

teachingmatters

teaching and learning support and development

Rob's Reflections

I thought it might be interesting to note that the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy is almost 2 years old already. An article which looks at progress so far and priorities for the Strategy for the next two years will appear in the Autumn issue of *Teaching Matters*. Talking of anniversaries, recently, I 'celebrated' one of those significant birthdays that end with a zero. For my birthday, my daughter gave me an edition of the *Picture Post* magazine which was published on the very day of my birth. She found it in a junk shop quite by chance. I hope that not everything of that vintage should be sent to a junk shop. However, it's a fascinating read with some terrific photography and some wonderfully evocative adverts for cigarettes, beauty aids, clothes, and cleaning products. Articles include: 'GIs in Britain: a full and fair investigation' which one might now sub-title 'oversexed and over here'. It contains reviews of 'The Snake Pit', a movie on psychiatry, and 'Brigadoon' the great new show in town. There was also an opinion survey on the politics of the age and in particular whether or not to nationalise various things (though not banks!). However, the article that particularly caught my eye was 'The University Woman is 100 years old'. After briefly puzzling over which particular woman had become a centenarian, I realised that they were referring to the establishment of the Ladies College of Bedford Square in 1849. Its founder Mrs Elizabeth Jessie Reid was in some ways ahead of her time and in other ways not in hoping that the college would provide higher education that would encourage 'the moral and intellectual character of women so that they could become better wives and more understanding mothers'. The struggle to maintain the college was hard at first. I will spare you the details of the accommodation and catering arrangements so as not to cause you nightmares. There were many financial problems including, I noted, the stocking of a library on very little resource. It was also hard to find enough girls with sufficient elementary education to follow the advanced courses. Mrs Reid was also keen to see women provide all the teaching and administration but it proved impossible to find women with the academic background so for many years most of the teaching was done by men. They complained that women lacked the appropriate skills in administration and that 'committee work was unknown to ladies and that they often interrupted meetings with private conversations'. Bedford College became a constituent of London University in 1900 and by the time of the *Picture Post* article it had 830 students studying subjects from English Literature, Geography, Zoology to Social Studies which would allow graduates to take up social work as a professional career. Bedford College merged with Royal Holloway College in 1985. It struck me that, as a trail blazer in 'widening participation' it was a spectacular success with more women than men now entering university. But thinking of the current access agenda, it also shows the long time it takes to achieve societal reform. Uncomfortably, some things still persist: men are still disproportionately represented in leadership in universities and elsewhere of course; there is still not equal pay for women nationally. It still proves a big challenge to provide sufficient resources e.g. for libraries: students still complain about food in residences etc. However I certainly would not care to comment on whether ladies still interrupt committees by private conversations as I was rather hoping to see it through to another birthday!

Professor Rob Robson

Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching & Learning)

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University Learning and Teaching Enhancement Priorities 2009–2011

Introduction

Over the period 2008–2013 the University of Reading has a clear Corporate Plan (CP) and a comprehensive learning and teaching strategy. The latter covers all aspects of learning and teaching maintenance and development covered by 58 action points. However, the University has prioritised which of these 58 areas it would like to focus its enhancement in the first part

of planning period (i.e. 2009–2011). This gives priority to 18 areas for enhancement which have been drawn out of learning and teaching strategy. It is envisaged that toward the end of 2011 these enhancement areas will be reviewed by UBTL prior to setting enhancement priorities for the last two years of the planning period 2011–2013.

Enhancement areas

A. Ensure that our programmes remain competitive and address market needs.

Enhancement actions (in brackets is the action number from the Learning & Teaching Strategy Implementation Plan)

1 (4). Develop a data set and associated competitive information on programmes in specific fields in order to allow Schools to reflect on their offerings to ensure that their programmes remain competitive

2 (5). Review with the objective of improving how support is provided to Schools where market opportunities exist to develop new programmes

3 (9). Further develop mechanisms for partnerships and collaborative arrangements, nationally and internationally, in order to facilitate both rigorous and timely developments of such initiatives

B. Support staff to adapt their teaching to pedagogic developments and the changing needs and expectations of students.

4 (10). Develop a clearer understanding of the changing needs of learners and how they are challenged

5 (11). Adapt QA processes to effectively inform and assist enhancement

6 (12). Further develop the role of mechanisms (e.g. regular T & L events) to encourage enhancement and sharing of effective practice

C. Enhance the support provided both centrally and locally to help students develop the academic skills to become increasingly independent learners.

