editorial

The value of values

Celia M. Whitchurch

The debate about professional values and norms that an Association of university managers and administrators might be expected to promulgate was launched at the 1998 AUA Conference, and will undoubtedly continue as the Association reviews its role in the new millenium and beyond. Some of the key points are addressed in a paper by David Allen, Chair of AUA, and Eddie Newcomb, Chair of the Association of University Heads of Administration, in this issue of *perspectives*, and are the focus of a session at the March 1999 AUA Conference. As has been discussed before in these pages, university managers are a heterogeneous bunch of people, comprising broadly-defined groupings of 'specialists' and 'generalists' and, increasingly, people with transferable and leading-edge skills (for instance in the field of information systems) who support a variety of university activities, and do not fall neatly into administrative, 'support' or academic categories. How often did we see advertisements for Web Page Editors five years ago?

In pursuit of these themes this issue inevitably involves some collective navel-gazing, accompanied by strong professional development, quality and enhancement threads. Changing with, if not in advance of the demands of the environment, is a prerequisite not only for individual career progression, but also for the survival and development of professions. Lateral rather than traditional thinking is required, as exemplified by Lynne Gornall in her thought-provoking piece on 'New professionals: change and occupational roles in higher education'. Is it indeed possible to produce a template for a professional association that will embrace all-comers, particularly if it wishes to offer qualifications, codes of principle, ethics and good practice, and also to encourage an increasing internationalisation of what we are about? How far should university management and administration be influenced by definitions used in other professions, or indeed by practices in the private sector?

Successful role performance, individually and corporately, depends partly on clear definition of tasks by the organisation concerned, but also on what individual(s) and teams bring to their roles, so that they can modify them where necessary to meet and anticipate change. One problem about providing 'definitions' is that if they are generalisable they tend towards the meaningless, while greater precision can lead to static and solidified attitudes, particularly if statements are not reviewed regularly. Effecting individual and organisational progress is therefore an organic process on all fronts, requiring flexibility, adaptability and creativity. A professional association should be able to provide networks that will encourage and stimulate individual members to adopt proactive attitudes by heightening awareness of thinking and good practice across institutional, and even national, boundaries. Such benefits are not always obvious or quantifiable, and as such difficult to 'sell', unlike the more tangible benefits of a journal, newsletter or conference, though they will undoubtedly flow from these 'harder' offerings.

Turning outwards again we continue the *perspectives* philosophy of pursuing the connection between principles and practice, and of linking individual and corporate agendas. Dr Peter Knight and Professor Lee Harvey, in a paper based on Dr Knight's keynote address to the 1998 AUA Conference, illustrate how staff satisfaction is regarded as a key indicator in institutional success, and how 'taking the collective pulse', using the University of Central England's Staff Satisfaction Survey, has become a significant management tool. A cogent update on the pursuit of quality, and the new framework proposed by the Quality Assurance Agency, never far away from the collective consciousness these days, is provided by Dr Roger Brown, a speaker at the 1999 Conference. Keith Cook offers a comparative review of how British higher education institutions are responding to increased demands by students for a lifelong learning approach, in the context of two of our European partners, Sweden and Germany.

AUA faces the new century with a critical agenda, and the views of members and other readers of *perspectives* will be vital in informing the debate about where the Association should be going and where it should be focusing its efforts. This issue illustrates some of the expertise that is available 'out there'. The editorial board of *perspectives* and the Executive Committee of AUA would, as always, encourage you to enter the debate and to make your views known, either to the Executive Secretary, Lynn Rawlinson, or to the Editor, Celia Whitchurch.

Celia Whitchurch is Senior Assistant College Secretary, Guy's, King's and St Thomas' School of Medicine, King's College London, having worked previously at the Universities of Birmingham, London (Senate House), and Kent. She is a member of the AUA Corporate Planning Forum, and author of a number of publications on higher education management.

perspective

University management and administration: a profession for the 21st century

David Allen and Eddie Newcomb

As the Chairs of AUA and the Association of Heads of University Administration (AHUA), the authors wish to initiate an agenda-setting debate for the development of university management and administration into the next century.

AUA and AHUA are well placed to drive forward Continuing Professional Development (CPD) since AUA is the only individual membership body that is open and accessible to all involved in university administration and AHUA, representing Registrars/Secretaries and their equivalents, has a special responsibility to lead the profession, help shape its future and promote professional development. CPD was defined by Madden and Mitchell (1993) as: 'The maintenance and enhancement of the knowledge, expertise and competence of professionals throughout their careers, according to a plan formulated with regard to the needs of the professional, the employer and society'. Together, the two associations working with other bodies, as appropriate, should be able to add considerable value to the development paths of both recent entrants and established colleagues.

AUA is not alone among professional associations in approaching a crossroads. Watkins, Drury and Bray (1996) assessed the future role of UK professional associations over the next decade. It is clear from their research that CPD is high on the agenda of mature, maturing and emerging professions. Professionals face greater pressure to be accountable to their stakeholders and the pace of change is such that their knowledge and skills require continuous updating. They look to their professional associations for information, support, networking and protection. The professions, in a knowledge and information based society, will become increasingly inclusive rather than exclusive. Professionals will find their expertise increasingly challenged as the Web in particular opens up specialist knowledge and makes it available to the intelligent lay person.

Watkins *et al.* show that most professional associations claim two fundamental aims:

- 'to create and continually develop the body of knowledge and skill that underpins the profession;
- to ensure that this knowledge and skill is applied both ethically and to the highest professional standards for the public good.'

Jeff Watkins was commissioned in 1997 by AUA to advise on its strategic direction. He identified four key features as basic minima of a professional body:

- entry barriers based on education/experience to qualify as members
- a register of members
- a code of conduct or guidance for members regarding their professional work
- systems to maintain standards and quality within the profession.

In addition to the traditional core services of professional bodies, such as setting standards for admission to the profession and regulating the conduct of members, a range of new supplementary services was identified including:

- networking opportunities and mentoring support groups
- employment intelligence and career planning
- non-discipline related training e.g. in the development of general management skills – technical, legal, ethical and financial
- advisory services – instant information updates using on-line databases.

It is clear that a number of professional bodies are providing a similar range of services, and the possibility of collaboration with other associations in related areas should be considered in order to permit economies of scale through shared costs and resources. Increasing globalisation was also noted, with the possibility of growing opportunities for professional bodies to expand their services internationally. While recognising that AUA is a small and fairly new organisation, Watkins was impressed by the range of cost-effective services provided to members, and felt that AUA's advanced information network e.g. its website, special interest groups, newsletter, and professional journal would in themselves be worth the subscription fee for a larger target audience. Various recommendations were made, including the potential for AUA to play a significant role in the development of portfolios of skills and experience for its members, within the context of a professional code of ethics and values. It is these two areas of CPD and the development of an ethical code upon which the remainder of this paper focuses.

'The AUA is an open and accessible body for all those with administrative and managerial responsibilities in higher education in the UK and the Republic of Ireland among whom it seeks to promote the highest standards of professionalism … in furtherance of its mission the Association seeks to enhance its status and credibility as a recognised professional and influential voice in higher education.' This extract from AUA's mission statement provides our starting point. AUA has about 3500 members in over 200 branches, a highly professional office is in place, and the journal *perspectives* and other publications, such as the Good Practice Guides and *newslink*, have been successful launched. AUA's annual conference, attracting well over a thousand delegates each year, remains the biggest gathering in the higher education sector.

AUA is a benefits rather than sanctions driven organisation, and will continue to deliver the various benefits of membership in a cost-effective way. However, the organisation must keep moving forward just as the aspirations of its members, and potential members, continue to develop. The creation of the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) and the consequent accreditation of teaching and learning for new lecturers presents both a significant challenge and a great opportunity for AUA. Watkins noted that many professional bodies are working more closely with higher education, and that a number are decentralising and returning to a devolved branch structure. AUA already operates with a similar structure, which provides a platform for the generation of the model of CPD activity, which will be laid out in this paper.

> *...CPD is high on the agenda of mature, maturing and emerging professions...*

For many years, university administrators have debated the extent to which they belong to an identifiable profession and, if so, whether a professional qualification should be developed. The weight of opinion has held that university administration is not a unified profession, and that any qualification in the field would lack portability and credibility. It is also argued that staff development opportunities are now much more widely available within institutions and there may consequently be less of a need for a national (or international) approach. University administration is sometimes referred to as a collection of specialisms e.g. in Finance, Personnel, Estates, Information Technology, with the staff operating in these areas having their own professional bodies and thus having little need or inclination to form part of a wider profession of university administration.

This prevailing orthodoxy should now be challenged. It remains true that most AUA members are drawn from what might broadly be termed 'academic administration' i.e. Registry and Faculty work, but there is a very significant and growing section of the membership (approaching one in three) who are already specialist professionals. AUA's penetration within each of these areas continues to be small but, taken together, numbers across the specialisms are growing. It is also the case that in the so called generalist areas colleagues need to become increasingly skilled in specific areas e.g. quality assurance or student administration systems. Given the range of activities and skills now deployed across university administrations, the trend to specialism is likely to accelerate with more colleagues being recruited from specialist activities outside universities e.g. in development or IT. This increasing fragmentation will militate against a unified administrative service and will also inhibit the

David Allen is Chair of AUA and Registrar and Secretary of the University of Birmingham. He was previously Registrar at the University of Nottingham and has also held senior posts in the Universities of Southampton and Wales.

Eddie Newcomb is Chair of the Association of University Heads of Administration (AHUA) and Registrar and Secretary of the University of Manchester, a post he came to after previous Registrarships at the Universities of Essex and Leeds.

creation of multi-disciplinary teams, unless there is some over arching ethical code, and body of skills and knowledge, which unifies the various specialist groups. The role of AHUA and AUA may increasingly be to provide the glue which prevents fragmentation of university managements and administrations. Equally, the growth of ad hoc teams to replace hierarchical structures may lead to a greater sense of common purpose across administrations, coupled with a recognition that there is indeed a generic set of skills, knowledge and professional practice which is necessary for success, regardless of the particular task to be performed, and transferable across all the many aspects of university administration.

Alongside these developments, administrators will increasingly look, perhaps with some envy, at the structured programmes that will be and are being offered to academic staff, in order to enable them to be accredited teachers, and will see advantages in similar programmes tailored for themselves in order to ensure that they maintain professional parity with academic colleagues. The Dearing Report foreshadowed an increasing blurring of the roles of teacher and supporter of teaching as administrators, librarians and IT specialists support new methods of delivering teaching and advise on curriculum development.

Watkins has helpfully provided a checklist of key features of a professional body (see above), all of which are in place in the mature professions such as law, medicine and accountancy, and also in the maturing professions such as personnel management. In education, it is interesting to note the recent introduction of a General Teaching Council to regulate the teaching profession, as well of course in our own sector the creation of the ILT. AUA has not sought, nor does it now seek to be a regulatory body with disciplinary powers but it does, along with AHUA, represent a body of people who act in a professional way and have professional goals. They are well qualified, intelligent, able, dedicated and with a highly developed ethical sense. Since university administration is a relatively young activity, and because of its generic nature, it has yet to coalesce into a generally agreed and accredited body of knowledge and skills. Given the example of the ILT however, and the aspirations of its members, AUA is poised, hopefully with the support of AHUA, to move more securely into the professional development arena with a model of CPD specifically designed for the special circumstances of university administration. Universities have been able for some time to recruit highly capable young graduates to their administrations. The challenge now is to retain, motivate and develop these able young people, as well as to enable experienced staff to gain credit for the experience and skills which they have acquired during their careers.

AUA is not an accrediting body. Like many other professional associations it has neither the resources nor the expertise to carry out this function. Neither is it to a very significant extent a provider of CPD programmes. It offers certain well established niche products together with bespoke courses from time to time in response to the wishes of members, and generated by topical issues. AUA does not, however, seek to compete with or duplicate the offerings or activities of other providers or organisations such as the Universities and Colleges Staff Development Association (UCoSDA), the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) or The Higher Education Training Organisation(THETO). Similarly, AHUA does not offer any programmes but its members, as the leaders of the profession, are key influencers and providers of resources for the professional development of their staff. AUA and AHUA should co-operate with all these bodies, together with institutions themselves and private sector providers, in order to provide maximum value for their members. However, rather than simply being one of a number of providers of staff development opportunities for higher education professionals, AUA would also wish to gauge the reaction of its members to its developing a portfolio approach for career management. This would involve AUA facilitating members to build up their own career portfolios of professional development and experience. AUA would provide and advise on a framework within which members would construct their own personal portfolios of achievement, underpinned by support from AUA through:

● providing specific courses and advice on how to develop a CPD portfolio
● identifying a core set of values, ethical conduct, knowledge and skills
● publishing a directory of qualifications and programmes that reflect AUA's core values, knowledge and skills
● developing a template for CPD portfolios
● establishing a network of mentors to provide support
● creating a network of 'verifiers' to advise on the quality of portfolios
● considering whether, in the future, the verification process might lead to different categories of AUA membership e.g. Associate, Member and Fellow.

