

Meeting the challenge of Business School accreditation with pedagogic research (0178)

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## **Introduction**

The competitive nature of global higher education (HE) has meant that institutions are constantly seeking ways to differentiate themselves. One way in which business schools do this is to aim for accreditation by prestigious bodies such as the Association of MBA's (AMBA) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). The requirements of the AACSB are that the majority of teaching staff (including sessional and hourly-paid lecturers) must have an active research record. Standard 15 of the AACSB eligibility procedures for accreditation states: "*The school maintains and strategically deploys participating and supporting faculty who collectively and individually demonstrate significant academic and professional engagement that sustains the intellectual capital necessary to support high-quality outcomes consistent with the school's mission and strategies*" ([www.aacsb.edu](http://www.aacsb.edu)). This causes challenges for Business Schools where often, a large amount of teaching is delivered by experienced practitioners who are employed because of their industry knowledge rather than their academic research. Faced with the dilemma of how to retain faculty yet still meet the rigorous requirements of the AACSB accreditation panel, a group of staff in a UK Business School established a pedagogic research group with the aim of increasing research output over a period of two years. In this paper, the results of the initiative will be presented.

## **Forming a pedagogic research group**

The group (informally known as the Business Education Research Network) was formed in July 2014. The initial composition of the group included four full time, teaching-focused faculty, two with PhDs, two completing PhDs plus one part-time hourly paid member of staff with no research experience. A second hourly paid lecturer (also with no research experience) joined the group in March 2015. All members are based in the Business School at the University and represent the three departments within the school, but none of them are classed as 'researchers' in their institution (i.e. they have very little time formally

allocated for research). An initial strategy of working on conference papers, evolving over time into journal article submissions was agreed upon. An approach was developed which combined teamwork, collaborative writing, accessing small pockets of funding, and the establishment of a shared digital resource to “jump-start” the research activity. Throughout the work, collaboration has been key, with strengthening relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Tools and technologies have been harnessed to promote a shared repertoire with a highly structured shared file area (Dropbox) and collaborative writing tools (Google Docs). A particularly effective tool for collaborative research has been the Thematic Analysis Grid (“TAG”) which itself has been the subject of several conference papers (e.g., Anderson, Lees and Wason, 2015) and has been recognised internationally by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business who have invited the group to present at their 2016 main accreditation event in Minneapolis. Overall, the working of the group reflects approaches advocated by thinking on Communities of Practice (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002).

A particular challenge faced by the group has been the funding of the hourly-paid lecturers’ research time. Although ad hoc faculty money has been available, to be sustainable required a different approach. We approached our Dean in March 2016 to fund an innovative “Adjunct Faculty Research Bursary” and secured £8000 to be used between April and July 2016 to fund the two sessional staffs’ research time. Other creative solutions to the challenge of collaborative writing include the use of scheduled writing retreats at other campuses (to minimise cost and disruption).

## **Results**

62 submissions have been made to journals, conferences and internal staff development events since July 2014. The group currently have five accepted journal articles (in *Teaching in HE*; *Journal of Strategic Marketing*; *London Review of Education*; *Student Engagement and Experience Journal*; *Practitioner Research in Higher Education*) and 24 national and international conference papers along with invitations to present at several institutions.

By developing the group to include teaching-focussed hourly paid lecturers and full-time faculty, the group have pioneered a new approach to staff development to ensure that teaching is research-led. As one of the hourly-paid lecturer members commented:

*“Due to an external accreditation process, I needed to become research active and to publish within a year. Having a heavy teaching load, I was isolated from the rest of my faculty and, not being regularly included in meetings, was unaware of what research opportunities existed. In networking with colleagues, I learned of this cross faculty research group and was invited to join.....Both the students I teach and my institution have benefitted from this group and my newly-established research record (four journal articles plus two papers under review and six conferences publications). My students have benefitted by being taught by a more engaged, engaging and innovative pedagogue who now employs evidence-based interventions”.*

The benefits to the institution of incorporating hourly-paid lecturers into faculty research groups was commended by the Dean of the Faculty:

*“Our sessional staff are often not research active but bring good teaching and practice to the learning of students. The pedagogic research group has demonstrated very clearly that when actively working together, individuals will achieve outputs that are not part of their regular contract and beyond the requirement of the role of the hourly-paid lecturer”.*

## **Conclusions**

In summary, we argue that it is possible to respond to the challenge of ensuring all faculty are research active by establishing a community of pedagogic researchers in which full-time faculty work with part-time colleagues using collaborative writing tools and harnessing technology. This in turn has the benefit of improving the staff experience in terms of integrating practice amongst full and part-time faculty. The student experience is also enhanced by the strong focus on student-centred innovative pedagogy, evaluating and disseminating results via conferences and publications.

## **References**

AACSB web-site [www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/standards/](http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/standards/) (accessed 23 June 2016)

Anderson, D., Lees, R. and Wason, H. (2015) "Tagging" the literature with the Thematic Analysis Grid: a tool to facilitate collaborative research. Proceedings of *Society for Research in Higher Education* (SRHE) annual conference.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R.A. and Snyder, W. (2002) *Cultivating Communities of Practice: a guide to managing knowledge*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston.