

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Worcester</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 25 - Education</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Enhancing Practice and Influencing Policy in Vocational Education and Training</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research into reflective practice, the process by which reflection on workplace actions generates new insights into practice and thus enables reshaping of that practice, has influenced both practice and policy in vocational education and training (VET). Through an innovative “fieldbook” it has enhanced the working practices of VET practitioners across Europe. In addition, this “fieldbook” has helped to shape recommendations for improving quality assurance in VET at European level - one of the European Commission’s current policy priorities in education, training and lifelong learning – which will ultimately feed into policy and practice development.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>There is a well-established and on-going tradition at Worcester of research into reflective practice. This is demonstrated not least by the foundation in 2000 of the journal <i>Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives</i> by the University’s then Professor of Education, Tony Ghaye (1978-2001) and by the continued contribution of Worcester academic staff to research in this area. For example, 12 articles written or co-written by Worcester staff and research students have appeared in <i>Reflective Practice</i> over the REF period.</p> <p>This case study is built upon the research of Dr Phil Chambers (1978-2007) and Brian Clarke (1979-2008) into reflective practice in various educational settings, both UK and international, specifically Initial Teacher Education (<b>References 1 &amp; 2</b>), Vocational Education &amp; Training (VET) (<b>Reference 6</b>), and Adult Education (<b>Reference 5</b>). The central focus of their research was on the “lived experience” as a rich source of data for increasing understanding, and the use of narrative or “conversations” as a means of shaping this experience and enabling meaning to be extracted (<b>References 3, 4 &amp; 5</b>). Chambers demonstrated that these narratives could be analysed through categorising and coding of content, identifying themes and ideas and building of concepts, but as much understanding emerged from the process of producing the narrative itself as the analysis (<b>Reference 3</b>).</p> <p>The research emphasised the importance of risk taking and innovation in practice and the challenging of orthodoxies. Such creative approaches could often lead to unanticipated outcomes which were vital in shaping and changing practice. A funded project looked explicitly at such outcomes in an Initial Teacher Education context (<b>Grant a</b>).</p> <p>Building on this earlier research, Worcester engaged in an EU-funded collaborative project with partner organisations from with Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy and Norway (<b>Grant b</b>). This pilot project focused on increasing the capabilities of teachers and trainers in vocational education and training (VET) by implementing “reflective practices” in their activities. The project had three main outcomes: (a) a state of the art review of reflective practice and vocational education and training; (b) the development of a conceptual framework within which VET practitioners could operate; (c) a “fieldbook” for practitioners to facilitate the process of reflection. Chambers and Clarke were primarily involved in producing the fieldbook, which brought together the key themes of lived experience, narrative and unanticipated outcomes (<b>Reference 6</b>).</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Clarke, B. L. &amp; Chambers, P.A.</b> (1999) The Promotion of Reflective Practice in European Teacher Education: Conceptions, Purposes and Actions, <i>Pedagogy, Culture &amp; Society</i>, 7.2: 291-303.</li> <li><b>Chambers, P. A., Colombo, M., Askland, L. &amp; Clarke, B. L.</b> (2003) Significant learning incidents and critical conversations in an international context: promoting reflexivity with in-</li> </ol>

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service students, *Journal of In-Service Education*, 29.1: 101-122.

3. **Chambers, P. A.** (2003). Narrative and reflective practice: recording and understanding experience. *Educational Action Research*, 11(3): 403-14.
4. Deeny, K. & **Chambers, P. A.** (2004). Sharing the learning: re-oxygenating the experience, *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 5(1): 133-143.
5. **Chambers, P. A.**, Bhosekar, K., **Clarke, B. L.** & Fowler, K. (2005). Narratives, Meaning-making and reflective practice in adult education: a UK framework. In Colombo M. (Ed.), *Reflexivity and creativity in educational professionalism: an International perspective*, Milano: Vita & Pensiero: 173-192
6. Stroobants, H., **Chambers, P. A.** & **Clarke, B. L.** (eds.) (2007) *Reflective Journeys. A Fieldbook for Facilitating Lifelong Learning in Vocational Education and Training*. Leonardo da Vinci REFLECT Project Publication, Istituto Guglielmo, Tagliacarne, Rome.

### Grants

- a. Dr Phil Chambers (Principal Investigator), An interrogation of unanticipated learning outcomes within a reflective practice approach to international teacher education, British Academy Small Grant Scheme, (2004-5), £7,324.
- b. Dr Phil Chambers & Brian Clarke (Co-investigators), REFLECT: Supporting Vocational Education & Training Through Reflection, EC Leonardo da Vinci Programme (Dec 2005-Dec 2007), £40,000 (Value for Worcester).

