

# **MA and PhD Dissemination Off the Shelf**

## **Consultation Report**

### **Introduction**

In July 1998 the TTA distributed a report and consultation leaflet to all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and appropriate agencies on the TTA project aimed at bringing selected higher degree research by teachers to the attention of classroom practitioners for use in their own work. As the TTA reported, joint planning with BERA, BEMAS and UCET, widespread national advertisements, letters to HEIs, LEAs and others eventually resulted in only thirteen research summaries which were produced for national dissemination.

Through the consultation process, the TTA sought to:

- understand the reasons for the low level of applications and awards;
- explore how the TTA's interest in pedagogic research with a focus on both teaching and learning could be communicated more effectively;
- explore how such research could help in the process of mediating research and practice;
- explore the implications of the Scheme for post graduate teacher INSET.

Forty responses were received from Universities, Colleges of Higher Education, UCET and BERA. (Appendix 1).

In general, HEIs strongly welcomed the TTA initiative to encourage the dissemination and increase the accessibility of practitioner research. In their approach to the questions raised by the consultation, respondents also took the opportunity to raise a number of concerns of their own and to offer a range of constructive suggestions for future development. The TTA has found the consultation process to be helpful in informing its strategy for the development of teaching as a research and evidence based profession. We would like to thank all the respondents for their contributions.

In this paper Part 1 reports on the HEI responses to the consultation and Part 2 outlines the TTA's broad response to the concerns and recommendations which have emerged from it.

### **PART ONE: THE RESPONSES**

#### **1. Incentives and Motives**

- 1.1 Some HEIs thought that the sum on offer to teachers to summarise their work was a major disincentive in applying to the TTA scheme and one university thought it ‘derisory’. However others did not feel the problems were financial. They cited a range of reasons for the low level of applications and awards. These included the lack of time to respond to the advertisements, the restrictive eligibility criteria, the pressures on HEIs, the diffidence of teacher researchers and the time gap between the completion of the project and the dissemination requirement. Many teachers, according to the HEIs, had simply ‘moved on.’
- 1.2 The scepticism with which teachers currently viewed the relevance of research to practice was noted by a number of HEIs. One university said that an MA student, working in this field was uncovering evidence that there is a long way to go before teachers adopt a more positive view of research. Others recommended further research on how teachers develop and improve their practice and the links between research/evidence and changes in practice.
- 1.3 Many HEIs picked up the point about the effects of the research funding regime and the lack of incentives in terms of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). “TTA should continue to reform the criteria for allocation through the RAE so that practitioner-oriented research and practitioner focused dissemination has increased value within that exercise”.
- 1.4 A number of HEIs pointed to the lack of currency for pedagogic research within the higher education research community. It has “been out of fashion” said one. Others explained that there “has been no official encouragement over the past two decades ..... for research to inform pedagogical practice ..... research has increasingly shifted away into other areas and purposes.” Similarly, some respondents refuted the notion that there were, in fact, appropriate works of research as Michael Bassey of BERA put it, “languishing on university shelves like gold dust”. They pointed out that much of their research was in management or other issues rather than directly involved with teaching and learning.
- 1.5 Many HEIs felt that some sort of official ‘steer’ from the TTA would help boost teacher engagement in research and dissemination. “Official recognition of the intrinsic worth of work undertaken to enhance teaching and learning would go a long way towards heightening teachers’ enthusiasm.” To achieve this, many recommended that the funding and encouragement from the TTA be made available at a much earlier stage in the life of the project. Teacher researchers and supervisors could then build in the expectation of this kind of dissemination as an additional outcome to their work.
- 1.6 HEIs were also clear about the benefits of school involvement and recommended that the TTA should encourage schools to view teacher research in a more positive light. This would help to overcome teachers’ diffidence about the value of their research to anyone but themselves. “It would help if such study was more integral to staff and school development and was regarded and rewarded as part of the normal expectation of teachers and others to undertake CPD.” Suggestions as to how this could be achieved included:
  - prizes awarded for the best classroom based research projects;
  - launching a Classroom Practice Research Journal (“the sort of journal that would be expected on the desk of every head teacher”);
  - offering financial awards to schools to encourage them to support the teachers;

- building teacher research strategies into school development planning.

