

Teaching & Learning Research Programme

BULLETIN 03/03

December 2003

Action requested:

- Take pleasure from ESRC appreciation of the progress being made by the Programme and note the thanks to all colleagues expressed by the Directors' Team.
- Note liaison developments across the UK.
- Review the report on the TLRP conference in Edinburgh. Consider making further contributions to consideration of 'underlying conceptualisations of learning and teaching'.
- Consider who will be attending the Capacity Building Conference, and associated Welsh Showcase event in Cardiff on 24th February.
- Consider who will be attending the Forum for Project Directors or Award Holders, and associated Northern Ireland Showcase event in Belfast on 26/7th May.
- Note forthcoming Welsh Extensions, and Northern Ireland possibility.
- Consider RCBN provision and the use in enhancing skills and developing research careers which might be made of it during 2004.
- Discuss the report below on the conference discussion of 'warrant' issues, and consider if it may be of any assistance in developing or preparing to report on your project.
- Note the developing work of Thematic Groups and the new provision for Responsive Task Groups.
- Note the appointment of Martin Ince as the TLRP Media Fellow and the strengthening of the TLRP office.
- Consider project developments, advise on possible Associated Projects, and consider inter-project activities you might like to initiate.
- Note the timetable for Annual Reports and the hope that these will be used *formatively* and produced *collaboratively*.
- Note that the Programme has developed expectations on certain outputs and would appreciate it if these could form a part of each project's own, unique impact strategy.
- Review the proposals for coordinated activity at selected major conferences and advise of your views as appropriate.

Thanks

Colleagues will be pleased to know that the quality of work within the Programme has been noted and affirmed by ESRC's Research Programmes Board. At their last meeting, RPB commented very favourably on the progress made, just as our own Steering Committee had done a few months previously.

The Programme develops because of the contributions of all colleagues, in projects, thematic groups, office roles and elsewhere. These contributions come in many, many ways and are invariably thoughtful and constructive. Working, discussing and moving the field forward together is the rationale for having a Programme and we should certainly aim to both enjoy it *and* get some work done. Things are moving forward very well on a number of important fronts and the Directors' Team would like to express their thanks to all research teams for the overall productivity of the past year.

Liaison with Government across the UK

Over the past few months engagement with colleagues in government departments in Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England has deepened. The Director has met with senior civil servants in Wales and Northern Ireland and is meeting very soon with Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills. In each case, the focus has been on how TLRP can contribute to the development of evidence-informed policy and research capacity. Lewis Macdonald, MSP, Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Scottish Executive, spoke at the TLRP conference in Edinburgh. There has been strong support for TLRP Showcase events with considerable assistance from education departments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Ministers are expected to speak at the forthcoming events in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Scottish TLRP Showcase event

This event was held in Edinburgh, just prior to the annual conference and was attended by some 45 users of educational research and about 20 colleagues from project teams. Interest was high, particularly since one third of TLRP's projects are now either based in or co-directed from Scottish institutions. 40 posters representing TLRP activities were studied and some very useful links were made in respect of the future development of TLRP's contribution to Scottish education.

TLRP conference, Edinburgh

With *all* phases of TLRP projects represented, the level of debate and discussion at this event was very high indeed.

Phase III projects met on the first day and focused on sharing basic project information – a foundation for possible collaboration in the future. There were also sessions sharing experiences on how to maximise user engagement and on the forms of support available for capacity building.

On the second day, representatives of all project teams were present. Lewis Macdonald, MSP, welcomed TLRP to Scotland and spoke of the significance of educational research to Scotland's policies on lifelong learning. The conference then focused on sharing each projects' 'underlying conceptions of learning and teaching' – some feat, with six parallel sessions enabling 30 papers to be presented over a three

hour period. Six brave discussants, Celia Hoyles, Noel Entwistle, Karen Evans, Peter Bryant, Roz Ivanič and Martin Hughes, began the process of providing an overview.

If an early summary might be attempted, there seemed to be a feeling that, whilst the issue of how learning and teaching are conceptualised lies at the heart of TLRP's intellectual mission, the Programme should not aspire to produce a single, integrated model of learning and teaching. Rather, a key objective should be to identify and refine conceptual and analytic tools available for investigation of a range of the key issues concerned with teaching and learning. Like the elements of many professional resources, these would be fit for their purpose without perhaps claiming to address or represent all possible issues and dimensions. At another level, a consequence of the Programme's work might be to influence the fundamental ways in which teaching and learning is considered and thought about in everyday life within the UK.

