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Towards a research strategy on learning and teaching

Report to HEFCE by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information

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CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
RESEARCH & INFORMATION

Foreword

This report for the Learning and Teaching Directorate of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has been prepared by John Brennan, Peter Knight and Vassiliki Papatsiba of the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information of the Open University. Andrew Pollard from the University of Cambridge and Ulrich Teichler from the University of Kassel in Germany have acted as advisers.

The authors are grateful to the many HEFCE officers who made time available to talk to us and for the openness with which they did so. We are also grateful to several members of the Council's Quality Assessment Learning and Teaching (QALT) Committee for their time and candour. We have spoken to representatives of several other national and international higher education agencies in the course of this project to whom we are also grateful for their advice and openness.

Although the focus of this report is on the research and evaluation strategy to support the development of the Council's learning and teaching policy, at several points we raise wider issues concerning the Council's research and evaluation strategy as a whole, the role of the Council and its relationships with other organisations.

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Towards a Research Strategy on Learning and Teaching

Report of a study to assist HEFCE in the development of a long-term research and evaluation plan to underpin its policies on learning and teaching

CONTENTS

Executive Summary

1. The Council commissioned the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) to conduct a scoping study to assist in the development of the Council's long-term research and evaluation strategy for learning and teaching. Members of the project team have conducted interviews with a large number of HEFCE staff and with staff and representatives of other national bodies and higher education institutions, have scrutinised HEFCE research and evaluation reports, and have investigated the approaches and experiences of a number of other countries.

2. The statutory responsibilities of the Council, as stated in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, fall within three areas of activity:

    *   administration of funds
    *   provision of advice to the Secretary of State for Education
    *   provision for assessing the quality of education.

    However, the project team noted a lack of consensus both within the Council and the sector more widely on what these responsibilities meant in practice. This has implications for the ease with which a future research and evaluation strategy can be identified. *(Section 2)*

3. One of the clear implications of the changing landscape of higher education is that the Council's four strategic areas of widening participation, learning and teaching, research and knowledge transfer are all, to a greater or lesser extent, inextricably linked. There was, however, some indication that the Council's current organisational structure might encourage their separation. *(Section 4)*

4. We identified four types of study funded by the Council:
    *   Studies to promote or encourage institutional change
    *   Evaluation studies
    *   Policy feasibility and implementation studies
    *   Strategic research.

    We suggest that there is need for a greater emphasis on strategic research but note that there is not a consensus in the sector that HEFCE is the appropriate body to take this forward. *(Section 5)*

5. Under the theme of 'enhancing excellence in learning and teaching', the Council has funded more than 80 projects over the last six years. These have been undertaken in response to particular policy concerns at particular times. They are typically carried out to very short timescales. We encountered considerable dissatisfaction with this state of affairs, both within and outside the Council. On the whole, individual projects do not appear to contribute to a long-term evidence base available to the Council. *(Section 6)*

6. Commissioned projects embrace a rather wide and even loose conception of both 'research' and 'researcher'. This leads to noticeable discrepancies between the reports in terms of types of investigation, degree of transparency and elaboration of methodology and conceptualisation. *(Section 6)*

7. The project team classified the projects into three areas based on the three major strands of the Council's learning and teaching policy: a) Quality assurance (7 projects), b) Quality enhancement (19 projects), c) Funding and HE supply (46 projects). There were a number of projects that could not be classified in this way. Project reports tended to be largely descriptive and many of them required greater critical analysis and interpretation. Similarly, evaluation reports appeared to lack a common framework and it was not always clear what would be learned from them. *(Section 7)*

8. We summarise approaches to the organisation of research to support higher education policy in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. There is no common pattern, although Germany and the Netherlands have both managed to create a more substantial and focussed research capacity than exists in the UK. But in all four countries, politics appeared to be more important than evidence in the formulation of policy. *(Section 8)*

9. We have summarised the research programmes relevant to higher education learning and teaching of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Higher Education Academy. We also note the existence of several regular data sources, including the Rolling Research Brief, and summarise the results and implications of recent research in the United States. *(Section 9)*

10. On methodology, we anticipate that more holistic and longitudinal studies are likely to be required if the interconnected complexities of the issues confronting higher education are to be addressed successfully. This should result in fewer and larger projects than has been the previous practice of the Council. The effective blending of quantitative and qualitative methods within single studies is also likely to be necessary. *(Section 10.5 and 11.7)*

11. We propose the grouping of new research initiatives within the following themes:
    - The future size and shape of the HE sector
    - Quality and the funding of an adequate teaching infrastructure
    - Developing educational processes and practices.

    We also recommend that research take account of a number of contextual issues applicable across the themes. These concern (i) learning outcomes, (ii) marketisation, (iii) a changing HE environment. *(Section 11.3- 7)*

11. We believe that the task of generating specific research questions should be done in consultation with the sector and the research community. In doing so, it will also be necessary to consider the feasibility of finding answers to the questions, including methodological difficulties or lack of a suitable research capacity. *(Section 11.6)*

12. We suggest that consideration might be given to the establishment of regular reviews of research and their policy implications, drawing on the existing Rolling Research Brief. It is understood that the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) would welcome an opportunity to play an appropriate role in an overarching review of teaching and learning research in UK higher education. *(Section 11.8)*

13. In order for the Council to identify emerging issues and research questions in good time – and so to lessen the problems of compressed timescales – we suggest that regular meetings between relevant HEFCE officers and researchers be held. *(Section 11.9)*

14. There is potential for greater collaboration between bodies such as the funding councils, government departments and various other national agencies in the identification, funding and utilisation of research and evaluation studies. *(Section 11.10)*

15.   We make recommendations concerning the management and co-ordination of the Council's research and evaluation activities. These include the roles of policy officers, the establishment of quality criteria and the use of peer review. *(Sections 12 to 14)*

16.   We include some observations on research capacity in this field and make some suggestions as to how it might be enhanced. *(Sections 15 and 16)*

A. Contexts

1. Background to the study

1.1 The Council commissioned the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) to conduct a scoping study to assist in the development of the Council's long-term research and evaluation strategy for learning and teaching. The purpose of the strategy is:

    a. to assess the effectiveness of past policies to inform future work and account for the use of funds;

    b. to measure the impact of present activities and assist the rollout and development of strategy;

    c. to develop the longer-term evidence base for future strategy and policy, including the case for future investment;

    d. to raise awareness and understanding amongst all stakeholders, including Government and the HE sector itself, of trends and developments in learning and teaching in HE in England;

    e. to increase competencies in the L&T team on: awareness of the value of research and evaluation to inform and develop policy and strategy; techniques for the effective management of research and evaluation to inform policy development; and abilities and awareness to work in partnership with other relevant stakeholders and the research and evaluation community more generally.

The Council has a central Planning team which oversees its overall research strategy and assists with research strategy competence building. Research strategies to support the work of all four of the Council's directorates will form part of a '*long-term policy-focussed research and evaluation programme'.* The present report is intended to feed into the formulation of this programme from the interests of the Learning and Teaching Directorate.

1.2 Key issues identified in the brief for the study were:

    • *timescales* – the balance between short-term needs and the value of longer-term perspectives

    • *range of work* – using researchers, evaluators and consultants (not a single research community)

    • *role of the Council* – the need to focus and to take account of the work of partners (e.g. the Higher Education Academy, DfES, ESRC)

    • *priorities* – the need to identify clear priorities at the outset and to only commission new work where existing sources are insufficient.

1.3 The work to be conducted for the scoping study was as follows:

    a. audit of the present key information and research sources used by the Council in learning and teaching;

    b. a summary of the relevant information, evaluation and research results that will become available over the period of the strategy relevant to L&T in HE;

    c. the methods that might be adopted by the Council to identify future needs and priorities in research and evaluation in L&T and to judge levels of investment. This is to include (i) commentary on the methods/evidence that might be used by the Council to judge the impacts of policies over the period, (ii) an analysis of the likely key gaps in

evidence; (iii) a view on short-, mid- and long-term horizons for research and evaluation evidence;

d. the role that the Council should play in L&T HE research and evaluation (with regard to the audiences for research and the work of other bodies, e.g. the ESRC and the Higher Education Academy);

e. the processes that might be adopted in the Council in L&T in the management and review of strategy, and the management of research and evaluation flowing from the strategy.

In addition, at a later stage Council officers asked the team to give consideration to the nature of future research questions to inform learning and teaching policy and practice.

2.   The role of the Council

2.1   The statutory responsibilities of the Council, as stated in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992[1], fall within three areas of activity:

- administration of funds
- provision of advice to the Secretary of State for Education
- provision for assessing the quality of education.

2.2   The Council's mission is described in the current Strategic Plan (2003) as *'Working in partnership, we promote and fund high-quality, cost-effective teaching and research, meeting the diverse needs of students, the economy and society'.* There are four strategic aims covering widening participation and fair access, enhancing excellence in learning and teaching, enhancing excellence in research, and enhancing the contribution of HE to the economy and society. The aim under the heading of 'Enhancing excellence in learning and teaching' is described as *'to ensure that all higher education students benefit from a high-quality learning experience fully meeting their needs and the needs of society'* although several of the other aims are arguably also relevant to the work of the Learning and Teaching Directorate.

2.3   Notwithstanding these formal statements concerning the Council's role, in our consultations inside and outside the Council we heard some quite different and contradictory interpretations of what this role meant in practice. Among the points made to us were the following:

- The Council's role was to *implement government policy* through the funding of higher education institutions.
- Although the Council also had a statutory responsibility to *advise the Secretary of Sstate.*

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[1] The Further and Higher Education Act, 1992 (Part iii) states that
- Each council shall be responsible, subject to the provisions of this Part of this Act, for administering funds made available to the council by the Secretary of State and others for the purposes of providing financial support for activities eligible for funding under this section (§65.—1).
- Each council
(a) shall provide the Secretary of State with such information or advice relating to the provision for their area of higher education as he may from time to time require, and
(b) may provide the Secretary of State with such information or advice relating to such provision as they think fit, and information and advice provided under this subsection shall be provided in such manner as the Secretary of State may from time to time determine. (§69.—1)
- Each council shall secure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided in institutions for whose activities they provide, or are considering providing, financial support under this Part of this Act (§70.—1a)

- As institutions became less dependent on government funding through HEFCE, so the *role of the Council should become more limited.*
- As institutions became more subject to market pressures, so *the role of the Council would need to be enhanced* in order to ensure the wider public interest was represented.
- The Council needed to take *an independent strategic role and to act as a 'buffer'* between different interests – both within and external to higher education.
- It was important to distinguish between the Council's formal role and its *informal relationships and influence.*

In part, these differences reflected perceptions of changing relationships between the Council and the DfES. To some extent, they reflected predictable stakeholder interests. But the differences in emphasis among the Council's own staff were more surprising. It becomes difficult to address the Council's research and evaluation needs when there are such divergent views about its role. However, notwithstanding the differences in emphasis, there is reasonable common ground about *core* functions and these concern the public *funding* of higher education. The Council needs to obtain it, distribute it, know what is done with it and what economic and social benefits derive from it. These are large and complex issues.

3. Organisation of the Council

3.1 The Council is currently organised into a number of directorates representing a matrix of functional, regional and corporate responsibilities. We understand that one of the purposes of this form of organisation is to avoid a split between 'policy' and 'operational' activity.

3.2 There may be consequences of this form of organisation, however, for the effectiveness of the Council's activities in policy and research. It was pointed out to us that policy officers 'no longer sat together' but within their individual directorates. Regional consultants with policy briefs – although formally based in Bristol – were even less able to interact regularly with other policy colleagues. These arrangements, when accompanied by heavy workloads and relatively high turnover among L&T policy staff, may lessen the opportunities for sharing experiences and building collective expertise and a knowledge, for building interconnections among various policy issues, and for creating and maintaining a strong organisational culture. We return to these points later in the report.

3.3 The Quality Assessment Learning and Teaching Committee is the strategic committee for learning and teaching and advises the Board on its statutory responsibility for quality assurance and on funding for learning and teaching. We have had useful discussions with several members of this Committee. We refer to the role of committees in the Council's structure later in the report.

4. A changing HE landscape

4.1 Higher education is not immune to the effects of wider processes of social change. These impact directly and indirectly upon the work of higher education institutions and may be mediated, but not removed, by the policies of governments and national bodies. It is often considered that higher education's rhythm of responsiveness to external change follows too slow a pace. Government and its agents thus feel the necessity to intervene in order to increase the pace and/or to ensure that change is not at the expense of quality and

standards and that the interests and needs of students, society and the economy are represented. For higher education institutions, national policies are but one of the external factors that have to be taken into account.

4.2 It is difficult to capture the full range of the changes currently affecting higher education and which can be expected to do so in the future. Many of these reflect a continuing attempt to come to terms with 'mass' higher education, and its consequences both for institutions and for society. Key issues here concern the varying forms of diversity – of students, of institutions, of experiences, of outcomes. Changing labour market requirements and changing conceptions of social justice are all part of this landscape. For the individual, an essentially part-time and fragmented 'student experience' over much of the life course may be anticipated for the many, and is already the reality for a substantial few. In addition to changes connected with mass/diversity in higher education are changes in public policy more generally in the direction of greater emphasis on consumer choice, personalisation of public services, markets and diversified funding sources. Developments such as these are, of course, not limited to the UK, and a further changing feature of the landscape comes from the various aspects of globalisation – increases in student and labour mobility, international benchmarking for improved transparency, international frameworks of greater 'harmonisation'. Alongside trends of globalisation can be found trends towards greater emphasis on regional and local developments. Indeed, one might observe that the combination of global and local trends could suggest that the days of explicitly *national* policies and agencies might be numbered!

