

12 Evaluation of the BA Programme and Project

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to illustrate how evaluation took place on the BA Programme and Project, to describe the major findings of the different forms of evaluation and how they were employed.

Project evaluations typically aim to answer three key questions:

- Do project results justify project inputs?
- What progress has been made and are desired outcomes being achieved?
- Are there ways that project activities can be refined to achieve better impacts and outcomes? (Govt of Ontario, 2006)

A common rationale for conducting an evaluation is to provide a form of external validation of work being done on a project, enabling a stakeholder to determine whether a project is demonstrating effective and efficient use of its financial and other resources. A second common rationale is to assess whether desired outputs and outcomes are being achieved. Thus an evaluation may identify progress towards achieving anticipated outcomes, point out achievements and success factors, identify weaknesses and make recommendations for changes or improvements (Potter, 2006). BA Project evaluations initiated by the Ministry of Education, aimed to satisfy both a demand for accountability and a desire to assess progress towards achieving outcomes.

Process evaluations deal with how a programme or project is delivered, whether it is being delivered as was intended and are formative in nature. Outcomes evaluations (whether reviewing short-term outputs, such as the number of teachers receiving degree awards, or longer-term project outcomes, such as changes in teaching behaviours and other evidence of capacity-building) analyse results and tend to be summative in nature. BA Project evaluations tended to be process and formative in nature, though a more summative focus was attached to the final independent evaluation.

The BA Project contract, finalised at the project planning stage, envisaged a series of external evaluation activities, each 10-14 days in duration. The relative brevity of these evaluation activities, contrasted with the constant need to keep track of progress towards achieving anticipated outcomes particularly in the early stages of the project, created an immediate need for robust informal monitoring and review processes. During the life of the Project an increased awareness of the need to evaluate more formally led to a decision to undertake a series of impact studies to provide snapshots of particular aspects of the Project and Programme. In addition an audit of the BA Educational Studies (TESOL) Programme was undertaken by the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency. The focus of the audit was the management of the collaborative provision. These aspects of evaluation of the BA Project are all considered below.

2 INFORMAL EVALUATION PROCESSES

2.1 Aims

A wide range of informal evaluation procedures, the most important of which were meetings, reports, guidelines, proformas, faxes and e-mails, was developed in the initial stages of the Project for monitoring efficiency and maintaining quality on the Programme and Project. These are described below, based on School of Education (2003).

2.2 Meetings

Meetings took place regularly at a range of levels and in a range of contexts on the Project and Programme. Collectively these allowed staff and students to feed into the process of review and quality monitoring.

In Oman at the highest level the Executive Management Committee of the Project provided an annual forum where broader programme and project issues could be discussed in a face-to-face environment by representatives from the Ministry and the University. Administrative and financial matters concerning the BA Project, such as organising a graduation ceremony, were monitored throughout the year by the BA Steering Committee. Minutes of such meetings were taken, action points identified and followed up. BA Project management staff in Oman held daily discussions to monitor and review all aspects of the BA Project and Programme and to determine what matters needed to be raised with Leeds or with the Ministry. The BA Project Manager was in close e-mail and telephone contact with all tutors to discuss aspects of programme delivery, project procedures and other matters and twice a semester he held a meeting with Regional Tutors (RTs), which tended to focus on discussing upcoming assessments. Discussions were minuted and action points raised with Leeds. Staff-student committee meetings, held each Winter and Summer School, as well as regionally each semester, provided an opportunity for students to raise queries and contribute to the ongoing informal evaluation of the Programme and Project.

Similarly in Leeds, staff met regularly to discuss all aspects of the academic management and development of the Programme. A key function of these meetings

was to review existing procedures, to revise or develop new procedures where appropriate and to monitor implementation of systems. Markers' meetings were held for each module assessment, at which a pool of markers met to discuss and standardise in order to ensure that marking would be carried out consistently. Formal External Examiners' Board meetings were held twice a year in Leeds to officially approve grades and classifications on the Oman BA Programme.

