

PART THREE THE CHALLENGES

CHAPTER NINE

EDUCATING FOR CAPABILITY: SOME OBSTACLES AND WAYS FORWARD

John Stephenson and Susan Weil

Introduction

The review of current practice presented in Part Two is not intended to be comprehensive. The examples described represent only a small proportion of those submitted for our consideration. The examples are reports from the field rather than systematic case studies of the approach to educating for capability summarized in Chapter 2. They highlight issues and suggest ways forward; they are not blue-prints.

The examples show:

- a) a varied range of development activity is taking place, across the whole range of disciplines;
- b) coverage across subject disciplines is patchy, with learner responsibility and accountability the norm in some fields and the exception in others;
- c) many examples have resulted from the commitment, ingenuity and energy of small groups of staff, often working within traditional teaching environments;
- d) staff, students and institutions are confronting major educational issues and, within the context of their own subject areas, breaking new ground;
- e) most of the examples describe minority experiences for students; formal contributory assessment and inappropriate systems support are major obstacles to overcome;
- f) as staff become more confident and colleagues see students progress, practice is spreading to contiguous areas;
- g) institutional support often lags behind staff initiative, with staff having to press for changes in the institutional infra-structure;
- h) the funding provided by the Enterprise in Higher Education Initiative has been a major factor in initiating and supporting change;
- i) there is sufficient evidence to report that making students responsible and accountable for their own learning promotes motivation, raises student confidence, develops relevant skills and, where appropriate, leads to favourable responses from employers;
- j) running two conflicting cultures simultaneously can be resource expensive;
- k) once staff cross the pain threshold of trying something new, they can enthuse low morale departments.

Higher Education for Capability presents major challenges for students, teachers, course designers, validators, institutional managers, employers and external funding agencies. This final Chapter focuses on the issues arising from the experiences of those who are introducing learner responsibility and accountability in the context of those challenges and suggests possible ways forward.

The Challenge for Students

The suppliers of examples report considerable and varied benefits for students who successfully manage their own learning. A compilation of typical claims:

Improved study skills, higher motivation, a greater understanding of theory than when traditional methods were used, more reading done, a high quality of presentations, greater student confidence with regard to taking responsibility for their learning and working at their own pace within their chosen environment; more confident and capable of negotiating and working in teams; refreshing tutor morale and communication.

Some suppliers also report initial scepticism and resistance amongst a small minority of students - even within groups where the benefits have been great. Initial student resistance can also be a deterrent to cautious teachers and institutions. It is important that staff and students understand the bases of student resistance if they are to take steps to maximise student benefit. There appear to be six main causes of resistance:

- a) student expectations of teacher roles, based on prior and parallel experience;
- b) fear of failure being attributed to their own inadequacies;
- c) the absence of traditional measures of progress, such as the volume of lecture notes and comparing assignment grades with fellow students;
- d) concern that work initiated by themselves may not be taken seriously by outsiders;
- e) short-term aspirations focused on the achievement of qualifications by the least effort.
- f) lack of experience and confidence with this approach to learning.

These factors have most significance in mixed-mode environments, where 'cultural disjunction' exacerbates the students' concerns about being treated differently, being left behind or, worse, 'being experimented on'.

The examples illustrate a number of ways in which student resistance can be addressed. They include:

- a) providing students with a clear rationale for the new approach, together with the time to discuss its relevance and meaning;
- b) helping students to review the relevance of the new approach to their previous experience and longer term aspirations;
- c) early exposure of students to potential professional environments and practitioners, with a focus on the knowledge, skills and qualities needed for good performance;
- d) the provision of peer support, with time explicitly devoted to the exploration of process problems
- e) an unequivocal commitment to students learning from the experiences of responsibility and accountability, with an emphasis on critical dialogue between student and tutor about the student's progress, and the development of skills of self-monitoring;
- f) helping students to review the progress they are making in their specialist studies;
- g) confirmation of the value of the process from established external bodies;
- h) staged introduction to responsibility and accountability

Experience shows that these measures promote a sense of student ownership and control over their own learning, give reassurance about its value, establish the intellectual as well as functional credibility of the process, help students to address for themselves the basis of any scepticism they may have and provide an expanding dossier of evidence of student progress.

The Challenge for Teachers

The wider introduction of capability approaches is to a large extent dependent upon successful initiatives by subject teachers. The Art and Design experience reported in Chapter Three shows it is possible for a wide variety of teachers, many of them part-time, to manage whole programmes of study in which students are helped to be responsible and accountable for their own learning. The capability approach is traditional in Art and Design; teachers are imbued with its values and a belief in its relevance; it is part of their own educational experience and current professional practice. To educate for capability in Art and Design is to conform with the culture. Teachers in many other disciplines - to varying degrees - have additional and more difficult tasks. They have to devise approaches which are new to their culture and have the confidence and skill to implement them. They have to cope with cultural disjunction, not only with some of their colleagues but also with their own substantial but different experience. They have to address the issues of their own identity and role.

The examples in Part Two present a useful source of information on the nature of the difficulties which teachers have to address, and ways in which they might be overcome. The difficulties are only partly related to the mastery of unfamiliar techniques; the major difficulties relate to the teachers' perceptions of their roles. Some staff have inhibitions about the very concept of passing responsibility to students. There is a fear of letting go; that students may not learn what the teacher wants them to learn; that once the traditional function of transmitting information has gone the residual roles will be trivial; that teachers may not always be able to answer students' questions; that a process consultant has less status than a subject expert, and less opportunity for promotion in a system that favours subject expertise and research. There are inhibitions related to teacher perceptions of student readiness: students can not be trusted to get on with things; they have had no experience of taking responsibility; the standard of their work will suffer; they will make unreasonable demands on the teachers' time; it is not possible to manage so many different student interests at the same time; they will be disadvantaged in terms of professional recognition.