AUA would promote the CPD portfolio to members but the scheme would be optional. It will clearly require institutional support and could probably only be achieved with the support and assistance of AHUA. Other groups representing university managers and administrators such as the British Universities Finance Directors Group (BUFDG), the Universities Personnel Association (UPA), the Association of University Directors of

Estates (AUDE) and numerous others would also need to be involved. AUA's directory and calendar of other higher education organisations lists over 30 organisations representing various specialisms in university administration, ranging from managers of student services to the education law network. All these bodies should play a role in supporting the development of university administrators, and many of their activities would fit well into the portfolio model. The resource implications of the scheme would, of course, need to be thought through, and it will eventually need to be self-financing through fee payments, whether by employers or members, or a combination of both. AUA would continue to be an open and accessible organisation and there would be no intention of converting the status of existing full members, into associate members. However, as an emerging professional body, AUA will have to consider in future the possibility of the introduction of categories of membership, in a similar way to those proposed for the ILT, in order to recognise the progression of its members as they develop their portfolios of qualifications and experience.

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Work has also commenced on the development of an ethical code for university administrators and a session on this topic was led by the authors at the AUA Birmingham conference in April 1998. A number of questions were posed to the participants. Is it possible to define a set of core values to inform our work? If so, what are they and are there tensions between corporate and individual professional values? Are these tensions growing stronger or weaker? Would it be helpful for AUA to develop a code of practice in this area?

A number of pressures were identified which would make it desirable for AUA (perhaps working with AHUA) to identify the core values and ethical conduct that should underpin university administration. The code would be voluntary, but it would enable members to point to an ethical framework in the event of difficulties being experienced with their employers or clients. Among the pressures identified by the conference participants were lack of resources, growing internationalism and the need to deal with many different cultures and ethical codes, the increasing lack of a common culture across administrations, given the diversity of the

sector, and the growth of some extreme forms of managerialism. Constant change, pressures, fewer absolutes and the need for accountability to stakeholders all pointed to the need for a core value system. The group took as its starting point the Nolan Committee's Seven Principles of Public Life namely: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership, as providing the backbone of the value system. The Principles of Public Life provide a point at which both the corporate values of public sector bodies, and the individual values of their members, might coincide. The conference session also looked at comparators, including the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, the Public Finance Accountants Membership Guide, the Rules and Principles of Professional Conduct for Solicitors and the Personal Standards Lead Body publication 'A Starting Point for Standard Development', as well as the General Dental Council's publication on maintaining standards. Across these publications, fundamental principles of integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality, professional behaviour and technical standards are identified as common. Advice is frequently provided on matters such as conflicts of interest and the acceptance of hospitality and gifts.

...Work has also commenced on the development of an ethical code for university administrators...

It was recognised that university administrators have to strike a balance between the needs of a number of different stakeholders. We are responsible in many ways for the welfare of our institutions, for the interests of staff and students, for dealing with suppliers of goods and services, as well as having regard to the broader public interest and the proper use of public funds. The high degree of accountability required of university administrators is consistent with the notion of professionalism as requiring a high degree of accountability.

There was much discussion of the appropriate list of core values and characteristics of university administrators. The way that we deal on a day-to-day basis with colleagues and clients was felt to be important, as well as the broader relationship

between individual professional values and the corporate values of the institutions in which we work. It was not sufficient simply to list a number of attributes, but rather to develop an integrated set of values which collectively define professional behaviour e.g. courtesy may be the hallmark of a professional but it is unacceptable to be courteously disingenuous or incompetent!

To take the argument a stage further, the basis on which we deal with each other has ramifications for:

- the effective working of our institutions
- the improvement of trust and morale and encouraging a sense of belonging and ownership
- the improvement of service to our clients whether internal or external
- the development of a culture – up, down and across the organisation – whereby individuals are encouraged to behave in a professional manner.

It can be seen, therefore, that both institutional and personal professional values are linked. If objectives of the kind set out above are to be achieved, then the management style must be open and participatory involving listening and consulting, and the communication strategy must be rooted in values appropriate to professional behaviour. Among these the following were identified:

1. Integrity
2. Objectivity
3. Intellectual honesty
4. Competence
5. Diligence and due care
6. Expedition
7. Courtesy
8. Consideration
9. Even handedness.

Individual values can be put to the test as a result of a tension with the corporate values of the institution as a result, for example, of

- pressure to cross the threshold between exploiting the rules of funding regimes and unacceptable misrepresentation of data
- the intensification of competition internationally not only for students but also for research achievement
- the development of extreme forms of managerialism
- the increased emphasis on PR, marketing and presentation, and the extent to which this can lead to pressures for inaccurate 'spin' and 'hype'.

A set of professional values and an ethical code supported and buttressed by a professional organisation such as AUA, and subscribed to by AHUA, would be an important safeguard for individuals coming under corporate pressure that conflicts with their professional ethical code.

The final piece in this jigsaw of ethics, values and CPD is the establishment of the core knowledge and skills that each university administrator should possess as a minimum. The list might become quite a long one and is in the course of being prepared by AUA's Professional Development Committee. It will inevitably include aspects of governance, information technology, committee work, quality assurance, planning and resource allocation. The skills of business planning, business process re-engineering and other management tools are increasingly becoming the common currency of university administration.

One frequently overlooked area is internationalism and AUA is actively discussing with AHUA, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the British Council and other bodies what possibilities there may be both to provide greater exposure for university administrators to the international environment, and to enable UK colleagues to meet their counterparts from overseas. As part of this process it is intended to make the AUA annual conference a more international event with a higher number of international delegates and more colleagues from other countries leading sessions. The Professional Development Committee will also be scanning the programmes offered in the sector by a number of institutions leading to various degrees, diplomas and certificates, and will seek to make common cause with other professional bodies such as the Institute for Chartered Secretaries and Administrators and the Institute of Administrative Management where appropriate. This will enable a directory of programmes to be developed that will provide signposts for AUA's members as they build their personal portfolios.

We believe that university administrators will increasingly look to AUA and AHUA to support them in developing their professional skills and experience, and to assist them in induction, career planning and the achievement of career goals. It is hoped, of course, that these goals will be fulfilled within higher education but it is recognised that a well constructed CPD portfolio will be valuable to employers outside higher education. There is much work to be done before a fully fledged scheme can be introduced, but the development of an ethical code and a pathway of continuing professional development are the next logical steps in the professional advancement of university administration into the 2lst Century.

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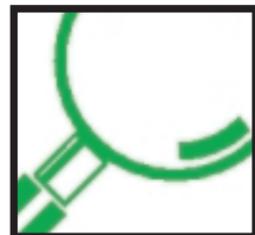
perspective

'New professionals': change and occupational roles in higher education

Lynne Gornall

Whyley's research (NCIHE 1997:175) with administrative and support staff for the Dearing Commission reveals that many felt that they were playing an increasingly central part in higher education. However, many also complained of pressures, workloads and concerns about quality and about lack of back-up in the new roles. This paper explores the changing roles and role boundaries in the shifting balance from teaching to learning in UK higher education (HE).

Upstairs/downstairs in the UK University

Traditionally in HE, there have been only two categories of staff – 'academics' and everyone else. The way in which this distinction is characterised has survived a number of revisions, some more positive and inclusive than others:

academic:	non-academic staff
teaching:	non-teaching staff
lecturing:	technical, administrative, managerial staff
tutoring:	support roles

Even allowing for the centrality of the learning or academic function in HE, what has always seemed rather unusual is the way in which a large part of the sector is swept up and grouped together in an

Lynne Gornall is a member of the Information Systems Group at the University of Glamorgan with interests and responsibilities in teaching and learning innovation, project management, staff and student development. She specialises in telematics projects and evaluation of new media. A postgraduate training in anthropology has proved an invaluable resource in most of these roles!

essentially negative category. As Hendry (1995: 17–18) notes, employees in an organisation are often not treated the same, but here, it is almost as if in industry half the workforce were known as the 'non-management' group, or managers as the 'non-production' workers. Even today, it is common to hear the distinction made if not between 'academic' and 'non-academic', then between 'teaching' and 'non-teaching' staff. People in education are well aware of this system and its inadequacies, but for one observer (Knight 1996), the distinctions are telling reflections of the British class system, implying as they do unequal value and differences in perceived status.

Anthropologically, groups defined by 'what they are *not*' as opposed to what they are, constitute a kind of 'other' in cultural systems (see Leach 1976), a point to which we will return later. For Crosthwaite (1996:2), these distinctions originated in a division of labour at executive level, where responsibility for 'academic' matters (teaching staff, courses and students) typically rested with one individual, often the vice-principal, whilst 'administrative matters', which included all other staff, were usually the responsibility of another officer, the Senior Administrative Officer (SAO) or equivalent.

The current term in popular use today for non-teaching staff – 'support staff' – is a more positive formulation, but (i) retains an upstairs/ downstairs flavour and (ii) remains too inclusive a category: 'we all support students now' in the more customer-focused environment of UK higher education (see Legge 1995:50). The term 'support staff' too, in a descriptive sense, does not differentiate amongst staff who work in personnel, finance, registry, estates, library, technical support, student services and so on. The Dearing Report (NCIHE 1997) is a good example of this, commissioning separate studies of 'academic' and 'administrative and support' staff roles without distinguishing amongst them or indeed questioning these categories. Of course, there may be other formulations too: former UFC universities for example have long had 'academic-related' posts, with a separate salary scale – a grouping 'in between' the other categories.

It is now possible, I would suggest, to identify an emergent new group, associated with the support of teaching and learning, who are neither wholly lecturing nor technical nor support staff, and indeed who may not have had any of the 'traditional' backgrounds at all. In the educational cosmology, this makes them 'other' perhaps, even to the otherness of the 'non-teaching' support category noted above.

'New professionals'

This emergent group is employed in roles clustered around changing forms of support for teaching and learning (T & L). These staff often have non-traditional job titles, cross-role posts and non-traditional contracts and conditions of service. Their role is involved in supporting learners (students and/or staff) in both teaching and learning modes. They engage, that is, in tutoring (or training) that is not lecturing, and may be one-to-one, *ad hoc* and unassessed, and in learning support that is resource-based, but not necessarily in the role of technicians or librarians *per se*. They also sometimes have a management or administrative role through project co-ordination, and may be involved in the development of learning materials, which they may not author and in which they may not retain rights. I call them 'new professionals' because their backgrounds are often specialist or discipline-based – in media, library, IT, training, development, or subject teaching – but also because their professional skills are applied in a new strategic and practical context. Many too, I suggest, have come into HE or into their new role as a result of projects and 'new' funding incentives, designed to stimulate T & L change.[1]

Others – see for example Scott (1995), Smyth ed. (1994), McNay ed. (1992), Miller (1994), Bocock and Watson (1994), Schuller ed. (1991, 1995), Shattock (1997, 1995), Duke (1992) – have ably documented the wider structural, market, pedagogic, legislative and organisational changes in HE since the 1980s. These changes have been associated with a changing discourse about 'teaching and learning', as opposed to subjects and research, which put the recipients of education, as 'customers', at the centre of the picture. Simultaneously, it also brought into view the staff involved in the 'support of learning'.

The notion of a new group of staff arises in the Dearing Report as associated with 'support' staff; I would argue however that the 'teaching and learning professionals' discussed here are drawn from across the range, from both teaching and support areas, and from outside too. The 'new professionals' thus have a direct stake in the educational process, but do not yet see themselves as a group, as a *new* group or as a *professional* grouping – nor is this attribution generally made about them.[2] It is not clear either, for example, which workplace union they might be in – or which professional journal

they might read! Many moreover, will have developed their new role in post as part of active 'change management' processes.

To see if I could bring some practical evidence to bear on this, I approached a small sample of ten people who, through professional contacts, I know to be in the sorts of posts, or at least on a relevant continuum, likely to be 'teaching and learning new professionals'. Eight replied in time to be included here. These data were deliberately drawn from different HE contexts – pre-1992 universities (2), 'new' universities (5) and colleges/former colleges of HE (1) in regions of England and Wales, and were thus a targeted sample. I wanted to know more about their own background, who their colleagues were, whether their posts were newly-created and so on. Using email, I was able to send out a questionnaire and receive responses very quickly. I am grateful for the co-operation of my respondents, who have been anonymised in the tables that follow; the order of reporting is also varied in each table, in order to avoid association with any single institution or individual. The results were very interesting.

