What is topical/emergent in Research-Teaching Linkages?

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Introduction

This paper provides a brief introduction to emergent trends related to the Research-Teaching Linkages Enhancement Theme. It focuses on three core areas of topicality:

- integrating research-teaching linkages into other Enhancement Themes
- addressing inclusivity through enhanced research-teaching linkages
- exploring comparisons between research-teaching linkages and student experience.

Integrating research-teaching linkages into other Enhancement Themes

It was noted in this project's previous paper that, rather than being seen as inherently separate, research-teaching linkages and employability can be fruitfully integrated within curricular activity. Some institutions have taken this process of integration a step further by exploring how an institution can bring together the full range of Enhancement Themes for learning, teaching and assessment development through the Graduates for 21st Century agenda.

Such a process of integration is complex. From the outset it requires:

- Commitment to partnership working across an institution's typical organisational boundaries. This means establishing groups whose membership includes academics, students, quality assurance officers, careers and PDP officers, employers, educational developers and, where possible, the engaged sceptics (academics and students who don't necessarily see why they should engage with such a process). This latter group is particularly important in representational terms as their concerns often bring vertical challenges to what can be very horizontal development assumptions. If their concerns cannot be adequately addressed, then it is more than possible the horizontal approaches will meet with appropriate resistance when any attempts at implementation are made.
- Recognition that partnership working is hard. There is a multiplicity of uncontrollable factors in the context of the partnerships. These include:
  - each organisational unit within an institution will have its own identity, perception of relevant role within the 'bigger picture', and ways of working. These identities and perceptions do not always align mutually with the other 'players' in the partnership
  - disciplinary identities are 'trans-institutional' in composition, focusing as they do on knowledge development that is based around certain, increasingly global, assumptions about the core aspects and ways of working of the discipline. The role of the Research Excellence Framework in restating that identity cannot be underestimated, but neither can

the sheer motivational force of disciplinary identities. As drivers for academic staff, they are critical and partnerships that invalidate them do so at the peril of stymieing staff engagement.

- A resource commitment to support and encourage 'buy-in' by discipline specialists.
- Recognition that such a process of integration is a long-term aspiration and cannot just be achieved through either minor changes to sections of programmes or the production of descriptive documents.

The diagram below suggests a map for considering how to build partnerships to work on the integration of Enhancement Themes.

Vertical but inter-linked questions - What are the links between the Enhancement Themes?			
• *In common* aspects of the Themes? • *Theme-specific* aspects? • *Complementary* aspects of the Themes?			
RESEARCH-TEACHING LINKAGES: Identify why this is the best starting point for curriculum enhancement.	**EMPLOYABILITY and WORK-RELATED LEARNING** What are the possible alternative social environments in which to develop research-like attitudes, skills, capabilities?	**ASSESSMENT** Assessing to encourage engagement with these processes? Assessment to check students have learned what we want them to learn?	How do we pull all of this together for the students through: **FEEDBACK and (where relevant) PERSONAL DEVELOP-MENT PLANNING?**
What are the discipline-specific ways of generating outputs that could inform assessment design? / How should we be 'decoding' the processes and procedures of the discipline to encourage investigative approaches in the students?	What can be identified as work-related specific only? How should these areas be documented or assessed?	What can be identified as Theme specific only? (ie are there some aspects of good assessment practice that exist independently of other curricular activities?	
Horizontal but interlinked questions			
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT from transition into FIRST YEAR through to post-doctoral experience What role can the students play in developing the curriculum?			
Employer engagement What are employers looking for from our graduates? Where can we supply the support for this? When and where is it best done by the employers?			
Partnership working with careers units, student services, quality assurance officers, and educational developers How is transfer and adaptation of learning going to be achieved from the classroom to other settings? What does the research suggest about best practices or high impact interventions that encourage student development of the various attributes?			
How will links be made *in* and *across* courses that make up a particular programme?			

Diagram 1: working groups' starting place: thinking about integration

Addressing inclusivity through research-teaching linkages

A theme of continued and growing importance in discussions concerning research-teaching linkages is the role they play in encouraging students to participate fully in the processes of learning to which they are exposed and which they can influence while at university. Such a theme divides into at least three headings: student engagement; equality and diversity; research-teaching linkages and internationalisation.

Student engagement

Recently published research suggests that students do perceive the benefits of being in a research-intensive environment. At the same time, they also recognise certain disadvantages that arise from academic staff prioritising their research over their teaching (Healey, Jordan, Pell and Short, 2010).

Two clear emerging questions within the Research-Teaching Linkages Enhancement Theme are:

- How can students be encouraged to engage fully in their learning environments so that they (a) become aware of the research cultures in which they are immersed and (b) learn how to think and act explicitly in relation to these?
- How can academic staff be encouraged to (a) include students in their research activities at a variety of different levels in undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and (b) include students in such a way that authentic involvement and reciprocity are at the heart of the approaches?