Such concerns are bound up with genuine concern for the students' progress and future opportunities. In the eyes of the traditional teacher, because student progress is seen to be directly related to the quality of teacher transmitted expertise it would be irresponsible for the teacher to let go. The power of this feeling of teacher responsibility should not be under-estimated. Its influence continues long after staff have bitten the bullet and have seen at first hand that learner responsibility and accountability are both feasible and educationally productive. Our correspondents report feelings of guilt about their new roles, that somehow they are abdicating their 'real' duties. To counter this some teachers retain the practices of 'wealthier times' by trying to be available for all possible student needs and requests, in addition to taking on the demanding and complex tasks of the new order. Others go in the opposite direction and leave students to their own devices, fearful that any intervention or instruction by them would weaken the delicate flower of student managed learning. Uncertainty about which way to go contributes to feelings of being exposed, insecure and at risk.

Our correspondents also report that the change from content provider to 'learning assistant' can be rewarding and intellectually challenging. To engage students in critical dialogue about fundamental concepts, to be open about their own struggles with particular content areas, to share the pain and excitement of what it means to be a scholar, to help students to find their way through the growing mass of references and information sources, to test assumptions against practice, to help students 'talk it through', and to explore the provisional nature of what we currently accept as knowledge are more challenging and intellectually satisfying activities than the sterile communication of 'certain' knowledge and information. A capability approach, far from de-skilling specialist academics, can give new status to their scholarship; for good measure it prepares students for learning through the rest of their lives. Contributors report feeling revitalised by the freshness of their interactions with students which in turn revitalises departments where morale is low.

Higher Education for Capability encourages student negotiated learning, not student self-determination (Chapter 2). Negotiation is two - way, with tutors as active participants, not as passive gate-keepers. Negotiation makes it possible for tutors to participate in the students' learning, pressing for clarity of purpose, challenging assumptions, encouraging the development and testing of propositions and supporting students in critical reviews of the development of their personal skills and understanding. The tutor can raise students' awareness of different theoretical perspectives and give access to supporting specialist resources and sources. Critical dialogue is relevant at all stages - when students are planning their programmes, carrying them out and grappling with the criteria and mode of assessment.

A number of strategies have helped tutors to cross the barrier from scepticism and wariness to intellectual challenge and enthusiasm.

Small initial steps, for instance, have helped a number of correspondents to 'get their feet wet', building confidence incrementally. A useful and relatively safe first step is for subject-based staff to articulate the skills which they hope

their students derive from their courses and to consider the kinds of learning experiences most likely to develop them. Some staff were stimulated to introduce changes in response to follow-up studies of graduate appraisals of the skills they wished they had developed on their under-graduate courses. Giving students responsibility for their own projects is the most frequently mentioned initiative; the most useful further step is to focus the students' attention on the learning processes and learning outcomes of the project. Another effective first step, (effective because it ensures student interest and gets to the heart of the capability process) is for tutors to initiate discussion with students about the criteria used in their final assessment. Those who have tried this report higher student motivation, improved student performance and student debate about the meaning and relevance of the course aims and objectives.

Greater self-discipline has also been of assistance. The capability teacher has a complex set of duties which need to be well managed if the tutor is to flourish. Many tasks are of an administrative nature. There are many students with different problems, records to keep, placements to arrange and supervise, student reports to read, meetings to attend, contracts to review and scholarship to sustain. With innovations there are strategies to devise, people to persuade, plans to prepare, approvals to be sought and students to recruit. Without good time management urgent administration can exclude time out for reflection. Students need to be briefed of the constraints and helped to work within them. Well-disciplined tutors also present good models for students, particularly if the students themselves need reassurance; over-pressed and disorganised teachers convey uncertainty and doubt.

Effective team working can spread burdens and provide a forum for peer related critical dialogue. As with students, a support group can help tutors address issues of concern. Staff logs or diaries and co-counselling can help tutors build up their own confidence in the process as well as providing experience with techniques useful for students.

Staff development based on capability principles can provide tutors with first-hand experience of the processes they might use with their students. The most effective staff development programmes reported to us involve staff working together, with guidance, assessing their own development needs, setting targets, monitoring their progress and recording their learning whilst introducing capability approaches into their own teaching programmes. As with students, so with staff: the medium is the message. The integration of the introduction of capability into a formal programme of staff development provides support, time and occasion for staff reflection about the issues and the learning they are deriving from the experience of introducing capability approaches.

The Enterprise in Higher Education Initiative has been particularly successful in bringing about change because it has paid for time and practical support for staff to talk through the issues, to prepare plans, to seek advice and to reflect on their progress.

Affiliation with fellow specialists is an important staff need. Persuasion from education experts is less potent than the encouragement and example of respected figures within the same field. Belief in the distinctive needs of teaching particular subjects is strong; reassurance from people dealing with the same specialist issues is welcomed. Informal networks and databases which cross institutional boundaries are increasingly being developed for the exchange of ideas and the sharing of concerns.

Contact with employers can help tutors appreciate the relevance of their courses to the world of work. A number of academics in non-vocational areas have found it useful to demonstrate the vocational relevance of the skills and qualities their students develop. Employers can provide encouragement, study opportunities and resources for capability oriented activities.

Overall, the experience of the examples submitted is that most of the educational and practical obstacles facing staff can be overcome. The most challenging difficulties teachers have to overcome relate to academic values and self-esteem. Both of these legitimate concerns can be addressed by focusing attention on the quality of student and staff learning engendered by greater student responsibility and accountability. One interesting assertion is that once staff have progressed to working effectively with learner responsibility and accountability they do not wish to return to their former practices.

The Challenge for Course Designers

Higher Education for Capability invites a new approach to course design. Capability programmes consist of frameworks within which student negotiation can take place. If the content and mode of assessment of part or the whole of a course are negotiated by the student, it is no longer possible to describe courses in terms of the content to be covered. Instead, course design needs to focus on the processes involved, the systems of tutorial and resource support, the procedures to be followed, the general objectives to be reached, the criteria which have to be met and the rigour with which they will be judged.