A snapshot

From figure 1, we can see that the sorts of posts that might be occupied by 'new professionals' can be regarded as on a scale of nearer to/further from traditional roles.

Figure 1. Job titles.

Eight 'new professional' postholders	
Flexible Learning Co-ordinator	less traditional
Distance Learning Officer	
Project Teaching Tutor	
Project Officer	
Head of Teaching and Learning Division	
Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator	
Head of Centre for Educational Development & Media	
Team Leader, Academic Services	more traditional

Figure 2. Department/unit title: teaching and learning 'new professionals' often work in 'new units' or new kinds of groupings.

Titles of units/centres/departments for 'new professional' staff
- Learning and Teaching Division of Learning & Information Services
- Centre for Corporate Academic Developments
- Centre for Educational Development and Media
- Flexible Learning Initiative
- Academic Services, Information Systems Dept
- Professional Training Unit
- Educational Development Unit
- Cross-Institutional Project team

Figure 3. Type of contract: the teaching and learning staff are also on a variety of contracts.

Scales, grades and contract types of 'new professionals'

- **APT&C**　　　　　　　　　　traditional

traditional 'support' and technical/administrative staff grades

- **academic related**

a category from the 'old' universities for teaching related support staff

- **academic**

various academic roles, from associate dean to research assistant

- **individual contracts**　　　　non-traditional

including fixed term contracts, for management staff or non-traditional roles outside academic/support categories

Figure 4. Previous background: staff clearly come from 'teaching', 'support' and 'external' backgrounds.

Postholders' background		*Postholders' experience*	
Senior lecturer	traditional academic	Teaching	traditional academic
Principal lecturer		Curriculum development	
IT senior support post	traditional support	Staff development	traditional support
Senior Media support post		Systems support	
Student (first post)		Distance learning	non-traditional academic
Postgraduate		Instructional technology	
Development post	non-traditional support	Instructional design	non-traditional support
Training development		Training management	

Figure 5. Job titles of colleagues: new professionals' colleagues are in posts with the following sorts of titles.

Titles of colleagues in same unit

- **Learning Support Manager**
- **Learning Materials Developer**
- **Head of Resource Development**
- **AV Technician**
- **Learning Technology Adviser**
- **Flexible Learning Officer**
- **Graphic Designer**
- **Research Assistant, Lecturer**

- **Resource Editor**
- **Academic Development Officer**
- **Courseware / Video Producer**
- **Adult Education Development Officer**
- **Technical Services Assistant**
- **Academic Support Officer**
- **Continuing Education**
- **Training Officer**

These staff may or may not report to the 'vice principal' of the old 'academic staff' category noted earlier; they certainly do not report to the SAO, but they are indeed largely under 'corporate' rather than purely academic direction. That the posts symbolise the shift from teaching to learning and are arguably the consequences of management decisions for change, is in part evidenced in the reasons for creating the posts, the 'human resource management' (HRM) dimension

Figure 6. Reasons for posts.

'Why were the posts created' : respondents' answers

'Restructuring'

'Establishment of a new educational support group'

'To create a career structure for staff with shortage skills'

'Pump priming from the Funding Council'

'To participate in the project'

'Initiated by funding opportunities'

'To support academic staff/student needs'

'To improve support and learner autonomy for a heterogeneous student body'

The important point to note here is that *none of these posts existed prior to 1991*; they have all been created since. In the period leading up to this, there was a decline in traditional full-time 'academic' appointments against significant student number increases, and a rise in the use of part-time staffing, non-university funded academic posts, sponsored and project-based staffing.[3]

Human resource management and differentiated change in HE

Crosthwaite (1996:1) has used HEQC audit reports and the review *Learning from Audit* (2) to gain insights into some of the recent areas of staffing change in HE. Staff appointments, development and reward, she says, are 'one of the main lines of audit enquiry'. O'Neill (1994: 209) relatedly notes the trend for institutions today to look for a flexible mix of types of staff, including offering varieties of contracts. It is a situation that arguably mirrors the nature of institutional insecurity, from both funding allocation changes as well as market conditions.

In terms of human resource management (HRM), we see a trend towards employment structures based on core and contract labour. Reasons for this, according to Claydon (1994: 97–106), include (a) the need to reduce organisational overheads in order to retain planning and financial flexibility (b) the

attractiveness of outsourcing models, including advantages of not having to 'hire or fire' own staff during market fluctuations (c) the use of new technologies as productivity tools to replace labour or add value (see Crosthwaite and Warner 1995: 3) and (d) a need to retain high-skill people in-house. In education we have a prime illustration, but as we have seen, key high skill employees like the teaching and learning new professionals may be marginalised in temporary, short term or insecure job contracts. As one informant told me:

'I have six people plus me; one a placement (but not next year), one a temp, and one on secondment to another unit; we are being reviewed, which will probably result in my half merging into [another unit] and the rest leaving, retiring and merging into other units; our unit head is on another campus in the other half of the unit'.

The 'core' staff in today's organisations, partly because of the role of technology-use at work, according to human resource management writers like Hendry (1995: 17–18), have high commitment, adaptive behaviour and expert skills. But the flexibility that organisations seek (largely currently by avoiding a large permanent staffing base) also cuts both ways, and organisations may in the future face greater competition in recruiting or retaining 'core' staff. At the same time, the supply of specific skill 'contract' staff may also fluctuate, again subject to competition and market supply. This could leave dependent organisations with the potential for serious shortfalls in either core or contract staff or both. The old alternative was to keep people on, to develop staff, increasing the overheads. Market conditions today however could begin to favour formerly 'peripheral' workers (Claydon 1994: 105), who because of the range and specificity of experience gained in serial contracts, could become the 'flexible', multiskilled core workers of the future.

The new professionals, as agents of 'T & L change', are thus potentially valuable assets. At the moment, they are often part of a 'flexibilised' workforce (Hendry 1995: 18), but with the potential to displace traditional employment groups (such as teaching or administrative groups) at the core of the organisation. Indeed, our snapshot survey shows that a high degree of 'flexibilisation' has been going on *within* core HE groups in the T & L professional areas. However, job insecurity and the instability of contract, project-based innovation, can make it hard for organisations to benefit from and sustain change. As one respondent commented,

'Funding drives recruitment, not strategy. Funding is offered to "drive" new initiatives but is often too short-term to yield any real

benefit. People can achieve little in twelve months in terms of new teaching and learning methodologies. Development staff need to be core employees.'

Betwixt and between

Human resource management policies differentiate amongst and develop particular groups of staff. The paradox is that in HE this has been applied in recent times through the rhetoric of an 'all staff' ethos. This 'inclusive' trend has accompanied a re-valuing of staff as a whole, particularly the 'other', I would argue, of the non-teaching groups. This is seen in attempts to redress the 'upstairs/downstairs' imbalance through training, a higher profile and incentive schemes such as Investors in People.[4] Such relative empowerment, of course, has tended to decentre the formerly 'central' role of academics, the teaching professionals.

Perhaps it makes sense in a more corporate environment for managers to favour staff whose primary orientation is to the organisation rather than to 'outside' subject specialisms or cross-institutional research groups. As Duke (1992: 96) has commented, the idea that teaching staff anyway could be regarded as 'resources' (in the human resource terminology) *for* the organisation, has in many cases been resisted. That the new empowerment of other groups has been at academics' expense is therefore not so surprising: teaching staff were arguably already empowered, with wide job discretion, high status and valued expertise. However, with learning more flexible and student (and support staff) managed (Legge 1995:55), some of these have now been displaced from the 'core' onto fixed term teaching and 'flexibilised' work contracts, often across more than one department or organisation.

But in this changing HE world there are few certainties, including for the teaching and learning *new professionals*. As inhabitants of 'new territory' between teaching and non-teaching roles (see O'Neill 1994: 204), they still have no real or settled status in the current educational pantheon. They are 'threshold people' who fall on or between the boundaries of categories, a 'liminal' status, which social anthropologists argue, carries implications of both marginalisation (Leach 1976: 35), and power (Douglas 1966, Turner 1969:86). The 'new professional' role thus

- can be regarded as '*marginal*', since in some respects the newer posts in HE often carry insecure contracts and their incumbents (and units) may be less integrated into existing professional, staffing and trade union networks;
- can be regarded as *powerful* to the extent that it may be associated with change desired by executive groups, who may circumvent normal reporting lines and afford postholders elements

of discretion and range of work that traditional roles may lack.

Whyley (NCIHE 1997: 177) indeed found that 'new professional' staff reported the highest levels of job satisfaction but were also the most likely to *leave* the HE sector to gain career progression. Thus, the re-valuing of 'all staff' has not yet led to greater security for the contract-based T&L staff.

Conclusions

In service organisations like education, people are crucial, and service quality depends on people quality (O'Neill 1994:199). This makes recruitment a key part of the business strategy and mission. In HE, it amounts to the quality of teaching and learning relationships between students, teaching and support staff, and the expertise that goes into maintaining and developing these. Effective recruitment practices should therefore improve the supply of requisite staff and skills into the organisation, while staff development policies, incentives and training schemes should aim to improve existing skills.

HE environments, I would argue, through the contingencies of funding opportunism, market and policy uncertainties, together with enormous pressures on traditional teaching and support functions, have nurtured some of the hybrid new roles into being – the topical notion of 'incubation' springs to mind here. Today, the market for such skills is becoming increasingly competitive. The question is, are we in the 'people-growing for export' business, accept-ing that staff will move on or be snatched up by others, or acting as shrewd investors, planning to reap the benefits of change management and investment in the teaching and learning 'new hybrid' staff? As Donkin (1995, quoting Pfeffer) reminds us – '*when everyone has the same computer technology, where else but in people is the competitive advantage?*' (my emphasis).

And what of the 'new professionals' themselves? Do they recognise their liminality, the hybrid nature of the role (see Brackley 1996).[5] Do they feel both valued and invisible, the paradox of a 'threshold' position? Are their backgrounds as diverse as those sampled here? And what are their aspirations – is 'T & L support and development' a career move today? Will the 'new professionals' indeed see membership of the new Learning and Teaching Institute, for example, as proposed in the Booth Report (1998), as for them?[6]

It may be that all the forms of support that learning, teaching and research need and involve could be part of 'T&L'. Given both the growing numbers of such staff, together with its broad interests, the AUA might wish to attract the 'new people' in; the term 'administrator' (in 'AUA') would not be appropriate of course, but perhaps this could be part of a wider re-think about

boundaries, constituencies and names. The writer★ would be interested to receive contributions on the question of 'teaching and learning new profession-alism', its relationship to existing and evolving HE employment categories, and debate about AUA as a body concerned with the 'management, administration and support of teaching and learning', as aspects of *strategic* change in HE.

★ and the Editor of *perspectives* – Ed.

Notes

[1] In funded 'teaching and learning' or electronic services projects, for example, via TLTP, JTAP, FIGIT, industry sponsorship, TEC, EU, T&CS initiatives and so on.

[2] I have suggested at the beginning of this section that 'new professionals' are generally not involved in course assessment, class teaching of students, 'lecture' presentations or 'ownership' of content, where this represents a 'boundary' distinguishing the 'academic' from 'teaching and learning' role. It may be too that there are other 'tests' that could be applied, including the selection of students. Indeed, such may present the interface with other 'support' roles, where increasingly, 'central' staff (from Registry or equivalent) take the lead in admissions or recruitment processes, for example. Depending on their previous post, 'new professional' post-holders in T&L may retain affiliations to groupings such as *UCISA* (IT staff), *SCONUL* (library staff) or *SEDA* (staff developers), while those in 'new technology' areas may have found kindred spirits in the *Association for Learning Technology (ALT)* for example.

[3] The figures tell the story well: full-time 'academic' posts in HE teaching and research grew by only 21% over the whole period from 1980 to 1993, a time that saw dramatic rises in student numbers, while part-time teaching posts increased by 172%, and non-university funded posts grew by 23–27% (Universities' Statistical Record Vol. 1 Staff and Students, for 1980/81, 1988/89, 1991/92, 1992/93).

[4] Interestingly, in the 'old' university sector, administrative staff probably received more training than academics, through bodies such as the CVCP Administrative Training Committee, the precursor to the work of UKCoSDA.

[5] Counterpart perhaps to the 'hybrid manager' of the 1980s, characterised by Brackley (1996) as having a general professional approach, specific expertise as well as 'new technology' competences.

