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## **Editor's comments**

**Dr Angus I. Carpenter**, Research Centre manager, The Research Centre, City College Norwich

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the latest issue of the *Research and Development Bulletin*; Volume 8, number 1. I think there will be something in this edition that proves to be an interesting and informative read to all involved across the Learning and Skills sector. The articles presented cover a wide range of subject areas and topics.

Firstly, the City College Norwich's personalisation project is presented. This project initially started three years ago. It is delivered by the staff within each school and has grown substantially since its inception. A small selection of these projects are reviewed here, with both staff and students giving their perceptions on the projects they were involved with. This is followed by an article that reviews return on investment models, a way by which institutions could evaluate the impact of training services on the bottom line, and what public organisations currently use if anything to evaluate programmes. Next is an article that addresses organisational culture within a mixed economy college and what this means for its management. This article is a first from Richard Stakes, University Centre, Doncaster College, which highlights our intention for the bulletin to be used by first time authors. Lastly, is an article that reports on an international study group that reviewed how the Dutch use / process accreditation / recognition of prior learning.

### **The Research Centre**

City College Norwich (CCN) was recently celebrating after receiving an nfer award that recognised CCN as a research engaged college – one of just seven across the UK currently. On 21<sup>st</sup> July, five representatives from colleges and schools joined to officially celebrate their research engaged awards (Fig. 1). It was held at CCN's St Andrews House site with presentations from the institutions and a discussion session that



Figure 1. Attendees at CCN's celebration day for being awarded nfer's research engaged school / college award. Starting from the left they are: Martin Beedle (Ossett School & Sixth Form College), Judy Dawe (CCN), Carys Davies (Yale College), Richard Steer (CCN), Serena Dixon (Recreation Road Infant School), Teresa Whitehurst (Sunfield Research Institute), Alison Lawson (nfer) and Angus Carpenter (CCN).

provided the opportunity to develop ideas, knowledge and potential collaborations. Institutions that have been successful in gaining the award can display the nfer research engaged logo (Fig. 2).

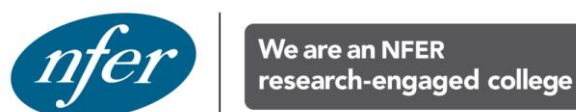


Figure 2. The nfer research engaged college logo.

City College Norwich is also one of the Learning and Skills Improvement Sector's (LSIS) further education laboratory colleges, working with CUREE and college staff to report on within college research by practitioners.

It has been a very busy year for The Research Centre here at City College Norwich. The SOUL Record project has

grown from strength to strength as it expands from its main stream third sector application in to new sectors, such as the educational and children services sectors. Several county councils are currently investigating ways to introduce The SOUL Record strategically across their institutions. Also, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) is poised to give further funding to the highly successful 'HEA Research Skills workshops' project. With the highly positive and complimentary feedback received for the workshops conducted this year, which were developed and delivered by the Research Centre with collaborators such as Becky Turner from the HELP Cefl, University of Plymouth, the HEA looks set to continue to fund the project this year.

With the ever changing landscape of the FE sector currently being orchestrated by the coalition government, there will no doubt be many new situations that will have to be adapted to in the future. Quite what this will actually mean for practitioner research remains unclear at present. Certainly, while there is an ever increasing awareness of the potential benefits practitioner research can bring to an institution, funding for this sought of research will be much harder to come by in the future. Therefore, where practitioners do get the change to undertake research, please do not forget to disseminate it. The R&D Bulletin is always happy to receive articles from people in the sector, especially if 'new' authors, and we are very willing to support potential authors in preparing manuscripts. Please either contact me directly or go to our website for further details:

<http://www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/>

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### *Erratum*

In Volume 7, number 2, a full authorship was not cited correctly. It should read as follows:

Garside, P., Pichon, L., Gobey, K., Stocking, J., O'Neill, A., Foster, K., Johnson, D., Wilkinson, S. (2010) Assessing mentoring. *Research and Development Bulletin*, 7(2):47-50

Also in Volume 7, number 2, an author's name was incorrectly cited. It should read as:

Vallely, J. (2010). Delivery of effective mentoring through the investigation of the coordination and quality assurance of mentor support for ITE trainees. *Research and Development Bulletin*, 7(2):21-32

## ***The personalisation project at City College Norwich; a vignette of case studies***

**Barbara Abrahams**, Lecturer, Hotel School, City College Norwich

**Jo Brannen**, Lecturer, Foundation Studies, City College Norwich

**Cath Harrison-Williams**, Lecturer, Health and Care School, City College Norwich

**Andy Leech**, Lecturer, Technology, City College Norwich

**Brenda Unwin**, Lecturer, Creative Arts, City College Norwich

**Gillian Scofield**, Researcher, The Research Centre, City College Norwich

### **1. Background**

A range of personalisation initiatives have been implemented by the Schools at CCN. The Schools' developed and delivered a range of projects within a number of generic themes such as, Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), Learning to Learn, Differentiation in Learning and Teaching, Learning Empowerment, Negotiated Assignments/ Assessments, Mentoring for Success, Learner Role in Quality Assurance, etc. Within these overarching categories each school has introduced its own projects which have been implemented over a range of the courses, qualifications and levels. For example, the School of Health and Beauty have engaged with the negotiated assessment theme which is being implemented with students studying at levels 1 – 3, and a mentoring project has been implemented with Beauty Therapy and Hairdressing level 2 – 3 students with the aim of students becoming more confident in supporting each other. The School of Creative Arts has instigated a project to meet the Learn to Learn criteria which is being delivered through the BTEC Music National Diploma and the Creative and Media Diploma and a Mentoring for Success project has been implemented within the Art and Design Foundation degree.

### **2. The case studies**

The following five case studies have been selected from the range of personalisation projects being conducted by the various Schools. Each case study gives a staff perspective of the individual project (as a result of discussions with the relevant project

leads) and comprises a Project Summary, Project Outline and Project Outcomes. Student perceptions of the projects have also been sought either via focus group interviews or by use of on-line questionnaire surveys and are also included. Additionally, where appropriate quantitative data has been available, a Project Impact section is incorporated to highlight subsequent student results and achievement. Further Information provides signposts for accessing examples of associated documentation where available.

#### ***School: Hotel School***

***Project title: Greater Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) within the interview process***

#### ***Project summary***

The main focus of the Hotel School personalisation project was a review of the way in which the student selection process was conducted with an aim to 'personalise that experience' and increase initial information, advice and guidance (IAG). The expectation being that this would benefit both prospective students and the college. In terms of the student, the project aimed to gain a greater insight into the needs and motivation of individuals with the key being to identify any additional learner requirements and, thus, have the appropriate student support mechanisms in place before the commencement of an individual's course. In turn, it was expected that this greater information and knowledge of the individual would have knock-on benefits for the college, such as improved course retention and completion rates.

It was recognised that young people who

progress in to Further Education (FE) could have a variety of learning difficulties and / or disabilities, such as dyslexia, ADHD or other learning support needs around literacy and numeracy, and it was felt that there was a need to find a way of personalising the application process and interview experience so that those needs became recognised pre-enrolment. This would then allow for greater strategic planning of resources within the college.

#### *Project overview*

The project involved the redesign of a number of practices and procedures. Firstly, greater flexibility was introduced into the availability of interview dates themselves. Rather than having one fixed day of the week for interviews these were arranged so that they were held on different days of the week, which, in itself, increased accessibility and interview attendance rates.

Another major procedural change that developed as an outcome from this personalisation project was that every application form was inspected and studied more carefully, prior to interview, by the personalisation lead in the Hotel School. The application forms were sifted and checked "... to see if GCSE grades, either actual or predicted will meet the needs of the demands of the course". Forms were also checked for any disclosures by applicants themselves or "... just as crucial, evidence of undisclosed learning needs ...". As explained by the personalisation lead:

*"... it may be that the young person has filled in the application form themselves and it is quite apparent that the literacy doesn't match the level of the course ... they might have spelt quite simple things wrong and yet they are applying to do a level 2 course ..."*

Consequently, any potential issues highlighted on the application form would be brought to the attention of interviewers prior to the applicant attending interview.

The 'interview process' was also revised to provide a welcoming experience for potential students. This consisted of a half day where attendees (parents were also invited) were all welcomed by the Head of School and introduced to some of the teaching team within the School. During these three hours the applicants, split in to two groups, completed a basic skills review and had a tour around the School to view the facilities and resources. This was as well as conducting their one:one interviews.

A further introduction, as a result of the project, was an 'aspirations sheet', which was given to students to complete whilst attending college for their interview. There was recognition that interviews and application forms could only provide basic levels of information and, therefore, the objective of the aspirations sheet was to augment this data. This additional tool had a number of beneficial aspects. For example, it allowed staff to gain a 'wider picture' of the young person and their motivation. It asked questions such as; 'What are they aspiring to?', 'What can they do to reach that?' and 'What can we [the college] do to support that?'. This written form had to be completed on the day (negating the chance for parents to complete it on behalf the learner) and provided further evidence of any potential learning support needs required by the young person. The School's essential skills tutor was available on the interview day to meet with any of the students where there was an identified need.

Finally, the project introduced a series of 'trigger questions' to be asked at interview, alongside the standard City College Norwich interview questions. Although it was highlighted that the questions appear to be 'simple', they were actually designed with care to help understand the interviewee in more detail and provide an indication as to the level of their motivation. An example cited was interviewees would be asked; 'Who is your favourite chef?'. Whilst, it was acknowledged that, in isolation, this was not 'a perfect measure of motivation', put together with the other additional resources, developed under the project, it "... gives you

a much more rounded picture of the person that you're interviewing".

*Project outcomes; the staff perspective*

It was confirmed that the project had been very effective, with the Hotel School student retention currently up at 90%. Whilst it was recognised that other, external factors may also have impacted on retention rates it was considered that identifying student support needs early had resulted in learners keeping on programmes until they completed. Similarly, although not 'researched', the impression gained was that students were much happier in the Hotel School with the variable support mechanisms in place.

The project lead highlighted that as a consequence of the introductions made during the personalisation project, "... now we're talking about planning the support in November – May, not waiting until they [students] come to us in September and working on the back foot". An outcome of increasing achievement and retention was acknowledged, however, as also pointed out, "... for me there is a kind of qualitative thing - that you've already made a good connection with these people".

In summing up, the benefit of the project was pointed out:

*"I think that transition from High School to Further Education College is enormous, absolutely enormous, and that we don't give it enough attention, and that it's just a little stepping stone to make them [applicants] think, well actually this is a safe environment where people care about you."*

The pilot project was instigated in 2008/09 and the developments / outcomes and procedures were refined, in true action research style, over the period of the project and have subsequently now become embedded as current practice within the Hotel School.

*Project outcomes; the student perspective*

A focus group was held with a sample of the

students, where they were asked to comment on their experience of the interview process within the Hotel School. However, 12 months plus has elapsed since the focus group students were, themselves, going through this process. Hence, this would affect the details of their recall about the experience. The participating students were studying on courses ranging from Entry Level to Level 2.

It was agreed that the tour of the School was very useful and that without the tour the students would not have had the opportunity to see what was available and on offer as one student remarked: "It [the tour] was very good, the equipment was good that you could use". The benefits from the tour were the opportunities it provided to meet people and obtain information, as one student commented; "I think so, because you get to know the staff very well when you're on the tour, so you get more information from the staff ... [and]... you get to meet new people as well.", while another student pointed out; "...that [the tour] helped me as well because when they showed me ... they gave me my timetable as well, and that really helped me because I knew where to go already from the first day I came in, instead of being scared and didn't know where to go".

In terms of the day being organised with group sessions (aside from the individual interviews), again, this was felt to be a preferred format as highlighted by one individual; "...it was totally better in a group". Also, it was agreed that the group arrangements helped to break the ice and that, as such, attending the college for an interview did not feel so isolated. This was summed up when one student stated, "... we did activities which helped to bond, because when you come to college it's like different from school and it's bigger isn't it". Another student stated:

*"When I first came in [for interview] we went in Inspirations [restaurant] and like I didn't know anyone then and there was quite a few people, but because there was a load of people that grabbed my confidence up ... I met people there that are my friends to*

*this day”.*

The focus group were complementary regarding the level of additional support available to students once studying. They also highlighted that "... your support is there when you need it". They felt there was a good assessment process at the interview day too. One interviewee commenting on the assessment process said it allowed for support to be available when students required it, thus, highlighting where the project meets its aim to identify early and provide the appropriate student support mechanisms for individuals.

When asked for views regarding the 'aspirations' sheet, which prospective students were required to complete on the interview day, one of the group commented positively that from this sheet "They [college staff] know what you want to do and they can help you".

The students also mentioned that the induction week was very useful stating, "It made me feel a lot more confident".

Finally, in terms of the overall impression that prospective students took away from the Hotel School's interview process, it was felt that this was 'professional'. As one student commented, the process was managed in a way he expected to find in the world of work: "This is really what you would do outside". The student confirmed that he could not see where there needed to be any changes made to the Hotel School interview process.

**School: School of Technology**  
**Project title: Achieving success;**  
**combined year student groups**

*Project summary*

This Technology School personalisation project focused on peer mentoring as a means to increase the level of success achieved by individual students. Whilst students completed and passed their specific course, generally they were achieving pass grades rather than extending themselves to

gain merits or distinctions. As highlighted by the project lead; "... the success rate was ok but the distance travelled was something we needed to look at". For example, prior to the project there was a number of students who progressed in to their second year but had to undertake re-sits from the first year or who had referrals in different subject areas of the course. Therefore, the aim of this project was to work towards raising individual student grades, thus move the cohort grades from the majority being pass towards a higher number of merits and distinctions in their coursework.

The project was based upon the introduction of an 'Achieving Success' session each week whereby the first year and second year groups would come together to work jointly and peer mentor under naturally built relationships. The premise and expectation was that the two year groups would holistically support, help and mentor each other. Specifically, year two students leading in the mentoring of year one students. Ultimately, there was an expectation that these sessions would have positive impacts in the form of improved course grades, retention and progression rates.

This particular project involved Engineering National Diploma students at Level 3 and was first implemented in the academic year 2006-07.

*Project overview*

At the time of the initial pilot project there was some, perhaps expected, reluctance on the part of the two student year groups to mix until they had got to know each other. In order to overcome this, the project started with a social event that took the form of a 'Green Day', when it was arranged for Toyota cars to be present at the college and the two student groups, working together, had to design, build and race a solar powered model car. This activity acted as an initial ice breaker and other similar events have been used in following years, when new student cohorts begin the course. These consisted of a social evening in Norwich, the group undertaking a cookery exercise in the Hotel School and the continued organisation of the 'Green Day', which were all enjoyed by the

students. During the early stages of the project, staff considered how best to introduce the second year students to the new first year cohort. It was decided to allow the students progressing in to the second year to resolve this situation. They then decided to develop and run the induction week for the new first year cohort. As such, students were asked by staff; "What didn't we do in the induction well?", "What would you improve?", "What would you like to do and how would you like to be introduced to the college?". As the project lead explained; "... and so they put together a plan of the whole week ... and they documented every session". Thus, as a result of organising student induction in this way, the two student year groups were immediately mixing at the start of the academic year.

Additionally, in terms of improving the success of the project, it was decided that it would be beneficial for the students to attend mentor training. Hence, both year groups received some formal training at the college so that they had a grasp of mentoring skills, which could then be used within the Achieving Success session.

The Achieving Success session itself was not optional but timetabled as part of the course, hence student attendance was required. The session was 1½ to 3 hours per week, and the class size was approximately forty (approx. twenty students from each year). The facilities provided included a large classroom equipped with both normal desks, where groups could work together, CAD stations and computer desks with PC / internet access. At the start of each session the students "... declare what they are going to achieve in that session" said the project lead. The goals would be written up on a white board so that their targets were clear for all to see.

Students were free to decide what they wished to use the session for and work together in small sub-groups. A member of staff was, obviously, always present during these sessions and would assist students with their chosen activities and in 'pairing up' groups of students who wished to work on

similar tasks or who would like help from students in the alternative year group. For example, if a first year student wanted help with a particular subject / unit the lecturer would be aware of a second year student who was particularly strong in that subject area and would consequently suggest appropriate students for mentoring. It was also acknowledged to students that within these sessions the student mentors facilitate and guide only, "... they [the students] are not telling them what to do but showing them how to get there". It was also highlighted that where a student was mentoring, this not only helps the mentee but, in itself, also helps to reinforce the understanding of the mentor who was 'teaching' a topic to others in the group.

The actual activities undertaken in the Achieving Success sessions varied depending on the students' requirements. However, examples might be working on revision for an exam, working on assignments, such as science or maths, or using the session for visits from external speakers, etc. At particular times of the academic year students may look at completing their UCAS forms or job applications. An example cited being if a student was interested in progressing to university the written target on the white board might be "... by the end of the session today, identify three universities and courses you're interested in. So we start them getting ready to get their UCAS form in".

Alternatively, the group dynamics within these sessions has encouraged not only the second year students to mentor those in the first year but also visa versa. For example, second year students re-sitting units from year one may find it useful to revise with first year students who were currently completing that unit and could give relevant information.

#### *Project outcomes; the staff perspective*

Since the introduction of the Achieving Success session there had been an effective achievement of a greater number of merits and distinctions by students. As highlighted by the project lead, "The majority are getting distinctions in the majority of [units] ...

because they've been given the help and guidance of how to get there" (Figure 1).

Within the sessions, students also have access to a spreadsheet log of their results and can, therefore, assess their own progress and where they might improve. An awareness of their ongoing course grades also appeared to have resulted in another benefit, in that this has introduced an element of 'positive competition' between students. Hence, motivation appeared to be greater for students having worked within the mixed year one and two group. As highlighted, the class has fulfilled two aspects; "... they have a time slot to do their work and a peer group to help them do their work".

