LSRN Strategic Planning Workshop
The future role of research and its use in the sector

Thursday 10 October 2013
80 The Strand, London WC2R 0RL
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THE BRIEFING PACK

This briefing pack has been put together to support the Strategic Planning Workshop on 10 October 2013.

It includes a paper to stimulate discussion on the day and background information about the history, purpose and values and the activities of LSRN from its origins in 1996 (as FERN) to the present. The briefing paper agreed by the National Planning Group which accompanied the invitation to the workshop is included as an Annex.

THE WORKSHOP

This event is hosted by Pearson College. Planning for the event was supported by a small grant made by LSIS to support the work of LSRN during 2012-13.

The LSRN planning team were: Andrew Morris, Yvonne Hillier and Anne Thompson. It was organised by NIACE on behalf of LSRN by Averil Coutinho (Events Team Leader), Celestine Harris and Joanne Barrett in liaison with Pearson College.
POSITION STATEMENT

The aim of LSRN is to help people, in going about their professional practice, engage with research and development. Its members believe that high quality research has a vital role to play in the sustainable development of education.

The focus of the Network is collaboration: between the HE and Learning and Skills sectors, between research producers and users, between all the professions concerned with research informed practice. Its scope includes both the creation of research knowledge of value to the sector and the use of it in practical settings. As a consequence people who participate in its activities are from a wide range of communities – adult, work-based and FE organisations, universities, awarding bodies, government, research institutes and a wide range of intermediary NGOs.

Developing a coherent strategy for research in the learning and skills sector and its use has never been easy in such a diverse sector; but recent changes in infrastructure provide an opportunity to look again at the future. Our expectation of the Planning Workshop is that, by bringing together people from many of these communities we will become better informed about the complexity of a strategy for research and evidence use and will have sketched out ways in which LSRN might help realise it.
STIMULUS PAPER

The 2013 Planning Workshop is about the long term strategy for research and use of evidence in the sector, and the role LSRN ought to play in this. It’s a key issue at this moment for many reasons: changes in the organisations supporting the sector, changes in the policy backdrop and perhaps most importantly, developments in our understanding of how knowledge is used. The creation and closure of knowledge organisations is all too familiar in the sector: the FEU and Staff College became FEDA which transformed into LSDA which split into LSN and QIA which merged with CEL to form LSIS which gave way to the Education and Training Foundation. Once again we begin a new era, with a new kind of organisation in a new policy environment. Given this history of restless reorganisation, taking time to reflect on the longer term knowledge strategy could hardly be more important.

At the most fundamental level, research and its use are largely funded by government and shaped by national policy, which is clearly on the move. Research Councils, funded with public money, increasingly look for research that informs the public services; the HE Funding Council now provides incentives for research that makes an impact. As quangos that once supported the use of research evidence disappear, new structures are arising, more distant from Whitehall, such as the Education Endowment Foundation, the What Works Centres and, who knows - a VET Centre?

At the same time public awareness of research evidence seems to be growing as TV news bulletins increasingly cite research from bodies such as NICE and IFS. In education the OECD PISA studies, the EPPSE programme in early years and the work of Research Centres such as NRDC and the Centre for the Economics of Education are increasingly influential. Demand for research evidence from the practice community, though historically weak, also appears to be rising. The McLoughlin CAVTL commission emphasises the value of the evidence base, LSIS’s Inside Evidence translates research for practitioner use and many colleges are developing a research culture, some achieving “Research Engaged” status thanks to NFER.

Less well known perhaps, are advances in our understanding of the research process itself, and particularly of the way research can be effectively used. ESRC devoted a major research programme to the topic of teaching and learning and involved practitioners; it continues to support the development of research capacity through its National Centre for Research Methods. For the busy practitioner, overviews of the state of knowledge on a topic are increasingly available thanks to the growth in systematic reviews. The art of applying research directly to practical improvement is also progressing. New models have been developed that blend research with development activity on the ground: “design study” and “D&R” approaches engage researcher and developer in an iterative process of studying and implementing change; “joint practice development” has guided LSIS in its Researcher Development Fellowship programme for practitioner research.