These are important (if tentative) initial conclusions, about which comments are very welcome. Indeed, following the discussion, those attending the conference were urged to communicate further thoughts in any way they could – an invitation which still stands.

The conference dinner provided excellent food and company, and was further enhanced, thanks to Peter Cope, by the Blackford Fiddle Group. To purchase their CD please email: p.a.cope@stir.ac.uk

On the final day of the conference, colleagues from Phases I and II began by re-considering the issue of warrants, and a report of this discussion is offered later in this Bulletin.

The remaining sessions were concerned with sharing ideas about output possibilities and discussing strategies for maximising impact. Following a presentation from Andrew Pollard and distribution of a 'TLRP Output Portfolio' of advice and examples, a free-wheeling 'bazaar' provided a vibrant opportunity for the practical exchange of resources and ideas. After lunch, Sandra Nutley, from St Andrew's, shared findings from her review of effective impact strategies, following which projects in major sectors then met to discuss ways forward. Some of the practical proposals shared during these sessions are drawn on further in this Bulletin.

The feedback on this conference has been extremely positive. As an opportunity to engage in high level discussion about key educational topics with knowledgeable colleagues it was an excellent experience. Thanks are offered to all those who participated in such a constructive spirit.

Capacity building conference, Cardiff, 24th February 2004

This event is intended to draw together the experience of the TLRP on research capacity building, and will be led by RCBN's new Director, Gareth Rees. Capacity building has come to be recognised as a key element not only in the development of more effective (however defined) educational research, but also across the social sciences more widely. The conference will explore the theoretical issues associated with notions of research capacity building, as well as some of the practical implications of TLRP achievements and experiences to date in this area. The TLRP is

the first major research programme to have capacity building explicitly identified in its brief and it is important that this invaluable experience is properly utilised.

Forum for Project Directors or Award Holders, Belfast, 26th May 2004

This is the event, indicated last June, for senior researchers to take stock of the Programme's development, the contribution of their projects to it, and to discuss future directions and strategies. A meeting of this sort is expected to recur each summer. Further details of this particular event will follow, but it is intended to dovetail this Forum into the TLRP Showcase in Northern Ireland. TLRP's international work will be one topic to be considered. Please ensure that a senior colleague from each project has protected the time. It is likely that flights to Belfast will be arranged for the morning of the 26th, with return on the morning of the 27th.

Welsh and Northern Irish TLRP Showcase events

These events are designed to introduce TLRP's work to *users* of educational research. Following the successful Showcase in Westminster last June, further events have been arranged for:

- Tuesday 24th February, Cardiff (CIA, from 5.30; following the TLRP Capacity Building conference)
- Wednesday 26th May, Belfast (details to be confirmed; following the proposed TLRP Directors' Forum)

Welsh and Northern Irish Extensions

A proposal for Welsh Extensions to TLRP work has been developed. This is expected to produce a fund of £0.5m for projects starting during 2004/5. A call is likely in the New Year. A similar scheme for Northern Ireland seems likely but awaits formal confirmation.

RCBN news

The programme of RCBN activities continues to develop. Forthcoming events will include seminars/workshops on context in qualitative research (organised jointly with the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning), randomised control trials, the uses of longitudinal data (quantitative and qualitative) and multi-level modelling. The first of a series of seminars on 'Qualitative Research in Teaching and Learning: quality, innovation and future directions', organised jointly with Manchester Metropolitan University, will be held in December. The RCBN has agreed to collaborate with BERA in the production of a series of 'master classes' (*sic*) on aspects of research methodology and theory building.

Warrants: building confidence in our conclusions

At the cross-Programme warrants seminar held in May, various forms of warrant argument were discussed. These had been identified in Project Annual Reports for 2002 and, put very concisely, were:

- User: benefiting from user validation and endorsement
- Cumulative: drawing carefully (and systematically?) on previous research
- Comparative: considering findings from other contexts, including international
- Theoretical: building on appropriate, coherent conceptual frameworks

- Empirical: grounding findings in appropriate high-quality evidence

The issues were explored further in a paper summarising the May seminar discussion (produced by Mary James, Andrew Pollard, Gareth Rees and Chris Taylor), and then in vigorous discussion at the Edinburgh conference. Attention in Edinburgh particularly focused on how the various forms of warrant argument might take prominence, interact and combine in different ways according to the nature of the research and the stage in the research process. Interestingly, there was less discussion on the types of warrant argument themselves, rather than on their relationship and contextual appropriateness. This was particular debate about the relative significance of user validation and empirical warrants. We also continued to struggle rather uncomfortably with the word ‘warrant’ itself.