The Achieving Success session, mentor training and the student led induction week have since become embedded as part of the National Diploma. The retention rate for the two year course was at 90 per cent (rising to 100 per cent for the second year cohort of the course) and whilst it was recognised that external factors may have also impacted upon retention rates, it was considered that Achieving Success sessions had had a positive impact on these outcomes.

In summing up the benefits of the project it was stated by the project lead that, "Now we are looking at the majority of them passing with distinction rather than the majority of them, four years ago, passing with a pass".

#### *Project outcomes; the student perspective*

Two focus groups were held with students (year one and year two) who were asked to give their thoughts on the Achieving Success session, which they attend as part of their Engineering National Diploma course.

The first year group commented on the type of activities they would complete within the class and pointed out that they could choose what they wished to do. One student explained, "Basically if you've fallen behind on something it's a chance to catch up on that, or if you've got everything done you can either help people, or do work that people haven't started yet, it's basically organising everything really". Further examples given of

the use of time in the session might be to discuss a recent visit to a local employer or exam revision.

The way in which the session had been beneficial to improving grades was clearly highlighted by the statement of another student:

*"If you've done everything, maybe if you've got a merit you can... [ask the lecturer]... can I just do the distinction stuff, so you can go and do it again. So if you want to do the higher grades you can do".*

Regarding the benefits of having a mixed student year group, one of the focus group members stated:

*"...there is us and the second years so if we need any help from them, because obviously they've done it before, we can ask them for help and vice versa ... so they come and ask us about some stuff that we can help them with, which is a good group bonding session".*

One of the examples cited was "They [the second year group] did business this semester and we did ours last", which highlighted where second year students might be mentored by first year students who had already completed the module concerned. The benefits of this mixed year group was also apparent when second year students could mentor first year students regarding progression routes: "They can tell us what their plans are for the future and that kind of gives you an idea about what you want to do...". A second student added, "... they told us what uni's [universities] they were going to, [and] how they got in".

The group also commented that they "... get to work with people that you wouldn't normally work with". They felt that this provided helpful skills, such as 'getting on with people'. Similarly, the students also remarked that because they remain later in

the day to attend the Achieving Success session, there was a sense that it was "... more like a working environment". It was also suggested that there was a greater motivation to attend a larger group session, such as Achieving Success, than perhaps there might be if this was 'free time' to study individually.

The students commented on the usefulness of having access to a spreadsheet of their grades; "... so if you have a referral you can find out..." and they also indicated that if a student had problems (for example, if there was an instance of bullying) it was possible to go to the lecturer for help in that session.

The second focus group, with the second year students, also gave positive comments regarding the mixed year sessions. One student commented:

*"I think it's a good session because you get to do what you like, and the teachers there to help you. You always have a lecturer there and support staff ... because it's an open session you do what work you want, you've got access to PCs and desk space, a lecturer, so everyone's there, so if you need help you can always mix with different students".*

In terms of working in smaller subgroups it was stated that the lecturer would direct them to helping a group of first years if they needed help with an assignment. The reciprocal nature of the class was also highlighted with the students confirming that conversely the first year students could assist the second year students with re-sits, etc. However, it was mentioned that it was not necessarily a group of first year and second year students together, "... it's just who is doing what assignment".

In regard to the session's organisation it was highlighted that "I think the lesson structure works really well. You have to write what your goal is and the teacher makes sure you achieve it". The students explained that they could work in smaller groups on assignments and, supporting a comment made by a first

year student, this group indicated that if there was a course visit or 'engineering day out' the Achieving Success session "... gives us that whole lesson to plan things ... plan out what we need to do". The students felt it was a good motivating session but also "... relaxing and eases a bit of the pressure, because you know you've got that lesson if you do need to catch up".

The group were also able to confirm in hindsight that they found the session useful when they, themselves, had been in the first year of the course: "I think it made the first year a lot easier, also you have a vague idea of what happens on your second year". Another student added; "... you get a better insight into what the college was like when you're a first year".

Finally, one of the students expressed the opinion that; "I think a lot of people would have failed ... I know I would have failed the course if I didn't have Achieving Success". The focus group generally felt most students would agree that the session was really helpful; "... it really does help".

#### *Project impact*

A spreadsheet was provided by the project lead that included the recorded grades (fail, unclassified, pass, merit, distinction) gained by students on the National Diploma for each unit. Data were collated and presented on the percentage of unit grades achieved by students completing (who had gained course certification) the National Diploma in Mechanical Engineering (total course 18 units) (Fig. 1). It showed a decrease in pass grades and concomitant rise in the number of merit and distinction grades being gained by students (Fig. 1) for these students. However, it should be noted that the year groups 2004-06 and 2006-08 completed identical units, while some units completed by the 08-10 group were different to those of the previous cohorts.

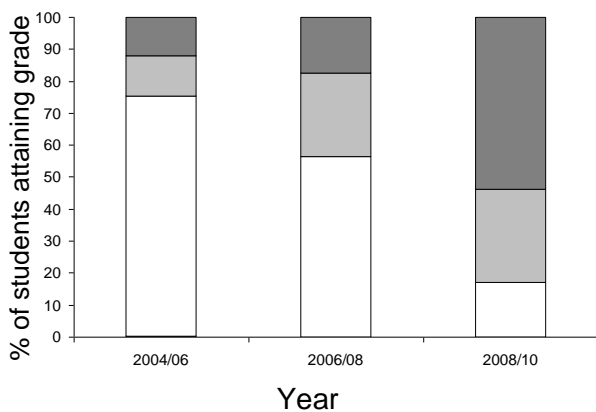


Figure 1. Changes in student grades achieved since the introduction of the 'Achieving success' sessions by CCN course staff on the National Diploma in mechanical engineering. (unclassified = black, pass = white, merit = light grey, distinction = dark grey).

Twenty one students commenced year one of the two year course, in the academic year 2008/09, of which twenty completed the course, nineteen passed and only one student failed. The second year of the course had twenty entries all of whom completed the final year with nineteen passing and one fail.

**School: School of Health and Social Care**  
**Project title: Negotiated assignments**

*Project summary*

The School of Health and Social Care personalisation pilot project was conducted with students studying on the second year of a Foundation degree (Fd). The project allowed students to negotiate one of their assignments in terms of developing and agreeing an assignment brief and the associated criteria for the learning outcomes within the boundaries of the module. As the project lead highlighted:

*"What we set out to do was try to allow students that freedom to be much more independent and to actually take much more initiative with their assignment work ... by using this personalisation route".*

The expected outcomes of the project were that students would engage with the course work at a much deeper level and that developing and designing an assignment would encourage greater academic understanding and critical thinking. It was anticipated that this in turn might have a subsequent positive impacts on the grades obtained by students within the group.

The pilot project was implemented within the current, 2009/10, academic year and the module selected for this pilot was 'Health Care Policy and Practice'.

*Project overview*

The personalisation project was discussed with potential students who expressed interest in the opportunity to design their own module assignment. The class worked in three subgroups and each group produced an assignment brief for the module together with the instructions, criteria and learning outcomes required for the assignment. The subsequent assignment schemes were displayed on the whiteboard and the class, as a whole, chose one assignment to implement for the module from those drafted. Whilst working in three small groups facilitated student involvement, it was decided that as a pilot project, and in order to keep the project manageable, one assignment would be chosen jointly by the group. The process of developing the assignment took place over a two week period (during the first three weeks of the module), after which the lecturer involved reiterated, with the class, the agreed outcomes, focusing on the content and meanings that were explored in depth. It was reported that:

*"There was a very good atmosphere in the classroom over these two weeks while we were doing these activities and there was a good bit of competition about who was going to have the best assignment".*

It was agreed that the task also appeared to increase motivation for the students as the interviewee explained; "... some of the students actually said to me they found it very

motivating. They actually got more stuck into this module than any others". An example was given of one student who commented that he had expected this module to be 'dry and boring', but had realised that it wasn't when he became engaged, and because he was able to apply the assignment exactly to his work, he then saw the relevance and the module's aims fitted into place.

The project lead also pointed out that they felt one of the benefits of the process was that students gained an insight into the intricacies of setting an assignment, of which they previously had little knowledge or understanding:

*"I think a lot of the students didn't realise just how hard writing assignments can actually be, writing the assignment brief, and just how much understanding of the learning outcomes you really do need".*

The feedback from the group was positive with students stating that they felt more engaged; "... a lot of them said they felt engaged at a far deeper level, had more understanding ...". Similarly, it was also highlighted that students had also commented that they felt the assignment design had greater relevance to their work:

*"... and they just felt it was more relevant to their work because they were able to make, probably, I think, those deeper connections of what they were doing ...[and]... they felt they had control over the assignment process, which then also allowed them to link very closely into work".*

Whilst it was pointed out that, generally, the aim was to write modules and assignments with work related links, it was felt the benefit of the student involvement in this instance meant "... students making those cognitive links between learning and the doing. As well as being in control and being really independent and learning, what they feel is relevant to them. Hence, personalisation

really".

The Health, Care Policy and Practice module chosen for this pilot was indicated as being quite a difficult and challenging module. In this context, it was one which was felt would be appropriate for the students to engage in. It was stated, however, that the assignment brief task was more appropriate for year two students; second year students having gained more experience of the level of academic work required, although depending on student cohort capabilities it might be possible to attempt in semester two of the first year. This having been said, it was also highlighted that similar tasks had already been introduced to both year groups on the Fd; first year students had been introduced to writing instructions for a constructed assignment, while second year students had been given the task of designing 'a scheme of work'. It was felt that these previously established developments complemented the assignment brief exercise undertaken in this pilot by building steps towards this more complex work.

#### *Project outcomes; the staff perspective*

It was confirmed that the pilot had been effective in terms of a number of benefits to the students, such as the increased opportunity to introduce critical thinking and a deeper understanding of assignment criteria and learning outcomes. Notwithstanding the impact on marks awarded for the module and the student feedback was also good.

In terms of a noticeable difference to the marks awarded, the interviewee stated:

*"... there were no fails in that group and I think overall, the marks are pretty solid. I think for some students there might have been slightly higher marks, but I was pleased with the outcome".*

It was also agreed that to a certain extent there was evidence that the benefits gained by the students undertaking the task in the

pilot module were transferred to other, later, modules. As the project lead stated:

*"I certainly saw, in a module I taught them over a whole year, quite a change in some of them in terms of how they were much more aware, if you like, of the importance of learning outcomes..."*

As explained by the project lead, there was an aim to embed the assignment brief task into the second year teaching. However, in building up to this level of work, the lecturer confirmed that they would be considering strategies with colleagues to include 'stepping stone' tasks threaded throughout the two year Fd course, in order to embed this type of learning across the whole programme. In taking this work forward, it was suggested that it might be appropriate to involve student representatives at various stages during course development, such as internal verification of assignment briefs:

*"I think there would be a lot more student engagement all round and that to me would probably increase motivation all round, and that sense of ownership"*

In summing up, the following quote highlighted what the project lead felt were the main successes of the pilot project:

*"I would say it was a very positive experience. I think what I got out of it was, I liked to see the students do that deeper level digging into learning outcomes, getting much more understanding, making it really fit with what they do, what they need to learn, how they are applying it to work, but for me, I think the greatest pleasure comes from seeing students enjoy themselves while they are learning"*

*Project outcomes; the student perspective*  
Students participating in the personalisation project were asked to complete a short, online, questionnaire that gave the opportunity for them to provide their views on

the pilot project task anonymously. The module group comprised of seventeen students, all of whom completed the questionnaire.

Twelve of the cohort indicated that they had not previously been involved in the design and development of an assignment. The questionnaire asked if, having experienced the assignment development pilot, the students felt they had greater ownership, understanding and enthusiasm for completing this assignment. The response to each of these points was, generally, a positive one. Ten students agreed it did give them greater ownership while four stated that it didn't and three were 'undecided'. Sixteen students agreed that they had a greater understanding with just one 'undecided'. Ten students agreed that they had greater enthusiasm for the assignment while four ticked 'no' and three were 'undecided'. These recorded student views appear to support the aims of this pilot project with the outcome of student understanding being particularly strong.

To ascertain the impact of the negotiated assignment brief task at a fundamental level - in terms of completing a piece of academic work - students were also asked whether, they were clearer about completing the 'Health Care Policy and Practice' module in regard to:- the theoretical background; literature review; subject areas to be covered in the content; type and style of presentation; and general confidence in producing the piece of work. Again, the responses from the students were in the main positive, as the results presented in Table 1 show.

Table 1. Understanding of requirements for completion of the assignment within the Health Care Policy and Practice' module.

Academic assignment requirements	Clearer Understanding		
	Yes	No	Un-decided
Theoretical background	13	3	1
Literature to review	13	1	3
Subject areas to cover in the content	17	0	0
Type and style of presentation	13	3	1
Confident about producing work	12	3	2

The questionnaire asked what mark (%) students received for this piece of work and, as a result, where the mark for this module fell in relation to their overall range (low, middle, high, higher) of coursework marks. A range of marks were reported, ranging between 41–72% (with two non-respondents) with nine students recording marks of 50% or above. Nine students indicated no particular change between this module mark and those of others. ‘High’ or ‘higher’ marks were gained by six students in total (three in each category), while ‘lower’ marks were indicated by the remaining two students.

To elicit additional qualitative data, an open ended question asked students to reflect on the task used in the pilot project and whether they would recommend its use more widely within the college. Out of the seventeen respondents to this question, students were generally positive about the idea. At least fourteen provided, clear, positive feedback, these included:

*“This gives you a better understanding of what is expected in the assignment”*

*“I think it was very useful to do this as it helped me to understand learning outcomes better and prepare the plan for an assignment”*

*“By developing our own learning outcomes the assignment became more personal to us and helped and encouraged us to make more of an effort to research and read around the subject, making it much more interesting”*

*“By looking into each aspect of the subject, I was able to research and develop in depth but I also felt in control of my own learning, had a greater understanding and felt confident to write the assignment. This development in my learning was successful as I achieved an increase of 11 marks from the last assignment”*

*“Yes I would [recommend it] as it generally enables the student to feel*

*proud of their achievement and ownership of the assignment they have produced”*

Of those who expressed some reservations, these mainly concerned issues such as time constraints and the time consuming nature of the task. Also, despite the assignment task being completed over two weeks and being set during the initial three weeks of the module, it was indicated that perhaps the assignment brief task might have been set at an earlier stage:

*“At the time I felt stretched with other assignments and felt that this process was added pressure to my already busy schedule”*

*“I would recommend it to be done at the beginning of the module, after first 2-3 lessons, as later on people have much more work to do, assignments to write, and get frustrated that they have to do that as well”*

Finally, students were asked for any suggestions, both positive and negative, they had for staff who might wish to use a similar personalisation task in the future. The brief responses reflected similar points to those above. Negatively orientated responses given, again, concerned the time constraints, the time consuming nature of the task and added pressure:

*“There are not many lessons in each module and unless you can get this re-write done in one lesson, it seems to take up precious teaching/learning time that the student needs to grasp the subject, module, to get working on it early”*

However, conversely, positively orientated points highlighted a better understanding of the subject, the opportunity to work in student peer groups, and the flexibility.

**School: School of Creative Arts**

**Project title: Learner role in Quality Assurance: Student delivery of Micro teach session**

*Project summary*

The School of Creative Arts personalisation project was centred on two modules that were incorporated within the first and second years of a Foundation degree, from its introduction in 2008. The first year (Project Design and Delivery 1) and second year (Project Design and Delivery 2) modules respectively and required students to research, design and deliver workshops to their peers.

The aim was to see if, and how, the experience would influence students. For example, would having to prepare to deliver a learning session and produce their own resources give them a better appreciation, awareness and understanding of the background of their own Fd lectures / sessions delivered by staff. As highlighted by the project lead; "... because they have to deliver their own session, whether their view point on their own classroom experience changes having given their own lesson". Having said this it was pointed out that:

*"... although the project was for learner evaluation of the classroom we were very clear that it wasn't going to be about the quality of the teaching they were receiving, it was about the experience of giving a lecture, so it didn't become a personal attack on their tutors and tutors weren't made to feel it was another observation process".*

Additional outcomes of this project were possible higher expectations of the student group. It was also indicated that dependent on the outcome of the project, it might be feasible to introduce a similar task (i.e., delivering a half hour workshop) into Creative Arts courses at Level 3 with the prospect that, again, this might raise expectations and aspirations, thus, 'improve learner participation'. There was a focus on "...

whether students' perceptions changed and, if they did change, how you could incorporate peer learning ... to benefit the students. Peer learning happens elsewhere anyway, but not in such a formal way".

*Project overview*

As an integral part of the Fd, the project was based on the work and assignments that students had to complete as part of the module requirements. As highlighted by one of the course lecturers, one of the aims of this Fd was to enable people to become arts facilitators and as such the 'Project Design and Delivery' modules focus on "... teaching students about learning styles, how to write a lesson plan, what an aim is, what an objective is and the differentiation. So they learn, if you like, the basics that a teacher would have". The students have access to lecturers' workshop lesson plans and then have to develop a workshop of their own, which was delivered to their course peers and staff. The lecturer to explain that the students "... design and deliver an ice breaker first of all ... They then organise everything from the management point of view, how to lay out the tables, make sure they've ordered all the equipment they need ... they produce the resources, handouts ... and they then lead the group for two hours". Following each student's workshop delivery the lecturers have a plenary session to discuss the teaching experience; i.e., what went well and what could be changed or improved.

The experience students gather from the first year undertaking of this task was built upon in the second year, where students were asked to design and write a twenty hour scheme of work. They design workshop sessions, written out week by week, and, again, they deliver one session (of 10 x 2 sessions) to their peer group. The course lecturer stated that "They are learning what it's like to stand up and talk to people and deliver a session. They're learning organisational skills but they are also learning lots of practical art skills from each other...". It was also pointed out that many of the students work in volunteer positions and that a number of them had been involved in external exhibitions. Therefore, they had added experience of

some delivery of workshops with the public.

