

**ESRC TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH PROGRAMME:
CO-ORDINATION OF RESEARCH CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES**

Invitation to Submit Outline Proposals

1. Executive Summary

The ESRC is inviting outline proposals from individuals, groups, teams or networks based in UK Higher Education Institutions or other institutions eligible for funding by ESRC to lead, co-ordinate and support the Teaching and Learning Research Programme's activities aimed at the development of research capacity for evidence based practice in teaching and learning.

The successful applicants will be expected to develop and implement a strategy to support research capacity development focused around three core elements:

- i) a review of the research resources available within the Programme and beyond and identification of opportunities for adding value and collaboration;
- ii) support for research capacity building activities and training within the Programme;
- iii) dissemination and training targeted at the wider research community (including active researchers in 'user' / 'practitioner' communities).

Particular priorities will be:

- the development of skills in the design, conduct and management of quantitative studies, including experimental, quasi-experimental and survey techniques, capable of evaluating the effects of teaching and learning upon learners' attainment across various contexts,
- enhancing the theoretical and conceptual bases for such studies;
- the articulation / combination of qualitative approaches with quantitative studies;
- the greater utilisation of inter-disciplinary theories and methods;
- the transformation of research based knowledge through to its embodiment in practices relevant to enhancing learner attainment.

Up to £500,000 has been set aside to fund the successful award which will be expected to start in the spring / summer of 2001 and run for 3-4 years.

Individuals who are interested in applying are encouraged to discuss their ideas with the Programme Director, Professor Charles Desforges (University of Exeter – see section 7 below for contact details) before submitting their outline proposals.

The closing date for outline applications is **22 May 2000**.

2. **Background**

i) **The Programme.**

The £12.5 million Teaching and Learning Programme is being commissioned and managed by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) with funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The Programme aims to support research which will lead to significant improvements in the achievement of learners at all ages and stages in all sectors and contexts of education, training and lifelong learning, including formal settings and beyond, throughout the United Kingdom. Further details of the Programme can be found on its website at <http://www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP>

The core objectives of the Programme are to:

- enhance the achievement of learners 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.

ii) **Review of Capacity for Research into Teaching and Learning**

In line with its capacity-building objectives at an early stage the Programme commissioned Prof. D McIntyre and Dr A McIntyre (University of Cambridge) to conduct a review of capacity for research into teaching and learning.

The following general conclusions were drawn in the review:

- The **expertise** necessary for the conduct of research on teaching and learning which has potential to have an impact on attainment consists of:
knowledge of relevant social science theory relating to cognition, learning, learning cultures, teaching, teaching cultures and related managerial and administrative cultures (including theories of policy); methodological skills in a broad spectrum of research methods; managerial skills relevant to a broad range of project types and styles; knowledge and understanding of the everyday circumstances of teaching; knowledge and skills relevant to effecting changes in teaching and learning practice; interpersonal skills relevant to negotiating partnerships of researchers, policy holders and users; knowledge and skills relevant to the design of practical applications and dissemination of research findings.

- This expertise is widely and unevenly distributed. University social science departments contain strength in depth in social theory and method but limited expertise in other areas. Practitioners have considerable ‘street savvy’ and practical experience but often lack knowledge of social theory and methods.
- The **motivation** for research on teaching and learning is highly differentiated. The RAE, it is argued, motivates social scientists to focus on theoretical work to impress peer reviewers. Schools of Education are motivated to meet the compliance demands of Ofsted and the TTA; schools are primarily motivated to focus on pupil attendance and exam results, and businesses focus on immediate profits and other short term objectives.
- The **opportunity** to conduct research with the potential for impact on attainment is differentially constrained by the operating circumstances (funding, accountability, day to day pressures) of different potential stakeholders and by the terms and conditions of workers in different institutions.
- The report identified one system wide gap in expertise. This refers to the skills and knowledge necessary to the conduct of large scale, quantitative research, including experimental / quasi-experimental studies, evaluating the effects of different approaches to teaching and learning across various contexts. Such ‘what works’ studies require particular managerial, administrative and design know-how which, it is claimed, is relatively lacking in teaching and training research communities.

