

Special Issue: Contract Research Staff and the TLRP

Chris Taylor

Cardiff School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

The most important feature of any research infrastructure must be the people involved in the research enterprise. Hence the quality, innovation and impact of research is heavily dependent upon the qualities of the research staff involved. In UK Higher Education (HE) nearly a third of all academic staff are fixed-term contract research staff (CRS). Thus the majority of research activity in the UK HE sector is dependent upon the CRS employed on research projects. This is certainly the case for the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) and most other social science research projects. Not only do CRS provide the back-bone to most teaching and learning research they are often the source of the next generation of principal investigators, leading experts and research programme directors. The way that contract researchers perceive their work, the way they are treated and the encouragement and guidance they are given will determine: what a research programme such as the TLRP can achieve; what empirical, theoretical and methodological advancements can be made; and the quality and quantity of future research in this field.

The issues that fixed-term CRS face are not necessarily new, as many established professors with permanent contracts will remind you! But recent fears about a down-turn in

the number of qualified researchers entering the social sciences generally, but particularly in to the education research field, has meant that there is a growing need for these issues to be taken more seriously than they have in previous years.

One of the central themes to the RCBN's work in the last three years has been CRS, primarily those involved in the TLRP. For example a number of capacity-building activities have been tailored to the particular research training needs of CRS, especially those at the beginning of their research career. But we have also organized activities where the primary objective has been to support the career development of CRS. In doing this the RCBN has sought to identify the needs and contexts that CRS find themselves, and then provide or broker the support and guidance they perhaps need. We have also tried to provide a forum in which CRS have felt comfortable to discuss, challenge and address the issues that they face. These have included, for example, the short-term nature of their contracts, how to manage their working lives, and the treatment they receive from the principal investigators, their departments, their HE institutions and the main social science funding council, the ESRC.

This was one of the main objectives of a conference entitled 'Life after

the TLRP' organised by the RCBN in Edinburgh (2-3 December 2004) that attempted to move these issues and debates forward in a constructive way. This special issue of *Building Research Capacity* reports on that event. The first three papers in this issue represent some of the varied views that CRS have of their circumstances. The article by Wahlberg et al (p.2) offers a critical perspective of the work of CRS, and in particular the 'underground' nature of such work. The article by Burt and Moore (p.4) discusses their roles in a TLRP project, including how they have managed their own learning alongside the needs of their project. Furthermore, the third article by Remedios and Weedon (p. 5) reminds us of some of the key advantages that can be secured from working as a CR on a well-funded ESRC project. The fourth article (p. 6) is a product of the conference in which all participants contributed, and this set out to highlight the main issues and provide a number of recommendations. These were presented to a specially-formed panel who were seen as potential agents of change, and their responses are summarised in this article. Finally we invited Steve Baron, Associate Director of the TLRP with specific responsibility for the future of research capacity building within the TLRP, to respond to the papers and recommendations (p.9).

'Underground working' – understanding hidden labour

Madeleine Wahlberg¹, Kim Diment², Jennie Davies³, Helen Colley⁴, Eunice Wheeler⁵

¹ University of Warwick

² University of the West of England, Bristol

³ University of Exeter

⁴ Manchester Metropolitan University

⁵ City of Bristol College

"Who built Thebes of the Seven
Gates?
In the books you will read the
names of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of
rock?...
The young Alexander conquered
India
Was he alone?...
Where, the evening that the Great
Wall of China was finished, did
the masons go?"¹

Introduction

We are all researchers who have been working on an ESRC TLRP Phase two project, Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education (TLCFE). Now drawing to its conclusion, the Project is in a very reflective stage. What have we found? Amongst other things, we found what was initially termed 'underground learning'². For example, our data point to many instances in which Further Education (FE) tutors survive and do a good job – but only by doing things for and with students that they are not officially supposed to be doing. As we explored this idea of 'underground' or 'silent' work in our data, there were two main developments. Firstly, we began to generalise and theorise the idea in terms of a labour process, moving from 'underground learning' to a wider sense of underground *working*, recognising that the underground learning of students is created by the underground work of tutors. Secondly, we became increasingly aware of our own underground work, as researchers. How does it construct us as researchers and how does it construct our data and analysis? It is these two developments that we will open up in this short paper.

There are good reasons why the TLCFE project, particularly at this penultimate stage, has shone a miner's lamp into the darkness of underground working, going deeper than merely finding it in our data but also finding it in our researcher selves.

- The project uses the ideas of Bourdieu including the need for social reflexivity, particularly in relation to the co-production of research data between researcher and the researched. This requires us to 'notice' our labour as researchers and we have sometimes taken different views of it.³
- The project uses biographical data. Accessing this kind of data has required us to develop a particular set of qualitative methods and inter-personal skills – only to find that an important sector of educational researchers seem to either denigrate, or to be deaf to such skills and methods.⁴ It feels like doing *hidden but essential* research.
- The third of our project aims has been to increase the research capacity of FE. As part of the conversations around this, we have had to become more aware of what 'doing research' might mean for FE.⁵
- Within our team of researchers, those of us who are CRs nearing the end of contracts are having to re-understand the structural conditions of our work; to wonder why it does not afford less exploitative alternatives; and to decide on our ability to tolerate low pay and insecure jobs. At a personal and immediate level, we are taking a hard look at the issue of underground working or,

to put it more openly, to ask if we still want to be the housewives of the academy - *hidden but essential*.