The module assignments had learning outcomes that required students to: (1) design and prepare an arts based project for delivery to specified clients in the areas of health / community; (2) identify the needs of different client groups and write aims and objects; (3) to write session plans, (4) prepare resources and deliver the workshops and (5) evaluate the project outcomes. Hence these specific modules provided students with the insight required for them to evaluate their experience.

The lecturer highlighted that a considerable amount of the teaching for these practical art modules was of a personalised nature where students were often tutored on an individual basis

*“All the creative side of the Arts and Wellbeing tends to be personalised learning because one sets off, with perhaps an overall project framework, Arts Practices is one [module], but then people take it in individual directions so somebody might be working with sculpture, somebody with painting, somebody with print making, so I am working with each of them individually”.*

The interviewee also explained that a tutorial system was employed to support students; students booked a time and “... we talk specifically about their work, contextual references, what they need to do, how to develop it...”.

#### *Project outcomes; the staff perspective*

In regard to the project’s aim of informing the students’ view of the delivery on their own course, the lecturer interviewed suggested that the students had gained an awareness in terms of the processes involved in developing and delivering lessons. They stated:

*“They [the students] recognise how much organisation has to go into teaching now ... it gives them a greater appreciation of all the*

*managing and all the organising that has to go on”.*

Also, it was observed that:

*“I think it’s been very successful in making them [students] much more mature in their approach to learning as a whole, it emphasises organisational skills and creativity, so it’s had a role-on impact on their organisation and how they deal with the rest of the course”.*

It was also an opportunity to not only put their art and organisational skills into practice but also their communication skills and awareness of others, which was covered in other modules.

Interim feedback forms given to first year students by their lecturers to comment on the Project Design and Delivery 1 module, also appeared to support the fact that students gained a greater understanding of what was involved in lesson planning. For example, students cited:

*“How in depth you need to be when putting together a lesson plan”*

*“... also realising how much preparation is needed, very useful”*

*“How to structure a lesson plan. I have researched my chosen subject and also researched my target group”*

*“Interesting to see how lessons are planned in advance and how much actual variation has to be taken into account”*

Having completed the first full delivery of the two year Fd, course staff were considering whether one Project Design and Delivery module was sufficient, or whether they could adapt one module to become more focused on the students own practice as an artist and the second on organisation skills required when leaving the course.

*Project outcomes; the student perspective*

Students on the Arts and Wellbeing Foundation degree were asked to complete a short, online, questionnaire to provide their views on aspects of this project experience. The questionnaire was sent to students in both years of the Fd ( $n = 20$ ). The survey was completed by eleven students; seven from year 1 and four from year 2. All the students stated that they had delivered a workshop session. The majority of the questions focused on acquiring data of a qualitative nature, to gain an insight into the views of the student group.

Students were asked if the planning and development of the workshop / lesson required more work than they expected. Of the eight respondents, six indicated they had found that the task required more effort than they had originally expected while two stated 'no'. Students were also asked to summarise what they learnt most from the experience of having developed their own session. Nine students responded and highlighted themes such as the importance of: (1) preparation, (2) time management, (3) lesson plans, (4) differentiation and learning styles and (5) having confidence. Student statements highlighted these main points:

*"How to devise and plan out a lesson plan, including identifying how to adapt the lesson to suit different learning skills and possible issues with differentiation ... Gaining practical skills ... Gaining self confidence..."*

*"The importance of time management, applying the session / presentation to different learning styles (e.g. VARK) etc... The most valuable thing I have developed through giving presentations and delivering micro teaches is my communication skills and confidence"*

*"A better understanding of my own strengths, and organizational skills. I learnt the full extent of all that is involved, time, planning, preparation, delivery and evaluating"*

*"I have learnt that lesson planning is a lot more work than you might expect..."*

The questionnaire asked if students' experience had changed their attitude towards lecturers or the way that students now received lectures delivered by the course lecturers. Of the nine respondents to this question, the large majority ( $n = 7$ ) had said it had changed their attitudes towards lectures they had received since their own experience. Where students had stated 'yes' to the question, they were asked to summarise their attitudinal changes. All the comments were of a positive nature and generally highlighted an engagement in the learning process and an appreciation of their own lecturers:

*"My attitude changed in that I gained a new respect and empathy for them [lecturers]. I now appreciate the work that goes into delivering a session and the careful observations that have to be made in order to ensure that everyone can cope and feel as involved as possible in the sessions. Also the importance of feedback."*

*"I was more engaged in observing their [lecturers] processes of delivery and watching the way in which my fellow audience responded ..."*

*"I developed a greater appreciation of their [lecturers] work and input to us, as students. I became more aware of their teaching styles and was able to learn from their tutoring. Things that I felt worked and didn't work in order to strengthen my own styles and skills..."*

*"It made me realise just how much work the lecturers have to do to plan each session we have..."*

Following on from this question, students were asked what had been the biggest learning point from having conducted their own presentation / lesson. A variety of comments were provided here, with students

indicating widely differing aspects, such as:

*"To be extremely organised and time conscious!"*

*"Confidence to speak to an audience / deliver a session to a group."*

*"Research skills and referencing!"*

*"Need to try to talk slowly and clearly, and to give time for learners to respond to what you are saying / asking to / of them."*

*"Allowing students more time to come up with their own ideas and suggestions."*

In response to the question had the experience given them more confidence to deliver workshops / presentations, of the nine student responses, eight said 'yes'. Thus the majority of students had benefited and earlier observations made by the students would seem to indicate confidence as an important factor for them in terms of workshops delivery. Those students who ticked 'yes' were asked to enlarge on their responses by providing their reasoning:

*"The experience of stepping outside my comfort zone, standing and speaking at the front of the class has allowed me to exercise skills that I would not have otherwise felt comfortable doing"*

*"It was good to see people's reactions and work, very satisfying. The better the planning, the better this will be."*

*"I feel I have developed a way of developing presentations that is comfortable for me and can be used in multiple situations."*

*"I have become more comfortable about public speaking ... I have been able to begin to enjoy delivering presentations and workshops because of the practice and application of these*

*skills in the classroom, and in work based learning settings."*

*"I know I am capable of delivering a workshop but I have learned what I need to do to improve it in future."*

The questionnaire also asked if students would like more opportunities to give presentations / lessons, either within their peer group or, possibly, to a wider audience. Eight out of nine respondents indicated an interest in further opportunities. Students added further comments to support or expand their views, while the student who stated that they did not want additional practical delivery opportunities, wrote:

*"But I know this is not the right answer ... practice is the thing. Straight after the micro teach there were things that I wanted to put right, and then another opportunity would be welcome"*

The students wanting more opportunities to deliver presentations, generally, cited further practice as the main reason:

*"I think more opportunities to deliver presentations etc. to my group would be good as the group has become very well formed and comfortable with each other. I think, personally, delivering a presentation to a larger, unknown group at this point would be too much for me." [Second year student].*

*"Yes, because it will give us more practice and confidence in delivery. Would be good to share the experience with a partner / in pairs, etc – in order to share ideas"*

*"It would be useful to have the opportunity to deliver such things to a wider audience, still with the support of the tutors as delivering to your peer group becomes a comfortable place and it is important to be stretched beyond that at some point in the 2nd*

year.” [Second year student].

Interestingly one of the first year students commented:

*“I feel it might be beneficial to micro teach the first years next year. They benefit from learning a new skill and are given a taste of what they themselves will be doing and we get the chance to teach to a wider group.”*

Finally, students were asked if there were any other activities / skills that they thought would be beneficial to their experience and understanding of workshop delivery, which they would like to see incorporated in the future. This elicited several suggestions:

*“Just to be given the opportunity to present to a wider and more diverse audience. At the moment I have only worked with familiar class mates. I would be interested to find out how I would react to the same situation but teaching / presenting to people I didn’t necessarily know.”*

*“Integrating 1st and 2nd years for the delivery of micro teach sessions ... as this would further exercise communication skills, confidence and group cohesion.”*

*“I think practical lessons in the construction of PowerPoint presentations would be a useful addition to our learning.”*

*“... possibly some teaching in to the background of specific user groups”*

*“Maybe to plan another, longer session in pairs or groups so that you get used to having to work along side other people ... as you won’t always be the only facilitator in your placement giving sessions.”*

**School: School of Foundation Studies**  
**Project title: Mentoring for Success: A Level student mentors to Phoenix Plus GCSE students**

*Project summary*

It became apparent to staff that many students leave the Phoenix Plus programme to attend A-levels and ‘struggle with the leap’ from GCSE to A-level study. The Phoenix Plus (P+) programme incorporated a wide range of students from a variety of backgrounds. The students on the P+ programme have invariably had negative experiences of education, which included bullying, sickness, behavioural and emotional issues, such as depression.

The P+ programme allowed students to study their chosen GCSEs in smaller groups; up to 20 students. However, many of the students needed greater amounts of time and often required one:one tutorials to help them complete their work. There was a general consensus that any extra support would be beneficial. Although the P+ course has an excellent Additional Learner Support (ALS) system, and tutors were available a vast majority of the time, this was not necessarily when students were able to meet with tutors. Thus, it was decided to implement a mentoring programme between students from the sixth form centre (6FC) and Foundation studies (FS) P+ GCSE programme.

*Project overview*

Through discussions with students and staff the need for extra support for individual’s progression was identified. During discussions with colleagues on the P+ GCSE programme the project lead found that, although keen on the idea, those colleagues felt there was a need for earlier implementation. They were also unsure of how the project would work within the department.

Therefore, it was agreed to create a link between 6FC and Foundation Studies to set up a mentoring programme between 6FC and FS that could continue beyond one academic year. This was to improve retention rates on the P+ GCSE programme, to provide

additional support for learners with social, emotional and behavioural issues and to improve progression rates from P+ to A-level programmes. Although these were ambitious aims, it was felt that they were achievable within a two year period.

Tutors were encouraged to propose the mentoring programme to appropriate students within the 6FC. Mentoring was discussed in the 6FC tutorial sessions. It was explained to all interested students that the main characteristics of mentors were empathy and open-mindedness. Several of the mentors had been mentors at their previous schools, or had had experiences from school where they believed having had a mentor themselves would have been beneficial. P+ tutors were asked to identify students progressing on to A-Levels who would benefit from the mentoring programme.

From the pool of potential mentors, individuals were asked to nominate themselves if they wanted to be a mentor. These individuals then attended training, including safe guarding, confidentiality and listening skills. The mentors attended one of the GCSE sessions and observed the session, 'getting to know' the typical needs of students on the P+ programme.

The mentors were matched with mentees by the strength of their subject areas. They attended the class and made contact with the tutor via email. Also, mentors had regular meetings with project staff to discuss issues and to ensure and encourage their continued participation.

#### *Project outcomes*

Mentors attended ten sessions within P+, although they had not yet been able to work individually with their mentees. However, this involvement has laid the foundations for continuing support for the next academic year.

During a focus group, mentors were asked for their opinion on the project. The feedback was positive and the mentors had some suggestions for future practice. This feedback will be reflected in the next year plan. For

example, the mentors commented on the matching process, "Going into classes to help [allows] students to come to you ... to pick people out to be mentored then just says to them, you know, I must be doing something wrong". As a result of this comment, the next year plan will not assign people immediately but allow this to occur naturally.

In conjunction with the mentoring project a 'meet and greet' was set up between A-Level students and P+ prospective A-Level students. The 'meet and greet' took place during an A-Level tutorial session and included refreshments. P+ students were encouraged to match up with someone doing a subject they had applied for and discuss the requirements, commitment and tutors on the course.

The event was very successful with four of the potential ten P+ students and nine A-Level students attending. Through observation and joining the discussions it was evident that this was useful to both groups. P+ students were asked if they enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the A-levels and were unanimous in their agreement that it was "well worth it".

The future plan for the mentoring project was to commence the relationship earlier in the academic year in order to provide the much needed support at the beginning of the course. Previous P+ students studying A-Levels would be invited to join the programme. Mentors would still be selected in a similar way and with the support of the New Deputy head of the 6FC. It would also be important to include the enrichment team in the planning to increase numbers involved.

#### *Project outcomes; the staff perspective*

A selection of student mentors attended a focus group to discuss their views regarding this peer mentoring, personalisation project.

The students were asked why they had decided to put themselves forward to be mentors. One student indicated that they had been mentored while at high school, which they found a supportive experience. So they felt it might be helpful to others if they

volunteered to be a mentor at college. Another student saw it as an opportunity that, "... came up, so why not take it ...", as they had time available. A third student had also been previously mentor at school, where they had mentored new, year seven students. They remarked that, "I really enjoyed it so I thought I'd carry on".

For the two students who had had some previous experience of mentoring, the mentoring scheme received at the college was generally what they had expected. Although it was said to be "...more professional..." at the college, where they had undertaken mentor training.

The focus group were asked what they thought was the goal of the peer mentoring. One of the students felt it was, "To support and help a lot of the people in the college". The student mentor identified that some students in their class struggled because English was not their first language:

*"so if they have someone to come and talk to when they don't understand rather than sticking their hand up in class and making a fool of themselves, which they think they would, then it gives them the ammunition to say they need help".*

Another of the focus group commented on that fact that having skills for mentoring not only helped others but helped them personally as well. It was suggested that it built a link between GCSE students and the 6th form, "... so if they are going to come here, they feel more comfortable about being here because they are going to have someone they can ask questions about 6<sup>th</sup> form and all of that to, as well".

In terms of receiving preparation and training, the students confirmed that there was a training session each week with training "... on confidentiality, how to recognise peoples' behaviour, who to go to if there was a problem...". It was suggested perhaps individual sessions could be longer so overall training would be completed earlier. The students clarified how they were

'matched' with the mentees, this experience appeared to vary. One of the group explained their mentees were assigned to them. In another case, the teacher introduced the mentor to the class and explained who they were and that they were there to assist if members of the class needed to contact them for help with their work. Another mentor was both assigned two mentees and introduced to the class generally as being there to assist, as with the example above.

The focus group understood that the mentoring appeared to be mostly for academic work, initially, but could extend to other areas once the mentees got to know their mentors.

The focus group were asked if they would introduce any changes to the mentoring scheme. One of the students suggested she felt the best way of being introduced to the students concerned was via the whole class, so mentees can come to the mentor if they need help. There was some confusion between the student mentors as to whether individual students were 'picked' to be mentored or whether they had chosen to be mentored.

The focus group outlined what they felt they gained for taking part in the scheme, other than gaining mentoring skills. For example, "Talking and listening and respecting people, just the ability to help somebody else with what you know, in a different way to what you help your friends". At the time of the focus group, it appeared that the mentoring had petered out to a certain extent (due to classes being cancelled, and / or early revision for the GCSEs). However, email contact was available between the mentors and mentees. The focus group participants appeared to mainly assist within a classroom setting and saw the mentoring as mainly academic help. However, they did understand that there was an intention for the mentoring to be both academic and pastoral. It was suggested perhaps if there had been a room set aside for mentoring this would have offered somewhere organised to meet outside of the classroom environment.

# ***A review of Return on Investment (RoI) models and use within public sector organisations***

*Gillian Scofield*, Researcher, The Research Centre, City College Norwich

## **1. Introduction**

Many organisations utilise training programmes for staff development and/or the up-skilling of the business work force. However, despite the large costs often associated with such training events, the benefits are often neglected or evaluation methods used which do little to assess the robustness and effectiveness of a development programme and thus the business impact remains unknown. As such, the main driver for this project was to review the current tools used for evaluation and reflect on their usefulness for measuring impact. Following a review of theoretical evaluation models, interviews were used to collect data on current training evaluation methods being used in a variety of business settings. The data collected could then be used to inform the development of an in-house training evaluation which incorporates business impact and considers return on investment.

The expected outcomes of the project were to include a literature review of relevant theoretical models followed by an investigation of the various evaluation methods actually used by a number of organisations. This would then allow a comparison between both theoretical models and evaluation methods used in practice, with a view to implementing a ROI evaluation model.

## **2. Methodology**

A literature review was conducted to identify the main theoretical models of training evaluation used in business settings. The literature review was conducted using appropriate books and journals and also papers available from internet searches conducted for 'bottom-line benefit' evaluation and ROI.

Taking into account the project timescale the intention was also to conduct a small number of interviews to gain an insight into the systems currently used in the workplace. Semi-structured face-to face interviews were conducted to collect data on training evaluation methods being used in practice by organisations. The selection of participating organisations did not draw on scientific sampling methods, but rather, organisations where personal contact permitted.

Ethical guidelines were adhered to in carrying out this project and participants were advised of data protection issues surrounding the anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided in the report.

In terms of the parameters of this project, unless otherwise specified, 'evaluation' refers to the evaluation of 'in-house' staff training and development i.e. that which does not lead to recognised qualifications. The terms 'bottom line benefits' and 'ROI' are used interchangeably.

## **3. A current perspective**

Literature appears to suggest that little time and effort is given to evaluation of training programmes in the workplace. Marchington and Wilkinson (2000) state "It is widely acknowledged that the evaluation of training is one of the most critical steps in the process, and it is one which is frequently not done in any comprehensive or systematic fashion." This view was also supported by earlier research by Holden and Livian, (1992), which stated "...the method of evaluation most commonly used was informal feedback from line managers and trainees; this was used twice as often as tests, and much more regularly than formal evaluations conducted some time after the training had been completed" (Marchington and

Wilkinson, 2000). Indeed, as the authors point out:

*“Too often, training courses receive highly positive ratings at the reaction and immediate levels, only to achieve little at the intermediate and ultimate levels; in other words, individuals find the courses and the learning enjoyable but are unable to make full use of what they have learned, either because it is inappropriate, or due to obstacles imposed by prevailing organisational cultures”* (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2000:203).