[6] The Booth Report (CVCP 1998) says 'We use the generic term "teachers" to encompass all staff involved in the learning and teaching process' (Section 2.1). On membership criteria for the new Learning and Teaching Institute, however, they recommend that 'learning and teaching' staff (which includes technical and librarian roles) can only progress to full membership 'if their teaching activities and responsibilities (warrant) it.' Much will clearly hang therefore on definitions of the nature of 'teaching' work, and the relative weight of 'learning' and 'teaching' support work, in assessing the equity with which such criteria are applied.

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commentary

The new quality framework
Roger Brown

At the time of writing (late October 1998), the Quality Assurance Agency has just published its new quality framework ('the framework') (Quality Assurance Agency 1998). This paper describes and analyses the framework with particular reference to the implications for administrators in institutions. Those seeking further or more detailed information are referred to the author's various recent publications (Brown 1997a, b, 1998a, b).

The background

The background to the framework has a number of elements:

- The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act ushered in a dual system of external quality assurance with the Higher Education Funding Councils assessing the quality of teaching and learning in particular subjects (Teaching Quality Assessment – TQA) whilst the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), a self-regulatory body owned by the institutions, audited their institution-level quality assurance arrangements (academic audit).
- Institutions' unhappiness with the perceived costs, burden and duplication of this dual system led to the report of a Joint Planning Group in December 1996, which recommended the creation of a single quality agency (the Quality Assurance Agency – QAA) to integrate the two processes.

- Building upon research carried out by HEQC on graduate standards and external examining, the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Committee) recommended in July 1997 a strengthened external quality assurance process with greater attention being paid to comparability of academic standards.
- In March 1998 the QAA consulted institutions on a proposed new framework bringing these various elements together. A central feature was a new system of Registered External Examiners who would report to the agency on the standards being achieved at each institution.

The framework – description

It is not yet wholly clear when the framework will come into force throughout the UK. The framework document speaks of the TQA programme being scheduled to continue in England until December 2001. New procedures for 'programme review' (see below) will then come into force if not before (they will come into force in Scotland and Wales in 2000/1, with the period between now and then being used for trialling). Institutional review will continue in its present form ('continuation audit') until 2001, although from 1999 audit reports will contain a view of the confidence that can be placed in the reliability of the institution's management of its academic quality and standards. Audits will normally include collaborative and overseas provision, but where these are locally significant a separate audit may be scheduled.

The new framework has three main objectives:

- To ensure that each institution maintains its degree standards.
- To ensure that programmes of study are delivering their intended outcomes, and that student achievement meets the standards required by the institution for its awards, by relevant national subject benchmarks, and by any accrediting professional body.
- To provide information for potential students and others about the quality of the learning opportunities that will be available to them in each institution, and on the extent to which the

Roger Brown is Principal of Southampton Institute. He was previously Chief Executive of the Higher Education Quality Council and Chief Executive of the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics, and before that a DTI civil servant. He has lectured and written widely on quality assurance issues. He is a Visiting Professor in Education at Middlesex University, Goldsmiths College and Roehampton Institute.

institution as a whole meets expectations of good practice in relation to support of student learning.

Institutions will propose and agree with the Agency (and any relevant professional bodies) the programmes to be subject to their own internal review cycle over a six year period. The reviews will be subject to various parameters including timing (the six year cycle actually becomes a three year cycle for individual subjects), and will cover 42 national units of assessment. These programme reviews will be evaluated by teams of 'Academic Reviewers' answerable to the Agency. They will produce reports on the outcomes aimed at and achieved, and on the quality of learning opportunities in the subject/institution concerned. The proposal for Registered External Examiners has been dropped because of widespread institutional concern that the position of the external examiner as a 'critical' friend could be undermined.

...the reviewers will discuss with each institution the effectiveness of its overall academic systems...

In the light of evidence gained from participation in institutional quality procedures, and that gathered from programme review, the reviewers will discuss with each institution the effectiveness of its overall academic systems, and will produce a published report dealing with:

- the effectiveness of the exercise of the awarding function (or, where the institution does not award its own qualifications, the effectiveness of its academic management systems); and
- the effectiveness of institutional management of the support of student learning.

Varying the intensity of scrutiny

The document comments that:

'Where, in due course, experience gives a high level of confidence in the procedures of institutions, the level of external scrutiny needed to make reliable independent judgments may reduce.'

At subject/programme level, the variation in intensity of scrutiny will be in the extent of direct engagement with internal processes, and the Agency will be producing a code of practice on programme monitoring and review which will be the basis for its judgments about the confidence to be placed in institutional procedures, together with criteria against which decisions about varying the intensity of scrutiny will be made. (The timescale for these and other guidance documents has not yet been announced.) At institutional level, a discussion with the institution may be sufficient, alternatively an audit may still be necessary.

The framework – analysis

Elsewhere the author has set out what seem to him to be the key criteria for the success of any external quality evaluation regime. The main ones are:

- The coverage and focus. Does the framework cover the right things? Does it cover all of them?
- The overall balance and relationship between the different elements of quality assurance, and especially the balance between accountability and enhancement
- Within the accountability element, the balance and relationship between external and internal accountability and, related to this, the balance between extrinsic and intrinsic motivators; and
- The source, level and use of the resources needed for the framework to work effectively (Brown 1998b).

Coverage and focus

The new framework scores in three ways over the previous one, i.e. the mixture of institutional audit and subject assessment stemming from the 1992 Act.

...it is enhancement, and not accountability that is the key to improving quality...

First, it covers both standards of student achievement and the opportunities students have to reach and demonstrate those achievements. In layman's language, it covers both 'standards' and 'quality'. Second, it covers, in a potentially integrated process, the arrangements for managing students' learning at both local (departmental, subject or programme) and institutional levels. The former is a legacy of

the Dearing Report, the latter stems from the JPG Report. These two features together make it demonstrably superior to the previous arrangements. (The qualification 'potential' is applied to the integrated process because the actual difficulties of securing integration, even within a single organisation, are not to be underestimated). Third, the new framework emphasises the responsibilities of institutions, as awarding bodies, for guaranteeing the quality of what is offered in their name. This emphasis is overdue, for reasons set out at length elsewhere (Brown 1998c). But it will have major implications for the administration in many institutions where there may need to be new committees, new systems, new posts, and new information to enable the university or college collectively to ensure that it is informed about what is being done in its name by individual faculties, departments or partners. In some institutions this will be a matter of pulling back or regulating what has been decentralised over time. In others it will be a case of establishing something that has not previously existed. In either case it is likely to call for some delicate judgments and handling on the part of senior administrators.

The balance between accountability and enhancement

The QAA paper acknowledges the importance of quality enhancement, but is mostly concerned with the accountability element of quality assurance (regulation and reporting, guidelines and codes of practice). By contrast, enhancement (learning from quality assurance, best practice benchmarking, and research and development both responsive and proactive) and transformation (framing and implementing change) receive little attention (Middlehurst 1997). The underlying view of the document seems to be that quality assurance is mainly about accountability whereas the present author would suggest that this is only one, albeit essential, part of the picture. It would certainly be a great pity if, given these signals and faced by the demands of the new framework, institutions were to scale down their various enhancement activities, because ultimately it is enhancement, and not accountability, that is the key to improving quality (Harvey and Knight 1996, Middlehurst 1997).

External and internal accountability

The third critical aspect of the new framework is the balance within it between reliance on external and internal accountability mechanisms. The framework envisages the possibility, over time, of greater reliance being placed on institutional quality processes provided that these meet certain yet to be

specified criteria. This provides grounds for real optimism. But there are some important caveats.

The main one is that, whether or not institutions use external peers in their internal quality processes, the Agency will rely on the judgments of a new category of evaluator, Academic Reviewers. These evaluators in turn will rely on subject threshold standards 'to set agreed national standards in each subject'; a national qualifications framework 'to ensure that qualifications that share a common title are of a common level and nature'; and codes of practice. Institutions will also be expected to have 'programme specifications' setting out the outcomes to be expected from a particular programme.

...the Agency will rely on the judgments of a new category of evaluator, Academic Reviewers...

It is at this point that one begins to become uneasy. This arises partly from the potential overlap with the existing functions of external examiners, and partly from the nature of the instruments upon which the academic reviewers will be relying. Threshold standards, a qualifications framework, and programme specifications all stem from HEQC's work on standards, and in particular from the Graduate Standards Programme (HEQC 1997). However HEQC was cautious about thresholds (in the proper sense of specified attributes, the possession of which could be demonstrated to a sufficient extent through assessment) except possibly in relation to sub-disciplinary areas. The Council certainly did not envisage them applying across subject areas as broad as those which QAA apparently have in mind. Still less was it possible to conceive of 'above threshold' standards! In any case, subject thresholds, the qualifications framework and programme specifications were all seen as devices to help *institutions* to map and improve their programmes and awards against practice generally, rather than as a means of *external* regulation of those programmes and awards. QAA has here taken up, it would appear eagerly, the lead given by Dearing. Is it just a coincidence that words such as 'diversity', 'responsiveness' and 'innovation' appear nowhere in the QAA document? Altogether this comes across as a conservative framework: certainly there is very little in it to encourage institutions to take risks in modifying their curriculum to meet the needs of

their students, and a good deal to encourage them to play safe. Is it also a coincidence that there is no reference to cooperation with the new Institute for Learning and Teaching?

These fears may well prove groundless, and the QAA document itself talks of the need 'to avoid the risk of seeming to dictate a curriculum'.

There are three further concerns.

One is about the nature of the engagement in institutional processes envisaged for the Academic Reviewers, and the risk that this could distort these processes, with institutions carrying out the real work of quality assurance elsewhere and using their formal events for demonstration purposes, something that already happens from time to time even under the present arrangements. Much will depend here on the people chosen as Academic Reviewers, the instructions and training given to them, and the extent and way in which they are managed by the Agency.

...it is no use would-be external quality regulators prescribing medicine that they are not willing to take themselves...

Another is about the nature of the programme review reports produced by the Academic Reviewers. The QAA paper states that these 'will allow comparison between institutions', but whether this will extend to summative, quantified ratings is still under discussion with the Funding Councils. In the author's view it would be a retrograde step if the present system of numerical gradings, largely discredited as it is, were to continue beyond the present cycle. Yet the Funding Councils appear to continue to believe that their statutory obligations require numerical ratings and that these serve a useful quality function.

The final worry relates to the programme review model itself, and the possible equation of institutional processes for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning with subject or programme review as it has been defined through TQA. If diversity is to mean anything it must surely include diversity in relation to the quality assurance and quality

control policies and procedures adopted by institutions. To take a concrete example, my own institution has a well established and well regarded system of internal academic audits applying to various aspects of teaching and learning. This would be our own preferred model for periodic quality review, supplementing the usual processes of course validation and review, in-course monitoring, internal and external examining, student feedback, etc. But if internal TQA is in effect to become mandatory, I can see little point in continuing with the internal audits. Other institutions may face similar dilemmas.

Resources

However the point that is most likely to concern administrators is resources. The QAA document says nothing about the costs of the new framework, either for institutions or for the Agency itself. Regrettably, this is par for this particular course. The assumption is that economies will arise as greater integration occurs between internal and external processes. Savings will also result from increasing integration of QAA sponsored and Professional and Statutory Body (PSB) evaluation events. But there are no figures – has QAA done any modelling? – and at least in the short run institutions will face increased costs as they try to come to terms with subject thresholds, national qualifications, programme specifications, and new and more comprehensive, and possibly more detailed, codes of practice. And, of course, it will be institutional manpower that will create, modify and apply these various frameworks. It would certainly be a very bold Vice-Chancellor, Registrar or Pro-Vice-Chancellor who would advise his colleagues to make less budgetary and human resource provision for quality assurance over the next few years.

Effectiveness

The final test is that of the effectiveness of the framework itself. Speaking of the outcomes of institutional programme review processes, the framework document talks of 'the overriding need to secure national consistency and comparability of judgments between institutions in the same subject area'. What plans has QAA itself to ensure that the framework produces judgments and findings that are valid, reliable and consistent, and therefore capable of withstanding challenge?

This is not just a clever point. As I can personally confirm, it is no use would-be external quality regulators prescribing medicine that they are not willing to take themselves. One of the main causes of the sector's unhappiness with previous arrangements was the variable, sometimes ludicrously variable, nature of the judgments made

concerning different subjects and institutions. Nearly every institution has its story – sometimes merely risible, sometimes positively Ortonion – of what happened when the assessors (and, though more rarely, the auditors) came to call. This indeed was a major reason why, in England, no serious attempt has been made at least until very recently by the Funding Council to link assessment outcomes to funding. This issue of effectiveness has two aspects.

