The moral duty to be evidence-informed

Professor Daniel Muijs P8
RESEARCH IN FURTHER EDUCATION: WHY WE MUST MAKE A FUSS ABOUT IT

If FE wants a powerful voice in deciding its purpose and place in society and education, a policy to build research capacity in the sector is needed, say Dr Gary Husband and Sam Jones.

Dr Gary Husband:
I left further education (after years of teaching and management positions) specifically to try and secure funding for research work within FE. Paradoxically, I had to leave FE to increase my chances of securing funding to conduct research in that very sector. With a few notable exceptions, funded FE research is not carried out by people who work in FE.

Sam Jones:
As a researcher in FE I am pleased that practitioners are starting to raise their voices; the Dancing Princesses books are a notable example, as are movements like Unite Voices and Research meets, both of which are sector-led movements. Increasing numbers of FE staff are convening, or involved in, the Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN), and sharing their research at conferences like the Association of Research in Post Compulsory Education (ARPCE) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA). There are changes within colleges – my own college has a research network and a blog, and it is a research-intensive university, with many students working in FE on placements. There are also distinct pressures to enhance the learning of students through their own engagement with research work.

We hold the view that those working in FE need to develop an understanding of the importance of research and how it is used in other sectoral settings, both for policy and professional purposes. If FE is to become more involved in research development, it needs to engage more closely with the other sectors. FE is losing the general research momentum and capacity that has characterised it in the past.

One possible future is that further education research is thought of in the same way as research conducted in universities. FE-based research would inform those areas relevant to it – for instance: commerce, industry, leisure, health care, engineering and so on. This sort of work is rare in FE, but it does exist. There are examples of colleges leading the world in areas such as solar-generated power and electrification of fleet vehicles. FE, by its very definition, is filled with examples from many industries, many of whom are able to provide the bridge between industry and researchers. There are also distinct pressures to enhance the learning of students through their own engagement with research work.

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REFERENCES


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