Marchington and Wilkinson (2000) continue that personnel and development “...practitioners clearly need to be aware of the ways in which evaluation is to be carried out, as well as being able to demonstrate the value of training to broader business objectives and corporate performance” (2000,198). It was acknowledged that evaluation can take place at a number of levels with different stakeholders, such as the trainees themselves, line managers, departments and organisations. The effects of training development can be assessed using a variety of methods, which include “...observation of work behaviour, interviews and questionnaires, and collection of performance data. Each of these can form a valuable component in the overall evaluation of training effectiveness” (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2000).

### **3.1 Reasons for the presence of evaluation**

There have been various attempts by academics to identify the main reasons behind the importance of evaluation. Marchington and Wilkinson (2000) cite Bramley and Newby (1984) who give five reasons for carrying out an evaluation of training effectiveness. Firstly, it provides feedback to both the trainer and trainees in terms of the design and relevance of the course and the achievement of individual learning objectives. Second it allows organisations to establish whether a training programme offers a cost effective and relevant solution to a problem. Thirdly, the

evaluation itself serves as valuable research, for example, in identifying the factors which help people transfer learning into the workplace. Fourth, it can be used as a form of organisational intervention which allows reappraisal of existing approaches and policies related to training. Finally, the authors also state that evaluation in organisations can become part of a political process whereby factions within management can use the results of a training exercise to gain approval for their ideas and proposals, “...in this process, outside consultants and academics may prove to be unwitting pawns in an internal struggle between departments or managers” (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2000:198).

Bee and Bee (1994) also suggested a number of reasons for the evaluation of training within organisations. As well as those reasons cited previously there is the need to justify the course or training programme to prove that the benefits outweigh the costs and to justify the role of training for budget purposes. For example, particularly in times of economic downturn.

The importance of levels of evaluation will vary according to the stakeholder concerned. For example, trainers will be interested in the delivery and success of a programme, whereas a finance manager may be more concerned about the cost-effectiveness of training programmes while a line manager will be interested in the impact of training on job performance.

### **3.2 Reasons for the absence of evaluation**

Lewis and Thornhill (1994) suggest a number of reasons as to why there is an absence or ineffectiveness of training evaluation. One such reason stated concerned the fact that it is often considered “...extremely difficult to disentangle the effect of training from that of other stimuli with which trainees have come into contact” (1994: 26). Therefore subsequent to a development programme it is difficult to establish “...which learning has occurred as a result of the training and which as a consequence of normal on-the-job activity.” (Lewis and Thornhill, 1994:26) Similarly, there is an argument that the

effects of training are non-quantifiable, particularly soft outcomes, such as communication skills or team working, and where quantifiable measures are attempted there is the issue of other variables confounding results. Lewis and Thornhill posit, "...were the better results in the sales division the effect of the sales training programme or were they due to an upturn in the economy?" (1994:26). A further debate surrounds the issue of costs involved in conducting evaluation. Buckley and Caple (2004) point out some organisations claim that the validation or evaluation process is too costly and in some cases may cost more than the original training. It has also been suggested that the costs will increase the higher the level of evaluation hierarchy (Lewis and Thornhill, 1994).

Lewis and Thornhill also highlight a general attitude towards training that "...training must be a good thing". There is a prevalent assumption at both national public policy level and at organisational level, that more training leads to more success, "...our more successful international industrial competitors engage in higher amounts of training than does the UK, therefore training must be associated with economic success" (1994:27). The authors point out that "...it would be unfashionable, as well as perhaps foolhardy, to argue otherwise. Yet it does not follow that all training is a good thing; effort must be applied to sort the effective from the ineffective" (Lewis and Thornhill, 1994:27).

Lewis and Thornhill (1994) also highlight another influence on the impetus placed on evaluation, what they term as the 'trainer sensitivity effect', stating that:

*"All trainers will recognize the fact that evaluation may point to the ineffectiveness of training and possibly also of the trainers, with all that implies for the future of the function. How much easier not to evaluate, or to do so in such a way that produces results that show the training in a favourable light!"* (Lewis and Thornhill, 1994:27).

Foxon (1989) also resulted in a similar finding

from a review of literature stating that "...many practitioners still avoid the evaluation issue...worried that evaluation will only confirm their worst fears (since they have no other alternative to offer management if the current program is shown to be educationally ineffective), they choose to settle for a non-threatening survey of trainee reactions" (1989:2). Similarly, a lack of both knowledge and experience by trainers in carrying out evaluation techniques may also account for limited input in this area. Foxon (1989) cites Woodington (1980) who "draws attention to the lack of personnel trained in evaluation methodology" (1989:6).

There is also what Lewis and Thornhill (1994) deem as 'organisational political' effects, where evaluation, and the extent to which it is carried out, may be affected by an organisation's culture. The authors highlight that:

*"Evaluation results that do not show training in a good light may be a function of an incorrect decision, taken higher in the organization's hierarchy, to conduct training. In these circumstances it may not be politically advisable for the trainer to question the wisdom of this decision."* (Lewis and Thornhill, 1994:27).

An organisation's culture may exaggerate the 'threat effect', which is implicit within evaluation. Similarly, the organisational culture may simply not value staff and / or the evaluation of staff development or "Simpler still may be the explanation that runs: we don't evaluate training because we never have evaluated training. It just isn't one of the things we do here" (Lewis and Thornhill, 1994:27). Consequently, an organisation which was defensive when admitting weaknesses, which does not value employees and does not evaluate training because it is something 'it's never done' was unlikely to instigate organisation-wide evaluation at the higher levels. Conversely, an organisation 'open' to ideas, which recognised its weaknesses and was willing to learn, value staff and the merits of the training evaluation process would be one that

“...holds out more promise for the trainer who wishes to demonstrate that training is making a valuable contribution to organizational objectives.” (Lewis and Thornhill, 1994:27).

#### 4. Theoretical evaluation models

There are many proponents of evaluation (Tyler; Kirkpatrick; Scriven; Stufflebeam; Cronbach; Guba; Lincoln; Patton), who have developed models with various epistemologies, however, a significant proportion of evaluation models, having been devised specifically for use in educational settings, were not seen as relevant in terms of the parameters of this particular project. Having said this, there were some recognised theoretical models which consider evaluation of staff development and training programmes in the business setting, which, in most cases, have been developed by academics in the United States. A number of these evaluation models include, to a greater or lesser extent, the notion of Return on Investment (ROI) or business impact and accountability and four such models have been discussed in further detail in the following section.

##### 4.1 Kirkpatrick's evaluation model (four level model)

A widely acknowledged evaluation model was designed by American Professor, Donald Kirkpatrick, and first published in 1959 followed by a number of revisions most recently in the 1980s. Kirkpatrick (1996) wrote:

*“Nearly everyone would agree that a definition of evaluation would be “the determination of the effectiveness of a training program.” But this has little meaning until we answer the question: In terms of what? ... Evaluation changes from a complicated, elusive generality into clear and achievable goals if we break it down into logical steps.”* (Kirkpatrick, 1996:294).

Kirkpatrick's model defined evaluation in four steps (or levels) as follows:

- Step 1: *Reaction* - how well did the trainees like the programme?
- Step 2: *Learning* - what principles, facts, and techniques were learned? What attitudes were changed?
- Step 3: *Behaviour* - what changes in job behaviour resulted from the programme?
- Step 4: *Results* - what were the tangible results of the programme in terms of reduced cost, improved quality, improved quantity, etc.?

##### *Step 1: Reaction*

In this first step of the evaluation process Kirkpatrick highlights the need to measure reactions to training programmes. This should be carried out as a combination of asking trainees for their responses together with the trainer him / herself making observations throughout a training session

##### *Step 2: Learning*

Learning is defined as attitudes which have been changed and knowledge and skills learnt. It does not include the on-the-job changes in attitude, knowledge and skills - which are evaluated at step 3. Kirkpatrick (1996) acknowledged that “...it is much more difficult to measure learning than it is to measure reaction to a program. A great deal of work is required in planning the evaluation procedure, in analyzing the data that is obtained, and in interpreting the results.” (Kirkpatrick, 1996:305).

##### *Step 3: Behaviour*

Measuring evaluation at this stage becomes more complex, usually involving more complicated procedures. Kirkpatrick (1996) points out that “It is obvious that very few training directors have the background, skill, and time to engage in extensive evaluations. It is therefore frequently necessary to call on industrial psychologists, research people, and consultants for advice and help.” (Kirkpatrick, 1996:307).

##### *Step 4: Results*

Kirkpatrick (1996) stated that most training programmes can be evaluated in terms of results, such as reduced turnover, reduced

costs, increase in quality, improved efficiency and improved moral. "There are, however, so many complicating factors that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible to evaluate certain kinds of programs in terms of results. Therefore it is recommended that training directors evaluate in terms of reaction, learning, and behaviour first and then consider results." (Kirkpatrick, 1996:309). One of these difficulties Kirkpatrick refers to as 'the separation of variables', meaning how much of any improvement can be attributed directly to the training. Thus, it was difficult to measure results that could be directly attributed to a specific training programme.

Whilst this four level, 'Return on Investment' model would measure financial bottom line, Rainbird and Maguire (1993) point out the dangers of becoming fixated with organisational needs to the neglect of those relating to personal development suggest that learning organisations attempt to satisfy both these demands together.

Brinkerhoff (1988) also reported shortcomings in the Kirkpatrick model identifying that the model only covered programmes where trainees learnt discrete skills, which could be applied readily in the workplace, to produce immediate effects. , Brinkerhoff (1988) stated that:

*"Consider, for example, applying the four-step model to a program teaching people how to save lives by using CPR. Barring a workplace heart attack, we would find no on-the-job application of the skill learned. Does this failure to detect broad third-level effects negate the value of the program? Probably not, so we need a different way to evaluate this program properly. Some HRD programs that do not produce behavioural results may nonetheless less have value"* (Brinkerhoff, 1988:66).

#### **4.2 Phillips' Return on Investment model (ROI, five level model)**

During the 1970s Jack Phillips developed a ROI training evaluation methodology, which has subsequently been refined during its use and application: "During this time the ROI process slowly began to catch on and in the 1990s it achieved global recognition, implementation and prominence" (Phillips, 2007:42).

Phillips (2007) stated that where there was a need for professionals to show accountability for investing in learning programmes, ROI "...is an excellent way to show fiscal responsibility" (2007:44). It was suggested that in the past, the success of a training programme and activities were measured by the number of people involved, money spent and days to complete with little consideration given to benefits derived from the activities. However, Phillips identified a change in evaluation methodology, what he called a 'value shift'; "Today the value definition has shifted: Value is defined by results versus activity. More frequently, value is defined as monetary benefits compared with costs". (Phillips, 2007:8). Phillips acknowledged that 'value' could be determined in several ways, i.e. organisational, spiritual, personal and social etc. However, "monetary value is often sought to ensure that resources are allocated appropriately and that investments reap a return" (2007:8). Phillips (2007) went on to state that monetary resources are limited and as such they should be allocated to programmes and processes which yield the best return.

The ROI methodology met the criteria of this new definition of value by capturing six types of data: 1/ reaction and perceived value, 2/ learning and confidence, 3/ application and implementation, 4/ impact and consequences, 5/ return on investment and 6/ intangible benefits

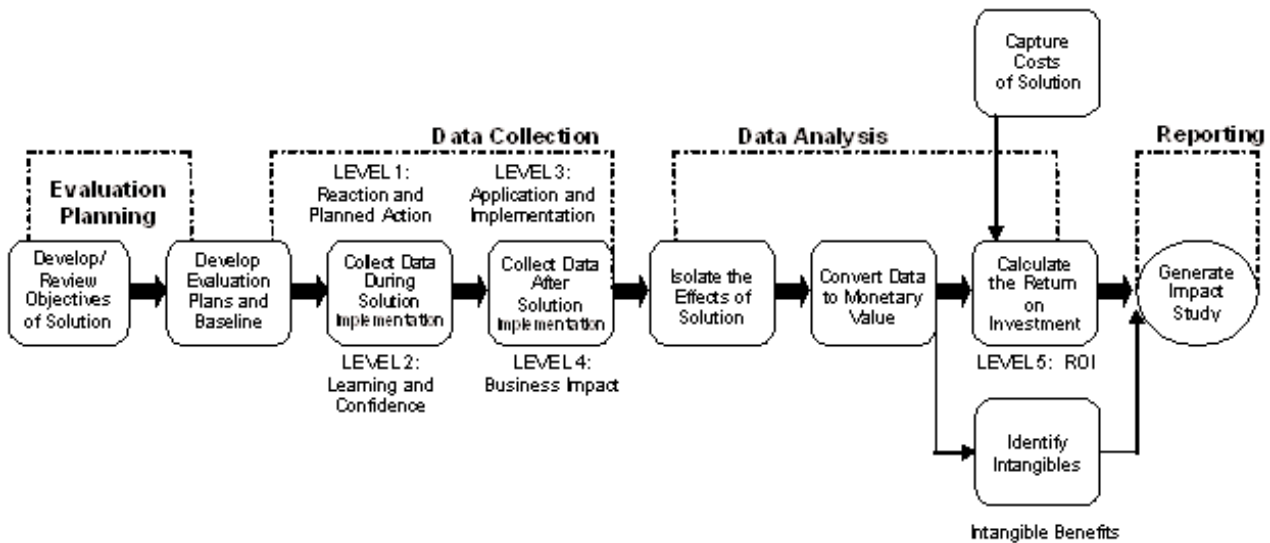


Figure 1. The Return on Investment (ROI) methodology (Source: Phillips, 1996).

Phillips recognised that an increase in the business experience of managers and greater awareness of ‘bottom-line issues’, evidenced based management, accountability, benchmarking and rising costs of implementing performance improvement projects have all led to the use of ROI methodologies, together with the fact that many performance improvement projects were stated as often running over budget and failed in terms of expected delivery:

*“Project disasters occur in business organizations as well as in governments and nonprofit organisations. Many critics of these projects suggest that the failure could be avoided if (1) the project is based on a legitimate need from the beginning, (2) adequate planning is in place at the outset, (3) data are collected throughout the project to confirm that the implementation is on track, and (4) an impact study is conducted to detail the project’s contribution. Unfortunately, these steps are unintentionally omitted, not fully understood, or purposely ignored; hence, greater emphasis is being placed on the processes of accountability.”* (Phillips 2007:10).

Phillips’ model has similarities to that of Kirkpatrick, building on the four levels of Kirkpatrick’s model with the addition of a fifth level of evaluation. Table 1 shows the modification of Kirkpatrick’s model as presented by Phillips, with the 5<sup>th</sup> level additional and highlights questions to be addressed at each of the evaluation levels. Phillips suggests that there is evidence of a ‘chain of impact’ between the levels and that if measurements are not taken from each level it might be difficult to conclude that results were actually achieved as a result of the programme.

The first level aims to measure reaction and planned actions focusing on the participants’ satisfaction with the facets of the training programme and their planned actions as a result of the programme. At level 2, the measurement focus is on what the participants have learned from the programme, usually this involves tests to determine to what degree skills, knowledge and attitudes have changed. The third level focus is on behavioural changes – the extent to which participants have utilised what has been learnt. The fourth level considers business results and the contribution of the programme to the organisation. Finally, level 5 - return on investment – is measured. This requires level 4 outcomes to be converted to

Table 1. Five levels of evaluation

Levels	Questions
1. Reaction and planned action	What are participants' reactions to the programme and what do they plan to do with the material?
2. Learning	What skills, knowledge, or attitudes have changed and by how much?
3. Job applications	Did participants apply on the job what they learned?
4. Business results	Did the on-the-job application produce measurable results?
5. Return on investment	Did the monetary value of the results exceed the cost for the programme

(Adapted from Phillips, 1996)

a monetary value that can be measured against the costs of the programme itself.

The two common formulas used to establish the financial return of a programme are benefit-to-cost ratio (BCR) and return on investment (ROI), as shown below.

$$BCR = \frac{\text{Programme benefits}}{\text{Programme costs}} \quad (\text{Eq. 1})$$

$$ROI (\%) = \frac{\text{Net programme benefits}}{\text{Programme costs}} \times 100 \quad (\text{Eq. 2})$$

Phillips (1996) suggested that individual organisations would have their own strategies regarding the requirement to evaluate training development at levels 4 or above; "... some organizations wrestling with this issue develop specific strategies for ROI calculations which often hinge on two specific actions: setting targets and sampling". (Phillips, 1996:317). Some businesses set targets for the percentage of programmes measured at each level (see Figure 4). It should be pointed out that, levels 1 and 2 were relatively easy to measure and, therefore, where a high percentage of evaluation undertaken actually focuses. However, levels 3 to 5 become much more complex and difficult:

*"At the on-the-job application level, measurement targets are lower because the follow-up process is time-consuming. At the business results level, the target is relatively small because of the difficulty of measurement. The numbers are even*

*smaller for the fifth level, the ROI process, which commands significant resources and budgets."* (Phillips,1996:317).

However, significantly, Phillips (1996) did acknowledge that it was not appropriate to calculate ROI for all training programmes. He stated that projects which were expensive, strategic, operationally focused, high profile and involved large target audiences were those which lend themselves to ROI calculations at level 5.

Level	Measurement Category	Current Status	Recommended	Comments About Status
		Coverage	Coverage	
0	Inputs/Indicators Measures inputs into projects, including number of projects, audience, costs, and efficiencies	100%	100%	Being accomplished now
1	Reaction and Perceived Value Measures reaction to, and satisfaction with, the medium, content, and value of the project or program		80-100%	Need more focus on content and perceived value
2	Learning and Confidence Measures what participants understand or learned from the project or program — information, knowledge, skills, and contacts (take-aways)		50-60%	Must use simple learning measures
3	Application and Implementation Measures progress after the program implemented — the use of information, knowledge, skills, and contacts		15-25%	Need more follow-up
4	Impact and Consequences Captures changes in business impact measures such as output, quality, time, and cost linked to the project or program		10%	The connection to business impact
5	ROI Compares the monetary benefits of the business impact measures to the costs of the project		5%	The ultimate evaluation

Figure 4. Data types and evaluation levels according to Phillips & Phillips (2007).