The first concerns the quality of the key people in the new framework, the Academic Reviewers, the criteria for the selection of which have still to be published (the paper says that the Agency 'will develop criteria for the appointment of reviewers, and will keep records of those who meet those criteria and are willing to be called upon'). The Reviewers will be practising academics of high standing with relevant expertise, or persons with professional and employment backgrounds with relevant knowledge and experience (these will be used especially in relation to professional and vocational courses). The paper comments that the time commitment of these folk will be no greater than currently under assessment and audit.

However, it is strongly arguable that the time given over to their existing functions, including training and development, is already seriously insufficient to achieve an acceptable range of judgments, and these functions have now been extended to embrace explicit concern with the standards of outcomes aimed at and achieved. How will the Agency ensure that enough people of the right calibre are recruited and trained; how will it ensure that they have sufficient time and resources to do a proper job; and how will it secure effective management, including proper benchmarking and moderation of their judgments where necessary?

In the past, questions of this kind were deflected by reference to the vagaries of peer review, with the implication that institutions had only themselves to blame because the Funding Councils had acceded to their preference for peer review. Even if this was a good enough defence in the past, and even if the Academic Reviewers are accepted as peers, this is an argument that just will not wash. It is the Agency that has to defend and justify the judgments made in its name: the Academic Reviewers are merely acting as its agents. It is therefore in the Agency's own interest to have some means of internal benchmarking, rather than put all its weight of quality control into recruitment and training.

To be sure, the Academic Reviewers will be relying on information, in the form of benchmark subject standards, national qualifications and codes of practice, emanating from the Agency. This takes us to the second aspect of effectiveness, the quality of the informational infrastructure underpinning the Agency's operations. The key things here are how specific the guidance on offer to reviewers and

institutions will be, and how closely they will be expected to adhere to it. The difficulties involved are formidable (Brown 1998a, b).

If the guidance is both highly specific and highly prescriptive then the outcomes are unlikely to be positive for institutions, at least those seeking to innovate. If on the other hand the guidance is too broad and flexible then the pressure on reviewers is likely to become intolerable, given the overriding need, in these litigious days, for a defensible basis for their judgments. How this balance is struck will determine more than anything else whether the new framework is any more permanent than its predecessors.

Conclusion

Although there are some important loose ends (notably the question of numerical gradings for programme review reports), the QAA and its Chief Executive deserve great credit for achieving a compromise between the various interests concerned. Moreover there are a number of positive aspects that will be important for the sector to recognise, notably the potential integration of the various external review processes and the prospect at least of greater reliance on internal procedures (though it has been a long time coming). The renewed emphasis upon institutional responsibility is also greatly to be welcomed. The main doubts concern the complexity and feasibility of the framework and the resources likely to be needed to make it function effectively, together with the potential threat to diversity and innovation represented by the post-Dearing thrust on standards. Quality assurance is likely to be with us for a while yet.
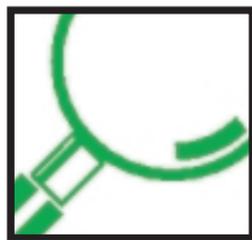
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perspective

The use of a staff satisfaction survey at the University of Central England in Birmingham

Peter Knight and Lee Harvey

The paper reports on a technique used to assess and evaluate systematically the areas of work with which staff are satisfied or dissatisfied. The technique also identifies which issues are important or unimportant to staff, and goes on to illustrate the action that the University of Central England (UCE) is taking to address concerns that have arisen.

Staff Satisfaction

The systematic analysis of the satisfaction of employees in any area of working life is rare. Employees often undertake 'spots checks' of contentment. Unions often undertake similar one-off surveys to show how discontented their members

Dr Peter Knight is Vice-Chancellor of the University of Central England in Birmingham, which he joined in 1985. In 1989 he was appointed by the Secretary of State to be a founder member of the Polytechnics and College Funding Council, and in 1994 to membership of the Teacher Training Agency. Having been a member of the CVCP since the redesignation of the polytechnics as universities, he was elected to its Council in 1995.

Professor Lee Harvey is Director of the Centre for Research into Quality (CRQ) at the University of Central England in Birmingham. The CRQ pioneered the development of the Student Satisfaction Survey technique. He has published extensively on quality issues and is Editor of Quality in Higher Education.

are. However, these do not add up to a systematic exploration of employer-employee relations, and in no way parallels the systematic surveying of 'customers' to be found in most commercial and industrial sectors.

Much the same can be said of the higher education sector. Increasingly, higher education has been seeking feedback from 'stakeholders': students, graduates, employers, professional bodies. Feedback from students, in particular, is becoming increasingly sophisticated and systematic. It is another issue as to whether this results in any action to deal with issues raised as problematic by students or other stakeholders.

Views of teaching and support staff in higher education are not often collected. When they are collected it is not often on a regular or systematic basis. It is rare that the results of such studies become public. It is even rarer that the questions in the survey are determined by the staff themselves, rather than managers or representative bodies, or that any systematic action follows the publication of results.

Following the successful development of Student Satisfaction (Geall *et al.*, 1995) at UCE, it was decided to extend the process to cover staff. Student Satisfaction is more than a survey, it is a tool for collecting management information for action to improve the service to students. It is rooted in a philosophy of continuous quality improvement. It is a process that is endorsed and managed from the top of the institution but which delegates responsibility to improve to those who own and control the practices and procedures at the student–staff interface.

Unlike many surveys of students, which collect data with no clear indication of how the data might be used, the Student Satisfaction approach was

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designed from the outset as an action tool. Student Satisfaction is unique in combining the following:

● student-determined questions
● satisfaction and importance ratings
● management information for action.

The topics in the Student Satisfaction questionnaire are based on the outcomes of a stratified sample of focus groups of students. The issues raised in the focus groups are converted into questionnaire items by the Centre for Research into Quality (CRQ), who are independent of management and staff.

The research examines student *satisfaction* with a wide range of aspects of provision and then identifies which of those areas are *important* for students. Those areas that are important to students, but where students are dissatisfied, are priority areas for management intervention.

Student Satisfaction involves an annual cycle of focus groups, questionnaire design or modification, data collection, analysis, and the publication of a report that identifies areas for action based on the satisfaction and importance ratings of students. It also includes interviews to ascertain action strategies, codification of intention or reporting of action under way, and feedback to students about what has happened as a result of their responses. The basic Student Satisfaction methodology, which is the market leader, has been published in the *Student Satisfaction Manual* (Harvey *et al.* 1997a) and marketed world-wide.

In developing Staff Satisfaction and adopting the same approach, UCE has taken a step into previously uncharted water. The implications of Staff Satisfaction are profound. Although adopting a well-developed approach, this is no longer an exploration of 'customer' views but an examination of industrial relations issues. To commit to ensuring the same process of public scrutiny, followed by a systematic identification of issues, commitment to action and feedback of outcomes is fairly rare in any area of work but, to our knowledge, unprecedented in a higher education institution.

The Staff Satisfaction survey was piloted in 1996 and it was demonstrated that the Student Satisfaction approach could successfully be applied to exploring staff perceptions of their working experience (Harvey *et al.* 1996). The pilot included all staff employed by UCE. However, the approach turned out not to be appropriate for visiting teachers, other hourly-paid staff, and for weekly-paid manual workers because the questionnaire was too wide-ranging, and consequently response rates for these groups of employees were very low. In 1997 Staff Satisfaction was limited to monthly salaried staff (Harvey *et al.* 1997b).

In line with the Student Satisfaction approach, the research on staff satisfaction examines *satisfaction* with aspects of the work situation and the

importance of those areas for staff. As in the Student Satisfaction approach, the areas that are important to staff, but where they are dissatisfied, are priority areas for management intervention.

Focus groups (Group Feedback Strategy)

As in the Student Satisfaction approach, the CRQ convened appropriate focus groups of staff to identify the issues that staff regarded as important. These subsequently provided the items in the questionnaire. Staff were invited to take part in the focus groups and were divided into broad categories, based on their job description and location within UCE. The focus groups were designed to cover all the main types of job (management, teaching staff, administrators, support services, estates and so on) at the major sites. As far as possible, staff of broadly similar job description were invited to the focus groups: so that there was one group for administrators at the Perry Barr campus, another for new nursing academics at Westbourne Road, and so on. Every attempt was made, on the basis of the information available, to avoid having staff in the same group as their line manager. In all there were 13 focus groups involving a total of 208 members of staff.

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Each focus group was organised in a similar way, and in most cases lasted for one hour. Members of staff were asked to spend five minutes noting the 'positive' and 'negative' aspects of working at UCE on an 'individual feedback sheet'. These initial thoughts were discussed in small groups of four to six members of staff, who noted their consensus views on a 'group feedback sheet'. Half an hour was then spent on a total group feedback where the issues raised by the sub-groups were aired and debated.

The outcomes of the focus-group discussion were noted during the session and the group and individual feedback sheets collected. The data from the groups were collated and analysed. The main headings in the questionnaire reflect the broad themes

of the discussions and the specific items reflect the detailed points made during the discussion and noted on the feedback forms.

The questionnaire

The Staff Satisfaction questionnaire was based on the outcomes of the discussion groups and headings included terms and conditions, staff development, academic environment, modularisation and semesterisation, management, working environment, libraries, catering and other facilities, personnel, job role, interaction and teamworking and communication at UCE.

The sample

All monthly-paid salaried staff employed at UCE were included in the sample. A total of 1666 questionnaires were distributed. 993 usable questionnaires were returned by the final deadline. The overall response rate was 60%. Response rates varied between faculties and centres and different types of staff. The highest response rate was in Personnel (95%) and the lowest in the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Technology (35%).

Most of the sample were full-time (87%) and permanent (91%). Over two-fifths (44%) of the sample had been working at UCE less than 5 years and less than a quarter (24%) for more than 10 years. Males (55%) outnumbered females in the sample.

Two thirds of the sample were between 31 and 50 years of age (66%) and the majority were white.

Just under half the sample were on academic or research contracts (45%). Nearly two-thirds of the academics were senior lecturers and they made up more than a quarter of the entire sample. There was no detail available for 59 respondents, including those who anonymised their responses, who were on spot contracts, or where job role was not specified.

Throughout the process, the responses were treated as confidential. *No-one* outside CRQ had access to any of the questionnaires, and no-one at all had access to both a questionnaire and the database of respondents' names. Only aggregate results were reported, and all individual comments used for illustrative purposes were anonymised.

Reporting satisfaction

The central feature of Student Satisfaction is the way that results are reported. Instead of matrices of statistical data, the reporting procedure is to adopt a simple letter code to identify the satisfaction and importance scores for each item (figure 1). On the basis of this grid, a single letter is assigned to each item to represent the combined satisfaction and importance score, which are easily converted into 'action' messages (figure 2). In presenting the results, it is easy to pick out areas of exceptional performance and areas where action urgently needs

Figure 1. Satisfaction and importance grid.

	Very unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	OK	Satisfactory	Very satisfactory	
Very important	E	D	C	B	A	7
Important	e	d	c	b	a	5.5
Not so important	(e)	(d)	(c)	(b)	(a)	5.0
	1	2.75	3.75	4.25	5.25	7

Figure 2. Grid values and action implications.

	Very unsatisfactory E	Unsatisfactory D	OK C	Satisfactory B	Very satisfactory A	
Very important	Urgent need for immediate action	Action in this areas has high priority improvement	This area to be targetted for future improvement where possible	Ensure no slippage, improve	Maintain excellent standards	7
Important	Action to substantially improve this area	Target area for improvement	Ensure no slippage	Maintain standards	Avoid overkill	5.5
Not so important	Improve where resources permit	Ensure no further slippage	Restrict attention	Maintain standards where possible	No need for action here	5.0
	1	3	3.75	4.25	5	7

to be taken. (For example, figure 3 shows staff perception of management by faculty).

The results

The results of the first full year of the survey have been revealing and of enormous use to the University (Harvey *et al.* 1997a). They are very detailed and point to an array of very positive areas and also a significant number of potential action areas. The complexity of industrial relations in the public sector means that many areas are effectively beyond the control of the University. However, there are key areas that the University can deal with and it has been decided to review all the results with the managers concerned to seek to identify and agree plans that will address the staff's concerns before the next survey is undertaken.

Figure 3. Staff perception of management by Faculty.