2.3 Reports

Associated with the above, a wide range of reports was generated, which, taken together, documented and reviewed all Project activities. Winter and Summer School reports prepared by the University described the teaching and learning activities that took place on the BA. The Project Manager's annual reports reviewed progress towards meeting Project aims and objectives and raised Programme-related issues for discussion by the Executive Management Committee. Each RT produced an annual report in which modules were reviewed and student performance was discussed; these particularly provided an important insight into the Project and Programme for the Ministry's regional authorities in Oman. RTs also produced an annual Individual Report on each student, detailing academic progress as well as commenting on the impact of the BA on the student's teaching. The Academic Coordinator produced an annual report on his/her visit to BA Regional Centres in Oman; these visits allowed the University to assess how the centres were being operated, how Day Release was being taught and even to observe RTs handling post-lesson discussions in schools.

The assessment convenor for each module produced a Markers' Report detailing student performance on the module and describing the process through which the module was assessed. External Examiners produced annual reports for the University in which they provided an overall review of programme procedures.

2.4 Guidelines

A range of guidelines was also in place to support staff in writing materials, supporting assessments, administering and marking them. These also formed part of the network of informal monitoring and evaluation processes that safeguarded the quality of the Project and Programme. Markers' guidelines explained university assessment procedures and detailed the nature of the feedback markers were expected to provide students. An individual marking key was provided for each assessment. Materials writers guidelines outlined the desirable characteristics of BA materials. Guidelines for support specified the nature and forms of support that were permissible for RTs to give when students were preparing assignments and were fundamental to the fairness and consistency with which support was offered in Oman across regions.

2.5 Faxes and e-mails

The BA was managed jointly by staff in Oman and in Leeds and therefore many matters had to be handled through written communication. The Ministry and the University agreed from the outset that any issues requiring official attention would

be communicated formally through signed fax between senior officials in the Ministry and in Leeds. This tradition continued throughout the Project and was a key factor in ensuring that issues of significance were not lost in the massive amount of communication generated by the Project and Programme. Day to day correspondence was carried out by e-mail.

2.6 Staff recruitment and development

Formal procedures were in place for recruiting, inducting, monitoring and developing staff teaching on the programme and were considered to play an important part in maintaining a highly qualified, motivated and professional teaching staff throughout the BA Project.

2.7 Conclusion

The general format of all these informal evaluation mechanisms remained broadly unchanged throughout the duration of the project, suggesting that stakeholders found them effective. The extensive nature of the network of mechanisms and procedures meant that at no time was it possible for a problematic issue to go undetected or undealt with.

3 THE FOUR INDEPENDENT EVALUATIONS

3.1 Aims

Four 10-14 day independent evaluations were conducted during the lifetime of the Project, at the request of the Ministry of Education of the Sultanate. They were carried out by evaluators who were external to both Ministry and to the University, and who had extensive experience of programme and project evaluation (O'Sullivan, 2000 and 2004; Richards & Rixon 2002; Freeman, 2007). They were broadly interpretative rather than quantitative in approach (Potter, 2006), predominantly formative in intention and sought to identify both positive aspects and problematic issues arising in relation to specific terms of reference in order to provide information to the Ministry and the University which could form the basis for any necessary modifications to be made. During the Project's life the focus of these independent evaluations encompassed management issues and academic standards (O'Sullivan, 2000), the quality of teaching, teaching materials and assessment (Richards & Rixon, 2002), research (O'Sullivan, 2004) and evaluating learning outcomes and looking ahead (Freeman, 2007).

The first independent evaluation of the BA Project (O'Sullivan, 2000) took place almost one year after the commencement of BA Programme delivery. It had two primary aims, the first project-related, the second programme-related. The first was to critically review progress towards achieving Project goals, as well as assessing the adequacy and appropriacy of Project internal evaluation procedures, management, staffing and resource infrastructure. The second was to report on the extent to which the academic Programme was meeting the quality standards required by the University of Leeds for a BA degree. It considered the extent to which students were satisfied with the Programme, whether they were being given sufficient language

development support to enable them to cope with it and whether it was providing stimulating learning experiences.

The aims of the second independent evaluation (Richards & Rixon, 2002), which took place near the end of the first cycle of delivery of the BA Programme, were to provide information on the quality of teaching in the BA Programme, and on the effectiveness of module teaching materials. Again the evaluation was formative in nature and sought to identify both positive and problematic issues in order to provide information to stakeholders on these issues and to enable any necessary modifications in delivery or content to be made.

