



Business,  
Management,  
Accountancy and  
Finance

# BMAF magazine

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## Editorial

Richard Atfield, Academic Developer / Senior Lecturer, BMAF Subject Centre

**It's New!** This magazine is a new venture for the Subject Centre and we hope you will find it of value. When we raised this idea in E-News and at the Key Contacts Meetings the feedback was very positive, particularly because it would be (and is!) available in both printed and electronic formats. There are a wide range of issues affecting lecturers in our subject areas and many are represented here. I am grateful for your contributions.

**Grants** We are launching the 2007-8 Training Research and Development Grants and look forward to applications. A number of the current grant-holders progress reports are published here and, if you are wondering about how it feels, Julia Pointon reflects on her first steps into research. This is a great opportunity for you to seek funds for that idea you always wanted to investigate but lacked time and money.

**Internationalisation** Many projects involve international students and we are grateful to Jane Berry, of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) for her thoughts. See also the latest copy of 'Academy Exchange' which focuses on the theme of internationalisation and this is well worth a read through:  
[www.heacademy.ac.uk/4131.htm](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/4131.htm)

With a high proportion of students in Business Schools drawn from across the world, also taught in their country by UK university teams, this is likely to remain a critical issue. In 'Academy Exchange', Paul Middlehurst stresses the need to:

- recognise that internationalisation is a process, which will develop and evolve
- appreciate the pervasiveness of internationalisation
- be clear that internationalisation cannot be a peripheral activity

**What are your experiences with 'international' students?**

**Part-Time Teachers** Business Schools and Schools of Health employ a considerable proportion of part-time teaching staff as a key part of the teaching team. BMAF is working with the Health Science and Practice Subject Centre and the Association of Business Schools on an HEA project to investigate the support available to part-time teachers. The aim is to compare support offered at university and school levels, and produce exemplar case studies of best practice in the development of part-time staff.  
**What do you think? What are your examples and issues?**

**BMAF Staff** The Subject Centre has been gradually building up its work during 2006 and now has most staff in place. The workshops have been well attended and evaluated and we are looking forward to the 2007 BMAF Conference at Aston University in early May. This offers the opportunity to network with colleagues and discuss issues that are specifically related to our subjects. Details of the programme and attendance are inside  
**See you at Aston, 2-4th May!**

**YOUR Magazine** This magazine is produced by the BMAF Subject Centre, but our aim is to reflect YOUR views through content contributed by subject lecturers. This is your opportunity to share an idea, describe a new approach or ask questions of your colleagues working in the same context.  
Next copy deadline: **11th May 2007**

## Issue 1 Contents

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## The Director's Cut

Professor Jean Woodall, Director, BMAF Subject Centre

The BMAF magazine is an exciting development for the Subject Centre and for the community. It is a great example of two-way communication and I am delighted that so much of the first issue content has been contributed by subject lecturers themselves. I congratulate current BMAF grant holders for all they have achieved and look forward to reviewing applications for the 2007/8 round. I also look forward to meeting many of you again at the BMAF Conference at Aston in May, which will be another excellent opportunity to share experiences and contribute to each other's learning.

# BMAF Annual Conference

## 2 - 4 May 2007

The BMAF Annual Conference is being held at the Lakeside Conference Centre, Aston University, Birmingham, from Wednesday 2nd to Friday 4th May.

This year the focus will be on the challenges facing learning and teaching in a globalised context and the contribution of research, evaluation and reflective practice to addressing this.

Conference streams:

1. The research-teaching nexus - what does it mean and how can it be delivered?
2. Enhancing the first year experience - what works and where is the evidence?
3. Research and reflection on practice - designing innovative and effective assessment with timely feedback for large groups.
4. Evidence from practice - developing the skills of scholarship and critical reflection among a diverse student body.
5. Enterprising students and staff - the importance of entrepreneurial learning for the needs of small businesses and big organisations.

6. Dealing with issues around retention and progression.
7. Beyond standards and recognition - supporting our own professional development as reflective practitioners.

### Conference Schedule

As last year, the conference will offer a varied diet of discussion papers, workshops, plenary, panel and poster sessions, and the prospect of a memorable dinner.

It will open at lunchtime on Wednesday May 2nd and finish at lunchtime on Friday May 4th. Day 1 aims to set the wider picture with keynote speakers, the poster competition and prize giving and ends with a drinks reception. Days 2 and 3 explore the wide range of topics and issues more depth, with the conference dinner in the evening of Day 2.

### Conference Fee

The fee for attendance, meals and accommodation on all three days is £365. Details of conference-only and day attendance fees are on the registration form.

Wednesday 2nd May	Thursday 3rd May	Friday 4th May
	9:00 - 10:30 Paper Session 1: (Streams 1-7)	9:00 - 10:00 Keynote Speaker 3: Professor Gilly Salmon, Leicester University.
	10:30 - 11:00 Refreshments	10:00 - 10:30 Refreshments
	11:00 - 12:30 Workshop Session 2	10:30 - 12:00 Workshop Session 3
12:00-13:30 Arrival, registration and lunch	12:30-13:30 2-course buffet lunch	12:00 - 12:30 Closing Plenary
13:30-14:00 Welcome, introductions and conference overview	13:30-14:30 Keynote Speaker 2: Dr David Sadler, Higher Education Academy, York.	<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>The full programme with details of workshops and papers, registration form, and directions to Aston are available from:</p> <p><a href="http://www.business.heacademy.ac.uk/events/bmafconf07/">www.business.heacademy.ac.uk/events/bmafconf07/</a></p> </div>
14:00-15:00 Keynote Speaker 1: Professor Margaret Price, Oxford Brookes University.	14:30 - 16:00 Paper Session 2	
15:00-15:30 Refreshments	16:00-16:30 Refreshments	
15:30-17:00 Workshop Session 1	16:30-17:30 Meetings of Specialist Interest Groups	
17:00 Professor Neil Marriott - Preparing Papers for Publication in IJME	Poster Sessions	
17:00-18:30 Free time and networking	17:30-19:00 Free time and networking	
18:30-19.30 Welcome drinks reception	19:00-19:30 Drinks Reception	
Free Evening	19:30 - 21:00 Gala Dinner	

# Teaching Research and Development Grants

We were encouraged to see that a paper supported by a BMAF grant was published in the International Journal of Management Education (Vol 5 No 2). The paper, written by Roger Bennett and Rita Kottasz of London Metropolitan University, examined the expectations of first year students on admission and, some weeks later, the same students' perception of their courses and the university.