The term 'underground work' may seem eclectic. We have used it to point to types of time, social relations, politics, knowledge, silences and money. There are other terms that reflect these more precisely – emotional labour, tacit knowledge, economic exploitation, excluded status etc. However, the essence of 'underground work' is that it expresses labour that, for a variety of reasons in the relation between field and habitus, is hidden but crucial. It is a term that we are using to point to some of the boundaries of research, some of the silences and some of the key social relations in our complex project, including those of the Brecht poem above. It will always be a term which requires both conceptual and empirical investigation to specify what particular meanings are constructed by it.

Turning the personal into the political

We came to understand the 'silent' work of many tutors in FE in terms of the relation between their habitus and the field that they occupied. The college did not formally compel the extra work that the tutors continuously undertook. Indeed it is probable that the college is not even aware of all that they do. Why then do they do it? One set of arguments might try to position this work as normal 'professional' behaviour. The tutors see a need in the students and respond fully to it. But is 'professional' behaviour of this sort just voluntaristic? We could argue that in a sense their work is compelled. Through a range of ideologi-

cal mediations, the college positions the tutors as 'professionals'. In doing so, it can serve to validate the unpaid labour of the tutors. At the same time, the college legitimates a partial account of the tutors' labour, obscuring its full extent and nature. The 'professionalism' of FE is very often predicated on the *hidden but essential - the unacknowledged* work that tutors perform.

An additional way to view underground work is to understand that it is indeed more directly compelled. The structures of the college audits mean that tutors have little choice but to undertake underground work, not just to ensure that their students achieve but also to retain their own jobs. Were the college to be fully aware of what the tutors do, it might class them as either inefficient or as disobedient. Either way, they are doing things that the job does not officially require – the opposite of the approbation of being a 'professional'. Underground work needs to be understood as a very contradictory form of labour.

If we look at the field and the habitus of CRs, then a number of similar issues are raised. The concept of 'professional' work is used in similar ways but it is contradicted by the equally prevalent concept of CRs as junior 'apprentices'.⁶ However this notion of 'apprenticeship' is weakened by the lack of job continuity; by the demographic of many CRs (female, middle aged, experienced and part-time); and by the ambiguity of the idea that research is the appropriate apprenticeship for becoming a lecturer. Nonetheless, it remains surprisingly effective in legitimating low pay and underground work. As with FE tutors, underground work by CRs may acquire a pejorative dimension – seen as indicative of inadequacies such as poor time management; the use of insufficiently rigorous research methods; and over-emotional involvement in the research. To use the ideas of Lave and Wenger, contract research is a peculiar form of *permanently* peripheral participation.⁷

'...hauling up the rocks' of underground working

We do not wish to suggest that our personal experiences in TLCFE have been highly oppressive. Indeed much of the teamwork has been progressive. Nonetheless it is critical to speak out about the underground aspects of all research work, to understand the power relations and their impact on research findings. Whilst this applies to all participants in research, we are very suspicious of attempts to normalise or deny the underground working of CRs by a simulacrum of shared experience – the assertion that most professionals, including professors, engage in underground working. The field of Higher Education (HE) research does embody significant oppression as well as exploitation of CRs.⁸ This has an unacceptable effect on CRs as individuals and the practice of ethical research should include an awareness of this, and a commitment to end it. It goes well beyond the practice of unpaid overtime. Voices are actively muffled as well as passively silenced by the relations of power. CRs talk about being inhibited in the ideas that they put forward, frightened to jeopardise the follow-on contract. The contract framing stifles extra- or cross-contract thinking and publications. The valuation of research in HE (particularly through the Research Assessment Exercise) may prevent CRs from disseminating their research through the most efficacious channels – those that will reach practitioners - and inhibit their ownership of ideas in the most prestigious channels. Moreover there is the obvious loss of research expertise as contracts end. How much of the RCBN's capacity work will have been in vain, and will they track what jobs the TLRP researchers move on to? The development of ideas, expertise and research-informed practice in education is held back, and not advanced, by the CRs system.

Research outcomes play an increasingly vital part in HE funding, policy and practice and the muffling of voices of a casualised workforce of CRs, who contribute fundamen-

tally to constructing and consolidating research in practice and theory, is something we feel no one should accept. The hesitancy (by government; research boards and commissioning bodies; HE; and those such as the LSC and the LSDA who have a front-line interest in enhancing the evidence base in education⁹) to speak out about the underground aspects of CRs research has a deeply debilitating effect on the quality of education research.

Contact

Madeleine Wahlberg, Centre for Education and Industry (CEI), University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL. Email: m.wahlberg@warwick.ac.uk

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the RCBN Contract Researchers and Early Career Conference, 2nd-3rd December 2004, Edinburgh.

Endnotes

¹ Brecht. B. *Questions from a worker who reads*. Available online at www.marxists.org/subject/art/literature/brecht/

² See James, D. and Diment, K. 2003 *Going Underground? Learning and Assessment in an Underground Space* JVET Vol. 55 / 4 pp. 407-422.

³ See James, D. and Diment, K. 2003 *Going Underground? Learning and Assessment in an Underground Space* JVET Vol. 55 / 4 pp. 407-422.

⁴ For example see Hodkinson, P. (2004) 'Research as a form of work: expertise, community and methodological objectivity' *BERJ* Vol. 30 / 1 pp.9-26.