4.3 While it is undoubtedly the case that there is 'much going on' at the macro level of social, economic and political change, the connections with and implications for changes at the more micro world of student learning represent one of the major challenges facing higher education. Some within HEFCE would, we believe, see an essential part of the Council's tasks as helping to mediate between changing 'macro' landscapes and the need for change in the 'micro' worlds of higher education institutions.

4.4 One of the clear implications to us of this changing landscape is that the Council's four strategic areas of widening participation, learning and teaching, research and knowledge transfer are all, to a greater or lesser extent, inextricably linked at the level of institutional practice and need also to be linked at the level of policy.

B. Approaches to research and evaluation

5. Types of projects undertaken by the Council

5.1 We have distinguished four types of project funded or potentially funded by the Council.

- The first type of project seeks to *promote or encourage institutional change.* This would include identifying and disseminating good practice in learning and teaching. Apart from major programmes such as the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) and the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN, now part of the Higher Education Academy), there appear to have been relatively few separate projects of this type in recent years. This kind of work seems likely to fall within the remit of the new Higher Education Academy in the future.

- The second type of project consists of *evaluation studies.* Evaluation research can have a variety of purposes. The Council commissions two types of evaluations: small-scale project evaluations, which are often commissioned, managed and sometimes undertaken by project teams (Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning, FDTL, and Innovations) themselves; and thematic evaluations, as with the TQEF evaluation and the formative evaluation of foundation degrees. The timing of evaluation studies varies as do their purposes. A proportion of evaluations shade into what might be described as 'impact studies' where the effects of Council policies and initiatives are sought.

- The third type of project is concerned with *policy feasibility and implementation.* Probably the majority of projects fall within this type. These include consultations with the sector, literature reviews and case studies and are frequently concerned with aspects of the core functions of the Council, i.e. funding issues. Particularly in the last couple of years, projects have mainly concerned the implementation of policies that have been developed elsewhere, most notably in the 2003 White Paper. Research questions frequently concern the costs and likely acceptability of new policies, although the data to provide good answers to such questions are not always obtainable in the time allowed.

- The final type of project we describe as *strategic research.* Research of this sort is inherently long-term and is more concerned with shaping agendas rather than simply responding to them. 'Strategic research' does not appear to have been a term in wide use within the Council although historically there has been activity of this sort, sometimes referred to as more 'speculative' research. The White Paper appears to have edged out this sort of work in the recent past. However, there is a felt need, both within and outside the Council, for more research of this sort. There are, however, differences of view about whether this should be a task for HEFCE.

5.2 The differences between the above types of project are not of course clear-cut. While there is broad consensus about the need for all of them, there is less agreement about which are appropriate activities for the Council. The need for the Council to undertake research in connection with policy implementation and evaluation is generally accepted but its role in the other two types is more contentious.

6. Information and research sources used by the Council in learning and teaching

6.1 Under the theme of 'enhancing excellence in learning and teaching', the Council has funded 86 projects over the last six years. These cover a wide range of topics and were commissioned from a wide variety of 'consultants'. Their purpose has been a mixture of informing HEFCE decision-making (including submissions to the annual government Spending Review) and providing advice and information to the sector. However, in addition to special projects, Council staff have access to in-house work undertaken by the Analytical Services Group, the research summaries contained in the Rolling Research Brief, advice from members of Council committees and working groups, and the networks and informal contacts of individual officers.

6.2 Commissioned projects[2] embrace a rather wide and loose conception of both 'research' and 'researcher'. Projects have been undertaken by university-based researchers, private consultancy firms and other national organisations. They include consultations with the sector, evaluations and development projects, action research within institutions, case studies of 'good-practice', support for technical and operational matters, as well as more recognisably 'academic' research and literature reviews. Projects are generally undertaken to a short time-scale, often to a rapidly prepared brief. Over the last couple of years, the 2003 White Paper has largely set the research agenda, but prior to that there was also an element of what has been described to us as more 'speculative' research.

6.3 The 86 commissioned projects do not appear to have been grouped in any way nor to reflect any long-term themes or agendas. They have been undertaken in response to particular policy concerns at particular times. Doubts were expressed to us, both within and outside the Council, about a) the quality and scope of the evidence, b) its functions (e.g. informing policy or legitimating policy), c) the extent to which this 'evidence' was actually used, and d) its contribution to the long-term evidence base of the Council (other than in the heads of some of the more long-serving officers). In some cases, interviewees believed that evaluation and research were being used principally to legitimate policy rather than to influence it, and that it reflected a need 'to be seen to be doing something' rather than a serious intention to use evidence in the formulation of policy and practice. Several people commented negatively about the general quality of commissioned research. Although research reports were generally well-presented, content was frequently described to us as 'unimpressive'.

6.4 There appear to be several reasons for this situation. Officers often have to prepare project briefs in a matter of hours and may possess little relevant background in either the substance of the project or in research design and broader issues of methodology and the interpretation and criticism of results. Consultants often lack a research background in the field of the project, and the short timescales provide little opportunity for literature reviews or consultations with wider groups of experts. The lack of a systematic approach to research and to the accumulation of evidence and understanding further limits the impact of reports.

6.5 Project management has been spread among a large staff group, and many staff have only recently joined the Council. High workloads have meant that opportunities for sharing experience and developing expertise have been limited, as has the time available for more senior staff to provide support and advice to junior colleagues.

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[2] Which we do not take to include projects funded by the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning and Innovation in Higher Education.

6.6   Many of these problems have been recognised within the Council and are being addressed. We comment on future arrangements for the co-ordination and management of research in sections 12 to 14.

7.   Analysis of reports

7.1   We received two lists of 86 projects covering the period 1999 to 2004 (last update 16/07/2004). Eighty of them had already been commissioned (and most of them had been completed) and six were 'proposed projects'. From this set of 86 projects, eight projects[3] were finally excluded because they had a predominantly developmental dimension. We were warned by officers about a possible lack of accuracy in some project titles and commissioning periods, and this turned out to be the case. This created some delays in attempting to match reports and other documents to listed titles. Beyond the needs of the current project, the creation of a more efficient system for accessing the outcomes of completed projects, invitations to tender and associated documents reporting on the various difficulties, criticisms and achievements of projects, could be a valuable source of knowledge for internal use.

7.2   We classified 72 projects[4] into three categories based on the three major strands of the Council's L&T policy: a) Quality assurance, b) Quality enhancement, c) Funding and HE supply. A first classification gives the following picture. (A list of projects, organised in terms of this classification, is contained in annex 2.)

- Some seven projects would be classified in the first strand of 'Quality assurance'. We can mention, as an example, the project on *'Public information needs on HE quality and standards'*, as well as the project entitled '*Collecting and using student feedback on quality and standards of learning and teaching in HE'*. Both investigated quality assurance issues from the point of view of different stakeholders and actors in the system.

- Nineteen projects could be considered as investigating issues related to the second strand of 'Quality enhancement'. Examples in this category include '*Good practice in institutional L&T strategies'* and '*Building capacity for change: research on the scholarship of teaching'*. Another area of investigation in this category dealt with modes of learning, for example a project on 'e-learning'. Projects investigating the nature of learning at the level of the individual were less common than projects on topics with direct institutional implications.

- Forty-six projects could be grouped within the third category concerning 'Funding and HE supply'. Typical examples here include a project on '*Types of foundation degree - a case study approach'* and a project on the '*Comparative costs of HE in HEIs and FECs'*. A third example falling in this third category is a project on '*Evidence of how HE improves graduates' employability'*.

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[3] 59 Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE feasibility study.
153 Workshop on effective dissemination.
235 Higher Education Academy.
236 Higher Education Academy.
238 Higher Education Academy Implementation.
263 HE in FECs: review of the code of practice.
1 HE in FECs: review of the code of practice.
181 Seminar on HE in FE colleges: policy and participation in England, Scotland, Wales and N Ireland.

[4] From the list of 86 projects, eight were excluded and six were at the stage of 'proposed' projects.

Some projects seemed to belong to two of the strands or raised other questions of classification.

7.3   Twenty-four projects were selected for further scrutiny and analysis. Whenever possible, as well as project reports, we obtained the invitation to tender and minutes from committee or steering group meetings where the project had been discussed. The criteria for the selection of projects, based on the titles and short descriptions, were as follows:

- conducted during the last six years
- undertaken by different types of 'researcher' - consulting companies, academic researchers and national organisations
- represented a mix of topics dealing with technical, utilitarian or conceptual dimensions.

The authors of this report would not claim to possess the necessary specialist expertise to evaluate the detailed achievements of all these projects, but some general observations can be made. Reports tended to be largely descriptive. Generally they sought to provide overviews – sometimes with some more detailed examples – of some aspect of the 'grassroots' reality in institutions. For this purpose, typologies, classifications and taxonomies were often mobilised by the researchers in order to organise the description and to give a coherent view of the object under investigation. There was greater variation between projects in their analytical or interpretive aspects. Only a few attempted much in these respects although, in so doing, they demonstrated that even within tight time constraints it was possible to go beyond simple descriptive reporting.

7.4   Below we consider in more detail specific aspects of the reports.

- *Nature of evidence*

The reports revealed different sorts of evidence, some more research-based than others. Some appeared to be products primarily of *'craft expertise'* where results and conclusions were presented without explicit explanation of how they had been reached. The reader had to 'trust' the expertise of the investigator. Others were more clearly *systematic empirical investigations* where the stages of the investigation were presented, and it was possible to follow or to reconstruct the progression of the argument and to see the evidence for the conclusions. However, the research questions tended to be *ad hoc,* reflecting the immediate preoccupations of the commissioners of the study. The linkage with wider issues or with previous research was not made. The outcomes were mainly descriptive and stayed close to informants' statements. A small number of studies revealed *more conceptual and methodologically elaborated* approaches where empirical studies were complemented by references to other work, placing the study in a wider context and allowing the articulation of more precise research questions, as well as containing more robust evidence for the validity or plausibility of the results and conclusions. The second type of approach – systematic empirical investigations - was the one most commonly found in this set of reports.

We believe that each type of study has its place. The need for answers to quite practical questions against extremely tight deadlines may accord high value to what we have called 'craft expertise'. But there will be other occasions when the complexities of issues call for greater conceptual and methodological sophistication.

- *Methodologies*

Reports frequently contained sections on methodology. These generally described the key phases of the study and the tasks undertaken by the investigators. These sections of reports were accessibly written but often 'thin' in terms of content. Information on

methods of analysis tended to be limited. Methods and techniques of analysis also tended to be fairly unsophisticated. The evidence (whether quantitative or qualitative) for the way information had been obtained and analysed was not always provided.

- *Bibliographies*

More than half the reports contained a bibliography of some kind. Some of these included a rich combination of academic publications, commissioned reports, 'grey' unpublished literature of various bodies and organisations, and policy documents. Sometimes literature reviews were included, often in the appendices. Other reports contained a shorter list of published commissioned reports, some publications of team members and a small number of scholarly publications. Statements such as 'some research in the UK suggests…', without any reference to support the subsequent statement, were found in a number of reports. The absence of comprehensive referencing works against the achievement of cumulative knowledge. In those cases where the only references were to commissioned reports from various policy bodies, the cynical reader might consider it a sign of 'quick fix' policy legitimation.

- *Recommendations*

Nearly half of the reports included a section entitled 'recommendations' or less often 'policy implications', 'advice to HEFCE', etc. Recommendations took a wide variety of forms, largely independent of the type of investigator or investigation.

- *Use of reports*

Had reports influenced the policy process? The analysis of the reports themselves cannot provide the answer. In our view, the potential for application exists, as the reports generally provided at least some good descriptive data. We have already noted, however, the views of many of those interviewed that the impact of reports on the policy process had been quite weak.

7.5 Although several of the people we interviewed emphasised that it was not the Council's role to undertake 'academic research', we would nevertheless argue that many of the reports required greater critical analysis and interpretation than they contained; not in order to turn them into 'academic research' but in order to ensure that supportable inferences and conclusions were drawn. This would also necessitate considering a project's findings in the light of other relevant research literature.

7.6 Eight projects were **evaluation studies**. There does not seem to be a Council policy on evaluations, nor are there standards to guide evaluators. A consequence is that evaluations are not cumulative; they are of varying quality, reflecting different levels of investment and evaluator expertise. There appears to be some difference of function, with concerns for accountability, improvement and enhanced understanding being variously mingled. Evaluations of projects or developmental activities tend to be either (a) end-of-project or (b) continuous throughout the project. The second sort is more costly but allows the evaluation to fulfil a formative purpose, potentially adding value to the project. The former can be little more than a formal signing off that the project has to some extent met its aims. Neither type of evaluation is in a position to appraise longer-term impacts.

7.7 There are also some ambiguities about the role that evidence, such as that presented by research and evaluation reports, is intended to play. In the case of evaluations, for example, it is not always clear whether evidence has been collected for accountability purposes, for improvement purposes, or for learning purposes. Ambiguities about the relationship between evidence and policy, and about the reasons for collecting evidence, run the danger

of compromising the value of any report, no matter how seriously the work has been carried out. There is also a danger that the results of individual studies are addressed predominantly within a 'political' rather than a research context.

7.8 The lack of an evaluation and research framework also limits the power of individual studies, not least because policy evaluations are enhanced by a comparative dimension. Although there is some value in considering whether a particular policy is being delivered as planned, there is more power to evaluations that weigh a policy against alternatives. In some cases this implies making international comparisons.