## 2006-7 Grants

In 2006 the Subject Centre received 28 project proposals and the 13 awarded grants by the Subject Centre are now in full swing with their research, with many clear and sometimes surprising outcomes already identified. Outlines of these project proposals can be seen at:

[www.business.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/trdg/trdgholders0607.html](http://www.business.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/trdg/trdgholders0607.html)

- o Assessing International MA Students with Mini-Vivas: Susan Sayce, Bournemouth University
- o Assessing multicultural groups - benefits and drawbacks: Rachel Wicaksono, York St John University
- o Business Tutors' Perceptions of a Virtual Learning Environment: Nadine Fry, Bristol University
- o An Evaluation of the priorities of the international students and learning support programmes: Miao Zhang, Kingston University
- o From Expectation to Experience: An investigation to identify the prior expectations held by international students of their preparedness for postgraduate study in a UK university compared to the reality experienced post arrival: Julia Pointon, DeMontfort University
- o Good practice in using wikis to enhance learning, student support and retention for business students: Marija Cubric, Hertfordshire University
- o Improving group work in accounting: a student perspective: Martin Roberts, Sheffield Hallam University
- o Introducing multi-cultural learning sets to enhance the learning experience of MBA international students: Kok Leong Choo, UWIC
- o An Investigation into online resources to support work placements: Beverly Leeds, UCL
- o Plagiarism - Whose Fault is it Anyway?: Louise Gracia, Warwick University
- o The Revolving Door: An Investigation Into The Reasons Why Students Leave: Frances Trought, London South Bank University
- o Teaching applied business skills within the large class context: entrepreneurship models: Laura Galloway, Heriot-Watt University
- o Translating Business Ethics into Graduate Employability; Are We All Speaking the Same Language?: Julia Clarke, Leeds University

Several awards were made to projects on topics identified as important in the BMAF Baseline Survey and the Scottish Enhancement Themes.

A number of the current grant holders offer their updates and reflections in the following pages.

## 2007-8 Training and Development Grants

Now it is your chance!

Always wanted to focus on a pet issue?  
A little short of funds to make it happen?

We are now seeking applications for the 2007-8 round of Training Research and Development Grants and would like to encourage you with this. Details of the process can be accessed at [www.business.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.business.heacademy.ac.uk) but the principles are as follows:

- o Clear Project Title and Theme(s)
- o Applicant and Institution details
- o Project Overview (300 words)
- o Project Rationale/Need (100 words)
- o Relationship of project to previous work (200 words)
- o Aims and Objectives (150 words)
- o Methodology and timetable (200 words)
- o Expected Deliverables (150 words)
- o Anticipated Benefits (150 words)

Each will be independently reviewed and assessed to establish if:

- o the proposal addresses an important and identified need within the subject area
- o there is a clear well-structured project plan
- o appropriate outputs and dissemination plans are identified
- o there are likely to be benefits to the wider subject community
- o the proposals represent good value for money
- o the planned outcomes are likely to be achieved within the time and budget

### Timescales

Applications should be received by 18th May 2007  
Decisions - end of June  
Contracts - sent to successful applicants to be signed by their organisation  
Initial funds - released in early September 2007 (or once signed contract received, if later)  
Interim Report - by end of January 2008  
Final Report - by end of May 2008  
Final release of funds when Final Report accepted

If you are unsure about the relevance of your idea or the application process itself, please come to the session about BMAF Grants at the Conference in May.

# Grant Updates

## Introducing multi-cultural action learning sets to enhance the learning experience of MBA international students

Dr Kok Leong Choo, Cardiff School of Management,  
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff. [lchoo@uwic.ac.uk](mailto:lchoo@uwic.ac.uk)

### Aim and objectives

The aim of the project is to examine how multi-cultural action learning sets can be used in a formal educational setting to enrich international MBA students' learning experience and overcoming culture and learning shock.

The objectives are to:

1. introduce evidence-based action research to inform policy and practice.
2. provide empirical evidence to inform pedagogic development and design.
3. provide a basis to complement the traditional labour intensive system of one-to-one personal tutorship.
4. implicate a new way to internationalise higher education.

### Methodology

The methodology adopts an interpretative epistemological strand and is based on a research design that combined interviews and narrative analysis. The study is conducted in the author's Business School setting and is absorbed into the normal lives of MBA international students as their study unfold i.e. in essence it is an action research process. The research participants are a mix of international and British students. The study takes the form of co-operative enquiry (Balwin, 2006 and Heron and Reasons, 2006) in guiding the research design. Heron and Reasons' co-operative inquiry paradigm i.e. research 'with' rather than 'on' people (students) is adopted in the overall study. The inquiry process is based on individual student examining and sharing his or her problems, learning experience and actions collaboratively with other fellow students in an action learning set. Students worked together as co-researchers and as co-subjects. They are involved in the design and management of their own enquiry, and their experience and actions are explored and shared.

### Project plan

The project is structured into four phases: The first phase involved negotiation with gatekeepers i.e. seeking approval and co-operation for the study. This included reassuring senior management and colleagues that the action research approach fulfilled ethical considerations, even though it is seen to be methodologically different from traditional research.

The second phase is concerned with laying down a foundation for the study i.e. forming multi-cultural action learning sets as subjects for the study. The process started during the student induction period and 44 students (10 British and 34 International Students) were selected from a sample of 50 volunteers and formed into ten multi-cultural action learning sets.

