced in late 2000 / early 2001 under this Phase and will run to 2004/2005.

A Research Capacity Building Network, based in the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University and led by Professor Stephen Gorard, was also established in the summer of 2001. The Network will be designing and implementing a range of research capacity building and training activities, targeted both at researchers within the current Programme and at the wider

teaching and learning research community, with a view to enhancing their capacity to conduct high-quality research using a range of appropriate social scientific techniques. It will also be providing support to applicants during the Phase III commissioning process (see section 12 for further information). The Programme is also supporting a small number of Research Training Fellowships for practitioners who wish to conduct a PhD attached to Phase I or II projects.

There is already a significant amount of work under Phases I and II in the post-compulsory field. This includes research on:

- the significance of communities of practice and the role of the wider regulatory framework of the employment relationship (for example, wages and conditions of employment, levels of unionisation, legal requirements) to workplace learning (*Phase I Research Network*);
- the effectiveness of problem-based learning in assisting students to achieve specific competencies in the education of healthcare professionals (with particular reference to under-graduate nursing education programmes) (*Phase I Career Development Associate*);
- educational practice, learning and learning cultures in Further Education - to deepen understanding of the complexities of learning; identify, implement and evaluate strategies for the improvement of learning opportunities; and enhance practitioners' capacity for enquiry into FE Practice (*Phase II Project*);
- new ways of encouraging high quality learning in undergraduate courses in biological sciences, economics, engineering, history, and media and communications including an examination of the quality of student learning and how it is influenced, not just by teaching and assessment, but by the whole teaching-learning environment (*Phase II Project*);
- three groups of graduates (accountants, engineers and nurses) through their first three years of full-time employment to explore what is learnt in the early years after graduation, the best way to facilitate this learning, how university knowledge is adapted to practical situations and to identify approaches to improving the management and support of learners for such groups (*Phase II Project*);
- the ways in which new technologies can be used in educational settings to enhance learning including the design and evaluation of longitudinal teaching and learning initiatives using new technologies such as computers within the areas of English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities, Modern Foreign Languages and Music, plus learning that cuts across traditional subject disciplines, across the primary, secondary and FE sectors (*Phase II Project*).

Further details of all these projects, and all the other projects supported under Phases I and II (plus links to individual websites, where applicable) may be found on the Programme's website at <http://www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP>. Research supported under Phase III will be expected to complement this existing work under the Programme. The researchers engaged in the projects listed above will be happy to discuss them with potential applicants.

4. **The Practice and Policy Context for Phase III**

There is widespread recognition of the role of learning in the realisation of social and economic goals and of personal fulfilment. Huge social, economic and personal impacts and vast sums of money are at stake in the pursuit of education, training and learning policies. Post-school education, training and self-directed learning are therefore increasingly at or near the top of the policy agenda in the United Kingdom as a whole and in all its nations and regions. In this context a very broad conception of learning is required - including the acquisition, understanding and utilisation of bodies of knowledge and skills, through the development of personal and social skills and beyond into the development of the values and commitments of good citizenship.

A wide range of government departments is involved beyond the Department for Education and Skills, including the Department of Trade and Industry, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the Home Office, the Department of Health and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (and their equivalents in the devolved administrations). Even larger numbers of non-departmental public bodies, other quasi-governmental institutions and non-governmental bodies are engaged, as well as the institutions, employers, voluntary and community groups and other organisations that deliver and support specific elements of teaching, training and learning.

There are three main strands to national policies affecting post-compulsory learning:

- (a) First, within a global economy, improving both the overall skills base and the skills of individuals is seen as having a central role in improving the UK's international competitiveness, through the creation of a knowledge-based economy and a highly skilled and flexible labour force. A major requirement of the post-compulsory education and training system is to provide the intellectual capital upon which corporate performance, creativity and innovation can be developed.
- (b) Second, post-school education, training and personal learning are seen as playing central roles in the creation of a more inclusive society and the development of citizenship and social capital through the continuing engagement of all citizens in lifelong learning (within education, employment and other contexts) and the provision of enhanced opportunities for personal development and fulfilment.
- (c) Third, and closely related to the first two strands, there is recognition of the need to promote **inclusion** through opportunities for all citizens to engage in both formal and informal learning and at the same time **excellence** through ever-increasing standards of achievement. Inclusive approaches are seen as particularly important for individuals not currently engaged with any formal learning, especially those who have had poor outcomes from the compulsory years of education or who identify themselves as marginalised or inactive learners. Research which promotes the learning outcomes of such constituencies is particularly welcomed by the Steering Committee.

There are, however, longstanding and seemingly intractable problems facing many learning contexts in post compulsory education and training. The assumptions underlying the policy strands outlined above are also contested in some quarters. Concentration by policy makers on supply-side responses to what may be demand-side problems (for both individuals and organisations) has been criticised. The concentration on qualifications is seen as unhelpful for many learners. There is a perceived reliance on human capital theory in the "skills agenda". In the workplace, learning and skills may be seen as derived needs, rather than aims in themselves.

Challenges include the following:

- Among young adults, there is a significant minority who are disaffected from societal aims, including education. Many are "lost" from formal learning, and even from the visible economy and society. Some of the most effective learning for disadvantaged young adults may also be in socially undesirable directions: the effectiveness of prisons as crime schools has been persistently, if anecdotally, cited. There are also concerns about drop-out rates from further and higher education among economically disadvantaged groups.
- In the world of work, low skill and short term employment may not bring opportunities for skills enhancement or other employment-related learning, whether formal or informal. Small and medium sized enterprises find it particularly difficult to sustain coherent training programmes for their employees. There are moreover persistent questions about the effectiveness of much training provision, but with little evaluation of training outcomes. Commentators have noted the pressures on employers to take a narrow and short-term view of the value of training and still more of wider learning. Power relationships also mean that training may not be directed at those who need it most.
- The number of adults with poor basic skills (especially literacy and numeracy) is higher than in comparable countries and a range of supply-side initiatives have as yet had limited success in tackling this. In particular, bringing the "casualties of schooling" back into formal learning remains a difficult challenge. Some agencies argue that supported informal and self-directed learning is likely to be the most effective strategy for these groups.
- Patterns of participation (by class, gender, ethnicity, disability, geography, etc.) are very uneven and highly resistant to policy intervention.