7 (14). Strengthen academic induction to help students make the transitions into and within programmes

8(14b). Ensure enhancement of academic and social transition for non-home students

9 (15). Continue to adapt the curriculum and assessment and feedback to promote active student learning

10 (28). Encourage and support existing and new joint university-RUSU initiatives and synergies (e.g. MASIV)

D. Offer students opportunities for work-based “real world” learning experiences within the curricula and outside their formal learning.

11 (39). Further develop opportunities and support (including quality monitoring) for placements within programmes where appropriate

12 (40). Encourage and support students to seek relevant work experience including internships and increase the internship opportunities available

13 (41). Further develop and support work-based/ work-related projects in the curriculum where appropriate

14 (36). Develop mechanisms for employer involvement in L&T at University and discipline levels

E. Ensure that the promotion to all levels of seniority is possible via contributions to T&L.

15 (47). Further increase esteem for roles and leaders in L&T by supporting the continued evolution of the framework for promotion to enable promotion to the highest levels in the University

16 (48). Celebrate and reward internal and external success in learning and teaching

17 (49). Review and enhance the recruitment process to ensure that L&T is given due weight in the selection and appointment of academic staff

18 (54). Strengthen the engagement with external Learning and Teaching-related bodies, (including the HEA, external CETLs and other professional and discipline-related bodies) and with regulatory and resource-related bodies such as QAA, funding councils

The ASSET Project: Enhancing feedback provision at Reading

Dr Anne Crook (Teaching Enhancement Manager, CDoTL) and Dr Julian Park (FDTL, Life Sciences) are leading an 18-month JISC-funded project which aims to improve student and staff engagement with feedback. Using Web 2.0 technology the project has developed an online resource, 'ASSET', which provides staff and students with innovative ways to engage with feedback through video and audio media. It works by enabling staff to easily upload video/audio materials into their own module areas within ASSET (e.g. using a webcam), which students registered on those modules can then access. Students can then copy their favourite video/audio clips into their own customisable 'playlists' to revisit as and when they choose. ASSET also supports the development of generic 'university-level' learning materials, i.e. video/audio clips that do not relate to specific modules/assignments but which are likely to be useful to all students. But ASSET does more than support feedback to students; it also encourages staff to focus on 'feed-forward'. For example, a member of staff can upload a quick video to explain how students can use feedback to improve their performance in future

assignments. And finally, ASSET also provides an online forum for students to discuss feedback/feed-forward with their peers and also, if they choose, with staff (anonymously).

On the 25th March 2009 the ASSET team hosted a workshop for staff at Reading. This resulted in colleagues from five Schools/Centres signing up to take part in a pilot of ASSET in the Autumn term 2009/10 (Real Estate and Planning, Law, Fine Art, Chemistry, Food Biosciences and Pharmacy and the International Foundation Programme). In addition, the Centre for Applied Language Studies (CALS) will be piloting ASSET with over 100 students during the Summer term 2009 which will enable us to evaluate how well ASSET supports staff and students' engagement with feedback and feed-forward in advance of the main pilot phase in the Autumn term.

The ASSET team is working closely with the VP Education in RUSU and with its project consultants at the University of Plymouth, Staffordshire University and the HEA Centre for Bioscience in Leeds. The team will be presenting papers at the University's Learning and Teaching

Conference, the National Science Learning and Teaching Conference in Edinburgh and the HEA's Annual Conference in Manchester.

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This Is Me – who are you?

Everybody does it, nobody likes admitting to it, but there comes a point in people's lives when the urge to Google themselves becomes irresistible.

For the uninitiated, this practice involves not some form of self harm, but typing your name into an Internet search engine (such as, well, Google), and finding out how you are making your mark in cyberspace – from Facebook profiles and blogs, to your life's loves and work.

As we've discovered during the This Is Me project on Digital Identity (DI), however, knowing there is information about yourself on the Web is one thing, but knowing how to control it is quite another. And it appears to be something few of us with an online presence devote much energy to.

Throughout the eight-month, Eduserv-funded project, the team at SSE have been gathering DI stories from staff and students to try to paint a picture of how they use services such as social networking web sites, and their attitudes towards their online reputation.

What has emerged is that while many people enjoy the ability to connect openly with others from the comfort of their keyboard, others are mistrustful of how their information may

be used, and by whom, leading them to 'lock down' parts of their DI - or simply avoid having one at all.

Based on this research, the team have generated a collection of learning materials, bookmarked resources, games and exercise sheets on their web site (<http://thisisme.reading.ac.uk>). A This Is Me book is available to download free from www.lulu.com/odinlab

The aim is to inform and encourage staff and students to consider how they want to be seen online and by whom, particularly as they turn their attention towards the job market and career enhancement – thus creating a DI that works for, and not against them.

