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Impact of research funding on the experience and status of college-based higher education lecturers (0299)

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Introduction

Research is perceived as one of the core activities in Higher Education (HE) (Locke, 2012), with links between teaching and research emphasised (Jenkins, Healey & Zetter, 2007). With the growth of HE provision within Further Education (FE) Colleges (Parry & Thompson, 2002; Scott, 2009) the role of research within FE colleges has come under scrutiny. Harwood and Harwood (2004) identified that college based HE lecturers valued research as important for maintaining current subject knowledge to inform their teaching. However due to cultural and contractual issues they lacked time to engage in research and scholarly activity, a frustration also noted by Young (2002). Traditionally the focus for staff within the FE sector has been on teaching received information, rather than originating new research (Young, 2002; Hillier & Morris, 2010), so teaching HE within this context presents many challenges.

Whilst the way FE practitioners commonly engage with research is via a postgraduate qualification (Anderson, Wahlberg & Barton, 2003), there has been a tradition of practitioner research within the sector, although opportunities for networking and dissemination have been limited (Hillier and Morris, 2010). Gale, Turner and McKenzie (2011) noted that where opportunities are sought there was a lack of institutional recognition of FE lecturers' scholarly activity as it was seen by managers to conflict with their teaching practice.

While the IfL requirement for 30 hours CPD offered an opportunity for staff to engage in research, in practice this time is often hijacked for college priorities serving the interests of the mainstream business of FE, rather than the needs of the minority HE provision (Scott, 2009; Gale *et al*, 2011). So Anderson *et al* (2003:500) argue for a 'cultural shift' in the way colleges perceive research.

One scheme that has sought to encourage HE lectures working in colleges was the Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre for Excellence in Teaching and

Learning (HELP CETL) whose aim was to support teaching practice through research and scholarly activity opportunities for the benefit of staff, students and institutions.

Methodology

The sample comprised of 51 HELP CETL award holders, over five annual cohorts, 65% were female and 35% male. Upon having been granted the award the respondents were sent the *entry questionnaire* to complete which included 13 open questions asking award holders to predict how they felt the experience would be with respect to the impact on their working life and the perceptions that others may have of them now they were an award holder. After completing their final report they submitted the *completion questionnaire*, which asked them to reflect on the lived experience of being research-active with reference to the same issues.

Results

The respondents seemed to have accurately judged the impact the award would have on their daily life with about half predicting an increase in workload, although some feeling that the time bought out of teaching did not reflect the time they invested in the project, whereas others saw the increasing workload challenging, at the positive end, and stressful at the negative end.

Motivations to apply for the award were the need for personal development either through enhancing their pedagogic practice, increasing their skills base or enhancing their reputation. Another explanation frequently encountered was their need to add something new to their daily routine, to motivate them and bring new rewards.

Subsequent reflection on the experience indicated that the project was successful in these aims as the majority of respondents referred to how 'interesting' it had made life.

When asked about what impact the award may have on their colleagues' perception of them, respondents were either unsure, or convinced that the award would make no difference. On reflection it seemed that generally there was no difference, but

where there were differences the direction of opinion was based on their relationship to the award holder; those close to the respondents saw the benefits of the award, and those less connected were disparaging, possibly feeling threatened by the accomplishments of others. Regardless of how well they thought they would be received by their colleagues there was the hope that their colleagues would benefit from the research in some way, either from the findings or by being inspired. In reflection this was not achieved.

With respect to how they believed the institution would view their achievement, more than anticipated found that there was no change in their managers' view, or indeed experienced a negative response through a lack of understanding or ambivalence. Although they hoped that the institution would benefit from the findings and inspire others to become involved, the only impact that they felt their work had achieved at an institutional level was to raise the college's reputation.

The impact that the research activity had on the award holders with respect to their career was to enhance their reputation within the institution and they felt that this was a positive contribution to their CV. The greatest impact was the number of award holders who had achieved, or were seeking out, new opportunities, including internal promotions, external examiner positions or HE posts at alternative institutions. Other award holders had continued to be research-active, through dissemination opportunities or applying and securing new research funding.

Conclusions

The process seems to have been a challenging experience at both a practical and interpersonal level. It seems that the value of research activity is not always understood, and therefore not embraced. If more institutions held more positive views of research activity then maybe more internal opportunities could have been made available for the award holders to disseminate their findings and inspire sceptical colleagues. For some respondents the process has expanded their career horizons and has changed the route of some careers in a way that would not have been previously possible.

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