However, all sectors of post-compulsory education, training and learning recognise the need to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the education and training system (broadly conceived) and thereby the outcomes for learners. They are also working to understand the needs and wishes of learners, stimulate their engagement in structured learning and increase their demand for enhanced skills. In support of that, Government is acting both directly and indirectly to increase investment in education and training as a proportion of national income.

It is of course also recognised by Government and other agencies that the fields of post-compulsory education and training are extremely diverse and that different levers apply in different contexts. Government and policy bodies have therefore developed a wide range of policy initiatives directed at specific sectors and contexts of education and training provision within the overall strategy for enhancing the skills needed for economic competitiveness and improving opportunities for learners. These are increasingly intended to stimulate both the supply and demand sides of education, training and continuing professional development, and self-directed / informal learning. The policies have also been developed in the context of differences between the post-compulsory education and training systems in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Policy and practice decisions intended to increase the effectiveness of teaching training and learning in the wide range of contexts after the years of schooling have far reaching consequences. It is broadly recognised that these decisions should be grounded as far as possible on a firm evidence base, but that this evidence base is currently largely inadequate or poorly understood in many of the component sectors of post-compulsory learning, especially work based learning and informal learning. There is little evidence, moreover, as to whether the core processes of teaching and learning have been changed significantly by policy initiatives, or whether they need to be changed.

There is therefore a growing consensus that it is essential to develop a more firmly research-informed approach to policy and practice in education and training. This would enhance the knowledge base for teaching and learning and embed both the current knowledge base and new understandings more widely and effectively in practice. Phase III of the Programme is seen as an important opportunity to contribute to those aims and to develop the capacity for further research in support of them.

5. The Scientific Context

In recognition of the broad scope of interest in the Programme, the contested views on the nature and status of educational enquiry and the critical context in which the Programme will operate, an extended process of consultation has taken place to inform the research agenda.

This has involved discussions with a wide range of researchers and potential beneficiaries. It has also involved discussions with research teams and educational administrations in the USA and the EU where similar projects are in hand. The proposals in this Specification have been significantly shaped by these exercises (see the Programme's WWW pages at <http://www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP> for further information on the outcomes of this consultation process).

The Programme has also commissioned the Tavistock Institute to conduct a review of current pedagogic research and practice in post-compulsory education and lifelong learning. The main aims of this review were to synthesise current conceptualisations of pedagogy as outlined in the current literature and to produce an overview of current evidence and understanding

that could improve teaching and learning practice and lead to improved learning outcomes. The final report from this review is expected to be available from the Programme's website in February 2002 and it is hoped that this will be a useful background resource for Phase III applicants.

The nature and function of educational enquiry and research is contested. From one perspective such enquiry is conducted to identify 'what works' (for whom and under what circumstances) through experimental or quasi-experimental studies designed to establish and communicate a body of 'safe' knowledge, which is intended to inform the educator's choice of practices and to build the design principles of new methods.

From an alternative perspective, teaching and learning do not consist of, and cannot be reduced to, a set of controlled variables. In this view learning is a social process, created in human exchange and its enhancement involves judgements based on analysis appropriate to particular situations. Educational enquiry is not a process separate from educational action. Rather, it is an organic part of it. Engagement in educational enquiry in this, more interpretative, perspective is intended to promote wise judgement in emergent situations.

The Programme Steering Committee recognises the validity of these and other alternative perspectives and **does not privilege any particular discipline or methodology**. It is satisfied that the complexity of educational phenomena calls for a range of forms of enquiry, including historical and comparative international work. Research proposals drawing on a range of perspectives will therefore be considered to the degree that (as in all cases) the projects meet the objectives of the Programme (see section 2 above) and that the methods proposed are **appropriate to the research questions**. In particular, the Steering Committee seeks research proposals which are relevant and useful to their potential beneficiaries. They should have good potential for transformation and generalisation to a range of relevant policy and practice contexts in support of improving learning outcomes.

The track record of educational enquiry in respect of teaching and learning has been heavily criticised by some commentators, who have suggested that there is little evidence of an accumulated or accumulating knowledge base in the field. It has also been argued that there is no evident focus or strategic thrust either to research or to the dissemination of research findings. For the system of post compulsory education, in particular, a review of reviews suggests that there is little research which explores the link between teaching and training inputs on the one hand and learning processes and outcomes on the other, especially in work based learning, community education, adult and voluntary education.

The post-compulsory domain is not, however, a greenfield site. There are bodies of world class research relevant to the aims of the Programme, much of the UK component of which has been funded by the ESRC. The commitment of the Programme in this field is set out in section 3 (above). If appropriately transformed through the dedicated work of educators and researchers building on professional expertise, much of this research could be expected to enhance considerably the outcomes for learners.

There is, for example, extensive and well theorised work on the acquisition of practical and intellectual skills; on the development of expertise in a wide range of domains relevant to professional and other work based performance; on general cognitive and metacognitive processes at the heart of human and learning; on teachers and learning processes (including the processes of assessment and work management) and on motivation.

The Programme will encourage researchers and research users to create and develop communities of learners dedicated to building on the existing knowledge base with the objective of enhancing learning. Participants will be encouraged to think creatively in order to transform and enhance current knowledge in the development of high powered learning communities. They will also be expected to achieve the widest possible impact of the work through committed interactive communication reaching beyond the immediate parties to the Programme and projects.

