

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Sunderland
Unit of Assessment: 25
Title of case study: Helping Research Findings Become Good Educational Practice in the Further, Adult and Vocation Education (FAVE) sector: the impact of the University of Sunderland's Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT) upon policy and practice.
1. Summary of the impact

1.1 Through the development of national Research Development Fellowships (RDFs) and the national Exploratory Research programme, SUNCETT has worked in collaboration with policy professionals from the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), (now the Education and Training Foundation, ETF) to contribute to **changes to public service practices and policy guidelines for the sector**. Through the same work, SUNCETT has **improved standards of teaching, learning and practitioner research across the sector** using a model for educational improvement, originally applied in schools by Fielding et al (2005), described as 'Joint Practice Development' (JPD). Through JPD, SUNCETT has enabled policy professionals and practitioners to incrementally improve practice across the FAVE sector in research-informed, realistic and sustainable ways. These applications of JPD have been led nationally by SUNCETT and the improvements in practice achieved as a result of this approach have been recognised externally in the form of the LSIS Legacy Report (2013) (Source 1), in various OFSTED inspection reports (Source 2) and by the British Education Research Association in, *Why Educational Research Matters* (BERA, 2013) (Source 3).

2. Underpinning research

2.1 The Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training initiative was a high profile government policy, launched nationally at the House of Commons by Lord Treisman and Sir Geoffrey Holland in 2008. By invitation, the University of Sunderland's Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT) team was the **only** CETT of the eleven nationally, asked to present their research at the House of Commons event. SUNCETT was specifically included in the CETT network in recognition of our work in teacher education and because we are seen as one of the few expert groups in the UK able to contribute to the development and support of practitioner research and new policy development for the sector. SUNCETT's extensive practitioner networks enable our work to reach and impact positively upon the field of educational practice in a wide variety of ways. SUNCETT is nationally identified with JPD, practitioner research and evidence-informed practice. SUNCETT's support for practitioner research builds upon, and for the first time extends, the work of Fielding et al (2005) into FAVE contexts across the sector. SUNCETT works with a coherent theory of change and impact, which begins with local concerns and incrementally extends these to team, departmental and whole organisation level. Working with over 200 sector practitioners and reaching out to over 2,000 teachers and tens of thousands of learners, our JPD research engages with local, regional and national issues in education policy by involving education managers, teachers, learners, policy professionals and other key stakeholders in all stages of a participatory, evidence-informed research process.

Specific Findings from the Work of SUNCETT with Relevance to Education Policy and Policy Guidelines include:

2.2 The importance of establishing the right conditions for JPD by opening up spaces for dialogue characterised by openness, trust and honesty is central to our work. Creating these conditions takes time and is vital in bringing about realistic and sustainable improvements in educational practice through JPD (Source 5, Gregson and Nixon 2013; Source 6, Nixon and Gregson (2013); Source 7, Gregson et al, 2013).

2.3 The SUNCETT team use the theory and practices of JPD to open up spaces where policy professionals, teachers, education leaders and learners can work together in systematic ways to improve practice; practitioner-researchers work with SUNCETT researchers to examine practice in context, in order to identify and agree an aspect of practice in need of improvement; plan for

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improvement together through engagement with educational research and relevant literature; identify an educational intervention supported by robust research evidence that could be explored together to address the aspect of practice in need of improvement ; work closely with each other to plan the action needed to implement the intervention; agree how to evaluate the intervention in context, identifying 'hard' and 'soft' indicators of impact, which can then be used to establish how we might recognise that something is changing/improving. (Source 7, Gregson and Nixon, 2009).

2.4 The mutual importance of sharing experiences of trying out interventions and innovative practice together, underscores the work of SUNCETT. Developing practice is more likely to happen when practitioners in the sector work together to implement and carry out incremental and progressive evaluation of the impact of research ideas and interventions, where the originators of new ideas for improvement can work alongside partners interested in putting the intervention into practice. (Source 7, Gregson and Nixon, 2009; Source 8, Gregson et al, 2013).