Perhaps of greatest importance for the longer term is the growing body of evidence about “knowledge mobilisation” and the use of evidence. Key studies in St Andrews, Ontario, Wellington, London and elsewhere are converging on a few key points. The “users” of knowledge need to be
engaged from the first stages of the research process if impact on practice is intended. More generally, the whole process of using research evidence needs to be understood as a social act: it involves exchange of ideas and knowledge rather than simple transfer and works best through cycles of iteration, rather than one-off actions. Fortunately, useful models of this cyclical process, in which knowledge is both produced and put to use are now widely available. The two examples below indicate the process from the point of view of research (based on the work of the Strategic Forum for Research in Education) and practical action:

Our challenge is to work out how the huge variety of players - in colleges, training providers, adult education centres, universities, awarding bodies, government, local authorities, NGOs, businesses, community organisations, charitable foundations and countless other bodies - can act together, in concert, throughout these cycles. We know that sound research evidence is essential for improvement action to be effective and that many types of player need to be engaged in making and using it. Collaboration is of the essence; this is where LSRN enters the fray!

The Learning and Skills Research Network was founded on the principle of collaboration. Its constitutional basis is a set of values and purposes which have remained unchanged since its inception in 1997. It focuses on research for improvement and has a non-hierarchical approach to collaboration between the Learning and Skills and HE sectors. It is independent of any body or interest group and adapts to prevailing conditions - it works with the grain. Its work is carried out by volunteers working with one another, with particular activities supported by sponsors.

The intention of this workshop is to prepare the way for LSRN to continue its enabling role, perhaps to enhance it, in the emerging world sketched out in this paper. To do this effectively, participants from a wide range of communities have been invited to reflect together on the contributions they make to the research and evidence-use processes. It is hoped that from this LSRN and all participants will emerge better informed about future strategy and their potential roles within it.

Andrew Morris, July 2013
LSRN PURPOSE AND VALUES

Purpose
The network aims to help people, in going about their professional practice, engage with research and development.

The network seeks to:

Demonstrate the value of research and development by:
- assisting practitioners to undertake effective research and development
- assisting practitioners and policymakers to understand the outcomes and processes of research and development
- encouraging the growth of a research culture at institutional, national, regional and local levels.

Help build the capacity of the sector by:
- putting people in touch with each other
- providing opportunities to present and discuss research and development
- organising opportunities for professional development
- developing opportunities to undertake research and development work, collaboratively or otherwise.

Exploring ways of increasing the influence of findings by:
- encouraging work across sector and discipline boundaries
- encouraging collaboration between parties
- developing conduits through which findings can be assessed and disseminated.

Values
In pursuing its purpose, the network places particular value on:

An inclusive approach which:
- recognises the variety of relevant methods and topics
- involves participants from a wide range of backgrounds, including practitioners, researchers, developers, managers and policymakers
- identifies the specific role of practitioners and others in evaluating and implementing findings.

Applying research to the concerns of practice and policy by:
- encouraging reviews of existing knowledge before new research is undertaken
- distilling and communicating key messages in appropriate ways for different audiences.

Addressing capacity by:
- building practitioner training into projects
- encouraging engagement with research through professional development activity
- demonstrating the value of research and development to budget holders
- maximising connections between regional groups.
HISTORY

The Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN) was set up in 1997 by a group of individuals from further, adult and higher education who had met together at a workshop on research in FE in 1996. A planning group was formed which established the regional basis, the collaborative approach and the network form of organisation. An inaugural conference took place in Blackpool in December 1997 which was addressed by leaders from colleges and policy bodies as well as by academics and included examples of practitioner research. This continued for a further six annual conferences, which typically grew in size and range of activities. FEDA (forerunner of LSDA) supported the conferences and subsequently the network not only by its professional organisation of the conference but also by creating an associated Research Journal, developing an R&D Toolkit and engaging its regional offices. The latter provided leadership and logistical support which enabled meetings and one-day conferences to take place across the country.

For four or five years, funding was also provided through its LSC grant for small-scale, collaborative studies on locally-determined issues, combining the expertise of practitioners and researchers of various kinds. The varied topics chosen and methods used are described in an evaluative report Collaborative Research in Practice published by the Learning & Skills Research Centre in 2004. On some topics, sustained work over several years enabled expertise to develop on issues of national importance. These included studies of 14-16 year olds in colleges, adults’ learning journeys in skills for life and surveys of the experience of part time and recently qualified staff.

The annual national conferences continued and gave rise to annual awards for best papers, which were subsequently published as a book, Readings in Post Compulsory Education, in 2004. In 2006 the LSDA was replaced by two new organisations: the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) and the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA). LSRN groups in some regions have continued independently and a national planning group sustains the Network by working with a range of supportive organisations. Annual research events have been held in London since 2007, most recently supported by Pearson College, NIACE, LSIS, C&G and IfL. In 2010, the story of the growth and development of LSRN was featured in a journal article by two of the founders of LSRN1. And in 2011, one of the authors with a regional convenor published an article on the role of practice-research networks featuring LSRN2.

