



staff development forum

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From the Chair



Sue Law, SDF Chair,
at the Spring Conference

2008-9 has been an eventful year so far for the SDF—After appointing a new Executive team in October, SDF colleagues presented an overview of our activities at the annual SDF-LFHE Staff Development Conference, held in Edinburgh in early November. We then welcomed several new regional representatives and agreed a clear, targeted Action Plan at our January 2009 Council meeting in Liverpool. By April, Paul Dixon and colleagues in the North West Regional Group were hosting our very successful second SDF Spring Conference at the MacDonald Hotel,

Manchester and a little later that month, in addition to taking forward other activities and clarifying some constitutional matters, Council agreed outline plans for our 2010 Spring Conference, with organisation to be led by Clive Betts (SDF Council's South West regional representative), and to take place in Bristol.

Importantly, at our last Council meeting we also confirmed plans for a crucial development led by our Professional Development Task Group, which is coordinated by John Doidge. We hope this will offer real benefits to the wider staff development community. At a time of significant economic and social challenge, this key SDF motivation - our commitment to professional development and particularly to 'developing the developers' -

takes on a sharper and greater importance. The work currently being undertaken by our PD task group is a clear demonstration of this commitment and of the view that '*All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded the individual*' (Einstein).

This work has two main strands. Firstly, during 2009-10, we plan to establish a workshop/seminar series focused on supporting the needs of those in development roles, whether as administrators, practitioners or leaders/managers.

We are keen to ensure that these offerings are topical, timely and practical, focused on skills development and—wherever possible—on policy formulation and implementation issues. Of course, being staff developers, we are only too aware that 'the best laid plans...' may not go as we would wish, so we know there is no room for complacency!

Secondly, while it will take time to develop, we are also pleased to report that our PD team is exploring with SEDA (Staff and Educational Development Association) the potential for developing a qualifications pathway, based on existing accreditation frameworks, which would provide scope for professional recognition, including the establishment of an 'SDF Fellowship'.

If you have any suggestions for workshops – or better still would like to offer something as part of our 'menu' – please don't hesitate to contact Matt Levi (m.r.levi@exeter.ac.uk)

Although it is quite an ambitious agenda, as Linus Pauling, the Nobel Laureate in Chemistry once argued '*The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas*'. So by adopting our 'nothing ventured' approach, we see this as a timely development and one which, despite the difficult economic climate, we should not delay in taking forward. After all, as the Japanese proverb says, '*When you're thirsty, it's too late to dig the well*'.

Sue Law, SDF Chair

A word from the editors

This edition of *SDF Update* is issued a little later than originally planned to allow Sue Law, in her report from the Chair (above), to include matters from the recent meeting of the SDF Council, and also to enable reporting on this year's SDF Spring Conference (back page).

Producing this newsletter is an important part of the work of the newly created SDF 'Marketing and Communications' team. Its responsibilities span a number of aspects of SDF work, and significant effort has recently gone into a complete redesign of the SDF website, on a new platform. This will bring a host of benefits, and the new website will be released during the summer. The address will be unchanged, at www.staffdevelopment.ac.uk

The Marketing and Communications team consists Claire Bradshaw, Becky Robson, Matt Levi, Andy Mee and myself as convenor. If there are matters you want to raise about any aspect of our 'MarCom' work, please don't hesitate to get in touch via p.anstey@uea.ac.uk

Meanwhile, we hope you will find this edition of *Update* interesting and stimulating, and we welcome comments and suggestions for future editions—please see the back page.

Paddy Anstey, for the *Update* editorial team



The new MarCom team has oversight of both paper and electronic communications

SDF UPDATE

New to staff development in academia? You are not alone!

We interview Sophie Sowerby of Durham University, and hear what it's like—and how her regional staff development group (NESD) has helped



Old and new at Durham University... the Calman Centre (left) is next to where new-arrival Sophie works, and offers a contrast with much of the rest of the campus (far left)

So Sophie—what attracted you to a Staff Development Role at Durham University?

I considered the role would provide me with a professional challenge working for a renowned and well respected Higher Education Institution. As Higher Education is a fast changing environment I relished the challenge of working for a premier university bringing experiences derived from my career to date that has found me working within the private and public sector in both commercially competitive and highly professional environments.

How does Staff Development fit in?

Durham University values individual development and is committed to enhancing the leadership capabilities of its staff. I felt that there was no better time to work in such an organisation when the opportunity to contribute ideas and develop best practice in an evolving environment was welcomed and encouraged.

What is it like working in Academia for the first time?

As I have worked in the public sector before some aspects are familiar, such as the range of stakeholders and governance issues when dealing with the public purse. What is new is the longer lead in times for projects. As educational achievement is not something that is easy to commodify I realise that I am dealing with a sophisticated entity and there are a number of different aspects of HE life to get to grips with. Durham University is well set up to support you when you are floundering and I have received excellent guidance from both academic and non academic staff.

Choose 3 words to describe your role?

Convener
Enabler
Supporter

What are the unique challenges you are facing?