The third independent evaluation (O'Sullivan, 2004) took place mid-way through the life of the BA Project. It looked both back at the experience from 1999 to 2004 and forward to the period 2004-2008. Its terms were firstly to review the implementation of the Second Independent Evaluation by the main stakeholders; secondly to assess how successfully the main stakeholders were continuing to address the aims of the Project; thirdly to identify future challenges and propose how these could be addressed; fourthly to consider how the Ministry could continue the process of professional development of graduate teachers of English; and finally to make suggestions for internally assessing the impact of the programme and the project.

The final independent evaluation (Freeman, 2007) investigated the impact of the BA Project and Programme on teachers' practices and pupils' learning. From the Ministry's perspective this evaluation was more summative in nature. Firstly it aimed to find out which BA Programme modules teachers considered most valuable/influential and why; secondly it examined the aspects of teachers' practices that had been influenced by the BA Programme; thirdly it examined the extent to which developments in teachers' practices appeared to be reflected in pupils' learning. Finally it considered which aspects of the BA Programme seemed to be most influential in promoting teacher development, better teaching and learning. The evaluator also made recommendations on how the Ministry could benefit from the Project in implementing future educational projects.

These four evaluations are considered separately below.

3.2 Main findings and recommendations of Evaluation 1

3.2.1 Findings

O'Sullivan (2000) concluded that the BA Project was being implemented successfully and was likely to achieve its goals; that appropriate and adequate internal evaluation procedures were in place; that Project management in Oman was of an appropriate quality though under-resourced, while BA Programme management in Leeds was appropriate and adequately resourced; that the programme was using high-quality procedures for selecting, deploying, and evaluating academic staff, and was likely to achieve its academic goals; and that the Project was close to achieving its required resource infrastructure.

He found that the BA Programme met the requirements of a University of Leeds degree programme, that students were satisfied with the value, quality, relevance,

level of difficulty and teaching on the Programme, but not all were satisfied with the degree of release they were being given from duties within their schools. He concluded that the Programme was likely to result in significant English language improvement and that it was using and promoting efficient and effective ways of teaching and learning.

3.2.2 Recommendations

O'Sullivan made a number of key recommendations:

That Project communication could be enhanced in a number of ways.

In response the Project developed a range of documents: a mission statement; a statement of the principles of teaching and learning within the BA Programme; a brochure in Arabic showing how the Project related to on-going education reforms; and an annual Project Newsletter. These were disseminated to Regional offices, current and prospective BA participants, headteachers, key officials in the Ministry and Leeds with the aim of publicising and increasing understanding of the Project. At regional level, regular meetings were held to deepen understanding of and to keep officials informed about the Project in their region. These initiatives gradually facilitated greater appreciation of and publicity for the Project. A database of information on Oman BA students, developed by the University, proved an invaluable resource for staff in Oman.

That a further independent evaluation should be conducted during the life of Cohort 1 by a Teacher Education specialist with the aims of auditing the quality of Leeds and Ministry tutors' teaching, the quality of module materials, the appropriateness of reference materials and the adequacy of pre-BA Programme English language preparation.

This recommendation was accepted and led to the second review whose findings are discussed below.

That since BA participants were not satisfied with their release from duties within schools, the issue of release should be audited, a report prepared for the Ministry and appropriate actions recommended, implemented and monitored.

The Ministry responded by commissioning an audit, which concluded that regional authorities were in fact doing their best to minimize teaching loads and other responsibilities and that only a relatively minor proportion of teachers were actually experiencing unreasonable loads, while most had significantly lower loads than the recommended maximum. While the Ministry wanted to minimize student dissatisfaction, it was also aware of the importance of maintaining positive working relationships with the regions, and of teachers maintaining positive relationships with school administrators. It was clear that regional and local constraints made it impossible to please all BA Programme participants and it was therefore decided to continue working for gradual incremental changes, rather than to expect major reductions of load and responsibility. Also the Ministry did not feel the issue of release from duties should be emphasized at the expense of students taking responsibility for managing their time and developing independent study practices to enable them to meet the demands of the BA Programme effectively.

That various actions should be taken on human resource issues: The Ministry should ensure the recruitment of a skilled Omani Deputy Project Manager; new RTs and Leeds tutors should be appropriately inducted into the Oman context; Leeds should commit itself to a retention target for its field personnel; and a strategy for postgraduate scholarships and other capacity-building should be put in place.