Item	BIAD	BE	BUS	CIS	CON	Educ	ECT	HCC	LSS	UCE
Overall management competence of										
UCE strategic management (Directorate)	B	B	D	C	B	B	B	C	D	B
Your Dean, or equivalent head of Centre	B	B	D	D	B	B	B	D	B	C
Your head of section, school or department	B	B	B	B	A	B	B	B	C	B
Openness and transparency of decisions										
Made by UCE strategic management	C	C	D	D	B	D	C	D	D	D
Made by Dean or equivalent head of centre	B	B	D	E	C	B	C	D	B	C
Made by head of section, school or department	C	C	B	C	A	B	C	B	C	B
The soundness of financial management										
Of UCE strategic management	B	B	C	B	B	B	B	B	C	B
Of your Dean, or equivalent head of centre	B	B	D	D	D	B	B	D	B	C
Of your head of section, school or department	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	C	B
Management structure and approach										
UCE's management structure	B	C	D	D	B	C	C	C	D	C
UCE's corporate image	C	D	E	D	B	c	C	C	D	C
Devolution of financial management to faculties	B	C	d	D	B	B	c	C	D	C
Devolution of other responsibilities to faculties	B	C	d	C	B	B	c	C	D	C
Management's commitment to improvement	B	C	D	D	B	C	C	C	D	C
Chances for appraisal of management by staff	D	E	E	E	D	D	D	D	E	D
Consultation with management about issues	D	D	D	D	C	D	D	D	D	D
Extent to which your views are heard	D	D	E	D	C	D	D	D	D	D
Accountability of Deans for financial decisions	B	D	D	E	D	B	C	D	C	D
Skills of those in management positions	D			D	D	C	D	D	E	D
Opportunities for management training	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Support from line manager	B	B	B	B	A	A	B	B	B	B
IPR and Student Appraisal of Teaching										
The idea of the IPR system	c	b	b	C	B	c	B	b	c	b
The way IPRs are conducted	C	D	C	D	C	B	C	B	C	C
Confidentiality of IPRs	A	B	B	B	B	B	A	B	B	B
The usefulness of the IPR process	d	d	d	D	d	D	D	C	d	d
The developmental outcome(s) of IPRs	d	E	D	D	D	C	D	C	D	D
System of student appraisal of teaching	d	C		E	C*	D	c	C	D	D
The outcome(s) of student appraisal of teaching	d	D	E	E	C*	C	d	C	E	D

Areas of satisfaction

Generally staff were satisfied with the following important areas:

Terms and conditions
- the amount of annual leave
- the pension scheme
- security of employment
- flexibility of working hours.

Academic environment
- the stimulation they get from working with students.

Management
- the soundness of the financial management at the Directorate level
- the support from their line manager
- the confidentiality of IPRs.

Job role
- the variety of work they do.
- interaction and teamworking
- the support they get from colleagues
- the friendliness of colleagues
- the stimulation they get from working with colleagues
- the expertise and experience of colleagues.

Communication
- communication with their line manager
- communication with other staff at their level.

Equal opportunities
- the equal opportunities policy.

Working environment
- access to a telephone
- access to a computer
- access to a printer
- the helpfulness of UCE mail staff
- the efficiency of the mail staff in dealing with external mail.

Library
- the opening times of the library.

Areas of considerable dissatisfaction

In general, staff expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the following important areas:

Terms and conditions
- opportunities for regrading
- the regrading process.

Academic environment
- the amount of reading and preparation that students do

- the level of student attendance
- time available to undertake research
- the support provided to undertake research.

Management
- the skills of those in management positions
- the opportunities for the appraisal of management by staff
- the extent to which their views are heard by managers
- the system of student appraisal of teaching
- the outcomes of students appraisal of teaching.

Job role
- the time available to reflect on their work.

Working environment
- the air quality around their campus.

Library
- the time it takes for books to be ordered in the library
- the noise level in the library.

Other facilities at work
- the availability of social space (common rooms).

Impact of gender, ethnicity and length of service

There were no overall substantive differences in satisfaction, on important items, between males and females in the sample. Similarly, length of service at UCE did not result in any substantive differences in satisfaction.

There were substantive differences between ethnic groups (Asians, black, white) on the following important items (the dissatisfied group(s) are indicated in parentheses)

- opportunities to attend work–related training courses (Asian)
- relevance of work–related training courses (Asian)
- openness and transparency of decisions made by UCE strategic management (White)
- openness and transparency of decisions made by Dean or Head of Centre (Black)
- devolution of financial management to faculties (Asian)
- efficiency of the UCE switchboard (Black)
- system of authorisation signatures as part of the procedure for the Central Finance System (Asian)
- implementation of equal opportunities policy in Faculty or Centre (Asian, Black)
- procedures for dealing with equal opportunities issues (Asian, Black)
- induction procedures for new staff (Asian)
- availability of furniture and equipment (Asian)

- amount of office space (Asian)
- access to the UCE network (Asian)
- speed of response of information technology support staff (Black)
- the time it takes for books to be ordered in the library (Asian)
- the system for funding the library (Asian)
- personal safety on and around campus (Black)
- adequacy of health and safety procedures (Asian).

Action taken

A critical feature of the Student Satisfaction survey has been the action that is taken as a result of the expressions of dissatisfaction. Each year the deans of faculty and heads of services have a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor to review the results of the Student Satisfaction survey for their area of responsibility. Where there is a continuing source of dissatisfaction the meeting seeks to agree a course of action that will address the dissatisfaction and solve the problem. Over the years that Student Satisfaction has been operating at UCE many problems have been solved by this technique. Indeed it is ironic that once a problem is solved, students no longer regard it as important! It often disappears as an issue in subsequent feedback meetings and there is no reward for past successes!

The results of the Student Satisfaction survey are now characterised by a limited number of problems, many of which for external reasons, are insoluble. An obvious example is the increasing concern that students experience about their financial well being.

...the issues raised by the sub-groups were aired and debated...

The same technique is applied to Staff Satisfaction. Meetings take place with deans and others to see if the issues that staff expressed concern about can be identified and resolved. This technique has already achieved some success. As an example, staff across the University have expressed concern about the staff development policy. That policy is common across all groups of staff, faculties and departments. It is clear that a minority of deans have developed techniques of openness and clarity of communication that means that staff in their area understand, and as a result, are satisfied with the staff development policy. Other deans are already learning from that open approach and are confident that this issue can be resolved in time for the next survey.

It is important to realise that some of the techniques that make Student Satisfaction valuable may not be easily translatable to the Staff Satisfaction survey. In particular, in Student Satisfaction the size of the survey allows a particular problem to be disaggregated so that it can be identified with an individual school or department if that is where the issue is occurring. In order to protect confidentiality and because of the more limited size of the sample it is not possible to disaggregate staff satisfaction in the same way. As a result managers are sometimes not clear whether there is a general problem leading to dissatisfaction in their department or whether it is a small group of staff who are particularly dissatisfied about an issue. This inability to disaggregate and refine the problem is undoubtedly one weakness of the Staff Satisfaction approach as we are currently undertaking it. The problem is exacerbated when reviewing the results from faculties where it is clear that the views of the support staff can be masked by the larger number of teaching staff. There does appear to be a distinctly different set of values and attitudes amongst the support staff in the University when compared with the teaching staff. Put simply, support staff have an allegiance to the institution whereas teaching staff's primary allegiance is often to their subject and course. While that is understandable, it does lead to different concerns, attitudes and influences coming through in the survey's results.

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On some issues the survey gives a fascinating insight into life in the institution. For example, most of the staff at the Perry Barr campus were satisfied with the provision of car parking. Yet the staff in the Personnel Department were dissatisfied. This puzzled us as Personnel had exactly the same parking opportunities and problems as all the other staff on the campus so why should Personnel be dissatisfied? When we thought about it, it was obvious. Staff in the Personnel Department included the Security staff who were responsible for organising the car park. They end up having to solve

everybody else's problems! So while the rest of the staff were satisfied that their parking problems were solved, the security staff were understandably dissatisfied about having to solve them.

There are some interesting contrasts between Staff Satisfaction and Student Satisfaction. Mischievously it can be reported that there appears to be no correlation whatsoever between the satisfaction of students with their educational experience at UCE and the satisfaction of the staff in the faculty concerned. Presumably improving the satisfaction of staff with their working life at the University is going to achieve rewards other than an improvement in student satisfaction. One interesting area of comparison is the different attitudes between staff and students on certain issues. For example, students are entirely satisfied with the noise level in the libraries (except Librarianship students). Staff are dissatisfied with the noise levels in the libraries, regarding them as too noisy in an environment that should be characterised by silent reflective study. The difference of views is so clear that someone has to win. As the University principally exists for the education of the students, and the students do not regard the noise level as a problem, the staff are going to have to adapt to it.

Perhaps the very process of saying clearly and consistently that if the students are satisfied on this issue we should not be concerned about it, may change staff attitudes.

Student Satisfaction has been an immensely important and valuable tool in a large, diverse and devolved University. We are certain that Staff Satisfaction will be equally valuable although it will probably be necessary to keep in mind the distinct differences that exist between the staff and student populations and the attitudes and values that they hold. UCE is committed to repeating the Staff Satisfaction survey and to continue to use it as an open and public tool for consistent improvement.

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commentary

Lifelong learning: some examples from the European Union

Keith Cook

The aim of this paper is to identify issues raised by some examples of Lifelong Learning (LL) in the European Union. Although approaches may differ, there is an increasing trend throughout the world to establish comprehensive systems for education and training within the context of LL. This paper therefore adopts the original definition tabled in 1973 by the OECD, which takes a broad perspective of LL (recurrent education was the term used then) as being a comprehensive education strategy for that which occurs after basic or compulsory years of schooling. It therefore embraces post-16 education and vocational training, higher education at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, continuing professional development, and other forms of skills and knowledge updating that occur over the life span of an individual in alternation with other activities, principally work, but also with leisure and even retirement.

This paper does not set out to provide a comprehensive account of this broad and varied field, but considers approaches, structures, issues and trends in three different EU countries – Britain, Sweden, and Germany. These have been selected to illustrate contrasting approaches towards the same end – a Learning Society geared to mass participation to produce an educated and skill proficient workforce to meet the needs of economic development in the 21st Century.

Britain is moving towards achieving comprehensiveness by setting in place a strategic policy context that sets a 'user friendly' framework to enable individuals, providers and employers to engage in constructive partnership. Public investment is limited to key points in the system to achieve maximum impact and to increase participation. An integrated qualifications framework provides the cement which holds LL together, but within that framework there is a fairly non-prescriptive approach to choice and provision.

Sweden provides a contrasting environment. The dominant feature is one of public provision at all levels of LL in largely public educational institutions, with fairly well defined routes through the formal qualifications framework. Although attempts are being made to blur the boundaries between the academic and vocational there is still a divergence between higher education and vocational institutions. The system is still fairly hierarchical and remains tightly regulated, though recent reforms have managed to introduce a high degree of individual choice. The Swedish case also highlights the difficulties of attempting to shift from a regulated and publicly funded comprehensive system to a more employer-demand-led one, more reliant on market forces.

The section on Germany does not attempt to look at the whole system of LL. It concentrates on that part which is perhaps best known outside Germany – the delivery of vocational training by the 'dual system'. It attempts to assess the appropriateness of this long-established German model with an emphasis on occupational qualifications in the context of global competition and technological change. In particular, the strains caused by the system's dependence on a strong and buoyant economy are highlighted.

In taking these three examples as a starting point there is no intention to imply that they offer model solutions that can be easily applied elsewhere. In fact, the differences between the three systems point to the opposite conclusion. Each country has to look at its own history and the particular political, social and economic context within which it wishes to

Keith Cook is currently working in Eastern Europe as a senior consultant with Universitas. Prior to this he was a senior manager from 1991 to 1997 at the University of Luton. Originally graduating from the University of Newcastle as a town planner, and from the London School of Economics as a social scientist, he spent most of his previous career as an academic.

address perceived problems, and to develop its own solutions, taking account of external models but keeping in mind their own specific circumstances.

Nor is it meant to imply that the issue is simply a European one. In addition to major EU and national government reports, LL has been addressed in major reports by the OECD and UNESCO. Global competition and the pace of technological change faces us all, whether we are in advanced industrial, transitional, emerging, or developing economies. The need for a well educated and skilled workforce to underpin the growth and development of economies, as well as enabling individuals to participate in society through employment and economic reward, is paramount. However, whereas there might be consensus around the need for LL, the same cannot be said for the means by which this might be achieved, as this paper will try to show.

Britain

The starting point for the British Government has been that, despite a record of good achievement in many sectors, the overall pace of change has been far too slow and unevenly distributed amongst society. Policy sets out not to be prescriptive, but to put in place a series of measures and processes that will bring about a fundamental cultural shift in Britain towards a Learning Society for all. An underlying feature of the approach is not one of coercion, legislation or direct funding by central government, but of persuasion. This it hopes to achieve by outlining the rewards to be gained by individuals and companies of a commitment to the process of continuous learning and to make access to learning at all levels simple and convenient, progression routes straightforward, and the act of learning itself both manageable and fun. Great emphasis is therefore placed on putting a framework in place that will exploit the new information technologies and unlock the resources of individuals, employees, employers and institutions of learning.