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Enhancing teaching, learning and employability through employer engagement

Engaging with employers can enhance the quality and relevance of teaching. Demonstrating good employer links and a strong commitment to employability can make the School more attractive to prospective students, and lead to research opportunities as well as financial donations to the School. These are the findings from a fellowship recently commissioned by the Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS) to look at the types of employer engagement being used across the University.

The research found a number of Schools across the disciplines successfully engaging with industry with the direct aim of enhancing their undergraduate students' learning in their degree discipline and improving their employability. Eight different types of employer engagement were identified:

Industry in the lecture room

Dr Chris Phillips of the Henley Business School has worked in partnership with O2 in creating and delivering the School's part 2 Marketing module. Delivery of lectures is split between Dr Phillips and O2, with lecture examples from O2 being so current that students are required to sign a confidentiality agreement. At the end of the lectures, working in teams, students are given a relevant marketing scenario to study and are required to prepare both a written report and give a presentation on their conclusions/recommendations. The strongest teams are invited to give their presentation to senior O2 managers. Successful teams/students are not only given prizes by O2, but can also be offered summer or industrial placements with them.

Industrial advisory boards

"In Construction Management the role of the advisory board is not limited to commenting on the curriculum as teaching is the minority of our work, but we are looking for the advisory board to work with us in relation to three key areas: the industry, the economy and society as a whole. I guess the key thing is that the reason we have such strong employer engagement is that we do not think of them as mere employers of our graduates, but as partners in the whole of our mission to develop new and robust knowledge about interesting things in the management and economics of the construction sector".

(Professor Will Hughes)

Mentoring schemes

This year Real Estate and Planning are introducing a 'student mentoring scheme' where 125 students will be given their own industry mentor. This initiative has been set up with the help and support of RREF (Reading Real Estate Foundation). The Foundation is funded solely by Real Estate and Planning alumni and provides help and support to the school in a number of ways: providing speakers from industry, organising dedicated career fairs, offering work experience and funding research and academic chairs.

Work based learning

As part of the Communications at Work module run by Dr Lucinda Becker (School of English and American Literature,) students do a period of course-related work experience, which they are required to reflect on to produce a written assignment and a presentation. Across the University other Schools such

as Food Bioscience and Systems Engineering are finding that industrial placements (12 month periods in industry) between their second and final year of their degrees not only enhance their knowledge and understanding of their degree discipline, but also significantly improve their success in finding graduate employment.

Work related learning

Dr Alina Congreve (Real Estate & Planning,) together with Reading Borough Council, has devised a group assignment for her students where they look at a 'real life' regeneration situation. Students work in mixed teams and have access to Council information to help them work through a current regeneration problem for the Borough. Students' proposals are then submitted to Dr Congreve and presented to councillors and staff at Reading Borough Council. The group case study is a win-win situation for the Council, students and the University. The Council have work undertaken at a fraction of the cost that they would have had to pay an external consultant. The students benefit from doing 'real work' which not only enhances their learning and understanding of their degree subject, but can also give them valuable examples to use in job interviews. The University as an institution benefits from forging good relationships with a local employer, and from contributing to the Reading community. The School benefits by being able to set students challenging 'messy' tasks that require synthesising learning from different parts of the degree.

Employability modules

In the Henley Business School Dr. Maria Gee has used problem based learning to refocus the usual CMS (Career Management Skills) learning outcomes. Dr Gee's approach enables students to consider why employers adopt certain selection methods through undertaking activities that simulate employer recruitment processes.

The project requires students to work in a team, and using fictitious but plausible company details, develop an advertisement, job description and job specification. They are required to select suitable candidates for interview from CVs supplied to them and, more importantly, justify their choices. Once the students have chosen their preferred candidates, they must then consider the type of selection methods they would use in identifying the best candidate for the job and why.

Developing this project required an initial investment of time and effort in design, materials and logistics. However, Dr Gee feels that this has been justified by the amount of positive feedback she has received from the students on what they have learned and how they will apply this to their own applications for jobs.

Sponsorship

As one of the leading universities in Food Bioscience in the UK undergraduates studying at Reading can apply for both company sponsorship and scholarship opportunities with companies such as Northern Foods, GlaxoSmithKline, Sainsbury's, Kerry Foods and more.

Accreditation

A number of undergraduate degrees such as the MEng in Electronic Engineering (which is accredited by the IET) or the BSc

in Computer Science (accredited by the BCS) look for an element of employer engagement within the undergraduate curriculum.