Although a Ministry invitation to carry out school visits proved difficult for Leeds tutors to take up regularly due to logistical and financial constraints, their understanding of life, religion and culture in Oman, and of the educational reform grew steadily throughout the project. Other recommendations were acted upon swiftly. In particular agreement was reached on scholarship funding, with Leeds generously offering to provide three MA TESOL scholarships per cohort for the life of the Project.

That the Project should prioritise research in the next phase of the Project.

The Ministry recognized the importance of encouraging a research profile for this project. A Research Committee was established and work commenced on the preparation of guidelines for researchers.

The evaluator observed that if there had been an evaluation at the design stage, several risks to the Project could have been identified earlier. These included a lack of front-loading of Project Management in the initial setting-up phase of the Project and the absence of a budget for handling capacity-building within the context of the Project or for dealing with emergency staffing difficulties,

3.3 Main findings and recommendations of Evaluation 2

3.3.1 Findings

Teaching: Richards & Rixon (2002) concluded that Leeds lecturers, teaching fellows and RTs demonstrated a high level of knowledge, skill and professionalism in their teaching, for example by giving or eliciting examples of how theoretical concepts could help understand problems encountered in Omani classrooms, by drawing on local materials, and by focusing on reflection. They appeared well-briefed on the goals of the educational reform and established links with Basic Education goals wherever appropriate. They used culturally appropriate behaviour and styles of communication when teaching either all male or all female groups. A high level of student involvement was noted and small group work was found to be particularly effective. Participants reported a high level of satisfaction with the teaching of Leeds lecturers, RTs and teaching fellows.

Modules: The evaluators found that the BA curriculum offered state-of-the-art coverage of the field of TESOL with well-developed and sequenced modules treating all the major areas expected in a BA TESOL degree. Participants found the modules extremely relevant to their teaching situations and were very positive about the majority of them. The evaluators found module content generally provided a good balance between theory and application, but that stronger links between theory and application were needed in some modules and that module content was sometimes at a higher level than normally found in an undergraduate degree. They noted a consistent focus in the modules on participants' experience,

classroom practice and personal theories and beliefs, for example tasks and activities encouraged participants to re-examine their beliefs and practices, to apply what they had learned to their own teaching situations, and to develop the analytical and conceptual skills needed to process module information. However it seemed opportunities for this to be realized did not always occur because participants needed large amounts of support to assimilate content. RTs felt there should be more tasks requiring participants to search out and discover things for themselves. They wanted links between modules to be made more explicit and felt modules could be strengthened by adding summaries for participants.

Assessment: The evaluators concluded that the BA TESOL degree was more heavily assessed than other degrees of this kind and that participants were consequently over-concerned with assessment. This large number of assessment exercises resulted from the structuring of the degree around 10-credit modules.

The time lag between Summer and Winter school sessions and dates for assignments and examinations was found to often have a negative effect on retention of content. Thus some RTs found themselves having to re-package content during Day Release sessions before they could focus on preparing participants for assessments. Some reported that because they were not fully aware of the qualities that were being looked for in assignments and exams by Leeds staff, they could not adequately prepare students for these assessments. The evaluators concluded that Winter and Summer schools would provide a good opportunity for Ministry and Leeds tutors to meet to discuss issues related to the module assessments as well as other more general issues.

Libraries: The evaluators concluded that Regional Training Centre libraries contained good, up-to-date coverage of the BA course by key texts and a very good set of journal resources, though some titles seemed more appropriate for postgraduate study. Some students reported difficulty in finding books in centres where two cohorts of students were using the library.

Language proficiency: Lecturers and tutors reported that students had made considerable gains in language proficiency during the degree, particularly as a result of tutor support. Students too felt their language had improved considerably, but still wanted language support. Tutors reported that some of the language development modules needed revision.

3.3.2 Recommendations

The evaluators made the following key recommendations. Efforts were made in the next phase of the project to respond to these recommendations which all, in different ways, created opportunities to enhance the successful delivery of the Programme and the successful implementation of the Project. The action taken is discussed in Chapter 3.

That opportunities should be provided for Leeds lecturers to visit schools and observe classes. Although this continued to be problematic to implement for logistical and funding reasons, all Leeds lecturers who had responsibility for developing and teaching on the programme were eventually able to visit some schools in Oman to observe teaching.