The third phase is the data collection stage. It is the touchstone of the overall co-operative inquiry in which multi-cultural action learning sets are become fully immersed in and engaged with action and experience. The conveners (British students) of the set have been asked to record events, experiences and problems encountered by their set members and how they react and share their problems with their fellow members as their study unfold. The conveners are asked to keep all events, problems and experience in a narrative form that students encountered or reported to them or shared and discussed in the set meetings, and the kind of actions if any have been taken to address the problems. A short one hour interview will be conducted with each member of the sets to clarify and triangulate the information recorded by the conveners. The overall aim is to build a data bank of events or stories for the next phase of data analysis.

The fourth phase is data analysis. The aim is to identify and cluster emergent themes and categories (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) that is, to construct an understanding of the participants experiences and establish how and what they have changed and what the multi-cultural learning sets have done for them. The process will be both inductive and deductive. The inductive process looks for consistent themes to emerge from the narrative analysis consonant with Ramsey (2005) notion of

re-narrating events or stories to look for way that the set members create a social bonding, overcoming anxiety, address cultural differences, relating to each others and adjusting to learning methods as their study unfold. The deductive process ensures that the data is not over-interpreted or misinterpreted by triangulating emergent theme with data obtained from the interviews. This interactive process is an intentional interplay between reflection and making sense of the data and is used as inquiry cycles (Heron and Reason, 2006).

### **Reflection and anecdotal evidence to date**

There is some anecdotal evidence so far to suggest that:

1. The core facets of multi-cultural action learning sets may be able to provide an invaluable mechanism to support cross-cultural learning for international MBA students. It may also be able to provide emotional and social support to overcome students' culture and learning shock.
2. Multi-cultural action learning sets may be able to play a mentoring role to complement the more traditional labour intensive system of one-to-one personal tutorship to enrich international students' learning experience.
3. Multi-cultural action learning sets can provide a powerful mechanism to mitigate asymmetrical power relationships between international and British students that are attributable to cultural and language differences. Overall it seems that its tenets can provide a fairer mechanism for formative assessments, particularly when international students are required to work in a syndicate of diverse ethnic composition.
4. Multi-cultural action learning sets can play an important and active role in internationalization of Higher Education.

### **Acknowledgement**

This project is carried out in memory of Professor Dianna Winstanley who devoted her academic life to caring for international students.

## **Good practice in using wikis to enhance learning, student support and retention for business students**

Dr Marija Cubric, Senior Lecturer, Business School, University of Hertfordshire, [m.cubric@herts.ac.uk](mailto:m.cubric@herts.ac.uk)

The main aim of the project is to help in enhancing students' learning experience through the use of new and increasingly popular *wiki* technology (Cubric, 2006a).

The target group for Semester A trial included 16 MSc E-business/Decisions Sciences students. The trial will continue in Semester B to include a further 10 MSc Decision Science students.

The first trial consisted of weekly *wiki* updates by students and tutors in the context of the following learning and teaching scenarios: on-line collaborations, on-line discussions and on-line reviews.

Students' work was assessed and contributed towards 40% of their final grade. The role of the tutor has been that of an observer, mediator and reviewer.

The process can be outlined as follows:

- Day 1: Lecture day. After the lecture the tutor publishes "weekly task" on the module *wiki*.  
Day 2 - Day 6: Students add individual (weekly task) contributions to the module *wiki*.  
Day 7: Tutor reviews weekly *wiki* contributions and provides group feedback. The feedback is used to "re-shape" the new lecture.

The most interesting outcome of this project so far is the formulation and implementation of a truly *blended learning* process, that is founded on the principles of constructivist learning (e.g. Vigotsky's theory of social development, Laurillard's *conversational learning*, Novak's *just-in-time teaching* etc) and supported by the use of *wiki* technology and Web2 authoring style (e.g. *connected* and *transactional* writing as defined in Richardson, 2006).

The idea of "weekly tasks" (Gravett & Petersen, 2002) had been used to support "structured dialogue" amongst students and between students and tutor. A weekly task can include one or more of the following activities: add definition to the module glossary, add literature review (case-studies, journal articles, books, websites), contribute to the collaborative topic analysis (unsigned contributions), complete practical group exercise, provide comments to colleagues on their work in progress, develop coursework (on the *wiki*) etc.

The idea of on-line coursework development and using students as reviewers has been particularly interesting and has helped in enhancing students' learning experience and the overall quality of their work (e.g. better final results compared to the last year cohort).

Another useful experience was in designing suitable assessment strategy for students' wiki contributions. Last but not least, experience gained in using the MediaWiki tool is valuable and directly applicable in future trials and work in this area.

Students' response to the above teaching & learning method were extremely positive (documented in the module feedback and final reflection). [Some of the typical responses are included below.](#)

My initial objective was to explore use of wiki by providing students with a "structured bulletin board" (Leuf & Cunningham, 2000) for reflection, meta-products, analysis and feedback that is navigable and fun to use. However, during the trial, new objectives have become apparent and equally and more important e.g. to provide tutor (myself) with a regular insight into students' comprehension and progress; to extend pre-scribed contact time from 24h/term to 24h/day, by using other students as teachers, reviewers and role models etc.

This project has attracted significant interest and

support from the University Learning and Teaching Unit and its outcomes have already started to be disseminated across the Business school, where a new trial is currently under way and includes participants from various subject-areas such as: accounting, business problem analysis, project management, operational research and marketing (Cubic, 2006b). This trial will provide further insights into the use of wikis in diverse subject areas, mixed groups (IT and non-IT) and different group sizes (ranging from 20-188 students).

*Screenshots of the Module Wiki are available in the online version of this magazine.*

## **Business Tutors' Perceptions of a Virtual Learning Environment**

Nadine Fry, Senior Lecturer, Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, [Nadine.Fry@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Nadine.Fry@uwe.ac.uk)

We applied for a Teaching, Research and Development Grant (2006/07) in order to undertake a project that we believe will encourage tutors to reflect upon their teaching practice and improve the student learning experience. The project aims to elicit business tutors' perceptions of the extent to which the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) supports, or indeed enhances, the teaching-learning environment. The data were

The Wiki page is a good part of learning because it encourages class members to integrate, which was quite helpful...