Employability and employer engagement. Why so much new emphasis on the 'E' words?

- **Supporting the University Learning and Teaching Strategy (2008-2013).** The strategy emphasises the development of lifelong skills and knowledge that are required by students for their destinations beyond University. Employer engagement can play a key part in providing students with an awareness of the broader context of their studies and in developing their personal and academic skills within and around the curriculum.
- **Attracting prospective students.** Rightly or wrongly, First Destination survey figures are a key criteria used by students and their parents in determining where to study. Our statistics are used in the preparation of various national league tables such as *The Times Good University Guide* and are published on websites (<http://www.unistats.co.uk/>). Driving up our scores is likely to influence our success in attracting students, which can in turn result in an increased calibre and numbers of students. Currently, perceived poor industrial links are cited by many prospective students as the reason for declining the opportunity to study at Reading.
- **Employers track the source of graduate hires.** Just as universities track students' employment, we are increasingly seeing employers tracking the source of their graduate hires to help them determine which universities to engage with in the future and where to invest their scarce resources.
- **Employability.** Schools are increasingly seeking to enhance the employability of their graduates. To support this they can draw upon employers to help inform the relevance of the curriculum to the world of work, and to consider how students can develop 'soft' skills. Whilst employers are not necessarily expecting universities to provide these skills, they are looking to work together with universities to help promote the importance of these skills to students and to provide mechanisms for students to gain them.

The Reading opportunity

The Thames Valley is one of the most vibrant local economies in Europe, home to many small, medium and large enterprises, many of which are the UK, European or global HQ's of multi-national corporations. Our location should be a unique selling point of the University for both employability and employer engagement.

Schools such as Construction Management, Real Estate & Planning, Food Bioscience and ICMA clearly demonstrate the benefits of a whole school approach to working with employers, while many other schools show the gains possible from more targeted approaches. Schools that actively engage with employers also seem to enjoy higher graduate employment results than schools that do not.

However, effective employer engagement is not something that can be achieved overnight. It is something that needs to be nurtured and developed at a sustainable pace. In order for employer engagement to become successfully embedded within a school, it is important for the school to understand how and why it wishes to develop employability. This

understanding is one that should be based upon an analysis of employability set within the context of the discipline and the specific needs of the school. A bespoke programme of activities in individual schools will be more effective than a 'one size fits all' programme across the University. However there are some common key success criteria:

- **Strategy:** Awareness of employer engagement and its benefits may increase the level and even recognition of employer engagement within a particular school, but for employer engagement to become truly embedded in a school, staff need to invest time and energy in developing their own employer engagement strategy.
- **Alumni:** Tracking alumni not only provides important information on career opportunities for graduates but ex-students generally like to stay in touch and give something back to their schools. Imparting the knowledge and skills they have acquired to both secure a graduate position and successfully manage their careers can be of enormous benefit to students just starting out. Finding a way to communicate and work with your school's alumni is therefore strategically important and can be one of the first steps to successful employer engagement.
- **Ownership:** The responsibility for developing and working with employers can be the responsibility of one person in the school, but to be effective it should be a shared endeavour supported by management.

Conclusion

The research shows that by adopting a thoughtful and carefully crafted approach to employer engagement schools can demonstrate multiple benefits to the University, the students and the employer. While each school needs to craft their own bespoke programme to gain maximum effect, there are common criteria to success and many instances of good practice across the University that can be learnt from. CCMS have produced a booklet entitled: *'Enhancing teaching, learning and employability through Employer Engagement'* which will provide schools with a 'tool kit' illustrating ways that schools can and are engaging with employers. Staff will be able to draw on the tool kit, as well as other resources such as the career learning website Destinations®, to find localised ways of embedding employability. For further information about this project please contact either David Stanbury at d.r.stanbury@reading.ac.uk or Julie Rees at j.a.rees@reading.ac.uk or go to <http://www.reading.ac.uk>.

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Extenuating circumstances

The University Board for Teaching and Learning has recently approved revised extenuating circumstances procedures that will be implemented from the 09/10 academic year. These have been developed following consultation at the sub-committee for examinations and assessment, the Faculty Boards, University Board and Senior Tutors. The main elements of the procedures which have changed are:

1. The University now has only have one procedure for extenuating circumstances (extensions are seen as an outcome of having an EC and thus the separate extensions procedure and form will disappear).
2. It is the Senior Tutor who will have ultimate responsibility for EC procedures in a given school.

3. All claims for extenuating circumstances need first to be made, and recorded by the school in which the student is registered for their programme of study.
4. Given point 3, the procedure relies on rapid and effective communication between schools (where necessary), particularly in relation to requests for extensions where student registered in your school are taking modules from another school.