That content and tasks in all modules should be reviewed to ensure that they allowed for consolidation and application, did not over-emphasize theory at the expense of application and minimised overlap. Reduction of content was recommended where possible to allow RTs to focus in Day Release sessions on exploring classroom applications rather than on revising content. The level and density of certain modules should be reviewed to ensure that treatment was appropriate for undergraduate students. The evaluators recommended that a short overview of each module would be helpful for students.

The evaluators made various major recommendations on the programme itself. First, **that some modules should be grouped into larger blocks of 20 credits**, thus reducing the number of assessment points. Second **that there should be more focus on computers and technology in language education**. Third, **that greater use should be made of assignments and other forms of assessment rather than examinations**. Fourth, **that more use could be made of assigned texts** in appropriate modules to support the student notes and that each student could receive a copy of a practical reference grammar to refer to during the BA and to retain after graduation. Fifth, **that reading files should be reviewed** to ensure that they contained articles of a suitable level. Sixth **that basic titles should be added** to the regional libraries on general topics such as testing, listening, language acquisition as well as additional copies of key texts. Seventh, **that ways of reducing the content load of the Winter and Summer schools should be explored** in order to facilitate better learning of the content of the modules taught.

That ways should be explored to involve RTs more actively in the module revision process.

That research guidelines and a research agenda agreeable to the Ministry and to the University should be finalised in order to facilitate the carrying out of research projects. (By 2003 the Project was research-active.)

3.4 Main findings and recommendations of Evaluation 3

3.4.1 Findings

O'Sullivan (2004) concluded that both Ministry and University had responded appropriately to the recommendations of Evaluation 2, within the limits of their respective constraints, but that the principal issue of contention, assessment load, was not as amenable to change as RTs had hoped. Second he found that the BA continued to be a very successful Project, achieving its aims, largely realising completion targets, achieving gains in professional and language skills, and marked by strong management. Third he supported the intention to research the impact of the Programme / Project. Fourth he endorsed the proposed establishment of a network of Omani teacher educators to promote the ongoing professional development needs of BA graduates and other English language teachers.

Finally, he identified three main challenges to the Project in its final stage from 2004 to 2008, related to the potentially more demanding circumstances of the teachers remaining to join Cohorts 5 and 6 the BA Programme. First, that a combination of lower language proficiency levels, concerns about level of release

from duties, perceptions of the demanding nature of the BA, and somewhat lower levels of motivation could affect participation in and successful completion of the degree. Second, he noted the need to intensify quality assurance measures given the potentially more demanding circumstances of Cohorts 5 and 6. Third, he stressed the need to retain key management and teaching staff postholders, in the interests of maintaining quality assurance.

3.4.2 Recommendations

O'Sullivan's key recommendations, with a summary of action taken, were:

That a reasonable time-frame for further addressing assessment issues should be agreed after which the matter should be considered closed. This was accepted by the Ministry.

That the Ministry should intensify its quality assurance procedures in the final phase of the Project. In response the Ministry continued to prioritise adequacy of teacher release and retention of RTs and Project Management in order to optimise participation and minimize failure rates in Cohorts 5 and 6.

That the Ministry should consider establishing a cadre of 8 regional Omani teacher educators to lead ongoing professional development of English teachers in their regions. The Ministry took up this recommendation through the Director Generalate of Human Resources, by establishing a network of Regional Teacher Trainers of English. It was also agreed that after the BA Project, its libraries would be handed over to regional authorities, where they would serve as central resources for the ongoing professional development of English teachers.

That the Project should aim for a number of small-scale impact studies, as these would provide a richer, more useful, and arguably more valid investigation of actual impact than a single large-scale study. The Ministry acted on this by initiating a series of four small-scale studies, three of which are reported on below and in Chapters 14-16. More studies could have taken place if Omani co-researchers could have been suitably incentivized and recognized.

3.5 Main findings and recommendations of Evaluation 4

3.5.1 Findings

Freeman (2007) concluded that a range of modules, which focused on language acquisition and learning, English language development, advanced communication skills, methodology of teaching English to young learners were rated as being most useful /valuable/influential by participants.

He also noted that as the whole programme was delivered in English, the entire Project design contributed greatly to participants developing greater confidence in the language.