The examples illustrate that though much can be achieved by teachers within the confines of their own discrete areas of responsibility, the student experience is often small scale, inevitably affecting only a proportion of the students' total higher education. Some of the key elements necessary to provide a coherent capability experience such as admissions policy, student progression, timetables, quality assurance procedures, validation, resource availability and assessments for final qualifications are beyond the control of individual teachers. Many teachers report having to work against course structures; much more could be achieved if the course structures themselves were designed to develop student capability.

Capability courses need structures which support and accommodate student initiative and provide assurance to the world at large, including the staff, that programmes planned by students themselves are valid and of an appropriate standard.

Supporting and accommodating student initiative

Educating for capability involves a re-ordering of the relationship between teacher and student, and between content and process. Course structures should provide the right balance and relationship between three activities: giving students access to content; helping students prepare for and exercise responsibility for their own programmes of study; promoting reflection on the learning which takes place. Many conventional courses are designed around the first of these, the delivery of teacher determined content with some space for reflection on the material delivered. A capability approach puts the emphasis on the planning and reviewing of student learning by the students themselves, supported by activities (lectures, using the library, workshops, assignments, projects, consultancies, placements etc) which enable the students to engage and understand content relevant to the students' explicit needs and aspirations. Far from diminishing the status of content, the experience reported in the examples indicates that students in this second model can cover a considerable amount of content and reach deeper levels of understanding.

The second model has clear implications for the timetabling of courses. If content related activities are to support student initiatives, they should not occur before time has been provided for the students' review of expertise and exploration of possible programme activities. If students are to manage their own learning, content needs will vary and this will involve access to more varied, flexible and readily available sources than reliance on a predetermined lecture programme. The experience also suggests that where whole programmes of study are concerned, students benefit from being in process groups which provide opportunities for peer support and student - tutor dialogue.

If time is to be found for process activities, the timetable can not be filled with formal lectures or workshop demonstrations. Pressure on staff resources and the lower cost of desk-top publishing are encouraging many courses to make lecture notes available on disk or in packages stored in the library. New data storage and retrieval systems mean that students access this teacher produced material in the context of other sources of information. Library-based lecture material makes it easier for students to cross boundaries into other specialist areas. The examples also show that active and interactive learning can expose students to a greater variety of information sources and expertise, as well as involving students in the application of knowledge and skills.

One problem highlighted in the examples is the danger that students can be left too much to their own devices, that staff will think that activities and resource availability will suffice. Placements, for instance, give students experience of being in environments relevant to their studies, but without time and energy devoted to the support of student planning and reflection there may be little learning from the experience. Package based lecture material without time for planning and reflection on its relevance can just as easily lead to teacher dependent content acquisition and regurgitation.

Assuring credibility through student accountability

The credibility of student managed learning with employers, accrediting bodies, teachers and the students themselves is enhanced when the course structure places obligations on students to justify their intentions and account for their learning, and when the timetable makes time and support available for students to do so. Moreover, student accountability conducted with rigour is a major vehicle for the development of student confidence in higher level capabilities related to evaluating their own performance, explaining what they are about and learning from their own experiences. It represents a conscious commitment to reflection on learning, to the building up of accumulated knowledge and skill and developing the means of doing so, and to the integration of student learning from their activities with 'the field'.

The capability of students, the quality of their learning and the credibility of their programmes are enhanced when course structures require students to reflect upon and give account of:

- a) their prior learning and future intentions (at admissions and the start of courses);
- b) the relevance of their proposed programmes of study (at admissions and in the context of negotiation);
- c) their intended learning outcomes, how they will be achieved and how they will be demonstrated (at approvals of plans for programmes and assessment);
- d) the intended and unexpected learning they are deriving from active and interactive learning (at stage or monitoring assessments);
- e) the nature, relevance and value of their achievements (at formal assessments).

Learning contracts are increasingly being used as devices for structuring student initiative within a framework of accountability. Where contracts cover all the above stages of a student's experience, there is opportunity for students to prepare coherent and integrated programmes of study. Where contracts are renegotiable they can respond to unplanned learning. Contracts make it possible for courses to establish formal approval or registration procedures which in turn give reassurance to students and outsiders.

A major issue mentioned by some of our correspondents concerns the criteria used for the approval of student learning contracts. In some cases the criteria are externally determined and relate to specific areas of content thereby reducing scope for student initiative; in others they are not clearly articulated, leaving students vulnerable to unexplained judgments and a pernicious form of control. The approval of learning contracts requires open and clear criteria related to the level and scope of the awards students are seeking, leaving students to propose specific activities and areas of study. Some of our correspondents have found the preparation of those criteria to be a valuable staff development activity in its own right.

The examples submitted give insights into a number of more specific course design issues: admissions, progression, modular structures, and assessment.

Admissions

It greatly helps capability teachers when admission to capability oriented courses is based in part on students' potential for taking responsibility for their own learning. Though significant changes are under way (see below), entry based on Advanced Level General Certificate of Education (A Levels) scores still pre-dominates in many areas. The difficulty with A Level courses is that they use traditional teaching methods and encourage students to rely heavily on their teachers. Many academics have told us that they can not introduce capability programmes because students recruited straight from school **are not able, or do not wish**, to take responsibility for even part of their own educational development. This assumption is used to justify the continuation of didactic approaches to teaching in under-graduate education. Staff, in other words, collude with the perpetuation of alleged student inability to manage their own development rather than introduce students to approaches more appropriate to higher centres of learning and the development of capability.

This collusion over teacher dependent styles of education invites the following caricature, a self-justifying cycle:

We take high A level score people; they are not used to being given responsibility for their learning so we do not give them any; our students do well when spoon-fed and they pass our exams based on the regurgitation of spoon-fed material; employers recruit our students because of our A level points policy and complain about the lack of capability in graduates; we get high quality ratings because our students have high A level points and get first destination jobs; we are able to attract even more applicants because of our high public rating and first destination reputation so we can push up the A level average score at entry still further and defend A levels as the gold-standard of quality in HE.

