Enhancing Research Culture Fund 2024

Agile Research Teams (ARTs) in FES

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Background and context

Valuing the *process* of Research & Knowledge Exchange

There is often a transition to be made from practitioner to educator/academic which requires a shift in identity positioning. There is a need to challenge the false dichotomy, often perceived, between being a practitioner or a researcher. This transition is best performed and negotiated in interactions with others (Harre 1990, Mclean & Price, 2017). In order to boost the institutional research culture in our faculty, we wanted to explore whether supporting and developing colleague's skills to engage in 'agile research teams' (ARTs) will increase their capacity and confidence to engage in research. The ART is inclusive as it allows colleagues to contribute in a way which is manageable for their time available and their preferences for working. It draws upon their specific skills sets, discipline knowledge, interests and values and their contribution is timebound. Working in a research team deepens our learning and transfer of our learning to our practice and encourages creativity. It also gives us the opportunity to learn from each other.

Purpose of the ARTs project

- To create manageable and **sustainable research activity** among practitioner-researchers in FES
- To highlight the importance of valuing the process and relation of 'Research & Knowledge Exchange' as much as the object of KE
- To establish, support and **build researcher relationships** across teams and disciplines, bringing together our diverse expertise
- To **urgently increase capacity** to support **'live' research projects** in FES

What we did?

BESPOKE PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER TRAINING

We enlisted the help of Dr Lesley Deacon to adapt her existing programme for Facilitated Practice-based Research (2023). All participants receive a Bassot (2016) Research journal to support personal reflection during the process and to draw upon for data collection in the evaluation.

COVER FOR STAFF ENGAGING IN 'ARTs'

To enable staff to be released from teaching activity to engage in ART – ITAP.

We can't own knowledge as we used to… it's a socially constructed process and personal in its meaning.. (Dismore, et al 2024). Agile Research Teams (ARTs) encourage us to ensure that there is a relational response to KE, to provide balance with the performative and neo-liberal one.

Aims

- Establish two 'Agile Research Teams' to meet urgent capacity requirements
- Design a bespoke practitioner-researcher training programme which meets the needs of practitioners in addition to the needs of the live projects
- Collect data from the FES practitioner-researchers to evaluate this approach as a way of increasing the capacity to engage in research

What have we learned?

- ARTs need to be planned alongside work loading and programme review in July
- The cost of releasing staff to engage in additional research activity cannot be underestimated – ARTs need to utilise the RSA allocation
- Time sensitive and 'task & finish' approach to research enables greater involvement
- ARTs need coordinators/mentors from the research labs to ensure that ethics and outcomes are fully supported
- The researcher training programme needs to be flexible and responsive to the specific needs of practitioner-researchers to be team and project focused and recognise existing talent

References and links

Deacon. L. (2023) 'Facilitated Practice-based Research: A model of Empowerment to Reduce Research Anxiety in Social Work Practitioners and Reframe Cultural Capital, European Journal of Social Work Research, 1(1), pp.102–117.
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Dismore, Campbell-Barr, Manning & Warwick (2024) Relational approach to Knowledge Exchange in HE. Studies in Higher Education. Taylor & Francis
Harre (1990)
Kincheloe (2003) Teachers as Researchers: the path to empowerment and critical inquiry. Jossey-Bass.
McLean, N & Price, L (2017) Identity formation among novice academic teachers: a longitudinal study. Studies in Higher Education. pp. 1-14.

Impact so far..

- Established a network of 26 'research interested' colleagues across the Faculty.
- 15 attended the first day 25th June (a second day to be held early Sept to 'mop up')
- 3 'live' research projects underway with AR Teams and collection scheduled for July 2024.
- A further 2 projects due to start in Sept 2024
- Primary Ed Team asked by AHoS to plan to use 5 RSA days specifically for their contribution to an ART
- Projects aligned FES Research & Knowledge Exchange Strategy, 2023-2026
- Invited to support and collaborate with colleagues in an FE college in Nottingham, looking to increase their research capacity
- Applying for additional funding to support the work of the projects within the 'Research Labs' and the **InterAction Unit** – to look to build a commercial consultancy

Next steps

1. **COMPLETE RA TRAINING**
   A further 2 days of training planned around reviewing literature and process of analysis
2. **MENTORING**
   Identify mentors to support the ARTs
3. **EVALUATION OF ARTS**- (June 2025)
   Establish the effectiveness of ARTs to increase capacity and collaboration

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