7.9 Eight evaluation studies were examined in more detail.[5] These studies suggested a range of purposes and methods, from large-scale surveys (TQEF evaluation) to more strategic formative activity (foundation degrees). It was clear that evaluations had been undertaken for different purposes and at different times in relation to the projects they described. There was some uncertainty as to whether individual evaluations were intended to show that money was well spent, to inform decisions about spending more money, to contribute to project improvement, or some combination of all of these things. This element of vagueness of purpose meant that even though reports often had the air of being careful and thoughtful, it was sometimes hard to detect their substance. This was compounded by two further factors. One was the lack of an evaluation framework. Evaluators should, of course, deploy the approaches that best address the project in question, but that does not preclude the use of a common evaluation framework to provide guidance. The absence of a common framework meant that evaluation, in this sample, was a rather heterogeneous activity. Related to this is the absence of a sense of learning from evaluations. In terms of these eight studies, that sense was only, perhaps, present in one of them.

8. International perspectives

8.1 Many of the problems discussed in sections 6 and 7 were evident to a greater or lesser extent in the other countries we examined as part of this study. In the **Netherlands** and **Sweden**, the difficulties are somewhat eased by the smaller higher education systems and by the greater reliance that can be placed on informal knowledge and contacts. Thus in Sweden, university-based academics appear to be a source of informal advice and information out of which projects are sometimes developed. In the Netherlands, informal meetings between researchers and ministry officials have taken place on a regular basis, out of which both policy and research agendas have emerged. There is some suggestion that these have been happening less often recently. At a more formal level, although previous Dutch government 'White Papers' (Higher Education and Research Plans – HOOP) had built on the results of research, the latest (HOOP 2004) shows a lower level of interaction between policy formulation and research. This recent relative disconnection between policy and research reflects financial constraints and time pressures. There is also a tendency towards short-term and quite narrowly-focussed studies. Annex A of this report provides some background information about the ministry's quadrennial plans.

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[5] They were:
223 Formative evaluation of foundation degrees.
216 TQEF evaluation.
197 Evaluation of the expansion of medical school numbers.
141 Independent evaluation of the HE summer school scheme.
108 Non award-bearing courses evaluation.
62 Evaluation of the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning
52 Evaluation of the impact of CVE development funding.
37 Evaluation of the quality of 2001 HE summer schools.

8.2　An 'escalation of expectations' leading to poor quality research was described to us by a respondent based at a Dutch research institute. 'Escalations' occurred when the ministry produced unfeasible research specifications – due to lack of time and expertise – and consultants, in order to gain competitive advantage in the tender process, added even more elements to the projects. The result was that projects were undertaken with objectives that could not possibly be achieved. Unsurprisingly, the results were disappointing. We believe that an 'escalation of expectations' has sometimes occurred with HEFCE projects.

8.3　It is worth noting, however, that for their size both the Netherlands and Sweden have developed a stronger higher education research capacity than exists in the UK. While in Sweden this capacity is spread over several institutions, in the Netherlands the University of Twente's Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) provides a concentrated research resource to support higher education policy. CHEPS has nearly 40 staff and 18 doctoral students. Many of the latter are from overseas, but the net effect is the availability of an expert and experienced resource from which the ministry and others can seek advice and commission research. Similar centres exist in other countries and provide comparable resource and expertise. This is not to imply that higher education research expertise must be concentrated in a single place, but the existence of one or more specialist centres in a country seems to provide a focus for evaluation and research training, and opportunities for research careers in the field, that are largely absent in the UK. We return to this point in sections 15 and 16.

8.4　A brief description of the background to higher education policy and research in **France** is set out in an annex to this report. The ministry generally does use research results to support its decisions on higher education matters. All French interviewees recognised the weak impact of research on political decision-making. The evidence-based policy appeared to them as an ideal principle but nearly incompatible with the nature of the political decision-making process. The 'political cost' was considered to be a strong opposing factor to the introduction of research-based policies. One of our informants mentioned that research cannot change the course of a political decision, but what it can do, in the best case, is to 'force' policy-making people to produce an honest discourse about the deeper rationale for a planned change. Notwithstanding the above, informal links exist between the policy-makers and the research community. Even well-known researchers or scholars have had political responsibilities at the highest level (e.g. the previous minister of education Luc Ferry, who is a scholar in the field of educational philosophy, and François Dubet, sociologist of education and previous director of one of the directorates at the ministry).

8.5　The development of research on higher education is fairly recent (during the last five to six years). One of the reasons for its development is the growth of comparative European or international studies. The latter, by countries including France, have given the opportunity to conduct research on higher education issues, mostly from a macro perspective and with an historical or sociological approach. Yet this progress, however important it may be, does not cover the research needs in the field. Research on student learning, especially, has been developed in only a fairly limited way. One of the recent developments in the field of higher education research is the creation of a network of research (Réseau d'Etude sur l'Enseignement Supérieur -RESUP) in 2001. This network gathers teams of sociologists, economists, political scientists and educationalists working on higher education issues. It has received support from the ministry which, however, does not intervene in the definition of its research activities. In the present stage of its life, the network is developing an academic-type (or scholarly-driven) research activity (conferences, register of researchers etc.) and has not received any direct remit from the ministry. As we already mentioned, the latter does not traditionally support its decisions on higher education matters with research results. The network seeks to structure research around five topics: (i) diversity of contexts of studies and inequalities; (ii) the HE selective sector, vocationally-

oriented studies, costs and advantages; (iii) institutional autonomy and HE policies; (iv) the academic profession; (v) pedagogical innovations in HE.

8.6   According to a ministerial point of view, diversity – that is, diversity of the HE sector (selective vs. open), of subjects, of level of studies, of individual strategies and experiences, part-time students, ethnic minorities, etc. – should be taken into account in all higher education research. Furthermore, four topics were identified by one of the interviewees as presenting a strong interest for the policy-makers. They do not necessarily overlap with the scientific community's priorities. The first one is the development of a 'meso' or middle level of research, mainly dealing with issues of institutional functioning and efficiency. The second would focus on students. It includes issues of 'markets' and student mobility (in all forms, e.g. inter-institutional, regional, European or international) and forms of regulation, as well as students' trajectories and experiences. The third one has to do with the implementation, costs, efficiency, pedagogy and impact on students' work of information technology. The fourth one would raise and explore questions related to the creation of a 'common culture' for students. What kind of citizen do we want to 'shape' through higher education? What common basis of knowledge do we need to build and to make available to students in order to better understand (a) forms of diversity, (b) various socio-economic international contexts and societies, (c) the evolution of science/technology and (d) the role of the citizen in supporting such developments?

8.7   Concerning the internal evaluation and research capacity of the French ministry, the Directorate of Evaluation and Prospective (DEP) plays a major role in commissioning research or other investigations and analyses of educational issues (though not specific to HE). Traditionally, consultation with 'experts' was the most frequently adopted approach of the ministry. Private companies of consultants have also been commissioned, mainly for collecting data that later were analysed by in-house analysts or for providing audits. Nowadays, there is a tendency towards long-term, large projects that aim to contribute to the state-of-the art on the selected topic. However, this fundamental research concerns topics of political relevance (recently, for example, regional disparities in education, decentralisation, student mobility). In addition, the DEP organises and commissions (a) studies for assisting it with the creation of instruments of evaluation and various indicators, (b) analysis of secondary data (OECD, or from international benchmarking, such as PISA) and (c) studies of the feasibility and evaluation of specific policies.

8.8   In **Germany**[6], research on higher education is highly decentralised. When interest grew in higher education reforms during the late 1960s and early 1970s, more than 20 universities established Hochschuldidaktische Zentren (centres of higher education didactics), which served staff development as well as research, notably on teaching and learning but often on a wider spectrum of themes as well. In the intervening years, the majority of these centres have been discontinued or have reduced in size significantly. Today, the Zentrum für Hochschuldidaktik of the University of Dortmund is the only one remaining which has reasonable visibility.

8.9   In the early 1970s, the Hochschul-Information-System (HIS, Higher Education Information System) was established in order to provide services to universities on matters of computerisation of the administration, resource planning etc., as well as in order to conduct applied research in higher education. HIS, jointly funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the ministries of the Länder in charge of higher education, is best known for large-scale surveys on access to higher education, student flows, the social situation of students and graduate employment. Also in the early 1970s, the Bavarian government established the Bayerisches Staatsinstitut für Hochschulforschung und Hochschulplanung (Bavarian State Institute for Higher Education Research and Planning).

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[6] The information on Germany was supplied to us by Professor Ulrich Teichler of the University of Kassel.

The IHF considers itself as an institution of applied research in a broad range of higher education issues.

8.10 Sizeable higher education research institutes (both with 10 or more regular staff positions and considerable contract-based research activities) exist at only two universities in Germany:

- The *Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung* (Centre for Research on Higher Education and Work), an interdisciplinary research institute of the University of Kassel, was established in the late 1970s. It is known for research on the relationships between higher education and the world of work, on various issues of higher education and society, and the internationalisation of higher education, as well as for international comparative studies on higher education in Europe and other parts of the world.

- The *Institut für Hochschulforschung Wittenberg* (Institute for Higher Education Research Wittenberg) at the University Halle-Wittenberg, was established in the late 1990s. It is jointly funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and by the government of the Land Sachsen-Anhalt. It addresses a broad range of themes, but puts some emphasis on higher education in Eastern Germany as well as in Central and Eastern European countries. HOF is in the process of establishing a national system of computerised information on higher education research in Germany (bibliographies, abstracts, directories, etc.).

Both institutes conceive themselves both as academic centres responsible for strengthening the theoretical and methodological basis of higher education research, and as institutes undertaking contract research relevant to improving higher education.

8.11 In addition, we note a considerable number of small research groups or individual scholars at various universities and some Fachhochschulen focussing on or occasionally undertaking research on higher education, notably on students, teaching and learning, graduate employment and work, history of higher education, and higher education legislation, as well as funding and management. When a Directory for Higher Education Research was prepared in 2002, about 100 scholars, individually active or in small teams, decided to present themselves as higher education researchers. Some of them might be termed institutional researchers, i.e. closely linked in their research to reforms within their institutions, among them most visibly a research unit of the FernUniversität Hagen undertaking research into distance learning.

8.12 In recent years, many universities have undertaken substantial studies to provide a systematic knowledge base for their evaluation and strategic planning activities. As a rule, however, these studies are undertaken by professional staff along with other tasks, and neither the people themselves nor the institutions classify these activities as 'institutional research' or similar.

8.13 A few major research institutes outside the universities focussing predominantly on other themes occasionally embark on studies in the domain of higher education. This notably holds true for the Max-Planck Institute for Human Development and Education, Berlin, an institute for basic research; and for the Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung der Bundesagentur für Arbeit (Institute for Labour Market and Occupational Research of the Federal Employment Agency), which undertakes studies on graduate employment and work.

8.14 In the wake of the current managerial reforms in higher education, the formation of a private company, the Bertelsmann Foundation, has provided funds since the mid-1990s for the Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung (CHE, Centre for Higher Education

Development). CHE considers itself as a think-tank actively advocating reforms to strengthen managerial, entrepreneurial market-oriented university administration, providing consultancy for individual universities, and undertaking applied research aimed at higher education reforms. Among its applied research activities, the most widely known are studies on the 'ranking of universities' according to the students' assessments of study conditions and provisions, research reputation, etc.

8.15   Since early 2004, initiatives have been taken to establish masters programmes serving the initial training or the continuing professional education of professionals in higher education, i.e. university training for staff active in managerial functions of the university or other domains closely linked to the core functions of the university (counselling, curriculum development, staff development, international relations, career guidance etc.). Courses were established for higher education and research management at the Verwaltungshochschule Speyer (College of Public Administration Speyer), jointly at the Fachhochschulen (universities of applied sciences) in Osnabrück and Bremen, as well as on higher education in general at the University of Kassel, the latter serving both the training of young researchers and the continuing professional development of higher education professionals.

8.16   Altogether, research activities on higher education in Germany are somewhat less widely spread than in the United Kingdom. With the exception of some institutions and scholars, German higher education researchers almost exclusively publish in the German language.[7]

8.17   Although we have not attempted to look explicitly at the organisation of policy research on learning and teaching in the **United States**, the existence of well-established higher education research centres in several US universities as well as a substantial research literature on the subject should be acknowledged. The main conclusions from a major forthcoming review of this literature will be summarised in section 9.7.

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[7] See S. Gunkel, G. Freidank and U. Teichler. *Directory der Hochschulforschung: Personen und Institutionen in Deutschland.* Bonn: Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, 2004.

C. Future research priorities

9. Summary of relevant information, evaluation and research results that will come available over the period of the strategy

9.1 The short-term nature of research commissioning, not only by HEFCE but also by other policy and funding bodies, makes it difficult to assess the kinds of information, evaluation and research results that will be available to the Council from other sources.[8] In the case of academic research in the field – funded by research councils, foundations and international bodies – it is especially difficult to know in advance the work that will be done unless it is part of larger programmes, e.g. the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme. Thus, the lists provided below are necessarily incomplete.

9.2 **The Economic and Social Research Council**

The ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) contains a number of projects concerned with higher education. These cover topics such as problem-based learning, teaching-learning environments, the social and organisational mediation of university learning, learning by disabled students, and learning to 'perform'. A list is provided in annex 3. The projects on the first two topics are at the reporting stage but the others will not be completed until 2007, although there will be intermediate outcomes from all projects.