The University is confident the research above meets the 2\* quality threshold. Reference 1 was returned to UoA68 (Education) in RAE2001 as part of a submission rated 3b. References 2, 3, 4 and 5 were assessed by independent review as 2\* in preparation for submission to RAE2008. Reference 6 was the product of a European funded project which is indicative of its excellence.

### 4. Details of the impact

The impact of the research has primarily emerged from the REFLECT project (although as highlighted above this project was the culmination of a body of earlier research). The project was designed to directly inform the practice of VET practitioners through the fieldbook. The fieldbook was produced in 5 languages (Bulgarian, Dutch, English, Italian and Romanian). It was made open access from the outset through the project website to ensure that it was as widely used as possible (**Source A**).

It has also had a wider influence on professional standards and guidelines for training in VET: specifically it was identified as one of a small number of good practice projects by QALL (Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning), a project bringing together 15 Quality Assurance (QA) agencies across Europe which ran from 2010-13. The aims of this project were: to highlight good practice in the field; mainstream this practice; and provide recommendations for development of QA in VET and Adult Education to policy makers, social partners, stakeholders and national authorities.

Quality assurance in VET and Adult Education is one of the European Commission's current policy priorities in education, training and lifelong learning. The QALL project was one of five thematic networks set up to increase the impact of innovative projects in the sectoral lifelong learning programmes run by the European Commission. It compiled a compendium of good practice projects funded through the European Commission's Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig programmes for the period 2003-2008. Out of the several hundred projects funded over this period just 39 are identified in the compendium (**Source B**). The compendium identifies the specific relevance of the project for QA, how it relates to the EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) Cycle – a common framework and tools for EC member states to improve, monitor and evaluate their quality assurance policies and practices in VET – and the potential for disseminating the project outcomes to other sectors. In its overview of the REFLECT project (**Source C**), it highlights:

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- the value of the fieldbook in the QA process as “an evaluation tool which involves thinking about and critically analysing one’s actions with the goal of improving one’s professional practice”;
- emphasises its relevance to the evaluation and review stages of the EQAVET Cycle;
- identifies it as setting out good practice for developing facilitators’ work.

The REFLECT project is also highlighted in the QALL Project report as part of the section on Self-evaluation/self-assessment (**Source D**).

In 2013, the QALL project published 10 recommendations derived from the good practice projects in the compendium (**Source E**). These recommendations addressed both implementation issues (aimed at practitioners and providers of VET and Adult education) and policy issues (aimed at European and national agencies and policy makers). The importance of reflective practice (and associated self-evaluation) is highlighted in a number of the 10 recommendations:

- Under the heading “Quality Culture” recommendations include:
  - Instil QA and evaluation into the daily practice of VET and AE professionals; promote collaboration and reflective practice.
  - Enhance reflective practices using a (self-)evaluation culture and peer review methodologies as a central tool.
- Under the heading “Methodologies” recommendations include:
  - Use bottom-up self-evaluation as an important element of quality culture; raise awareness for its benefits and do not restrict it to a bureaucratic procedure for compliance with formal requirements.

These recommendations have been widely circulated by the project team and are intended to feed into QA policy at the European level.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Website giving open access to the fieldbook:  
<http://reflect.tagliacarne.it/htm/downloads/documents.asp>
- B. QUALL Project Compendium:  
[http://www.qall.net/fileadmin/qall/Downloads/QALLL\\_projectCompendium\\_web\\_version\\_fv.pdf](http://www.qall.net/fileadmin/qall/Downloads/QALLL_projectCompendium_web_version_fv.pdf)
- C. Overview of the REFLECT Project by QALL:  
[http://www.qall.net/fileadmin/qall/Collected\\_Projects/projects\\_1st\\_mapping/Reflect\\_OR\\_-\\_Reflective\\_Practices\\_for\\_Professional\\_Guidance\\_Practitioners.pdf](http://www.qall.net/fileadmin/qall/Collected_Projects/projects_1st_mapping/Reflect_OR_-_Reflective_Practices_for_Professional_Guidance_Practitioners.pdf)
- D. QALLitative Report:  
[http://www.qall.net/fileadmin/qall/Downloads/QALLL\\_QualitativReport\\_web.pdf](http://www.qall.net/fileadmin/qall/Downloads/QALLL_QualitativReport_web.pdf)
- E. QALL Recommendations:  
[http://www.qall.net/fileadmin/qall/Downloads/QALLL\\_Recommendations\\_web.pdf](http://www.qall.net/fileadmin/qall/Downloads/QALLL_Recommendations_web.pdf)