Apart from the above system-wide gap, it may be inferred that the limits to capacity to conduct relevant high quality research are imposed by the peculiar distributions of expertise, motivation and opportunity rather than any absolute lacunae in knowledge, skills and experience in the system taken as a whole.

The report made seven key recommendations, covering issues such as the provision of strong incentives for collaborative research between educational researchers and disciplinary specialists, the need for thorough, critical reviews and syntheses of national and international research and development of research communities involving higher education with other education and training providers. A key recommendation was:

“Since the level of capacity [for quantitative research into teaching and learning effectiveness] is very low, the success of the Programme in enhancing capacity in this respect (and even perhaps in sponsoring high-quality research) will be dependent on it adopting a highly pro-active strategy in this area.

Such a strategy should be designed to educate, encourage and support educational researchers in the use of diverse approaches to quantitative study of teaching and learning effectiveness, recognising the genuine difficulty and complexity of useful research of this kind. It would be counter-productive for the Programme to be used to promote any single narrow orthodoxy of approach”.

iii) Current Programme Activities

The Programme is already supporting the development of capacity in a number of ways. The four Research Network awards supported under Phase I involve multi-institutional collaboration, multi-disciplinary approaches and partnerships with teachers, trainers and other potential 'users' of the research. Two Career Development Associate awards were also made under Phase I to support the development of the careers of promising new researchers with particular reference to acquiring firm evidence of effectiveness in improving outcomes and working in collaboration with practitioners.

Phase II of the Programme will support approximately 10-15 major research projects from inter-disciplinary research consortia involving appropriate teaching and learning practitioners and managers. It is expected that projects will establish learning communities with partners from all relevant interested parties including users and beneficiaries and enhance capacity for a research-based approach to practice. Proposals were expected to be based on a review of relevant knowledge bases and to include rigorous procedures to implement, research and evaluate innovations. Encouragement was given to proposals which combine carefully controlled quantitative designs with qualitative methods to maximise the lessons learned and the capacity to disseminate them. Phase II also includes provision for the funding of a small number of senior research fellowships as a part of projects with particular emphasis on quantitative techniques and/or the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods and/or the development of interdisciplinary theories and methods. The outcomes of the commissioning process for Phase II will be announced in the summer.

Further details of Phase I awards and of the commissioning of Phase II can be found on the Programme's website at <http://www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP>.

The Programme Director organised a consultation workshop at the University of Westminster on 2 February to discuss any further action which should be taken in support of capacity development. In view of the limited funds available and duration of the Programme, the consensus of this meeting was that a focused approach was needed targeted at those areas where the Programme could achieve the greatest added value. Three potential foci were suggested:

- First, a focus on the Programme itself as a resource in terms of both expertise and a source of innovation in terms of methods, theory and seeing results through into practice. This implies that key roles should be to facilitate the sharing of this expertise and knowledge, to identify key strategic issues and developments which require wider discussion and / or dissemination and to pursue opportunities for adding value to, and co-ordinating, the research capacity-building activities of the projects being funded.
- Second, and closely related to the first, a focus on providing training for, and supporting the continued professional development of, researchers involved in the Programme.
- Third, building on the first two, a focus on supporting the development of research capacity in the wider research and user communities at mid-senior career levels. Particular attention in this respect should be paid to issues such as complex project management, quantitative research design (including experimental and quasi-experimental techniques, randomised controlled trials,

and conduct of surveys), integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches, evaluating impacts, research ethics, new conceptual developments, opportunities to draw on inter-disciplinary approaches, the potential for applying developments across differing educational sectors and settings and the transfer of research into policy and practice.

All of this would need to be set in the context of a review of the current research resources available and coherent strategy identifying priorities for action.