TLRP projects are unusually large and long term by the standards of most social research funding, especially in the field of higher education. Thus, the outcomes should be broad and include new conceptualisations of issues, broader understanding of relevant literatures, as well as new data. They will also provide training opportunities for new researchers entering the field. TLRP as a whole is policy and practice oriented, and it is to be expected that outcomes of the programme will be significant to future policy making, including by HEFCE. In particular, an interest in learning outcomes in a context of greater student and institutional diversity will be important to widening participation as well as learning and teaching policies.

A review of recent research on learning and teaching in higher education was included in a report commissioned by TLRP from the Tavistock Institute in anticipation of phase 3 of the programme.[9] The following are some highlights of what the report says about research into higher education.

- The dominant conception of knowledge remains abstract and disciplinary based, although other sources are acknowledged.
- There is evidence in the literature of increasing interest in the student learning experience.
- Recognition of the importance of informal learning processes alongside formal ones.
- A critical or reflective view on pedagogy in higher education is not widely found in the literature. Pedagogy tends to be presented in technicist terms – as decontextualised ideas and practices – rather than located in a social and philosophical space.

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[8] This is partly a function of policy uncertainty: it is seldom clear what questions politicians will be asking five or more years ahead; and partly a function of demarcation - so that even if we know the questions, it is not clear who will be responsible for looking for answers.

[9] Joe Cullen, Kari Hadjivassiliou, Emma Hamilton, John Kelleher, Elizabeth Sommerlad, Elliot Stern (2002) *Review of current pedagogic research and practice in post-compulsory education and lifelong learning.* London: The Tavistock Institute.

- The dominant psychological paradigm in teaching and learning in higher education, and the narrow way in which pedagogy has been conceived, are being increasingly questioned. The dominance of the cognitive tradition in the individualistic psychological paradigm may explain the poor showing in higher education of social learning models of teaching and learning.
- The research and practitioner literature on teaching and learning in higher education is highly individualistic in focus.
- Many analytic studies of higher education have observed the 'interiorisation' into institutional values and purposes of external social and cultural forces. In the higher education journal literature, the tighter coupling of the university with the economic and social system is implicitly accepted by many authors as part of the new reality.
- A great deal of the commentary on broad social and cultural trends in society, and its implications for higher education, is generated by those responsible for the management of higher education. The proximal forces having greatest impact on universities are mediated through political/ministerial channels – White Papers, policy directives, accountability requirements and mechanisms.
- Part of the problem of responding to current changes in cultural, social and institutional trends is the deeply embedded notion of the 'ideal undergraduate' student, and a somewhat romantic notion of the student experience that simply ignores the new realities of student choices, flexible delivery, the pressure to respond to student markets in the face of the decline in government policy, and the emergence of competition from diverse, well resourced and highly creative alternative providers.

The following gaps in knowledge identified in the report include the following.

- There is little systematic work on the institutional learning setting as an active constituent of learning, and not simply as a background to learning. As learners bring their new identities and expectations as consumers into the learning setting, for example, what change is there to the social relations within the setting, and how does this affect the 'psychological learning contract' between teacher and student?

- The 'institutional experience' of many students in the contemporary world is very different from the one that existed when much of the research on 'student engagement' was undertaken. An increasing number of students are spending less time on campus and more time working in paid employment. They either seek, or have in their lives, an increasing number of activities and priorities that compete with the demands of university. This new institutional environment will be a very different one, providing a very different student learning experience.

TLRP will continue until the end of 2007. Although the proportion of projects that have reached completion remains small – and cover all education sectors – the Director reports that some overall findings are gradually emerging.[10] Five of these are offered below.

- Teaching and learning must be seen holistically, in context. Policy frameworks, institutional and disciplinary cultures create learning environments which affect outcomes.
- Informal learning is at least as significant as formal learning. 'Teaching' has its limits and outcomes are likely to be enhanced where informal learning is recognised within formal processes.
- Learner motivation and engagement are influenced by past experiences, anticipated futures and agency. Teaching and learning in all sectors should take account of learner perspectives and the progressive construction of learner identities through life.

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[10] Pollard, A. (2004) 'Some tentative TLRP findings', personal communication.

- Whilst the diversity of learner needs is growing, there are many teaching and learning issues, with consequences for outcomes, which are experienced 'in common'. Among these, 'learning how to learn' is particularly significant.
- The specific nature and form of subject knowledge, skills and other learning challenges are of great importance. Enhancing learning outcomes depends on successfully managing the tensions between preserving the perceived integrity of forms of knowledge and constructively engaging learners.

9.3 **The Department for Education and Skills**

Although the forward research programme of the DfES had not received ministerial approval at the time of writing, it contained a number of relevant projects. We were provided with a list from the Department of projects thought to be relevant to learning and teaching policies. (They are listed in annex 3.) These contained three projects related to economic/employment issues, six on quality/efficiency issues, three on enhancement issues and one (the Rolling Research Brief – see 9.6) that cut across themes. In fact, only two of the projects were directly focussed on the topic of learning and teaching: one reviewing the literature on the relationship between research, teaching and scholarship; and the other looking at the role of ICT in learning and teaching. But in fact, several others were indirectly relevant, including two on higher education staffing.

A project on the 'returns on higher education teaching' is indicative of the strongly economic concerns of the Department. The largest single category of projects reflects economic and employment concerns. These clearly flow from current priorities in government thinking. Other projects – especially on widening participation – underline the interconnectedness of different policy and practice issues and their frequent large implications for learning and teaching, something which we refer to elsewhere in this report.

In discussions with staff in the Department, it was clear that government concerns with the returns on public investment in higher education raised quite fundamental research questions – about the individual and social benefits of higher education and the most effective ways of achieving them. It may be that there is a more 'critical' research agenda being set for higher education from outside the sector than the preferred 'enhancement-related' agenda of many of those within it.

9.4 **The Higher Education Academy**

The details of the forward plans of the Academy are not known at the time of writing. However, certain activities have been carried over from the LTSN and the Institute for Learning and Teaching. The larger projects tend to focus on evaluations of the Academy's constituent parts, especially the subject centre network. But there are also quite a large number of smaller projects, generally subject-specific.

Concerning the evaluations, *the second stage evaluation of the LTSN* is now complete and has made comments on the state of play in 2004 compared to 2002 when the first stage evaluation was undertaken. The report comments on the impact of the subject centres to date and their prospects for the future. In addition, *a review of the configuration of LTSN subject centres* has been commissioned and is currently being carried out. It will collect a variety of documentary, self-analysis, and interview and limited survey data.

The *small-scale research and development projects* sponsored by individual subject centres are almost all focussed on quite specific learning, teaching and assessment issues. Some observers have expressed the view that the money is spread too thin and that the quality of these studies can be low and the generalisability limited. Others consider that small sums of money used in this way lever considerable commitment and can attract other resources.

There is so far no systematic Academy knowledge of these projects, nor any attempt to see how far some overall sense might be made of a very diverse set of projects.

Looking to the future, the terms of reference of the Academy contain a research function that did not exist previously, and the Academy is currently recruiting a Director of Research and Evaluation. We were informed that the Academy's approach to research would embrace the student experience broadly. While the focus will be on practitioner issues, it seems likely that the Academy will also be interested in undertaking, commissioning or collaborating in some policy-related research.

9.5 **Regular data sources**

In addition to the outcomes of particular projects, HEFCE will be able to draw on the regular information flows from national and international agencies, e.g. the Higher Education Statistics Agency, HESA, and the OECD. While some of these are mainly statistical, others – for example, the new round of OECD thematic reviews and the Council's own Teaching Quality Information – will provide new contextual, comparative and performance data. We suspect that more could be done with these data sources. Consideration might be given to the development of an annual synthesis publication along the lines of the Nuffield Annual Reviews of 14 to 19 provision and the *Campus Trends* publication of the American Council on Education. The annual statistical analysis undertaken by Nigel Brown and Brian Ramsden for Universities UK is an example of the sort of thing that could be developed further.

9.6 **The Rolling Research Brief (RRB)**

This research database is maintained by CHERI for the DfES, HEFCE, the Academy and Universities UK. It provides an up-to-date picture of published research but cannot of course predict what will be published in the future. It currently contains 146 entries under its learning and teaching theme. These cover the following topics:

> 4 on e-learning
> 6 on accreditation of work experience
> 20 on other aspects of work experience
> 11 on work placements
> 2 on distance education
> 26 on key skills/competences
> 5 on lifelong learning
> 15 on non-completion
> 5 on personal development planning and transcripts
> 33 on student assessment
> 23 on achievement/progression
> 37 on student views/expectations.

(The sum of the numbers for the topics exceeds the 146 total because some of the database entries relate to more than one topic.)

However, this breakdown partly reflects the interests of the DfES as the original funder of RRB and cannot be taken to represent the true state of the field. This will be rectified as the database is further developed.

A number of points can be made based on CHERI's experience of maintaining the RRB.

- It is clear that the volume and quality of research differ between research areas and themes. This largely reflects the capacity and organisation of research in different fields (which itself reflects the importance attached to different policy areas in recent years). In some fields – for example, the graduate labour market – there are several well-

established research centres with interests in labour markets and employment and which possess experienced researchers whose work focuses on higher education. The research output in this theme reflects this capacity. In other research areas, and learning and teaching is a particular case in point, research is much more geared towards practitioner interests, often local and in a context of staff training and development.

- Research themes also differ in the extent to which they are addressed by relevant academic disciplines such as economics, psychology, public administration and sociology. Contributions from such sources, when they occur, bring the conceptual and methodological strengths of the core disciplines but often reveal a lack of knowledge of the higher education research literature.

- The disjuncture between policy research, practitioner research and academic research has been pointed to in the international literature by Elaine El Khawas.[11] She notes that each has its separate institutional bases of higher education research with its own agenda, mode of research and communication circles and that interaction between them is generally rather limited. Consequently, the foci, standards and networks of these kinds of research differ considerably. For example, practitioner research tends to have a local focus, is undertaken by people for whom 'research' may be a relatively minor function with immediate practical ends. Similar 'biases' can be found in policy, evaluation and academic research and can limit the utility of research beyond its immediate commissioning context.

- We believe that these differences are important when considering the national capacity for generating good quality policy research on higher education. From the experience of developing the RRB, it is clear that research areas differ in terms of the balance between policy, practitioner and academic research.

9.7 **Recent research in the United States**

As previously noted, there is a much stronger tradition of higher education research in the United States where there have been regular systematic reviews of the literature on 'college effects' since the early seventies, much of which has important implications for policy and practice in learning and teaching. A completely updated edition of an earlier major literature review undertaken by Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini will be published in 2005.[12] We are grateful to the authors for letting us have advance sight of their conclusions and some of their findings. Although these are based on the US experience, we believe that their potential applicability to the UK context is sufficiently large to warrant reporting them in some detail. The report also raises some important methodological points and makes suggestions about policy implications. We summarise the main points below.

Substantive findings cover:

- <u>interconnectedness.</u> 'In-class' and 'out-of-class' experiences combine in complex ways to shape learning
- <u>diversity.</u> 'Growing evidence that diversity within the faculty and student body is a potentially powerful force in shaping important cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes'
- <u>two-year programmes.</u> New evidence on the effectiveness of community colleges

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[11] El-Khawas, E. (2000) 'Research, policy and practice: Assessing their actual and potential linkages', in Teichler, U. and Sadlak, J. (eds.), *Higher Education Research: Its Relationship to Policy and Practice.* Oxford: Pergamon/IAU Press.
[12] Pascarella, E.T. and Terenzini, P.T. (2005). *How college affects students (Vol 2): A third decade of research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- <u>academic programmes.</u> Enhanced understanding of the effects of a wide range of instructional approaches and teacher behaviours
- <u>new technologies.</u> Much new research – although 'typically atheoretical and methodologically unsophisticated'.

Methodological points cover:

- distinguishing between 'change' and the 'net effects of college'
- the importance of estimating effect sizes (as opposed to statistical significance)
- better measures of between-college effects (noting that a majority of students spread their studies between more than one institution)
- the timing of change (is change linear and monotonic or discontinuous and episodic?)
- conditional effects: different students and different outcomes
- direct and indirect effects must be distinguished (although both are important)
- qualitative research methods needed.

Policy implications

a. <u>Diversity as a factor in student learning</u>. Research indicates that 'diversity experiences' are positively related to both cognitive and affective learning outcomes. This suggests a need to increase diversity in <u>all</u> learning settings.
b. <u>Two-year versus four-year institutions</u>. Despite continuing lack of parity in funding and status, community colleges compare well with four-year institutions on a range of variables: 'two-year institutions may well provide students (and the taxpayer) with cost-effective routes to the bachelor's degree that do not sacrifice intellectual rigour or competitiveness in the marketplace'.
c. <u>Redefining educational 'quality' and rethinking accountability</u>. Typical categories or rankings of institutions are <u>not</u> related to differences in student learning. Existing quality systems produce misleading comparisons.
d. <u>Access and programme completion</u>. Focussing on financial barriers is too narrow: 'choosing to attend college and succeeding once there are part of a complex interaction of family-, school-, and college-related factors'.

Such policy issues may be equally relevant to the current state of higher education in the UK. Moreover, the model of effective learning identified by Pascarella and Terenzini has major implications for institutions. The features of the model may be summarised thus:

> 'The evidence indicates clearly that encounters with new and different ideas and with people different from themselves challenge students to learn. When students are actively engaged in learning, whether through classroom instruction or through out-of-class activities, change is likely to occur. The research consistently shows that learning is bound neither by time nor by place, that it occurs continuously in a variety of locations, often unpredictably, and that it is maximised when both the activities and outcomes have meaning for the learner. Finally, learning is not a solitary activity, but is more likely relational and social, taking place when students engage in a task with others and in informal interactions with peers and faculty members.'