In considering which aspects of teachers' practices had been influenced by the BA Project, Freeman concluded that participants had strong beliefs about instruction and learners. He found that beliefs about instruction (which included beliefs about teaching reading, writing, using communicative tasks, and classroom management) "focused on flexibility in using content, materials, and activities",

while beliefs about learners "focused on adaptation of the former to meet their interests and needs", for example by motivating, differentiating instruction according to needs, encouraging pupil talk, with flexibility in teaching helping teachers to adapt to pupils' needs. However, he also noted confusion over teaching literacy and reading and suggested that this might be a confusion area for English teachers generally in Oman and that further research in the area was necessary.

In considering to what extent developments in teachers' practices due to the BA appeared to be reflected in pupils' learning, Freeman found that participants believed the BA had helped them to better understand the logic and theory of both the reform and the curriculum. He observed 10 lessons and concluded that they were well-managed according to Basic Education reform values and EFM curriculum practices; there was considerable evidence of adaptation of instruction, which participants said the BA had given them confidence in; there was also considerable differentiation of instruction and recycling of vocabulary, though he felt these were probably more the result of the EFM curriculum than the BA. Although in the post-observation interviews, teachers spoke about the importance of tasks and activities being done communicatively and how this contributed to pupil motivation, and of balancing student-student and teacher-student talk, teachers did not always act on this learning in lessons the evaluator observed. Several teachers he observed felt that the BA Programme input was still too fresh in their minds and that they were still trying to integrate what they had learned into their teaching. Freeman noted that research studies indicate that it takes about five years for new teaching knowledge to be fully integrated into classroom practices.

In considering the aspects of the BA Project that had been most influential in promoting 'best practices' in language learning and teaching, Freeman found that the features participants considered particularly valuable were the Day Release Programme and the Summer/Winter schools in Oman and at Leeds, combined with consultations with RTs. In particular he recognised RTs' valuable contribution to the BA Programme and Project. "For many participants, they are the faculty of the BA experience" (Freeman 2007:47).

In considering how the BA Project had led to teacher development and changed practices in language teaching Freeman reported growth in confidence in three areas: in using English, in being more flexible in classroom practices, and in adapting curricular materials according to perceived learner needs and interests. He also noted that the BA Project had had a positive impact on many participants' careers, in the sense that the BA degree has led to them being offered and/or assuming roles of greater responsibility.

3.5.2 Recommendations

This final evaluation was different in that its recommendations were based on the outcomes of the evaluation, but were aimed at advising the Ministry on how it could benefit from the Project in implementing future educational projects. For the benefit of the reader, these are here reproduced in full:

To create momentum and sustainability of the current BA Project, it is important to:

- 1. Support, on an on-going basis, the use and further development of the English language and professional competence that participants have gained through the Project.** Such support need not necessarily be centrally provided. In fact, experience shows that it is often more successful to stimulate local professional initiatives (i.e. study groups, inquiry or action research groups, etc. through appropriate release time and/or mini-grants for example). Similarly, consistently publicizing a visible set of avenues for exposure and dissemination of on-going professional work (i.e. local and national conferences, web-based dissemination and print publications) can create a powerful draw to stimulate participants to pursue their own further development.
- 2. Through Human Resource planning combined with #1 above, set out clear paths by which BA graduates are encouraged to stay in the classroom as 'engaged' teachers.** The capacity-building aspects of the BA Project are as inescapable (good people identified through the Project will rise) as they are admirable. I would add many similar national initiatives would rightly envy such results. However, the Project intends on creating a cadre of classroom professionals, which is where most of the graduates will remain. It is, therefore, important to plan for, recognize, and monitor how these individuals are faring as they continue to teach. Providing supports, mainly through classroom-based professional development opportunities, is key to keeping these individuals engaged. It would not be desirable to have a situation in which those graduates who leave the classroom are seen to be the 'successful' ones, while those who remain are not.
- 3. Consider a fuller evaluation of the BA Project on classroom teaching practices and on pupil learning.** Such information will help to understand, plan for, and more fully benefit from the Project 'momentum'. The current evaluation has been in many senses, a pilot, given the resources of time and personnel available for completing it. That said, a solid overall design, along with certain tools and procedures, has been developed as part of this evaluation. This design could well be re-run on a more comprehensive basis, which would produce important data on the longer term influences of the Project on teacher and pupil learning. Further, as is often done in large-scale projects of this nature, such a comprehensive evaluation could be designed and run by an external party to involve Omani personnel, thus mitigating the costs and more importantly contributing to local capacity-building and to national learning from the results.
- 4. Consider disseminating what is being/has been learned** in the BA Project to a broader international audience. This recommendation, the last about the current Project, is in some senses a selfish one. The BA Project, from planning to implementation, represents a major long-term international professional development initiative, which fact alone makes it worthy of disseminating. The ways in which the Project has intersected with and supported the national