In pursuing these aims participants in the Programme will be expected to make fruitful links, where relevant, with existing research projects / networks under the Programme and with related research and development activities outside the Programme. This includes, for example, work being pursued by ESRC Centres such as CREDIT and SKOPE (see Annex 2 for further details of relevant current ESRC investments); the DfES and other government departments and agencies; professional and sector bodies; and relevant programmes in other countries.

6. Research Areas

The consultation and review exercise revealed a very wide range of issues and potential research questions worthy of programmatic work (see the October 2001 Newsletter on the Programme website). At the same time it exposed a clear preference for a strategic focus on a relatively small number of core themes likely to have a cross-sector significance and to provide direct applicability to learning and learning processes. Such a focus would promote coherence in the work of the Programme and maximise the probability of making a significant impact. These lessons from the consultation exercise are reflected in the proposed research themes and indicative approaches.

There will be three intimately interconnected core research themes. These are:

1. Learners and learning
2. Teachers, trainers and learning environments
3. Learning communities

It is unlikely that the maximum potential benefits of the Programme would be achieved by progressing research and collaborative knowledge transformation and appropriation in any one of these areas taken alone. Projects that cut across these themes are particularly welcomed.

Theme 1. Learners and Learning

It is a truism that learners are at the heart of the education and training process and yet policies and other arrangements intended to enhance learning rarely take the learner and learning processes as focus. Whilst there is a vast literature and an increasing understanding of the behaviour of learners in complex social settings, this material has yet to be harnessed in the enhancement of learning broadly conceived. Similarly, whilst biographical experiences and narratives are often seen as significant influences on learner attitudes, their cumulative effect on individuals' learning throughout the life-course is imperfectly understood.

Relevant research questions include:

- how are learners' identities shaped by educational and training experiences?
- how do learners' biographies influence their attitudes to new learning?
- how can learners' motivation be maximised?
- how can learners' image and self confidence be enhanced?
- how can learners' repertoire of learning strategies and styles be extended?
- how can the learners' point of view (learners' voice) be put to best use in the design and management of learning experiences? and, fundamentally,
- how can learners' identities, motivation, styles, strategies and perspectives be linked to enhanced learning?

For each of these questions, the underlying task is to identify and enhance the characteristics, dispositions and behaviours of learners in diverse settings which best promote and deliver effective learning.

It is recognised that a great deal of learning in the domain proceeds informally and that learners shift from setting to setting, spending only relatively small amounts of time in formal learning environments. In pursuit of enhanced attainment this raises the following questions: what is the relationship between formal and informal learning; how can environmental transitions be capitalised on as learning opportunities; what is involved in the learning process known as 'knowledge application' or 'knowledge transformation' - how do learners learn to use / apply / transform what they know in new settings?

Similarly, proposals in this field will be expected to recognise the considerable diversity that exists in the experiences and circumstances of learners. This may be manifested by appropriate consideration of factors such as gender, ethnicity, economic and social background and disability.

Theme 2. Teachers, trainers and learning environments

Provision for learning involves putting learners in the way of learning experiences through the work of teachers and trainers (broadly defined) and the design and management of learning settings. Across the domain of post compulsory education those playing a role in the provision for learning take on a wide range of designations. Some are, formally, teachers or trainers (mostly teaching an academic subject or a professional skill). Others are managers with a direct training responsibility whilst others might play a significant role in provision / support / feedback but have no formally designated training component in their job description.

Similarly, learning environments may be formally designated, designed and provisioned as such (e.g. classrooms broadly defined) whilst others may be normal work sites and yet others simply 'learning opportunity settings' including the home. The efficacy of such settings for enhancing diverse forms of learning outcome is likely to vary widely, as may their effectiveness in terms of access, participation and inclusion.

Individual learners shift along the 'learner' / 'teacher' continuum and across a wide diversity of settings. They report a wide range of qualities of learning experience, from the outstanding to the defective. A great deal more needs to be known about the qualities of effective "teachers" (teachers, trainers and others with less formal roles in providing supportive environments, across post-compulsory learning) to provide a sound knowledge base for enhancement. In this context, the conditions within which teachers, trainers, mentors etc. work becomes an important issue.

Significant questions include:

- which characteristics of effective teachers / trainers / learning support workers lead to effective and appropriate learning?
- what is effective practice and how can it be taught or otherwise spread?
- which characteristics of assessment systems maximise learning and how does teachers' / trainers' engagement with these systems impact on learners' outcomes?
- what professional, workplace and relational considerations enable teachers and trainers to enhance learner's outcomes most effectively?
- how can the teaching of academic subjects or professional skills be enhanced?
- what are the characteristics of cutting edge developments in training in different parts of the post-compulsory sector?
- what are the design characteristics of effective learning environments - particularly in regard to the integration of experience across ICT / multi-media, multi-setting provision and the improvement of access, participation and inclusion? and
- what are the cost-effectiveness parameters of various forms of provision?

Theme 3 Learning communities

If learning is to be improved on a persistent basis, educational and training providers will have to develop continuously both personally and at the organisational level in order to provide the appropriate intellectual and material infrastructure and to keep pace with technological advances in their delivery. On an international level, there is a body of well established research and theory pertaining to teacher development and organisation learning. This work draws on a wide range of social science disciplines and fields.

It is clear that many changes to national, regional or local educational and training policies have not in the past had significant effects on learning processes or learning outcomes. Policies are mediated at the level of providing institutions (including workplaces) and individual practitioners'

actions. However, they are rarely appropriated by practitioners and learners to become part of everyday practice, identity or workplace cultures.

