



Linking Teaching and Research in Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Introduction

This essay outlines work undertaken by the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) for Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism (HLST) as part of the LTSN Generic Centre national project '[Linking Teaching and Research in the Disciplines](#)'. The HLST LTSN was one of five subject centres selected to investigate the links between teaching and research in their subjects, the others were Bioscience, Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Law, and Health Sciences and Practice. Further investigation was also undertaken in two subject centres, English and Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine as part of the project.

The national project was designed to facilitate exploration of the extent of current teaching and research links within subject disciplines, how these linkages could be successfully embedded in curricula, and the creation of materials to support the development of linkages. The focus of the project is specifically on undergraduate level study as this is where the relationship has been shown to be most problematic (Jenkins and Zetter, 2003, p3).

This essay reports on the current linkages made between teaching and research, and the issues surrounding these, in the hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism subject areas. It is sourced from research undertaken as a part of the national project. The growing debate surrounding the teaching and research nexus is well documented elsewhere and will not therefore be approached in this work, see for example the [resource guide](#), and the [case study](#) report by Jordan which considered linkages from the subject perspectives, both undertaken as part of this project, and a generic consideration of [Linking Research and Teaching in Departments](#) by Jenkins and Zetter.

The aim of the project was to research the possibilities for linking research and teaching within HLST subject areas, and to identify and promote current practice within this aspect of provision. The objectives of the project were to:

- Research current work and current practice and to initiate discussion relating to the linking of teaching and research.
- Make information generated through this project available to academics within our subject areas.

Resources developed through the project are a [resource guide on linking teaching and research](#), a report on a focus group discussion concerning [student engagement with research](#), and two case studies, one each on the [staff](#) and the [student perspective](#) of the links between

teaching and research in the subjects, a [LINK newsletter publication](#) and a number of case study examples demonstrating how effective links have been made within the subjects.

It is fair to say that previous to this project, no extensive consideration of the links between teaching and research in the subjects has been made. What is clear from current thinking is that linkages offer significant benefits, but they are not automatic and can in fact be problematic, and if they are to be achieved, then this requires proactive consideration and action. This work therefore provides insights into current practice and thinking within departments, and offers a starting point for those interested in considering and pursuing activity in this important aspect of quality enhancement.

Hospitality Leisure Sport and Tourism Subjects in Higher Education

Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism are cognate but separate subjects that were brought together for the first time in 2000 by the QAA within the categorisation of Subject Benchmark Statements as Unit 25. This bringing together of the subjects was further supported by the establishment of the LTSN subject centre, also in 2000. There are aspects of both commonality and diversity within the subjects, a key benefit of the subject grouping is the opportunity to capitalise on the learning which can be gained from cross subject and interdisciplinary investigation.

A common feature across the subjects, apart from a concern with individual well being and experiential consumption is that the Unit 25 subjects are, to differing extents, vocationally oriented, and there is also likely to be a pre-disposition to experiential learning (LTSN Baseline Statement, 2002, p3). Most provision, with the exception of sport sciences which has a more scientific content, is likely to be related to management studies, however, the definition of the subjects is more complex than this. The origins of courses are likely to have developed from relationships with other subjects, for example, psychology or physiology in sport, and sociology, economics or geography in tourism and leisure. The QAA subject benchmark statement states that whilst “common to all programmes is the opportunity to learn through the integration of theory with practice...,” “the Unit is characterised by a breadth of subject matter ranging from the Natural Sciences, through Business Management, to aspects of Geography and Cultural Studies (QAA, 2000 p3).