If ROI calculations are required for some, but not all courses, businesses must decide on their own level of ROI requirements and should consider the following:

- staff expertise in evaluation
- resources that can be allocated to the process
- the organization’s commitment to measurement and evaluation
- pressure from others to show ROI calculations
- the nature and types of HRD [human resource development] programs  
(Phillips, 1996:318)

Organisations may have a sampling process to select a small number of programmes to be evaluated at ROI level. However, the majority of organisations settle for evaluating one or two sessions of their more popular programmes.

**4.3 Instructional systems development model (ISD)**

Instructional System Development models “...deal with processes for the design of instruction that fits within the training program of an organization” (Molenda, Pershing and Reigeluth,1996:267) A conventional ISD model should link a training programme into the business operations of the organisation, providing valuable outputs which it must do in a cost effective manner. In this sense then, the ISD model can be seen to have some emphasis on bottom line benefits.

The main elements of the ISD model are analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation, thus it is sometimes referred to as the ADDIE model. In the conventional ISD model these five phases are also subdivided into a number of procedural steps (Fig. 5).

In terms of evaluation for the conventional ISD model, Molenda *et al.* (1996) suggested that this was mainly of a summative type to provide evidence for stakeholders as to the value of a programme.

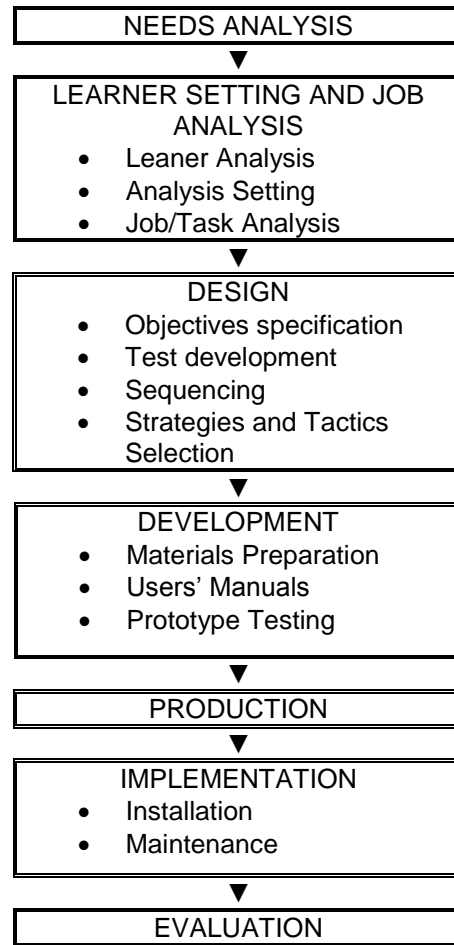


Figure 5. Breakdown of phases and steps in the ADDIE Instructional System Development (ISD) model (Source: adapted from Molenda *et al.*, 1996).

Subsequently, Molenda *et al.* (1996) developed an updated ISD model, called the Business Impact ISD model that addressed the realities of training in today’s business context:

*“It ties the instructional design process more closely to other business processes, shifting the focus from training per se to improving organizational productivity through performance improvement. The functions of needs analysis, evaluation, and implementation – already present in the conventional model – are expanded in the Business Impact ISD Model. These are the functions by which the instructional design process can be more*

*strategically aligned with the larger business system.” (Molenda et al., 1996:267).*

It was acknowledged that ‘corporate education specialists’ view the ISD process differently than in the past due to the changing business environments of the 1990s; being influenced by competition, total quality management and restructuring. This led “... human resources people to begin to focus seriously on the business impact of their work. It became clear that only those processes that could be demonstrated to have a direct effect on profitability (or another measure of organizational success) were going to survive.” (Molenda et al., 1996). They went on to highlight that this new emphasis caused trainers to extend the boundaries of models to incorporate features of the ‘wider environment’ affected by training. Therefore, instead of a narrow focus on the human resources system, links should be made with other systems, such as production, sales, accounts, etc. “Successful organizations no longer view training as a staff or support function; it must contribute to the bottom line. Training must focus on business needs-performance problems or business opportunities.” (Molenda et al., 1996:267). The authors went on to highlight, importantly:

*“Training that takes place in isolation is largely unproductive, For training to be transferred and applied to the workplace it must be accompanied by changes in the workplace-job redesign, incentive systems, supervisor support, new tools, and so on. New skills and attitudes gained in the classroom shrivel rapidly unless used and supported on the job. This means the workplace must be readied at the same time as the trainees” (Molenda et al., 1996:280).*

Significantly Molenda et al. (1996) highlight that the major theme of a revised model was that “... training alone doesn’t solve performance problems. Almost all performance problems faced by

organizations were multidimensional. They were often rooted in more than one cause or barrier and training may or may not be part of the solution.” (Molenda et al., 1996:280).

Molenda et al., (1996) cited that one of the key distinctions of the Business Development ISD model was that “... evaluation and change concerns are addressed explicitly at each stage.”. They highlighted that at each stage of the model a trainer would use different methods of evaluating activity and output, which provided quality assurance throughout the process. In addition, important evaluation criteria and standards were contemplated and specified at each stage of the process rather than at the end. In turn, this ensures decision making processes were integrated into each stage and, thus, decision making remained focused on the main target of the training “business impact”.

The Business Impact ISD model used a taxonomy of training evaluation based on a strata of impact ranging from 0 to 5, and at each stratum the evaluation had a different focus. The authors suggested the strata were an extension of Kirkpatrick’s levels (see Fig. 7). It should be noted, however, that level 5 here, differs somewhat from other models with a focus on social impact rather than financial impact.

Qualitative data were collected from feedback made during the supporting process and on completion of the three mentoring events each member of staff had conducted with five students. On completion of the staff:student mentoring period, each active, staff participant was interviewed, either individually or in groups, to collect data on their experiences, thoughts and opinions in regard to having used The SOUL Record™ as a mentoring support toolkit. These interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed, with the main statements of interest, either positive or negative, extracted for analysis and discussion. These data have been presented here anonymously.

- Stratum 0:** Activity accounting. Counts the volume of training conducted or the number of trainees, regardless of the quality or impact of the training.
- Stratum 1:** Participant reactions. Measures participants' satisfaction with the training and is sometimes referred to as "smile tests."
- Stratum 2:** Participant learning. Attempts to assess the extent to which learners accomplish the objectives of the programme; do they exhibit the intended knowledge, skills, and attitudinal behaviours at the completion of training?
- Stratum 3:** Transfer of training. Focuses on job performance; do the participants use their new skills on the job?
- Stratum 4:** Business impact. Examines the ultimate impact on the success of the organisation; does the improved employee performance make a difference to profitability (or other criterion of success)?
- Stratum 5:** Social impact. Attempts to ascertain the impact of the organisation's changed performance on society.

Figure 7. Instructional System Development (ISD) evaluation strata and targets (Adapted from Molenda *et al.*, 1996).

Molenda *et al.*, (1996:283) stated that "None of these targets is inherently more correct or more worthy than any other. In different circumstances different targets - and sometimes multiple targets - may be justified". The strata were not to be viewed to demonstrate a hierarchy and it was suggested that the viewing of evaluation in an apparent ascending order had perpetuated a belief that higher levels of evaluation were more difficult and costly to implement than lower levels. However, these authors did not subscribe to this belief and pointed out that it could, in fact, be difficult and costly to design valid and reliable performance tests, such as for stratum 2.

#### 4.4 Stufflebeam & Guba's CIPP model

The CIPP model was developed by Stufflebeam and Guba in the 1970s. It was introduced specifically to evaluate projects conducted throughout the United States that aimed to improve education. However, the American of Society of Training and

Development (ASTD) reported that this model had since gained widespread use in business organisations. Phillips (1996:838) considered that the CIPP Model "... meshes well with traditional organizational training evaluation and with the value-added training evaluation model".

CIPP is an acronym of the four areas of evaluation addressed: Context, Input, Process and Product. Stufflebeam described the epistemology of this model as follows:

*"The CIPP approach is based on the view that the most important purpose of evaluation is not to prove but to improve. It is a move against the view that evaluations should be "witch hunts" or only instruments of accountability. Instead it sees evaluation as a tool by which to help make programs work better for the people they are intended to serve...Fundamentally, the use of the CIPP Model is intended to promote growth and to help the responsible leadership and staff of an institution systematically to obtain and use feedback so as to excel in meeting important needs, or, at least, to do the best they can with the available resources" (Stufflebeam, 1983:118)*

Whilst there appeared less of an emphasis on impact assessment evaluation with this model compared to those discussed previously, it does include elements of accountability and improvement. Phillips (1996) highlighted that the CIPP Model provided a means of clarifying a programme's goals and objectives, and whether these had been achieved. It also produced information that could be used by the programme producers to improve the training in order to achieve their goals.

Despite an emphasis on the use of formative evaluation and the use of feedback in terms of improvement, Stufflebeam (1983) confirmed that the CIPP approach to accountability characterises evaluation for decision making as formative or proactive

while evaluation for accountability was summative or retrospective He goes on to point out that each evaluation stage of the CIPP model could be used in both the formative role and the accountability role, as highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2. The relevance of four evaluation types to decision making and accountability

	Context	Input	Process	Product
Decision making (formative orientation)	Guidance for choice of objectives and assignment of priorities	Guidance for choice of program strategy Input for specification of procedural design	Guidance for implementation	Guidance for termination, continuation, modification, or installation
Accountability (summative orientation)	Record of objectives and bases for the choice along with a record of needs, opportunities, and problems	Record of chosen strategy and design and reasons for their choice over other alternatives	Record of actual process	Record of attainments and recycling decisions

(Source: Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985).

Each category covers different aspects of the evaluation process.

*A. Context evaluation*

Stufflebeam (1983:128) stated that the primary purpose of the context evaluation was to identify the strengths and weakness of an object, "... such as an institution, a program, a target population, or a person and to provide direction for improvement". He added "A context evaluation also is aimed at examining whether existing goals and priorities are attuned to the needs of whoever is being served." (Stufflebeam, 1983:128).

*B. Input evaluation*

The main objective of this stage of the model was to help prescribe a programme that could be used to bring about the required changes. Evaluation at this stage should rate and identify the most appropriate approach for a programme bearing in mind any constraints and the resources available. The overall aim of the input evaluation was to consider all options available, to design a plan that would work and, thus, avoid implementation of a practice that was likely to be unsuccessful.

*C. Process evaluation*

Stufflebeam (1983) described process evaluation as an ongoing check on the implementation of a plan: "The main use of process evaluation is to obtain feedback that can aid staff to carry out a program as it was planned or, if the plan is found to be seriously flawed, to modify it as needed" (Stufflebeam, 1983:133). Four objectives exist for this stage of evaluation. First was the provision of feedback to managers or supervisors regarding progression of a programme. Second was that the evaluation should provide guidance for modifying or explicating a programme, as issues may arise at this stage that were not foreseen. A further objective was to periodically assess how programme participants accept, and were able to carry out, their roles. Finally, the process evaluation should provide considerable records regarding the implementation of the programme, whether it met its intended outcomes, cost implications, how stakeholders viewed the programme quality, etc.

*D. Product evaluation*

Stufflebeam (1983:134) stated that "The main objective of a product evaluation is to ascertain the extent to which the program has met the needs of the group it is intended to serve". For example, it was "... to measure, interpret, and judge the attainments of a program ... [and] ... should be extended to assess long term goals." (Stufflebeam, 1983:134). A number of areas were for consideration at this stage of evaluation, which should take a broad view of the effects of a programme and consider both intended and unintended effects together with positive and negative outcomes. Product evaluation should also gather and analyse views from a broad range of programme stakeholders, from both sub-groups and individuals. Often there would be a requirement to establish how the attainments from a programme compare with the original objectives and, in particular, the extent to which the outcomes were worth more than the cost of the programme.

## 5. Research interview data and summary of outcomes

Five interviews were conducted with staff from a range of public sector organisations (further education colleges, NHS and local council), each of whom held a staff development / training delivery role. These semi-structured interviews were used to determine the methods of evaluation used within individual organisations. The overarching aim was to ascertain (1) what was known of the theoretical models and (2) to what extent these models had been either implemented in their entirety or formed the basis of the evaluation, thus, establishing at what level the organisations conducted their evaluation.

### 5.1 Interview A

Interviewee A was from a further education college, where, currently, evaluation for in-house training was conducted, predominantly, by an evaluation sheet that was to be completed directly after the event. Interviewee A stated that the sheets asked questions such as "... were they comfortable, was the room light and airy, could they see and hear, was the organisation good, those sorts of things". Hence, the evaluation generally took place at the reaction level.

In terms of evaluation providing measurements for reviewing 'success', it was considered that this was "... probably not enough, in terms of quantitative data. It tells us the satisfaction level and it tells us the number of attendees". However, there was apparently a current review of training evaluation that had resulted in the development of a new evaluation document. This updated evaluation sheet, which took the form of an e-mail questionnaire, had been piloted a few weeks after a recent training event. The aim was to develop the evaluation process so that more quantitative data would be available and it was also acknowledged that the key measure of success would be to establish the impact of training on a staff member's job role. This required evaluation at levels above that of stated reaction level. As such, the benefit of longitudinal evaluation

was recognised and it was agreed that whilst the college currently achieved step 1 (Reaction), via the immediate evaluation sheet, there was a move to incorporate step 2 and 3 (Learning and Behaviour) by a follow-up evaluation. SurveyMonkey had been used to introduce a follow up evaluation, which asked; "What was the impact of training ...[and]... how have you used the training." This aimed to incorporate steps 2 and 3; "... because we focus on what have they [trainees] learnt and how have they changed the way they are working and what difference have they seen." The importance of taking note and using staff feedback was also cited as key. It was considered important that trainees felt that their comments and experiences were being used constructively and that they were not just completing a 'tick box' exercise.

The interviewee confirmed that "Kirkpatrick has influenced what we are thinking about doing and having a go at now" and "... [stage 3 and 4] they're ones which I think we should definitely be bringing into this at some point. We need to look closely at how."

In terms of advantages and disadvantages of ROI evaluation, it was considered that it could possibly be quite difficult to get staff to evaluate the impact of a training event a few months after it had taken place. In terms of recalling the training intervention:

*"I think whatever process you use whether you emailed them, you phoned them, it's still two months down the line and to get them to think back on something and whether or not it's changed what they do is quite difficult".*

It was also felt the same difficulty could apply to asking line managers what they felt was the impact of staff training after several months, and it was also highlighted that line managers may view their role as ensuring staff attend the training rather than requiring them to assess its impact. As the interviewee stated; "I think if we then went to them at some point and said 'What was the impact of

that training on your department', I don't think they will necessarily know. So we would have to almost train them to recognise they are going to be asked". The interviewee also highlighted that the additional time needed to carry out further evaluation could be an issue for the staff development team in terms time constraints. Collecting data electronically (by using SurveyMonkey) was cited as being an advantage in terms of the issue of time involved and there was an appreciation that electronic systems could be useful if evaluating at the higher levels.

### **5.2 Interview B**

Interviewee B was also from a further education college. They, again, confirmed the use of an evaluation sheet as the only source of evaluation, which again was at the reaction level. Similarly, trainees would be asked to complete and return the form immediately post the training and no further longitudinal evaluation took place. It was also highlighted that a considerable amount of feedback was in the form of anecdotal comments from staff following training, "... people say to me, well that was really useful and now I'm doing something different in the way I do this in the class...". The development of soft outcomes, such as attitude and confidence, were also highlighted as a result of anecdotal evidence. For example, verbal feedback included comments such as; "... I didn't know it was that easy or yes I'll give that a try that will be really useful for me doing this with my group".

ROI models were not known of or utilised and, as also highlighted in interview A, evaluation did not consider any financial return on investment. However, the cost implications of further evaluation, at level 3 and above, were cited as a possible drawback:

*"... in that to do those would actually cost quite a lot of money if you wanted to find out how people changed their behaviour. Because you have to have some kind of measure of what they were doing before and what they're doing afterwards and who's going to be doing that measurement and how much is that going to cost you. So*

*there's always that kind of trade off and I appreciate we should kind of do more evaluation on whether training is effective or not, but it's a lot more expensive the further down you want to draw, isn't it?"*

A point was also raised regarding the suitability of ROI evaluation within the FE sector; "... given that we are not making a profit and it's not our intention to make a profit". However, there was recognition that within the sector the emphasis could be on quality. For example, "... improved quality on the provision that we make and that staff are using all the different possible tools ... to make sure they are engaging with those tools, because if they don't the students are missing out and that's the important thing."

Finally, in terms of advantages or disadvantages the interviewee raised a point regarding ROI evaluation becoming particularly prescriptive and, thus, having a negative effect on the enjoyment and interest in staff development training. For example, "If things just become a tick box exercise ... it tends to drive all the fun out of it ... I mean that in an important way because if it is seen by staff as 'oh', then they have to demonstrate this, this and this ... then they're less likely to actually engage with it". Also it was stated that "If you drive the fun out of any kind of staff development I think there is a danger that then people switch off altogether that is the only thing I would say, but I understand that we should try to evaluate the value of the things that we're doing and whether they're making an impact."