I learnt a lot from other people's input. Whenever I got stuck alone, I would hop onto Wiki page and get the answers I needed...

Looking at my input on Wiki made me feel quite good because I could see my input to the whole course.

(Use of wiki) made us concentrate more in class and read more about the topic in order to know how to answer the questions, therefore, understand things better.

The things which I have learned beside this module is that how should I conduct my work in organised form.

An important part of this module was collaborative learning, which is about working in a team to achieve common goals such as sharing and constructing knowledge

Knowledge and skill I gained from using Wi-ki page will be useful for me in the future because Wi-ki page can be used not only in studying purpose but also in business purpose. It could be use inside a company allow employee to share and exchange information need in business process.

collected via in-depth interviews with all level 1 module leaders at Bristol Business School (BBS). The extent to which tutors use the VLE and the manner in which they integrate it with their taught sessions provided the focus of the interviews. The discussions also considered tutors' perceptions of students' use of the VLE and its impact on student engagement, as such issues are likely to influence tutor behaviour. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with information and communication technologies (ICT) trainers employed by the University in order to establish a benchmark as to the potential use of the VLE.

Although we are currently in the process of undertaking a detailed analysis of the data, the initial findings are of much interest. Firstly, there does not appear to be a community of best practice amongst tutors. Indeed, tutors appear to work largely in isolation of each other, resulting in very little sharing of ideas and few links between module sites. Furthermore, one could loosely identify two groups of tutors; those who have engaged with the technology and those who have resisted it. The former group view the VLE as an additional tool that can support traditional modes of teaching, emphasising the need to satisfy a wide range of student learning styles. However, even though many tutors are aware of the potential benefits of the VLE, they recognise that it is not a panacea and its use is often limited. At the other end of the spectrum, tutors believe that learning can only take place in the classroom and are therefore unwilling to integrate the VLE into their teaching strategy (although forced to do so to a certain extent due to minimum requirements). Many tutors regarded themselves as the font of knowledge and lay claim to their intellectual property. As a result, there was much criticism of the impact of the VLE on student attendance at taught sessions. Furthermore, there were concerns that the VLE will replace the role of the tutor in the future - but is it as simple as tutor or computer? It is hoped that further analysis will provide us with a greater understanding of the factors that influence tutor acceptance of and subsequent engagement with the VLE.

During the course of the project, we have had the opportunity to meet other members of the e-learning community. The research has certainly encouraged us to review our own teaching practices with a view to embedding the VLE into a more coherent teaching and learning strategy. We

are therefore excited by the prospect of disseminating our research findings, which should be of interest to the wider academic community. After all, we are all operating in a technology-driven era!

## A toe in the research water.....

Julia Pointon, Principal Lecturer in Human Resource Management and Organizational Behaviour, De Montfort University, Leicester, [J.Pointon@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Pointon@dmu.ac.uk)

Well, I did it....not huge I know - but a first and the start of many more I hope. What did I do? Well, I submitted a proposal for and was awarded a BMAF Teaching Research and Development Grant.

During my five years in Higher Education I have become aware of the, let's say 'mild tension' that can sometimes exist between those described as "Research Active" and RAE'able and those of us who are less research active and who will not be contributing to the RAE, at least not this time around. I have never considered myself to be anything other than a novice researcher so the fear of contributing to the transmutation of values so impressively detailed by Sheila Slaughter and Larry L. Leslie in their 1997 book, *Academic Capitalism*, was not a concern I had. Their concern, and one that has some credibility, is that the once jealously guarded autonomy of any university has been purchased and altered through relationships with external sponsors.

While my role in this development was something that felt a long way off I could not escape from the reality of the message neatly enveloped by David Montgomery. Namely, that securing research funding - not only government grants but also corporate support - is an increasingly important qualification for admission to, and success in, professorial academic life. Details of a candidate's research publications and their concomitant success in the chase after external money are the focus of many promotion interviews. In his words "to discuss anything else is naïveté, bad manners, or proof of a lack of seriousness". I knew I needed to do something in order to survive!

The BMAF research award was for £3,500. This was important for three reasons. It was enough to support a research project that was sufficiently substantial to stand alone, have value and be credible in the eyes of the department. But, it was

small enough for me to feel confident I could 'manage' it alone, so on this first occasion I did not need to negotiate or sustain a research relationship with other colleagues. Thirdly, it was an amount I considered I was worthy of applying for. I had seen grants to support research from other professional bodies of values ranging from ten to two hundred and fifty thousand, but they represented something far more substantial than I could justify even thinking about never mind applying for!

The research was motivated by something I was particularly keen to investigate further and use the data to inform and improve practice. Writing the proposal was therefore straightforward and I have to say rewarding. The format was easy to navigate and asked for nothing more than I had already considered and discussed with my Head of Department. Securing their support before you consider applying is probably my biggest tip! The hard part was waiting for the outcome, but it was positive and after a few administrative issues over intellectual property rights I was able to make a start.

The research itself was an amazing experience and in some ways a revelation. I became immersed in the literature, the interviews, and the initial analysis of the data. I gained a sense of personal confidence in my ability to do meaningful research. I believe I have also earned a degree of respect from my research active colleagues, all of whom have been incredibly supportive and willing to offer assistance and advice. Our research community has been extended by one new member - and it feels good. The undergraduate and postgraduate students have emphasised the importance of my research and its relevance to them in shaping their experiences in the UK and ultimately their learning.

Halaka (2004) questions the value of research awards suggesting the themed nature and predefined focus of the research topics is compromising the ability of novice researchers to develop the skills and characteristics needed in the construction of their own research questions. Are they are simply engaged in a process of providing answers to problems set by the financiers of research and not developing their own skill base? I do not believe it is a debate of opposites, rather one of appropriateness and context value added. The research funding allowed me to engage in a research exercise I would otherwise have been

denied, to practice and refine my research skills, to engage in a process of reflection and debate and to broaden my community of research contacts. I am still only half way through the research exercise, but already I am able to identify implications from the findings for future pedagogic research and educational policy and am therefore confident the opportunity provided by the funding will enhance, rather than limit, my ability to construct my own research questions and become make a valuable contribution to knowledge.