In 2013, a new grouping is developing within LSRN for people interested in the use of research evidence in practice: The Evidence Users Network.

TIME LINE

GLOSSARY:

CEL  Centre for Excellence in Leadership
ETF  Education and Training Foundation
FEDA Further Education Development Agency (formed in 1995 by a merger of the Further Education Unit (FEU) and the Staff College)
FERN Further Education Research Network
HEA Higher Education Academy
IfL Institute for Learning
LSDA Learning and Skills Development Agency
LSN Learning and Skills Network
LSIS Learning and Skills Improvement Agency
LSRC Learning and Skills Research Centre
LSRN Learning and Skills Research Network
NOCN National Open College Network
QIA Quality Improvement Agency
SRHE Society for Research into Higher Education
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>FEDA event on research in FE. Participants propose a network</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>January 1997: FERN formed, Planning Group set up</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Inaugural conference at Blackpool in December - residential two day event</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>9 Regional Networks formed</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>College Research launched by FEDA</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>2nd annual Conference at Birmingham</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Planning for R&amp;D Toolkit begins (FERN with FEDA)</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Third annual Conference at Cambridge</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>FEDA replaced by LSDA</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Regional research projects funded by LSDA</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4th annual Conference at Warwick. Awards for best papers initiated</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>R&amp;D Toolkit Prospectus. 17 modules written and delivered by LSRN activists</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>FERN becomes LSRN</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>College Research becomes Learning and Skills Research Journal</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>5th annual Conference at Cambridge</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>LSRC (Learning and Skills Research Centre) created</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>6th annual Conference at Warwick</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>7th annual conference at Warwick</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Conference planning taken over by LSDA. LSDA research conference Paddington</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Book of readings based on best papers from past conferences published</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Collaborative Research in Practice published. LSRN/LSDA regional research</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>LSDA disbanded and replaced by LSN and QIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>October - seminar to discuss continuation of LSRN. Relaunch of LSRN</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>National Planning Group resume meetings</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>One day 8th annual Conference held in London with support of NIACE and sponsored by C&amp;G, Edexcel, HEA, IfL</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>QIA and CEL absorbed into LSIS</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>9th annual Conference in London supported by NIACE and sponsored by C&amp;G, Edexcel, HEA and IfL</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>10th annual Conference in London. Sponsored by NIACE, LSIS, IfL, HEA, NOCN</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Award for best paper reinstated</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>11th annual Conference in London sponsored by NIACE, LSIS, IfL, HEA</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>LSN into administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Conference format changed. One day Research Event sponsored by NIACE, LSIS, IfL, C&amp;G CSD and hosted by Pearson in London. With participation of Australian academics and joint seminar on day 2 with SRHE</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>Annual Research Event sponsored by NIACE, LSIS, IfL, C&amp;G CSD, hosted by Pearson College</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Planning Group agree to hold strategic planning workshop October 10th</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>FE Guild starts operation. Retitled Education &amp; Training Foundation</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>LSIS closes</td>
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NATIONAL RESEARCH EVENTS

After the formation of FERN in 1997, an inaugural Research Conference was held at the Grand Metropole Hotel in Blackpool in December. For the next six years, similar two day residential conferences were held attended by up to 400 practitioners and researchers. The events were organised by a conference planning team of FERN/LSRN activists. The programme included keynote speakers but was designed to offer the opportunity to as many practitioners as possible to present papers in other sessions.

In 2000, awards for best papers were initiated, judged by an LSRN panel. Papers based on the prize winning papers from this and the next three conferences were published as Readings in post-compulsory education: research in the learning and skills sector.

LSDA had been providing support for LSRN national and regional activity and for the administration of the annual conference but in 2004 responsibility for planning the research conference was removed from LSRN and LSDA held a research conference in that year.

In 2006, after the closure of LSDA, LSRN was relaunched and in 2007 the annual conference was resumed with the support of NIACE. This was a one day event with the format modelled on that of the previous conferences with presenters selected by a panel; attendance was good with 144 participants. Subsequent conferences followed the same format and, in 2009, the award for best paper was reinstated. In 2011, based on lower attendance at the previous conference and on feedback, the focus and structure of the day were changed to move from a conference centred around presentations to a more interactive and solution focused event. The 2011 also had an international focus with the participation of a group of Australian academics and a joint seminar on a second day with SRHE.