This seems to be an important discussion for TLRP to have, and one which indicates a sense of professional responsibility. In part then, the purpose is substantive – to ensure that, when we draw conclusions, however diverse, they are appropriately grounded in the evidence which our research conceptualisations and designs make available. Additionally, there are presentational purposes – to ensure that the strongest possible set of arguments is available to be deployed to validate key findings from each project. By thinking these issues through, and working on them if appropriate, we can be confident ourselves and confident with others.

Without getting sucked into complex argument, it is therefore hoped that the simple identification of these types of potential warrant argument will be helpful. In what ways are these forms of argument appropriate for your project?

Thematic groups

TLRP’s five thematic groups are continuing their regular meetings and are working towards tangible outcomes during the 2003/4 academic year. These will take rather different forms, depending on the nature of the group. The groups on ‘Outcomes’ and ‘Lifecourse’ are expected to produce relatively conventional academic outputs. The ‘International Synergy’ group is contributing to activities underpinning an ERA-NET proposal and a website on Learning in Knowledge-based Societies (LinKS). The ‘ICT for Impact’ group has been contributing to TLRP’s ICT infrastructure, as has the ‘Transformation and Impact Group’, though in a different way.

Responsive Task groups

TLRP is often invited to comment on contemporary issues and, for appropriate topics, this is an important activity which is much appreciated by policy-makers and others. The Steering Committee has agreed that ‘Task Groups’ may be formed on an ad-hoc basis in response to opportunities or invitations. Such initiatives are likely to draw for advice on small numbers of colleagues from across the Programme and, if appropriate, on specialist researchers or users from outside. Task group activity will be facilitated by the Media Fellow and members of the Directors’ Team. Typical outputs from Task groups may be briefing papers or press releases.

Support from Media Fellow

ESRC’s support for TLRP’s media work is being formalised. Journalistic expertise will now be available to projects, task groups and other initiatives from Martin Ince – who, in former roles, has been Deputy Editor of THES and Director of External

Relations at ESRC. Martin will liaise closely with the Directors' Team. He will work with projects on media strategy about a year ahead of completion and more intensively when key findings are available.

TLRP office

Lynne and Suzanne stand by as ever, to support projects. To assist them, it has been decided to employ an additional full time secretary. In particular, this is intended to lighten pressure of database and event administration, and release more time to focus on impact and media activities. The appointment will be made during the Spring Term.

Project developments

Phase I projects are beginning to finish, and final reports are being submitted to ESRC. Some impressive events for users have been and are being held. Two projects have produced Research Briefings and volumes in the *Improving Learning* series are being negotiated.

Phase II projects have been very busy and we continue to hear of many positive achievements, which will no doubt be reflected in the Annual Reports.

Phase III projects are either just starting or about to start. Generally, the negotiation of contracts has gone well, though there have also been a few delays. Almost all projects will have started by January.

Scottish Extensions seem to be progressing well, with meetings developing with related projects.

Only modest progress has been made in identifying Associated Projects, despite an initial search. It is important that Associated Projects really earn their place in terms of the agreed criteria (see www.TLRP.org under funding opportunities). If any colleagues have ideas for possible Associated Projects, please contact a member of the Directors' Team.

Project-initiated cross-Programme activities remain modest in volume. Where they do occur however, they are felt to be extremely worthwhile. The A4 poster collection and statements about teaching and learning, as distributed at the conference, provide excellent ways of spotting opportunities for cooperation. Supplementary funding for this remains available.

Annual reports from projects

Reports from all Phase II projects for activity and achievements during 2003 will be expected by 31st January 2004. A pro-forma was circulated in early December. This is substantially the same as the previous version – though with one or two refinements.

Once again, we hope that compiling the Annual Report will be seen positively as an opportunity to 'take stock' *formatively and collectively*. For the Programme as a whole, these are certainly vital documents.

As last year, the reports will be analysed as a set and we expect to distribute versions of them to colleagues within the Programme (with personnel or confidential matters edited out) to support cross-Programme sharing of information and synergy.

Where a project's end of award report is due within 3 months of 31st January 2004, then an end of year report becomes optional. Projects starting within 3 months of 31st January may also decide whether or not they wish to report at this time. If a report is presented, then feedback will be offered following Steering Committee deliberation. In respect of those projects which do not report, to enable cross-Programme information exchange it is anticipated that some sections of final reports and some sections of project proposals may be made available across the Programme. Please make contact with your critical friend from the Directors' Team if you anticipate problems with that.