### **5.3 Interview C**

This interview was conducted within a large, public sector organisation where much of the in-house training was mandatory. Again, the organisation's current evaluation process was to ask trainees to fill in an evaluation sheet on completion of the training event. The interviewee acknowledged that this was more a review of the day than evaluation per se; "... our process of evaluation does need developing and I wouldn't say it is actually evaluation. I would just say it is a view of the

day because what we don't do is go back three months later and see how it's had an impact on [service] or that person ... and we don't go back six months after that and check what's happening". It was acknowledged that it "... would be wonderful to go back three months later to every member of staff on that course and say how has it had an impact on your practice, have you changed your practice, have you changed your thoughts, your views, the way you work". However, the time constraints were considered prohibitive and the significant number of programmes involved could lead to evaluation being "... the only thing you do all year. So in a way you have to weigh up what is best, to what you do get out of it, to what you don't....".

It was acknowledged that "... all we are getting from our management evaluation sheets at the moment is how do we change the programme slightly to hit the need, but what we're not getting is how has it changed practice ... but I think that would come if we were able to do a three and six month follow up."

It was also noted that completing the evaluation sheet directly after the training did not allow for reflection by the participants. It was pointed out, however, that there were ongoing attempts to develop current evaluation methods. In regard to an external course, for example, the aim was to ascertain how the programme had changed practice, as explained by the interviewee: "... I'm about to put an evaluation sheet together and send out to the student and the manager to see how their practice itself has changed and the impact". Participation within the interview itself had highlighted that the general evaluation sheet used after training events, again, provided feedback at the reaction level, there was, however, an attempt to follow up some training courses in terms of the learning and reaction levels. Similar to the colleges' experiences, it was highlighted that some feedback came in the form of anecdotal evidence: "I might get it back in passing if I pass somebody and they say, 'oh, I went on that [course] and that was really good and I've now been able to do'...".

There was an awareness of theoretical models, although it was also pointed out that "I wouldn't in any instance say what we're using meets theoretical models, initially it was a development tool that we really put together for ourselves from the point of view of what we would find useful for our development, rather than a structured model of you've got to do this, this and this".

In comparison to the Kirkpatrick model, it was felt that with the evaluation sheet the organisation was currently attaining levels 1 and 2. It was acknowledged that a future aim would be to carry out evaluation that established cost effectiveness. However, the difficulty was simply having the capacity to conduct evaluation at levels 3 to 5.

Another issue raised was the importance of taking note of trainees' feedback comments and where possible reporting back to staff that these comments had been taken on-board, so that they felt their contribution to the evaluation process had an impact and was just a matter of ticking boxes.

It was agreed that there would be benefits to undertaking evaluation at the 'return on investment' level in the public sector and higher level evaluation would be "... absolutely beneficial because time is money".

#### **5.4 Interview D**

This interviewee was from an organisation that offered training development to external clients with a return on investment evaluation service. Thus, the data gathered from this interview was based on the provision of this service rather than in-house staff development and training. However, having said this, the concepts used in the provision with external organisations were relevant to an in-house application of ROI too.

The organisation had adopted the Phillips ROI methodology and, therefore, offered evaluation up to, and including, level 5 in producing a financial ROI calculation. An initial consultation process with the external client identified the business need or issue to be addressed, as the interviewee explained:

*"We go through a process which first of all looks at their business needs and objectives ... we go through a process called 'problematizing' where we look at what the problems are and we identify what problems they have that need solving to help them meet their organisational goals, and then from that we look at a programme of lets say a training intervention or interventions, and then from that programme we look at the learning outcomes in terms of what the learner needs to learn in order to effect the improvement to solve the problem."*

Having established existing measurements with the client, using a Phillips based ROI methodology, allows the measurement of (1) the learning that has taken place, (2) the application of the learning to the work place and a financial bottom line:

*"... we're changing knowledge and we're changing skills and we can measure that and then, through the information they're [client] providing, we can give it a financial element".*

Key to this application, as the interviewee highlighted, was the need to isolate the effects of the training intervention: "We also go through the process of isolation to make sure we are isolating other effects which may have equally brought about that improvement". The overall implementation of the ROI process was longitudinal and could take several months, as agreed with the client, the results being extrapolated over a one year period.

The interviewee raised a number of additional points of interest concerning the methodology used and its application. For example, clients' employees were made fully aware of the purposes of staff development:

*"we would sit down at the start of the process and say to the individuals ... the reason you're here is because your company wants you to do things differently, it's identified this business*

*goal, it needs to save an amount of money or it needs this job doing quicker or it needs this job doing differently, ... then we would explain to them, therefore, we're going to give them the knowledge, we're then going to hold their hand through application and then we're going to measure the improvement. So they're involved in that whole process."*

This avoided the situation whereby employees were 'sent' on training courses only to have no awareness of the purpose of the training.

The interview also highlighted an issue that had been raised elsewhere, that many businesses do not appear to fully appreciate what they, themselves, hope to achieve with training. Indeed, whether training was the solution to a particular problem.

*"A company will come along and say to us, for example, they want a course in something and we will ask why? Why do you want them [employees] to do it and what change are you hoping to get at the end of it, and when we sit and work with them, when we work through the problems we usually find that the problem they are trying to solve won't be solved by what they've asked for and, therefore, what we try and do is work with them to understand what the problem is and usually give them a different but more appropriate solution."*

This can be seen to meet the Phillips methodology, however, as the interviewee also highlighted:

*"Some companies are just not interested, not interested in having a discussion about how the training, that they are delivering or purchasing in some cases, whether it meets their needs. A lot of companies we deal with just simply say I just want this course, I just want people to do this and when you try and ask why they*

*often don't know and, therefore, don't want to discuss it ... so we acknowledge that we can't educate all the customers all of the time".*

It was acknowledged that many in the business sector do not have a knowledge or understanding of ROI and it was pointed out that; "... it is a strange thing to say but most companies are not interested in the financial return. What they're interested in is the change in behaviour or the business improvement itself". It was also highlighted that several members of staff who were involved with this programme had received training from the ROI Institute. This was felt to be 'crucial' and could be seen to negate the issue raised by other interviewees regarding lack of expertise in conducting ROI evaluation.

Whilst adopting the Phillips model, the interviewee stated they were also "... very careful to make sure the model was generic enough to be adaptable but was specific enough to what we wanted." This balance between adaptability and specificity, again, was common across interviewees and was in fact an issue acknowledged by Phillips (1996).

The interviewee highlighted the importance of the business needs, analysis stage and that ROI required consideration at this stage of the planning; "... our starting point, the organisational needs analysis is based on return on investment questions".

Finally the interviewee commented that evaluation, in terms of ROI and bottom line benefits, was not always necessary, as per Phillips assertion, and that the opportunity should remain for employees to undergo training for education and personal improvement per se.

### **5.5 Interview E**

In terms of training evaluation, this organisation had adopted a Kirkpatrick model. As a result, the organisation's training application form for staff training "... asks people why they're coming on the learning

intervention and what they hope to get from it".

It was highlighted that the organisation did conduct evaluation at a 'reaction' level, however, after a period of three months the trainees were asked to complete a further evaluation form: "... which tells us how they have embedded that learning into their everyday life." The interviewee also highlighted that evaluation was conducted by way of random telephone interviews with staff, three months after the training, to ascertain, "... did it make a difference, and was it what they were expecting, and what have they done subsequently?" In addition, evaluation took the form of 'mystery shopping', in that a member of staff development team would seat in on the training session:

*"... to see if it is delivering what we think it is, and obviously we will look at the results of all that and look at the bottom line impact and go back round the cycle and see what it is that we should be offering next time."*

Reaction level questionnaires were not given out nor collected by the trainer directly after the training, but rather emailed to the trainees by the staff development team post the training session. This was in an attempt to achieve a more 'truthful' responses. Copies of the evaluation sheets were, however, subsequently given to the trainer in order to provide him or her with feedback. This had resulted in a noticeable difference within trainees; "... much more able to comment openly about the quality of the training and whether it actually met the learning outcomes."

A key point raised during this interviewee was the fact that ROI had been introduced to run in conjunction with the organisation's performance management and appraisal scheme, with the aim of minimising the procedures and additional time constraints:

*"what we've tried not to do is to develop things for development sake,*

*because people say they're so busy they've got enough forms to fill in, so what we've tried to do is link it [ROI] with things that already exist"*

*"I think if it was a stand alone activity then it would be viewed somewhat differently and people would say it was yet something else that they have got to do and they might not give it perhaps the importance it deserves."*

As such, in this organisation, a longer term, three and six months, evaluation approach took place, with both employees and their line managers participating in the appraisal process.

Similar to thoughts given by interviewee D, this interviewee highlighted the fact that those requesting training have not necessarily established the problem nor always the right solution:

*"...quite interestingly they [managers] will ring us up and say, 'can somebody come and talk to us about team building' and when you go, it's not about team building at all, there's all sorts of other issues."*

The advantages of having adopted an ROI evaluation method were cited as the ability to justify a training intervention and the introduction of accountability. Any additional costs and time involved in using the Kirkpatrick model were felt to be off-set by embedding it with other processes, such as the management performance appraisal. The organisation had introduced this evaluation method for all staff development:

*"... clearly we want to know why we're doing it [training], what we want people to be doing differently. So we've been putting in measures right through the programme so that at the end we could measure and see whether we've achieved what we said we wanted to."*

In terms of allowing employees to take part in staff development it was stated that ROI had "... put the focus on relevance", with line managers having to approve training. However, it was felt that there were other methods of maintaining staff development and motivation, and thus staff retention, such as secondments, projects, working with mentors, etc.

## **6. Discussion**

The literature review highlighted that although there were advantages to conducting a structured evaluation at the higher levels through to the financial bottom line benefits, there also remains some ineffective evaluation within the business sector. In particular, a lack of evaluation above that of the reaction level (level 1). Much of this appeared to be linked to a lack of understanding of the purposes of the evaluation and knowledge about the methods.

It was acknowledged that there were benefits to conducting a rigorous evaluation of staff development training programmes. Notwithstanding the use of ROI evaluation as a method of establishing the cost benefits of training and hence business savings, evaluation at higher levels also provided: (1) A feedback process, (2) a review of existing practices, (3) a way to recognise if learning has taken place and been applied and (4) an answer to whether the right solution has been found for a 'problem'. Despite these benefits there appears to be an inherent difficulty that impedes rigorous evaluation. That is, by its very nature, evaluation may highlight less effective training delivery or programmes and, therefore, by implication this could result in a reluctance to training staff to evaluate at the higher levels. Other issues identified in the literature review were potential reasons for why ROI had not been implemented. These included: (1) A lack of knowledge in how to action ROI evaluation, (2) perceived time and cost constraints, (3) the difficulty in identifying and isolating the effects of a training programme, (4) the culture of an

organisation towards openness and willingness to learn and (5) a commonly held view that training was just not quantifiable.

A review of theoretical models underpinning evaluation methods used within a staff development context, outlined four methodologies that considered bottom line benefits and accountability in terms of training programmes together with the philosophies and aims of these models.

Both the Kirkpatrick and Phillips models offer similar attributes, with Phillips building on the original model devised by Kirkpatrick, and both include the notion of ROI and business impact as a final stage of evaluation. In particular, Phillips cites an increase in business experience in areas, such as evidenced based management, accountability and benchmarking, which had led to the use of ROI methodology. As such the objectives of the training evaluation should relate to an organisation's business needs analysis. Significantly, however, Phillips (1996) acknowledged that not all training required evaluation at the ROI level, which had been supported in other studies, such as Rainbird and Maguire (1993) who highlighted that there was a danger with becoming fixated on organisational needs to the detriment of personal development and suggested that attempts should be made to fulfil the needs and demands of both parties.

Instructional Systems Development (ISD) models have been applied to training. Molenda *et al.* (1996) highlighted that successful organisations no longer view training as simply a staff support function but rather one that should contribute to the bottom line.

The CIPP model, although perhaps not quite so grounded in a ROI epistemology, did recognise an accountability element to training. In particular, the process stage should assess the affect of training directly on job roles; i.e., what Kirkpatrick and Phillips would consider as level 3 (behaviour). The 'process evaluation' should also consider cost implications and whether a programme achieved its intended outcomes.

The interviews provided data on the use of evaluation models within the organisations, two of which were found to evaluate simply at level 1 (the reaction level). The other organisations did make use of bottom line benefit models and whilst the aim of the interviews was not to establish the detailed procedures used by organisations, they did highlight a number of key wider issues for consideration when implementing ROI evaluation.

A common theme highlighted by the interviews, with the organisations which had adopted ROI models, was the fact that whilst adopting a recognised model the organisations also ensured that it would meet their own requirements by adapting it to fit with their own aims and goals. Indeed, one organisation had employed a model alongside its own performance management appraisal scheme with the purpose of making the system less burdensome. It was the constraints on time that was identified as the difficulty in implementing greater evaluation methods by those organisations not yet using ROI training evaluation.

Also, appropriate training in the use of evaluation models was cited by interviewees as an important factor, otherwise staff did not have the skills to be proficient in an ROI methodology. This was supported in the literature review by the fact that a lack of evaluation skills was identified as the probable reason why higher level evaluation was not conducted.

Despite the fact that evaluation might be seen as a final process, after a training intervention, both theories and interviewees highlighted the importance of considering the evaluation of bottom line benefits; at both the business needs analysis stage and training needs analysis stage. The how and what was to be evaluated should be planned at this first stage of a staff development programme.

Another indirect but common issue raised in this study, was the fact that there appeared to be general uncertainty and misunderstanding by those who request training or development programmes. Specifically, in terms of why a

particular programme was chosen and what was the intended achievement and outcome. This 'problematising' stage, as described by Interviewee D, requires greater input to clarifying the intended training outcomes and expected bottom line benefits by the staff development team. Infact Brinkerhoff (1988:68) asserted that verbalisation of training outcomes was key:

*"Using the six-stage model requires articulating the assumptions about why and how each HRD activity is supposed to work. Without such articulation, comprehensive evaluation is impossible. And with such articulation, HRD practitioners and consumers can define and clarify expectations." (Brinkerhoff, 1988:68).*

However, there were those that thought ROI evaluation was not necessary for all training programmes, such as Phillips (2007) who stated that ROI evaluation was not a requirement for every staff development and training programme (Figure 4). It was also pointed out that some organisations do not have an interest in the financial ROI of training. Instead their key interest was in the change at the behaviour level. However, changes at the behaviour level may inevitably lead to financial bottom line benefits, even if they were not measured by the company. As Interviewee D stated, "... let's make sure that the training intervention that they've identified will solve the problem ... [even if evaluation was at levels 1 – 3] ... a lot of companies are actually just content that we've supported them in finding the right programme."

Interviewees also highlighted a dichotomy between the attentiveness to training and ROI evaluation, which provided bottom line benefits for an organisation, and the expense of the training, which focused on an individual's development. This supported the findings made in other studies (Rainbird and Maguire, 1993; Brinkerhoff, 1988).

A supportive organisational culture and senior management support were important factors in the successful implementation of an

ROI evaluation, as a 'critical' approach to evaluation was implicit in this process.

Finally, ROI and bottom line benefit evaluation conducted at the higher levels did provide the information to justify training and introduce accountability into the staff development process. As Phillips (2003:2) stated:

*"Most executives recognise the need for training and intuitively feel that there is value in training. They can logically conclude that training can pay off in bottom-line measures such as productivity improvements, quality enhancements, cost reductions, and time savings. They also believe that training can enhance customer satisfaction, improve morale, and build teamwork. Yet the frustration comes from the lack of evidence to show that the process is really working. While the payoffs are assumed to exist and training appears to be needed, more evidence is needed, or training funds may not be allocated in the future. The ROI methodology represents the most promising way to show this accountability in a logical and rational approach..."*

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## ***Changes in organisational culture: A case study within a mixed economy college***

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### **1. Introduction**

There is a continuing interest in the influence of the culture of an organisation on its management and success. Increasingly our understanding of concept of organisational culture has affected both the social anthropology of the workplace and how it might be managed effectively. For some an understanding of organisational culture is a key to organisational excellence as it is argued it can make a significant difference to performance. For example, Schein (1999) asserts that organisational culture matters:

*“Because decisions made without awareness of operative cultural forces may have unanticipated and undesirable consequences and because elements of culture determine organisational strategy, goals and operational modes” (p.3).*

Indeed such an understanding is sometimes seen as a panacea that will not only cure a range of organisational ills but also explain virtually every circumstance within an organisation (Hodgetts 1991, Peters 1992, Costello 1993, Furnham 2007).

However, any definition of organisational culture is complex and difficult; indeed there is evidence of a lack of clarity of use of the term among those working in the field. What some (e.g. Brown 1998, Schein op cit) describe within an understanding of the term organisational culture, others would describe in terms of organisational climate (e.g. Forehand and Von Gilmer 1964, Guion 1973). Yet others (e.g. Lehal 2000) use both terms interchangeably. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that Brown (op cit) has been led to describe the notion of organisational culture as “an embarrassment of riches where..... No consensus has emerged.”

Further, it is the case that most organisations demonstrate evidence of a complex web of sub-cultures (e.g. Triandis 1970, Ogbonna and Wilkinson 1990, Trice et al 1993, Furnham op cit). Evidence has also been produced to suggest that the culture of an organisation, while unique is set by a complex relationship between a number of factors including the relationship between its internal environment and external influences that are brought to bear (e.g. Bate 1994) and the current psychological disposition of its membership (Goffee 1997, Lundberg 1985 and Dyer 1985). Further, the culture of an organisation is regarded as dynamic and constantly open to either planned or natural (unplanned) change (e.g. Winter 1973, Handy 1993, Brown op cit, Schein op cit).

While taking into account the complexity of our understanding of the notion of organisational culture the purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it will consider the notion of organisational culture; secondly it will to report the effects of planned change on the organisational culture within two different faculties delivering a range of higher education programmes in a large mixed economy college in the UK.

