

Optimistic about FE research

By Joel Petrie

I once attended a conference at which Professor Frank Coffield lamented the limited evidence of research in further education and asked: “Where else would you find a £10 billion industry with no research?”

While the paucity of FE research is widely acknowledged, there are grounds for optimism. Several universities, particularly post-1992, have vibrant FE research traditions. There have been several books published about FE in the past year, written and edited by FE practitioners and researchers.

There is also considerable research activity, much of it practitioner-led, going on ‘under the radar’ which has significant value. Many FE professionals are studying for masters, MPhil and doctorates.

Engagement in research and its dissemination is unquestionably a challenge in FE. Scholarly activity can be a low priority for a sector responding to policy churn. A further significant barrier is the cost at a time of stretched professional development budgets.

However there are several organisations that promote sector inquiry and support FE researchers. These include the Association for Research in Post-Compulsory Education (ARPCE), the Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN), Teacher Education in Lifelong Learning (TELL) and, of course, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and the Society for Education and Training (SET).

Through various channels, including social media, websites and regular publications, these organisations provide support for practitioner and academic researchers, as well as information about events, conferences, new books and potential funding. ARPCE membership includes free electronic access to its academic journal, *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*. LSRN operates via voluntary regional convenors, promoting and supporting local events such as the burgeoning FE Research Meets. TELL organises about four free network meetings annually.

The ETF offers the Practitioner Research Programme bursaries for fellowships at SUNCETT, run by Professor Maggie Gregson. SET members can access an online research library powered by EBSCO. And they also benefit from research-based articles in *inTuition* and in its supplementary publications, including the annual *inTuition Research Supplement*.

There is a final factor which gives us optimism for the future of FE research – the fact that some of these organisations, including the ETF, are in discussion to establish an overarching meta-network of existing research bodies.

This could facilitate a joint electronic presence, foster collaboration and greater use of research evidence, and perhaps ultimately stimulate collaborative bidding for the funding of research focused on, and undertaken by, FE researchers.

Joel Petrie works in FE, and recently coedited *The Principal: Power and Professionalism in FE* with Marie Daley and Professor Kevin Orr.

 For information on ARPCE <http://arpce.org.uk/members/>
To find out more about LSRN contact Andrew Morris at a.j.morris@ucl.ac.uk
For details on TELL and its events, email Jim Crawley at j.crawley@bathspa.ac.uk

WHAT'S NEW

IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING?
AND WHY SHOULD I CARE?

WHAT'S NEW?

The government has published its response to last year's consultation on the implementation of T levels.

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

These are the biggest reforms to technical education and training in a generation.

The first T levels will be rolled out in 2020, although full roll-out is postponed to beyond 2022.

One of the main challenges, identified in the consultation, is to upskill current teaching staff and recruit additional skilled staff.

Extra support will be available for staff development, including up to £20m to improve teaching quality over the next two years. The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and the Society for Education and Training (SET) will be involved in delivering much of this support for teachers and trainers.

A further £500 million a year will be made available to cover the additional taught hours and industry placement requirements for T levels.

High-quality industry placements are essential to T levels, and the government has promised support to help providers deliver this aspect of the programmes.

T levels will include a six point grading scale for the core (A* - E) and a three-point grading scale for each occupational specialism (Distinction, Merit, Pass). There will also be an overall T level pass grade. Providers will set their own T level entry requirements.

The expectation is that most students will have gained Level 2 qualifications in maths and English by the end. For more information, visit: goo.gl/zsGoAW