A study from the USA's *Association for the Study of Higher Education* offers a useful tripartite paradigm for thinking about student engagement in research activities. In this publication, the authors (Hu, Scheuch, Schwartz, Gayles and Li, 2008) suggest that using a synthesis of research that has focused on student **involvement**, student **integration**, and student **socialisation** provides a solid basis for understanding student engagement in research and creative activities.

Overlaying such a paradigm need to be two core reflective questions:

- How do the environments of learning that we provide change the ways that students interact with the discipline?
- How do students change the discipline by the way they interact with us as mediated through the learning environments in which we meet, or do we have a hidden curriculum of self-replication?

Equality and diversity

Another emerging theme is the apparent relationship between research-teaching linkages and institutional approaches to widening access. The question of how we encourage the integration of **all** students into the research culture and activities of a university is central to this agenda. The literature on enhancing research-teaching linkages suggests a fairly consistent positive pattern of impact concerning engaging students in a manner that enhances inclusion (see especially Boyd and Wesemann, 2009).

As the *Equality Act (2010)* is rolled out as a single equality duty, it may well be that exploring enhanced research-teaching linkages (in the light of ensuring opportunities are advanced for all types and identities of learner), is an effective way for some institutions to simultaneously engage with both the Enhancement Themes and the equality and diversity agenda.

Research-teaching linkages and internationalisation

For institutions where a policy of increased internalisation is being prioritised, questions about how to link research activities and internationalised curricular activities are paramount. Equally important is how to engage students who are studying at a distance in enhanced research-teaching linkages that place an emphasis on student engagement. Arguably, the trans-national reach of much disciplinary research should provide an excellent context in which to link research, teaching and internationalisation. Additionally, the availability of new technologies can provide platforms for rethinking how research is generated within disciplines.

Transforming and internationalising curricular activities in such a manner that they also align with research-teaching linkages is not without its difficulties, however. Developing an internationalised research-based curriculum, encouraging inter-cultural awareness, and enabling international perspectives to suffuse the student experience cannot be done through minor tweaks to individual courses (for a useful case study see Leask, 2008). It is dependent on the sorts of partnership working outlined at the beginning of this paper as well as effective continuing professional educational development for academic staff.

Exploring comparisons between research-teaching linkages and the student experience

The development of instruments against which institutions are increasingly benchmarked is generating a trend of concern among academics about the relationship of research-intensivity and the student experience. It was noted earlier that the Healey et al study illustrated students' perception of disadvantage in terms of the availability of research-focused staff. In and of itself, this may not be seen as a big issue **if** survey results such as the National Student Survey (NSS) for the same subject area are relatively good when benchmarked by in-kind institutions elsewhere. When, however, there is a misalignment between the level of research-activity (identified for example by previous Research Assessment Exercise excellence) and the outcomes of the NSS, this provides academics with a real tension in terms of curriculum redesign and what they need to prioritise. In such a situation, the dataset provided by the NSS needs to be viewed as an invaluable resource for exploring curriculum review rather than a tool used to dictate curriculum changes (see Hagyard, 2009)

The tensions raised by the increasing use of public accountability instruments are exacerbated by a sense that the way research-teaching linkages have been elucidated is mechanistic and unrepresentative of how students experience immersion in the disciplines. For some disciplines, particularly but not exclusively related to the Humanities and the Social Sciences, it seems counter-intuitive to conceptualise how research-teaching linkages work via descriptions of teaching procedures. The idea that effective teaching of a discipline is always more than the sum of its parts is held as a fundamental belief. There is a viewpoint among some academic staff that research-teaching linkages' typologies describe mechanisms that can be used for 'diagnosing difficulties in teaching' rather than a concerted effort to enhance research outcomes and student experience simultaneously. Such a view is worth taking seriously. With respect to graduate attributes in a research-intensive environment, Professor Carolin Kreber recently noted that a focus on performance measurement can lead to superficial endeavours on the part of a given institution (Kreber, 2010).

To minimise such superficiality, institutions need to encourage focusing on a process of translating research graduate attributes into intended learning outcomes that become more than just lists that embody rhetoric but have little substance. To do this, at the same time as developing tools that describe the outcomes we and our students would like to see, we need also to be engaging in informed conversation about how these outcomes are actually achieved.

Projects to watch out for:

During 2010-11 Mike Healey will be leading a National Teaching Fellowship Scheme Project (funded by the Higher Education Academy) exploring creative honours projects. Details of the project can be found at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/ntfs/ntfsproject_Gloucestershire10.

Council of Undergraduate Research (USA) regularly produces publications relating to improving research-teaching linkages (see especially Boyd and Wesemann, 2009; Karukstis, and Elgren, 2009). Details can be found at: www.cur.org.

The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (ISSoTL) 2010 Conference in Liverpool (19-22 October) is holding a pre-conference full-day seminar session organised by the Council for Undergraduate Research (CUR), Mike Healey and Alan Jenkins on 'International Perspectives on Undergraduate Research and Inquiry'. Details can be found at: www.cur.org/pre-ISSOTL.html and www.issotl.org/conferences.html.

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