

**SCEPTRe FELLOWSHIP 2008/09**  
**Professional Training, Critical Reflection and Peer Support:**  
**Making the placement year work for others**  
**Dr Jenny Willis, Registry**

**Executive Summary, April 2009**

The aim of this research was to investigate the nature of the transformative experience that, year after year, students report has been effected by their professional placement, in order to enhance the curriculum for all. To this end, three questions were posed:

- Can we identify and draw benefit from the student PT experience in order to enhance the curriculum?
- What can we do at Level 3 to build on and extend the development of those who undertook a placement year?
- What can we do to enhance Level 3 for all students, including those who did not undertake a placement year?

The desired outcomes of the research were:

- to produce a Level P curriculum map for learning outcomes
- to provide a full report of the findings and recommendations
- to disseminate the work through articles for SCEPTRe and wider publication
- to contribute to conference workshops on the research, at, e.g. WACE, Vancouver 2009

The original research methods had to be revised due to the low response rate from students invited to one-to-one interview. The actual data sources were:

- qualitative student feedback for placements 2007/08 only (462 respondents)
- semi-structured interview data from two different Faculties
- P-credit analysis by subject area, verified by Senior Tutors for each subject
- learning outcomes for PT, by subject area
- students' written accounts of their PT experience (28 individuals), as submitted for 2008 SCEPTRe Storytelling competition, Learning to be Professional: the story of my placement.

The first task was to produce a map of the components assessed by each subject where professional training is available. These were aligned with the University regulations. Drilling down from the map, the desired learning outcomes associated with each component were identified and compared. The third, most detailed, level of examination was to investigate the (perceived) actual learning outcomes, as revealed by students' comments and accounts, for comparison with those anticipated. These were all discussed against leading theoretical models of professional learning.

The two main data sources, student qualitative feedback and student narratives, were each analysed separately but using the same methods: emergent themes were identified, then tracked across all respondents' feedback/narratives. These were compared with Yorke and Knight's model of professional learning as being comprised of Understanding, Skills, Efficacy Skills and Metacognition. The findings were also mapped against Eraut's Learning Trajectories, and envisaged in terms of Barnett's notion of 'knowing', 'doing' and 'being/becoming' a professional.

A new understanding gradually emerged, using a metaphor of plaiting cords into a rope of professional development. Cross-sections of each individual's development at any given point in their professional life were found to produce unique combinations of the cords, according to the context, events and the individual's stage of development.

The model enabled us to visualise the complexity of professional learning, raising practical and ethical questions about assessment. It became clear that assessment of understanding and knowing, of propositional and procedural knowledge, is less difficult and contentious than is that of the personal qualities, so-called 'wicked competences', that are associated with who we are or aspire to be.

The four outcomes for the research were achieved, and 10 recommendations have been made aimed at sustaining the professional development of those who have been on placement, and enhancing that of all students.

A reflective tool has been created which may be used by curriculum planners and/or individual students to assist in determining learning objectives for the placement, or reflecting upon their experiences. It is suggested that the same tool could be used in exploring ways of harnessing the work experience gained informally by students who work part-time in order to provide an income. Initial discussions have taken place with the Director of SCEPTre on collaboration with a group working in the same area.

The tool derives from a new conceptualisation of professional development. This understanding will be shared internationally with colleagues working in the field of professional learning. Within the University, and in addition to the role it may play in exploring the 'casual' work experience discussed in the last paragraph, it is hoped that it will contribute to the definition of 'professional intelligence'.

In sum, the fellowship has produced a conceptualisation of what we achieve through professional training and has identified two areas in which the findings can be applied:

- 1 in an exploration of whether we can increase critical reflection and bring about the professional development of students through their part-time, casual employment;

- 2 in working with colleagues on defining the notion of 'professional intelligence.'

Both areas offer the University of Surrey an opportunity to reclaim its unique selling point, and to become the leader once again in the field of professional training.