Research and development capacity needs to be built at both individual and institutional levels. Research must also explore the costs and benefits of national and local policies in respect of learning outcomes.

Research on organisational structures, decision making, communities of practice, institutional improvement and effectiveness, the impact of social capital and on motivation and volition, affords a rich but fragmented basis on which to build learning communities committed to continuous improvement. The research has yet to be applied holistically to the task of improving teaching, training and individual learning.

Some key research questions here are:

- how are teaching and learning cultures formed and shaped?
- how do these cultures interact with each other?
- how can different kinds of organisation (including workplaces and informal learning settings as well as educational institutions) become learning organisations and be transformed into communities with a capacity for continuous improvement?
- how can teachers' and trainers' capacity to enhance learning best be achieved?
- what are the impacts of education and training policies on organisational and individual provision for learning, and what are the cost-benefit implications?
- what conditions facilitate the appropriation of new learning by practitioners and learners and its embedding within everyday practices, individual identities and institutional cultures?
- what processes, at the individual and organisational level, maximise improvements in the professional provision for learning?
- how do power and conflict within learning settings affect the availability and effectiveness of opportunities for learning?
- how do accountability and funding structures shape teaching and learning cultures?

7. Research methodologies and approaches

In the review of research capacity in the field of teaching and learning commissioned by the Programme it was argued that for research to be effective (i.e. to contribute to theory development and the advancement of teaching / training practices) it would have to call on a wide range of expertise. This would need to include the capacity to understand and apply social science theory to complex settings; to design and manage research and research transformation / communication projects; to analyse results rigorously using sophisticated models; and the capacity to understand the everyday operation and management of teaching, training and work settings.

In recognition of the force of this argument it is expected that proposals will come from multi-disciplinary teams appropriate to the proposed research area. For example, this may include: social scientists from a range of disciplines and

applied fields; practitioners; educational and work place managers; data analysts; and learners. Such teams will represent a cross-community investment in the success of the Programme and a significant enhancement of research capacity.

It is also recognised that if the research is to have impact beyond the settings in which it is conducted then the theoretical and managerial issues involved will have to be confronted. In theoretical terms the effect of context and the issues of generalisability will have to be factored into designs. In terms of management, it is expected that all parties to educational effectiveness will be engaged with the research process throughout, from formulating research questions and design to transformation of results and maximising impact on policy and practice. In this Programme, working to support influence and impact is a continuous process from day one. It is not merely 'what we do with the results'.

The Steering Committee will look for evidence that:

- appropriate partners from relevant learning communities have been involved in formulating the research questions;
- the research methods proposed are suitable for those research questions;
- the project timescale is appropriate to the research design;
- the project team include or can recruit / train team members with the range of skills required;
- and that project costings (including those for communication and impact activities) are robust in relation to the research proposed.

It is anticipated that all **Full Proposals** under Phase III will start with a review of relevant knowledge bases as sketched out above. They will progress educational methods in order to engage with the relevant learners and learner groups and promote improved learning outcomes. They need to demonstrate that they will contribute to broadening and deepening the knowledge base for improving learners' achievements. Proposals will need to include rigorous procedures to implement, research and evaluate these innovations at the levels of fundamental theory, cost effectiveness, generalisability and sustainability and of practical impact with regard to the objectives of the Programme.

Outline Proposals will need to indicate the strength of the current knowledge base and outline the parameters of the more detailed review they will undertake if shortlisted.

The Steering Committee would particularly welcome proposals which combine appropriately controlled quantitative designs with qualitative methods to maximise the lessons learned from projects and the capacity to apply them to the widest possible range of relevant learning locations / setting / learner groups.

8. **Project Teams**

In the light of this commentary, bids for Programme support are invited from project teams which can deliver, in the fields of post-compulsory education and learning, on the following:

- set up learning relationships with partners from all relevant interested parties including practitioners, learners, policy makers and the research community;
- while recognising diversity and difference, achieve significant improvements in learning outcomes for identified groups of learners;
- work in authentic settings of teaching and learning in post-school education, the workplace or in everyday life;
- wherever appropriate, bring multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary approaches to research, including the involvement of appropriate practitioners, learners and other potential beneficiaries in research teams;
- enhance the capacity for a research based approach to education and training practices;
- work in partnership with the wider teaching, training and informal learning communities, to achieve maximum impact of the research results;
- make research-based contributions to the fundamental understanding of teaching and learning and to effective practical action in post-compulsory education and learning.

It is expected that relevant, high quality research teams will put in place the management support and interactive partnership, communication and feedback structures necessary for this ambitious work. Support will be available from the Programme Office and the Programme's Research Capacity Building Network over an extended period of promotion, consultation and development - see section 11 below.

9. **Relevance and contribution to the ESRC's Thematic Priorities**

The Programme will make a significant contribution to the thematic priority referring to **Knowledge, Communication and Learning**. The Programme's research themes focus 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 the challenges and opportunities afforded by new technologies. It will promote life long learning at the level of pedagogy. The Programme also has relevance to other ESRC themes such as **Social Stability and Exclusion, Work and Organisations, Governance and Citizenship** and **Economic Performance and Development**.

10. **Programme profile**

Contributing disciplines and areas. It is anticipated that the research Programme will be best advanced by collaborative work appropriate to the

research area of the project. This might involve a number of disciplines and fields including anthropology, comparative studies, cultural studies, economics, education, history, linguistics, management, psychology, sociology and applications of ICT. Relevant perspectives from outside the social sciences (e.g. from medical research or business management) might prove especially useful, particularly in respect to knowledge transformation and its appropriation.