After evaluation of the 2012 Event, and in the light of major changes in the sector, the conference planning group proposed to the national planning group in January 2013 that the 2013 Event be replaced by a strategic planning workshop to take place on 10 October 2013 as an invitation only event.

The national research events have offered a showcase for practitioners and new researchers as well as keynotes addressing the themes and issues of the moment and reflecting sectoral changes - as indicated by their titles.

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Thirteen annual research events – 1997 to 2012

Inaugural conference, Blackpool, December 1997

Meeting the new agenda for FE, Birmingham, December 1998

Research in the Lifelong Learning Sector, Cambridge, December 1999

Research for the new Learning and Skills Sector, Warwick, December 2000

Research: making an impact on policy and practice, Cambridge, December 2001

Learners’ journeys: the role of research, Warwick, December 2002

Success and diversity: research and the post-16 strategy, Warwick, December 2003

Engaging with research: developing a new future, London, December 2007

Practitioner research in the Learning and Skills Sector, London, December 2008

Changing world, changing research: keeping abreast of research in the Learning and Skills Sector, London, December 2009

Travelling together: evidence for practice in the Learning and Skills Sector, London, November 2010

Hear Evidence, Offer Evidence, Share Experience, Shape the Future, London, November 2011

EVIDENCE USERS NETWORK

A network is being created for people whose role is to encourage the use of evidence in their organisation. To express interest or to find out more, contact either Joel Petrie (Joel.Petrie@liv-coll.ac.uk) or Eunice Wheeler (Eunice.Wheeler@cityofbristol.ac.uk).
CONFERENCES AND PUBLICATIONS – some examples

- Call for contributions 2003
- CD proceedings of 5th conference
- Conference 2010
- Prize winning papers, published 2004
- College Research, published by FEDA
- Learning and Skills Research, published by LSDA
- Inside Evidence, LSIS
- Authorised by LSRN members

- Teaching and learning
  - New partnerships between researchers, learners and managers, with a shared commitment to transforming learning
- Learners' journeys
  - Overcoming barriers to inclusion and engagement
- Empowering researchers in further education
  - Yvonne Hillier and Jill Johnson
  - Author and research manager
  - Andrew Morris
**LSRN EVENT PLANNING TEAM**

**Andrew Morris:** as head of research at the then Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) Andrew Morris worked with others to bring LSRN (then called FERN) into existence in 1997. FEDA/LSDA enabled him to strengthen the network though the involvement of regional coordinators, a practice-led research programme and a research journal, *College Research* then *Learning and Skills Research*. As Director of the National Education Research Forum he worked on improving the links between research, practice and policy across education. Currently he works as a freelance with many organisations and individuals to continue this. He is a member of the LSRN National Planning Group.

**Yvonne Hillier:** Yvonne Hillier was a founder member of LSRN. She is Professor of Education in the Education Research Centre, University of Brighton. She researches issues of policy and practice in post-compulsory education including basic skills practice, national vocational qualifications, initial teacher training, and work based learning. She has published books on FE policy (*All you ever wanted to know about FE Policy*, Continuum, 2006), Adult Basic Skills – *Changing Faces of Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy: A Critical History* with Mary Hamilton, (Trentham, 2006) and *Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Language: policy, practice and research* (edited with Mary Hamilton and Lyn Tett) (Open University Press – McGraw Hill, 2006); a book on research in further education with Jill Jameson in 2003 - *Empowering Researchers in Further Education*, (Trentham 2003) and edited a book of research by practitioners in further and adult education with Anne Thompson. Her third edition of *Reflective teaching for adult and further education* was published by Continuum in 2012.

**Anne Thompson:** as a manager in a general further education college, Waltham Forest College, Anne Thompson was particularly involved with Access to HE and OCN work and also contributed to a range of research projects and publications. She presented at the first LSRN conference in Blackpool, contributed to *College Research* and was a member of the London and South East region. She soon became involved in the conference planning group and has coordinated organisational arrangements for the recent conferences with NIACE. With Yvonne Hillier, she edited the collection of award winning papers from the conferences. Since leaving Waltham Forest College as Vice Principal in 2004, she has continued to work on a range of research projects related to ‘HE in FE’. She is a member of the LSRN National Planning Group.