⁵ As an example, see the paper by Colley, H. (2002) 'A disagreeable experience: the research skills survey' *Research Intelligence* 79 pp. 18-20.

⁶ As a way to examine this, one of our partnerships set out a range of models for enhancing research ca-

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capacity in FE. See Anderson, G., Barton, B. and Wahlberg, M. 2003 *Reflections and Experiences of Further Education Research in Practice* JVET Vol. 55 / 4 pp. 499-516.

⁷ Two recent examples of this are Bassnett, S. (2004) 'How to convert

a fixed-term contract into a full-time job' *The Times Higher Education Supplement - The First Rung*, pp.8-11, 19th November; and unauthored (2004) *A scoping study of career development for junior researchers in higher education institutions* HEFC.

⁸ See Reay, D. (2004) 'Cultural capi-

talists and academic habitus: Classed and gendered labour in UK higher education' *Women's Studies and International Forum* Vol. 27 / 1 pp. 31-39. Also available online at www.sciencedirect.com

⁹ Learning and Skills Council and Learning and Skills Development Agency.

Music education research; Broadening horizons and enhancing research capacity for, and through, contract researchers

Rosie Burt and Hilary Moore

Royal College of Music

Education research within music colleges has, by its very nature, capacity building at its heart. The very aspects of conservatoires that make them such a rich domain in which to research – students and staff striving for excellence in a domain which no one denies embodies expertise – also makes the job of the researchers that bit more challenging, as they seek to encourage students to embrace more expansive forms of learning than they might at first consider. The task of engaging students in research needs to be well considered, and often tailored to the individual, in order to convince them to take time away from practising their specialism. But what of the research capacity of the researchers as opposed to the researched? As two full-time 'junior' contract researchers, working on a total of six research projects in music education at the Royal College of Music, we would like to share our experiences of capacity building.

For Rosie Burt, research officer for the ESRC TLRP3 project, Learning to Perform: Instrumentalists and Instrumental Teachers, professional development and capacity building have been key to her role from the start, through both formal and informal channels. As a recent graduate, there are of course many opportunities for new skills to be acquired through simply being in the role and fulfilling the tasks required. But

alongside this there have been many excellent examples of good practice that, perhaps above all, feed into the researcher's sense of belonging and value. To refer to the recommendations made at *Life beyond the TLRP: A conference for contract and early career researchers* (December 2004), the issue of work recognition has been integral to this. Within weeks of beginning the post, Rosie had been involved in analysing data for a conference publication, and was duly acknowledged with co-authorship of the paper in question. Through the professional development funding that the college offers, she has subsequently presented at an international conference and was principal author on a paper submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. These activities have not only assured her personal acknowledgment, but also of course benefit the project and the institution in terms of increased recognition, and may ultimately feed into RAE 2008.

With such an emphasis on professional development, it is unsurprising that the contract researchers in turn link to building the research capacity of others working or studying in the sector. Through the HEFCE-funded Good Management Project, for example, Hilary Moore has helped to coordinate a special issue of the *British Journal of Music Education*. Due out in November,

and devoted to the subject of instrumental teaching, this issue will feature articles written by instrumental teachers with no prior experience of research. The employment of instrumental teachers shares several similarities with that of contract researchers: there are few long-term contracts and few possibilities for promotion. Employer-sponsored professional development can be limited. Most teachers at the conservatoire level report they are happy and satisfied with their jobs, yet the Good Management Project, currently in its extension phase, seeks to highlight ways in which their employment experiences can be improved further. The opportunity for them to extend into research, and the financial support to do so is one of these ways. Hilary is principal author for one of the papers herself, and has been active in guiding other contributors in preparing their papers for peer-review. She has also been given the opportunity to present her own research at a Royal College of Music research seminar in February.

Both members of the Music Education Research Team, we have built-in 'reflection days' that enable us to set aside approximately a day a fortnight for reading and reflection. If requested, this time can be spent away from our day-to-day office environment. Due to the busy nature of the positions, which include ad-

ministration as well as research, the reflection days have safeguarded time for the much-needed development of ideas and understanding which feed back into the respective projects. Both of us have found these days to be instructive and rejuvenating; centring our role as creative thinkers and strategy-builders, rather than always putting the emphasis on the administration that is a significant, and sometimes consuming, part of the job. We suggest that this practice is considered across educational research projects. Hilary has recently completed her PhD. The research required for her thesis was entirely separate from the projects at college. Despite this, she was awarded substantial flexibility in the scheduling of her

working hours to aid timely completion. Rosie is being actively encouraged to pursue a PhD through her involvement in the project, and has received support from all levels in exploring this venture.

While our jobs have significant administrative portions, we both feel that the RCM has consistently supported and recognised our development as independent scholars and researchers. While credit is due to the institution for this, and also to our line manager, Janet Mills, who is herself a contract researcher, it may also be in part due to the nature of music education research. The majority of researchers working in music conservatoires are on fixed-term contracts and funded by

research grants. The RAE funding for conservatoires, in a sense vocational rather than scholastic institutions, is dependent upon the excellence and the successful retention of scholar researchers. It has been recognised, at RCM at least, that an essential element to both excellence and retention lies in the encouragement of their employees' personal and intellectual development. We are aware that our cases are unusually positive examples of contract researcher employment. We share them in the hope that such good practice may become more widespread across the sectors.

www.musiceducation.rcm.ac.uk

The highs of being a contract researcher¹

Chris Taylor

TLRP Research Capacity Building Network (RCBN)
Cardiff School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

The highs of being a contract researcher are often overlooked in discussions about the state and nature of contract research work in academia. In this short article I try to address the problems and issues facing contemporary contract research staff from a slightly different perspective. First I attempt to identify what I believe to be the benefits of being a contract researcher are before highlighting the circumstances in which these benefits can be realised.