Involvement of practitioners, policy makers and learners. The comprehensive involvement of appropriate practitioners, policy makers, learners and other potential beneficiaries is essential to the success of the Programme. The Programme has already engaged a wide range of interested parties in consultations shaping this Specification. The further engagement of relevant beneficiaries as integral members of funded research teams is inherent in the nature of the research goals and themes. In addition, the continuous involvement of practitioners, learners and other beneficiaries is regarded as fundamental to developing and retaining a broad base of support for the Programme and for ensuring its impact through interactive transformation and dissemination of research findings and methodological / conceptual advances. It will furthermore work to ensure high levels of intellectual and political support for the Programme. The Programme's strategy for working with all its stakeholders in support of maximising its impact on policy and practice are identified in the Programme's Communication and Impact Plan.

Successful projects in Phase III of the Programme will be required to have their own **Communication and Impact Plans** (see **Annex 1**). These will set out their strategy for:

- interactive engagement with appropriate partners;
- transformation / communication of project results and other outcomes to relevant groups and individuals, in support of maximising impact and influence; and
- other activities relevant to their research topic involving stakeholders beyond these immediate partners.

Project teams will also be required to commit themselves to contributing to the Programme's Communication and Impact Plan (which will evolve as the Programme work proceeds). This will include participating in Communication and Impact Plan activities through the life of the Programme - which will exceed the life of most individual projects. They must in particular be prepared to report and discuss interim research findings methodological and conceptual developments etc. in pursuit of the objectives of the Programme, and contribute as requested by the Programme Director to other activities such as policy forums and international collaborations.

Capacity Building Network Successful projects will be expected to be committed to supporting and working with the Programme's research capacity activities, including the Research Capacity Building Network. This will include making their own expertise available for assisting skills development within the Programme, where relevant and appropriate.

Co-funding and complementary funding. The Programme centres on research, analysis and knowledge transformation to inform basic understanding and practical action. It is anticipated that this should be attractive to a range of research and development partners who would bring with them co-funding and/or support in kind.

Partners in HE, FE, commerce and industry and adult / informal learning might be anticipated to provide material support in many forms (e.g. money, seconded staffing, material, equipment, access, support for communication and engagement activities). Proposers should indicate what support from partner organisations they have already identified or discussed in principle with them. The extended bidding period, especially between shortlisting decisions and submission of final proposals, will afford opportunities for co-funding to be fully explored. The Programme Office will offer support in this process as appropriate.

International Comparative and Collaborative Research. Where appropriate, proposals may include an international comparative dimension to the research and/or collaboration with overseas researchers, policy-makers or practitioners. The Programme has developed collaborative links with a number of current or proposed overseas Programmes in the field including the Programming Council for Educational Research (PROO) of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), which is developing a major programme on Vocational Education, and the Finnish Academy, which has a major new Programme on 'Life as Learning'. Applications which involve collaboration with these or other relevant overseas programmes will be welcomed. The costs incurred by overseas collaborators in contributing directly to the research may be included under the overseas travel and subsistence and exceptional items headings as appropriate.

11. Management of a change in Programme Directors

Formal responsibility for the direction of TLRP changes on 1 March 2002 when Professor Charles Desforges (University of Exeter) is succeeded by Professor Andrew Pollard (University of Cambridge). However, to maximise continuity and support to Phase III applicants, an extensive period of overlap has been provided. Professor Pollard will be in post as Director Designate from 1 January 2002 and may be consulted on proposals. Professor Desforges, together with the Assistant Director, Dr John Kanefsky, will continue as part of the Programme Team until 30 April, 2002. The administrative office of TLRP is expected to transfer from Exeter to Cambridge on 1 May 2002.

12 Support for the Development of Phase III Applications.

In line with the Programme's objective of enhancing research capacity in the field, support will be offered to applicants during the commissioning process (both in the preparation of outline proposals and in the development of full proposals by shortlisted applicants).

As a part of this support, the current Director and Assistant Director (Professor Charles Desforges and Dr John Kanefsky of the University of Exeter) in

collaboration with the new Programme Director (Professor Andrew Pollard of the University of Cambridge), will conduct a set of regional workshops for intending applicants in January 2002.

- York 15 January
- Cardiff 22 January
- London 24 January
- Edinburgh 30 January

These will be invitation based events as numbers at each venue are limited, so only one member of each team should normally participate. Please contact the Programme Office (see below) for further details.

Both the current and new Directors as appropriate will also be happy to discuss research proposals / ideas with individual potential applicants, without prejudice to the Steering Committee's final decisions.

The current Director and Assistant Director can be contacted (up to 30 April 2002) as follows:

Teaching and Learning Research Programme
School of Education, University of Exeter
Heavitree Road, Exeter
Devon EX1 2LU

Telephone: 01392 264845
Fax: 01392 264945

Director: Professor Charles Desforges
E-mail: c.w.desforges@exeter.ac.uk

Assistant Director: Dr John Kanefsky
E-mail: j.w.kanefsky@exeter.ac.uk

The new Director (with effect from 1 March 2002) can be contacted as follows:

Professor Andrew Pollard
Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge
Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2BX

Telephone: 01223 369631
Fax: 01223 324421

E-mail: ajp67@cam.ac.uk

Support for applicants is also available from the Programme's Research Capacity Building Network, based at the School of Social Sciences at the University of Cardiff. The network will offer up to two hours' support for all bidding teams on request at the Outline proposal stage and deeper support for shortlisted bids. Further information can be obtained or by contacting the

Network (see below) or from their website at
<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/capacity>

Professor Stephen Gorard
ESRC TLRP Research Capacity Building Network
Cardiff University School of Social Sciences
Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff CF10 3WT

Tel. 029 2087 5345
Fax. 029 2087 4678

E-mail: Gorard@cardiff.ac.uk

Further information, particularly about the regional Workshops for Phase III can be had from the Programme Office and from the Programme Website at:

<http://www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP>

After 1 May the Website will migrate (a re-direct will be provided) to:

<http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP>

Background reports on the outcomes of the consultation process for Phase III and the review of current pedagogic research and practice in post-compulsory education are also available from this site (the latter from February 2002)

Further details of the formal Call for Applications, and 'Guidelines and advice for applicants' may be accessed through the ESRC website, at:

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/fundingopps.htm>

ESRC TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR PHASE III

ANNEX 1 - COMMUNICATION AND IMPACT PLANS

n.b. Engagement, partnership and impact are integral to the whole of the Phase III Specification, not a bolt-on afterthought. This Annex must therefore be read in conjunction with the whole of the Specification.