There are some striking similarities to the emerging findings from TLRP in the UK. Pascarella and Terenzini see the challenges for US institutions to be the following.

- How to take account of the 'holistic' nature of learning – how to persuade teachers that 'studies show that innovative, active, collaborative, co-operative, and constructivist instructional approaches shape learning more powerfully, in some

forms by substantial margins, than do conventional lecture/discussion and text-based approaches'.

- A need to 'rethink and restructure highly segmented departmental and programme configurations and their associated curricular patterns'. Interdisciplinary connections are crucial to learning and 'will require new organisational and curricular structures' and these must incorporate and capitalise on students' out-of-class experiences. We need structures and practices that 'recognise learning as ongoing, without regard to time and place'.

- The above would require shifts in the 'bedrock cultures' of colleges and universities. What incentives are needed to bring about such shifts, to 'increase the match between what we do and what we know about effective education'? There will need to be changes in things such as doctoral education; revised hiring, promotion and tenure criteria; organisational realignments; incorporation of new pedagogies. These would not cost much but there are powerful incentives on staff <u>not</u> to make such changes but to focus on research productivity, maximise new revenue streams etc.

10. Types of future research

We distinguished four kinds of research in section 5: to encourage institutional change, to evaluate, to explore policy feasibility and its implementation, and to support strategic analyses. Below we discuss the place of each within HEFCE's future research and evaluation strategy for learning and teaching.

10.1 Encouraging institutional change

There is a widespread view that higher education is today facing major challenges in the development of appropriate pedagogies for new kinds of students studying in different circumstances and with different goals. These imply changes, not only to the roles of individual higher education teachers, but also to institutional structures, processes and support services. The Council has commissioned projects that deal with these sorts of issues in the past and, although we anticipate that this will also be an area of major interest to the Higher Education Academy, we expect that the Council will continue to support studies of this type.

HEFCE's interest in encouraging changes to institutional practice in learning and teaching is in large part to do with concerns about both costs and effectiveness. In pursuing these issues, we would anticipate a need for studies that would look at the roles of senior managers and the implications of different kinds of organisational structures in facilitating institutional change and innovation. There may also be a need for the Council to encourage new forms of institutional research and to assess their effectiveness in informing institutional policies and practice.

It is clear that the Council will need to work out a sensible division of labour and responsibilities in this area with the Academy. This is likely to evolve over time, and flexibility and ongoing collaboration would seem to be necessary.

10.2 Evaluation studies

We anticipate that HEFCE will continue to commission evaluation studies in addition to its own normal and continuing processes of monitoring, appraisal and reflection.

We do not feel able to identify specific evaluation questions because the substantive foci of evaluations need to follow from decisions about which projects and policies to commission. We do offer, however, a set of 'meta-comments' on evaluations in general. We distinguish between evaluations of particular projects or innovations and evaluations of the effects of HEFCE policies.

We would expect that HEFCE would require all its funded development projects to have an evaluation strand, both formative and summative. Projects should cost evaluation into their activities and should use evaluators who are in a position to relate the local, project-specific issues to the general higher education context.

In the case of programmes, such as FDTL, that themselves fund projects, there should be two levels of evaluation: of the programme and of individual projects. The programme will need to have ways of ensuring that all project evaluations meet standards and that they generate information that is useful when considering the programme, as well as when considering the trajectory and achievement of a particular project.

In the case of policy evaluation, it is essential that the relationship between the evaluation and the decision-making process is spelt out so that the work can be designed to be timely and useful. In the set of eight evaluation reports referred to in 7.6, there were evaluations that appeared only to legitimate existing practice rather than to inform decision-making. And, except with the one formative evaluation, the relationship between the evaluation enquiry and the policy process was unclear. Simply put, the purpose of the evaluation needs to be clear to all concerned. It would be helpful for evaluation practices to be located within a general evaluation framework and for evaluations to be carried out with an eye to their potential value to national policy making.

In a strong sense, we see evaluation as a research activity that can contribute to a more general understanding of learning and teaching in higher education. Studies should be framed accordingly. There may be advantage in establishing a group that would address evaluation quality and co-ordination issues and possibly set evaluation standards for all HEFCE evaluations. The DfES' intention to establish a centre for higher education evaluation is of interest in this context.

All of this assumes that there are sufficient, expert evaluators available. This may not be the case; a lack of evaluation expertise has sometimes been evident in published reports, and the LTSN found it advisable to run a series of workshops for its subject centre evaluators. Lack of expertise, combined with a lack of appreciation of modern research evidence on learning and teaching in higher education, would perpetuate evaluation's current rather marginal position. This is part of the larger research capacity issues raised at the end of this report.

10.3 **Policy feasibility and implementation studies**

Projects in this category are likely to remain central to the Council's research and evaluation programme. The possible foci of such projects are considered in section 11 below. However, some general points can be made. We have noted above the doubts that have been expressed to us about the quality and value for money of many of the projects HEFCE has commissioned in the past. In future, we recommend:

a.   that the Council be more forward looking and strategic (see below) so as not to be 'surprised' by new policy issues and needs – this should allow more sensible timescales for projects;

b.   that decisions to commission projects, and the designs of such projects, be based on an appraisal of existing research and evidence;

c.   the introduction of mechanisms to ensure that project objectives are achievable in the time and with the resources available;

d.   consideration of links between different policy issues and an attempt to commission fewer – possibly larger – projects that are able to address interconnections between different policy questions;

e.   reconsideration of the role of policy officers and the arrangements for project management (see section 14 below);

f.   the need to give consideration to methodological and research capacity considerations and constraints.

10.4 Strategic research

Above we noted a need for research that is more strategic, long-term and concerned with shaping the policy agenda as much as responding to it. We note that similar views are expressed in the Council strategy document on widening participation research and in the paper on *'The development of the Council's long-term policy-focussed research and evaluation programme'*.

As we have already indicated, not everyone we spoke to believed that this was an appropriate activity for HEFCE. We do not agree with this view but would make the following points about this kind of research:

a.   there is a need for long-term strategic research on higher education policy, and the politics of who should be responsible for it should not prevent such research from being undertaken;

b.   collaboration with other bodies – DfES, the Higher Education Academy, UUK, SCOP and the other higher education funding councils – is particularly desirable for this type of research;

c.   formal and informal communication with experienced members of the research community are equally desirable, in terms of identifying issues, framing research questions and ensuring that project designs are feasible;

d.   some element of peer review should be considered at the design and commissioning stages, as well as at the reporting stage, in order to achieve acceptable research quality and standards;

e.   a better awareness of international research and developments will be particularly useful in addressing strategic questions.

In respect of points (iii) and (iv) above, consideration might be given to collaboration with ESRC in the design and management of strategic research. The ESRC has a variety of arrangements with government departments and agencies for the management of policy-oriented research programmes and projects.

10.5 Methodological issues

Some people we spoke to emphasised the importance of employing a wide range of methodologies in research, although there is a suspicion that large-scale quantitative work tends to be preferred by policy bodies. Methodologies should clearly reflect the purposes of research and, for many of the Council's purposes, some element of large-scale survey work is probably going to be required. In many cases, though, this needs to be

accompanied by analyses of empirical and conceptual literatures, case study and other qualitative research. This is all part of a larger issue of ensuring research quality and fitness for purpose. Issues concerning the improvement of research capacity and better communication between researchers and policy officers are discussed later in this report.

We believe that there are particular methodological challenges arising from the interconnectedness of the many changes currently facing higher education. The difficulties of identifying the impact and success of particular policies and initiatives in such circumstances are considerable. There is probably a need to address issues of methodology more explicitly in future. For example, reviews of international experience of higher education policy research, or of studies of policy impact in other public services, might suggest new approaches to policy research in higher education in the UK.

We anticipate that more holistic and longitudinal studies are likely to be required in future if the interconnected complexities of the issues confronting higher education are to be addressed successfully. The effective blending of quantitative and qualitative methods within single studies is also likely to be necessary.

10.6 **Towards a higher complexity of studies**

On the whole, individual research projects opt for a certain manageable theme, are based on a certain discipline, or at most a bundle of neighbouring disciplines, and are undertaken by a single type of researcher/consultant (see the typology in section 15). However, this report has already noted the interconnectedness of issues currently facing higher education and the methodological complexities of addressing them. There may, therefore, be a case for studies which attempt to address the complexities of themes and methods. The following approach to the development of such studies has been suggested to us by Ulrich Teichler.

On the basis of a brainstorming workshop with a sufficiently broad range of researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders, one could specify the nature of a more complex theme and then invite different researchers to co-operate in a research 'consortium' to address it. This would (i) ensure that individual analyses remained feasibly focussed and not overburdened by unrealistic expectations with regard to interdisciplinarity and breadth; and (ii) lead to the design of projects which were complementary and would help to bridge knowledge across interconnected themes.

To present one example: it is often claimed that universities should aim to be more responsive in their programmes to the diversity of student views, values, expectations and potentials. However, there are good reasons to believe that universities often create relatively stereotypic notions of the nature of the needs, wishes and potentials of the students they want to attract. Often, it is a circular argument: they note certain ways they want to serve students, and then just claim that students really are the way they would like them to be. We might describe this as a 'supply side' approach masquerading as 'demand-side'.

A bundle of projects to tackle this theme could comprise:

- a study on changes in youth values, orientations etc.
- a study of university teachers' perceptions of students' orientations and the way curricula, individual counselling etc. address students' views and expectations
- analysis of university students' lives and their courses of study, the role their motives and expectations play in making choices, in determining the intensity of study etc.
- a study of graduates' retrospective assessment of study conditions and provisions, their occupational motives, job satisfactions, changes of orientations and activities in the

course of their early careers, the links between their profiles of competences and their work assignments etc.

Some of these studies might be secondary analyses, drawing from already available research, whereas others might be genuinely new pieces of research. A group of connected projects of this sort would attempt to establish interactions, for example between changing employment and labour market conditions, students' orientations and universities' teaching and guidance strategies.

This is just one example of how a 'bundle' of related projects would allow more complex analysis than would be achieved by a large number of isolated projects. Clearly an appropriate way would have to be found to synthesize the findings of the individual projects. For example, a joint brainstorming workshop might be held when the reports of the individual projects were available in order to identify and strengthen the linkages of knowledge gathered through the individual projects.

11.   Research questions

11.1   Initial work on the identification of themes within HEFCE has produced the following in the area of learning and teaching: (i) the future size and shape of the HE sector; (ii) funding needed to maintain adequate teaching infrastructure; (iii) diversification of mission and impact on the HE curriculum; (iv) improving status and quality of teaching. These compare with the three categories used previously within the Council, i.e. 'quality assurance', 'quality enhancement' and 'funding and HE supply'.

11.2   Our initial report to the QALT Committee listed a number of other issues and themes that had been suggested to us in our early meetings.[13] These overlap with the list above to some extent. Following our further consultations inside and outside HEFCE, we would now suggest a series of factors that should be taken into account in determining a future research programme:

a.   the need to address those issues that are central to the Council's core functions;

b.   while these functions essentially relate to funding, they also prompt quite basic questions about the costs and the benefits of different forms of higher education;

c.   Government and others now appear to be asking fundamental questions about the social and economic benefits of investment in higher education;

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[13] a. Pedagogies for mass higher education (the implications of widening participation and diversification, for learning and teaching policy and practice).
b. Quality assurance in an increasingly 'marketised' system (including threshold quality required to receive teaching funding).
c. QA and innovation/differentiation (whether QA arrangements act as facilitators or blocks to change).
d. The differential impact and costs of 'blended learning'.
e. The relationship between research and teaching.
f. The areas and nature of future HEFCE 'interventions' (e.g. because of market failure and/or to take account of social equity).
g. The nature of higher education as a 'public good'.
h. The nature of the learning outcomes from an increasingly differentiated higher education system (including differences by level and mode, lifelong learning – outcomes at different stages in the life course).
i. Post 'Bologna' developments (convergence and competition) in the contexts of global education and labour markets.

d. there is a need to recognise the interconnectedness of issues, not just within learning and teaching but with areas such as widening participation;

e. there are advantages in grouping projects under a small number of research themes.

11.3 The core themes identified in 11.1 above appear to accord with these considerations. There is always going to be an element of arbitrariness in identifying thematic groupings, especially in the absence of foresight studies or comprehensive reviews of the literature. The preference of the project team would be for a three-fold grouping as follows:

* the future size and shape of the HE sector
* quality and the funding of an adequate teaching infrastructure
* developing educational processes and practices.