If, like me, you thought applying for a BMAF Teaching Research and Development Grant was for someone else - think again. Have confidence in your own ability. As Fuller (2002) points out the intangibility and unpredictability of knowledge make it difficult to control and plan. That may be the case - but I haven't stopped learning or enjoying the experience yet!

## Assessing multicultural groups - benefits and drawbacks

Rachel Wicaksono, International Centre, Faculty of Business Communication, York St John University,  
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Teaching on a 'Communication Skills' module, I asked students about their experience of working in groups. Sharing out the work between the members of a group was mentioned as a potential benefit. Drawbacks included the possible mismatch between a group mark and the effort, or ability, of individual members. 'Group work drags down our marks', was a frequently heard comment.

Talking to staff revealed support for the idea of group work, but frustration both at the time taken to manage the student experience and at the difficulty of assessing group work fairly. Although staff felt that working in a mixed nationality group would be a useful experience, they reported that their students generally preferred to work within single nationality groups in order to minimise what they saw as language and culture 'difficulties'.

In contrast with this, mainly negative, view of group work, much of the literature I read in preparation for the 'Communication Skills' module suggested

that diverse groups could outperform both individuals and homogenous groups. The most usual explanation for this was the creation of a 'cultural synergy' that was more than the sum of its parts. My research project aimed to explore this gap between student/staff perceptions and previous work on the 'group work effect'.

My research question is: to what extent is achievement in group work (where grades are based on group performance criteria) a function of the individual achievement (as shown in other individual, i.e. non-group, assessments) of group members?

Using a sample of one hundred students on a BA Management Studies module, assigned by the tutor to mixed nationality groups, I compared the average group marks of both UK and international students. As expected, these marks were similar. When the individual assessed component marks of international and UK students were compared however, a significant difference was found; with international students achieving much lower scores. This individual mark was a 'reflective learning journal' and my teaching experience suggested that international students' unfamiliarity with this writing genre makes it an inappropriate proxy for 'ability'. In an attempt to increase the validity of the individual mark, I collected individual marks from a range of other modules taken by the participants and calculated an average individual mark.

The next step in the analysis was to regress the group work marks on to (1) an average of the (average) individual marks in the group (2) the highest (average) individual mark in the group and (3) the lowest (average) individual mark in the group. The estimated beta coefficients for the lowest and average achieving students were insignificant at the customary confidence levels. The highest individual mark, however, did seem to be a significant predictor of group performance. Specifically, the results suggest that for every 1% increase in the individual mark (a proxy for ability) of the best student in the group, the mark of the whole group is expected to rise by 0.53%. However, further tests show that there is also a statistically significant correlation between the average individual mark and the group mark which does not appear in the regression. This may be because of a multicollinearity problem in the equation, where the highest and lowest achieving

students are measured twice, once as the highest/lowest individual achiever and once in the average individual achievement. I intend to explore this further, by testing the strength of the correlations between the group marks and the three measures of individual marks.

Overall, the quantitative data analysis seems to suggest that weaker students may benefit by being placed in a group with stronger students. Stronger students may miss out on the benefit of having their marks 'dragged up' by being in a group of even stronger students, but they are not disadvantaged by being the strongest in a mixed ability group. This is in contrast to the mainly negative view of group work expressed by students and staff.

My BMAF HEA-funded project on the benefits and drawbacks of assessed group work encouraged me to consider developing materials for students on 'effective group work skills'. In December 2006 I applied for, and was awarded, a York St John University Teaching Fellowship to design a series of webquests for students to be published on the university VLE. I am hoping that both content and task design will be informed by the findings of my BMAF HEA-funded research.

## Managing the Fear Using a Mini-Viva as a Unit of Assessment

Susan Sayce, Senior Lecturer, HRM and Organistaional Studies, Bournemouth University, [SSayce@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:SSayce@bournemouth.ac.uk)

Recently at Bournemouth University we have been experimenting with using the mini-viva as a unit of assessment. It has been used in Research Methods teaching to help MA students develop ideas in relation to research design. All of these international students will need to do a MA dissertation so it is important that they have an understanding of the methodological design issues needed.

In order to facilitate this, my colleague and I, who teach research methods, took the decision to incorporate a mini-viva assessment into the unit. The reasoning here was that while we felt that some of the students were quite capable of writing about research methodology, their understanding of what they had written was limited. When the students moved on to discussions with their

supervisors about their dissertation ideas and their own research design this limitation became apparent. Thus we felt it appropriate to introduce a spoken element to their written research design to give students an opportunity to improve aspects of their research while at the same time highlighting the importance of understanding their own specific research methodological route.

One area of concern was how could we deal with the student's anxiety, in doing, in effect a short 'spoken exam'. Indeed how do different nationalities interpret a mini-viva assessment and how does it help them to understand methodological issues?

These questions underpinned the research's objectives which included:

- o investigating the cultural meaning that in international students give to oral assessments
- o considering how verbal assessment and feedback impact on student's learning
- o exploring how students overcome issues of language in verbal discussions.

Fifteen semi-structured interviews with international students who originate from Burkina Faso to Korea from Indonesia to Uzbekistan and Venezuela to Norway were conducted. One theme kept appearing and that was the student's anxiety. We, as tutors, had found that we needed to constantly managing the fear that the thought of a spoken assessment, even if it is only ten minutes, seemed to invoke. This has meant that the teaching team have had to constantly reassure the students over what a mini-viva should entail. This has included running a mock 'mini-viva' for the group in order to allay some of their fears; constantly reiterating what we, as tutors expect from the mini-vivas. Otherwise there is a risk that the students' nerves could undermine their ability to talk about their research design.