You should also read the ESRC's Research Priorities Board Policy on User Engagement (Appendix 1 to this Annex).

1. Introduction

It is central to the Programme that the research it funds is aimed at improving the learning outcomes (broadly conceived) of the widest possible cohort of learners in all relevant settings. In support of this objective all projects funded under Phase III of the Programme will be required to have a detailed Communication and Impact Plan. This will address how the project will work collaboratively with its partners; communication into and from the project; work in support of impact throughout the life of the project; and longer term impact from its conceptual, methodological and research findings. It should complement the Programme's Communication and Impact Plan but focus on the specific context of the project.

Detailed Communication and Impact Plans will be required only from shortlisted projects but Outline Applications must include as part of section 12 of the application form a brief (c. 200 word) description of their strategic approach to communication and impact.

2. The Programme's Communication and Impact Plan

The core aims of the Communication and Impact Plan are to:

- support the Programme's primary objective of enhancing the achievement of learners at all ages and stages in education, training and lifelong learning;
- engage with learners, teachers and trainers to ensure our research reflects their needs and is transformed and communicated effectively in discussion with them, so as to maximise its relevance, usefulness and impact;
- form effective partnerships with organisations, groups and individuals who can contribute to and benefit from the Programme's work;
- promote the Programme's contribution to the development of policy in the field of teaching and learning;
- foster support for the Programme from all those who share its aims.

Impact and influence may be at policy, conceptual, management or practical levels, or a combinations of these. However impact is conceived not as a simple linear flow

of research followed by writing up, dissemination of findings and adoption by practice and policy, but as a much more collaborative effort: interactive, iterative, constructive, distributed and transformative.

The Programme's strategy therefore involves a much broader range of activity than 'disseminating' research. It aims to create and sustain processes both to deliver on wider Programme objectives and to support the development of a favourable climate for maximum research impact, building bridges between research and practice / policy communities.

The key activities envisaged in the Plan are:

- working with networks of practitioners, learners and others to deliver, transform and communicate research evidence and other assets (reviews, methodologies, perspectives, etc.) to the widest possible number of their peers, and to support practitioners in appropriating and embedding research and advanced techniques into their practice;
- engaging with a wide range of user organisations and other stakeholders to embed the aims, approaches and findings of the Programme in the cultural context of both research and practitioner communities;
- contributing to (and where appropriate organising and leading) strategic debates about teaching and learning, to influence policy and practice;
- working with key organisations in the field to raise the profile of evidence-informed teaching and learning as a significant and effective route to lasting improvements in outcome for learners;
- communicating about conceptual, methodological and practical approaches at both Programme and project level with the research, practitioner and policy communities;
- supporting training and other capacity-building activity which improves the ability of the teaching and learning community to undertake relevant research and transform it appropriately for a range of audiences;
- facilitating the learning and co-operation opportunities generated by discussion between projects within the Programme, to develop both conceptual and practical advances in transforming research into impact.

Further information on the Programme Communication and Impact Plan can be found on the Programme website:

To 30 April 2002: <http://www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP>

From 1 May 2002: <http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP>

3. Project Communication and Impact

No particular model of research methodology, engagement, partnership, transformation, communication or impact is privileged under the Programme. Project Communication and Impact Plans will, however, need to ensure that the range of approaches employed is demonstrably appropriate to the research envisaged and its likely beneficiaries / stakeholders.

A clear strategy for impact will be required and this will be subject to thorough evaluation through the peer review process. The outcome of that evaluation will be an important criterion in the assessment of proposals for funding.

Successful Phase III applications will go beyond simply spreading awareness of the research through dissemination and communication activities in the hope that this will rub off on policy and practice. Rather, the Programme is looking for imaginative project communication proposals which are:

- **Collaborative** and **Iterative**, exchanging ideas between researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. The aim is to foster an environment where all can contribute and where awareness / use of research evidence are routine and central to both policy and practice.
- **Interactive** and **Constructive**, because researchers are just one set of participants. Projects need to work with a wide range of partners, to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts.
- **Transformative**, to get the best of both basic and more applied research into improved policy and practice. This means transforming research evidence to generate practical outcomes / products.
- **Customer focused and Distributed**, since without demand from practice and policy communities impact will inevitably be sub-optimal. Projects must be prepared to share 'ownership' of their work and welcome its re-invention for particular circumstances.

It is recognised that there are dilemmas about the intensity and extent of these elements, which will inevitably vary over the timescale of the project and between different partners. Proposers should take a realistic view about what is achievable by themselves and each of their partners, and include appropriate resources for the management of the workload involved.

Priority will be given to proposals that employ **innovative approaches** and partnerships to make the best use of Project and Programme assets - especially those generated in collaboration with project partners. Such approaches may include:

- methodological developments;
- new conceptual / theoretical approaches and the practical application of these;
- new networks of influence and communication to reach and influence research, practice and policy communities;
- skills which can be shared and developed;
- transformative products such as new teaching materials, learner support systems, etc., accompanied by clear plans for their practical application;
- innovative and interactive uses of ICT (broadly defined).