While we believe some thematic groupings of this sort are needed to achieve coherence in the research and evaluation programme, it will be important to ensure they do not prevent the asking of certain questions because of a 'lack of fit' with the groupings. Partly for this reason, we would suggest a set of related contextual issues applicable across the themes. We suggest that these concern (a) learning outcomes, (b) marketisation, (c) a changing HE environment.

a. *Learning outcomes.* It has been suggested to us that whereas a lot of work has been done on the social benefits of research investment, there is no equivalent evidence base on the benefits of investment in higher education teaching. Although methodologically difficult, it seems important to consider issues of size and shape, diversity and status, teaching infrastructure and quality of HE teaching in relation to the outcomes and associated social and economic benefits that derive from different kinds of HE investment.

b. *Marketisation.* A further overlapping consideration that has been mentioned to us by many people is the growing importance of the market context for higher education and the significance of related concepts of consumerism and competition. While this would fall mainly within the heading of 'size and shape' considerations, and include research into the circumstances and nature of market interventions by the Council, it also has implications for diversity and for the part played by the Council's teaching funding in a context of more diversified funding sources.

c. *A changing higher education environment.* A further general consideration is the need to address all these issues in the context of a rapidly changing higher education environment. This includes such things as the likely reforms of 14 to 19 education, the spread of higher education over the life course for many individuals, the greater integration of higher education with other life experiences (the majority of students effectively studying part-time in parallel with work and domestic responsibilities), the effects of increasing internationalisation of both education and labour markets (of which the Bologna process is but a part).

In summary, we would see future research being undertaken within a small number of thematic groupings in ways that will take account of the effects of a rather longer list of environmental and contextual factors.

Themes	Environmental and contextual factors

1. Size and shape issues
2. Quality and the funding of an adequate teaching infrastructure
3. Developing educational processes and practices
	• learning outcomes, economic and social benefits
	• markets, competition and consumerism
	• 14 to 19 reforms
	• diversity: of provision, of students and their experiences, including
	   - learning needs over the life course
	   - a 'part-time' experience for the many
	• effects of internationalisation

11.4 Within each of the themes, it will be necessary to develop a programme of research that, although necessarily responsive to short-term issues as and when they arise, will have a long-term coherence and relevance. The factors listed in the right-hand column above will need to be taken into account in each case. In developing the programme, attention should be given to the current research literature in these fields and to the views of experienced researchers about where the main knowledge gaps lie and how they might be filled. But it will also be important to engage in dialogue with the sector and with other policy bodies.

11.5 Within this report, we have given greatest priority to issues that appear to us to be relevant to the responsibilities and goals of HEFCE. These of course provide only a partial map of a higher education research agenda for learning and teaching. Other stakeholders may have different interests and other ways of defining issues. It is perhaps useful to distinguish between (a) research and evaluation in which HEFCE has an interest or even a responsibility in commissioning, and (b) research and evaluation in which HEFCE has an interest (or even a responsibility) in knowing about.

11.6 In attempting to respond to requests from Council officers to be as specific as possible about the research questions that will need asking in the medium to long term, we are conscious of the dangers of falling into the trap of producing somewhat *ad hoc* – and possibly lengthy – lists of questions that appear important to the members of the project team but could be replaced by similar if overlapping lists by Council officers and committee members. We believe that the task of formulating specific research questions should be done in consultation with the sector. In doing so, it will also be necessary to consider the feasibility of finding answers to the questions, whether because of difficulties of methodology or lack of a suitable research capacity. With these important caveats, we attempt to identify below some of the issues that will need to be addressed by future research. We do so under the three thematic groupings. The issues listed draw heavily on the interviews we have conducted as part of this project.

a. *Size and shape issues:*

- foundation degrees and transitions from FE to HE
- the implications of learning over the life course, for both undergraduate and postgraduate provision and practice
- clarification of differences and relationships between part-time and full-time modes of study
- harmonisation of degree structures with Europe
- demand for and 'substitutability' of different subjects
- institutional responsiveness to new forms of demand
- (taking account of) employment and other societal needs

- opportunities and mechanisms for student mobility through a diverse system
- local, regional and national considerations, including co-operation and partnerships between institutions.

b. *Quality and the funding of an adequate teaching infrastructure:*

- use of HEFCE teaching funding within institutions (in relation to other funding sources)
- the effects on quality of the introduction of variable fees
- the changing nature of the student experience ('part-time' students on full-time courses)
- the effects (in terms of costs and outcomes) of different forms of curriculum organisation
- the effects (in terms of costs and outcomes) of different teaching methodologies
- the relationship between teaching and research
- the changing role of academic staff
- the changing role of student support services
- the role and impact of the QAA
- the relationship between resourcing and teaching quality
- information for students
- comparability of standards within a diverse system.

c. *Developing educational processes and practices:*

- consequences of widening participation for course design, content and teaching methodologies (and assessment of costs involved)
- extending conceptions of learning – to take account of recent research, for example on meta-cognition and the social conditions for effective learning
- extending forms of assessment in the light of the above
- barriers – inside and outside institutions – to curriculum innovation
- the effects of incentive and reward systems in institutions
- the relationship between teaching quality and learning outcomes
- the role of workplace learning, especially in its relationship to teaching and learning within HE
- the role and impact of the CETLs
- the role and impact of the Higher Education Academy.

11.7 Other issues can and will be identified, and the Council could be quickly on its way towards funding another 80 projects over the next six years. We would strongly urge otherwise. Not all issues will have equal priority and not all questions are equally capable of answer through research. The development of coherent and integrated research programmes within each of the above themes will be more likely to deliver value for money and make greater impact on policy development inside and outside the Council than would a large but disconnected set of projects.

As we have emphasised before, most policy issues are interconnected and need to be addressed through more holistic, longitudinal and multi-method projects. This should result in fewer and larger projects than has been the previous practice of the Council.

11.8 In this connection, consideration might be given to the establishment of more regular reviews of recent research and their policy implications. Such reviews could build upon but go well beyond the Rolling Research Brief which simply summarises existing research

without examining its policy implications. Inspired by the policy contribution of the National Commission on Education of the early 1990s, TLRP is actively exploring the possibility of facilitating and contributing to a portfolio of sectoral reviews of contemporary issues in teaching and learning. This would enable an integration of TLRP research and that of others in all educational sectors, with a strong focus on policy implications. For example, there have been extensive discussions with the Nuffield Foundation in relation to its 14-19 Review and concerning a possible investigation into pre-secondary education. TLRP has reserved funds to make contributions to reviews in additional sectors, hopefully in partnership with other organisations. It is understood that TLRP would welcome an opportunity to play an appropriate role in an overarching review of teaching and learning research in UK higher education.

11.9   In order for HEFCE to identify emerging issues and research questions in good time – and so to lessen the problems of compressed timescales – we suggest that regular meetings between relevant HEFCE officers and researchers be held, possibly in respect of each of the three themes. But there will also be a need for a forum to consider the interconnections between the themes. This latter group could also then be charged with foresight work – looking at themes that might well become significant in the next few years. The purpose of such meetings would be to identify research questions arising from both policy and research development. Reviews of recent research based on entries to the Rolling Research Brief might feed into such meetings, along with analysis of any sectoral reviews as indicated above.

11.10 We would emphasise that this section of our report is not intended to constitute a comprehensive set of research issues on learning and teaching. It excludes important areas of pedagogic research such as developments in e-learning, student assessment and associated staff and educational development issues. It also neglects larger questions of the broader social impact of higher education, its contributions to the continuing development of civil and democratic society (note for example the French interests in these issues, section 8.6). These are all important matters, although the lead responsibility for investigating them may not always lie with HEFCE. The institutions themselves, the DfES and the Higher Education Academy will all have interests in these areas. However, where there are funding and policy implications arising from research and development in these areas, they will also become of particular interest to HEFCE.

D. The co-ordination and management of research

12. Relations with other policy bodies

12.1 We have already discussed relationships with other bodies in respect of the anticipated roles of the Higher Education Academy in supporting research directed towards institutional and practitioner development, and of the DfES and others in respect of more strategic research. There is clearly huge potential for collaboration between bodies such as the funding councils, government departments and various other national agencies. At the same time, there is a danger that co-ordination and collaboration between agencies of itself takes up excessive time and resource. Insofar as the different organisations can themselves work to longer-term time horizons in planning their research and evaluation needs, the exchange of information and the avoidance of duplication becomes a relatively simple task. The sharing of research plans at a draft stage would be desirable. However, the point was made to us by the person responsible for research co-ordination in another national higher education organisation that she had no opposite number within HEFCE. Clearly the designation of an individual as the contact point for other organisations in respect of the Council's research programme would be helpful to achieving collaboration (although a prior task must be the effective co-ordination of work within HEFCE). We note that national bodies such as the Higher Education Academy, the DfES and the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) all have or will shortly have designated posts with responsibility for research co-ordination.

12.2 In respect of strategic research, it is particularly important that collaboration with other policy interests is sought. There may also be a potential role for the ESRC in managing projects on behalf of the higher education policy community – although we observe the quite limited funding of projects, and hence experience, by ESRC in this field. We note that consideration is being given to extending TLRP to cover widening participation issues. In this respect, we also note the differing views about how well the steering arrangements for TLRP have enabled it to respond to specifically higher education research agendas, and would draw attention to other models available within ESRC for the management of research on behalf of government departments and policy bodies.

13. Relations with the research community

13.1 We have drawn attention to the fragmented nature of the higher education research community in the UK. We have also noted that many of the consultants commissioned to do work for HEFCE would probably not consider themselves to be researchers. There is thus a question of the kinds of expertise required to undertake different types of project. The Council is, of course, limited to the kinds of expertise available to it. In some circumstances, the non-availability of suitable research expertise might be reason for not continuing with the commissioning process. The Council may also need to consider ways of encouraging experienced researchers to become involved in work for the Council.

13.2 Several Council officers – and also our Dutch colleagues at CHEPS – emphasised the value of good informal relations with researchers (see also 14.3 and 14.4 below). While this may be true, it is difficult for new officers to identify and establish relationships with

relevant researchers. Some degree of formalisation may therefore be desirable. A number of possibilities have been suggested to us, all of which seem worthy of serious consideration. These are:

- the appointment of a limited number of 'special advisors' to provide informal advice to officers. Such advisors might receive a retainer to make available a certain number of days per year to the Council
- the creation of one or more lists of active researchers in fields relevant to the Council's interests
- the identification of one or more research centres to act as 'brokers' to the research community more generally
- the creation of a new, probably multi-institutional, research centre as a focus for building up research capacity and to provide a source of intelligence on existing research and on research design and methodology. (This could also act as a 'broker' to the wider research community.)

These are options to consider across all of the Council's directorates. We note the consideration being given to the establishment of a 'widening participation research facility'. While the need to build up specialist research expertise is recognised, the interconnectedness of many of the research and policy issues confronting HEFCE need also to be borne in mind. It will clearly be important to liaise with bodies such as the DfES and the Higher Education Academy.

13.3 Whatever approach is taken, the Council should ensure that it has access to researchers who are aware of the policy process, and who understand both the agendas that have given rise to the research and the needs of the policy customers for the research. A good knowledge of the existing research literature and competence in appropriate methodologies should be considered essential.

14. The role of Council officers and committees

14.1 **The process of managing research**

The process of managing research entails a number of discrete stages:
- identifying a need for research
- reviewing literatures and consulting 'experts'
- defining research questions
- research design
- commissioning research
- managing research
- evaluating research
- using research.

To them we might also add a rather more 'meta' task, that of making explicit what HEFCE sees as credible research, what it expects of studies of different types, and what it expects to see in a report in order to avoid discrepancies between expectation and delivery and misdirected efforts by researchers.

We are aware that the Council provides both guidance and training to officers on several elements of this process. However, several of the policy officers we spoke to expressed concerns about their role in project management. Part of this was simply a problem of lack

of time, but there also appeared to be lack of clarity about what the role entailed and lack of support for new officers to acquire the knowledge and skills needed. Each of the above stages is important and potentially quite time-consuming. The funding of a smaller number of larger projects (see section 11.7) would make it easier for officers to devote the required amount of effort to project management and related tasks.

14.2 We have commented at several points that recent months have not been typical in the life of HEFCE. The implementation of the White Paper has provided a relatively fixed, urgent and externally-imposed agenda on HEFCE staff and committees. However, this period is probably at an end, and what has been described to us as 'the normal cycle of research' may be about to resume. This includes the first three of the elements listed in 14.1 above which have been largely absent during the 'White Paper period'. Several recently-appointed officers have had no experience of this 'normal cycle' and so may have a somewhat distorted picture of how the Council normally operates in this respect.

14.3 Notwithstanding these special circumstances of the recent past, we believe there is a need to seek improvements in the quality, relevance and utilisation of research within the Council. A key to these improvements is likely to be a closer relationship between officers and researchers. Although referring to the research/policy interface in a different field, the following comment may also be relevant to managing research within HEFCE:

> 'The sources and conveyors of information may be as influential as the content; for example, people accept information more readily from those they trust. But it is our hypothesis that good quality research, local involvement, accurate messages and effective dissemination strategies are all important if aiming for more evidence-based policy making. A lack of local involvement in drawing conclusions from research can lead to worrying impacts.'
> (Crewe and Young, 2002)[14]

14.4 The relationship between officers and researchers may be particularly important *following* the submission of a project report. Several of the people interviewed emphasised how political contexts could affect the receptivity to research outcomes. There was also quite a widely held view that little use was made of many research and evaluation reports. Our own analysis of a sample of reports did not conclude that the chief reason for the lack of use lay in the failings of the reports themselves, notwithstanding their limitations. Lack of use reflected partly political context and partly lack of time and procedure within HEFCE to address research outcomes over the longer term. At the very least, some form of debriefing meeting between officers and researchers – where findings, practicalities and political contexts might all be discussed – would seem to be a useful activity in most cases. In addition, the kinds of regular forums for meetings between researchers and policy makers envisaged in section 13 above might also be used to keep track of the use made of previous research.