Benefits of being a contract researcher

Time to do research with little distraction from teaching and administrative responsibilities – having experienced work as a traditional lecturer it is easy to allow these two aspects of an academic life to dominate: if there is one key element to developing a successful and sustainable academic career in contemporary HE it is about balancing these three aspects of work – each has to be done well, which can lead to a sense of frustration for not doing things better. Time as a CR allows you to build up and invest in

your research, therefore finding it easier to continue when one has these other responsibilities.

Learning new research skills (beyond the PhD) – The PhD as a learning experience can be relatively limited. Working on other research projects allows CRs to develop greater depth and breadth in their research skills/approaches. For example, PhD research can often be quite limited in its methodological and theoretical approaches. Working on other projects allows CRs to expand on these. Similarly working with other researchers helps to challenge and address epistemological, theoretical and/or methodological tensions, that can only benefit future research. Also, my experience shows that Universities are very poor at providing continued professional development for research activities – instead concentrating upon teaching and administrative training courses. So having the opportunity to continue learning about the practice of research outside the institution through research programmes, the ESRC (or other funding councils), and set-aside pro-

ject resources, is very useful – make the most of the many national social science and educational training activities.

Many discuss this as a research 'apprenticeship'. But we should also remember that CRs already have 'expertise' – indeed many will have many years of research experience. Typically the reason why CRs are not recognised as such is that 'expertise' is traditionally conferred by other esteemed researchers/scientists. Therefore the key to building a successful career is not always to develop expertise; it is in acquiring that status by others....

Developing a research profile – this is highly important in the current RAE-led academic working environment and labour market. Whilst this may not be agreeable there are other, more positive, benefits of developing a research profile. There are a number of ways this can be achieved as a CR: *Publications* – working with a team of researchers can be valuable in getting published. Not only can any analysis

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and writing be shared, there is collective responsibility in being published successfully (based on acceptance and rejection). *Networking* – CRs often have access to more resources to attend conferences, can produce more publications in any given time interval, and have access to national programmes of research seminars (e.g. through the TLRP). All these activities can greatly assist CRs to share and discuss their ideas with the wider research community, beyond departmental and institutional boundaries. *Wider contributions to the research community* – CRs can also have more time and enthusiasm than traditional academic staff to contribute to the wider research field in terms of helping to organise seminars, conferences, web-based debates, and getting involved in learned societies, such as BERA.

These are some of the key benefits of being a CR, but it is also impor-

tant to recognise that a number of conditions are necessary in order that they can be realised. Of course CRs must meet the conditions of work as outlined in their contract. Unfortunately there remains great variation in the nature of contracts between institutions, irrespective of funding agency. It is also imperative, from my experience, that CRs must develop a good working relationship with their PI. Increasingly, institutions are concerned that PIs are not given adequate guidance in achieving this. But it is also the responsibility of CRs to establish the basis of a good working relationship. Talking and sharing ideas with other CRs can be of enormous benefit here.

Having addressed these two 'responsibilities' CRs should then expect, I believe, to receive the following from their PIs and departmental management. In particular: *Autonomy, responsibility and freedom* – try to develop this within and beyond the project, but don't over-

stretch. Conversely make sure there is 'added value' to the project and team who got the funding;

Time, space and resources – some flexibility should be given to help develop 'own' research (see the BERA Concordat on CR staff). Also, make sure access is given to project resources in order to attend training and networking activities, conferences, etc; and

Support – formal and informal from PIs and other academic staff (e.g. mentors unrelated to project).

Finally, I would insist that central to all this is a place for reflection and learning in a CRs work. This is essential, it seems to me, not only to realise the benefits of being a CR, but to also ensure that the research field collectively benefits from the significant amounts of money and resources it invests in CR staff.

¹ The title and impetus for this article is largely indebted to Richard Remedios (University of Stirling) and Elisabet Weedon (University of Edinburgh)

Life beyond the TLRP: outcomes and recommendations

TLRP Research Capacity Building Network

Life beyond the TLRP: A conference for contract and early career researchers

Two-day conference

Thurs 2nd – Fri 3rd December 2004
Menzies Belford Hotel, Edinburgh

This conference invited discussion on issues regarding the nature of research capacity for contract and early career researchers that arose in the course of the RCBN's capacity building activities. The process used to develop the programme for the conference was a deliberate strategy to address some of the issues raised by the researchers; to take seriously their concerns and interests, to recognise their contribution to and situation within the profession, and to discuss the future of research capacity in educational research. An invited group of TLRP researchers met in Cardiff (August

2004) to discuss the remaining RCBN programme in the light of contract researcher issues, in particular discussing possibilities for the already scheduled conference. The discussion continued amongst the group through email, where the programme for the conference was developed and refined. The programme made use of the expertise and experiences of all of the delegates, who were asked to define scenarios of the future of educational research and develop a set of recommendations to present to a panel of people with responsibility for or interest in contract researchers. A crucial feature of the conference was that it was not an end, but a formalisation of the issues within a continuing dialogue. This is a summary of the presentation made to panel members, and their responses. The intention is that it will

continue the dialogue through inviting a wider group of people to enter into this discussion about the professionalism of contract researchers in the educational research community.