Creating networks within a multi-layered complex organisation and maximising the use of IT based resources to support the delivery of any training that I am involved with.

What do you love most about your job?

The opportunity to facilitate others to develop their skills and abilities and at the same time expand my own knowledge and learning. Plus working within an environment where individuals at all levels are involved with exciting and fascinating activities, and are prepared to challenge the status quo.

What is the most exciting thing you have achieved so far?

Early days yet! However the training team attended the National Training Awards and met Colin Jackson! We have won the HEAT Apprentice Award and are entering the National Training Awards 2009.

What challenges can you see on the horizon?

As an individual, retaining perspective and ensuring that I maintain a view on the external HE environment to ensure that Durham constantly learns from best practice.

Organisationally, developing leadership capabilities within all levels of the organisation and finding a way to support the academic ethos with appropriate management activities.

How has the North East Staff Development Group (NESD) supported you in your new role?

The NESD group have provided me with a fantastic network of like-minded training and development professionals who are willing to share best practice and work collaboratively on key issues affecting HE today. For example, I am currently looking at the potential of Mentoring and Coaching across HE establishments and have gained incredible support from the NESD members in the area.

Where would you like to be in 5 years time?

To have made a significant contribution to the leadership and management development capabilities of the staff at Durham University. To enable them to contend with the challenges and changes associated with ensuring that Durham retains its premier voice in the world of Higher Education. To continue supporting them remotely whilst sailing around the Whitsunday Islands!

Thank you, Sophie—and welcome to the staff development community!



Make a difference—your job depends on it

staff development
forum

Leadership
Foundation
for Higher Education

Particularly in today's cold economic climate, it is essential that we consider how we can make - and demonstrate - a positive difference in our institutions. 'Making a positive difference' is therefore a highly appropriate theme for the 2009 SDF/LFHE Annual Staff Developers' Conference, to be held in Cardiff on 4-6th November.

Building on feedback from previous years, the 2009 conference aims to encourage networking before, during and after the event, making the most of technology as well as face-to-face discussions. It will also encourage an even wider range of contributions, both scholarly and practical, to acknowledge the wealth of experience and knowledge delegates bring, as well as

recognising the increasing number of developers undertaking research through funded projects or higher degrees.

The SDF/LFHE Annual Conference has long been recognised in our community as one of the major events in the year, and bookings are now open through the LFHE website—see <http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/membership/sdc2009>

Key dates are:

- Friday 3 July 2009 - deadline for early-bird bookings
- Wednesday 30 September 2009 - deadline for full-rate bookings

Communicate news or needs via the Staff Development Forum email list

sdf@jiscmail.ac.uk

Broadening Researcher Career Horizons at Manchester University

Of all the facets of our profession, research development has possibly been most fragmented. Should postgraduate research skills and research career development be undertaken centrally? Even now, individual academic departments may see 'Roberts money' as their money and begrudge it going beyond their departmental boundary. Should the work be taken in with the nurturing of staff researchers? Should the whole lot be part of a still larger central development unit, so that those with other specialisms can easily complement those with a specifically research support remit? Of course, one size can never fit all and we have a microcosm of the wider debate—an organisational debate that affects us all. If that wider debate is of interest, you may wish to read the SDF document *Executive Briefing - Developing capability in the university*, available as a pdf from the SDF website.

This article, contributed by Claire Hughes, tells us about her work at Manchester University.



Over recent years the provision of transferable skills training for research students and research staff has been high on the national agenda with a number of factors contributing to this shift in culture, including the Roberts Report *SET for Success* (2003), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code of Practice for Research Degrees, and more recently the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. As a result of the government accepting the main recommendations of the Roberts Review, HEIs have been receiving dedicated funds to provide additional transferable skills training for research students and research staff.

These dedicated funds (widely referred to as Roberts money) have enabled the University of Manchester to expand and enhance the range of personal, professional and career development opportunities offered to researchers and provide mechanisms which assist researchers in identify training and development needs. The ethos underpinning all our training is to equip researchers with personal and professional opportunities which will help them to succeed both at Manchester and in their chosen career path.

Training opportunities are predominantly delivered via dedicated faculty researcher training teams and cover areas such as personal effectiveness, leadership and management, communication skills, networking and team working, career management and entrepreneurship. Specific research staff training provisions include an innovative 15 month leadership and management programme which is targeted at aspiring research group leaders and encompasses areas such as performance management, leading/managing

change, managing finances, and how to motivate and support individual researchers; a two day careers options event which enables research staff to look beyond their immediate research roles and explore the vast range of career options available to them and gain tips and advice on how to make that next career step; mentoring opportunities for those research staff who are interested in exploring the possibility of commercialising their research and acquiring skills to explore potential markets and undertake competitor analysis.

