**SEDA Research & Development Small Grant, 2011-12**

**Project Title:** Evaluation of a university teaching fellowship scheme as a tool to promote pedagogic research and development

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**Background and aims of the project:**

Teaching fellowship schemes (TFS) are widely used within the university sector to reward teaching and learning and to promote pedagogic research and innovation (D’Andrea, 2007). TFS commonly provide financial awards supporting small-scale educational research projects (D’Andrea, 2007). Their outcomes are expected to benefit individuals’ practice, and therefore enhance the student experience (Skelton, 2005). They have become established features of many universities. Published studies report on the positive impact of TFS, such as encouraging collaboration and contributing to the development of communities of practice which explore issues around teaching and learning (Dexter & Seden, 2012; Morris & Fry, 2006; Jones, 2010). These studies also identify barriers and others contest the contribution TFS have made to promoting pedagogic research (e.g. Skelton, 2005). They have faced criticism for not leading to long-term changes in teaching practices and for poor dissemination (e.g. Skelton, 2005; D’Andrea, 2007).

Plymouth University has operated a Teaching Fellowship scheme since 2003. Annually staff can apply for up to £5,000 to undertake a pedagogic research or development project. All staff are eligible to apply, with individual and collaborative projects being supported. Teaching Fellows are expected to use part of the fund to support their continuous professional development as university teachers. Since its introduction 134 Teaching Fellows have undertaken 61 projects. As envisaged in the early days of Teaching Fellowship schemes (e.g. Ramsden & Martin, 1996), this has given the University a critical mass of research-engaged teachers, serving to raise the status of such activities internally.

Drawing on the experiences of the University’s Teaching Fellows we sought evaluate the contribution this scheme has made to the promotion of pedagogic research and development. In particular we examined the impact of the scheme on individuals’ personal / professional development, the contribution made to their own, and their colleagues, teaching practices and how they had taken their pedagogic research / development activities forward following the end of the Teaching Fellowship project.

Based on the outcomes of this evaluation we have proposed a series of recommendations to the University in order to enhance the support offered to University Teaching Fellows.

**Methods:** Using a mix of email and face-to-face interviews we captured the experiences of 12 past University Teaching Fellows. The participants were purposely selected to represent a mix of project areas, disciplines and also career stages. Following each interview an initial analysis was undertaken to identify emerging themes carried forward into future interviews. Upon completion, a thematic analysis of all the interview data was conducted.

**Outcomes:** Although a diverse sample of Teaching Fellows participated in this study, common themes emerged relating to the following areas:

* Teaching Fellowship projects provided an opportunity to dedicate time to reflect on practice, with the projects themselves giving individuals the space to experiment with new ideas and discuss their practice with colleagues / interested parties;
* Many participants spoke of the ways in which their involvement in the TFS had encouraged their professional development and influenced the direction of their subsequent career paths within academia. The Teaching Fellows frequently deepened participants’ interest in, and understanding of, certain areas of pedagogy. The experience often sparked an interest that continued after the funding had finished, leading people to seek out further funding and building on the foundations laid in their projects.
* Not surprisingly participants identified challenges experienced during their projects which affected not only the process of undertaking their work, but more widely could have an impact on the adoption and future engagement with pedagogic research and development work;
* Benefits were identified which were discussed at the individual level; e.g. career development, networking and through the dissemination they undertook after the project was completed. Wider benefits, e.g. on colleagues, varied across the participants; however, collectivebenefits were evident including facilitation of more collaborative ways of working and the production of outputs that were of use to departments.
* Importantly, the Teaching Fellowship projects had demonstrable impacts on others beyond those individuals, or small groups of co-investigators, who held the awards. The research process and outputs were often useful to both staff and students, influencing their colleagues practice, as well as students’ learning needs. In some cases, the research projects led to significant change within Teaching Fellows departments.
* Student input into the projects varied. Generally students by trialling new technologies, participating with new pedagogical activities, and their experiences explored within projects. The participants advocated the importance of students’ engagement and reflected on more active ways to engage them process and practice of Teaching Fellowship projects.
* The Teaching Fellowship Awards not only had an impact on the recipients’ themselves, and on their colleagues and students, but also in wider contexts within, and beyond, Plymouth University.

Based on the outcomes of this study we have proposed seven recommendations which are going to be presented to the Associate Dean’s Teaching and Learning, and discussed more widely within the Educational Development team. These recommendations will inform both the support provided to University Teaching Fellows, on an individual basis, but also more widely to enhance the management and organisation of the Scheme.

**Dissemination:** We have had a workshop proposal entitled: ‘*University Teaching Fellowship Schemes: do they promote developments in pedagogic research and development?’* accepted for Autumn 2012 SEDA Conference. In additional we are currently writing an article for submission to *Innovations in Education & Teaching International* which reports the outcomes of this study.

**Budget:** In addition to the money awards by SEDA, we received match funding from the Teaching and Learning Directorate, Plymouth University to undertake this work. These monies were used to pay for transcription of interview data and to fund a research assistant to analyses the interview data.