Summary of discussion and recommendations

Capacity Building

Skills, training and competence - A technical approach to research capacity building is welcome by CRs. However, it is very important to recognise that these are not the only areas of capacity-building that CRs are interested in. Other features include:

- *Being an academic* – while the notion of an 'apprenticeship' is useful it assumes that CRs are not already 'expert' in some way.

It also compounds the belief that professional learning ceases upon leaving a research contract. On the whole being a CR is no different to being any other academic – the key difference, and one that many of these recommendations attempt to address, is the *structural* position that CRs find themselves because of the nature of their contracts.

- *Value, recognition and status* – these recommendations are meant to lend themselves to an increase in the overall value, recognition and status of CRs within the research field. Improving these conditions for CRs will encourage higher quality and more effective research to be undertaken.
- *Making a significant contribution* – recognising the value and status of CRs will encourage their long-term commitment and investment to the research field, both in terms of research output and their contribution to the wider community of researchers.
- *Prevent the undermining of research capacity* – offering CRs a long-term future (see above) in the research field will discourage them from leaving the profession, which, in turn, will reduce the waste in resources being invested in CRs for just the short-term.

This approach to capacity-building recognises that CRs are already professional researchers, as opposed to the traditional perspective that they are being trained to *become* professional researchers. It is also important to note that professional learning should be encouraged for all researchers, at whatever stage of their research career they are. In particular, researchers should be offered continuous support and training as managers of research or principal investigators of research projects. This should reflect good and bad practice among PIs and acknowledge their responsibilities towards contracted researchers. Although this does not consti-

tute a recommendation towards capacity-building among CRs this is central to the success and equal implementation of the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. *Work recognition*

- Make visible the many practices, or ‘underground’ working, that CRs currently undertake to ensure the quality of educational research. This includes any developmental work, collaboration and networking already being undertaken to ensure the continued quality of research.
- These practices should be included in the job specifications of contracted research staff.
- This will help to recognise the value of these researchers.

2. *Central status of researchers*

- Establish new specialist mechanisms and systems in the support of CRs that recognise their structural status. These would include mentoring systems, appraisal schemes and duty of care that are not just built around existing support mechanisms for other research staff, but that are implemented to reflect the short-term nature of research contracts.
- Make available dedicated research roles within HE institutions that encourage the long-term employment of current CRs. This could be achieved by establishing ‘researcher pools’, but simultaneously discouraging the further casualisation of research employment.
- Create established research careers in HE institutions that exist alongside traditional lecturing career routes.
- These changes must become common across HE institutions to accommodate flexibility and consistency, thereby preventing inequalities of opportunity for research staff within the competitive labour market.

3. *Visibility and transparency*

- Greater awareness and transparency among CRs about the allocation of funding and resources

(including contracts) within programmes of research and within HE institutions.

- Identify the real and full costs to both the quality and opportunity cost of the current contract research system. In other words is the current situation the most viable and efficient way in which research resources are spent, not just economically but also in terms of the quality (both short-term and long-term) of research.
 - Encourage greater dialogue between research funding councils and HE institutions in an attempt to resolve, among other things, the differentiation between the management of CRs (by HE institutions) and the funding of CRs (by research funding councils). This should also examine the accountability and responsibility of these different organisations to CRs.
- #### 4. *Setting the research agenda*
- Move beyond a narrow research agenda in an attempt to encourage multiple views and perspectives in establishing research questions. This could include the role of CRs in that process but it should also reflect the views of (potential) research participants.
 - Reclaim an inclusive language of truthfulness, respect, authenticity and intellectual courage within the practice of research. This would represent a shift beyond a solely technical and bureaucratic language of research that often stifles the development and quality of research.
 - Develop a new moral code for undertaking research that reflects the diversity and multiple views of all researchers.

Panel members’ responses to presentation and recommendations

Prof Jonathan Spencer (ESRC Training and Development Board)

He responded to the presentation both as representative of ESRC Training and Development Board and also from his role within an HE institution.

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- Following the Roberts' Review, money is coming into institutions for research development, and researchers should go back to their institutions and ask where it is,
- Sceptical about specialist provision for fixed term workers, suggesting there are difficulties in making special cases for people rather than treating them all the same because staff development is problematic at all levels and there needs to be a more integrated approach,
- The contractual inequities raised are evident in many other forms of fixed term work, and so it is not easy for research councils to influence them,
- Issues of visibility and transparency are part of a wider agenda of hierarchy and power within academic life and ESRC is both part of the problem and part of the solution, because while there are policies that promote transparency, the ESRC is not perceived as transparent by the academic community,
- ESRC has forthcoming policy changes that may set a new research agenda (although the people with the problems have not been well represented in their development), one example is money that has been ring-fenced for research staff to put themselves forward as P.I.s,
- A new professional ethic or vocation is at odds with the technocratic language currently used to describe academic work,
- Will take back to the ESRC the necessity of CR representation in research council committees and review boards.