Basic Education reform are likewise fascinating. I believe that the Ministry, Executive Management, and the Project management team have a great deal to contribute to international policy discussions about strengthening national education capacities. Likewise, other national and international actors would find much benefit in learning from this Project.

Future initiatives of this nature should:

1. **Continue the input/localization design**, which was so successful in this Project. There is little question that this balance and integration of input, provided intensively (i.e. in the Winter and Summer Schools) and localized extensively (i.e. in the Day Release meetings), is critical to success of such professional development interventions. It should clearly be replicated in further projects of this nature. Research and 'best practice' in such work underscore how important the tension, balance, and connection between these contrapuntal sources of learning can be; this evaluation has further borne out its importance.
2. **Engage with international partners, where feasible**, to bring the blend and balance of insider/outsider know-how and national/international perspectives that has propelled this Project. It is clear from the BA Project, as it is from other similar initiatives, that participants find instrumental motivation and benefit from professional development designs that combine agencies or institutions from within the national context with those from outside. In this instance, the partners are the Ministry and an international university, however in other cases, it could be the Ministry and, for example, an international training provider or professional association. The blend and balance of the partnership helps to frame the project activity within the national context and priorities, while at the same benchmarking the work internationally and thus giving it that credibility. The critical thing is that each partner's role be appropriate to its strengths, clearly understood and mutually defined, as has been the case in the BA Project.
3. **Plan for, and resource participant tracking, monitoring and evaluation of the professional development initiative from the outset**. Gathering and analyzing data about a professional development initiative throughout its life is key to both its effectiveness and momentum/sustainability. A good rule of thumb is to allocate approximately 10-15% of budget for project monitoring and evaluation. But more crucially, these resources need to be used throughout the life of project and not held until the end. Such monitoring/evaluation efforts can be treated as capacity-building themselves so that local talent learns and benefits from the process (see Recommendation #3 above).
4. **Plan for life after the project before beginning**. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, it is critical to plan for what will happen once the professional development initiative has been completed even before it starts. Such planning can involve harmonizing human resource, planning, reward, and other systems (within the new initiative and the larger educational

system), preparing for new career paths and opportunities for participants, as has happened with the BA Project, as so on. The point being that for any major initiative to be sustainable, the momentum it creates has to have somewhere to go. Only with the foresight of good planning is the full benefit usually reaped.

The BA Project has clearly been an ambitious and comprehensive undertaking, which has been responsive over its life to feedback and input and has adjusted accordingly. The overall success must be due to a constellation of factors. Some of these factors are evident (e.g. the quality of design, systems and their implementation and the attention to detail and appropriate control). Others may be less apparent (e.g. the commitment of most participants and of academic staff, or the intersection of Project activities with the broader Basic Education reform). It therefore makes sense to examine what can be learned from the BA Project not only for professional development and education in Oman but hopefully, I would argue, for the wider international context. The wider community could no doubt learn from what has been learned in the process of designing and implementing the BA Project.

To close, thus, with a personal comment: The complexity of how what teachers know and do shapes what their pupils learn is of critical concern around the world as limited resources are being allocated among various initiatives. The fragile equation, which seeks to improve classroom teaching to improve pupils' learning and future social and economic opportunities, is central to many people. Therefore the issues that are in the Terms of Reference of this Fourth Evaluation are very much on the minds of policy-makers, funders, administrators, as well as parents and community members, teachers, and pupils. Based on this evaluation experience, I am not aware of any other national context currently in which the confluence of professional training and capacity-building with educational policy and curricular reform have played out as positively as they seem to be doing here.

There are important things to be said, stories (in the best sense) to be told, and lessons to be learned from the BA Project experience, which I am sure colleagues in Ministries of Education and multi-lateral donor agencies would be very interested in and would want to hear. I hope that the Project Executive Management will seriously consider how what has been done and learned in the BA Project can become a timely Omani contribution to these critically important conversations.