The apparent ease with which blue chip courses can fill their places encourages complacency about the relevance of traditional admissions procedures. Changing the regulations, criteria and procedures for the admission of students to courses to include applicants' appraisals of their own prior experience is an effective way of encouraging the development of capability on the course itself. A number of the examples had their origin in teachers having to take account of individual student needs and differences within the broader groups they were receiving. Growing confidence in the techniques of accrediting prior experience and learning (APEL), and the newly launched National Record of Achievements are making it more feasible for admissions tutors to look for evidence of capability potential. Changes in the school curriculum associated with GCSE and TVEI are giving more of the conventional intake experience of programme negotiation and skills development.

Structural progression.

Some courses put students in at the deep end; most prefer to help students move gradually to higher levels of responsibility. A number of examples achieve progress to student responsibility by providing a good grounding in key skills and concepts in the early stages and allowing student negotiation based on that foundation for the later stages; some have progressively more permissive objectives for each stage of a course; others provide students with early exposure to the practical or professional context in which they wish to work to give them sufficient experience of the knowledge and skills requirements on which to base their proposals. The favoured gradual approach is successful if from the outset students and staff are aware of the overall strategy; knowledge of what is to come can encourage students to explore the relevance of earlier work to their future interests.

Modularisation

The rationale for the widespread modularisation of courses includes more effective resource management and greater student mobility; it does not necessarily imply any real change in the nature and quality of the learning experiences of students within those modules. Choosing from a fixed menu is a limited form of giving students responsibility for learning. There is concern amongst some correspondents that the modular solution makes it much more difficult for students to manage their overall personal and academic progression in response to their growing understanding of their needs; some complain that 'pick and mix' approaches to student planning avoid any obligation to address the issue of course coherence; others remark that relatively short self-contained units encourage a content dominated curriculum. The accumulation of credits can take precedence over the students taking responsibility for their learning and development.

On the other hand, the development of modular schemes has given many of our correspondents the opportunity to develop capability programmes. Course teams have begun to make unit objectives more explicit which in turn has encouraged discussion of personal skills and qualities and the ways of developing them. Progression towards capability can be helped if, say, all Level 2 modules have objectives which allow greater student responsibility than do Level 1 objectives. Others have found it possible to introduce radical change within the confines of one module without challenging the educational basis of the whole of their department. Others have found that cross movement of students makes it impossible to make assumptions about common expertise of module entrants and have found it useful to introduce learning contracts leading to general criteria for success at the end. One interesting solution to the problem of course coherence is to ask students to incorporate their choice of modules within an overall learning contract in which the mix is justified in terms of the students' expertise and long term intentions. It is also possible for courses to establish modules explicitly devoted to student/tutor dialogue on the planning of the rest of the programme, the monitoring and review of progress and critical reviews on student learning and outcomes. The learning from these activities can thereby be recognised and contribute to the students' overall assessment.

Assessments

Most of the examples of capability assessments are non-contributory towards the students' degrees; the traditional three-hour unseen written examination still prevails across much of the higher education system. There is, nevertheless, a growing expertise in the use of assessments which a) focus on the application of knowledge and skills; b) involve students in their own assessments; c) accommodate the assessment of students in groups, and d) involve professional practitioners and potential employers. Alternatives to the 3 hour unseen paper include:

- a) student negotiated projects or dissertations on issues or problems associated with an external context, such as the work-place or community activity;
- b) consultancy contracts negotiated with outside clients replicating work-place conditions and using professional criteria of success.
- c) collaborative projects in which individually negotiated contracts within the group make it possible to distinguish individual contributions and performance;
- d) critical reviews of the students' programme, learning and achievements, prepared by the students themselves, with supporting evidence from peers, employers, academics and their own teachers.
- e) profiles of student development and records of student achievement produced by the students themselves as part of their monitoring assessment

Each of the above gives students a high degree of personal responsibility, is an effective learning activity in its own right, and provides a great deal of information about what students can do and have done. Each enables students to demonstrate their personal skills and qualities through the assessment of their specialist knowledge and skills.

The successful integration of personal skills and specialist knowledge in the same assessment is particularly interesting in the context of current debates about learning outcomes and competences. The separate assessment of precisely defined skills in isolation from their integration with other qualities disembodies human capability and fails to indicate the students' ability to use skills in combination with other skills and specialist knowledge in the context of problems or issues relevant to the students' longer term personal and vocational development. Moreover, student negotiated assessments allow for a wider definition of skills and qualities than those contained within most course programmes, and invites greater understanding of their nature and relevance.

There is considerable interest in self and peer assessment, partly because judging your own performance is an important part of capability but also as a way of stimulating and systematising reflection on progress and the learning process. Many have reported student reluctance to give fail marks to peers or to give high marks to themselves, even when they feel they might be justified. These understandable inhibitions can be overcome if students are assessed not on the marks they award but on their ability to present a critical evaluation. The more we use self-assessments, peer assessments, work completed off campus and work in response to programmes negotiated by students, the more we need to address the issue of accountability. Publication of the criteria used in judging student performance in formal assessments, the involvement of relevant external figures such as professional practitioners, and the use of external examiners sympathetic to the aims of capability education, have established the credibility of student involvement in their own final assessment in the art and design field, and would do so in other areas.

The Challenge for Accrediting Bodies

Once designed, higher education programmes need to be approved. Polytechnic courses have been validated by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), university courses by their Senates and courses from both sectors are accredited by professional bodies. External validation is important for capability courses. Students need reassurance that their programmes will lead to recognised qualifications; the wider world needs assurance that the quality of student negotiated activities is satisfactory. The method of validation is a crucial factor as the contrasting experiences of the professional bodies and the CNAA illustrate.

Professional bodies, of course, vary and the observations which follow represent the general not the total picture. The involvement of professional bodies in the accreditation of higher education programmes ought not to be an obstacle to the introduction of Education for Capability. Professionals need specialist skills and knowledge; they also need to be aware of their limitations, capable of learning new skills and acquiring new information, effective in collaboration with other professionals from their own and from other fields, and able to relate well to clients. They need to be capable. Yet a frequently expressed reason voiced by academics for not introducing capability approaches is that 'the professional body would not allow it'. Staff responsible for some of the examples in Part Two have deliberately opted not to seek professional recognition because, they claim, the capability features of their programmes would have to be removed. Our information is that progress towards the introduction of capability into programmes leading to professional recognition is proceeding slowly and patchily.