Dr Elaine Freedman (BERA Executive Council, Portfolio for Contract Research Staff)

- CRs need to know what they are entitled to,
- BERA research produced a report on good practice for employing researchers in 2000 and a charter for researchers in 2001,
- The Roberts' Review money is one way that the work and status of researchers can be recog-

nised,

- The RAE model is competitive and we need to get institutions to think differently about these sorts of issues so that there is parity both across institutions and within institutions.

Dr John Harland (Head of Northern Office, NFER)

- NFER is an employment context that differs significantly from HE institutions, with 95% of staff employed on permanent contracts alleviating many contractual difficulties,
- Emphasised the professional nature of their work as researchers, and when the term "contract" is used, it refers to the fact that the entire organisation is supported by tendering for research contracts, rather than referring to the status of individuals,
- While there are deliberate attempts to develop a culture of transparency, costings and financial matters are inherently transparent because all research staff work on bids,
- Advises universities to properly support the career structures of staff by getting rid of fixed term contracts, devoting proper time to staff development and tendering for the real costs of these in research proposals (currently universities are keeping their overheads low at the cost of their research staff),
- NFER do not expect to set the research agenda, they are suppliers of quality research for others, and this is a more democratic agenda than organisations like NERF.

Dr Anne McFarlane (Assistant Director, Research Careers, The Office of Science and Technology)

- There are several offices within government with an interest in and responsibility for researchers, OST is just one of them,
- Roberts' Review suggests that not enough people are moving into research as a career,
- Universities are autonomous institutions so there is only so much influence OST can have,
- OST are involved in a number of

initiatives for researchers such as; money offered through ESRC for two week training activities for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, a scheme for academic fellowships that result in permanent employment at the end of the contract, a women's resource centre for women in research, revision of the 1996 concordat signed by vice-chancellors (although there is no contract researcher representative on this working party and contract research issues are only represented through an AUT representative), recommendations on the EU charter and code of conduct for researchers,

- Additional money to come out of the Roberts Review for transferable skills training comes with a caveat that learning must be shared within the HE sector to promote good practice,
- There is currently uncertainty about the impact of the government's policy to fund full economic costs, although career development should be included within this.

Prof Sally Brown (Former Vice-Chair of the TLRP Steering Committee)

- Capacity building functions are built into the TLRP not only through the RCBN but also each project has its own strategy for capacity building and researchers should ask to see this,
- University of Stirling has permanent researcher positions and other institutions should note that Stirling have been very successful in gaining contracts,
- Researchers should expect to be involved in the dissemination of their projects,
- There are mechanisms built into the TLRP for checking on whether the capacity building and development is being done, although institutions resist this kind of interference,
- Researchers also have a responsibility to familiarise themselves with their profession and be prepared to speak up within their institutions,
- Will commit to passing the issues

raised at the conference to Stephen Baron (TLRP Associate Director in charge of capacity building) and suggest that he

take them up with CRs.

Note: This summary was compiled by members of the RCBN core team

from the presentation developed by conference delegates and notes taken during the panel discussion.

Response from the ESRC TLRP

Steve Baron

Associate Director of TLRP

Unfortunately, at the last minute, I was unable to attend the *Life beyond the TLRP* Conference as I had agreed. This response is thus based on the preparatory papers and the notes of the discussions prepared by the team from the Cardiff Research Capacity Building Network. In my view the proceedings of the Conference highlight key structural issues about the political economy of educational research which underpin many of the particular issues, such as for example, the status and recognition of Contract Researchers. I will therefore comment on two such features before discussing briefly how some of the particulars might be handled in the immediate future.

Research Funding

The preparatory papers by Taylor and Wahlberg, Diment, Davies, Colley and Wheeler argue the case that Contract Researchers are a particularly badly treated part of the academic workforce, casualized, poorly paid, of low status with little career structure and very much subject to the personal power of the Principal Investigator and the demands for 'underground' working. While these negatives might be compensated by some of the 'highs' of being a Contract Researcher which Remedios and Weedon describe, and while they may be ameliorated by some of the reforms suggested in D below, they are very much conditions of existence rooted in the peculiarly British systems of research funding. Currently three main streams of funding support educational research, broadly defined, and each militates against the Contract Researcher.

The Research Council funding stream, principally from the Eco-

nomics and Social Research Council, has to ride the sometimes opposing pressures of accountability for public funds (often accompanied by demands to be seen to be 'useful') and responsiveness to the priorities and judgments of the reference academic communities. These pressures have been mediated with a high degree of skill by successive Chief Executives and officers but they result in a funding regime which is highly competitive and which tends to the medium term at best and to poor follow through from individual Projects and accumulation of insights across Projects. For Contract Researchers current procedures assume low pay and inexperience and prioritise the search for the next grant rather than the development of the full potential, for both the researchers and wider reference groups, of the research. The increased use of Programmes of which TLRP is the prime example is a mechanism by which some of these pressures and their consequences might be handled. I will develop this argument below after having considered the two other major streams of funding.

Much educational research is directly funded by a variety of public bodies, voluntary organisations or charities and such sources provide the mainstay for various research centres in higher education and for independent research organisations such as the National Foundation for Educational Research. Research funded in this way tends to be tied closely to the immediate priorities of the funder, to be less than the Full Economic Cost and to be more short term than Research Council funding. The pressure to produce the 'Report' while writing the 'Proposal' for the next three month

project again militates against the full development of research insights and the accumulation of research insights. For Contract Researchers such funding provides a major opportunity for a career in educational research but at the cost of a frenetic pace of proposal and report writing which, without a huge 'underground' effort, does not produce the peer reviewed papers on which careers in the wider research community significantly depend.