#### **1.1 Defining organisational culture**

In order to clarify what is meant by the term organisational culture the first part of this paper will focus on a brief consideration of the literature on the concept. As noted above defining the term organisational culture is difficult, with the complexity of the constituent parts making the task perhaps akin to attempting to pick up mercury with ones fingers. Any even superficial survey indicates there is a wide range of definitions. At perhaps the more simplistic level organisational culture is seen in somewhat pragmatic terms. For Bower and Seahorse (1966) for example, organisational culture is merely “the best way of doing things”, while Deal and Kennedy (1982) consider it as a set

of informal rules that inform behaviour in a particular setting. For Geertz (1973) organisational culture can be identified in terms of personal actions, which can be related to patterns of symbolic meanings. It is through these patterns, he argues, by which humans transmit their past experiences and which they also use to guide their future actions.

In contrast to these largely pragmatic definitions analyses by others (e.g. Schein 2004, Hofstede et al 2001, Goffee and Jones 2000) describe a complexity within their understanding of organisational culture within phenomena that is neither neat nor tidy. Rather, in their view, organisational culture is set around factors that are both tangible and more intangible within a setting; features that in some cases are tacit and obvious, while in other cases they are within both the individual and the collective subconscious, even perhaps taken for granted. For some this complexity allows organisational culture to be set within metaphors (e.g. Morgan 1986), while others (e.g. Gold 1982) consider it to be an objective entity. For Morgan (op cit) these metaphors are set within a range of influences on individual settings such as language, social norms, folk-law ceremonies and a range of other social practices that help to set and communicate key individual ideological values and beliefs and guiding actions. Metaphors used to discuss organisational culture are widespread and include references to machines and the theatre (Mangham and Overington 1983), the political arena (Pfeffer 1981) and the psychic prison Marcusse (1955), while Smircich (1983) analyses organisations in terms of their collective co-ordination and orderliness .

Within this wider understanding of organisational culture the contemporary discourse can be set around the 'culture is' (social science perspective) / 'culture has' (functionalist perspective) discourse (e.g. Huczynski and Buchannan 2007). These perspectives take widely different views of the nature of organisational culture. The functionalist perspective takes the view that every organisation has a culture consisting of an objective reality of artefacts, values and

meanings which are given to its members when they join. In this perspective organisational culture is regarded as being formed from both individual and group dynamics and awareness as a result of a range of activities based within a setting.

Needle (2000) describes this functionalist perspective as making assumptions about members that are not always explained and which help to deliberately create a set of beliefs which guide both their behaviours as well as the organisational processes as part of the management strategy within the setting. For others (e.g. Bernick 2001) this perspective allows managers within a setting to present a preferred culture rather than to act within the real one to be found there. For Hofstede (op cit) who also sits within this perspective, organisational culture is a passive notion; a collective programme of the mind set around the notion of highly successful 'corporate heroes' who are used as role models to influence the ceremonies, rights, rituals and acceptable behaviour of its membership. Further, it is Hofstede's view that members of an organisation are recipients of its culture which develop as a result of the mental programming of people within a particular social; environment.

The social science perspective of organisational culture is set in social constructionist terms based on a study of social understandings and interactions. This perspective is viewed as an active, powerful, latent yet largely unconscious set of forces that determine, both through individual and collective behaviour, perceptions of thought and working which change within a setting as it develops and progresses. For some (e.g. Schein op cit, Robbins 1997, Kemp and Dwyer 2001, Bishop et al 2006) such behaviours are set not only in terms of current values within a setting but also its history, traditions and assumptions. Those including Schein (op cit) Goffee (op cit) Trice and Beyer (op cit) and Tierney (1997) argue for a perspective of organisational culture relating to a range of consciously shared experiences, reactions, interactions and reflections within a setting. It is these experiences and their interpretation which not

only helps to shape the values norms behaviours and personal relationships within the setting but also helps to shape reactions to change.

These shared meanings are sometimes represented as being unquestioned and taken for granted within a setting (e.g. Dill 1962, Pettigrew 1979 Tierney op cit). Tierney (ibid) taking up this point argues we may only have a partial or intuitive grasp of a culture within a setting and that this may become part of our consciousness when we contravene its boundaries or break its accepted rules and norms. Further, he argues it is the negatives of the culture of a setting that tends to be most prominent in our thinking. In the social science perspective it is these social patterns, dispositions and assumption which are taught to new group members as the correct and acceptable form of behaviour. As a result forms of organisational culture in different settings are continuously reproduced and reinforced through the interaction of its membership (Huczynski and Buchanan op cit).

Such analyses as those described above have led to a range of models of organisational culture being developed (e.g. Handy op cit, Hofstede op cit, Schein op cit, 1992, 2004, Robbins op cit, Goffee and Jones op cit, Wilson 1992) and of their management (e.g. Handy op cit). While some of these have been developed on two dimensional linear lines (e.g. Handy op cit, Schein op cit) others are modelled on complex three dimensional representations (e.g. Goffee and Jones op cit) Further, some of these models have been influenced more by the functionalist perspective of organisational culture, while others reflect the influence of the social science perspective described above. However, whatever perspective has influenced these models there is a common complexity to each of them. Both Goffee and Jones (ibid) and Wilson op cit developed three dimensional models, with Goffee and Jones (ibid), describing an S shaped cube model where levels of solidarity, common tasks mutual interests and commonly shared goals in one dimension are matched with sociability and

friendliness in another and where the level of negativity /positivity of both of these characteristics can be considered. Hofstede (op cit) also describes a three-dimensional model based on concentric circles centred on organisational values and beliefs, while its outer circles focus on the words, conditions acts and characteristics that give meaning to its members.

In contrast to the more complex three dimensional models described above, the two dimensional model described by Schein (op cit) is typical of those which indicate there are different depths of cultural features within an organisation. Schein (ibid) for example considers there are three separate layers including surface manifestations (which are largely materialistic and easily identifiable artefacts) to features based on tacit, largely intangible attitudes and assumptions. In his view, organisational culture is expressed by the deep, inferred taken for granted assumptions that have developed in an organisation throughout its history. Schein (op cit) also argues the relationship between the surface manifestations and the deeper assumptions and attitudes is a key feature in a member's understanding of the culture of a setting.

## **1.2 The research setting**

The setting where the data was collected was the University Centre of a long established mixed economy college in the UK. These data were collected at a time of an increasingly vigorous interest by recent governments in the potential of the relationship between educational achievement and economic development with an emphasis on developing a highly skilled, highly trained workforce in order to meet successfully the challenges of a global economy. Planned changes in higher education (HE) have seen a focus on increasing the number of students in the 18-31 year age group who are undertaking courses of study as well as widening the participation of what have been commonly described as 'non-traditional learners' in this sector through the introduction of more vocationally orientated programmes of study, particularly through the introduction of

Foundation Degrees (e.g. HEFCE 2003, DfES 2004).

Such demands are bringing increased pressure for change on all places which provide higher education in the UK (HEIs), resulting in the fundamental resign of their structure and the relationship between all who work there (e.g. Scott 1995, Biggs 2003). These pressures have not only placed all staff under increasing demand to up-date, modernise and improve their professional skills but also challenged the organisational culture of all HEIs. Potentially at least such developments have led to a period of personal insecurity, re-evaluation and professional turbulence for all staff in HEIs. Consequently, it is particularly apposite to explore the experiences of and consequent perceptions of staff who work there at this time. With this in mind this research was conducted in a mixed economy setting where a development plan to expand HE provision had recently been initiated (DEC Definitive Strategic Plan 2003).

## **2. Research methodology**

As a result of the complexity of the concept of organisational culture detailed above, doubts have been raised as to the possibility of gaining a robust understanding of it (e.g. Goffee et al op cit, Uttal 1983, Martin et al 1985 Alveson and Berg 1992). Doubts have been raised over a comprehensive range of issues including; the reliability and validity of those data which might be collected; the ethical considerations collecting such data raises; and the methodological approaches used to analyse these data. Nevertheless, strategies have been developed to both collect data through either self-report (e.g. Allen and Dyer 1980, Glaser 1983, Cooke and Lafferty 1989) or external enquiry mechanisms (e.g. |Harrison 1972, Handy op cit, Brown op cit) as well as ways of interpreting those data either qualitatively or quantitatively.

However, there is a growing body of recent evidence (e.g. Schein op cit, Brown op cit)

that indicates a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis will provide more robust evidence, particularly if this methodology is employed with a degree of subtlety. For a number of reasons this mixed methods approach lends itself to the case study strategy which arguably has a number of advantages, including legitimising the use of a range of research methods to capture the nuances within the complexity of this situation and providing the opportunity to collect a small-scale 'snapshot' of the current organisational culture within this setting.

Data were collected in two phases. The first phase focussed on the collection and analysis of data from returns to a published questionnaire composed of eighty-four propositions designed by Brown (op cit) with the addition of an initial page of questions to ascertain the gender, age, current work role and length of service of those who returned the questionnaire (See appendix 1). More in-depth data was collected in the second phase of the study through the development of an open-ended, semi structured interviews schedule to be used with volunteers among those who had already completed the first phase (see appendix 2). The initial question framework for the second phase of the study was based on the negative responses received from the initial phase.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1 The pilot study**

The first phase of the data collection process was piloted with a small group of staff from another School in the Centre. Although the responses received were generally positive and the questionnaire was seen as 'fit for purpose,' with the questionnaire relatively easy to complete if somewhat lengthy, a number of other points were raised by them including:

- Difficulties in focussing their response on the School or their university centre experiences
- The irrelevance of a small number of statements, which it was felt might be better if they were omitted

- A lack of focus and vagueness in some statements which led to confusion
- Incorrect numerical weightings attributed to some statements in Sections 2 and 9, which they indicated could cause confusion for respondents.

However, even as a result of this feedback it was decided to make no changes to the questionnaire which was distributed to staff in two Schools in the Centre. For confidential reasons these will be described in the next section of this paper as School A and School B.

### **3.2 The results from the questionnaire phase**

Seventeen returns were received from Phase 1 of the research (a 56.6% return). The analysis of the data received indicated that the organisational culture in the setting was based on many positive indicators with only a few negatives. However, the levels of agreement within the individual statements in the questionnaire was often low, with only eight of the eighty-four propositions presenting at least a two thirds majority. Although no formal statistical analysis was undertaken the additional information indicated there was little or no connection between the age, gender and length of service of staff and their response to the statements, although there was some linkage between certain propositions and the work-role of staff.

The returns indicated feelings of helpfulness and consideration amongst colleagues, with evidence of cooperative team working, although some respondents felt this latter aspect could be usefully developed further. The majority of staff indicated that lines of communication with their immediate colleagues were strong and their managers were reported as setting up good two-way communication links. There was little reported evidence of professional jealousy.

Although there was evidence of a lack of consistent agreement about the interpretation

of rules and regulations and the effectiveness of a control system in the setting, the majority of staff indicated both that they understood and obeyed these and also that any violation of these would be likely to be reported to an appropriate person. The setting was also regarded as somewhere where people had the opportunity to learn from their mistakes, particularly in discussion with other colleagues. However, less confidence was expressed about the learning opportunities available to develop their professional skills. Respondents also reported the setting was business-like and one where a majority of them enjoyed working. The returns also indicated the setting was a place where planning ahead occurred and where there was a firm focus on the future. However, it was reported from all levels within the workforce that they were not always as fully aware as they wished to be of this planning. In line with research conducted on other HEIs (Kerr op cit, Becher and Trowler op cit) and to some extent in contrast to the raft of recent government initiatives in this sector, staff also reported that this setting was a place where changes in policy and procedure were generally undertaken slowly.

There were eight negative returns from the statements presented in the questionnaire. And these statements appeared in only three of the twelve sub-sections within it. Further, an analysis indicates no direct relationship could be made between any of these statements. Statements relating to the enjoyment of work produced the least positive response. However, similar data has been presented in other recent research on this issue. For example, Smith (1997) indicated a job satisfaction rate of only seventy-seven percent among professions working directly with the general public and Nolan (2004) reported staff in HEIs were among the least satisfied group of workers in the UK.

The returns also indicated a certain lack of professional trust in the setting, although this was not totally consistent across all of the relevant statements, with the returns to a statement relating to professional respect presenting a more positive return. Staff also

indicated that their work went unrewarded, a feature which may also account for poor returns relating to their long term loyalty to the organisation. Negative returns were also made about the time available to think through new ideas and that new ideas were not generally shared among colleagues. Further, there were indications of difficulties in communicating with other staff across the centre. There was also some evidence of staff feeling there were influential work cliques in the setting, although there was little reported experience of wider antagonism as a result of this.

### **3.3 Results from the interview phase**

Phase 2 of this research was conducted with thirteen volunteer staff who agreed to participate in this phase drawn from both School A and School B in the Centre. All of the interviews were completed within two months of them completing the questionnaire. The purpose of this phase was to collect 'rich thick' data so that a deeper understanding of the negative findings from the questionnaire could be investigated.

The data collected at the interview stage indicated there was a considerable discrepancy of views emerging between the perceptions of staff in the two Schools about both the changes being introduced and the effect they were having on both their personal and professional lives. The evidence from School A indicated that these staff continued to be largely enthusiastic about the changes being made and that they were working hard to ensure the developments were successful. Although a small number of staff in this School had some anxieties about the impact of these change, these were largely over-ridden by both their commitment and enthusiasm about the changes. An example of this level of commitment was provided by one interviewee who spoke of "staff buying into the changes big style", adding "we responded pretty well and were really up or it". Other respondents were similarly positive, with one stating "we felt it was our future." The overarching view of the staff in this School was summed up by one of its members who spoke of these developments as "a significant event in the history of the

college" and an opportunity to "develop a new brand" (and to)"create a new product."

However, in contrast to the staff in School A, staff in School B viewed these changes quite differently, and largely in contrast to the positiveness displayed by staff in school A. In the interview phase, the views received from the staff about the changes that were being made in School B were largely negative. This effect of this negativity was apparent on both the individuals within the School but also on its collective morale. The staff in School B used words such as "acrimony" and "hostility" to describe their relationship with the college senior management team (SMT). With one stating the impact of the changes had led to "heated and emotional discussions" between the SMT and the staff in their School.

In direct contrast to the comments received from the staff in School A, staff in School B reported they did "not want to buy into this idea", while other felt decisions about the changes being made had been taken without their being consulted and they "had been excluded from the discussions on their future." The deteriorating relationship between the SMT and the staff in School B was illustrated by one interviewee, who described the management style as "baronial", while others concurring with this viewpoint, spoke of a "developing lack of mutual confidence" between the School and the SMT; and of "a lack of sense of direction" in their School. As a result, more than one member of staff of School B reported they felt their views were being ignored. One respondent speaking about this, for example, spoke of "being left out on a limb"... where no one was talking to each other."

Indeed, some staff in School B were so demoralised by the deteriorating relationship between the School and the SMT that they reported there were "being exploited" and that the SMT had shown "little sense of loyalty to them." Some staff in this School reported feelings of depression and of being so dispirited that they were being forced to consider their professional future in the Centre. As a result there was a discernable increase in their level of anxiety about both

their own futures as well as the future of their School. Again in contrast to the views generally expressed throughout School A, the evidence from School B indicated a distinctly negative counter culture was beginning to emerge as a result of their perceptions of the effects of the changes that had been introduced.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In considering the effects of planned change in the organisational culture in two of the Schools presenting HE programmes in a mixed economy college setting the following conclusion can be drawn.

The evidence collected from both phases of the research provided a useful snapshot of the current organisational culture within the two participating Schools. Largely as a result of the methodological approach used, the questionnaire phase of the data collection process did not identify the diverging circumstances between the two Schools, the second phase, based on the negative answers received in this phase, revealed that the planned changes in the setting had a considerable, yet markedly different effect, on both the individual members of staff in the two different Schools, as well as the organisational culture of the Centre. Further, the polarisation of opinion between the staff in the two Schools had developed over a relatively short period of time. While the staff in School A was shown to be largely upbeat and enthusiastic about the changes that had been introduced, concurrently staff in School B reported they were anxious, depressed and dispirited; to the extent that many were considering their professional futures.

The evidence collected also supports that collected by Winter (op cit) and Burnes (op cit), indicating that managing planned change has unpredictable consequences on the organisational culture in a setting and that managers can have difficulties in controlling it. This research also supports the view that planned change can lead to a wide range of

reactions by staff apparently undertaking very similar work within the same setting.

Collecting further evidence of the effects of these changes on the staff in the two Schools would also provide useful snapshots of the organisational culture of this setting as well as presenting further information for this area of study.

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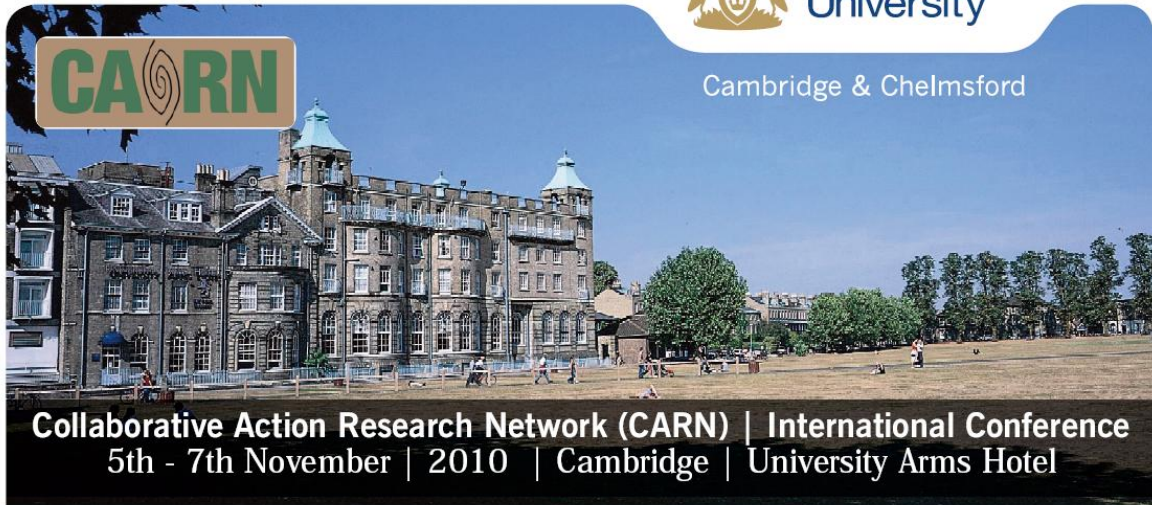
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# ***The Dutch structure for recognition of prior learning and practical examples of the process***

*Ian Fleming*, Consultant

## **1. Introduction**

The study visit team consisted of nine participants from six countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Spain (Galicia and Navarra) and the United Kingdom. Members of the team came from a wide variety of backgrounds, from state agencies to voluntary bodies and small business, and from specialist fields including the inspectorate, management, policy formation and advice and guidance.

