

Practitioner-led research

LSIS Research Development Fellowships

Practitioners and academics are working together on projects which are tackling improvement issues across the learning and skills sector. These range from the use of peer assessment to improve learners' independent learning skills, to engagement and progression in STEM programmes by involving industrial partners in teaching and learning. Each group of participants was awarded one of 21 Research Development Fellowships, initiated and sponsored by LSIS, advised by IfL and guided and supported by the Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training at the University of Sunderland (SUNCETT). An intensive induction event in October 2009, commenced the projects and there will be a research conference in March 2010, when fellows will present their findings to LSIS and IfL.

Sheila Kearney, LSIS' head of research and Maggie Gregson from SUNCETT realised early that the impact and success of the research development fellowships depended on getting the design of the

programme right. LSIS first commissioned a review of existing and previous programmes to support practitioner research which provided a framework for the design of this programme. Hence, according to Maggie, "they took account of the importance of providing practitioners with a space where they could feel confident in talking and writing about their practice and research". The practitioners identified research issues relevant to their own practice and will work together to try out new practice and evaluate its success for their setting.

A key factor is recognising how people can help each other learn and grow – in this case by experiencing new practice together, rather than being told what 'good practice' is by an external party and expected to apply this to their own setting. A key goal for LSIS and SUNCETT is to create a 'community of researchers' in which the practitioners will feel a sense of belonging and become confident that they are well equipped to see a project through to the end. One of the objectives of the programme is to support the fellows in the design of their projects so that they stand a good chance of producing transferable learning and cultivation of research champions for the sector.

This table gives a flavour of some of the projects.

| WHO | WHAT | HOW |
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| Hilary Eyres learning resources advisor Learning Resource Centre Cambridge Regional College | Partnership working to integrate information skills into the FE curriculum | Hilary is collaborating with academic staff from across subjects and disciplines at the college to identify the appropriate information skills needed for various subjects, and intends to develop, trial and evaluate a range of strategies which aim to improve learner's applications of these skills in their learning. |
| John Henry/Tim Bartlett senior tutors Bedford College | Vocational Workshops for Level 3: Optimising Frequency and Duration in FE Science | John and Tim are exploring the impact of tutorial support and ideas and strategies on learner performance, independence and motivation. They are proposing to trial and evaluate different ways of organising tutorial workshops. |
| Marcin Lewandowski centre manager/ESOL tutor Action Acton Ltd, London | The role of technology in language development | In Marcin's project, ESOL learners are collaborating with their peers to conduct recordings of conversational practice in class. Learners are able to listen back to the recordings and are given the opportunity to constructively criticise their use of English through self and guided peer assessment. Learners will then repeat and evaluate the exercise taking into consideration feedback and identified points for improvement. |
| Julie Osborn manager for disability and mental health support services City of Bristol College | How effectively are disabled learners using access technology in higher education? | Through interviews with teachers and learners, Julie's project is identifying the barriers learners face in using technology, and the impact technology has on the retention and achievement of disabled learners. |
| Yousef Taktak/Tony Oakley STEM coordinators Rotherham College of Arts & Technology South Yorkshire | Improvement of Level 3 learners' retention rates, engagement & progression in STEM programmes by involving industrial partners in teaching & learning | Yousef and Tony are giving learners opportunities to link up with employers so that they better understand how STEM subjects are used in industrial settings. The project will help produce a framework to allow collaboration, partnerships and information flow between industry and the post-compulsory education and training (PCET) sector. |
| Anne Taylor lecturer/course manager Colchester Institute | Using formative peer assessment creatively to improve critical thinking skills and empower learners | Anne is investigating whether peer formative assessment can be used to improve learners' independent learning skills. Various methods of achieving this will be trialled and evaluated. |

Further information about each of the 21 Fellowships is available at www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=200603