

Chair's Report 2008-2009

DRAFT

Introduction

ALDinHE's second year has been another productive and significant one. I see our association as both championing a learning development approach in higher education and representing our members' professional interests. These aims, though complementary, clearly imply different kinds of activities. Nonetheless it is consistent with the notion of a community of practice that this should be the case – and that we should be concerned with a wide range of issues, and seek to act in a variety of arenas. Through the journal; our developing links with SEDA, the HEA and other bodies; our support for the wider network LDHEN; and our policy developments, ALDinHE now has initiatives underway relating to the micro and macro realms of LD. These include practice-focussed issues around how students learn and how teaching 'works' in the contemporary HE contexts, as well as activities relating to the wider dimensions of government and institutional policy. This report therefore offers some examples of the various goals we have been pursuing and discussing at the monthly ALDinHE Steering Group meetings.

LearnHigher proposal

Our most significant current initiative is the proposal to bring the LearnHigher Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning into the association, once its funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) comes to an end in July 2010. LearnHigher is collaborative set of HE partnerships with an excellent 'brand', website and many associated projects - involving research, development, evaluation and dissemination of LD resources for the sector. Such an ambitious and potentially far-reaching development is likely to occupy a large proportion of our time and energy in future – but offers great rewards for LD, the LearnHigher partners, and the sector as a whole. Not least of the benefits could be that, as ALDinHE seeks to represent LD in the UK and Ireland, it may be hoped that new LearnHigher partnerships will do likewise in future. The Steering Groups of both ALDinHE and LH support this proposal (see <http://www.aldinhe.ac.uk/docs.htm>) and I

would like to ask for your support for the associated motion which will be proposed at the AGM.

Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE)

The recent publication of our journal (see <http://www.aldinhe.ac.uk/ojs>) has been a cause for great celebration. Putting this together for the first time was a mammoth task for those of us on the editorial group. I would like to express heartfelt thanks to all those who wrote, reviewed, edited and helped in so many ways! There has been a good response from readers and already we have a range of submissions for future editions. Following the 2009 LDHEN Symposium, it is likely that many more papers, case studies and articles will come in. We are particularly keen to encourage writers to come forward with their reviews of LD-related books and learning resources. If you have not yet had a chance to read the journal, please do have a look and tell us what you think.

DIUS Inquiry: 'Students and Universities'

ALDinHE has been proactive in seeking to lobby for a learning development perspective in a number of ways. Our contribution to the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee inquiry: "Students and Universities" was submitted in December 2008. In this document (see <http://www.aldinhe.ac.uk/docs.htm>) we put forward views on admissions and transitions to Higher Education; research; degree classification; and student support and engagement.

We argued that funding for provision of effective support for students is essential, and needs to focus on pre-entry, induction and first year experience initiatives with an LD focus, to support retention and progress. In particular, we emphasised that support for entering and engaging with HE and disciplinary cultures is needed. We also stressed that research is a key aspect of learning and stated that LD professionals are well-placed to encourage practice-oriented approaches.

We called for the full range of students' achievements and experience to be accorded valued, and for students' experience of their learning to be brought to the centre. We promoted the view that skills are best learned when embedded in subject context and that the sector as a whole would

benefit significantly by having sufficient LD professionals working alongside other academics and students.

Supporting LDHEN

The email discussion network <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/ldhen> is open to anyone – and there are contributors and subscribers from several countries as well as the UK. A key role for ALDinHE is to support this wider network and to encourage participants to become members. The sixth LDHEN Symposium in Bournemouth looks set to be very successful – with lively debate, innovative opportunities such as a graffiti wall and a labyrinth for reflective work, as well as a great mix of participants. We are very grateful to Chris Keenan and her colleagues in Bournemouth for their work in organising the event. I also want to thank the whole ALDinHE Steering Group again for the many hours they have all put in, working to review and comment on the Symposium proposals. The dedication and effort this involves should not be underestimated!

Work with SEDA and the HEA

Our joint work with the Staff and Educational Development Association has continued to develop. We are looking at how we can build and accredit professional development opportunities; Becka Currant leads up our working group in this area. We also hosted a joint one day conference with SEDA: 'Teaching Enhancement and Student Success - the proposed new funding model for Teaching Enhancement and Widening Participation. This lively event was held on 4th December 2008 at the University of Reading. The day was well attended, with over 75 delegates from universities around the UK, and from organisations such as Aimhigher, Higher Futures and Volunteering England. Keynote speakers included Heather Fry, newly appointed Director of Learning and Teaching at HEFCE, and David Gosling. A report of the event, including ALDinHE's joint submission with SEDA to HEFCE, is hosted on our site at <http://www.aldinhe.ac.uk/docs.htm>

As a result of our initiative last year for the establishment of an advisory group for LD, the Association is now represented on the HEA's 'reference group' for Academic Development. This has held one meeting so far and we have expressed a view that the Association should be involved with developing the student learning-related aspects of this group's work. Our involvement here also fed in to our submission to the DIUS committee referred to above.

'Learning Live' conference

ALDinHE is developing a proposal for a student conference to be held in 2011, along with the Student Learning & Teaching Network. The event will be called 'Learning Live' and its primary aim is to provide a live, online forum for undergraduate students to give presentations about any aspect of their experience of learning in HE. They will be invited to submit written papers, webcasts or pre-recorded material, posters or other 'objects' for presentation at an event that will take place simultaneously in participating universities across the UK. The Association plans to offer certificates to all student contributors whose work is accepted for inclusion, and specific awards (including prizes) for especially innovative, scholarly or otherwise outstanding presentations. A multi-media record of the whole event would provide a number of 'products' both students and academic participants to use for their own purposes: an online journal, podcasts, film and other media. There will therefore be a conference website to host all accepted material

Using contacts in the Subject Centre networks, ALDinHE is preparing for the Learning Live conference by encouraging academics in as many disciplines as possible to help promote the event. We will seek their support in involving students by 'constructively aligning' some aspects of their programme activities and assessments with participation in the conference, so that taking part will be 'credited' rather than something extra for students to take on.

International Links

Our continuing contacts with organisations abroad have yielded some interesting conversations. One suggestion is that we hold an international conference about student learning jointly with a number of groups including: the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW); the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ); the Association for Academic Language and Learning in Australia (AAL see aall.anu.edu.au/); and the US organisation, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA www.nacada.ksu.edu/). No specific plans have yet emerged, although Alex Barthel of AAL has offered Sydney as a possible venue - an exciting development for the future!

And finally

Thanks! To all the current ALDinHE Steering Group members, and to all of you for your contributions to the field of LD. Please do use the Association by contacting us if you need support in any way, or would like to consult about local LD issues in relation to staffing, strategy and provision. Please also come forward if you are willing to help with any of the association's activities – you would be most welcome.

John Hilsdon, Chair

14/03/2009