UGRLS Project Proposal: Researching the researchers: Exploring student experiences of research

1. Research Project Leader: Dr Anne Tallontire

2. Scholarship Project Supervisor: Dr Anne Tallontire (Project lead for Making Group Work Work), Dr Jen Dyer (project lead for Factors impacting Student Engagement in SEE) and Katie Livesey (Faculty Student Engagement and Personal Development Manager)

3. Working title of Scholarship Project: Exploring the value of the different opportunities for student experiences of research in the Schools of Geography and Earth & Environment

4. Period of Scholarship Project Work (see note i):

   End of Year 1 summer: 5 weeks (by mutual agreement between Scholar and Supervisory Team)
   During first semester of 2nd year: approx. 5 days for data collection – based on availability of Scholar
   During second semester of 2nd year: approx. 5 days for data collection – based on availability of Scholar
   End of Year 2 summer: 5 weeks (by mutual agreement between Scholar and Supervisory Team)

5. Summary of the research to which the Scholar will contribute:

   This project explores the different experience of students as they develop skills to undertake a research project in their final year of their undergraduate programme.

   This project will contribute and add value to an existing set of teaching and learning research projects being undertaken by colleagues in the School of Earth and Environment. The School has recently established a “Knowledge Exchange in Teaching and Learning” (KETL) which supports scholarship to enhance student education and provide a peer support for educators. Colleagues are engaged in projects such as:

   - Making Group Work Work and Factors Impacting Student Engagement
   - The Q-Steps initiative on quantitative skills development in the social sciences
   - Education for sustainability and the development of the Creating Sustainable Futures Discovery Theme
   - The Virtual Landscapes project in geological sciences and its roll out to other disciplines and to support students with disabilities.

   Colleagues in the KETL have an extensive database of literature on learning and teaching which will support new teaching and learning research projects and have plans for dissemination of guides for teaching.

   In finalising the design for the “Researching the Researchers” project the Scholar would have the opportunity to interact with projects based on their background and interests.

6. Summary of the work to be undertaken by the Scholar:

   The aim of this project is to explore whether and how the design of students’ programme of study and their choice of extra-curricular experiences support them in developing research skills. Conducting research involves a variety of skills; some of these are more obvious than others, and not all are necessarily taught in a degree programme, but are important for employability and professional development, as well producing a dissertation. In this project we want to explore how a student’s experiences on their course and other parts of university life can help them build up skills from a being taught to conducting an independent project.

   We have previously conducted research on skills development (e.g. in group work) and on what makes an ‘engaged’ student, but we’d like to build on that to explore how different activities that make up university
life help in enabling students to become researchers. For example, some students are active in societies or sports teams, some get involved as course reps, some concentrate on their academic work, some do a year abroad or in industry, or go to conferences: how do these activities relate to doing research? And how do different courses build up research skills?

7. **Detail of the work to be undertaken by the Scholar:**

The project would involve qualitative research on the learning and experience of students in the School. The Scholar would be involved in all aspects of the project from design to dissemination, with the close supervision of the supervisory team. We would anticipate the project would produce (anonymised) case studies of the various ‘journeys’ that different student have taken through their courses and the opportunities on offer in the School and how this has affected research skills development from the perspective of the students.

To help design the project and to create a framework for analysis, we anticipate using the Healey Matrix, (see figure 1). This matrix presents a pathway from school based learning (being taught) through research-led learning to research-based learning that is seen as necessary for success in a final year project (where they are supervised and supported, but have to be autonomous and self-reliant learners).

**Figure 1:** “The Healey Matrix “on the nexus between teaching and research


In this qualitative project, data collection methods would include semi-structured interviews with individuals, some repeated over the course of the project to get a sense of different phases, as well as focus groups to help in building up more general themes. The Scholar, guided by the supervisory team, would develop (anonymised) case studies and draw out key analytical themes and conclusions. Ultimately we would like the research to inform future curriculum development and programme enhancements, including the extra-curricular support and opportunities provided for students.

Whilst we would like the scholar to work with the supervisory team to refine the project research design, we would anticipate the following activities being carried out:

1. Participate in briefing on relevant projects and read relevant documents on related projects.
2. Conduct brief literature review
3. In collaboration with the supervisory team refine research objectives and develop research plan
4. Conduct pilot interviews and focus group;
5. Preliminary analysis and refinement of data collection tools
6. Data collection
7. Data analysis and write up
8. Communicate findings creatively and effectively (e.g. blog, briefing paper, poster, presentation, report)

Through the period of the UGRL, the Scholar would be invited to come along to workshops or seminars organised by the KETL and at the end of the project, the student would be invited to contribute to a presentation at the University’s Student Education Conference and also to participate in the British Conference of Undergraduate Research (aimed specifically at students as presenters and participants) and other conferences within the wider student engagement community.

8. **Detail of the Leadership development to be undertaken as part of the project:**

The project offers the opportunity to be involved in the full cycle of research, including refinement of the research design, through to development of findings and dissemination and with a large component of data collection and analysis. The data collection process will involve scheduling interviews and focus groups as well as planning and developing the research instruments to be used. The Scholar will have opportunities to present the research e.g. in the KETL in the School and at the University’s Student Education Conference.

9. **Outputs expected of the Scholar including the final report:**

- Preliminary Report including Literature review and detailed research plan and schedule (end of first summer, approx 1,500 words)
- Interview and focus group write ups (May 2018)
- Anonymised case studies (July 2018)
- PPT slides of key findings
- Final Project Report, approx 2,000 words, plus appropriate appendices. This would cover the whole project, including a reflection on the process of the research, relevance of findings and learning points for the Scholar (end second summer).

10. **Details of supervision arrangements**

Dr Jen Dyer and Katie Livesey will provide weekly supervision meetings during the project work period with at least three meetings per academic year with Dr Anne Tallontire. Dr Anne Tallontire will provide strategic direction, ensuring that the project is tied with school and faculty procedures and priorities and links with related projects. Dr Jen Dyer will offer support in research design and analysis and Katie Livesey will facilitate data collection and contribute to the development of research instruments and outputs.