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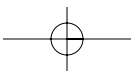
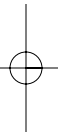
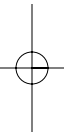
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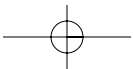
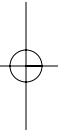
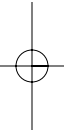
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Editorial

HOWARD TANNER

This special edition of the Welsh Journal of Education reports on attempts to rebuild capacity in educational research in Wales following an extended period in which the trajectory has been characterised by decline and loss of capacity. Analysis of Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) returns since 1991 reveals a progressive decline in capacity (Furlong and White, 2001; Rees and Power, 2007).

This decline continued into the 2008 research assessment exercise. Alone amongst the nations of the United Kingdom, Wales experienced a significant decline in the number of staff entered under sub-panel forty five – Education. Only six entries were made to the Education sub-panel from Welsh institutions, comprising forty one ‘category A’ staff in total with a mean entry of only seven staff per institution. Even after allowing for the fact that the largest Welsh submission from 2001 (Cardiff University) was submitted to another sub-panel in 2008, this represents a serious decline in capacity and was commented on with concern in the subject overview report (RAE, 2009)

These differences have implications for research capacity and funding, especially in the light of a low average quality profile for Welsh institutions. (RAE, 2009: 1)

However, in spite of the relative loss of capacity in Wales over the period of the 2008 RAE, there are some signs for cautious optimism as recent initiatives intended to develop capacity have begun to have a positive impact.

This special edition reports on research activity in Wales that resulted from recent initiatives to develop capacity in educational research. In particular, research reports are presented from four projects that were funded, from 2005 to 2007, by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under its Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) (Extension to Wales). These ‘Welsh extension’ projects were linked to existing TLRP

projects with the intention of increasing the relevance and impact of TLRP research in Wales, enhancing the research capacity of institutions across Wales and enabling Welsh institutions to enlarge their existing networks (Davidson, 2004).

Collaboration between the researchers in the Welsh extension of the TLRP led directly to the formation of the Welsh Educational Research Network (WERN) under the directorship of Dr Sue Davies. WERN was funded by the ESRC and HEFCW for a pilot period between 2007 and 2008 and subsequently extended to July 2009. This special edition of the journal reports on that pilot and the research and capacity building activity which resulted.

There are two categories of research report in this edition. First, there are papers based on research from the four TLRP extension projects, a project that gained funding from Becta following a WERN bursary award, and an evaluation of the first year of the Welsh Education Research Network (WERN).

Second, there are shorter reports of the ongoing research and capacity building activities engaged in by the eight collaborative groups who gained bursaries in the pilot phase of WERN.

At the time of writing, the future of WERN and the form of any further capacity building activity in Wales remains uncertain. However, the collaborative research activities encouraged by the TLRP extension and WERN that are reported on here are ongoing. If educational research is to have a sustainable future across Higher Education in Wales, it is vital that the green shoots of recovery that are beginning to show themselves are nurtured and developed.

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