2.5 The importance of encouraging critical dialogue and debate in the light of unfolding evidence is key to the identification and consideration of the *impact of the intervention in transition*, in order to discover what has and has not 'worked' in that context and why. (Source 7, Gregson and Nixon, 2009; Source 8, Gregson et al, 2013).

Impact of SUNCETT upon Standards of Practice and Practitioner Research:

2.6 SUNCETT has improved standards of practice in, and provided access to, new routes into a professional career as a teacher educator, through the development a dedicated internship and Master of Arts degree for intending and existing professional teacher educators. This three-year internship supported high calibre, newly qualified teachers who aspired to become teacher educators in the future. All SUNCETT interns have since progressed into teacher educator roles following the period of their combined internship and programme of study and all continue to work as professional teacher educators (Source 9, Case Studies of SUNCETT MA for Professional Teacher Educators).

2.7 SUNCETT has improved teaching, learning and assessment, particularly by demonstrating the effectiveness of JPD in the following contexts across the sector:

- Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects. (Source 10, Impact Grids).
- Improving teaching and support for speakers of other languages (ESOL) (Source 10, Impact Grids).
- Enabling adults in residential care and other 'at risk' groups to engage and progress in education (Source 10, Impact Grids).
- Improving the literacy levels in Adult, Community and Offender Learning (Source 10 Impact Grids; Source 11, Gregson and Nixon 2010).

2.8 Through JPD, the SUNCETT team has enabled FE college principals and other senior education managers in the sector to work with teachers and other practitioners to develop sustainable programmes of continuing professional development through JPD (Source 10, Impact Grids and referees).

2.9 Research Income: The total research and development funding generated by SUNCETT between 2008 and 2013 is in excess of £2.2 million. SUNCETT is directed by Professor Gregson, with the active and collaborative support of the SUNCETT team. Professor Gregson completed her PhD at Newcastle-upon-Tyne University in 2003. SUNCETT organises and manages a wide variety of local, regional and national events, related to specific aspects of educational research and issues in improving teaching and learning. This work includes conferences, workshops and seminars in subjects such as 'Joint Practice Development'; 'Practitioner Research'; 'Educational Values'; 'Mentoring'; 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Educational Action Research', 'Adult and Community Learning' and Work Based Learning'.

3. References to the research: Key Research Outputs

1. Gregson, M., and Nixon, L., (2013) *Knowing Different*. American Education Research Association Conference. San Francisco. USA. 27th April -1st May. [Online repository]. - [electronic copy available](#)
2. Gregson, M., Nixon, L., and Spedding P. (2012) *Putting Speaking with Others into Practice in the Initial Teacher Education Curriculum*. American Education Research Association Conference. Vancouver, Canada. 13th – 17th April 2012. - [electronic copy available](#)
3. Gregson, M., and Nixon, L., (2010) 'Unlocking the Potential of Skills for Life (SfL) Tutors and Learners: a critical evaluation of the implementation of SfL Policy in England', *Teaching in Lifelong Learning*. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press. – [hard copy available](#)
4. Gregson, M., and Nixon, L., (2009) 'Assessing Effectiveness: Ways of Seeing Impact' *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 21(3). [electronic copy available](#)
5. Nixon, L., Gregson, M., and Spedding, P., (2008) *Practitioners' experiences of implementing national education policy at the local level .An examination of 16–19 policy*. London EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. – [hard copy available](#)

4. Details of the impact

4.1 Research carried out at SUNCETT 2008-2013, has had an important impact on the LSIS/ETF approach to policy and practice. We have produced five major reports and 22 conference papers as well as published peer-reviewed academic practitioner-oriented articles aimed primarily at improving teaching and learning across the sector, in important areas of practice, reflected in LSIS and policy initiatives and in relation to enduring educational issues and priorities. These works are used in teacher training and professional development and have been circulated across government departments.