In the development of our training provisions full recognition has been given to the varying needs of our researchers and the need for flexibility within our programmes. The University has developed a series of online training modules covering key aspects of personal, professional and career development needs to enable researchers to 'dip in and out' at the point of need. To view the full breadth of training available to postgraduate researchers and research staff please visit www.researchsupport.manchester.ac.uk



Claire Hughes
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Planning ahead—for your own good

The world tends to take stock and reflect with each new calendar year, but for the typical development professional in HE, a more natural time could be the summer. The schedule of courses and workshops tends to get a little lighter and while there is necessarily planning for what you will offer your institution in the coming Academic Year, and maybe summer projects to get your teeth into, what about also planning for your own development?

Schedule space in your calendar, now, to protect the time before it gets taken up. How much time per week (or month) are you planning to set aside for this? Make a list of things you want to do. You might include, for example...

- Get to know another developer who shares your area of specialism but works in a different HEI, so you can informally learn from each other. Maybe plan reciprocal visits? Immediate colleagues, conference delegate lists, HEI websites or your regional staff development group could each help you get in touch.
- Identify a relevant area outside your present skills set and determine to acquire those skills. What books/videos might relate? Who might you talk to about it?

- Find out about a different area of development, to broaden your awareness. So if you are mostly into personal development, what about (say) educational development? Or if you are mostly into IT training, what about organisational development? If you are an educational developer, what about researchers? And so on...



We developers are generally highly creative people, so get your thinking caps on!

And don't forget to schedule in your regional development group meetings, and preferably at least one SDF and one 'specialism' national conference—not to mention breaks for yourself, just to unwind and relax!

Visit the Staff Development Forum website
www.staffdevelopment.ac.uk



SDF Spring Conference: *Out on the Floor*

Becky Robson has a word with conference organiser Paul Dixon, from Manchester University...

What purpose, Paul, do you feel the Spring Conference has in the Staff Development calendar?

A kind of bridge really. The November conference is a sort of high spot for many but genuinely some people are sometimes overwhelmed by this, the size and numbers of people involved. I personally tend to find less value in big pelerines where senior people often take the opportunity to talk about their strategic brilliance without offering up to much that is of practical value. As a member of the SDF Council I am committed to doing things that are manifest and practical that support folks' CPD and help them with their work, so the more we can do by way of things like the Spring Conference the better really.

Why is the Spring Conference important?

The idea of a bridge between the November conferences, also not every HEI can afford to send people to the November event so if we have something that is over one night and less expensive then at least we are trying to cater for people's needs and encouraging all to try and get involved to some degree.

How did you come to lead the Spring Conference 2009?

I volunteered on behalf of the North West Region. I thought the venue for the 2008 Conference at UEA was a little difficult for some people to get to, so on the way back from that I figured that to offer it in Manchester might help with travel. Subsequently SDF revised their thinking regarding ownership of the Spring Conference so that each regional group hosts it in turn. This means that people form different regions can get involved and the hosting region has a great motivation to do a good job for other regions. It also helps with the idea of regional bonding and networking



What has been the biggest challenge in getting it all arranged?

The logistics and numbers, that kind of thing. I was very reliant on one of my Manchester colleagues who did a fantastic job with all the detail things that are not my forte. The main personal challenge for me was hitting the target of 60 we had set for numbers attending. In the end we had 58 people on a residential basis and 7 attending each day, so overall we exceed the target.

What attracted you to the venue – Manchester McDonald Hotel and Spa?

My colleagues had been sourcing a few hotels for us to use and they raved about the Manchester McDonald, who offered us a great introductory delegate rate. Also it was a stone's throw from the railway station so seemed a good bet. The rooms were really good and the staff were very helpful, so I would recommend the place to anyone.

There was an exciting mix of parallel sessions. In setting them up, what did you look for in the speakers?

People who would do things differently and offer novel approaches. I had first hand experience of a lot of the people concerned. Annette had done a Brain Friendly Learning session for the North West Region which went down great, Stuart was given the remit of challenging and doing something different, and I have worked with Kevin Dennison as an NLP Trainer.

In your view how did it go?

There was one session which might have been better planned and those who were there will know what that was – but I guess you try something and it can't always got to plan; that's life though.

What do you feel have been the biggest achievements and successes?

For me something must have happened that kind of encouraged people to talk with each other and share their experiences. The dinner was great for that, and overall the Conference had a really good feel and buzz throughout.

What has the feedback suggested?

It confirmed the dodgy session I referred to, the rest on balance was very good. People valued the 'hands-on' focus, the networking and the venue, so overall a success—with a couple of learning points to think about for the future.

What do you think we need to consider for the Spring Conference 2010?

Try and keep the hands-on focus, try for the novel and unusual, advertise as soon as possible in order that it can get in people's diaries, and finally pay attention to the venue—so that it is as accessible as possible.

Thank you, Paul



For your diary...



**SDF/LFHE Annual
Staff Developers' Conference**

Cardiff — 4-6th November 2009

About *Update*—and a call for contributions

Update is the twice-yearly newsletter of the Staff Development Forum. Limited numbers of paper copies are distributed to HEIs in the UK, and it is available as a PDF download from the SDF website. The next edition is due for publication in the Autumn of 2009. If you have news you would like to share, or suggestions or comments on this issue, then we'd like to hear from you. Just contact one of the Editorial and Production Team, listed below.

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