

Notes from TLRP/TEL briefing meeting on call:

Research on technology enhanced learning, Institute of Education, 6 June 2007

(with thanks to Professor David Martin, University of Southampton for compiling the below).

See also Q&A from the session on the TLRP VRE Technology Enhanced Learning area

<http://groups.tlrp.org/portal>

40+ attendees and attendance was limited to 1 person per potential application (this was the only briefing meeting for the call), so there will be plenty of competition. Plenty of people present who are not part of any of the currently funded projects and certainly some who had not bid in previous round. NB Written call specification is the definitive document – this meeting is just aimed at clarification and background.

Andrew Pollard – TLRP director – stresses he is not the specialist in TEL but there is a specialist commissioning panel being assembled by ESRC now. This panel will review all the applications following peer review and make recommendations to full TLRP steering committee who make funding recommendations to ESRC/EPSC. The panel do have to stick to the specification however – the second call spec. is a variant on the first round. Another document which reviews what happened in the first call will go up on the TLRP website, probably within the next week (based on Lydia Plowman et al.'s review work esp. of the capacity-building aspects of the first round). Everyone knows this is a hard area and noone is really expecting these proposals to come up with all the answers – hopefully by the end of this process there will be new interdisciplinary synergies emerging. Aim is to get added value in different educational settings, wherever there seems to be the best chance of making progress – hence the very wide-ranging call: this may not necessarily result in a 'balanced' final portfolio of projects.

Andrew Pollard commentary on some key issues: "understanding, creating and exploiting digital technologies" – each of the words in the title reflects something of the aims of the programme.

Interdisciplinary is a must. Really seeking added value from interdisciplinarity. Not just the case of having a team with diverse members, but looking for genuine intellectual collaboration.

Finance £5.5m at 80% FEC. About another £0.5m is being held for programme coordination etc. Outline applications for up to £1.5m (100% FEC) and smaller projects £100k-0.5m. Panel haven't formed a view regarding the final balance between projects of these different sizes – probably a value for money decision when applications have been reviewed.

Focus on **learning outcomes** – need to show the value to learners and not just study an interesting process: in particular, can we measure the outcomes and make useful assessments of what works – full realisation that there are no simple answers, but it is reasonable to ask what actually enhances learning: Therefore, key aspects of proposals will be: Whose learning? What are the outcomes targeted? (e.g. spelling skills much easier to measure than learning disposition – the most worthwhile challenges are often the hardest!) What form of intervention is planned? What evidence will be collected in relation to these outcomes? How will the research design support conclusions about the effectiveness of the intervention? (NB it's not absolutely essential to have an intervention, but most projects probably will)

Research challenges:

productivity – higher quality and more effective learning in affordable and acceptable ways. This has moved from last place in round 1 to first place in round 2 – just reflecting that the first round proposals

were relatively less in this area. NB Productivity is not just about money. Can we learn things that could be scaled-up and widely used? Also *Personalisation; Inclusion; Flexibility*. In first round, most applications touched on several of these, which was fine. They have kept with these four because they were felt to be well-judged for first round and also to provide potential for dialogue between projects in future.

Anticipated that some other projects could join in this community through “sandpit” idea: invite people to come to a one-week “ideas factory” activity, with independent facilitators and subject experts. These people do creative things together and come up with proposals – at the end of the exercise, money (maybe c. £0.5m, being held in reserve) split between those attending. Also possible that the programme may gain some associated projects – funded in other ways, but invited to join.

12 July 4pm closing date through J-eS. Don’t leave it to the last minute in case of technology failures! The deadline is absolute.

Assessment of applications All applications will be assessed against these criteria:

Contribution and fit to TLRP call – as already discussed. Does proposal build on what TLRP has already been doing? Thoughtful commitment to participation in the programme as a whole.

User engagement: does it include strong collaborative partnerships and appropriate user engagement with policy-makers, practitioners and potential adopting organizations throughout all stages of the research? Evidence that these bodies have been involved in the development of the proposal.

Interdisciplinarity – discussed above

Contribution to knowledge – tricky, because an awful lot is already known about many of these topics and applications led from a single discipline tend to risk missing very relevant literatures from other perspectives. Is there a coherent analytical framework and can we demonstrate contribution to interdisciplinary research knowledge base?

Research teams and project management - will it actually work? How will leadership be managed? ESRC/EPSRC insist on having a PI that they can hold accountable – regardless of interdisciplinarity which programme hopes to foster: someone has to take primary responsibility and teams have to make this work. Capacity-building for project staff?

Research design and methods. Clearly articulated? Appropriate to the timescale. Has careful consideration been given to ethical issues (NB some note that there were first round applications that didn’t give this sufficient consideration). Similarly analysis methods. Is there a risk analysis included: how could it go wrong and how would it be managed?

Contribution to research capacity building – commitment to helping to build research capacity in interdisciplinary research in TEL in future?

Communication, knowledge transfer and impact plans (more on this in full applications, but outlines need to show these have been considered) Any strategy for sustainability of project outputs as appropriate?

Value for money – esp. relative to likely outcomes.

This is a ridiculously large amount of stuff to present in an outline proposal, but treat it as a checklist of issues to bear in mind.