It is interesting to note the experience of Art and Design. British designers are highly regarded world wide. A high proportion of design graduates work as designers. They are sought after by overseas companies. There is no tradition of regulation by professional bodies and a high number of the tutors work in professional practice themselves. The students have to earn their employment by their professional competence, not by the academic credits they gain on accredited taught courses. On the other hand, in business, finance and law, employers have reported dissatisfaction with professionally prepared graduates and prefer to train their own staff recruited from 'non-relevant' disciplines.

Here are some of the obstacles perceived by academics:

- a) members of review panels are often unaware of the educational advantages of involving students in the design, operation and assessment of their own programmes of study;
- b) there is a lack of flexibility in the range of approved assessment techniques; unseen written examinations predominate;

- c) accreditation is often based on the structure, content and staff student contact hours of courses rather than on the demonstration of professional capability.

It is difficult to judge the extent to which these concerns of some academics are excuses for inaction or genuine obstacles to change. Sometimes the conservatism resides within academic boards and senates.

On their part the professional bodies have an obligation to protect the interests of clients and customers by ensuring that members have appropriate standards of competence. They have traditionally seen accreditation of courses on the basis of their content as the main means of securing that assurance. This pressure is increasing in Europe. Many bodies also argue that their procedures are more flexible than some academics assume, that recent changes in their regulations are more forward-looking and that progress would be made if more innovative proposals were submitted.

Our discussions with both sides have suggested a number of ways forward.

- a) Further dialogue on the most appropriate balance between knowledge and skills.
- b) A formal system of post-initial and continuing professional education and development on which continuing membership is dependent, thereby freeing initial higher education programmes to concentrate on helping students develop mastery of essential concepts, gain experience of the nature and values of the profession and build confidence in their ability to continue to learn from their experiences.
- c) The inclusion on review panels of more leading edge practitioners and employers, people with an understanding of capability processes and a commitment to the development of effective professional performance, and fewer people who are there by virtue of seniority and past achievement.
- d) The use of criteria for accreditation couched more in terms of capability outcomes and appropriate learning experiences, and less in terms of prescribed content.
- e) Illustrative syllabuses based on capability principles.
- f) Procedures for the accreditation of learning contracts negotiated between students, professionally relevant employers and higher education institutions, probably through delegated responsibility.
- g) Encouragement for the use of assessments based on how students use their professional knowledge rather than their mere possession of that knowledge.
- h) Jointly prepared initiatives - between academics and professional bodies - based on capability principles.
- i) More use of student negotiated 'live projects' with local employers or client based professional practices jointly supervised by college staff and professional practitioners.

By contrast there are many examples of educating for capability on courses that previously received validation by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) or in institutions with CNAA delegated powers of validation. The CNAA approach to external validation has been based on four principles, all of them consistent with the code of practice advocated by Higher Education for Capability for the accreditation of courses devised by students:

- a) Responsibility for the preparation of detailed proposals about content, process and methods of assessment rests with the institutions;
- b) General criteria and procedures related to the level of courses and ***the development of personal qualities relevant to capability*** are published by the CNAA;
- c) Proposals for courses have to be justified in terms of the published general criteria of the CNAA;
- d) The review panels include people drawn from other institutions, employers and relevant professional bodies.

The personal qualities referred to in item two above are:

***'the development of students' intellectual and imaginative powers; their understanding and judgment; their problem-solving skills; their ability to communicate; their ability to see relationships within what they have learned and to perceive their field of study in a broader perspective.... the development of an enquiring, analytical and creative approach, encouraging independent judgment and critical self-awareness.'* (CNNA Handbook, 1989)**

In other words, the criteria against which accountability is to be judged have been made explicit.

The success of this approach can be judged by the fact that polytechnics have raised their reputation for the quality of their work to the point where self validation is no longer seen as a contentious issue. With the demise of the Council and the designation of polytechnics as self-validating institutions, it is important that the four principles continue to be applied by academic boards and are transferred to senates as the universities build up their quality assurance procedures in readiness for the new funding arrangements.

The differences between the influences of the CNAA and the professional bodies on the design of capability courses may well be related to the fact that the former responds to local initiative and is concerned with learning outcomes and the development of skills and the latter constrains local initiative by pre-determining the content.

The Challenge for Higher Education Institutions

The nature and style of management and leadership in higher education institutions (HEIs) have a significant influence in the development of capability. As our examples indicate, most initiatives have come from individual or groups of academics working within institutional structures which were developed to support a very different tradition of education. New approaches inevitably test these structures. Navigating the pathways to change can be unnecessarily burdensome, requiring high commitment and political ingenuity for success. If the more obvious points of tension are removed, more initiatives can be made and the bluff of the constrained innovators who complain that 'the system is against them' can be called. With staff morale being tested by frequent and major changes in funding and administrative arrangements, help and positive encouragement for educational development would pay dividends.

Areas where action by HEIs would be most effective are institutional ethos, staffing policies, physical resources, educational resources, and quality assurance procedures.

Institutional ethos: the learning institution

In capability oriented institutions, learning is a common experience shared, at different levels and in different contexts, by researchers, teachers and students. Capability students can very well learn from and alongside researchers. Undergraduate experience of learner responsibility and accountability would greatly diminish the need to prepare post-graduate students for carrying out their own work, thereby reducing lead-times and doctorate wastage rates. Specialist teachers who are also scholars can help and enthuse students with their own learning, discussing concepts, current issues, underlying principles and methods of study. Teachers, in turn, can learn from the activities of their students.

