



University
of Glasgow



Seminar: "More than inquiring minds?"

Event: "Critically Thinking Graduates?" 19 March 2008

Presented by the project team:

Dr Vicky Gunn (Project Director),

Dr Steve Draper

Ms Mel McKendrick (Project RA)

For the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences disciplinary area project
Of the Quality Enhancement Theme:

"Research-Teaching Linkages and Graduate Attributes"

<http://rtlinks.psy.gla.ac.uk/>

for many details, materials, case studies.

Project overview:

This project specifically examined the experience of academic staff within subject areas designated as either Arts and Humanities or Social Sciences. Perceptions of staff within these disciplinary areas were explored through the development of practice case studies. These case studies were constructed by the project's research assistant, Mel McKendrick, and Steve Draper, following semi-structured interviews that Mel undertook with 15 academics at institutions across Scotland and, also, on one occasion through the voluntary submission of a solicited example of practice in which the staff member filled in a template. (Disciplines covered Sociology, History, Literature, Theology, Psychology, Public Policy, Classics, Education). Additional information came from discussion that occurred in discipline-oriented workshops led by the project's director, Vicky Gunn, and both generic and discipline-specific educational literature.

Key Findings 1: Staff Perceptions

- Staff were enthusiastic about implementing research-type activities within their courses;
- Staff believed in the reciprocal nature of the relationship between staff and students. For many staff research informed and engaged students but students also informed research;
- Staff differed on their views about when to introduce 'research-teaching linkages' opportunities. There was a division between:
 - those who suggested that the process of progression meant that core skills were a better 'fit' in levels 1 & 2, with Honours as the focus of research-teaching linkages and,
 - those who saw it potentially running throughout the programme from level 1.
- Staff were not ideologically opposed to the notions of generic skills or graduate attributes but tended to struggle in the face of quality assurance language or phrases perceived as 'jargonistic';

Key Findings 2: Practical issues

- Staff noted a lack of continuity of practice between one level of study and another as well as between one course within a programme and another. In these cases the identification of systematic exposure to research-led practices is complex but should be considered as of value.
- Staff noted key implementation issues as:
 - managing the heightened anxiety of students who found the research-led learning environments unfamiliar;
 - clarifying course objectives and expectations;
 - timetabling constraints.
- Staff acknowledged that there was little in-depth evaluation of the courses, but where evaluation had taken place it suggested dislike of and resistance to the unfamiliarity of some of the processes, followed by recognition of the benefits once the course was completed.
- Most of the staff we interviewed believed the students did receive the research components with enthusiasm, whilst others were less convinced.
- In two cases there were perceived increases in exam scores since the introduction of the interventions.