Further details of the procedures will be available on the Examinations Office website <http://www.reading.ac.uk/Exams/>

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HEFCE/Paul Hamlyn Foundation Student Retention Project

CDoTL is working on a three-year collaborative project with Oxford Brookes University concerned with the co-ordinated approaches to supporting students through study advice and personal development in both institutions.

This study is one of seven funded by the HEFCE/Paul Hamlyn Foundation Student Retention Grants Programme. The aim of the Retention Grants Programme is to identify effective practice in supporting students' progression and success in HE and to inform the wider sector.

Oxford Brookes is focusing specifically on the School of Life Sciences, and their Personal and Academic Support System (PASS) while here at Reading we are conducting a University-wide study, paying particular attention to the areas of study advice and personal development.

It is a longitudinal study, allowing us to track student cohorts over the next three years, focusing specifically on their engagement with and perception of the areas of advice and support mentioned above. We are examining the extent to which interventions in these areas impact on their learning experience, academic performance and progress at University.

CDoTL won the bid to undertake this research in July 2008 and Dr Elena Bedisti is the project lead. A project officer, Dr Jessica March, was appointed in February this year. If you would like any further information about this study, or the Grants Programme more generally, please contact Jessica at j.march@reading.ac.uk

Dr Jessica March

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Reading students publish in new undergraduate journal



The online Bioscience Horizons Journal was first published in 2008 by Oxford University Press and was established to showcase high quality research undertaken by UK-based undergraduate students during their final year projects. Universities are asked to nominate their best eligible bioscience projects. Students are then asked to write and submit a research or review paper based on their project work. All submissions are independently refereed prior to publication. Volume 1 and the recently published Volume 2 contain 4 papers from Reading students:

Nodoka Nakamura: Species richness and aggregation effects on the productivity of ruderal plant communities under drought perturbation

Matthew P. Worster: Has golf-course management had an effect on the plant

species composition and character of a calcareous grassland?

Robyn E. Drinkwater: Insights into the development of online plant identification keys based on literature review: an exemplar electronic key to Australian *Drosera*

Susannah J. Bedford: The effects of riparian habitat quality and biological water quality on the European Otter (*Lutra lutra*) in Devon.

Calls for submissions for 2009 will shortly be released. Further details of this and all papers published in Bioscience Horizons can be found at www.biohorizons.oxfordjournals.org

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VP Education bids farewell



Vicky Clarke

I really cannot believe that I am coming up to the end of my year as Vice President of Education at Reading University Students' Union – and what a year it has been! My role at the Students' Union entails spending a lot of time working alongside members of the University, aiming to improve the student experience at the University of Reading. The collaboration between the Union and the University this year has achieved some fantastic results, with longer library opening hours and students benefiting from additional study space during the examination period. I have worked alongside academic colleagues and members of CDoTL on addressing the provision of feedback on assessment. In addition, both RUSU and the University are working really hard towards addressing the issues with the quiet period to make it quieter!

With all these successes, I really hope that the next team of Sabbatical Officers

will continue to have such a profitable relationship with the University. No doubt many of you will soon be meeting my successor, Tom Gilchrist. His manifesto pledges are as challenging as always, including addressing areas such as feedback, learning resources, student peer support, and opposing rising rates of tuition fees. Let's hope he is able to achieve great results with the support of the University, so that together the Union and the University can provide students with the ultimate student experience.

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Taking an overview of learning development research

As a collaborative network of learning developers in sixteen universities, LearnHigher is potentially one of the most productive of the CETL initiatives, generating a wealth of insights into student practices from a diverse range of student communities. Telling a coherent story from this data is a challenging task, recently undertaken by Kim Shahabudin from the Study Advice team at Reading.

A report presenting an overview of research projects across the LearnHigher network is now available in electronic form via the LearnHigher website (www.learnhigher.ac.uk). Titled 'Investigating effective resources to enhance student learning', the report describes common concerns and issues that have emerged through collating LearnHigher research into student academic practices, and the development of resources that aim to enhance them.