(Freeman 2007:49-52)

4 IMPACT STUDIES

In 2004-05, four impact studies were conducted into different aspects of the BA Educational Studies (TESOL) programme. The goals were firstly to investigate ways in which the BA had had an impact on those associated with it, primarily the graduates but, in one case, also their headteachers. A second goal was to develop research capacity among graduates by involving them in various aspects of data collection and analysis. Three of these impact studies are reported as chapters in this collection (see Chapters 13, 14 and 15).

5 THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AUDIT

5.1 Aims

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education is an independent body responsible for ensuring that the highest academic standards and quality of education are provided in universities and colleges throughout the United Kingdom. One means by which the agency carries out its duties is by conducting audits which provide information on how universities manage their provision of higher education and maintain academic standards. As part of a larger review of all UK higher education institutions' collaborative partnerships with overseas countries, the BA Educational Studies (TESOL) programme, run in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in Oman, was one of several partnerships selected for audit in 2004. The purpose of the audit was to examine how the university maintained standards and quality within the partnership. Documents describing how the partnership operated and detailing the procedures in place for assuring quality and standards together with an internal review of the programme management were submitted to the QAA. These documents were linked to University of Leeds policies and made reference to the expectations laid out in the QAA code of practice on the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education. Following consideration of these documents a team of five auditors and an audit secretary visited Leeds University to interview key academics working on the BA programme before making a visit to Oman to hold discussions with key members of staff and with students studying on the programme.

5.2 Main findings and recommendations of the QAA audit and a summary of action taken

A full report of the audit of this collaborative partnership conducted by the QAA team in 2004 was published and made available on the QAA web site (QAA, 2005). Of relevance here are two main findings which are highlighted in the report. In particular, the audit team considered that a particular feature of the successful partnership between the University and the Ministry in Oman was the detailed contract which clearly specified the responsibilities of both partners. They also acknowledged the usefulness of the detailed schedules and other documented information in the management of the programme. Secondly, the audit team considered that the principles of the QAA code of practice were reflected in the programme and that both academic standards and the quality of student learning experiences compared favourably with other university programmes.

In the conclusion of the report the following positive features of the programme were highlighted:

There was a clear attribution of responsibilities. Role specifications for those involved in delivering the Programme were clearly documented and were supported by a number of schedules detailing all aspects of the programme (paragraph 14).

The manner in which the University utilised both its own and the Ministry's monitoring and review processes was constructive. The QAA audit team recognised the unusually high level of internal monitoring and review and external evaluation of the Programme and considered the systems to be robust. In general, it noted that the monitoring and review processes were highly responsive to issues raised in relation to enhancing the student experience and that full consideration was given to reports at school and faculty level in the university (paragraphs 22, 24).

There were well-developed arrangements for liaison and administration. These allowed data on the admissions process and student progress to be shared, in the latter case through a secure database (paragraph 37).

There were effective processes for the appointment, preparation and development of teaching staff. The QAA audit team noted that the university procedure for peer observation of teaching covered all teaching staff (School of Education lecturers, university teaching fellows on short term contracts and regional tutors) and found it served to monitor and support the delivery of the programme and supported the development of teamwork (paragraph 40).

The QAA audit team identified four points for further consideration by the university in the development of its partnership arrangements. Firstly, it suggested that further mechanisms for monitoring the consistency of written feedback to students on their assessed work could be introduced (paragraph 32). Secondly, the audit team suggested that the university utilised the experience of existing external examiners in the School of Education in making future appointments to the Programme in order to ensure greater comparability of standards across programmes in the school (paragraph 34). The third point related to the entitlement to access university library facilities and a concern expressed by students that they may be disadvantaged by lack of full access to specialised literature. The audit team recommended clarifying for students the extent of their need for access to the University Library in connection with the dissertation (paragraph 44). The final recommendation made by the audit team suggested that the university should consider making the information on the complaints and appeals process more accessible to students and that the procedures and support available for students not studying in Leeds should be made more explicit.

6 CONCLUSION

From the discussion above it should be clear that the BA (TESOL) Project was an extremely closely scrutinised endeavour. Arguably one of the main reasons for its success was the careful, systematic process of review, monitoring and evaluation outlined above, which meant that it was at no time possible for a problematic issue to go undetected or undealt with.

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