A final stream of funding, little discussed so far as Contract Researchers are concerned, is the Funding Councils' 'R' stream. The current *per capita* basis of allocation means that Contract Researchers successfully returned in the Research Assessment Exercise are directly generating a secured, annual income to their (2001) institution equivalent to a substantial proportion of their salary. In addition the work of Contract Researchers plays a significant role in the 'R' funding of other academics and in the assessment of the Unit's research income, research culture etc. Despite this significant contribution to institutional funding I know of no examples where the role of Contract Researchers is recognised by transparent management of the income and its use to support and develop their careers - often the 'returned' person is long gone in search of the next short term contract. This is perhaps the greatest but least discussed form of exploitation of Contract Researchers.

From an initial position of some considerable scepticism about TLRP (its dirigiste origins, the narrowly conceived focus on 'learning outcomes', its potential equation with

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

educational research as a whole) I have come to see its value *per se* and to see in it the germ of a more creative future funding model within current constraints. While maintaining its focus on teaching and learning TLRP has brought together researchers from a wide range of intellectual backgrounds with diverse substantive interests and has funded them to conduct comparatively long term, large scale research. The unprecedented scale of TLRP has, in my experience to date, two direct benefits: the Programme has gone a long way beyond its narrow origins and is beginning to re-formulate and address some strategic issues in our current education systems; there is a 'quality multiplier' in funding longer term strategic research rather than shorter term research directly linked to policy or other concerns. The recent commissioning by the English government of a report on personalized learning from ongoing TLRP research provides a possible future model for reconciling pressures to immediate utility and long term, strategic thinking – the scale of TLRP enabled it to provide a research based response to government concerns more speedily and, I contend, of a higher quality than the more usual commissioning of an ad hoc research contract. Systematically developed (for example a cognate Programme on the social contexts of education) the model of long term strategic research with relatively open agenda from which research based commentaries could be drawn would mitigate some of the negative effects of current funding described above. For Contract Researchers the potential benefits of TLRP could be more systematically developed – longer contracts, capacity building support, the development of a personal research 'line', a wider range of research collaborators, opportunities for caucus building. While there is considerable potential benefit in such developments they do not address the central question of the structure of the academic profession.

The Academic Profession

Jon Nixon (2003) typically raised fundamental questions about the purpose and moral basis of the 'Academy' and starts formulating answers rooted in the radical tradition. In this context I will not pursue these arguments (except to encourage them) but will focus on the more immediate re-structuring of the academic profession. Contract Researchers inhabit a hinterland in the Academy between being 'apprentices' for later appointment to posts which combine teaching and research and being lifelong researchers for whom there is no clear career structure. A third route for Contract Researchers is to leave the Academy and find agencies which do have career structures for educational researchers. Focussing on the Academy it is apparent that the nature of staffing the field of 'education' has particular issues with implications for Contract Researchers. The largest activity and source of funding for Faculties of Education is the education of teachers, particularly their initial education and staff appointments tend to reflect this with staff appointed largely for their pedagogic experience and expertise in a particular subject rather than their track record in research as would happen in a 'subject' Department. In particular many staff do not have a grounding in the social scientific research which the Feedback from the 2001 RAE Panel highlighted as a key characteristic of high quality research. The proportion of staff returned in the Education Unit of Assessment was lower than many other Units.

One strategy which University managers have adopted to maximize their RAE profile (by reducing the denominator) is to move away from traditional 'lecturing' post combining teaching and research in favour of some teaching only posts (on Academic Related scales and therefore off balance sheet). There has not been a concurrent move to create research only posts and, except in a few cases, this does not seem likely. Tactically this is understandable but, in my view, is destructive

of the academic profession a key feature of which is the synergy between teaching and research activity. Rather than trying to establish a parallel research only career structure I think that Contract Researchers are best thought of as capacity builders within the educational Academy. There is a dearth of people with rounded research methodology expertise to support staff with little social scientific research background in developing their own expertise. The need exists for permanent appointments whose primary purposes would be to conduct research and through formal teaching of research methods, supervision and mentoring, secondment to research projects etc to develop the capacity of colleagues in their University (and possibly in regional consortia).

Future TLRP work with Contract Researchers and Newly Appointed Lecturing Staff

The TLRP Steering Committee has agreed a Capacity Building strategy for the remainder of the Programme's life. There is provision for an annual Conference for newly appointed lecturing staff to be held (subject to agreement) the day before BERA at the conference venue. There is also provision in the budget for an annual two day Conference for Contract Researchers in continuation of the current model. It is hoped that the group which convened in Edinburgh will build on the outcomes of that Conference and will continue to discuss and act on issues affecting Contract Researchers. Particular priorities over the next year are to try to influence the revision of the CVCP Concordat, to press ESRC to make capacity building a more structural part of its assessment and funding model and to press for transparency in the use of 'R' stream funding attributable to Contract Researchers; all while writing the next Proposal ...