14.5 **The role of project managers**

There is considerable variation in the ways in which this role is executed within the Council, both within and between directorates and between regional consultants and other officers. One experienced officer summarised the different potential elements of the project management role as follows:

- research collaborator – research as 'think tank'
- funder/fundee relationship – are 'customer' requirements being met?
- auditor – are financial 'rules' and 'procedures' being followed?

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[14] Crewe E and Young J, 2002, 'Bridging research and policy: context, evidence and links'. *ODI Working Paper*, Overseas Development Institute, London.

There probably has to be some elements of all three of the above. It may be, however, that the third element could be performed by other staff members within the Council. This would enable policy officers to play more active roles in projects, possibly to include secondments to work with project teams. This would, we believe, make it more likely that projects would meet Council objectives and expectations, and that the Council would be better able to take appropriate action on the results of projects. It would also be invaluable staff development experience for officers, providing them with, in some projects, first-hand experience of institutions as well as insights into the research process.

14.6 Focus and co-ordination of research within the L&T team

We note the existence of a designated research officer in the Widening Participation team and we understand that it is intended to designate a 'research co-ordinator' within the Research team. Given the large size of the Learning and Teaching team, we feel that a similar designation of responsibility would also be appropriate. This does not mean that research and evaluation would be focussed on a single person, but it would mean that there would be a clear locus for the co-ordination and sharing of experience of research, for building up expertise in research design and the evaluation of research. Other policy officers would still play project management roles in respect of projects within their remit, but would be able to draw on a clear repository of advice, information and experience. However, consideration should be given to whether it is appropriate for all policy officers to be involved in project management along with a wide range of other responsibilities. It will inevitably be more difficult to ensure the appropriate level of expertise and the achievement of comparable standards if these responsibilities are thinly spread. Our impression is that officers differ in their interest and aptitude for the project manager role and would not necessarily object if this were recognised in the allocation of responsibilities.

14.7 Use of the Analytical Services Group (ASG)

Many people inside and outside the Council spoke highly of the professional competence of the members of ASG. More use can probably be made of their expertise. At the moment, it seems to be largely a matter of chance as to whether and when they are consulted about projects. Sometimes, consultation has been too late for them to make an appropriate input. Policy officers may need to receive more guidance about when they should consult members of ASG, and about the kind of assistance they can obtain from this quarter. We have noted that the opposite numbers of ASG staff within the DfES perform the project management functions for DfES-funded projects.

14.8 Use of steering groups

There does not appear to be any consistent pattern in the use of steering groups. Where they exist, their membership and terms of reference may differ considerably. Steering groups can sometimes send out messages that are not consistent with those from Council officers. There is probably no single pattern appropriate to all projects, but in determining the need for, and the composition of, a steering group the following points may be borne in mind:

- are members appointed for their personal expertise or for the interests they represent or is it a mixture of both?
- are roles and relationships between steering groups, project managers and project directors sufficiently clear?
- what is the relationship between a steering group and the responsible HEFCE committee (generally QALT in the case of learning and teaching although other committees may also have interests in particular projects)?

There is also a case for establishing steering groups for sets of projects rather than having one group per project.

14.9 **Co-ordination of research and evaluation activity across HEFCE**

Although our brief was to advise on research strategy in the learning and teaching area of the Council's work, it became very clear to us that neither policy nor research agendas sit neatly within the different remits of the Council's directorates. There is clearly a danger that research and evaluation activity will be too much a reflection of the internal organisation of the Council rather than of the problems and issues facing higher education, its institutions, staff and students, and its various external constituencies and interests. We recognise that organisational structures must serve multiple purposes, and much is already being done to co-ordinate the research and evaluation programme. But we believe that more needs to be done within the Council to ensure that a more holistic view of issues is achieved and to strengthen links between different policy areas and research. We also believe that links with other research commissioning bodies and with the research community would be assisted by the existence of a stronger research co-ordination focus within the Council.

E. A note on research capacity

15. Types of researcher

15.1 We and others have noted how higher education policy research tends not to be informed by the research literature, and that there has been a general lack of cumulative research in this field within the UK. Several people both inside and outside HEFCE have commented on the lack of higher education research capacity in the UK at the present time. Several officers have also commented on the small number of project applications that come from academics working in universities. One reason for this is undoubtedly the relatively few people in higher education who are specialising in this area over a long period of time. Other reasons are the short timescales of projects, including the time available for submitting bids. There may also be a lack of incentives to academics to engage in such work, especially if it is not going to contribute to RAE ratings.

15.2 We commented on this in our application for this project and referred to Ulrich Teichler's analysis of the 'types of higher education researcher'. We feel it is relevant to repeat the typology here.

Types of higher education expert[15]

	Basis of expertise		
Types	Theory/ methodology	Field knowledge	Application development
Discipline-based, <u>occasional</u> higher education researcher	++	-	--
Discipline-based <u>continuous</u> higher education researcher	++	+	--
Theme-based academic higher education researcher	+	+	?
Applied higher education researcher (policy researcher, institutional researcher)	?	+	+
Consultant	-	+	++
Reflective practitioner	--	++	++

+ and ++ are strengths
-- and – are weaknesses

As Teichler indicates, the different types of researcher bring different qualities to the research process. Different types of project require different types of expertise and experience. But UK expertise in some of the above types is extremely thin and is neither being renewed nor replaced as people retire or otherwise leave the field.

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[15] Teichler U, 2000, Higher Education Research and its Institutional Basis, in S Schwarz and U Teichler (eds), *The Institutional Basis of Higher Education Research,* Dortrecht: Kluwer

15.3   As various scholars have pointed out, higher education as a field of study has been relatively ignored by social scientists. Notwithstanding, when research is undertaken in this field, it can both benefit and suffer from the 'insider status' of the researcher. The distinction between the researcher and the practitioner appears blurred. We refer again to Ulrich Teichler who has observed that there is hardly any other area in research 'in which both the ordinary person actively observing the field, and the decision-makers possibly interested in the results of research, have such a complex knowledge of the field itself and such a high intellectual competence' [16]. This highlights another frequent criticism of higher education research – its lack of objectivity. Too many researchers bring into their research sets of interests and attitudes derived from their participant status in higher education rather than from their researcher status. This is one of the reasons why external consultants are sometimes preferred – they possess the neutrality of (relative) outsiders. It remains necessary to develop a research capacity that combines appropriate academic expertise with objectivity.

16.   Improving research capacity and quality

We believe that there are a number of measures that could be taken to improve capacity in the field of higher education research, and especially higher education policy research. They include:

- commissioning longer term projects (to give better researcher continuity), perhaps linked within 'programmes'

- funding research studentships in a small number of centres in order to establish critical mass, training opportunities, etc

- requiring research proposals to be informed by existing research literatures (including use of peer review)

- providing some core funding over a reasonable time period to a small number of centres (possibly multi-institutional) to provide opportunities for research careers in the field – as well as ensuring the available capacity to respond rapidly to policy needs/questions

- ensuring that HEFCE officers have sufficient expertise to commission, manage and use research

- collaborating with the Higher Education Academy, especially on the boundary between policy and practitioner research.

In addressing such measures, it will be desirable for the Council to collaborate with others in the higher education policy and research communities.

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[16] Teichler, U. (ed.) (1996) 'Special issue on the state of comparative research in higher education', *Higher Education,* 32(4).

F. Conclusions and recommendations

17. Conclusions

17.1   In recent years, HEFCE has supported a substantial programme of research and evaluation activity concerned with learning and teaching policy and practice. This report has highlighted different views inside and outside the Council of the success and value of the programme. These views reflect divergent assumptions about the Council's role and its needs in commissioning research. In addition, the term 'research' – as applied to this set of activities – does not reflect a single accepted definition, or an agreed set of expectations and standards.

17.2   Ambiguities about the relationship between evidence and policy, about the reasons for collecting evidence, and about the use of evidence have also been identified. These ambiguities run the danger of compromising the value of the various types of commissioned research and of reducing its potential contribution[17] to policy. There would be value in HEFCE making more explicit what it regards as credible research and evaluation, what it expects of studies of different types and what it expects to see in reports. This would help to avoid discrepancies between expectation and delivery and misdirected efforts by researchers.

17.3   We have identified a number of types of project commissioned by the Council. While there will undoubtedly continue to be a need for sharply focussed projects on specific matters of policy formulation and implementation, there is also a need for more *strategic* studies that are able to tackle the interconnected complexities of the policy issues confronting higher education. Future research should include more holistic, longitudinal and multi-method studies in order to address these complexities. This may result in fewer and larger projects than has been the previous practice of the Council. Projects might also be grouped, perhaps into larger programmes. For example, a 'bundle' of related projects would allow more complex analysis than would be achieved by a large number of isolated projects. It is also worthwhile mentioning that a better awareness of international research and developments will be particularly useful in addressing strategic questions.

17.4   Although the focus of this report is on research and evaluation in respect of learning and teaching policy, in practice it is quite difficult to separate this from other areas of higher education policy and practice. Several of the matters raised in the report will be relevant more widely to the Council's research and evaluation activities.

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[17] Research may be used in different ways, ranging from instrumental use that results in practical/behavioural change, to conceptual use that results in changes in understanding and attitude. In Nutley S, Walter I & Davies H, (2002), 'From knowing to doing: a framework for understanding the evidence-into-practice agenda', Discussion Paper 1, Research Unit for Research Utilisation (RURU), University of St Andrews. Linked to the ESRC Network for Evidence-based Policy and Practice.

18. Recommendations

18.1 Our report contains a number of suggestions and recommendations which attempt to reduce the fragmentation of research and evaluation activity and to obtain greater value for the funding expended on it. These include the following.

- The creation of a more efficient system within the Council for accessing the outcomes of completed projects, invitations to tender and associated documents reporting on the various difficulties, criticisms and achievements of projects.

- The construction of evaluation and research frameworks in order to avoid vagueness of purpose, unevenness in quality and under-utilisation of evidence. There may be advantage in establishing a group that would address evaluation quality and co-ordination issues and possibly set evaluation standards for all HEFCE evaluations.

- Consideration of the inclusion of (a) an appraisal of existing research and evidence, (b) some element of peer review - at design, commissioning stages and reporting stages. (We recognise that this will not be feasible for all projects, but we believe that it is a principle to strive for whenever possible).

- Better communication between Council officers and experienced members of the research community - as a way of identifying issues, framing research questions and ensuring that project designs are feasible.

- In relation to the above, some degree of formalisation of relationships with the research community so that advice can be obtained on a continuing basis outside the process of competitive tender. A number of ways in which this could be done are described in this report.

- The strengthening of procedures within HEFCE to support the assimilation and utilisation of commissioned studies. At the very least, some form of debriefing meeting between officers and researchers – where findings, practicalities and political contexts might all be discussed – would seem to be a useful activity in most cases. In addition, regular meetings between researchers and policy makers might also be used to keep track of the use made of previous research. Such joint meetings could also be charged with foresight work – looking at themes that might become significant in the next few years.

- The designation of 'research' responsibility within the Learning and Teaching Directorate would also be appropriate in order to enhance (a) co-ordination and sharing of experience of research, (b) building up expertise on research design and (c) evaluation of research. Consideration should also be given to whether it is appropriate for all policy officers to be involved in project management along with a wide range of other responsibilities.

- Policy officers to play a more active role in projects, possibly to include secondments to work with project teams. This would allow a tighter correspondence between objectives and expectations and appropriate action on the results of projects. It would also be invaluable staff development experience for officers, providing them with, in some projects, first-hand experience of institutions as well as insights into the research process.

18.2 Our report makes a number of suggestions about future research priorities in the area of learning and teaching. We recommend the grouping of future projects within three 'programme' areas of:

- the future size and shape of the HE sector
- quality, and the funding of an adequate teaching infrastructure
- developing educational processes and practices.

Projects will also need to take into account important environmental and contextual factors. We identify five: (i) learning outcomes, economic and social benefits, (ii) markets, competition and consumerism, (iii) 14 to 19 reforms, (iv) diversity of provision, students and their experiences – to include learning needs over the life course, and a 'part-time' experience for the many, (v) the effects of internationalisation.

18.3 HEFCE will continue to play a vital role in assembling evidence through research and evaluation to inform the policy process. But it will not be an exclusive role. Other national bodies continue to have responsibilities in this area and the academic community itself is engaged in higher education research of various kinds, especially at local levels. We have noted in this report that the higher education research community is itself a highly fragmented one. Greater communication and co-operation between the different higher education policy bodies on the one hand, and between the policy bodies and this fragmented research community on the other, would be very desirable. This report contains some suggestions for ways of achieving it.

Annex 1: People interviewed

Department for Education and Skills

Linda Dale
Karen Hancock
Nick Sanders
David Thompson
Alan Wilson

Economic and Social Research Council

Gary Grubb

Higher Education Academy

Cliff Allan
Paul Ramsden
Nick Hammond

Higher Education Funding Council for England

Sarbani Banerjee
Liz Beaty
Michelle Cronin
Alice Frost
Sarah Howls
Paul Hubbard
Sheila King
Roger Lewis
Kate Murray
Kate Nickols
Lucy Pow
Fiona Reid
Graeme Rosenberg
Gerry Taggart
Carole Webb

HEFCE QALT Committee members

Robert Burgess
Sandra Burslem
Peter Scott

Higher Education Policy Institute

Bahram Bekhradnia

Institute for the Advancement of University Learning, University of Oxford

Graham Gibbs

Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche, France (Ministry of national education, higher education and research)

Philippe Cassela
Elie Cohen
Jean-Richard Cytermann
Françoise Oeuvrard

Centre national de recherche scientifique – CNRS, France (National centre of scientific research)

Christine Musselin

Universities UK

Tony Bruce
William Locke

University of Twente/Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies

Jurgen Enders
Frans van Vught

University Chancellor's Office, Sweden

Sigbrit Franke

Annex 2: Classification of recent HEFCE projects

The following projects were identified by officers as contributing to 'enhancing excellence in learning and teaching'. They are grouped below in terms of the three strands of learning and teaching policy identified in the Invitation to Tender for this study.