## 2. Focus on Teaching and Learning

- 2.1 HEIs were more divided in their responses to this. They ranged from criticism of the TTA's focus on pedagogy as "narrow" and "technist" to being "hugely supportive of the TTA continuing its efforts in this area." There was a general concern that other areas of research should not be undervalued by concentrating exclusively on pedagogic research.
- 2.2 A number of HEIs were also worried about an apparent separation of 'academic' and 'relevant' research. One university summed up these concerns: "Education researchers wish to remain part of the whole research community and not to be regarded as second class citizens working to different and possibly lower criteria to those imposed on their colleagues in other disciplines and fields of study." Others saw it differently and were anxious to avoid this distinction: "Part of the problem is the rather limited style which is assumed to be necessary for academic respectability .... I don't see why grace, elegance and simplicity should not be academic virtues recognised by educational studies." One university which had two MA dissertations accepted by the TTA scheme pointed out that both students had now registered for Research Council sponsored PhDs and both had articles placed in refereed academic journals. "The important lesson from the success of these two students is that important high quality research can meet the conventional academic standards of the research councils whilst also being relevant to practising teachers."
- 2.3 Notwithstanding these concerns, most HEIs were explicitly welcoming towards the TTA initiative. Some described initiatives which they were already undertaking in their own institutions to assist in the move to teaching as a research-based profession.
- 2.4 Many HEIs saw Continuing Professional Development as well as Initial Teacher Education as the prime vehicles for encouraging more pedagogic research. They saw such research as an essential component in CPD, linked to the Framework of professional development. "The clear and obvious way for the TTA, UDEs and schools to collaborate on promoting pedagogical research by teachers is for the TTA to include training and support for such research as a significant element (not a brief mention) in its professional framework and so to make it a priority area for expenditure."
- 2.5 HEIs would like overt recognition of the value of higher degrees as part of CPD programmes. One university said frankly that research topics focusing on pedagogy are "not easy" and that there was a tendency to go for the 'safe' option for dissertations. It was one of many which suggested increased funding: "not necessarily through research routes .... could come from weighting CPD funds in such a way as to encourage teachers to undertake the necessary sustained study to complete a research project."
- 2.6 Funding was the major area where many HEIs thought the TTA could make an impact on the nature of teacher research. Direct funding of research studentships against specified TTA criteria was one method suggested for the encouragement of more practice based research. It was thought that schools, too, could be funded to undertake their own research practice, with accreditation through an HEI.

### 3. **Dissemination**

3.1 Many of the HEIs concentrated much of their response on the problem raised by the TTA of disseminating research findings and making them more accessible to teachers.

3.2 Overwhelmingly, HEIs questioned whether written summaries or reports, however accessible and relevant to classroom practitioners, could make a significant impact on changing, reviewing or developing practice. This was especially important given the lack of knowledge about how teachers actually change and improve their practice. It was suggested that further research in this area is critical.

3.3 A large number of HEIs also questioned the effectiveness of dissemination at the end of a research project. They stressed the importance of dissemination taking place throughout the project. This was summed up by three collaborating respondents as follows:

Good dissemination is partly a result of the way a research project is set up..... The research projects must be: 1. relevant to the concerns of teachers, 2. be disseminated during the course of the research as well as after it, 3. be seen to benefit schools during the research as well as after it, 4. involve as large a number of teachers in the activity of the project as possible..... Diffidence about research is not felt if there is involvement in it.

3.4 The 'RAE factor' was raised again in the context of the "conflicting pressures as between the kinds of dissemination identified by the TTA and the requirement of the RAE." One university stressed that "the 'academic' emphasis of the RAE was not of our choosing and we do not generally support it. Research that is of practical use to professional teachers..... ought to be better acknowledged and rewarded within the RAE framework."

3.5 Notwithstanding this conflict, it is clear from the responses that dissemination is assuming a more important role in higher degree research in education. An encouraging number of HEIs reported that they were in the process of or had already introduced strategies for improved dissemination of education research. These included:

- the development of a specific module to encourage dissemination of research through publication in refereed journals as well as conferences and within local school communities;
- the design of doctoral (EdD) programmes with a strong emphasis and specific components on dissemination;
- the establishment of research forums where researchers are encouraged to present ongoing work to colleagues and others.

Others referred to research dissemination projects already well-established, such as the Classroom (Collaborative) Action Research Network and the OxSpec project, where

teachers were funded for release from school for one day a week for a year.

3.6 Nearly all the responses contained practical suggestions for more extensive dissemination through a variety of media. Suggestions for effective dissemination embraced four key themes: paper based, through accessible summaries, practical journals and established media; electronically based, through the Internet and managed data-bases; conference based, through HEI or LEA sponsored networking events; discussion based, both in and between schools and between schools, LEAs and HEIs. A linking theme throughout was the need for additional funding for effective dissemination: whether for HEIs, schools individuals or projects.