It is also recognised that hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism subjects are at different stages of research community development. Tourism and leisure has a growing and well developed body of knowledge to use as a research basis, and increasingly academics from related disciplines are moving into leisure and tourism research, for example, in the anthropology of tourism. Hospitality does not have such an extensive research base, so needs support and encouragement to aid its development. Traditionally many hospitality educators entered higher education based on their industry experience, and by nature, these courses and the students enrolled are often more practically focused. In comparison sport sciences, does have a distinct RAE unit of assessment, and to some extent a recognised track record in research, although even this has been brought into question by researchers from the more traditional scientific areas of study. Research in HLST

has been developing rapidly alongside the maturing of the cognate areas as academic subjects at university level (Botterill et al, 2003 and Botterill, 2002). Recent results from RAE 2001 provide evidence of the growing volume and improving quality of research in these subjects mainly within Units of Assessment 43 (Business and Management Studies) and 69 (Sports-related Subjects). The inter/multidisciplinary nature of hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism subjects creates a complex arena for research, particularly in view of the different modes of enquiry adopted within the different disciplines often involved. Research in these subjects is somewhat disadvantaged when compared to traditional disciplines as they do not have established research cultures, funding mechanisms, or indeed specific units of assessments in the RAE. The lack of academic credibility and the fragility of the research ethos of research in hospitality, and to some extent in tourism, sport and leisure is a limiting factor in terms of research development, and thus potentially in terms of linking teaching and research.

A particular characteristic of research in hospitality, leisure sport and tourism is the potential for links with industry through for example workplace learning and industry based consultancy projects. These offer a range of opportunities to include research and consultancy activities within programmes, thus consultancy and problem solving activities are often a feature of subject programmes. Industry can benefit from the input of staff and students, and the curriculum can benefit from up to date material and a contribution to knowledge creation.

The Unit 25 Subject Benchmark Statement (2000, p6) identifies generic knowledge and skills which should be achieved by all HLST undergraduate students in addition to those which are subject specific. In respect of research, these are that all graduates will be able to demonstrate amongst other aspects, knowledge in:

- A critical understanding of the development of knowledge in their particular subject domain
- An understanding of the need for both a multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approach to study, drawing as appropriate, from service, research and professional contexts
- Their research and problem solving abilities by critically understanding methods of acquiring, interpreting and analysing information appropriate to their context of study

And intellectual skills demonstrating the ability to:

- Research and assess subject specific facts, theories, paradigms, principles and concepts
- Critically assess and evaluate evidence
- Critically interpret data and text
- Describe and analyse information
- Apply knowledge to the solution of familiar and unfamiliar problems
- Develop a reasoned argument and challenge assumptions
- Take responsibility for their own learning and continuing professional development.

This demonstrates a strong focus on the ability of undergraduates to be competent in undertaking research as a result of their studies. In order to achieve this development it is required that appropriate approaches to learning, teaching and assessment strategies and curriculum development are adopted.

There are extensive possibilities to consider and enhance the link between teaching and research within the subjects. For example, through problem based learning, support given to production of final year projects / dissertations, inclusion of academic research within student courses, student assistance in staff research projects, teaching by postgraduate students and research-based enquiry.

The provision of suitable information and support to students undertaking research projects and dissertations has been identified as a key aspect of development within the subjects. There is currently one pedagogic research project funded by the subject centre to support [the development of materials for student research methods courses](#), and one resource guide on [Teaching Research Methods](#).

It is vital that the maturing of research within HLST subjects is further supported by identifying and promoting the possible links between research activity and learning and teaching, particularly at a time when resources and time are so scarce.

The staff perspective on links between teaching and research

To provide context to this section, it should be borne in mind that there is concern regarding the staff time currently available for personal scholarship, this was expressed in the QAA Subject Overview Report relating to research in hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism:

"...the reviews also identify a need to strengthen staff research and scholarly activity more generally within the disciplines. This is linked to a lack of academic challenge in some of the provision..." (QAA, 2001e:8)

Consideration was given to the [staff perspective of research activity as part of a subject centre funded project](#), which investigated the staff view of quality in tourism subject provision in comparison to that of the QAA in the Subject Overview Report (QAA, 2001). This revealed concern about the amount of time and level of resources available to enable staff to keep up to date with their personal scholarship.