Interestingly, although many of the students mentioned the difficulty of having to do a spoken exercise in a secondary language the students seem to have taken on responsibility for managing this. Several of them argued that at the MA level they should be able to converse on their topic to an interested other and that while it may not be perfect English they should be able to understand questions based on what they had written and be able to express their ideas in connection to their

topic. However, those from South Asia did comment that grammatically that was easier for those from Europe. But even they considered that they should be able to do this type of exercise as they were expected to have a certain level of language before becoming MA students.

Culturally, the nationality that found this open expression of ideas most difficult to do was those from former Russian satellite states. As one student said people from his country were not used to openly discussing their views and justifying their decisions. This viewpoint he related to his experience of the former Communist regime. However, contrary to expectations this viewpoint was not shared by those from more collective South Asian countries, they saw it more as an opportunity to advance their academic and business knowledge.

Learning styles was another area of importance in the student's experience of doing a mini-viva. Regardless of nationality there was a split between those students who preferred to write down their research design and those who relished the opportunity to speak about it. The second grouping saw the mini-viva as an opportunity to improve the mark they had gained from the written design while the others saw the mini-viva as an exercise to be gone through. However, what has become apparent from doing this type of exercise is that combining the two learning styles has released the students' learning potential. For those students who really struggled with this exercise (even failing it) was the recognition that they had to do more work. They had to fill in their gaps of knowledge which had become very evident from the mini-viva and really understand what they had written if they wanted to do a successful proposal for the MA dissertation. As one Taiwanese student said after he had failed the mini-viva 'it made me think.'

When I began this research I thought issues of language would be predominant but as the above indicates although this is an issue, it has not upset the value of doing a mini-viva and the combination of both a written and spoken exercise may help students in different ways to release their learning potential. Thus I would argue helping to make the case for experimenting with the mini-viva as a method of assessment.

# Enhancing the Student Learning Experience through Internationalisation

## The Role of the Higher Education Academy

**Jane Berry, Higher Education Academy, York**

A founding purpose of the Higher Education Academy is to support higher education staff, their institutions, sector stakeholders and partner organisations in meeting the challenge of upholding the UK's reputation for quality of teaching, learning and student support, and further enhancing the learning experience for all students. Underpinning all its work, therefore, is a commitment to having an international perspective in recognition of the increased competition from overseas providers faced by the sector; growing international perspectives on curricula and standards issues being driven by the Bologna and other policy agendas; and not least the needs of students themselves as future parents, employees, business and political leaders in a world of global 'connectivity' and mobility.

Enhancing the learning experience of students by definition means improving the experience of both UK domiciled students and those from overseas. The student body is increasingly diverse today and the Academy's work with, and on behalf of, institutions and their staff has to reflect this diversity. Universities and colleges are putting in place strategies and practices that recognise the dual challenges of creating a more 'internationalised' student and of meeting the needs of international students themselves (Salehi-Sangari and Foster, 1999, cited in Black, 2004).

The Academy's work in this area is 'work in progress' - an emerging programme of activities to address themes identified by the sector as being of increasing importance. Our focus currently is on the internationalisation of the curriculum and support for international students. These are 'big' issues. Furthermore, and fundamental to our approach, is a necessary recognition that there is at present no clear consensus around the term 'internationalisation' or around how best it might or should be operationalised in an institutional or departmental context. This is exemplified in the diversity of approaches being adopted by HEIs which in turn reflect the wide range of drivers for change.

In a curriculum context, these approaches variously embrace both the formal curriculum (for example, through enhanced learning opportunities and settings, breadth and scope of course content, placements etc) and the informal, in which the student constituency itself is recognised as a part of the learning experience and the institution seeks to promote the integration of an international and inter-cultural dimension into all its functions as part of a 'holistic' approach to internationalisation.

These issues - and their inherent tensions - were discussed at a consultative exercise undertaken by the Academy in December 2005 which invited the participation of colleagues from across the sector with a specialist knowledge and/or direct experience of the practical issues associated with internationalisation in HEIs to help identify sector needs for support in this area. As well as serving to confirm how contested an area this is, it also highlighted a wide range of aspirations both for more internationalised curricula and for the enhancement of support for international students. Taking an outcomes approach to reflection on what such curricula might look like, it pointed, for example, to the importance of cross cultural learning and teaching of skills for global citizenship; the recognition of necessarily differing approaches by different disciplines; the need to challenge normative assumptions about western culture; and the overarching importance of pedagogy to the process of internationalisation.

This agenda is clearly to be differentiated from that of the implementation of support systems to enable international students to progress through higher education successfully. In this context there was a widely held view that the sector should not only see the care and support of international students as part of a broader, widening participation agenda but should also avoid deficit models of diversity. On a practical level institutions were seen to face significant challenges here in managing all students' expectations - to include those of international students - preparing them for transition to HE; inducting them into local academic values and conventions; and then providing support structures and study skills provision on an on-going basis, all

such provision to be viewed, in an ideal world, from an integrated perspective. As one contributor said, "international students are the solution not the problem!"

Whether addressing issues of teaching and learning or wider student support, the engagement and development of staff was seen to be fundamental to any internationalisation strategy and featured prominently as an area of support which the Academy might address. This might be through, for example, collaborative work with educational developers, research, development and dissemination of resources, disciplinary initiatives and the promotion of the benefits of internationalisation for the student learning experience more widely across the sector through dissemination of good practice. Directly involving staff will usefully contribute to improving how both they and their institutions address the need to problematise the process of internationalisation, for example, through assessing course content or embracing a more international perspective within all aspects of their teaching.

Finally a number of guiding principles were identified and widely endorsed in relation to the process of internationalisation in general, a number of which might not only be seen to have relevance for the enhancement of the student learning experience but also to offer opportunities for the Academy to work with the sector in the progressing of this agenda.

These included:

- o Being open to the learning to be gained both from overseas institutions and from operating overseas as a UK provider
- o Being committed to addressing the needs of both international students and staff working in UK HEIs
- o Encouraging more UK students (and staff) to participate in overseas opportunities
- o Movement towards the wider recognition of international work and academic partnerships through the RAE.