3.7 Suggestions for paper-based dissemination:

- ◇ articles in the 'trade press' (TES, THES, teacher union publications);
- ◇ new Practitioner Journal(s);
- ◇ summaries written for classroom teachers;
- ◇ an annual TTA digest of completed dissertations;
- ◇ consortia of HEIs and schools to edit themed work-books for TTA publication.

3.8 Suggestions for dissemination via conferences/workshops:

- ◇ HEIs to host regional conferences sponsored by the TTA;
- ◇ short courses and/or workshops to present and explain summaries;
- ◇ encourage presentation of the research as part of the award.

3.9 Electronic dissemination:

- ◇ the TTA to establish an electronic database of summaries, accessible through the Internet;
- ◇ teacher research networks to be established as part of the National Grid for Learning;
- ◇ the TTA to establish a research Website which could combine database access with themed discussion groups.

3.10 Discussion-based dissemination:

- ◇ HEIs to act as focal point and develop networks of teachers interested in similar themes;
- ◇ HEIs could act as consultants for the dissemination of Teacher Research projects in local schools.

## **PART TWO: TTA RESPONSE**

4 Introduction

4.1 The TTA has consistently maintained its support for a mixed market of research funders in the field of education. As one agency among many, it has pressed hard for increased attention to be given to pedagogic research which supports teaching and learning in

classrooms. It does so because it has identified a significant shortage in this area. Only 27% of education research submitted to the last Research Assessment Exercise was identified as pedagogic and not all of this had a classroom focus even though research in this area has the greatest capacity for informing teachers and helping to raise standards. It recognises that pedagogic research, like pedagogy, is challenging, but the TTA remains convinced that there is a need to focus attention here. (Even, or perhaps especially, education management research needs to make the link with how school leaders and managers can support teaching and learning in classrooms.)

4.2 The TTA has concentrated its extremely limited research budget on influencing both the supply and demand for pedagogic research through a range of activities. These have been designed both to illustrate what can be done and to encourage others to use and undertake research which is focused on teaching and learning. The dissemination of teacher research projects done through higher degrees is only one of the strategies the TTA is employing. Others include:

- the four year TTA teacher research grant initiative (now in its final year);
- the School Based Research Consortia comprising partnerships of schools, HEIs and LEAs working together on teacher engagement with and in research and evidence over a three year period;
- pilot partnership conferences designed to challenge teachers expectations of what research can do for them and what they can do for research;
- the gathering of evidence about teachers' views on the credibility, relevance and usefulness of research and evidence;
- a research review of evidence about teacher use of research;
- the establishment of a National Advisory Panel of Teachers to provide a teacher perspective on research priorities and research and evidence based practice;
- campaigning to ensure that teachers are included in the panels for the next round of the RAE and that the criteria for this exercise include impact on practice;
- commissioning larger scale pedagogic research in relation to the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the use of ICT in teaching literacy and numeracy.

## 5. **Strategic Issues**

5.1 All of these activities, established over the last four years, also aim to tackle a number of the specific concerns and recommendations raised in this consultation exercise, namely:

- the perceived conflicting demands between the needs of practitioners and the demands of the RAE on Departments of Education in relation to research dissemination;
- the development and support of a more explicit and co-ordinated approach to dissemination of HE accredited teacher research;
- the need to develop and extend knowledge of how teachers change their practice;
- the need to ensure that the focus on teaching as a research and evidence based profession is built in to teacher education at all levels, from Initial Teacher Training to Continuing Professional Development;
- collaborative schemes for networking at a local and regional level.

5.2 Throughout the above programme there is an emphasis on partnership with HEIs and researchers who have a particular interest in and concern for the needs of practitioners. The responses to this consultation will be built into this work in concrete ways. For example, the extension of the research conferences scheme piloted in 1998-99 will incorporate as criteria the concrete and practical suggestions for supporting teachers in non paper based dissemination (see below).

5.3 Some of the responses to the consultation exercise cause the TTA concern because of the assumptions made about status. Those which see relevant and accessible research as having the capacity to raise rather than lower the status of evidence and research offer a more positive way forward. Good teachers want good research. At their best teacher research projects represent rigorous case study work geared to interpreting, illustrating or testing out larger scale, high quality research in classroom settings. These are the projects which need wider dissemination. Other projects are geared more to engaging the teachers involved with the research of others as a part of their personal continuing professional development. This work represents high quality in-service training which is not necessarily suitable for dissemination. If the goal is mainly the teacher's own development then perhaps there is a need to look at whether it is useful to label this 'research'. Why shouldn't enquiry based teaching and teacher development be seen as high status activities in their own right? Such activities make an important contribution to mediation between research and practice which might more easily be valued by the academic research community if its separate nature and contribution is maintained.