3. Call for Expressions of Interest

The ESRC is inviting outline applications from individuals, groups, teams or networks based in UK Higher Education Institutions or other institutions eligible for funding by ESRC to lead, co-ordinate and support the Programme's activities aimed at the development of research capacity for evidence based practice in teaching and learning.

The successful applicants will be expected to develop and implement a strategy to support research capacity development focused around three core elements:

- i) a review of the research resources available within the Programme and beyond and identification of opportunities for adding value and collaboration;*
- ii) support for research capacity building activities and training within the Programme;*
- iii) dissemination and training targeted at the wider research community. (including active researchers in 'user' / 'practitioner' communities).*

Particular priorities will be:

- the development of skills in the design, conduct and management of quantitative studies, including experimental, quasi-experimental and survey techniques, capable of evaluating the effects of teaching and learning upon learners' attainment across various contexts,*
- enhancing the theoretical and conceptual bases for such studies;*
- the articulation / combination of qualitative approaches with quantitative studies;*
- the greater utilisation of inter-disciplinary theories and methods;*
- the transformation of research based knowledge through to its embodiment in practices relevant to enhancing learner attainment.*

i) Review of Research Resources Currently Available and Identification of Opportunities for Adding Value and Collaboration

Research Resources within the Programme. The Teaching and Learning Programme will itself be a major resource for building capacity for research into teaching and learning. As outlined in section 2 above, following the completion of Phase II of the Programme 10-15 major research projects are likely to be supported in addition to the 4 major research networks under Phase I. These projects will encompass differing educational sectors and settings, cover a variety of topics, and employ a range of conceptual, theoretical and methodological approaches. The majority of them are likely to involve 3 or more named senior co-award holders, often spread across a number of institutions. Thus there will

probably be well in excess of 50 senior researchers involved in these awards. In addition, each of these projects will be employing an average of at least 3 research staff, bringing the number of active research staff to well over a hundred. There are also two career development associates funded under Phase I and, possibly, a number of senior research fellows supported under Phase II. Each of the projects also brings with it a much wider learning community of research partners and collaborators including teachers, trainers, managers, policy-makers. Each project will also be expected to undertake its own activities in support of capacity development in their field.

In addition, the Programme Director, Professor Charles Desforges, and Assistant Director, Dr John Kanefsky (University of Exeter), will also be undertaking a range of complementary activities and the successful applicants will be expected to work closely with them. For example they will be organising a range of networking and dissemination activities as a part of the Programme's Communication Plan (details of which can be found on the Programme website at <http://www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP>) and international collaborative activities (e.g. with relevant Programmes funded by the National Science Foundation).

An important early step will therefore be to review and evaluate the existing research resources and activities under the Programme in consultation with Programme participants in order to identify opportunities for adding value and strategic priorities for further action. This will include the identification of strategic cross-cutting issues where further support and development is required as well as actual case studies raising conceptual, theoretical, methodological or practical challenges which would merit wider discussion. Similarly support for the wider dissemination of conceptual or methodological innovations emerging from individual projects may be required e.g. through the production of teaching or training materials, targeted publications or events (conferences etc.).

Research Resources beyond the Programme. There are a wide range of existing research resources and other initiatives in the field. It will therefore be essential to review and evaluate existing activities and research resources in order to ascertain where the greatest value from further activities can be added. The outcomes of this review are themselves likely to be of wider utility to researchers in the field and consideration should be given to producing a ***'gateway' or 'road-map' of existing research resources*** as one of the outputs of this review.

A key element of this review should be the identification of ***opportunities for collaboration and strategic partnership with other bodies*** in the support of research capacity development. Account will need to be taken of other relevant developments such the establishment of the National Educational Research Forum, and other current initiatives underway (eg the Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE, activities of the TTA, other research programmes etc. etc) in determining where efforts should be focussed and where activities would be most appropriately pursued in partnership with other bodies. For instance, there are likely to be opportunities for collaboration with the new DfEE funded Centre for Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice in Education at the Institute of Education and with other DfEE-funded Centres. Similar opportunities will exist with the new ESRC Co-ordinating Centre (and possibly some of the specialist nodes) for Evidence-Based Policy and with other relevant ESRC initiatives (e.g.

the possible new initiative on research methods which is currently being discussed by ESRC's Research Resources Board).