The study visit not only provided an opportunity to undertake an in depth review of the Dutch arrangements for accreditation of prior learning (APL), but also gave us a broad overview of the Dutch system of government and allowed us to experience something of everyday life, travel, work and study in the Netherlands. The success of the visit was due both to the efficiency of its planning and the personal qualities of the organiser and her colleagues. It is also worth commenting upon the highly successful way in which the participants became closely involved with each other as a group of active learners. Group members were open and honest in discussions and, in addition to participating fully in the intense programme of formal study, we shared social activities with great enjoyment and much laughter.

The study visit programme provided a very full schedule of presentations, discussions and visits over four days, commencing on the Sunday evening on arrival with a welcome from the organisers, an overview of the week and a shared meal. The formal programme included presentations and discussions at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) in The Hague, in the group hotel (Hotel Mitland, Utrecht), at ROC Midden Nederland, Nieuwegein, and at the Metaalvakschool, Nieuwkoop. In addition, the group participated in practical activities and tours at ROC Midden Nederland,

Metalvakschool Nieuwkoop and Eurodeur, Nieuwkoop. The study visit organisers also arranged an interesting complementary programme of social activities. This included a tour of Binnehof and the Dutch Parliament buildings at The Hague on the first day, a shared meal in the kitchens of ROC Midden Nederland, cooked and presented by students, and a boat trip on Nieuwkoopse Plassen, with a commentary on the natural history of the area, on the third day, together with the opportunity, in the late afternoon, to visit central Utrecht.

## **2. An overview of the Dutch system for APL / RPL**

We were introduced to the structure of Dutch education and training and the APL/RPL (recognition of prior learning) process in the Netherlands by means of formal presentations at OCW at The Hague by Peter van Ijsselmuiden and Patrick Leushuis. This was followed by an input from Kenniscentrum, the Dutch Knowledge Centre for APL, by Karin van der Sanden, together with copies of useful supporting documents. We were given more information from the International Director of ROC Midden Nederland, Norbert Ruepert, and his staff, and, on the third day of the study visit, we met a range of local collaborators in vocational education and training in the Alphen an der Rijn area. On the final day of the study visit we had a presentation from Jolande Botke of Bureau Zuidema about APL in a wider European context.

The group held short discussion sessions in the evening after each day's formal programme and we appreciated the patient way in which the NL Leonardo da Vinci Programme facilitators, Anne Potters and Ellen Hanselman, worked with us during the week to answer our questions and correct any misunderstandings about the Dutch APL

process. Our outstanding queries had all been resolved by the final day of the study visit.

The Dutch system of APL has developed from a realisation, during the early 1990s, that lifetime employment was no longer a realistic feature of Dutch industry and commerce, due to changes in patterns of employment and developments in technology. Both government and social partners started talking in terms of work security, rather than job security, and, after an interlude when a process of recognition of prior qualifications was proposed, a broader approach, considering all kinds of prior experience (RPL) was adopted.

This embryonic Dutch APL system was stimulated, but not regulated by government, which means that APL in the Netherlands has emerged from a need in society, rather than being imposed from above by overt government policy. The policy approach of government support for APL without regulation was termed 'letting a thousand flowers bloom' and it generated a lot of experience. The OCW national action plan on lifelong learning in 1998 gave APL a central place in the Dutch lifelong learning agenda.

In 2000 the Kenniscentrum (Knowledge Centre for APL) was set up, with funding for

10 years, after which a review will be conducted. Social partners and government worked together on a first model for quality assurance of APL, inspired by EU principles on the validation of formal and non formal learning (European Commission 2004), a national covenant was drawn up and, in November 2006, the Quality Code for APL was agreed and published.

The position in 2009 is that APL is now a well established element of Dutch VET provision and a network of APL providers exists to support individuals, including unemployed people, from a diverse range of backgrounds and contexts. The 'organic' growth of the Dutch APL process over the last 15+years, with support from government and social partners but very little legislative intervention, represents a great strength of the process and the study visit team was impressed with the active involvement of social partners. However, the lack of a legislative framework for APL is a matter that is currently being debated and the way that the process has developed does mean that there are some missing parts of the APL 'jigsaw'. The most significant omission is the lack of a defined national standard for assessors and APL supervisors.

Table 1. Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) reported good practice.

Title of programme / initiative	Name of the institution that implements it (website if available)	Contact person (if possible) who presented it to the group	Whom the project/ programme/ initiative addresses	What features of the project/programme/initiative make it an example of good practice?
APL Quality Code	Established by covenant between NL government and a range of social partners in 2006  <a href="http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/apl-english">http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/apl-english</a>  <a href="http://www.kennis">http://www.kennis</a>	Patrick Leushuis of OCW (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science)  Karin van der Sanden, Dutch Knowledge Centre (Kenniscentrum) APL	All users of the APL process in NL, especially APL providers	<b><i>Defined quality principles for the APL process</i></b>  The Dutch Knowledge Centre for APL states that: <i>'National actors, including APL providers, employers and accreditation bodies, have joined hands to develop a quality code for APL. Based on existing quality methods and the Common European Principles for the identification and</i>

	<p><a href="http://centrumevc.nl/apl-english/182-a-quality-code-for-apl-identifying-and-accrediting-a-lifetime-of-learning">centrumevc.nl/apl-english/182-a-quality-code-for-apl-identifying-and-accrediting-a-lifetime-of-learning</a></p>			<p><i>validation of non-formal and informal learning, the APL code has been developed to enable all actors in the Netherlands to bring APL to a higher quality level.'</i></p> <p>The Quality Code increases the accessibility of APL, clarifies what APL is and how it should be offered. It also provides transparency and allows better comparison of different APL procedures, as well as guaranteeing civil effect.</p> <p>The Code provides clear and comprehensive guidance and has developed from the Dutch 'bottom up' approach towards the stimulation and management of APL. The Code also relates clearly to national provision for registration of APL providers and reflects national beliefs in individual rights.</p>
<p><b>The system of APL in NL</b></p>	<p>A wide range of APL providers across the NL</p> <p>One example is <i>ROC Midden Nederland, Nieuwegein</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.rocmn.nl">www.rocmn.nl</a></p>	<p>Norbert Ruepert, International Director, and colleagues</p>	<p>The part of <i>ROC Midden Nederland</i> that we visited specialises in Hospitality training</p>	<p><b><i>A defined, structured, quality assured and consistent approach to APL</i></b></p> <p>The <i>ROC Midden Nederland</i> visit provided us with a chance to discover more about the practical workings of the Dutch APL process. The 'Quicksan' review of a candidate's potential for APL can provide a supportive initial intervention for some individuals. The APL process comprises (in common with most other European experiences), registration, evidence compilation, assessment, validation and evaluation. Candidates compile their evidence portfolios against the level and competence structure set out in national and sectoral standards.</p> <p>There is a standardised APL report format and national registration and inspection of APL providers</p> <p>There is a clear expectation under the Quality Code that the roles of assessor and supervisor in the APL process should be separate.</p> <p>Research has indicated the clear individual benefits of APL in terms of personal motivation and growth. APL can apply to unemployed and socially</p>

				<p>disadvantaged individuals.</p> <p>Candidates may use an electronic format for their APL evidence portfolios if they wish and we learned that individuals with limited ICT skills can obtain support in digital portfolio construction.</p> <p>Costs of APL are usually met by employers, but there are tax benefits should an individual need to pay. State funding is available to assist unemployed APL candidates.</p>
<p>Industry-education collaboration in NL, as evidenced by examples in the Alphen an der Rijn area</p>	<p><a href="http://www.kvk.nl/english/aboutus/03_Our_addresses/Our_addresses.asp">http://www.kvk.nl/english/aboutus/03_Our_addresses/Our_addresses.asp</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.kenteq.nl/cms/publish/content/showpage.asp?themeid=1">http://www.kenteq.nl/cms/publish/content/showpage.asp?themeid=1</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.rocleiden.nl/">http://www.rocleiden.nl/</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.rparg.nl/cms/">http://www.rparg.nl/cms/</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.metaalvakschool.nl/">http://www.metaalvakschool.nl/</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.eurodeur.nl/">http://www.eurodeur.nl/</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.lerenenwerken.nl/">http://www.lerenenwerken.nl/</a></p>	<p>Frank Jonker, Managing Director, <i>Metaalvakschool</i> and colleagues</p> <p>Bastiaan De Roo, Managing Director of <i>Chamber of Commerce</i></p> <p>Jany Leijenhorst, <i>Kenteq</i></p> <p>Klaske Sinnema, <i>RPA Alphen an der Rijn</i></p> <p>Robert Bodegraven, Managing Director, <i>Eurodeur</i></p>	<p>Individuals in the region that need to access the APL process; potential metalworking industry trainees</p>	<p><b><i>Close working relationships between agencies to support APL</i></b></p> <p>Our visit to <i>Metaalvakschool Nieuwkoop</i> provided us with the opportunity to hear from a range of organisations concerned with VET in the Alphen an der Rijn area. There was a clear sense that the various agencies were working very well together in order to identify industry needs, provide training specific to the metal manufacturing industry (through planned schemes of training at the <i>Metaalvakschool</i> and links with the next door company, <i>Eurodeur</i>).</p> <p>We saw evidence of close collaboration between the <i>Chamber of Commerce</i>, <i>Kenteq</i>, the local agency for the government's <i>leren en werken</i> (<i>learning and working</i>) policy, the <i>ROC Leiden</i> and the <i>RPA (Regional Labour Market Platform)</i>. During the visit to Nieuwkoop we also met a successful APL candidate and questioned her about the process she had undergone.</p> <p>We were impressed by the clear overview of local industry and commerce, and the demographic context within which the APL process operates, which was presented by the Chamber of Commerce. Informal discussion with the participants in our programme at Nieuwkoop confirmed that APL is a common feature of VET in the area.</p>

## **2. Common approaches**

There were some common features relating to APL from the national experiences of the study visit participants. One was terminology. 'Accreditation of prior learning' is a commonly recognised and used term across the participants' countries, although it was noted that the Dutch and Czechs also use RPL: 'recognition of prior learning'. The Danish term is simply 'prior learning', while experience in the UK has been to apply slightly different terms to describe different contexts (eg APEL: 'accreditation of prior experiential learning'; APA: 'accreditation of prior achievement'; APCL: 'accreditation of prior certificated learning').

The EU context is that, to date, nomenclature in relation to recognition of non-formal and informal learning is far from fixed throughout Europe but the development of the EQF may go some way towards the creation of agreed terminology. 'Recognition of prior learning' (RPL) is the preferred EU term at present.

A/RPL enables access, transfer and progression. It can motivate non-engaged adults to resume or continue learning as it identifies and makes visible knowledge, skills and competence of which the individual may not have been aware.

Another common approach across the countries represented in the study visit was (except in the case of Bulgaria) the existence of a national qualifications framework. Where a framework exists, it enables the placing of an APL candidate at the appropriate level on the framework, this allowing existing knowledge, skills and competence to be formally recognised, rewarded and signalled to different stakeholders, including employers. This reduces costs through eliminating or reducing the need to spend time and money relearning what may already have been learned.

## **3. Common challenges**

The study visit group members spent a great deal of time during the week discussing their national approaches and also clarifying and identifying the benefits, as well as some of the possible drawbacks, of the Dutch APL system. The following were recognised as common challenges across group members' countries:

- The cost of a systematic and effectively managed APL process to the candidate (although employers may meet costs, there will always be some individuals who need to pay themselves and the costs are likely to be considerable).
- The difficulty of establishing a viable and effective system which reaches a wide potential market of candidates without a need for overt government intervention and legislative frameworks. It was interesting to note that the Danish and Czech approaches to A/RPL were essentially 'top down', with strong government intervention, unlike the 'bottom up' approach in NL and the examples of successful, but somewhat isolated, APL pilots under different schemes in Spain (including Galicia and Navarra).
- Our discussions and review of evidence led us to the conclusion that a 'top down' approach is not likely to lead to success without some highly imaginative and localised promotional programmes.
- The need for some well defined form of infrastructure to support APL. The position in the UK offered an interesting case study for group members. The UK has well defined APL guidance (to the extent of clearly enacted principles and precepts not dissimilar to the NL Quality Code), together with a long established national qualifications framework and also defined standards for assessors and supervisors. However, there is no national APL infrastructure, except in specific cases such as university entry for mature students and there appears

to be a feeling among many British VET practitioners that APL is a lot of bother. This means that only very highly motivated individuals ever undertake a full APL claim, often with little support.

- Portfolio construction is always an area where individuals can stumble and perhaps opt out if they lack the provision of genuine support from an early stage.
- The use of digital portfolios is highly appropriate in today's computer-literate society, but encouragement by APL providers to consider using an electronic evidence base may put undue pressure on those candidates whose ICT skills are limited.
- APL is often labour market driven, which may sometimes create tensions between the needs of employers and the needs and preferences of candidates. We often found ourselves discussing the social versus labour market dimensions of APL during the study visit!
- Without very close and genuine levels of collaboration between VET agencies and APL providers, it may be difficult to demonstrate the real value of APL in the employment market. If supportive structures don't exist, few employers will be likely to engage proactively with APL.
- Some employers may wish to shortcut the process and save money by ignoring or playing down the APL option to their employees. We heard informally, during our Nieuwkoop visit, that this has sometimes been a problem.
- The APL process can be time consuming and complicated for the candidate and, even with a good level of support, inertia and apathy may set in, meaning that some candidates fail to complete the process. Simplification, where possible, will assist.
- Recognition of competences measured against national standards is easier than giving appropriate

recognition to personal informal skills and life experience through an APL process, even though the latter may be more important to the candidate.

- The need for standardised assessment practices and for APL practitioners (assessors and supervisors) to be assessed against a defined national standard.
- The need to keep separate the APL roles of assessor and supervisor / adviser.
- All group members were firmly of the view that effective and appropriate communication and marketing are vital in order to support APL. It was also recognised that many individuals will need to be led gradually to an understanding of the potential value of APL. National media campaigns will have less individual impact than local publicity, linked with appropriate individual guidance.

#### 4. Effective solutions

- The Dutch approach of successfully involving a range of collaborative agencies in VET and APL, as outlined in the good practice section (example 3)
- Some form of structured framework for APL, as in NL, Denmark and the Czech Republic, in a more embryonic form, in Spain, Italy and. The more 'laissez faire' approach to APL in the UK does not seem effective in connecting with a wide audience of potential candidates, as the onus is simply left to individuals to take action, with little or no real support.
- A 'bottom up' or 'organic' approach to APL provision, rather than a 'top down' approach, as exemplified by the Danish system. (Although we were critical of the policy formation aspects of the Danish system we did nevertheless recognise many good features in its operational details).
- Some legislative support or at least quasi-governmental intervention,

without a full legislative framework, as exemplified by the Dutch system.

- Defined standards for assessors of APL as part of the national framework, as in the UK.
- Assessment of APL not simply by scrutiny of the candidate's portfolio but possibly also by appropriate tests. In some cases the evidence presented by the candidate may not be sufficiently clear or compelling and a structured interview and/or additional competence testing may be appropriate.
- Well defined overall expectations for APL standards, as in the Dutch APL Quality Code (see good practice section, example 1) and in the QAA Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning in the UK
- State support for unemployed people to engage with APL without incurring any cost, as in the Dutch system.
- APL targeted to specific sectors, as in the example of the Health Emergency Sector scheme in Navarra and the Professional Certificates project in six occupations in Galicia.
- APL seeking to engage older people with informal experience and competences, as in the Italian example of Project Maieuta
- Imaginative approaches in marketing APL and designing effective communications. There are effective leaflets produced by Kenniscentrum APL and Leren en werken NL. Websites are also used to promote APL where appropriate. From the study visit members' countries, one very interesting approach (from Navarra) was a well produced but simply laid out brochure in full colour with a picture on the cover of a gold bar and the text 'Tu experiencia tiene un gran valor. Aprovechalo' (Your experience has great value. Accredited it). The Danish PL campaign was supported by a national communications programme and a flexible information toolbox.

## **5. Future partnerships**

There are a number of identified future partnerships stemming from the study visit. These include:

- Continuation of the existing relationship between ROC Midden Nederland and Istituto Tecnico Statale Commerciale e per Geometri, Italy
- Development of the existing relationship between ROC Midden Nederland and Departamento de Educacion, Pamplona, Navarra
- Development of a relationship between National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education, Praha and Kenniscentrum APL (project Leonardo da Vinci Managing of European Diversity)
- Development of a relationship between Comune di Roma, Dipartimento Politiche del Lavoro, Formazione Permanente per Adulti e Litorale and Kenniscentrum APL
- Circulation to study visit participants of an English summary of the review of the Danish PL system, when available
- Liaison between the Danish and Dutch Knowledge Centres for APL
- Circulation within the UK higher education quality sector of a paper on the broad findings of the study visit, so as to stimulate discussion on whether a more proactive approach to APL in the UK should be canvassed.

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