**NEWSLETTER**

A regular newsletter is produced and circulated. Please contact Andrew Morris (a.j.morris@blueyonder.co.uk) to be included on the circulation list and the editor Rob Smith (rob.smith@wlv.ac.uk) to include material. **Rob Smith:** is a principal lecturer in post-compulsory education and research fellow in the Centre for Research and development in Lifelong Education at the University of Wolverhampton. He has taught in secondary, FE and HE settings and researches and writes collaboratively with FE teachers, focusing particularly on the impact of funding and marketisation on teachers’ work. As a part of developing a strong strand of work in practitioner research, Rob has been the West Midlands LSRN coordinator for a number of years. Latest work focuses on policy critique and the impact of managerialist cultures on FE teachers’ values and identities.
REGIONAL AND LOCAL NETWORKS

Regional networks were created following the first national conference in 1997. Their level of activity has varied over time and across the country. During the time when LSDA provided support and links with their regional coordinators regional conferences were held and regional research projects supported. More recently the networks are entirely reliant on volunteers and support in kind from institutions. However, there continue to be regular network meetings in most regions as well as regional events, and convenors are members of the national planning group. Recently local groups are also being organised often based around a city or lead college. If you would like to find out about these activities please contact the relevant convenor.

East (no convenor) contact Andrew Morris ajmorris@blueyonder.co.uk
East Midlands Peter Tunnicliffe PTunnicliffe@derby.ac.uk
London and South East Sai Loo S.Loo@ioe.ac.uk Rania Hafez rania.hafez@mail.com
North East Maggie Gregson maggie.gregson@sunderland.ac.uk
North West Tony Fort T.Fort@blackburn.ac.uk
South West Claire Gray claire.gray@plymouth.ac.uk Robert Cook robert.cook@plymouth.ac.uk
West Midlands Rob Smith rob.smith@wlv.ac.uk Kevin Orr K.Orr@hud.ac.uk
Yorkshire & Humber

There are also links with convenors in Northern Ireland and Scotland.
Northern Ireland Shelly Tracey s.tracey@qub.ac.uk
Scotland Anne Gillen AnneGillen@adamsmith.ac.uk

People who organise activities at a local level which are open to external participants are encouraged to provide contact details. Currently these include:

Bristol area: City of Bristol College Eunice.Wheeler@cityofbristol.ac.uk
Liverpool area: City of Liverpool College Joel.Petrie@liv-coll.ac.uk
South Central: Nadim Bakhsov Nadim.Bakhshov@highbury.ac.uk
Contact Andrew Morris to be added to the list ajmorris@blueyonder.co.uk
Some examples of regional and local activity linked to LSRN

From the West Midlands:

The West Midlands seems to be building up a head of steam when it comes to practitioner research. The annual conference of West Midlands Learning and Skills Research Network took place at the Hawthorns football ground in West Bromwich. This event also doubled as a dissemination event for an LSIS project that is breaking new ground by establishing a new regional cooperative model of blended ITE in FE in the West Midlands. There were eighty delegates from twenty different organisations from across the region...

This event provided an important platform for practitioner research and further enhanced the sense of this new Consortium as a forum in which institutions could work together to develop and support innovative practice in FE teacher education. In these challenging times, we need to find new ways of working together across institutional boundaries so that teachers (in FE and HE) are able to develop a critical view of the sector. This practitioner-centred event achieved this and anchored debate securely in a research agenda.

Rob Smith, Inside Evidence issue 14, Winter 2012

From Liverpool Community College:

Liverpool Community College is once again mounting a Research Conference with the support of North West LSRN and many other organisations. The event, on Friday 26th April 2013, begins with a keynote address from Emeritus Professor Bill Williamson on Reclaiming Our Ground: Democracy and Discovery for Educators. A series of seminars, led by practitioner-researchers from the college Research Network and elsewhere, will be interspersed with learner performances and an award ceremony. The concluding panel session involves Maire Daley (Teacher Education, Liverpool Community College), Bea Groves (President, Institute for Learning) and Dan Taubman (Senior National Official, FE and Lifelong Learning, UCU).

Joel Petrie, Inside Evidence, issue 15, Spring 2013

From City of Bristol College:

City of Bristol College has a long tradition of conducting and using research. The annual research conference attracts staff from across the college and guest speakers from across the nation. It acts as an important forum, giving recognition of the work of the many practitioners and learners who carry out research each year.

Funds from Workforce Development are used to support the research culture. Each year, a bursary scheme provides a package of ten hours of training workshops led by two experienced researchers for any member of staff who wants to conduct a first research study related in any way to teaching and learning. This is followed by 12 paid research hours, with individual mentoring by a member of the Research Support Group....