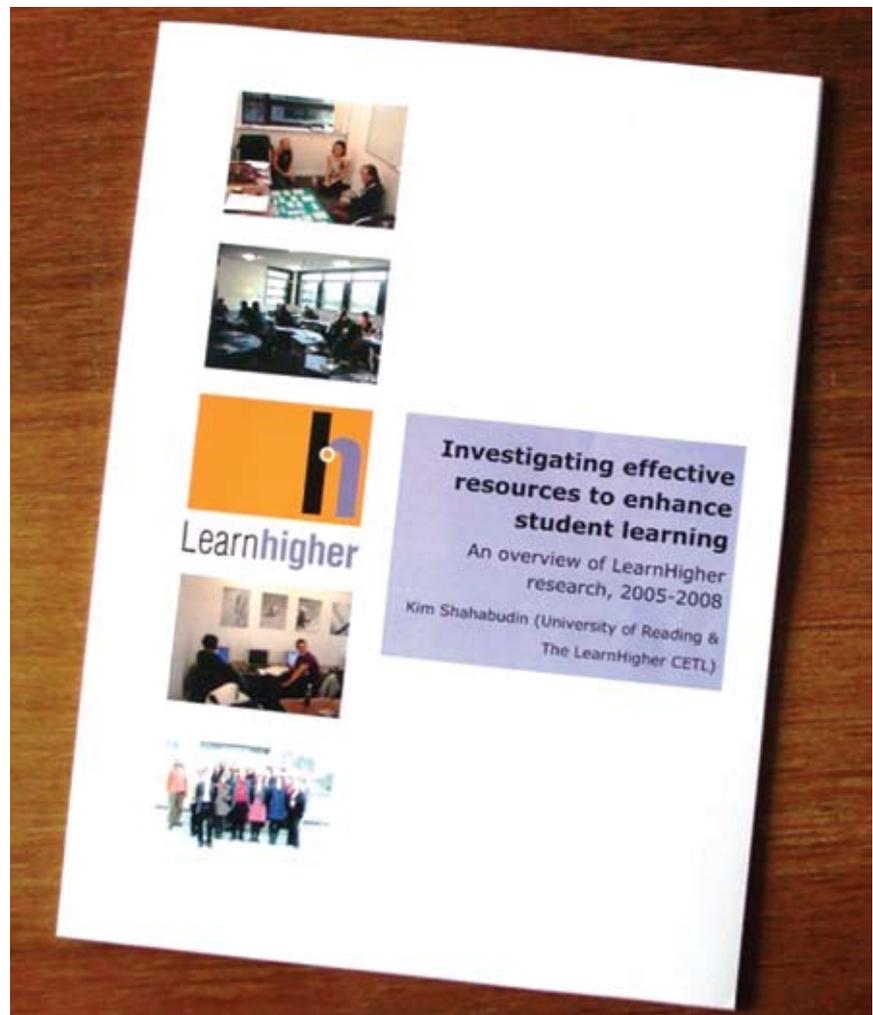
Research conducted by LearnHigher partners expanded knowledge on issues previously known but under-investigated: for instance, difficulties during academic transitions, or in understanding the purpose of referencing. Other issues revealed as widespread are more recent,

following changes in common university teaching practices:

- Where teaching staff were offered training in e-learning technologies, there was often nothing similar for students who were presumed to be 'digital natives', so were expected to self-train.
- Self-management of time and study is a growing problem with younger students, whose lives have been far more structured by parents and school than previously.
- Increasing use of group-work for assessment is another common source of student concerns.

In addition to highlighting effective interventions and areas for future research, the project has made a significant contribution to the relatively new field of learning development research by surfacing common theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches.

If you have any questions or feedback, or would like to receive a paper copy of the report, please contact Kim Shahabudin at k.shahabudin@reading.ac.uk



Pathfinder update

I joined Pathfinder in December and I can't believe how quickly the time has gone. When I arrived, Clare McCullagh and Irene Petten, my new colleagues, were already in full swing producing the Mathematics and History of Art contextual reviews, and I was very grateful to them for taking the time out to show me the ropes. By January I was immersed in analysing student surveys and perusing competitors' websites to see what they have to offer. A busy few weeks followed and we handed over the contextual reviews to the departments in late February. March and April saw the departments' Away Days, providing a great opportunity to meet with everyone in the departments and learn more about the positive work both departments have been doing. For myself and Irene, these were our first experiences of the Pathfinder Away Day concept and both gave us excellent insights into how the Pathfinder contextual review can stimulate thinking and provoke valuable discussions. These discussions help inform the departments' future action plans and the team are looking forward to working with them in the coming months to realise some of these plans. Pathfinder is committed to the ongoing process of enhancement and with this in mind we are keen to continue the relationship and support departments following periodic review. For example, Clare and our colleague Guy Pursey have run a number of e-learning self-development sessions tailored to the specific needs of departments we have been working with, including a podcasting workshop last week for the Chemistry Department. As well as providing e-learning training, the team offer support in a variety of areas. For example, our colleagues in CDoTL can advise on assessment, feedback, reflective learning and PDP. Furthermore, Pathfinder works closely with other support offices, including the Careers Advisory Service, the International

Office and the Planning Support Office. If Pathfinder cannot directly provide the support or training needed, we can normally put departments in touch with the people who can.

In late March the team met with those departments due for periodic review in the autumn; Meteorology, Real Estate and Planning and the Foundation Degree in Systems Engineering. We are really enjoying working with such a diverse range of disciplines and are making good progress with the contextual reviews. Several of the student surveys have been conducted and we plan to run student groups in the coming weeks. We hope to have the reports finished by July and anticipate some more fun and constructive Away Days in September.

Meanwhile, we are continuing to collaborate with other institutions, and have accepted an invitation to visit the University of Liverpool to run a workshop on our Pathfinder approach at Reading, and to share our experience and lessons learned so far. The workshop will take place just before *Teaching Matters* goes to print and we look forward to telling you how it went in the next issue.

Looking forward, the next six months promises to be just as interesting and enjoyable. Very soon we will be engaging with those schools due for periodic review in spring 2010. Several schools are due for periodic review and we anticipate a very busy few months ahead. However, we hope that our recent efforts to streamline the Pathfinder process, combined with the extensive help we receive from other departments within the University, including Planning Support, the International Office and the Careers Advisory Service, will ensure another successful and rewarding few months.

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International Student Barometer – Helping to Understand the Student Experience

Over the past three academic years, Reading International Office has subscribed to the International Student Barometer (ISB) – an externally run benchmarking survey of the international student experience. It is run by a company called i-graduate (www.i-graduate.org) that has grown from a client base of 12 UK universities to working with universities across the world to measure student satisfaction across a number of key areas: the learning experience, the living experience and support services as well as measuring the likelihood to recommend their university to others.

The survey differs from many of its peers as it surveys all levels and years of study, trying to build up a comprehensive picture of the student experience at the University of Reading. There are 18 elements measured in the learning experience and the survey runs at the beginning and the end of the academic year. Demographic questions enable analysis by level of study, faculty and year of study as well as a number of other factors.

The 'learning experience' questions cover student perceptions of the lecturers' expertise separately from the teaching ability, the transparency and the timeliness of feedback processes and also look at a number of factors relating to future employability and career development. Levels of satisfaction are measured on a four point scale ranging from very dissatisfied to very satisfied avoiding a mid-point of neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The results are then compared by i-graduate to the complete benchmarking group (ISB) average scores and then an average taken from the 1994 Group participants in the survey.

Results from the survey are not published externally in a league table format but are encouraged to be used internally to improve provision to students. Good news can be published externally with the permission of the International Office.

If you would like to know more about the survey and the results collected, please contact Beth Reed in Reading International Office e.reed@reading.ac.uk

Learning & Teaching and Learning through Enquiry Alliance 2009 conference, 14–15 July 2009

You are invited to this year's Learning and Teaching Conference, an opportunity to hear what's happening in teaching and learning and to share ideas and practice. The conference will be a joint meeting with the Learning Through Enquiry Alliance (LTEA), and we will be showcasing work from within our University as well as inviting presentations from both national and international HE institutions.

Our keynote speaker will be Professor Phil Race who will be delivering a very attractive lecture on 'How does learning happen'. He will also be leading a workshop on 'Giving Smarter Feedback'.

The conference will include:

- Workshops to help design and assess Enquiry-Based Learning
- Papers giving disciplinary case studies on Enquiry-Based Learning
- Papers on the Student Voice, Peer Support and Employability
- Discussions about the development of Academic Literacy
- Discussions about 'Enquiry' and the development of HE Policy
- And more...

To register for the conference please go to www.reading.ac.uk/ltea2009

For more information please contact Dr Elena Bedisti at the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning e.bedisti@reading.ac.uk, ext. 8409.



Learning and Teaching and Learning Through Enquiry Alliance

2009 Conference, 14–15 July
University of Reading



www.reading.ac.uk/ltea2009

Relaunch of the SOAR website

The SOAR (Skills Opportunities at Reading) website has been relaunched: www.reading.ac.uk/soar. Please direct your students to this resource which highlights the University's

seven transferable skills. For more information and to request promotional materials, please contact Alysia Zapasnik in CDoTL (a.w.zapasnik@reading.ac.uk, x6250).



Library news

Preparing next year's teaching materials? Maybe the Library can help?