Applications will need to demonstrate for all proposed elements of their Communication and Impact Plan why they are likely to be the most effective routes to influence and impact with the stakeholder groups they address and the best method of securing the engagement and communication outcomes envisaged. More 'traditional' formats such as **conferences** and **publications** are not, of course, excluded, and have their place in communication and impact. They are, however, unlikely to be sufficient on their own.

4. Structure of the Communication and Impact Plan

Full Proposals will require a detailed Communication and Impact Plan. This should identify:

- the key partners / networks for the proposed research (in practitioner, policy and research communities) and how the project will work with them over the life of the project - including research design, the conduct of the research, methodological and conceptual developments, transformation and communication of outcomes;
- targeted and realistic plans for communicating with other audiences / stakeholders (users and other beneficiaries) for the Project's research and other outputs and findings;
- the communication channels into and from the project;
- how the research team will ensure that project findings will be transformed and communicated to different audiences in appropriate formats;
- how the project will work to maximise its impact and influence on practice and policy;
- who will be the lead person(s) for the communication and impact work of project;
- expected costs of communication activity over the life of the project.

The Plan should indicate also the timetable of communication activities, especially when the first findings from the Project are projected to be available. The Plan should outline how early findings, work in progress and methodological developments from the project will be shared and discussed with research partners, with other stakeholders and within the Programme.

Outline proposals should include as much detail as appropriate to illuminate the strategic approach for developing the Communication and Impact Plan.

5. Project Website

All projects should normally have their own website, which should be designed to promote communication with project partners and interested others. This should be established at least in preliminary form within 3 months of the Project Award.

Websites should favour content over design values but will be expected to develop a strong element of interactivity whereby stakeholders can communicate with the project team, be informed of developments and contribute to the project's progress. However, websites alone should not be relied on as the sole or chief route to impact.

Full Proposals will need to indicate the expected content and approach of the project website, how this will be managed, the budget for its maintenance, and how it will support other communication and impact activity.

6. Contribution to Programme Activities and its Communication and Impact Plan

Given the significance of the Programme for teaching and learning in the UK and for educational research, it is anticipated that there will be a strong commitment by research teams to collective, Programme-wide activities. Indeed, it is a condition of funding that all project members make such a commitment. This may include participation in conferences and seminars, presenting to appropriate audiences, contributing to partnerships with relevant organisations, writing or co-writing contributions to newsletters and journals aimed at a wide range of audiences, etc. The Programme will facilitate and support this activity.

This commitment is not limited by time, but for planning purposes applicants should note that named researchers in each project team should be prepared to contribute up to 10 working days a year to participating in Programme activities.

Please note also that commitment to such activities applies for **the life of the Programme** (end-2008), not just the time-frame of the particular project.

The Programme may wish to create appropriate project groupings, if research topics have significant areas of common interest. Projects will be asked to contribute to such a group if appropriate.

7. Resources

Building and maintaining effective partnerships and communication structures requires considerable financial and other resources. Proposals will be expected to show that they have budgeted appropriate resources (including team members' and project partners' time) for communication and impact activities. They will also be expected to demonstrate that they have a clear strategy for targeting those activities to ensure the most effective use of resources.

8. Research Capacity Building

Communication and impact skills will be an important element of the research capacity skills building element of Phase III. It would therefore be helpful if applications gave early indication of any identified communication training needs of project team members - e.g. writing for varied audiences, media skills training.

9. Contacts

Questions about this Annex should be directed in the first instance to the Assistant Director, Dr John Kanefsky, who can be contacted (up to 30 April 2002) as follows:

Teaching and Learning Research Programme
School of Education, University of Exeter
Heavitree Road, Exeter
Devon EX1 2LU

Telephone: 01392 264978

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Appendix 1 to Annex 1 of the Specification for Phase III of the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme

THE ESRC's RESEARCH PRIORITIES BOARD POLICY ON USER ENGAGEMENT

The Research Priorities Board is responsible for the key investments contributing to the ESRC's priority themes, including Research Centres and Research Programmes.

1. The Policy

The Board's policy is that for its investments, including Centres and Programmes-though not necessarily for all projects within them- **research quality is enhanced by interaction between those traditionally regarded as research producers and research 'users'**, in industry, public or voluntary sectors. This interaction also improves accountability, fosters exploitation and, impact and helps attract resources for further research. Even those projects, which have limited direct relevance to 'users', are likely to be valued by users in the long term.

To promote research where quality is enhanced through interaction with 'users', the Board will:

- take practical steps to promote user engagement in its investments;
- give clear responsibilities for Directors of its investments;
- spread good practice and encourage learning from experience;
- resource good practice;
- develop a partnership approach to developing new investments.

2. Background

Traditional, linear, ways of thinking about research envisage a flow of new knowledge from producers (researchers) to 'users'. In contrast, more recent approaches - developed by social scientists, working with users - identify an increasing emphasis on interactive knowledge creation: active and deliberate exchange between those seen as producers and users in the traditional model. Knowledge is then both created and used within a continuous relationship around the definition and solution of problems. Researchers in this approach are working in partnership with users.