There is no doubt that higher education, with its experience of developing a mass higher education system, is well placed to play a leading role in this vision of LL. Lessons can be learnt from our experience of increasing access, particularly from non-traditional students, the development of progression routes through and between courses, and from innovative approaches to teaching and learning through credit modular schemes, distance and computer assisted learning, and work based programmes. Higher education managers could, if they so chose, occupy a pivotal position in making LL actually work by building on existing partnerships with local further education colleges, with Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), and

with employers. Relevant practice can already be found. The University of Luton, for example, has a formal association with nearby further education colleges and with the newly merged TEC and Chamber of Commerce. It operates a credit modular scheme with multi-access/exit and progression routes, and has developed innovative work-based learning programmes with local employers of all sizes. The development of a Metropolitan Area Network with the local cable company opens up a huge potential for the University and its partners to take the lead on many of the initiatives outlined in the Government's Green Paper.

Central to this, based on the perceived importance of certification of all aspects of LL and the principles of access and progression, is a well-developed qualification framework. This sets out the qualifications available in Britain in a comparable framework at five different levels from basic at level 1, through intermediate at levels 2/3, to advanced at levels 4/5. Each level has clear entry routes, clear progression paths, 'portability' and clear 'currency': that is, they provide a ready basis for credit-transfer arrangements. Thus one can opt for a traditional 'academic' route from school with General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced level to an undergraduate course and beyond at university, or one can proceed through a series of competency-based work-related skills known as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). At level 3 these equate with university entrance, which is a possible progression route, and at level 5 equate with a postgraduate level qualification. They are based on ability or competence to do the job rather than academic achievement.

Setting out this qualifications framework is a recognition of the need for a clear commitment by all players to widening and deepening participation and achievement in LL. This is as important in relation to basic skills, particularly for those who missed out first time round or for current school leavers with deficiencies in literacy and numeracy, as it is to increasing access to higher education. It is clear that in Britain there is still a deep learning divide. On the one side stands the minority, who have already gained qualifications and who will carry on with an active involvement in learning throughout their lives in work and beyond. On the other side stands the majority, including those who have little to show by way of formal qualifications and achievement, or who have not been involved in systematic learning since leaving compulsory education, and who have no plans to do so.

In starting to tackle this divide there will have to be a massive campaign to bring about a revolution in attitudes and approach that shifts the balance towards a greater sharing of responsibility for LL between individuals, employers and the state. It has to be a shared partnership. Notwithstanding the

important and expanding contribution of colleges of further education and universities to LL, especially in relation to increasing access and providing more places, there will have to be increased emphasis on learning in the home, community and workplace.

Cable television, the advent of the digital age with a huge multiplicity of channels and enhanced interactivity, CD ROMs and other distance learning packages, coupled with family learning schemes, opens up a huge potential for learning in the home. The Government is committed to setting up a 'National Learning Grid', which will give widespread access to information and tackle the potential danger of the emergence of an information underclass. A full range of learning materials will be available on the grid and it will link with the wide band network used by universities – JANET (the Joint Academic Network) and superJANET. This is especially important if we recognise the importance of individuals working at their own pace – one which fits their own circumstances and lifestyles. In relation to the community Britain has a long history of voluntary and community organisations, such as tenants and residents groups, and adult education through local authorities and the Workers Educational Association. Libraries and even community halls have the potential to become locations for learning. In the workplace there should be a major effort at enhancing and updating skills, especially amongst staff not normally involved in such activity. The role of national training organisations in each of the main sectors of employment provides a focus for action and offers benchmarks for progress. These are employer-led bodies which can set targets and standards (and which link with the NVQ framework), as well as national targets of achievement set by the Government. Small and medium-sized businesses can be supported by locally-based TECs, joint public/private sector bodies, which can assist in identifying training needs and act as a broker with local colleges and universities.

> *...Lessons can be*
> *learnt from our*
> *experience of*
> *increasing access...*

An important component of creating a learning society wherever it might be based is one of information and guidance. Colleges, universities and

TECs already have well-established centres for advice and guidance. In addition, however, the Government is proposing two further high profile sources. The first is a national 'freephone' telephone advice service and the second is the University for Industry (UfI). Once the latter is established it will incorporate the phone line into its information structure. The prime role of the UfI will not be one of designing or delivering education and training: it will only commission new materials where it has identified a gap. It will provide a convenient and accessible one stop help desk to assist individuals and employers to assess their learning needs and help them access the most appropriate learning package or local provider.

Sweden

The Swedish education system as a whole was shaped largely in the late 1960s and 1970s by an alliance of a socialist government and the trade union movement. The most important and underlying principle was equality of opportunity. The compulsory school up to the age of 16 is a comprehensive school without streaming by ability and open to all. All young people up to the age of 20 have the right to begin studies in an upper secondary school, which leads to work or university. Adult Education for those aged over 20 has been described as the 'jewel in the crown' of Swedish Education. There have been recent reforms in all sectors, and whereas the system remains highly regulated there is plenty of choice within it.

There are not supposed to be any dead ends either for those in the school system or for those in the adult system, and the aim is to have coherence between each level and within so that progression is easily achievable. At whatever stage one is at, the emphasis is on preparation for life in a changing society and constantly changing labour market. Continuing Education can thus be seen as one aspect of equality of opportunity.

Post compulsory education for young people takes the form of initial vocational education in the Upper Secondary School (USS). The system was reformed in 1995/96 with over 500 different subject areas being reduced to 16 nationally determined study programmes of 3 years duration. Of these, 14 are primarily vocational and two are for preparation for university.

Within the framework of the USS it is possible to put together a new form of education for an apprentice, that is, one whose main aim is to move into work in the near future and for whom the mainstream vocational programmes would be too theoretical. It is carried out in partnership with employers who organise the on-the-job training component.

It is worth noting that the USS has virtually become a compulsory form of education by default

because of an increasing lack of jobs for those wishing to leave school at 16 with no skills. Until the reform, this was beginning to create an element of dissatisfaction amongst those who were there because they had no choice, not because they saw it as a route to advancement. Central government set the number of places and their distribution in relation to Labour Market studies. This curtailed the element of individual choice. However as the pace of change quickened, and the labour market fragmented into a more complex system, it became increasingly difficult to plan at this level. There was also increasing evidence that the direct link between subject studied and employment was breaking down and that attainment of core or transferable skills was as important as a particular job skill. The reduction in the large number of subjects and their replacement by courses of study, coupled with free choice, has not only increased the numbers in USS and reduced dropout, but it has also increased the throughput to universities. (There has however been a worrying reduction in those following a course of study in science and technology.) Courses have become more general, but with an effort to breakdown barriers between academic and vocation, and to see them as merely a first step in a journey of LL. Specialisation now comes later and has become the financial responsibility of the employer, as an additional cost for them to bear.

...in Britain there

is still a deep

learning divide...

Beyond this the choice is the world of work (if available) or university. In 1977 all post-USS education was virtually in a single university system. This had a strong element of centralised national planning and regulation. The aims, length, location and funding of study programmes were laid down by Government. Until 1989, the Government even determined the curricula for each programme of study. In 1993 a new Higher Education Act deregulated this unitary system of higher education and gave greater autonomy to individual institutions to determine the organisation of study and range of courses on offer.

There are two main types of degree – general or professional. Increasingly a number of programmes include an element of work placement in a relevant industrial or commercial company. Participation rates have risen steadily so that some 30% of young people move from the USS into higher education.

An increasing number of mature students are also entering university.

In addition to postgraduate courses and research, it is possible to take a three-semester course of study leading to a Higher Technical Vocational Qualification. It aims to give a broader and deeper knowledge in a specific vocational field. It is taught by relevant practitioners and is open to those with either a USS qualification and four years' experience in the relevant field, or 6 years' relevant experience alone.

The other part of the jigsaw of LL is Adult Education. Public adult education is part of the school system regulated under the School Act and the responsibility of the municipality. It takes different forms dependent on the aspirations and choice of the individual. It is possible to choose ones own study programme by putting together separate courses organised in a flexible manner to fit in with employment and lifestyle. There are no formal entry requirements or leaving examinations, and studies can lead to formal qualifications in individual subjects or a complete course equivalent to the leaving certificate of the compulsory or upper secondary school.

Basic Adult Education confers knowledge and skills equivalent to compulsory school and is available as a right. Upper Secondary Adult Education uses the same material as, and is equivalent to, the vocationally oriented youth education at USS. There is no automatic entitlement to provide this after the age of 20, but municipalities are encouraged to make provision according to need. Supplementary Adult Education makes available vocational education courses not available in the youth sector. Courses can lead to higher professional competence or competence in a new profession. Study Circle activities do not confer any formal qualifications but cater for the learning activities of 25% of the adult population.

There has been an increasing realisation of the importance of continuing vocational education for adults in relation to growing global competition and rapid technological change. A recent study using OECD indicators for education revealed a growing gap between the generations. Compared to other industrialised countries Sweden has a relatively high proportion of those aged 24 to 34 with equivalent secondary education qualification (85%). This falls to only 61% for the 45 to 54 age group, much lower than in other countries. However by the year 2000, 80% of the labour force will be in the labour market. The need for renewal of competence each year will be 10 to 15% of the workforce, compared to 2% entry by newly qualified young persons.

This is a huge target to achieve, and it is curious, if not unfortunate, that this awareness of the need has come to the fore when there has been a change

in ideology with the election of a conservative government in 1991. This has been signalled by a change in direction away from the public education system. The budgets in 1992 and 1993 shifted public funding towards initial education and away from adult and continuing education – the two areas that had been at the heart of Swedish education since the 1960s.

In 1991, in an effort to expand training in relation to the demands of the economy without incurring an increase in public expenditure, public educational institutions were allowed to 'sell' education. This meant that more education could now be commissioned by external bodies, primarily employers in both the public and private sectors. Perhaps more significantly these employers could decide who received education and training. Thus the opportunity to receive adult education at public institutions partly depends on circumstances and decisions in the workplace. Expansion of adult education is increasingly reliant on employer sponsorship in the context of the market forces. Thus there is unlikely to be equality of access: it will depend on position in the work hierarchy. Experience has shown that participation rates vary from around 69% in the better educated groups to as low as 15% in some blue collar groups. Those in higher positions, usually the best educated, tend to follow more academic externally provided courses, whilst the more unskilled workers will tend to receive shorter on-the-job-training. This is not helped by difficulty in resolving issues around the role of competencies and their certification. This trend is unlikely to address the twin problems of the large number of older workers with low qualification levels and the explosion in demand for updating and continuing professional development.

Germany

The German model of Vocational Education is highly regarded and often held up as a model for Europe and the rest of the world. It has been described as a system for achieving social solidarity as much as skills acquisition. It combines skill development and training through college-based learning and on-the-job training, and hence is known as the 'dual system'. It however does rely on heavy direct government investment, and can be contrasted with the British approach, which is far more of a market-oriented model with lower levels of public investment.

The German system is based on the old European tradition of the formal apprenticeship to a trade, which still holds as the pattern for qualification by young people in the world of work. It covers all sectors of the economy, and it is difficult to progress in the labour market without this formal qualification. This is unique today in Europe, where

the general tendency is to move more towards the certification of competencies rather than to demand skills qualification.

The German system is founded on a formal partnership between education and industry and commerce. This partnership is highly regulated and dates back in its present form to the 1969 Vocational Training Act. Any company that takes on a trainee must provide them with accredited training. The system is called 'dual' because vocational training and occupational training are provided simultaneously (that is, during a single programme of work and study) to participants by schools and employers respectively. Theoretical aspects of training are provided in publicly run and financed vocational secondary schools, and practical aspects in companies, which provide and finance the apprenticeship. The programme usually lasts three years with about one or one-and-a-half days each week spent in school, and the rest with the company. There is a strong tradition of participation by small firms, an issue that causes some difficulty in other countries. However the apprentices in small firms acquire their skills 'by doing', whereas larger concerns will often have specialist training centres.

...there will have to be

increased emphasis on

learning in the home,

community and

workplace...

As has been said the dual system is highly regulated and corporatist in approach. On the Government side a formal agreement between the federal government and the Lander (state) Ministries of Education sets out the procedures for the co-ordination of education and training. There is a Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB), which has a wide range of regulatory responsibilities, including: reform; drawing up changes to training laws, standards or curricula after they have been deliberated on at length by employers associations, unions and state governments; monitoring of cost and effectiveness through nation-wide surveys; and financing state initiatives to increase vocational training. Vocational schools are run by Lander Ministries of Education in partnership with

municipalities or district councils, which fund equipment and material costs while the Lander fund personnel. On the employer side, the company bears the direct costs of the vocational training component, which includes the wage of the apprentice. All employers belong to regional employer associations, called Chambers of Industry. Regulatory control of the vocational training element is decentralised amongst 480 regional chambers. Each of these will have a vocational training committee (VTC) which include representatives from unions and vocational education teachers. The role of the VTCs includes determining suitability of firms to provide training, monitoring of quality of training provided. Chambers also set up examination committees for each occupation and conduct and pay for examinations.