At a disciplinary level the Academy's network of Subject Centres continue to work closely with their communities with the internationalisation of the curriculum being addressed through collaborations with professional bodies and overseas subject associations, and programmes of activity reflecting the varying extent to which internationalisation is

naturally addressed through core curriculum content. Activities typically include contributions to international journals and conferences; international research collaborations; and the exchanging and dissemination of international practice amongst many others.

A programme of centrally coordinated activity is also being taken forward by the Academy in direct response to the scoping exercise undertaken in December 2005. This includes a literature review; the funding of disciplinary projects commissioned through the Subject Centre network; the sponsoring of sector events to showcase good practice in the support of international students and to further dialogue around the internationalisation agenda, including the implications of the Bologna process; the development of web-based resources including case studies of institutional practice; collaboration with UKCOSA, SEDA and sector colleagues to explore the strengthening of internationalisation issues within teacher development programmes; and support for institutional projects. Issue 5 of the Academy Exchange magazine is devoted to Internationalisation and downloadable from the website at: [www.heacademy.ac.uk/4131.htm](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/4131.htm)

Finally, whilst a number of conceptual frameworks have been developed to describe approaches to internationalisation, in practice and for any one institution, the process typically involves a unique and complex mix of activities and initiatives with varying levels of stakeholder involvement. To date there has been very little investigation of the strategies used by UK universities, whether they are serving the needs of their international students and how they could be improved. The Academy has funded the University of Surrey to investigate the implications of greater international competition and internationalisation of HE for the institution's own strategies and practice and to develop an institution-wide research methodology as an investigative tool. The methodology has been adapted from existing quality review processes for internationalisation that have already been used in other countries. The report is downloadable from the Academy website at: [www.heacademy.ac.uk/4265.htm](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/4265.htm)

For further information about any of the above activity please visit the Academy website at or email to: [internationalisation@heacademy.ac.uk](mailto:internationalisation@heacademy.ac.uk)

# HRD Special Interest Group

We are pleased to announce the establishment of a Human Resources & Development Special Interest Group (SIG). This is a joint venture between BMAF and the University Forum for Human Resources and Development (UFHRD).

Launched within a UFHRD workshop at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston, the HRD SIG aims to focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment in HRD courses through research and dissemination. At the workshop, Jim Stewart and Sally Sambrook also presented an update of their work related to the Doctorate in Business Administration at Nottingham Trent University.



From left to right: Jim Stewart, Sally Sambrook, Alison Hollinrake, (of UFHRD), Richard Atfield (BMAF)

The current objectives of the SIG are to identify best practice in teaching, learning and assessment of HRD, and also any gaps, with the aim of developing and sharing improvements through four elements:

- 1) Review current literature identifying best practise in HRD TL&A
- 2) Survey HRD lecturers regarding TL&A best practise and materials, also gaps and needs in relation to knowledge and research in HRD and related subjects
- 3) Provide at least two Special Interest Group events to disseminate the research outcomes
- 4) Based on the above, develop web-based and other resources to widen access and close gaps to

encourage improved HRD teaching, learning and Assessment in higher education.

At the launch of the HRD SIG in January 2007, Professor Jim Stewart, Chair of UFHRD, said:

This is an important research and development project which brings together the resources of both organisations. Although the focus will be on the HRD subject area, the outcomes should be available and hopefully of benefit to the wider HE community.

Professor Jean Woodall, Director of BMAF and a member of UFHRD, recognised the potential signalled by the HRD SIG:

Firstly, I hope that the success of the research and subsequent workshop activities of the SIG will result in further proposals to continue the momentum into 2007-8.

Secondly, that establishment of this subject-specific SIG will encourage proposals from other BMAF subject areas.

We hope to provide reports on the progress of the HRD SIG in future issues of the BMAF magazine.

For further information about UFHRD, visit the website: [www.ufhrd.org](http://www.ufhrd.org)

## Other Special Interest Groups

**Accounting Education SIG:** A similar joint venture is being finalised with the British Accounting Association, to widen access to conference places and offer more research bursaries

**Marketing Learning and Teaching SIG:** Discussions are in progress with the Academy of Marketing

**Internationalisation and Employability SIGs:** These are critical topics which will be considered at the BMAF Conference and proposals presented for future BMAF funding.

If you would like to know more, become involved or have an idea for another SIG, let us know at:

[BMAFmagazine@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:BMAFmagazine@brookes.ac.uk)

# IJME - Latest Publication and Editorial Changes

## News!

The latest publication of IJME, Volume 6 Number 1, is now available in hard copy and online at [www.business.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/journal/](http://www.business.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/journal/)

2006 was a year of great change for IJME. At the beginning of the year, David Hawkridge was editing the journal. David started work on the journal when Roland Kaye took over the editorship from Keith Fletcher. David edited Volume 5 Number 1 and Number 2.

David stood down in August 2006 and said: "For me it has been a privilege to work on IJME. ... I am glad to have been able to help the Subject Centre through the journal's handover period. Now I wish the new editor all success."

The subject centre would like to thank David Hawkridge for his editorship of the IJME. His experience in reviewing and editing for other educational journals was invaluable and enabled him hand over the journal in an efficient and effective manner.

Professor Neil Marriot of the University of Glamorgan was been appointed as the new General Editor of the IJME for a period of three years from 1st August 2006.

Neil has been a member of the Editorial Board since its inception and knows the journal well. As Professor of Accounting and Finance and as Associate Dean at the University of Glamorgan Business School, he has developed wide national and international contacts. As a founding member of the Editorial Board of Accounting Education: an International Journal (guest editor for five issues), and as an Associate Editor of the Journal of Accounting Education for the last four years, he has long experience of journal publishing.

Neil's own research embraces three main areas: accounting and business education; NHS financial management; and small business financial management. He has published widely and presented numerous papers at national and international conferences. His main education research interest is the use of information and communications technology in higher education, the subject of his doctoral thesis.

Neil's appointment ends a process begun at the Subject Centre's Advisory Board in December 2005. Jean Woodall, the Subject Centre Director, offered several options for the journal's future and it was agreed to modify the mission and scope of the IJME to ensure that it appeals to higher and further education lecturers in all business and to clarify the parameters for editorial policy in respect of peer review, types of contribution welcomed, composition and role of the editorial board.