- ii) Support for Research Capacity Building Activities Within the Programme**
Building upon the review of research capacity within the Programme outlined above, a central role will be to *provide targeted training for, and support the continued professional development of, researchers (at all levels) involved in the Programme* with particular emphasis on the five priority areas listed at the start of section 3 above. This will involve the co-ordination and provision of training support and advice to researchers under the Programme and the creation of networks of within and beyond the Programme within which issues can be discussed and knowledge can be shared. There will also be a need to facilitate access to research resources outside the Programme and to bring in specialist expertise to assist with this as appropriate.

Both a *strategic and responsive approach* will be required. Strategic leadership will be needed in terms of identifying important cross-cutting issues on which the provision of support and training should be focussed. It will be needed to identify both the potential for supplementing projects' own research capacity building activities and important emerging conceptual and methodological innovations which would merit further dissemination. At the same time a responsive approach will be required in terms of adapting the strategy to new issues emerging from the Programme's researchers and dealing with individual requests from research teams for advice and support.

- iii) Dissemination and Training Targeted at the Wider Research Community**
Building upon the activities undertaken under i) and ii) above, opportunities for supporting the development of research capacity for the wider research community through the provision of training, training materials and a range of other activities should be explored and exploited. Particular attention should be given to supporting the continued professional development of mid-career and senior researchers and practitioners / managers engaged in research in areas such as complex project management, quantitative research design (including experimental and quasi-experimental techniques, randomised controlled trials, and conduct of surveys), integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches, evaluating impacts, research ethics, new conceptual developments, opportunities to draw on inter-disciplinary approaches, the potential for applying developments across differing educational sectors and settings and the transfer of research into policy and practice.

- iv) Possible Approaches and Activities**
Initial consultations have suggested that many of the research issues raised will require inter-active dialogue and discussion. Whilst some of this may be possible using interactive electronic technologies, some will also require intensive face-to-face interaction. The potential also exists for developing wider training and dissemination via electronic media and distance learning. A combination of face-to-face and electronic / distance learning approaches will therefore probably be required. However, the Steering Committee is open to proposals involving a

range of approaches and to innovative ideas for achieving the objectives outlined above.

Examples of the types of activity which might be undertaken as a part of the award include:

- organisation training seminars and workshops, master classes or dissemination conferences;
- laying on intensive courses and summer schools;
- provision of a 'helpdesk' advice service to Programme researchers;
- development of teaching and training materials or other research 'tools';
- operation of an inter-active website;
- running distance-learning courses;
- creation of 'virtual' / electronic research networks;
- publication of reviews of work leading edge conceptual, theoretical and / or methodological work and/or of 'best practice guides';
- preparing, co-ordinating or contributing to other publications targeted at the research communities;
- maintaining a guide / gateway to other research resources available;
- supporting a programme of senior visiting fellowships.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of 'requirements'; applications are encouraged to come forward with their own proposals for an appropriate mix of these and other activities. Applicants should however explain the rationale for selecting their proposed approach / activities in their proposals. The final programme of activities will, of course, need to be developed and refined during the review of research resources and strategy development initial phase of the award outlined above and a detailed work programme agreed in the light of this with the Programme Director and Steering Committee.

As noted above it is expected that where appropriate activities will be undertaken in partnership with other participants in the Programme and other providers of research training and support. Additional activities might be developed with co-funding from other sources.

4. **Management**

The above objectives imply the need for some form of central co-ordination to identify strategic needs and co-ordinate delivery although delivery itself may be devolved and involve a more distributed approach. The Steering Committee is, however, willing to consider a variety of proposed approaches to tackling this issue ranging from a focus around a single senior lead co-ordinator and/or a group within a single institution, to multi-institutional teams and/or more distributed networked approaches. Whichever approach is proposed, applicants should specify clearly the proposed management structure in their proposals and outline their relevant experience for the task; any key potential partners should also be identified.