Over a third of respondents felt that they were falling behind developments in tourism in terms of scholarship (Tribe, p37). Amongst the key findings that emerged from the survey was the "need to address the problem of the substantial group of lecturers who feel that they are falling behind in terms of scholarship. It is scholarship that ensures the currency and validity of what is taught. To some extent, it appears that the increasing demands of coping with day-to-day activities are squeezing out this vital part of investment into future quality..... Also perhaps related to these issues is the area of currency and innovation in the curriculum which many lecturers signal as a weakness" (Tribe, p39). This research reflects the current operating environment of the subjects in higher education.

Discussions at the [University of Wales Institute, Cardiff](#) undertaken as part of this project identified that in considering the links between teaching and research there are two dimensions, both of which are valid (Botterill, 2003). The first is that the link is found when a substantive research-based knowledge informs teaching, and the second is when students become researchers and share in the creation of subject based knowledge themselves. If these perspectives are accepted, then the linkages between teaching and research and how they are created and enhanced must be a focus of the student experience and the curriculum. Therefore the aspiration of departments should be to lead the promotion of research within the activities of both staff and students, through attention to both research processes and the creation of bodies of knowledge. For example, in terms of the curriculum, the research process needs to be the foundation on which courses are designed, making the process of knowledge creation explicit, thus an enquiry based approach to learning is required. Whilst the involvement of active researchers and their work in courses supports the link, research is often the interest of an individual, and there is an opportunity to go beyond this by supporting a more collective influence of research on teaching.

If effective linkages are to be achieved then an intervention strategy led by senior subject academics is required at departmental level. Whilst prescriptive measures may be in danger of quashing the links, inclusion of an appropriate strategy for making the links central to the learning experiences of staff and students, through for example the staff development and review and curriculum development processes, are likely to be more effective.

It is recognised that where links are established between research and teaching that this offers benefits, it enriches the student experience, makes teaching more exciting for staff, adds to knowledge within the subjects, and enables the curriculum to be up to date. Research for this project has shown that a consistent theme is that one activity often feeds into the other.

The development of research skills by students facilitates a student centred approach and ensures that research processes are embedded in the curriculum and so can be used to encourage an enquiry based approach to learning. In view of the often vocational nature of courses, a problem based learning approach is advantageous in this respect.

A limiting factor of the links between teaching and research is often that the links are implicit rather than explicit. For many students, the first time that they may directly face the research process will be at the stage of their undergraduate dissertation, this is too late. The research process needs to be adopted within the design of the curriculum and the construction of the learning, teaching and assessment strategies. Further to this, specific examples which can promote the links are:

- Research seminars focused on current research activities (for staff or students, or both)
- Provision of information within departments about current research activities (eg. through newsletters or websites, or inclusion within modules)
- Mentoring of young researchers
- Undergraduate research methods modules including a spotlight on current staff research

- Higher degree registration and supervision (for supervisor and student)
- Team teaching to enable research strengths to infiltrate teaching
- Live consultancy projects undertaken by students
- Use of context case studies in teaching

Increasingly in subject courses, research methods modules are now included within the first year rather than being introduced later in the programmes. Such modules can effectively include the research work of departmental staff, so bringing research to life for the students. This is to be welcomed as it provides a starting point for adoption of the research process at an earlier stage within courses by students.

http://www.hlst.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/link9/link9_contents.html

Hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism subjects have a wealth of research opportunities possible through links with industry. Many programmes include [live consultancy projects](#) and these offer the potential for a rich and interesting focus of student research activity.

The staff perspective of student engagement with research

Discussion at a [focus group](#) held as part of this study identified current areas of concern regarding student engagement in research. These centred upon the following aspects.

