

Institution: 10007140 Birmingham City University		
Unit of Assessment: 23 - Education		
Title of case study: Re-imagining and transforming teaching and learning in further education		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Matt O'Leary	Professor of Education	2015.07 - present
Professor Rob Smith	Professor of Education	2015.07 - present
Dr Vanessa Cui	Research Fellow in Education	2016.08 - present
Dr Fadia Dakka	Senior Research Fellow in Education	2016.07 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research by BCU's Practitioner Education Research Group (PERG) has made a significant contribution to re-imagining and transforming teaching and learning across further education (FE) in the UK and Republic of Ireland. Collaborative research with the FE workforce and its learners has been instrumental in raising awareness among policy makers and the education profession of the value and contribution of a historically marginalised sector, along with informing and improving sectoral and institutional teaching and learning policy and practice. The research led to the Reimagining FE conferences (2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019), one of the largest gatherings of FE practitioners in the UK and the sector-led movement #FEResearchmeet, which supports and promotes engagement with research and the development of research skills among FE practitioners. It has also informed and underpinned the Education and Training Foundation's national development programmes for FE leaders. PERG research has influenced policy debates: informing the Labour Party's agenda on promoting the transformative power of FE and directly shaping the policy focus of the sector's largest trade union body, the University and College Union (UCU).</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Our body of research on FE, undertaken across the UK and Republic of Ireland, has captured how the introduction of austerity measures in 2010 has impacted on teaching and learning policy and practice. Some of the research was conducted in collaboration with colleagues at Edgehill University (Professor Vicky Duckworth) and Dublin City University (Dr Justin Rami).</p> <p>Studies by O'Leary and Rami (2017) (R01) and Duckworth and Smith (2018) (R02) examined the impact of FE policy reform on teaching and learning in England and Republic of Ireland since 2010. O'Leary and Rami's research revealed how FE colleges were forced to reduce full-time staffing and resources for teaching and learning as a result of the ongoing funding cuts. Reduced budgets resulted in a climate of uncertainty and instability in FE providers. This study also found that there was a lack of FE practitioner voice and representation in central government policy, meaning that local, expert knowledge about the needs of the most vulnerable students was not being heard, with the result that government reform was revealed as having a negative impact on this group.</p> <p>Duckworth and Smith's work has theorised policy reform as three forces of objectification currently taking place in FE: 1) the instrumentalist 'skills' discourse; 2) the qualification framework and expectations underpinned by a linear learning progression model; and 3) the</p>		

competitive marketisation of FE. Collectively, all three contribute to prescribed knowledge and the reproduction of inequality through educational practices. The findings from these studies acted as a catalyst for our subsequent work on re-imagining FE teaching and learning, as they helped to identify that FE pedagogy can be a key driver for reconnecting students and practitioners to education as a meaningful, valuable and transformative dynamic in their lives and communities.

While demonstrating the impact that policy reform has had on FE learners, practitioners and providers (R01, R02), our research has also informed re-imagined conceptualisations of FE pedagogies that are underpinned by close collaboration between practitioners and learners. In particular, our work has focused on knowledge production and dissemination in FE teaching and learning as a means to inclusive, democratic and sustainable FE pedagogies (R02, R03, R04, R05). Central to these studies is our philosophy of collaborating and co-producing research with FE practitioners and learners. Smith and Duckworth's research (2018) (R03, R05) illustrates that participatory research can play a key role in driving inclusivity and social justice in FE teaching and learning. In particular, that the use of digital tools and platforms can be a powerful way to capture and share FE learner and practitioner voices. O'Leary et al's research (2019) (R04) has offered a re-imagined perspective on leadership that conceptualises leadership as a shared practice and collective responsibility but also places FE practitioners' experiences at the centre of improving teaching and learning in terms of empowering them with the agency to drive their own continuous professional development. The findings revealed practices and philosophies of leadership in FE colleges that empowered practitioner-led improvements in ways that management-led initiatives struggled to achieve. The research showed that practitioners are best placed to improve teaching and learning by identifying and targeting their own professional needs. Senior leaders and managers have an important role to play in establishing the conditions in which this can take place. The implications for the FE workforce are that leadership approaches to improving teaching and learning need to actively involve those that teach, listening to and learning from practitioners by drawing on their expertise and experience.