3. Towards Implementation

The Board recognises:

- a) **there are a variety of research 'users'**, including policy-makers with no formal background in the social sciences and researchers within user organisations who may be at the 'leading edge' scientifically. For any particular project, **researchers** must usually take the lead in identifying relevant 'users' with whom to work in partnership;
- b) similarly, **there is a range of research** supported by the Board. Its investments will embrace high quality, applied, strategic and basic research. Some of the latter will have limited immediate or direct relevance outside of the research community - but is no less valid on that account;
- c) it follows from the diversity of both users and research, that **the nature, form and extent of interaction between 'users' and researchers will vary significantly from case to case**. The appropriate processes for 'user' engagement must take full account of the particular context. In other words, **a 'one size fits all' approach is wholly inappropriate**;
- d) in some areas (such as transport and macro-economics) there is considerable experience of interaction and mutual recognition of its importance by researchers and users. In other contexts, the ways in which relationships can foster quality research are relatively unrecognised and the Board will make investments to promote development of that mutual recognition;
- e) **the professional integrity of social scientists- a dialogue with users is not user dictat of agendas, methods or outputs**. ESRC will continue to fund high quality research in areas which 'users' would not see as high priority. User priorities will often feed into - but never solely determine - the assessment of excellence in research. Scientists will need to exercise professional judgement over when and how 'user' engagement will foster quality throughout the research process - and the communication of outcomes;

- f) **the Board emphasises the role of specific expertise** - social scientists have notable skills in terms of theoretical conceptualisation, methodological sophistication and formulation of new knowledge; in a productive relationship these skills will often be complemented by the skills of 'users' in areas such as identification of issues, understanding of context and communication to other 'users'. It is, of course, the case that no group necessarily has a monopoly of particular skills, much depends on the context
- g) **differences in expectations, time horizon and norms of communication** will sometimes pose difficulties for both 'users' and researchers; the Research Priorities Board will seek to ensure its support for research recognises that user engagement often needs to be promoted over a long period rather than within the confines of short-term projects. Studies of the exploitation of social science have indicated that the time available to build relationships between researchers and 'users' during the research has a significant effect on the likelihood of 'user' exploitation of the research;
- h) whether or not a dialogue with users involves co-funding of the research, the Board recognises setting of agenda, assessment, management and evaluation is a **partnership**. ESRC investments are then also partners' investments - but never consultancy or a substitute for the proper funding responsibilities of others. With a partnership approach, all parties should give explicit consideration to intellectual property arrangements from the outset;
- i) interaction with users can embrace the **whole** of the research process -
- not least the **initial setting of research agendas for research Priorities** Some projects in ESRC investments may not have their origins in such interaction but Directors will seek the enrichment of these ideas by promoting engagement with users when appropriate;
 - including research issues **during the conduct of research**. User involvement will not be confined to management or administrative issues but extend to the substance of research;
 - formal dissemination of the outcomes of research at its conclusion in a form accessible to users is only **one, though vitally important**, part of the necessary relationship. Effective interaction requires investment of time, skill and other resources in communication with users throughout the research process. It is also often important to stimulate links with potential users who may become actual users as the research develops.

4. Into Practice

The Research Priorities Board is taking a number of practical steps to promote interaction with users by ensuring:

- competitions allow scope and time for dialogue in the establishment of agendas and research questions;
- there are assessment processes that involve reviewers, and commissioning panel participation, from users communities - drawing on the respective skills and experience of researchers and 'users' (but with due recognition of different incentives and motivations). This is a view that judgements are not more or less valid because they originate from researchers or 'users'. Both are important inputs to decisions on Research Priorities Board investments. This view does not change the Board's established practice of requiring scientific excellence as a necessary - but not in all cases sufficient - criterion for support;
- establishing advisory committees will engage users with the substance of ongoing research as well as communication of research outcomes;

The Board's policy also involves action on: the Role of Directors; Spreading Good Practice and Learning from Experience; Resourcing Good Practice; and Partnership and Ownership, as set out below.

5. The Role and Expectation of Directors

Directors of Research Priorities Board investments have a key role in the Board's approach to user interaction. The Board is aware that user interaction does involve potential problems e.g. pressures for consultancy rather than research, clashes over the appropriate timescale for research. The Board believes these tensions can be managed and often turned into opportunities. However, the management of such tensions and promoting constructive dialogue need particular skills and

experience. It is unrealistic to expect all researchers involved in the Board's investments to have these skills. Therefore:

for all major new investments the Board sets out its firm expectation that the proposed Director has the necessary skills and experience to enhance the quality of research through constructive dialogue with potential users.

These skills need to be much more widely available and the Board will consider how to address this problem.

6. Spreading Good Practice and Learning from Experience

Directors' experiences, those of other social scientists and practice by other funding agencies suggest that a number of good practices can be identified for different stages of the research process, and these can be made more widely known, spreading good ideas for the future. Naturally, the importance of context, the different kinds of both research and users imply a need to need to adopt "**horses for courses**". There are, for example, well established "clubs" in some areas where formal membership subscriptions for 'users' in return for explicit benefits are involved. While these arrangements will be made more widely known, it is clear that they are not universally appropriate. More generally, the Board will make more widely known the experience of effective practice with 'users' and advisory committees within its investments and investigate what can be learnt from outside of ESRC investments.

N.B. in making good practice more widely known it will be important not to overlook the serendipity involved in much informal engagement with users - although it is hard to measure the returns to the resources involved in informal activities, their value should not be underestimated.

7. Resourcing Good Practice

Providing suggestions on good practice is but one way in which the Board will demonstrate its commitment to facilitating research through dialogue. The Board also recognises the resource implications. At one level, the Board will ensure Directors have the necessary training and support staff to carry out their role effectively. At another level, it should be quite normal to have professional inputs for development of user engagement e.g. on marketing and in media relations. Such professional resource investments must be clearly **complementary to, not substitutes for** Directors' own commitment to user engagement. The Board is willing to support innovative approaches to securing the advantages of professional input. At yet further levels - down to the time of the individual research assistant - the Board makes it clear that it expects resourcing of dialogue to be included as an integral part of the cost of proposals - **economy in this area can be the enemy of effectiveness.**

8. Partnership and Ownership

As the Board fosters dialogue then it follows that Board investments inevitably become **shared** investments. Even where there is no co-funding, the Board is, in involving users, sharing the 'ownership' of its investments in the interest of supporting **quality** research. Although many experiences of co-funding have been very positive, it must not be assumed that co-funding with partners in itself guarantees the quality of research.