Accessible and credible resources

There is an immense amount of information available via the Internet, and increasingly this is the primary resource used by students. This raises an issue regarding the credibility of resources selected, and so the need for students to effectively make an appropriate evaluation of the sources they locate. An increased amount of academic material is now also available through on-line databases and websites, although the range and quality of such resources to support student research, for example completed theses, needs to be further enhanced and guidance provided to enable and promote student access. A potential negative impact of the use of the Internet is that it may be influencing student language in their use of 'web-speak' rather than academic language in their written work.

Assessment and Development of Student Research Skills

Assessment is often the key driver of student effort, so it is necessary that the tasks set reflect the desired learning outcomes to be achieved by students. In terms of research, within assessment these are likely to include the identification and critical evaluation of relevant resources. Thus course teams need to ensure that student activity and assessment criteria throughout the programme focus attention on this aspect and support the progressive development of these skills by students.

The Tribe (2003) project showed that a third of staff perceived that student reading made an unacceptable contribution to quality, with major shortcomings that need to be rectified, and a further 40 per cent responded that significant improvement could be made in this aspect. The average score in the survey for this item showed the lowest response in the whole survey. Tribe

(2003, p39) suggests that “The oft-heard witticism that students no longer *read* for degrees is given clear credence by the findings of this survey.”

In order to achieve appropriate research activity, students need to develop two complementary skills sets, firstly the methods and techniques to enable literature searching and critical evaluation, and secondly an ability to effectively communicate the results of their analysis through written or oral communication methods. The application of e-learning offers good opportunity to offer support to students in this aspect of provision.

Enquiry based learning

The adoption of [enquiry based approaches to learning](#) within programmes is considered to be an effective method of facilitating effective links between learning and teaching. A further potential benefit is that if students are involved in the creation of knowledge and so understand how knowledge is created and disseminated, then this may assist in overcoming issues of plagiarism in student work.

There is evidence of limited use of enquiry based learning within subject programmes, see for example [LINK 9](#). The use of this type of approach is an effective way in which to enhance the links between teaching and research. However, this is not without issue in the current environment of mass higher education and the subsequent diverse student body, particularly in HLST programmes where there is often strong provision in further education colleges and a high number of international students.

The student perspective on the links between teaching and research

The findings of [research undertaken by Jordan](#) at the University of Gloucestershire as part of this project have shown that within HLST subjects:

“Teaching and Learning strategies involving the use of group working, problem solving and reflective practice have traditionally been linked with the delivery of vocationally and/or professionally oriented programmes of study. For this subject area in particular then, a broad definition of research, encompassing key elements of scholarship, is likely to be beneficial in terms of any exploration of the links between teaching and research
“(Jordan 2003, p4).

It is apparent that students do recognise the benefits of staff involvement in research, although there is also a tension regarding the benefits of this, and potential frustration regarding the availability of staff. This it was felt could largely be overcome by clear communication with students about staff availability and about the various roles that lecturers undertake. The findings (Jordan, 2003 p13) concluded that students felt the most effective way of including research within courses is through:

- Encouraging students to develop and apply their own research skills with independent project work
- Allowing students to see the actual difficulties of researching as well as the tangible outputs

- Utilising staff experience of the processes of research and consultancy work to inform student learning
- Linking research and consultancy with relevant businesses or professional bodies where possible
- Incorporating research and consultancy outputs into practical lecture tasks (such as asking students to evaluate a particular piece of work).

Conclusions

In contrast to established disciplines, provision of HLST in Higher Education is relatively new, and with the exception of established sport sciences programmes, generally located within new universities. Therefore the emphasis of staff activities has largely been on teaching, rather than research. Staff keen to develop research within the subjects are often more likely to have needed to justify time for research rather than teaching commitments, in contrast to research led institutions where the reverse is perhaps more likely. Thus teaching development has been a focus of attention.

In subject courses there is often a propensity for multi/interdisciplinary approaches and the facilitation of experiential learning in curricula. This offers a rich environment in which to adopt enquiry based learning and approaches which make links between theory and practice, through for example live case studies. There is evidence of effective practice and links between teaching and research, and the opportunity to further enhance the potential benefits which can be achieved.

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