A commitment to being 'a learning institution' chimes well with a commitment to Total Quality Management. TQM involves all participants (in a learning institution this would also include students) in taking more responsibility for raising the quality of their activities and working environment in accordance with the stated aims of the institution. The development of higher education for capability could flourish in such institutions. Those responsible for the learning, administrative and physical environments would be sensitive to the needs of students taking responsibility for their own learning; they would see changing the procedures to accommodate new needs as progress, not a burden. Rigid distinctions between those institutions mainly concerned with 'research' and those mainly concerned with 'teaching' may distract attention from their common interest in learning, encouraging the latter to see students as people who are there to be taught rather than to learn how to be capable learners.

With a commitment to being responsive to the learning needs of students, institutions can be effective in both attracting and retaining groups not previously attracted or able to apply. The examples in Part Two illustrate the many ways in which a capability approach has been found to be appropriate for varied intakes of students; indeed, in some cases capability programmes were devised precisely to cope with the variety of students coming forward. Widening access is not just a matter of squeezing more in. It also means helping those attracted to build on their distinctive experiences and work towards their intended personal or vocational goals.

Staffing issues

Many of our correspondents refer to low staff morale and a lack of support from within their institutions. Many would welcome a more pro-active stance by middle and upper management to replace their normal experience of constantly having to push for support. Promotion policies, appraisals, resource support and recognition are among the issues raised.

The tying of academic staff promotions to research and publications can discourage ambitious staff from participating in the development of innovation in teaching. If staff spend time on curriculum development, they have less time to devote to preparing publications, unless they work twice as hard and do both. Investment of personal time, intellectual rigour and emotional commitment can be just as great for the successful introduction of innovations in teaching as for the preparation of academic publications for one's CV. If the innovations relate to the development of programmes based on capability principles, the payoff for the department in terms of quality of student learning and relevance to the outside world can be considerable.

Reservations expressed about staff appraisal systems focus on two issues. First, there is concern that appraisal does not always use criteria related to the institution's mission statement or goals, particularly where goals refer to the development of student capability, relevance to the wider community and responsiveness to the educational and employment needs of students. In fact, the capability themes described in Chapter Two in the context of student capability could also form the basis of an effective approach to staff appraisal, focused on the concept of the teacher as a learner and researcher and teachers taking responsibility for their own development within the context of institutional goals.

The second concern about staff appraisal relates to the use of student feedback on staff performance, particularly where capability programmes are being developed within a predominantly traditional teaching environment. Student feedback on standard questionnaires is likely to focus on styles of delivery, the adequacy of notes and other features of didactic teaching. Research on student responses to being given responsibility for the first time refers to periods of stress and disorientation as students struggle with the demands of taking responsibility, perhaps causing temporary frustration with the course and their tutors. The questions asked in student feedback on capability programmes need to reflect capability based quality concerns and the different roles involved in capability tutoring. Personal interviews and retrospective appraisals would give a better impression of the effectiveness of teacher support. Equally, institutions need to devise base-line criteria appropriate to a capability environment and consistent with the institution's mission statement.

Organizational issues

Regular weekly timetables and fixed staff student contact hours sustain the beliefs that knowledge and skills are best dispensed in equal and regular doses, that education and learning are synonymous with classes and contact with teachers, and the worth of programmes of study can in Part Two be judged by the number of hours students spend under classroom instruction.

The capability approach is based on the very different principle that students are better motivated, understand more and achieve more if they are helped to manage their own learning. The teacher's role is also different, being more concerned with the provision of a supportive and rigorous environment within which students can take responsibility. Our correspondents make reference to being straight-jacketed by the even distribution of staff time. At the initial planning and negotiation stages, for instance, students may need frequent guidance, perhaps in small groups or occasionally on an individual basis. In later stages, when they are pursuing their studies, their need for personal contact is much reduced and rises again when they are reviewing their achievements and progress.

A student case-load approach offers more flexibility and reflects the nature of the relationship between tutor and student. An annual (or termly) calculation of contact time allows peaks and troughs without an overall increase in staff activity. By front loading staff support, particularly with non-standard students, overall wastage rates can be reduced and the quality of student learning enhanced. Many staff enjoy intensive periods of work if as a consequence there are quieter periods for recharging or developing their own academic interests.

Resources for learning

Innovation has a resource dimension. Many of the changes reported to us have been made 'on-the-hoof' whilst teachers have been busy doing other things. Staff need time and support to work through entirely different ways of using scarce resources. The challenge to managers of HEIs and indeed funding bodies is to recognise the importance of the time and space required for re-thinking and re-structuring. Any major company would expect to have to invest in the design, development and appraisal of new products in addition to its normal staff development activities. One of the reasons for the success of the Enterprise in Higher Education Initiative in stimulating change has been its

allocation of funds to release some staff time to develop new approaches. The individual amounts have been quite small and the return has been high.

Capability programmes encourage students to engage library and other learner resources directly. As teachers teach less, students use other resources more. Institutions help the introduction of capability programmes when their procedures for accessing computers, databases, photocopiers, videos and personal computers are readily open to students. Networked library services and computer assisted learning facilities can give students access to a much wider range of specialist expertise than is available even within the best subject departments. Effective provision and use of a wide range of learning resources can free teachers to concentrate more on helping students talk through what they are doing. A number of the examples show how students are often able to secure specialist resources (often superior to those available in the HEI) from outside agencies as part of jointly negotiated projects. A teacher dominated approach tends to confine students to using teacher provided materials.

Capability education involves a high priority being given to the development of systems (administrative and technical) for facilitating student access to learning resources of all kinds; it involves giving greater status to those responsible for managing the learning resources, *via* increasing their internal financial allocations and ensuring their membership of key committees, including those planning new programmes. If, as a consequence of being able to respond directly to the needs of individual students, learning quality rises and student attrition rates fall, investment in the expansion of the learning resources infra-structure is money well spent.

Institutional power structures

A major obstacle to change identified by many correspondents is an assumed reluctance on the part of boards of study and other key approving committees to sanction major changes in admissions, course structures and assessment methods. The previous section on The Challenge to Accrediting Bodies gives some guidance on how the procedures for course approvals can aid the introduction of capability programmes. HEIs can assist further by reviewing the membership of those key committees.