Quality assurance (QA)

Projects funded under this heading covered such things as:

- development and evaluation of the QA method
- policy and strategy on academic standards (e.g. external examiner system)
- recording achievement and flexible learning
- development of staff and professional standards.

Specific projects funded under this heading were the following:

- Evaluation of the quality of the 2001 HE Summer Schools
- Exploration of the factors associated with the promotion of academic staff
- Collecting and using student feedback on quality and standards of L&T in HE
- Non Award-Bearing Continuing Education (NABCE) evaluation
- Public information needs on HE quality and standards
- TQEF Evaluation
- Evaluation of the New Technology Institutes (NTI) funding initiative.

Quality enhancement (QE)

Projects funded under this heading covered such things as:

- rewards for excellence in learning and teaching
- good teaching practice
- modes of learning (e.g. e-learning) and subjects and curriculum design
- links between learning and teaching strategy and human resource strategies
- links between teaching and research.

Specific projects funded under this heading were the following:

- Centres for Excellence in Teaching & Learning
- Further work on e-learning
- Review of learning and teaching quality enhancement for HE in FE
- Expert support for the development of processes to select Centres of Teaching Excellence
- Formative evaluation of foundation degrees
- Individual learning accounts (ILA)
- Research on the scholarship of teaching
- The collation of data to indicate the existing usage levels of TLTP materials in the UK arising from the first two phases of the programme
- Innovations in teaching and learning
- Communications and information technology in learning and teaching in HE and FE
- Scoping study to develop a research strategy for L&T
- The work of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee - to review the arrangements that currently support quality enhancement in higher education
- Building capacity for change: research on the scholarship of teaching

- Technical legal support to the HEFCE / UUK working group on IPRs in e-learning
- Promoting continuing vocational education (CVE)
- Mapping educational research in England
- Information technology assisted teaching and learning (ITATL) in HE
- Project to identify good practice in institutional learning and teaching strategies
- Review of institutional learning and teaching strategies.

Funding and HE Supply

Projects funded under this heading covered such things as:

- methods of funding of learning and teaching
- different forms of HE provision and provider (e.g. foundation degrees, New Technology Institutes and HE in FECs)
- progression into and through HE
- employer engagement including the skills agenda
- employability
- workplace learning
- supply/demand issues.

Specific projects funded under this heading were the following:

- The quality of graduate jobs
- The impact of the Internet
- Evaluation of the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL)
- The nature of sub-contractual arrangements between FE colleges and HEIs
- Review of teaching costs in specialist agricultural providers
- International comparisons of intermediate level HE qualifications
- Application/matching process for HE summer schools indicators
- Modelling for the performance indicators
- Mapping NVQs in HE
- Business of borderless education
- Evaluation study of the impact of CVE development funding
- Types of foundation degree – a case study approach
- The wider benefits of HE
- Mapping resources relating to the L&T of disabled students
- Comparative costs of HE in HEIs and FECs
- Maintaining the infrastructure
- Longitudinal survey of students attending HE summer schools
- Non-completion in HE
- Education and the adult years: a study of adults in continuing education
- Graduate employment: a review of issues
- Progression from HND/HNC to Honours degrees
- International comparison of the cost of teaching in HE
- Comparing the costs of HNDs and HNCs in FECs
- The nature and extent of work experience
- Study of comparative costs of first degree and sub-degree provision
- Progression from FE to HE
- Foundation degree analysis
- Evaluation of the New Technology Institutes funding initiative
- 'Minority' and 'strategic' subject analysis
- Evaluation of the expansion of medical school numbers
- Work-based learning
- Patterns of student progression
- Term-time working - is it associated with academic achievement?
- Mapping of Learning & Teaching Support Network employability activity

- The Higher Education in Further Education Development Fund initiative
- Study of supply and demand of dance and drama provision
- The role of vocational HE in meeting future needs of the economy
- Costs of part-time and off-campus modes of delivery and accreditation of learning
- Teaching libraries network
- Review of the graduate apprenticeships scheme
- The value of graduates
- Routes to professional qualifications
- UK graduates and the impact of work experience
- Evidence of how HE improves graduate employability
- Development of the costing model for ITATL
- Profile of Erasmus students

Annex 3: Projects on learning and teaching and related issues funded by other organisations

ESRC Teaching and Learning Programme

The Effectiveness of Problem Based Learning in Promoting Evidence Based Practice; Mark Newman (Institute of Education, University of London) (2000-03)

Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses; Dai Hounsell, Noel Entwistle (Edinburgh) (2001-04)

What is Learned at University: The Social and Organisational Mediation of Learning; John Brennan, David Jary, John Richardson (Open University), Mike Osborne (University of Stirling), (2004-07)

Disabled Students' Learning in Higher Education; Mary Fuller, Mick Healey (University of Gloucestershire), Alan Hurst (University of Central Lancashire), Sheila Riddell (Glasgow University), Terry Wareham (Lancaster University) (2004-07)

Learning to Perform: Instrumentalists and Instrumental Teachers; Janet Mills, Aaron Williamson (Royal College of Music, London), Graham Welch (Institute of Education, University of London), David Hargreaves (University of Surrey Roehampton) (2004-07)

Other relevant ESRC projects (not part of TLRP) are:

Social interactions and intergenerational social mobility, (September 2003 - February 2005), DU Anderberg (University of London: Royal Holloway and Bedford New College)

British and German higher education: staff and students in a changing world (June 2003 - October 2005), RMO Pritchard (University of Ulster)

Current and planned DfES projects that could inform teaching and learning policy

The Returns to Education. Evidence from the Labour Force Survey. The aim of the project is to examine changes in qualification levels and returns to different levels of qualifications in the 1990s.

The Returns to Higher Education Teaching. Reviews the evidence on the economic returns to higher education teaching.

Dropping out: a study of early leavers from higher education. Explores the reasons why some people leave higher education without gaining a qualification and the impact of this on the individuals concerned and how rates of non-completion need to be reduced.

Literature review on links between research, teaching and scholarship. Systematic review of international research into the relationship between research, teaching and scholarship that identifies and critiques the best available evidence and recommends ways in which this can be updated and developed.

Next Choices: Career choices beyond university. Investigated how HE choices and experiences for 1998 entrants related to their 18 months after graduating and explored reasons why some had withdrawn from HE.

Enhancing learning with information communications technology (ICT) in higher education. Assessed: (i) how far 12 HEIs had integrated ICT teaching; (ii) the extent to which this resulted in changes in students' attitudes to ICT; (iii) how, and to what extent, good practice had been disseminated with and between departments.

Minority ethnic students in higher education. Exploring the various factors which encourage or inhibit participation, retention and progression in HE and transition to the labour market by minority ethnic students.

HE costs and efficiency. Updating and developing the evidence on cost structure and the factors influencing them within English higher education. Providing estimates of average and marginal additional teaching loads and of changes in levels of research activity.

Recruitment and retention of academic staff. Investigating the factors that affect the recruitment of academic staff and international comparisons of academic pay.

Graduate Careers: 3 Years after Graduation – Moving On 2 (1998/99 graduates.) Updating understanding of early career paths and labour market outcomes and exploring how the graduate labour market is changing, paying particular attention to non-traditional graduates.

Youth Cohort Study HE extensions. Additional HE questions were asked of sub-samples of the YCS. They were asked a) about their attitudes, aspirations and intentions in relation to HE at age 17/18; and b) about their subsequent outcomes at age 18/19. Those who entered HE were asked about their early experiences of HE.

Rolling Research Brief. Places summaries of published research and statistics on HE policy issues on a web-based database which is updated continually. Teaching and learning is one of the policy themes covered. (This project is jointly funded by HEFCE, Universities UK and LTSN.)

Feasibility study of researching the changing role of HE staff. The remit of this project has yet to be finalised. However, it is likely to explore how staff roles are changing, why they are changing and, more importantly, what effects these changes have on the quality and quantity of outcomes.

Annex 4: Higher education policy and research in the Netherlands

The Higher Education and Research Plan (HOOP) sets out the Dutch Education Ministry's Plans for higher education and research. The HOOP is a four-year planning cycle and is partly drawn up on the basis of the annual reports of the higher education institutions. The annual report also contains a forward-looking section in which the institutions outline the policies they intend to pursue, partly in the light of their duty to society. Before the final version of the HOOP is published, the plans for the coming four years are initially published in draft form which is discussed between government and the institutions. The conclusions of this dialogue are incorporated in the final version of the HOOP (Boezerooy, 2003)[18].

Concerning the formulation of policies in science and technology, there is another specific plan, the so-called 'Science Budget' (Wetenschapsbudget). Both papers are published every four years. There is a yearly progress report on the Science Budget but not on the HOOP. The latter is intended to be broader than the Science Budget Paper and generally includes some discussion about science-related topics. However the HOOP 2004 Paper tends not to follow the previous versions. For instance, it does not discuss science matters, contains very few references to policy studies or research into the effectiveness of policies, or how the Netherlands fares compared to other countries.

Also, for the coming four-year period the Ministry has not formulated a 'Programme for Policy-oriented Research' where it sets out its plans for research in policy-related issues. The last programme of this sort was published in 2000. The whole situation expresses the recent trend to more *ad hoc* and clearly short-term issues, driven by political agendas. For science-related issues, the government installed the 'Innovation Platform' consisting of experts and stakeholders to advise the minister on research policies. This is an independent body due to come up with plans for changing the funding of university research and increasing competitiveness. There are also two regular buffer bodies - the AWT (Advisory Council for science and technology, www.awt.nl/) and the Onderwijsraad (Education Council, www.onderwijsraad.nl/frameset.htm). They provide advice as well as research (sometimes based on commissioned research).

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[18] Boezerooy, Petra (2003) Higher Education in the Netherlands, County report, Higher Education Monitor, CHEPS.

Annex 5: Higher education policy on learning and teaching in France

Broadly speaking the French ministry remains involved in centralised and standardised decision-making. Nevertheless it has questioned its national education policy implementation (Friedberg and Musselin 1993)[19] and adopted a more negotiated type of intervention, more open to local particularities, to diversity and to the rise of stronger and more autonomous universities (Musselin 2000)[20]. This change originates in 1988, when the introduction of four-year contracts (*contrats d'établissement*) between the ministry and each university took place. These contracts require the former to provide the latter with some extra operational budgets on the basis of a 'strategic plan' and priority-rankings of each university's needs for the following years.

As to policy related to teaching enhancement, there is not, at least officially, a specific policy aimed at supporting those universities that choose to strengthen and improve their teaching capacity and promote their reputation as teaching institutions. Nevertheless, the four-year *contrats d'établissement* do give scope for providing financial support for universities that have interesting initiatives concerning teaching. Indeed, all the universities have addressed teaching policy in their contracts. It is common to find in them plans to enhance teaching in order to reduce the rate of non-completion.

Current debates dwell more on the need for universities to enhance their research capacity than on their teaching activities. In the current context of major changes following the requirements of the Bologna process, the fear of becoming a teaching institution is very present.

Contrary to the French practice in research, decisions for attributing funds to the universities are not related to outcomes but to the number of students, considered as a more objective variable. The quantitative culture of evaluation tends nevertheless to be introduced. The Directorate of Evaluation and Prospective (DEP)[21] has started to produce regular comparisons of universities' outcomes, and several universities have launched 'observatories' to examine curricula and graduate employment. Some of these quantitative data can play a minor role in the recognition of professional diplomas, but in general there is only a weak articulation between quantitative evaluations of teaching and decision-making.

Two reports[22] commissioned by one of the councils responsible for the evaluation of the educational system (Haut Conseil de l'Evaluation de l'Ecole –HCéé-)[23] address and acknowledge the weaknesses, in terms both of practice and research, in the field of evaluation. According to these reports, student outcomes as well as evaluation of teaching in higher education remain insufficiently investigated.

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[19] Friedberg, E. & Musselin, C., 1993, L'Etat face aus Universités. Paris, Anthropos.

[20] Musselin, C., 2000, *The Role of Ideas in the Emergence of Convergent Higher Education Policies in Europe: The Case of France*, Centre for European Studies, Harvard University, Working Paper Series n° 73, March 2000.

[21] The DEP defines and implements the evaluation of the educational system and also contributes to the evaluation of the policies led by the ministry. It is charged with the design and the management of the system of statistical information. Another major activity of the DEP is to elaborate projections, forecasts or scenarios, for the short, medium or long term, qualitatively or quantitatively, in order to programme the evolutions of the education system in time and space.

[22] Dejean, J., 2002, *L'évaluation des enseignements dans les universités*. Rapport pour le Haut Conseil de l'Evaluation de l'Ecole (Feb. 2002); Romainville, M. 2002, *L'évaluation des acquis des étudiants dans l'enseignement universitaire*, Rapport pour le Haut Conseil de l'Evaluation de l'Ecole (Dec 2002).

[23] The HCéé does not conduct evaluations, but commissions and produces reports that provide a synthesis of available evaluations on the education system. It gives advice on the annual program of the evaluations produced or published by the Ministry of Education, appraises external evaluations and contributes to the creation of methods and tools for the evaluation of the educational system.