Eunice Wheeler, Inside Evidence issue 15, Spring 2013
ANNEX A

The background paper circulated with the invitation to participate in the Planning Workshop

The future role of research and its use
Briefing paper

The LSRN strategic Planning Workshop will discuss the future role of research and its use in the sector. The outcomes of the workshop will influence the future shape and role of LSRN. It will take place on Thursday 10th October 2013 from 11.00 – 15.00 at Pearson College, 80, The Strand London WC2R 0LR

The past

The Learning & Skills Research Network turns out to be one of the great survivors in the sector! Established in 1997 by enthusiasts from FE and HE it is a network rather than an institution, capable of responding to what its supporters want and adapting to an ever-changing environment

Its aim and purposes have remained steady since it began 16 years ago. They are explained in its key document LSRN: purposes and values and are encapsulated in its aim: “to help people, in going about their professional practice, engage with research and development”. It seeks to do this by:

- demonstrating the value of research and development
- helping build the capacity of the sector
- exploring ways of increasing the influence of findings.

After a decade of strong support by FEDA then LSDA, it reorganised in 2006 as a voluntary association of individuals to which a range of sector bodies lent active support. In this form it has regional convenors, regional meetings, national research events, a website and newsletter. In recent years the principal funders and providers of services have been LSIS, NIACE, Pearson College, IfL and City & Guilds. Administration, planning and regional coordination have been the action of volunteers.

LSIS has stood in a continuous line of central support from FEDA to LSDA to QIA, LSN and CEL to LSIS; its closure means a new era is opening up for LSRN and for the infrastructure for research in the sector generally. The purpose of the workshop is to invite people from the principal communities to discuss the future of research and its use and to explore the future role for LSRN.

The workshop

The event is planned in two halves with a lunch break in the middle. The morning discussion will focus on the future of research and use of evidence in the sector. To capture the wide range of interests, a number of participants will be asked to prepare and speak to a brief statement addressing what they see as the key issues and questions which might cover:

- What are the roles of research and its use in informing practice and policy?
• Which aspects of the current infrastructure for conducting and using research need to be retained, reformed or abandoned?
• What role should LSRN play, as an independent network linking all parties, in the new arrangements?

Discussion will be initiated by these contributions from four or five people from different interest groups and others who will respond to them. The open discussion that follows will be noted and used to inform the afternoon session.

In the afternoon, discussion on the future role for LSRN will be led by people active in LSRN and will drive towards specific statements of commitment from potential supporters of the network. If sufficient agreement is found about how LSRN might operate in future, indications will be sought about how to make this happen. Current members of the National Planning Group are ready to take action to ensure the continuation and adaptation of LSRN as agreed.

The future

LSRN has proved an important player in the recent past because it is entirely independent of government, colleges and universities and any particular sector body. It has provided a space in which research evidence itself can be presented and discussed, but equally importantly, a forum in which practitioners, researchers and a wide range of intermediary organisations can talk to one another, exchange ideas and prepare coordinated activities. It also acts as an emblem of research activity in the sector and of the value of evidence in enhancing practice and decision-making. To achieve this, the largely voluntary effort of its regional convenors and planning group has been supplemented by sponsorship and support in kind to enable events and activities to remain affordable for practitioners.

As changes in government funding for research and evidence use across the public services begin to impact, new structures and approaches are beginning to emerge – What Works Centres, independent consortia, networks of colleges and of schools. These often rely on committed individuals and organisations, organised as networks, to provide help with communications, planning and advice.

The FE Guild Implementation Plan, April 2013, has a welcome focus on research and the Guild proposes to work with established research centres and sector bodies and to engage with existing research networks. The Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) Report, March 2013, proposes the formation of a National Vocational Education and Training (VET) Centre to take forward research and development of VET.

In this context, a revitalised LSRN could potentially play an even greater role in the emerging world than in the past by collaborating with the Guild and the VET Centre, as well as other networks, and providing links with the practitioner community nationally and regionally. The purpose of this paper is not to pre-judge the future direction of LSRN or of research in the sector but to provide a common starting point for what promises to be an intensive and productive workshop. If it succeeds, it is hoped to resume the annual research events from 2014.... and a whole lot more as well!

Andrew Morris, Anne Thompson and Yvonne Hillier 20 May 2013
on behalf of the LSRN National Planning Group.

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http://lsrn.wordpress.com/