

Our mission is to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students.

We are an independent organisation funded by grants from the four UK higher education funding bodies, subscriptions from higher education institutions, and grant and contract income for specific initiatives.

For more information on all our research and evaluation activities, visit www.heacademy.ac.uk/research.htm

Research and Evaluation



**The
Higher
Education
Academy**



Educational research in higher education can play a very powerful role in improving practice.

Mike Prosser, Director of Research & Evaluation, The Higher Education Academy

Research and Evaluation

One of our key aims is to lead the development of research and evaluation to improve the quality of the student learning experience.

This means identifying and promoting key issues, synthesising current knowledge for the higher education community and providing high quality advice and services.

We work with institutions in a variety of ways, through presentations, events, consultations and network groups. We also provide web-based reports and resources. In response to feedback from institutions, we are focusing on a number of specific questions, including:

- What does research evidence tell us about what constitutes good practice, and what issues and problems need to be addressed in developing good practice?

- What sorts of evidence can and should the sector, individual institutions and academics be collecting for themselves, based upon what we now know about good practice and issues to be considered?
- What sorts of structures and processes should institutions build to reflect on and act on evidence that they collect about their own practice?
- How can institutions use such evidence to monitor and report on outcomes and achievements?

We will be drawing on the different forms of educational research and inquiry outlined below. These are not exclusive and will usually overlap.

Theory-driven studies

Theory-driven studies develop new knowledge and understanding. These studies are firmly situated in their relevant literature and make a substantial contribution to the field.

In 2005 we awarded funding for ten one-year research projects (theory-driven studies) on a variety of themes relating to the student learning experience.

One of these projects is looking at the changing fee regimes and their impact on student attitudes to higher education. Evidence will be gathered across three countries on changes in student service use and attitudes since they became 'clients', and the final report will present findings on how expectations of fees, grants and bursaries have affected students' choices for 2006 entry.

www.heacademy.ac.uk/research.htm



Details of all the projects, which will be complete by Autumn 2006, can be found on our website. Outcomes will inform HE policy and practice and contribute to the debate on improving the student learning experience.

Investigative and evaluative studies

Investigative and evaluative studies are undertaken to address specific problems and issues in HE policy and practice, and provide recommendations for policy and action. Although the investigation may start from a specific case, by situating the work in relevant literature the results of investigations can be of broader interest.

One of the first evaluative studies we are undertaking is a formative review of accredited programmes. We have surveyed graduates of accredited programmes in HEIs with regard to their

experiences and perceptions. This has been followed by directed interviews and focus groups. The evaluation will provide an evidence base to feed into policy for the development or refinement of such programmes.

Scholarship of teaching and learning

The scholarship of teaching and learning improves our practice as teachers. It involves critical and evidence-based reflection on practice, and draws on relevant literature.

We are working with institutions and a variety of groups to encourage the take-up of scholarly approaches to teaching and learning, and to further dialogue about and sharing of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Reviews

Reviewing existing research literature enables us to draw on everything that is

already known and integrate it into our own practice. In 2005 the Academy awarded funding for five reviews of research literature on topics relevant to HE policy and practice. These reviews will lead to more effective evidence-informed approaches to policy and practice while also exploring different reviewing methodologies.

One of these reviews is looking at the impact of working context and support on the postgraduate research student learning experience. The growing numbers of research students in universities, including those from overseas, coupled with increasing expectations from employers that students will develop a broad range of skills, mean that institutions face new challenges. The review aims to identify innovative ways of supporting postgraduate research students through their studies.



Surveys

Surveys of academic staff and students on aspects of their experiences of teaching and learning will provide us with valuable information that can be used to inform policy and practice. We commissioned a survey of first-year student experiences, are surveying graduates of the Academy's accredited programmes as part of a larger project involving formative evaluation of such programmes, and are developing a survey of research students' experiences.

Research reports

From time to time, we produce research reports on important aspects of the student learning experience. *From the margins to the mainstreams: embedding widening participation in*

higher education (published by UUK and SCOP) was researched and authored by the Higher Education Academy.

Collaborative working

We work with a range of organisations and key groups such as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), the Research Councils, the National Education Research Forum (NERF) and the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE). We are represented on a number of national committees and increasingly contribute to relevant research policy.

We aim to work collaboratively with individual institutions, disciplinary groups and staff to advance evidence- and research- informed approaches.

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