Neil expects to add to the Editorial Board by proposing names to the Subject Centre's Advisory Board. The Editorial Board will meet once each year, and members will be expected to support the General Editor by encouraging submission of papers and identifying appropriate scholars to undertake peer review. Neil also expects to propose associate editors and editorial advisors: more details will appear in the next issue."

## In this issue of IJME:

Bradley Barnes - *Comparing Service Quality among EU and International Post-Graduate Management Students*

Thomas Porcano and David Shull - *Survey Evidence: Attributes of US Business School Undergraduate and Postgraduate Study-Abroad Programmes*

Sue Shortland - *Participation, justice and trust within developmental peer observation of teaching: a model and research agenda*

Yvonne Turner - *Reflecting on the relationship between standardised admissions, academic expectations and diverse student cohorts in postgraduate taught Business and Management programmes*

**If you are considering submitting a paper for IJME, Neil Marriott will be running a workshop on preparing papers for publication on Day 1 of the BMAF Conference.**

Full references for the Grant Updates articles are available on the BMAF website

# Supporting Part-Time Teaching Staff in Higher Education

## Background

This is the title of a Higher Education Academy funded project, led jointly by BMAF and the Health Science and Practice Subject Centre, with support from the Association of Business Schools. It is part of the HEA's UK-wide review of issues relating to the employment of and support for Part-Time Teaching staff in Higher Education.

While some research across all sectors has already been published, this project recognises that there are particular issues for the disciplines within the two Subject Centres:

- o A significant proportion of staff are employed on part-time/variable hours
- o The disciplines included in the two Subject Centres represent a significant proportion of overall student numbers

The focus will be on part-time teachers who are mid-career professionals, experienced managers, consultants and practitioners - a group that is considered essential to learning, teaching and assessment in both subject areas.

## The Project

The project has three main elements:

- o Analysis of HESA data of the disciplines represented by both Subject Centres to identify the population characteristics of the way in which staff are employed;
- o Interviews with senior managers, programme managers and part-time staff themselves in 6 institutions across the UK in both their Schools of Business and Health to identify support arrangements provided, the extent to which they are taken up and the perceived needs of this staff group;
- o Development and dissemination of exemplar case studies to share those interventions that have improved access to and use of learning support for part-time teachers.

## Progress

The analysis of the HESA data is already in progress and an initial report should be available by the end of March, with an additional commentary by Colin Bryson to be available by the end of May.

Project Associates have been recruited to conduct the interviews and develop the case studies - 3 from health backgrounds and 3 from business. Access to both Health and Business Schools at a number of universities has been agreed to date and the interviews will take place over the next few months, aiming to be completed by June.

With reference to the underpinning data from the HESA analysis, the Project Associates will initially develop exemplar case studies from their individual work, then work in collaboration on cross-case analysis both within institutions and between different health and business schools.

By early autumn an overview report and case studies should be available, papers for specific conference submitted, and a number of workshops organised by the two subject centres for wider dissemination to practitioners across the UK.

## Would you like to contribute?

We will keep you informed of the progress of this project through future copies of the BMAF Magazine and through the E-News bulletins but are also keen to obtain a wider view.

Are you a part-time teacher with a story to tell? Do you have examples of good practice in your workplace, of useful tools and guidelines you have used, or of effective support arrangement provided? Do you have an opinion about the benefits and barriers related to employing part-time teachers, or being employed as a one?

Please let us know at:

[BMAFmagazine@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:BMAFmagazine@brookes.ac.uk)

## Thank you for reading the first issue of the Business Management Accountancy and Finance (BMAF) Subject Centre Magazine.

The Subject Centre exists to support lecturers and others who provide teaching, learning and assessment of BMAF associated subjects in Higher Education believing that such support is best offered by and within those disciplines. Support is available in many different ways - publications, workshops, on-line resources, grants and as a point of contact - and is very much driven by your ideas, requests and contributions.

The aim of this publication is to share information about issues affecting our subject areas; to present your work, observations and questions, to inform you about the work of the subject centre and HEA, and to share best practice in a number of contexts. The BMAF Magazine is designed to be easily portable in both a physical and electronic sense, and to fit in style between the monthly BMAF E-News circulations and the peer-reviewed publication of the Subject Centre - the International Journal of Management Education.

The BMAF Magazine is available to download [www.business.heacademy.ac.uk/publications](http://www.business.heacademy.ac.uk/publications) and additional printed copies can be requested from [BMAFmagazine@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:BMAFmagazine@brookes.ac.uk)

If you have any constructive comments about the design, format or content of this issue and future issues please let us know.

## BMAF Workshops

The Subject Centre supports 15-20 workshops each year on a range of relevant topics in conjunction with universities and other bodies. Over the past year this has included Employability, Enquiry-based learning, Plagiarism and Assessment and through financial support by BMAF to the host organisation these are free for practitioners to attend.

The next workshop is "Teaching and Supporting International Students", arranged jointly by BMAF and the University of Ulster, to be held on Tuesday 15th May at their Jordanstown campus. Further details are available at:

[www.business.heacademy.ac.uk/events/bmafws](http://www.business.heacademy.ac.uk/events/bmafws)

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## In the Next Issue:

- BMAF Conference - initial reports and your reflections
- Part-Time Teachers Project - progress report, your opinions and ideas
- BMAF Workshops
- Training Research and Development Grants - further reports from grant holders
- Special Interest Groups - developments from the conference sessions

**and YOUR contributions about any topic that affects your work!**

This magazine is published by the Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance Subject Centre, which is part of the Subject Network of the Higher Education Academy.

If you would like to submit an item for a future issue of this magazine - something you are working on, a book review, a reaction to or development of items in this magazine or IJME, feedback following a workshop, etc, please contact the editor, Richard Atfield  
01865 485978 or [BMAFmagazine@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:BMAFmagazine@brookes.ac.uk)

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