

Notes from the summer term London Staff Developers Group meeting held on June 6 2007 at Kings College London

The meeting opened with **brief introductions** from all attendees and a **review** of the notes from the previous meeting of the group in January. Particular points were raised with regard to take-up of the ITOL discounted HE membership offer and regional activities surrounding Adult Learners week/ Learning at Work Day. It transpired that a number of organisations had mounted events, with generally healthy numbers taking part at most locations. Sampler sessions and activities based around wine/ champagne tasting seemed to be especially popular and successful. It was agreed that given the generally positive response, efforts would be made to further co-ordinate activity next year, and that part of the Lent term meeting could be given over to this topic.

Organisational development in higher education

We welcomed Professor Jose Chambers, who introduced some sector wide work designed to map OD capability nationwide. She talked about a survey issued to Vice-Chancellor level staff aimed at establishing a 'community of practice' and a network based around a willingness to be consulted. She advised that she had received around 60 responses, just over half the institutions in the sample frame, with zero returns from many of the organisations we represent. She also introduced a further key question for us to ponder, namely how we would prefer the information is disseminated.

At this stage London Group regular Bob Thackwray inputted the discussion with his own distinctive reading on OD, in itself a response to a previous request to take a provocative stance on agenda items. His playful narrative covered much ground, critically questioning the wisdom that we need always to look to industry and debating whether or not universities are even necessarily best described as organisations, to include coverage of alternative typologies like the university as village.

Jose then took back the discussion to detail some of the findings thus far, which include a strong sense that many organisations are developing their own approaches to OD, but do not tend to make use of their own academic expertise in these fields. She noted too that many responses have been collated by Directors of HR, inviting questions as to the appropriateness of this location for OD conversations. Finally, she noted that where OD does seem to be working well, its where it happens naturalistically and in a multi-functional manner.

She promised to return in the new academic year to update us on summative findings, some of the implications of the research and progress made generating an online national resource.

SDF update

We heard from Sandy Wilkie, national Chair of the Staff Development Forum about the its establishment as a network for staff developers with a focus around CPD issues, its current format and some of its current activities, to include the gift of regional development monies.

He also updated us on current funding for the group, which will revert to a team subscription model from 2008, and received questions from the floor.

Academic publishing

Our next guest speaker was Deborah Spring, who introduced us to some of the issues around academic publishing and its operation as a new arena with many challenges and much development potential for many colleagues new to this field. Specifically, she addressed issues of marketing, selling, negotiation and timelines.

She already supports work in this field at a number of higher education institutions and details of her services are attached for those wishing to pursue this option.

Round robin of attendees items

Andrew Taylor talked briefly about the **heated** project and recent discussions with the Lifelong Learning Sector Skills Council about their set of standards for teachers. It was agreed that we need to return to this topic at a later date.

Systems, development and performance management

Our host, Ken Bromfield- at probably his final meeting as a salaried staff development employee- led our keynote participative discussion about the changing nature of the staff development function and the need for effective information systems in an age of emerging performance management. He invited colleagues from a number of institutions to both detail how they currently operated and to critically reflect on this practice, allowing for a shared dialogue on a key aspect of our work.

At the end of the session, our Chair paid fulsome tribute to Ken, acknowledging his enduring passion for, and commitment to, lifelong learning before presenting a farewell gift on behalf of the London Group.

The meeting closed with a round of any other business and a lunch kindly provided by Ken and Kings College.

Colleagues were reminded that the next meeting of the Group was scheduled for October 9 2007 at UCL.