Your Liaison Librarian can:

- Help you with questions to include in Blackboard courses – from Library induction to searching databases
- Check reading lists
- Add helpful hints to student portals
- Run sessions for Freshers, PhD students or any other level student
- Point students to reputable sources of information –online reference materials such as Britannica and reference collections and evaluated web pages.

Find your liaison librarian at www.reading.ac.uk/library/contact/staff/lib-liaison.asp

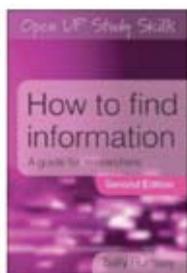
Here are a few well-used recent texts how to find, reflect on and evaluate information. If you have any suggestions for additional titles please let Helen Hathaway h.m.hathaway@reading.ac.uk or Sally Smith s.e.smith@reading.ac.uk know the details.

Rumsey, Sally (2008)

How to find information: a guide for researchers

Open University Press, xvii, 223pp

Main Library 001.42-RUM



How do I find relevant information for my thesis, dissertation or report? How do I evaluate the relevance and quality of the information I find? How do I find the most up to date information in my subject area? Anyone setting out to research a topic, whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level, needs to find information to inform their work and support their arguments. This book enables researchers to become expert in finding, accessing and evaluating information for dissertations, projects or reports. The book works systematically through the information-seeking process, from planning the search to evaluating and managing the end results. It suggests how to do this efficiently and effectively whilst using

a range of sources including online bibliographic databases and the internet. This edition has been thoroughly updated to reflect the use of new technologies in research by offering the most contemporary information on: online research; critical evaluation of resources; intellectual property rights; research communities; the changing landscape of research information; and, subject-specific resources. Written by an academic librarian, this book provides key reading, not only for academic researchers, but for anyone working for commercial, public or government bodies who have to contribute to research projects. Copyright: Book Data Ltd, UK.

Research skills for policy and development: how to find out fast

2007 SAGE, x, 363pp

Main Library 338.9072-RES

This book is a critical guide to conducting investigations under time- and resource-pressured conditions, equipping readers with the key skills and approaches for research designed to influence or inform development policies. Unlike a simple 'how to' guide, *Research Skills for Policy and Development* also provides a critique of various methods and situates these approaches within 'real life' organisational settings, enabling those working in or studying development to locate, evaluate and

use relevant information quickly but rigorously. The successor to *Finding Out Fast* (SAGE, 1998) it reflects the changes in development management theories and practice over the last seven years, and includes new material and advice on critical use of the web as a resource and research tool. It is essential reading for development managers in NGOs and public sector agencies as well as students of development management and development studies more generally. Copyright: Book Data Ltd, UK.

Yudkin, Ben (2006)

Critical reading: making sense of research papers in life sciences and medicine

Routledge, x, 129pp

Main Library 570.72-YUD

Textbooks are designed to teach, to explain, and to make complex information easily understood and assimilated. Research papers do the reader no such favours. Being able to understand and use primary research is an essential tool in any scientific career. This book teaches these valuable skills simply and clearly, saving hours in the long run. *'Critical Reading'* explains how to: approach every paper methodically; spot work aimed to support a pet theory; gain confidence in questioning what you read; be alert to

bias; use abstracts intelligently; identify suspect experimental methods; assess quantitative methodology; interpret results with confidence; and draw inferences from published work. Using extracts from published *'Papers in Focus'*, this book imparts valuable know-how to students and researchers from any biomedical or biological discipline. The text is easily read and understood, and the use of key points, summaries and reference reinforces good technique. Copyright: Book Data Ltd, UK.

Cottrell, Stella (2005)

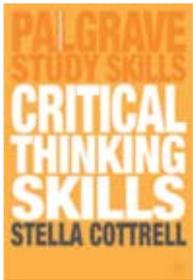
Critical thinking skills: developing effective analysis and argument

Palgrave Macmillan, xiv, 250pp

Main Library 153.6-COT

'More analysis needed' is a comment lecturers repeatedly have to write on their students' work. Proceeding beyond this level of feedback is difficult when many students don't understand what analysis is or how to integrate criticism into their work. With this in mind, *'Critical Thinking Skills'* has taken the seemingly baffling art of analysis and broken it down into easy to understand

blocks, with clear explanations, good examples, and plenty of activities to develop understanding at each stage. It even applies the techniques to reading, note making and writing. Recommending *'Critical Thinking Skills'* will help your students develop this important set of skills and improve their grades. Copyright: Book Data Ltd, UK.



Call for articles

The next issue of *Teaching Matters* will come out in the Autumn Term 2009.

Please send your articles to

cdotl@reading.ac.uk