Impact strategies

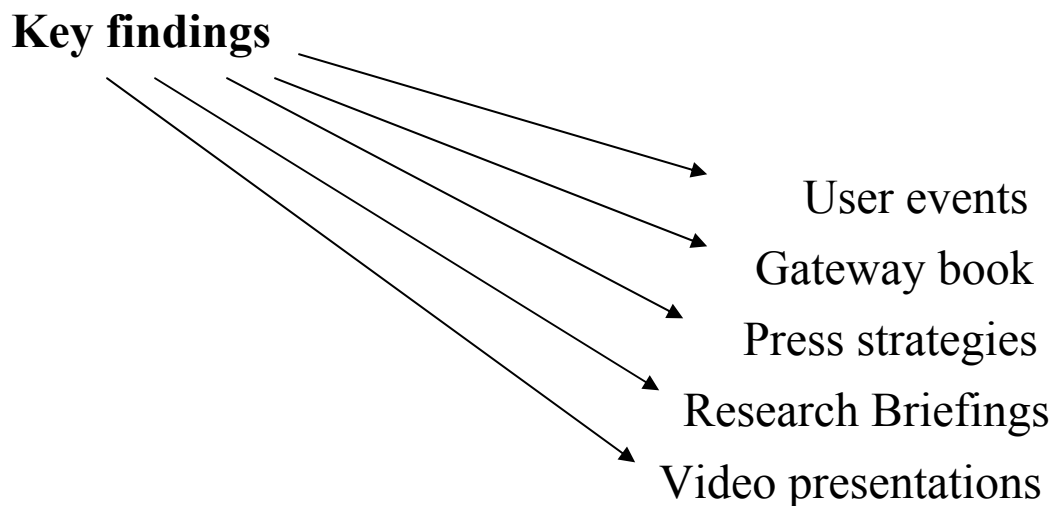
The development of impact strategies was discussed at length at the conference in Edinburgh. All Phase III and Scottish Extension projects will soon receive a 'TLRP Output Portfolio' (a ring-binder containing advice and examples). We would encourage colleagues to look through the portfolio together as a means of stimulating ideas – rather than simply as a file of guidance – though, of course, it is meant to be both! We would also be delighted to be sent examples of new impact strategies which could be circulated to colleagues to develop the portfolio.

Project teams will always create their own engagement and impact strategies. However, the Programme expects the following to be normally included, and will provide direct, tangible support for them.

- 'Gateway web pages' on TLRP website (from Start)
- Advisory Groups including user representatives and critical friends from Steering Committee and Directors' Team (within 3 months of Start)
- Project website (within 6 months of Start and regularly updated)
- Use of British Education Index (progressively, as suitable papers are produced: to be sent via TLRP office)
- Registration on TLRP database of users with project interests (progressively, with review at least 12 months before End)
- Media training of a nominated spokesperson (at least 12 months before End)
- Impact strategy discussions with Media Fellow (at least 6 months before End)
- 'Gateway book' through RoutledgeFalmer (proposals to RF 6 months before End)
- Identifying 'key findings' (progressively, and making final decisions at least 4 months before End)
- 'Research Briefings' for policy makers and others (at least 3 months before End)
- User workshops, seminars or other events (within 6 months either side of End)

- Pro-active press strategies in consultation with Media Fellow as appropriate (within 3 months either side of End)
- Multimedia video presentations of key findings (production before End)
- Journal papers through Carfax or other outlets (progressively)
- Participation in targeted academic conferences (during and after project as appropriate)
- Final report to ESRC (3 months after End)
- ‘Gateway book’ MS completed (to RoutledgeFalmer within 6 months after End)

The relationship between these outputs and each project’s ‘key findings’ is crucial. This is represented in the following diagram:



Proposals for future TLRP coordinated conference presentations

The conferences below have been suggested as events where we could, if appropriately organised, expect to make a particular impact using a degree of coordination of presentations and perhaps offering an exhibition of TLRP activities. Comments on this would be appreciated, including possible volunteers!

2004	AERA	BERA	ECER		
2005		BERA		EARLI	Australia/NZ
2006	AERA	BERA	ECER		
2007		BERA		EARLI	
2008	AERA	BERA	ECER		Australia/NZ

For projects in Schools Sectors, a particular focus on impact activities in 2005 has been suggested. For projects in Post-Compulsory Sectors, a similar focus might be in 2007 or 08.

Finally

We hope that the content of this Bulletin will have been of interest and that there will be time to discuss it at an appropriate meeting. Feedback on any aspect of the Programme and its development is warmly welcomed.

Since this Bulletin is going out in December, may we take this opportunity to wish you a happy and relaxing Christmas!