4.2 The impact of our work included **changes to public service practices/guidelines** and/or **improved educational attainment in FAVE**. SUNCETT impact activity and resources to date can be found in the following areas of research and projects,

- The Education and Training Foundation and the National Council for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics', *Maths Enhancement Project* (North East and North West Hubs).
- Research Management and Support LSIS *Research Development Fellowships* (4years).
- Research Management and Support for the *LSIS Exploratory Research Projects* (2years).
- Organisation & Management of *Research Conferences* (regional/national - 6 years).
- Organisation and Management of *Action Research Workshops & Networks* (6years).
- Joint Practice Development (JPD) *Consultancy* work (referee Robin Webber-Jones).
- *Joint Practice Development (JPD) Guide* (Resources).
- Organisation & Management of *Mentor Training, Projects/Networks/Workshops* (6 years).
- Literature Review '*Making Room for Argument*' (Resources).
- Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) *14-19 Diplomas CPD Project* (2 years).
- Organisation & Management of *Creative and Critical Thinking Workshops/Events* (6 years).
- Organisation & Management of *Work-Based Learning Research Conferences/Workshops*.
- Organisation & Management of *Regional Teaching and Learning Fairs* (NE & Midlands).

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4.3 We have extended the reach and ensured impact of our JPD research as follows:

- Our work has played an important role in contributing to the LSIS approach to improving teaching and learning across the sector (Source 11, JPD Guide).
- Our JPD Guide, Research Development Fellowship research, posters and papers are valued as core readings/resources (Source 3, BERA 2013; Source 12, LSIS Excellence Gateway).
- Practitioners were involved in projects at all stages to ensure impact on practice, through JPD research projects, advisory groups of stakeholders, online user consultations, trialling of materials in training and dissemination events (Source 10 Impact Grids, Source 12 LSIS).
- SUNCETT's Guide to JPD is providing a framework, guidance and exemplar case studies to support and encourage practitioners to use JPD to improve their practice. (Source 3, BERA, 2013; Source 11, JPD Guide).
- We work with groups of practitioners to develop understandings of educational research; identify implications of research studies for teaching and learning; organise workshops and events to refine, develop and contextualise research ideas and help to connect this to relevant literature in order to explore how the JPD approach to improving teaching and learning might be extended, adapted and developed to work in different ways and in different contexts (Source 10 Impact Grids; Source 12, LSIS Excellence Gateway).
- SUNCETT's first draft JPD Guide was produced and piloted in consultation with practitioners at the LSIS Annual Research Conference in 2011 and through further consultations with LSIS RDF practitioners. Meetings at further LSIS regional and national events conferences ensured the accessibility and relevance of the JPD Guide and practitioners were involved as critical readers in early drafts of the document (Source 11, JPD Guide).
- We have organised local, regional and national events on specific policies including Equality and Diversity, Creative Teaching and Classroom Management, (Source 12, E & D Poster).
- SUNCETT contributed to national evaluations of CETTs and approaches to the development of 'hard' and 'soft' measures of educational and public policy. (Source 7, Gregson and Nixon, 2009)
- We also have also been invited to present the findings of our work at the House of Commons and to the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the Institute for Learning, the Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN) and the national Commission for Adult and Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL).
- Our work with the LSIS Research Development Fellowships has contributed to the development of the LSIS/ETF research strategy and policy (see referee Sheila Kearney).
- Internationally we have presented our work at research conferences in Scotland, Finland, Belgium, Austria, the United States of America, Canada and Australia.
- Professor Gregson was invited to present the Keynote Address to the LSIS (2011) Annual Research Conference in which she challenged some aspects of taken for granted approaches to educational improvement through events and programmes of continuing professional development for teachers.

<h3>5. Sources to corroborate the impact of SUNCETT (SCI)</h3>
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- SCI:1 London University Institute of Education, Emeritus Professor of Education
1.1, 2.1-2.8, 4.3
- SCI:2 London University Institute of Education, Professor of Education
1.1, 2.1-2.5
- SCI:3 The Employment and Education Foundation, Research Commissioner
1.1, 2.1-2.8, 4.1-4.3
- SCI:4 Luxemburg University, Professor of Education
2.6
- SCI:5 Brighton University, Professor of Education.
4.1, 4.3