Reference

Nixon, J. (2003) Professional renewal as a condition of institutional change: rethinking academic work, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 13, 1, 3-15

Life beyond the TLRP: A conference for contract and early career researchersThursday 2nd – Friday 3rd December 2004, Menzies Belford Hotel, Edinburgh

Organised by the TLRP Research Capacity Building Network

Participant list

Name	Representing	Institution
Norma Adair	<i>Learning Lives: Learning, Identity and Agency in the Lifecourse</i>	University of Brighton
Jaume Ametller	<i>Towards Evidence-based Practice in Science Education</i>	The University of Leeds
Claire Blackman	<i>Early Career Learning at Work: LINEA</i>	University of Brighton
Ruth Boyask	<i>Research Capacity Building Network</i>	Cardiff University
Sally Brown	<i>Former Vice-chair of the TLRP Steering Committee</i>	University of Stirling
Rosie Burt	<i>Learning to Perform: Instrumentalists and Instrumental Teachers</i>	Royal College of Music
Julian Clarke	<i>Learning as Work: Teaching and Learning Processes in the Contemporary Work Organisation</i>	University of Leicester
Annalise Clements	<i>Effective Pre-School and Primary Education Project - EPPE 3-11</i>	Institute of Education
Kim Diment	<i>Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education</i>	University of the West of England
Susan Downey	<i>INTERPLAY: Play, Learning and ICT in Pre-School Education</i>	University of Stirling
Bryony Duncan	<i>Learning in Community-Based Further Education</i>	Glasgow Caledonian University
Elaine Freedman	<i>British Educational Research Association (BERA)</i>	University of Bath
Judith Furner	<i>Early Career Learning at Work: LINEA</i>	Sussex University
John Harland	<i>National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)</i>	NFER, Northern Office
Judith Litjens	<i>Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses</i>	University of Edinburgh
Anne McFarlane	<i>Research Careers, Office for Science and Technology (OST)</i>	OST, UK Government
Irene Malcolm	<i>Learning Lives: Learning, Identity and Agency in the Lifecourse</i>	University of Stirling
Laura Manni	<i>Effective Pre-School and Primary Education Project - EPPE 3-11</i>	Institute of Education
David Mount	<i>Evidence Ltd</i>	
Jon Nixon		University of Sheffield
Gareth Rees	<i>Research Capacity Building Network</i>	Cardiff University
Richard Remedios	<i>Competence-based learning: the early professional development of teachers</i>	University of Stirling
Candice Satchwell	<i>Literacies for Learning in Further Education</i>	Lancaster University
Jonathan Spencer	<i>ESRC Training and Development Board</i>	University of Edinburgh
Chris Taylor	<i>Research Capacity Building Network</i>	Cardiff University
Madeleine Wahlberg	<i>Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education</i>	University of Warwick
Elisabet Weedon	<i>Enhancing the Quality and Outcomes of Disabled Students' Learning in HE</i>	University of Edinburgh
Wesley Welcomme	<i>Effective Pre-School and Primary Education Project - EPPE 3-11</i>	University of London
Alison Wilde	<i>Enhancing the Quality and Outcomes of Disabled Students' Learning in HE</i>	University of Gloucestershire
Sara Williams		Cardiff University

ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme Research Capacity Building Network

Project Director

Gareth Rees (reesg@cardiff.ac.uk)

Project Administrator

Clare Davies (rcbn@cardiff.ac.uk)

Correspondence

Cardiff University School of Social Sciences
Glamorgan Building

King Edward VII Avenue

Cardiff CF10 3WT

Tel. +44(0)29 2087 5345 Fax. +44(0)29 2087 4678

www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/capacity

RCBN News

The RCBN has now come to the end of its programme of capacity building activities. However, the next issue of *Building Research Capacity* will outline the future of research capacity building within the TLRP and what you can expect to see over the next three years.

In the meantime the RCBN website is still active and provides many useful resources to those involved in teaching and learning research. For example, the RCBN website contains an extensive research resources catalogue with the names of many different organisations and groups that can provide continued support in training and development of a variety of methodological skills and techniques.

The RCBN website also provides free access to many of the discussion papers, presentations, references and other useful resources that have been commissioned and used by the RCBN in its activities over the last three years. For example, we have an extensive bibliographic guide to discourse analysis composed by Martyn Hammersley, presentations on the use of quantitative longitudinal datasets by Paul Lambert and Paul Croll, discussion papers on the use of qualitative research in policy-making by Lesley Saunders and Liz Spencer, and guides and presentations on writing and obtaining research grants by Dylan Wiliam, Andrew Pollard and Teresa Rees.

The RCBN website also contains a number of recommended references in a wide range of methodological areas, including a downloadable methodological references database.

Another important resource on the RCBN website

are evaluation reports from all the activities that the RCBN has organised, brokered or funded. The evaluation summaries of all these events are freely available from the website and copies of the full evaluations are available from the RCBN office. These are useful as a record of our past events, but we hope they also provide an invaluable tool for anyone thinking about organising future capacity-building activities. So, for example, if you are thinking about organising some activity or workshop on the use of ICT in research have a look at the evaluation reports of all the ICT-based activities we have arranged. This will give you an idea of potential contributors, what previous events have aimed and actually achieved, and the advantages and disadvantages of using particular formats for the activities.

www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/capacity

Dates for your diary:

- Official launch of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM), Oxford, 21-22 June 2005 (more details of the NCRM in the next issue of BRC)
- European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), University College Dublin, 7-10 September 2005
- British Educational Research Association (BERA) Annual Conference, University of Glamorgan, 14-17 September 2005

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Editor

Chris Taylor (TaylorCM@cardiff.ac.uk)

Cardiff University School of Social Sciences

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