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Scholarship beyond the main campus – Supporting the pursuit of scholarship in a distributed institution

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An increasing number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) institutions are operating across several geographical locations, due to mergers, partnerships or expansion into new markets. The seminal work by Boyer (1996) on ‘scholarship of engagement’ could not have greater resonance with such distributed HEIs, like the Open University. Its presence both nationally and regionally has a distinct advantage of harnessing local community knowledge that can inform scholarship projects (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000), as well as providing an opportunity for participatory research (Barker, 2004). However, the disadvantage is that academics working in nations and regions away from main campus may pursue scholarship in a disparate and singular way. As a consequence, there may be an unawareness of other work relating to their own scholarship projects taking place in different areas of their institution, and, missed opportunities to engage with cross disciplinary collaborative scholarship.

The SHARE project was set up by the Open University to address these issues by providing a cross faculty hub for networking and knowledge transfer across disciplines for academics based in nations and regions away from the main campus. The project has a dedicated website offering information, resources and interaction through forums. The website also hosts a monthly scholarship seminar, First Friday, using OULive (a version of Blackboard Collaborate) which is open to all university staff, including home based Associate Lecturers. In June 2015 SHARE co-hosted a one day conference, with live webscreening for remote participants, on the theme of Sharing Scholarship University Wide. It is planned for this to become an annual event to showcase some of the scholarship work from our geographically distributed colleagues.

Within the Open University we identify five different types of scholarship:

1. Institutional
2. Scholarship of teaching and learning
3. Scholarship for teaching
4. Scholarship supporting professional practice
5. Discipline based scholarship

The SHARE project is focusing on promotion and support of scholarship of teaching and learning. In a recent survey of distributed staff (n=50), approximately one third were either already engaging or wanting to engage in scholarship of teaching and learning. Of those actively pursuing scholarship of teaching and learning, 44% of respondents reported that their scholarship is not shared beyond the institution. One of SHARE’s objectives is to support and encourage those individuals to share their scholarship more widely to benefit the sector and the individuals through greater recognition of their work.

Q6. How does your scholarship match the five types identified in the Senate paper: Scholarship: A framework for implementation (S/10/4/6)?

(Q7. What types of scholarship (as described in Q6) would you like to be engaged in but are not currently? (More than one option could be selected)

Future developments

Looking to the future SHARE hopes to increase its impact through further development of the peer support network. A blog will be launched encouraging colleagues to share reports and experiences of conferences and other events they have attended, both internal and external. This will increase the return on investment when staff are sponsored to attend external events as it will facilitate the sharing of knowledge across the institution.

Work is also underway to produce a database of academic profiles to help colleagues find potential collaborators who are working on similar projects. Frequently individuals are working to investigate a particular issue and unaware that colleagues in another discipline may be working in the same area. By making connections between different groups be will be able to increase the richness and value of the scholarship being undertaken.

References