## 6. **Next Steps**

6.1 The consultation has highlighted a further five areas where the current TTA research programme could be refined in the light of the responses:

- building an expectation into higher degrees that teachers will undertake projects that have the capacity to inform their colleagues' work as well as their own practice;
- use of the Internet;
- improving and extending paper based dissemination;
- developing the status of teacher engagement with and in research;
- developing the effectiveness of steering;
- the identification and publication of case studies of good practice in disseminating teacher research done for higher degrees.

- 6.2 Perhaps the area where there is greatest scope for further development lies in the national programme of funding of postgraduate teacher in-service education. Here, the consultation responses repeatedly emphasise the need to build in an expectation that teacher research will be interesting and useful to other practitioners at the earliest stage of development. Strategies now being considered by the TTA include building this into the criteria for INSET funding, identifying and disseminating examples of good practice (and extending recognition that higher degrees which include a research component have a strong contribution to make to the development of individuals and the profession as a whole.)
- 6.3 Another area for development is the creation of models of text based dissemination which genuinely attract the attention of teachers. In the first two years of the Teacher Research Grant Scheme the TTA has gathered together considerable evidence of the kinds of writing which attract teachers' attention and interest. This will continue to develop during the completion phase of the Year Three projects and through all stages of the fourth and final year. Complementary work is taking place in the four School Based Research Consortia. The suggestions from the consultation exercise will feed directly into this process and into the preparation of a pack of materials identifying good practice, development guidelines and common pitfalls to be avoided for other agencies who are now increasingly starting to consider funding grants to teachers for small scale research.
- 6.4 Although there remains a case for paper based dissemination until current plans for wider access are in place there is increasing interest in and capacity for electronic dissemination activity, as cited in several responses to the consultation exercise. TTA is now developing its own website in relation to research and is exploring how to make appropriate links with other relevant websites. In response to the consultation TTA will build into this process consideration of how to link this strategy with other wider dissemination issues and ensure this is also considered by the new National Education Research Forum.
- 6.5 The final point highlighted by both this consultation exercise and the TTA's experience of the Teacher Research Grant scheme is the importance of effective steering for teacher research. In the second year of the Teacher Research Grant scheme the HEI steerers became known as 'stirrers'. The term captures the ways in which teachers, who were required to purchase such support from within TTA funds, looked for, and, (for the most part) received critique, questioning and support which both sharpened and loosened up their thinking and directed their attention to existing high quality research and evidence which had the capacity to help them. The contribution of HEIs in this work is important and will be acknowledged.



As a result, an additional strategy which the TTA is considering in the light of this consultation exercise is a survey of good practice in the steering of teacher research. This includes consideration of the need to secure broader school support, which was highlighted in the consultation, and broader support in the preparation of teacher friendly summaries.

## **7. Conclusion**

The TTA has found the consultation process to be a useful way of understanding and building upon the shared experiences of HEIs and others involved in supporting teacher research.

It welcomes the growing nucleus of support for a renewed focus on pedagogical research. It has been encouraged by the clear focus on dissemination which is beginning to emerge in the form of new degree modules and HEIs' interest in becoming involved in dissemination networks. The TTA will act in a variety of ways to take up suggestions about encouraging and extending the dissemination of research which has the potential to enhance and develop classroom practice and look forward to working in partnership with HEIs who do the same.

## **Appendix 1 Institutions, agencies and individuals responding to the TTA consultation**

Oxford Brookes University  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Doncaster College  
Leeds Metropolitan University  
Bradford and Ilkley Community College  
Chichester Institute of Higher Education  
University of Leicester  
University of Brighton  
University College Chester  
University of Sunderland  
University College of St Martin  
Cheltenham and Gloucester College  
BERA  
P Lomax  
University of Huddersfield  
Warwick University  
Edge Hill University College  
University of Hertfordshire  
Westminster College  
Kingston University  
University of Durham  
Liverpool Hope University College  
Keele University  
University of the West of England

University of Newcastle  
University of Cambridge  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
University of Plymouth  
University of Luton  
University College Worcester  
University of Oxford  
Bretton Hall College  
Institute of Education, London  
Bath Spa University College  
University of Hull + Middlesex University + UCET (Joint response)  
Newman College  
Brunel University