One consequence of traditional promotion policies in the universities is that many senior positions have become occupied by those who have been most successful in academic research and publications rather than specialists in educational methods. One influence of the CNAAs has been to stimulate expertise in curriculum development in the polytechnics and colleges. Their power structures reflect this, as do their internal procedures for quality assurance and programme validation. Consideration is given to the appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes; processes are discussed, as well as the content. The inter-relatedness of academic and organisational change is addressed. Internal quality assurance procedures are increasingly a feature of the whole HE sector. If these new internal instruments remain in the control of groups primarily concerned with the preservation of their own definitions of subject relevance, their potential for stimulating education for capability may not be fully realised.

The Challenge for Employers

Our examples clearly illustrate that effective academic employer collaboration can be a significant factor in the development of student capability. Employers offer students opportunities to a) experience the demands of the workplace, b) test their understanding of their college work through its application, c) appreciate the importance of personal skills, d) develop new skills and insights, e) have access to specialist materials and equipment not normally available to students, f) explore the relevance of their studies, and g) taste possible future careers. Successful contacts with employers can give students a sound base on which to develop their college work and increase their motivation.

College - employer collaboration can be still more effective when students have direct involvement in the negotiations, and when all parties concerned are committed to using the placement for the educational development of the student. Some of the most interesting examples involve students shopping around for placements which give them the kinds of learning experiences they need and employers making sure that students have those experiences and receive constructive feedback. Time is found for reviewing student plans, progress and achievements with the students themselves; students are trusted in front-line activities, working with researchers or directly with clients. Placements are fully integrated with the college-based programme.

Capability placements work well for employers too. They get motivated students who have thought out why they want to be there. They get students who are useful, who are bringing college expertise to bear on problems within their own organisation. Employers have the opportunity to directly influence the student's learning and to spot talent for future employment. They are helping to raise the quality and relevance of higher education. By participating in

student negotiated three way learning contracts they replicate business life and prepare students for responsible self-development within the context of institutional goals.

Not all the experience reported to us is so good. When times are hard, some employers have to cut back on their involvement. Despite strong employer support for the development of capability (usually at higher management levels) commitment and understanding vary enormously, even within the same company. There is a major task to educate more employers about the meaning and need for capability and why their business will depend on having staff who can manage change and take responsibility for their own performance. Difficulties appear to be most acute at local levels where hard-pressed line managers desperately need to recruit people with skills for particular tasks, however short-lived the usefulness of those skills might be. Some major companies who advocate the development of capability still compete for people from prestigious universities or from popular courses without reference to the nature of the student's learning experiences. Many industrial representatives who collaborate with higher education see courses purely in content terms, and do not understand the importance of the learning process. Major businesses like banks, for instance, send their staff on highly structured lecture based courses leading to professional qualifications when they could more effectively help their staff negotiate learning contracts with the local college giving access to specialist tuition and resources to support their work-based professional development.

From our discussions with academics, students and employers the situation is improved when

- a) employers monitor their recruitment patterns to see if they recruit from capability courses;
- b) recruiters ask how students used their higher education, set their own goals, monitored their own performance and managed their own learning;
- c) employers monitor the progress of recruits through their first years of employment according to their higher education experience and give constructive feedback to recruiters and colleges;
- d) employers educate their own staff about the kinds of qualities the company needs and the kinds of learning experiences which will help students develop them;
- e) employers give capable recruits responsible jobs to do, with opportunities and support for their further development;
- f) colleges stop asking 'what does industry need?' - industry as a whole does not have a clear or uniform answer - and start working in partnership with particular companies to help students negotiate their own appropriate programme and learning goals;
- g) colleges have the confidence to educate employers about the different ways they can educate students for employment and explain why capability approaches are in the employers' interests;
- h) colleges and employers get to know each others' business, as equal partners in developing personal and organisational effectiveness;
- i) employers serve on college committees and press for students to be given more responsibility and accountability for their own learning and ask how institutional mission statements are reflected in promotion and staff appraisal policies;
- j) employers give their capability recruits opportunity to set goals and manage their own progress;
- k) employers make their own expertise in staff development, staff appraisal and skills development more widely known and available to colleges;
- l) colleges involve employers in the supervision of student progress and in the assessment of student performance;
- m) large and prestigious companies take steps to educate smaller companies, including their own suppliers, about the importance of capability and the part they can play in its development;
- n) large and prestigious companies help to change the climate of opinion about the limitations of traditional forms of assessment and the validity of assessments based on what students can do with what they know;

- o) local Training and Enterprise Councils help smaller companies to arrange three-way learning contracts with students and colleges;
- p) capable graduates explore the opportunities potential employers offer for continuing personal and professional development, and the chance to work with initiative and responsibility.

In recent years, higher education has been criticised for not adequately preparing students for the world of work. Higher education has taken those criticisms seriously, particularly but not only in the polytechnics and the newer universities. Many changes have been made, and this book presents only a small sample of what is going on. Higher education has begun to understand its own roles better by making them more explicit. Some good practice is long-standing; academics are beginning to understand and explain its relevance more effectively.

Employers have a responsibility to match the commitment of higher education. The capability approach offers real advantages to companies: flexible responses to rapidly changing educational needs; short lead-times for new courses; more effective partnerships; better recruits. Capable recruits will help establish Total Quality Management; they will help the company respond more effectively to changing circumstances. TQM companies could make use of capability focused validation and accreditation procedures in their local HEI to give intellectual support to their own internal staff development activities and formal qualifications to their staff. The development of capability is in all our interests, and we all have a part to play in its promotion. Employers are in an excellent position to play a positive role and have the means to do so. Their interests go beyond the narrow demands of their own immediate recruitment needs; a capable society improves the quality of life of their employees and their customers.