With such a multiplicity of players on both sides of the process it is not surprising that the system has been described as over regulated and a bureaucratic nightmare. Yet it is a comprehensive system, given that the manufacturing and services categories, in which most apprentices are trained, cover nearly 90% of all employment in Germany. However alongside the comprehensiveness is a degree of inflexibility in its relationship with the labour market. Training is provided in over 370 formally defined occupations and job changes may require considerable formal job retraining. Again, the emphasis on formal qualification in each occupation contrasts with the trend elsewhere towards acquisition of more general core or transferable skills. The Swedish experience described above is an example of moving towards this more general approach within the framework of a regulated public provision, although it has so far failed to achieve the same degree of partnership between state and employer as the Germans have.

...In the workplace there should be a major effort at enhancing and updating skills...

The 'dual system' makes employers responsible for the training and socialisation of young people.

However the system is highly dependent on private training initiatives, which are themselves dependent on a strong economy: the basis of the system is rooted in the strong German economy of the 1960s. Between the mid-1960s and mid-70s, the budget for vocational training increased threefold. It started to founder in the early 1980s, picked up again in the late 80s, but against the background of the costs of German re-unification things are looking bleak again. Over recent years, employers have again cut back on the number of apprenticeships and for the first time in 10 years there are more young people seeking them than are available.

In conclusion the German 'dual system' has been described by the European Union in the 1995/1996 White paper as a promising approach to dealing with the qualification problem. However it does also question the value of the qualifications gained, and poses the question as to whether there might be other modes of delivery which will open up wider career opportunities. Taking account of the structural changes ubiquitous in all the member states, the EU is also in favour of promoting a more competence-based approach associated with the idea of personal training portfolios. This approach offers a considerable degree of flexibility and openness not linked to specific curricula or training arrangements.

In relation to these more flexible arrangements, the Commission pleads for more equality between general and vocational education and for a more universal system of learning that allows for more accreditation of prior learning and a wider variety of learning environments.

The German system has produced a greater proportion of formally qualified workers than in Britain. In the 1980s, two thirds of the British workforce were 'unqualified' compared to only one third in Germany. However Britain had a relatively higher proportion of degree holders which would point to a different pattern of skill utilisation. Qualifications are not the same as skills. Whereas the German employers insist on formal qualifications before a person enters a job, the British tend to seek work experience. Moreover the high incidence of training amongst young Germans is not reflected in older age groups and for a long time older workers in Britain have received more training than their German counterparts. Moreover the position in Britain has improved considerably in recent years with a startling increase in qualifications held by the working age population. National Vocational Qualifications and the broader qualifications framework have been introduced; the National Curriculum has been adopted in schools; national education and training targets have been set; and there has been mass expansion of the Higher Education Sector. This approach has been reinforced in the British Government's Green Paper (April 1998).

Conclusions

What lessons can be learnt from the above? Firstly LL is an essential feature of the future prosperity of this country in relation to an appropriately trained and skilled workforce at all levels in the face of global competitiveness. Yet the examples given here show that this road to the future is vulnerable to the fluctuating economic conditions of the present. LL cannot be done on the cheap, but it would also appear that it cannot be funded from a single source. The Swedish example, so well developed in the context of a centrally planned system, is sensitive to the needs to curb public expenditure. The German example, developed as an integrated partnership between the state and the private sector, is sensitive to downturns in the economic cycle that affects the ability and will of employers to meet their obligations. The British approach to LL recognises that there is a shared responsibility between individuals, educational providers (in the broadest sense), employers, and central and local authorities. Government policy is to set out a framework with some seeding funds to capitalise on this.

The second lesson is that universities and colleges – the traditional players in the post school market – need to carefully examine their role. Individual Learning Accounts, the UfI (or whatever it ends up as), the Internet and Learning Grid, the advent of digital TV and more all open up a huge potential for intervention in the learning process from other providers. They may already be far more skilled and far more at ease in interacting with their customers at all hours of the day in their homes, workplaces, community halls, shopping centres and libraries. The types of association described above between the University of Luton and other local educational and training providers, or the more formal merger of Leeds Metropolitan University and local further education Colleges may be the way of the future and could provide a recognisable context for developing LL. However higher education managers need to look beyond the confines of their institutions, not only to provide the resources needed for LL, but also to reach out to those who are not yet engaged and who are not best served by the traditional methods or locations of learning. Both the emergence and creation of a culture of LL is an opportunity and a challenge for managers in the higher education and further education sectors. If not addressed and taken up they might find that their role and that of their institutions will diminish as others take up the gauntlet thrown down by the Government in its Green Paper.

Further reading

The following sources were consulted in the preparation of this paper:

The Report of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century (1993) Chaired by Jacques Delors (Geneva: UNESCO).

White Paper on Growth Competitiveness and Employment (1993) (Luxembourg: European Commission).

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Kjell Rubenson (1995) 'Recurrent Education in Sweden: A Moving target'. In Paul Belanger and Ettore Gelpi (eds) *Lifelong Education* (Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education).

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The European Journal of Education (September 1995), **30**, No 3.

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book review

Benchmarking in Higher Education: A study conducted by the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service

(UNESCO, 1998, New Papers on Higher Education, Number 21)

Reviewed by David Palfreyman

This stapled paperback of some 125 pages has seven essays on the experience of benchmarking in Higher Education within the USA, Canada, continental Europe, Australia, and the UK.

The opening remarks note that it is merely (but usefully) an early contribution 'to what will inevitably become an area of increasing interest in the years to come': 'The remaining years to the turn of the century are therefore likely to see a number of experiments and innovations in the application and use of benchmarking in higher education, and it is currently too early to predict whether they will be successful.'

What is benchmarking? A couple of definitions are offered: 'A self-improvement tool for organisations which allows them to compare themselves with others, to identify their comparative strengths and weaknesses, and learn how to improve. Benchmarking is a way of finding and adopting best practices'; 'The open and collaborative evaluation of services and processes with the aim of emulating best available practice'. Thus, the booklet goes on: 'A central purpose of benchmarking is therefore to provide managers with an external point of reference or standard for evaluating the quality and cost of their organisation's internal activities, and processes. It follows that benchmarking will not be effective if it simply takes a snapshot of a comparative situation. It needs to be an on-going, systematic process for measuring and comparing the work processes of one organisation with those of another by bringing an external focus on internal activities… To this extent there is some evidence that successful benchmarking is much more likely to take place in those organisations that are already relatively well managed and with a strong emphasis on innovation… and conversely are likely to be less affected in individualistic or autocratic cultures where the long-term discipline required for benchmarking is unlikely to be found. *This latter conclusion may, of course, have significant implications for universities'* (emphasis added!). Indeed, to hammer home the point the same essay adds

that hence benchmarking will be 'a challenge to the traditionally inward-looking decision-making systems of higher education'.

Even the essay on the USA concedes that benchmarking as she is known over there 'really is not true benchmarking; it is typically the systematic generation of management information that can produce performance indicators and *may* lead to the identification of benchmarks, but it does not often extend to benchmarking by identifying best practices and adapting them to achieve *continuous* improvement in one's own institutional context, and even when it does, it seldom goes 'outside the box' of one's peer organisations.' (emphasis added). The same essay notes that the scepticism towards benchmarking, and performance indicators generally, is considerably greater among Canadian universities. Hence the prediction for North American universities is that benchmarking 'will remain sporadic and that progress will continue to be halting', but that its application will steadily grow.

The Australian experience is not dissimilar, being confined to individual initiatives within higher education institutions, rather than some kind of sector-wide development. Much the same applies to continental Europe. Both essays, however, suggest that the concept will develop, whilst recognising that the application of the theory is 'anything but easy': 'The difficulties involved in this should not be under-estimated, and the failure to do so may result in a great danger of becoming frustrated, in project failure, or in producing results which are sheer nonsense' (much the same generic problem with performance indicators).

It is to be noted that there is a 'Commonwealth University Management Benchmarking Club', which, amongst UK HEIs, includes the membership of Liverpool, Durham, Leeds Metropolitan, Nottingham, and UMIST, together with institutions from Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand, and South Africa.

The essay on benchmarking in UK higher education, contributed by Helen Lund, makes the point that the Dearing Report pushes benchmarking by

suggesting that the Quality Assurance Agency should develop 'work in institutions to establish small expert teams to provide benchmark information on standards, in particular threshold standards, operating within the framework of qualifications, and completing the task by 2000'. Dearing also recommends that a Governing Body should 'systematically review, at least once every five years, with appropriate external assistance and benchmarks: its own effectiveness… the arrangements for discharging its obligations to the institution's external constituency; all major aspects of the institution's performance…'. That said, and despite a fairly sophisticated approach across UK higher education towards performance indicators (after some fifteen years of development), the concept of benchmarking has not significantly penetrated the sector. There are, however, interesting developments in isolated bits, as outlined by Lund – notably in the provision of library services, and the benchmarking of estates/facilities management. Reference is made to HEFCE developing interest in 'value-for-money studies'. Thus, whilst the concept of benchmarking is 'certainly alive and well in UK universities… the activity seems, however, to be still in its infancy…'. Yet, infants, as we know, do have a tendency to grow into sturdy and potentially stroppy children!

BOOKENDS

The Reviews Editor, David Palfreyman, undertakes a regular round up of 'essential' and 'desirable' texts, as well as 'books I need to heave heard of but will never get round to reading'. Readers are referred to the extensive biography in Warner and Palfreyman, *Higher Education Management: The Key Elements* **(SRHE/Open University Press, 1996) as a starting point. This feature builds on that.**

Any suggestions for entry should be sent to David Palfreyman, Bursar, New College, Oxford OX1 3BN, UK fax: 01865 279590, email: kate/hunter@new.ox.ac.uk.

● Palfreyman/Thomas/Warner, *How to Manage a Merger – Or Avoid One,* Heist, paperback, 114 pp., £9.95, 1998. Merger/collaboration is the future for many (most?) F/HE institutions in the UK – this is the theme of the three authors, and seems to be endorsed by the fact that the FEFC has launched a £25,000,000 fund for the encouragement of merger, collaboration, partnerships (and whatever other euphemisms one can think of!). The book reviews the literature on merger, including some classic cases (Royal Holloway & Bedford College), provides guidance to Chief Executives contemplating merger, gives a series of flow charts for working through the merger negotiations, and explores other forms of relationship short of merger. The book notes that merger amongst commercial organisations is glitzy and at present very much the trend, but warns that the factors driving commercial mergers (economies of sale, asset-stripping) do not seem to be as readily available in terms of mergers amongst educational institutions. An essential message is the need for appropriate Due Diligence work as part of the pre-nuptial exploration and contract.

● Evans, G.R., *Calling Academia to Account: Rights and Responsibilities,* SRHE/Open University Press, paperback, 242 pp., £19.99, 1999.
Gillian Evans will be known to many readers for her fearless defence of academic autonomy via her membership of the Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards and her long-running legal battle with her employer, the University of Cambridge (which ended up with a Judicial Review Hearing last year before Mr Justice Sedley). This book will be reviewed in a future issue of *perspectives*; it is an important read, but not an easy read, veering as it does between the philosophical question of just what is a university meant to be in 1990s society and the legal minutiae of case-law on the principles of natural justice/due process in relation to staff complaints/ grievances/promotions procedures, etc.

● Craddon (European University Institute), 'Old University Academic Staff Salary Movement since 1949' in *Higher Education Quarterly*, **52**, 394 – 412, 1998.
Grim reading for wage-slaves in British universities. Craddon records the steady decline of the status and salary of British academics, over the last half century. The worst years were the mid-1970s; older readers will recall AUT marching on Westminster trying to make 'Rectify the Anomaly' into a chantable slogan. Craddon wonders, however, whether the decline in salaries matters, since universities seem to be able to fill academic vacancies (apart from certain narrow academic specialisms), not least given the casualisation of the academic workforce over the last five or so years.

● Jary, D. and Parker, M, *The New Higher Education: Issues and Directions for the Post-Dearing University,* Staffordshire University Press, paperback, 360 pp., £20.00, 1998.
This book will be reviewed in a future issue of *perspectives*. It is a collection of essays, assessing where British HE is at, given the rapid transformation that has taken place from 'elite' to 'mass'. If the catchy titles of each chapter/essay are anything to go by, it will be a stimulating read…