The successful applicant(s) will be expected to work closely with the Programme Director and Assistant Director and will report directly to the Programme Director and Programme Steering Committee. Following completion of the initial review of research resources they will be expected to produce a detailed strategy and associated workplan for approval by the Director and Steering Committee. Thereafter they will report regularly to the Director and annually to the Steering Committee. Before the end of the award they will also be asked to produce a report examining options for future support for research capacity development in the field beyond the end of the award.

5. **Resources available**

The Steering Committee has provisionally set aside up to £500,000 to support this award. Awards will be expected to start in the spring / summer of 2001 and to run for approximately 3 to 4 years. Outline costings should be provided in the application. Shortlisted applicants will be asked to provide more detailed costings in their full proposals. The actual amount awarded will depend upon the programme of activities proposed in the successful application and will be subject to negotiation between the ESRC and successful applicants. Applicants are encouraged to explore the possibility of obtaining co-funding or working in partnership with other providers in order to increase the range and impact of the funded activities funded under the Programme. Normal ESRC *Research Funding* conditions will apply¹ (copies of *Research Funding* should be available from institutions or ESRC's WWW pages at <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/resfund.htm>). Awards will be made through UK institutions eligible for ESRC funding. Individuals / groups not based at such institutions but interested in applying will need to obtain the support of an eligible institution which would be willing to administer any award made.

¹ Exceptionally ESRC will consider requests for funding the part-time release of the lead applicant / co-ordinator (if an established member of staff) in accordance with paragraph 5.3.4 of ESRC Research Funding

6. Commissioning Procedure / Action by Applicants

Please follow the instructions on the enclosed outline application form and return the original plus two copies to:

The Registrar,
ESRC,
Polaris House,
North Star Avenue,
Swindon.
SN2 1UJ

by **22 May 2000**

Copies of this form may be downloaded from ESRC's WWW pages at <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/fundops.htm>.

This deadline will be strictly enforced. Applications postmarked on, or before, the closing date of 22 May 2000 will be accepted but applications postmarked after this date will not be accepted. Faxed or e.mailed applications will not be accepted. It is essential that two copies are included with the original.

The Programme Steering Committee (see Programme's website for details of membership) will consider outline applications at its meeting in June 2000 and decide which proposals should be shortlisted for the submission of full bids. Applicants should be informed of the Committee's decisions by mid July. Full proposals will then be invited for submission by early October and will be subject to external peer review before the Committee considers full proposals in December. Applicants should be informed of the Committee's funding recommendations in January 2001.

In the interests of fostering partnerships and collaboration the Committee may wish to inform shortlisted applicants of the names of other shortlisted applicants or applicants who have not been shortlisted. If you would not wish your name to be passed on to shortlisted applicants in this way please indicate this in the appropriate section of the proposal form.

Previous applicants to the Programme may apply. Shortlisted applicants under Phase II of the Programme may apply but should clarify in their applications how, in the event that their application under Phase II being successful, they would propose to take forward the work (if at all).

7. **Further information**

The ESRC has appointed Professor Charles Desforges of the University of Exeter to direct and represent the Programme and to build networks and strategic partnerships appropriate to securing its successful impact. Dr John Kanefsky, (University of Exeter) has been appointed as Assistant Director with the specific responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the Communication Plan.

The Director and Assistant Director will be pleased to discuss further with applicants the aims, scope and content of potential outline applications with applicants and can be contacted as follows:

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Further information on the Programme can be found on the Programme Website at the following address:

www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP/

Queries about application procedures and eligibility for ESRC funding should be directed to Alex Monckton or Chris Godwin in the Teaching and Learning Project Team in the Research Division at ESRC, tel: 01793 413021 (Alex Monckton) or 01793 413055 (Chris Godwin), e-mail: Alex.Monckton@esrc.ac.uk or Chris.Godwin@esrc.ac.uk.