The Challenge for Funding Councils

The challenge for funding bodies is to find ways of rewarding those institutions aspiring to develop the capability of students and to those who are achieving it. The experience of the Department of Employment's Enterprise in Higher Education Initiative is that even small amounts of investment in staff time and staff development can bring about significant changes in staff attitudes and practice. Many of the examples brought to our attention have been stimulated or assisted by the EHE scheme.

Government funding of higher education institutions is now tied to external assessments of the quality of provision. The Higher and Further Education Funding Councils have the leverage to stimulate changes at very little cost. Two tools are available to them: the criteria used for the assessment of quality, and the targeting of funds for particular activities.

Criteria for judging quality

It would not make sense if the criteria used for the assessment of quality rewarded existing practice when one of the purposes of the new funding arrangements is to improve the quality and relevance of practice. There are a number of possible criteria which come into this category.

There is little point, for instance, in giving extra reward to institutions for expanding numbers according to fashionable subject titles such as Business Studies or Technology if the student experience on those courses reinforces passive and dependent learning and does little to develop deeper levels of student understanding of the subject or promote their ability to act effectively in the wider world.

Quality judgments according to high A Level scores may ignore the potential for rewarding the progress students make from modest beginnings to high achievement (ie the value added through the quality of the service provided by the institution), and sustain the perpetuation of traditional styles of teaching (see The Challenge to Course Designers).

Rewarding high first destination employment rates when employers compete for recruits from the more prestigious institutions without reference to the quality of their learning experiences may sustain those institutions whose previous generations of graduates have contributed to the general criticisms of the 'unworldliness' or lack of initiative of graduates as a whole.

Capability education will not be promoted if external assessments of quality consider the nature of the students' educational experience according to traditional views of teaching. In the absence of viable alternatives the former Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council used the ratings of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), whose definitions of good quality include 'a well organised purposeful programme of teaching... lucid exposition... students respond intelligently... are provided with regular indications of their progress...'

Successfully taking responsibility for one's own learning, we argue, is a more rewarding and demanding educational experience than being responsive to purposeful teaching and appreciative of lucid teacher exposition. Being able to set, justify, negotiate and achieve one's own objectives within a rigorous environment, review one's own progress and demonstrate one's achievements against criteria negotiated with accrediting bodies and relevant employers is a better mark of quality than being able to receive and build on regular indications of progress from teachers, useful though such feedback and advice might be.

Moreover, HMI ratings are aggregated. Poor learning environments can mask otherwise good performance. Some of our correspondents complain that their innovations have had to be housed in marginal accommodation and have been developed at times of funding difficulties, contributing to an overall environmental impression of low quality.

Student capability will not be enhanced if assessments of quality are based on student performance in predetermined, separately tested and objectively measurable personal skills and qualities. Capability is an integration of specialist expertise, personal skills, self-esteem and values and can only be satisfactorily demonstrated through the effectiveness and appropriateness of actions taken, the explanations given, the support and co-operation achieved, and the learning derived from the experience. Separate assessments of skills will perpetuate the difference between the possession of knowledge and skills and the ability to use them effectively.

Higher Education for Capability will be promoted if external assessments of quality consider

- a) the relevance of an institution's aims or mission to the changing circumstances in the world outside, and the effectiveness of its internal procedures for ensuring their achievement;
- b) the extent to which students are encouraged to take responsibility and be accountable for significant aspects of their own learning;
- c) the effectiveness of the tutorial and institutional support for students taking responsibility and the responsiveness to their needs;
- d) the opportunities students have to relate their studies to their longer term employment or personal needs and aspirations;
- e) the commitment to promoting student learning from their experiences of being responsible and accountable and the rigour with which their learning achievements are judged;
- f) the effectiveness of any external participation in the planning, operation and assessment of student negotiated programmes;
- g) assessments of student performance based on the application of skills and knowledge, not just on the possession of knowledge;
- h) the longer term career performance of graduates based on feedback from employers.

Targeted funds

All major businesses invest in product development. If the Funding Councils wish to use their resources to stimulate the introduction of new capability programmes, they could usefully target funds for particular activities. For instance, where institutions make specific commitments to the development of capability programmes, support should be given to pay for the time needed for the essential preliminary work. Funding normally follows student numbers; there are no students on courses under development. Plans not fulfilled could lead to penalties in later years.

Funds targeted on the development of learning resources infra-structures, including IT systems, computer assisted learning, media resources, library materials and services, library and media resources staff, external links and study materials will help reduce student dependence on tutors, widen the range of expertise available to students and prepare students for the high technology world they must eventually join. The availability of learning resources will make it easier for institutions to switch the emphasis of their courses to student responsibility and for staff to concentrate on the provision of 'critical dialogue' on the quality of student learning.

From *Quality in Learning*, edited by John Stephenson and Susan Weil, published by Kogan Page, London in 1992.

Download the *Quality in Learning* Introduction file from the ICLML catalogue for details of other chapters in this book (www.iclml.com)

By giving priority to the development of capability programmes, the Funding Councils will also be helping institutions make effective provision for wider access into higher education. The greater the variety of student intake, the greater the need to make varied and flexible provision. As indicated in an earlier RSA report, 'more means different' (Ball 1989); the experience in the examples of capability programmes submitted to the RSA also indicates that different means more. Programmes which directly relate to the individual experiences of students can reduce attrition rates and save resources.

Concluding remarks

Increasing numbers of people in all sections of higher education are working to improve the quality and relevance of student learning by giving students opportunities to be responsible and accountable for what they do. Many are breaking new ground; most are challenging the traditional view that quality education can consist entirely of a sequence of lectures to passive students - however well prepared and delivered the lectures might be. A new culture is being developed in which the roles of teachers, students, employers and institutional administrators merge into a common commitment to learning. The vision in the original *Education for Capability Manifesto* of combining the best features of 'education' and 'training' in the same process is becoming a reality for many students. Students are developing 'can do' as well as 'know how'. All those involved in the preparation of this book hope that the examples presented and the issues raised will help our understanding of what educating for capability means in practice.

Note:

The section on the professional bodies was prepared with the assistance of James H Armstrong, a Past President of the Institute of Structural Engineers.