This body of work was supported by two externally funded projects between 2017 and 2019. In total, these projects received £145,785 in funding: £86,794 from UCU (of which BCU received £43,397 and Edge Hill University received £43,397) and £59,001 from the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R01.** O'Leary, M. and Rami, J. (2017) 'The impact of austerity in Further Education: Cross-cultural perspectives from England and Ireland', chapter in Bartram, B. (Ed) (2017) International and Comparative Education. Abingdon: Routledge, 74-86. <https://www.open-access.bcu.ac.uk/6896/1/O%27Leary%20%26%20Rami%20-%20Final%20version%20of%20chapter.pdf>
- R02.** Duckworth, V. and Smith, R. (2018), "Breaking the triple lock: further education and transformative teaching and learning", Education and Training, Vol. 60 No. 6, pp. 529-543. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-05-2018-0111> (accessed: February 2021)
- R03.** Duckworth, V. and Smith, R. (2018). 'Creative Dissemination, Learners' Lives and Further Education'. In Grummell, B. and Finnegan, F. (2018). Doing Critical and Creative Research in Adult Education. London: Sense. <https://brill.com/view/title/56609?contents=editorial-content> (accessed: February 2021)
- R04.** O'Leary, M., Smith, R., Cui, V. and Dakka, F. (2019). The role of leadership in prioritising and improving the quality of teaching and learning in further education: final project report to FETL. FETL. Online: <https://fetl.org.uk/publications/the-role-of-leadership-in-prioritising-and-improving-the-quality-of-teaching-and-learning-in-further-education/> (accessed: February 2021)
- R05.** Duckworth, V and Smith, R. (2019). Transformative Teaching and Learning in Further Education: summative report for the University and College Union Transforming Lives and Communities project. London: UCU. <https://www.open-access.bcu.ac.uk/7754/1/TTL%20in%20further%20education%20Summative%20report.pdf> (accessed: February 2021)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Working collaboratively with the FE workforce, our research has offered a reimagined vision of FE that places learners, practitioners and their communities at the centre of the teaching and learning agenda. This vision has informed national policy and changed practice across FE providers.

Capacity building and the professional development of FE practitioners

Our work has elevated the importance of sustainable knowledge production and dissemination in FE that places practitioners at the centre (R01, R04, R05). This has led to a series of events, initiatives, movements and investments in practitioner-led research and inquiries to inform FE teaching and learning policy and practice. Since 2016, BCU has hosted one of the largest national conferences for FE practitioners, #ReimaginingFE, which has regularly attracted over 100 participants from a range of FE providers across the sector, including adult and community education, offender learning/prisons, general FE colleges, sixth form colleges, college-based higher education providers, training providers, work-based learning providers, private sector as well as higher education, trade unions and local councils [S01]. The conference is particularly significant in the way it, uniquely for the sector, brings together a diverse group of stake-holders including policy-makers, funding agencies, senior leaders, teachers and teacher educators. A key impact of the conference is on FE practitioners' development as researchers. 38 conference participants were supported to develop their conference contributions into published articles disseminated in two special journal issues, edited by O'Leary and Smith in 2018 and Savage (PhD student supervised by O'Leary) in 2019. Another direct impact from #ReimaginingFE has been the emergence of a nationwide, grassroots movement #FEResearchMeet [S02] that supports and promotes engagement with research and the development of research skills among FE practitioners. Over 450 FE teachers and staff have participated in this movement [S02]. This level of public engagement with our work led to the largest FE trade union in England, UCU, funding FE staff to carry out research into aspects of their own practice related to transformative teaching and learning [S03].

Our work has shaped the content and focus of national professional development programmes offered by the Education Training Foundation (ETF), the sector's most influential workforce development body. As part of the ETF's 'Advanced Practitioner' and 'Leaders of Advanced Practitioners in FE' programmes, O'Leary et al's research (R04) has been used to provide the conceptual underpinning for an innovative leadership module and accompanying resources aimed at middle managers to improve FE teaching and learning [S04]. These national programmes were first delivered in November 2020 to groups of 20+ FE practitioners, with O'Leary as a key consultant. Work by Sam Jones and David Powell from the FE Research and Scholarly activity working group at #ReimaginingFE is also referenced by ETF in their learning materials [S04].

Dame Ruth Silver, President of the Further Education Trust for Leadership, praised the quality and significance of work by O'Leary et al (R04) and highlighted how the research had made a "serious and substantial contribution to the sector's understandings of leadership, teaching and learning" [S05].

Shaping institutional practice

BCU's research has been instrumental in informing institutional reform in FE institutions in the UK and Republic of Ireland. One example is Central Bedfordshire College's use of O'Leary et al's work (R04) "as the main blueprint" to transform the College's teaching and learning [S06] after an Ofsted inspection that rated the college 'requires improvement'. The College used the research report to lead a staff development programme designed to "transform from a culture of 'them and us' among practitioners and managers to a collaborative working environment fostering support, trust and reflection" [S06]. Subsequent Ofsted monitoring visits recognised the significance of progress made, which the College's Principal, Dr Ali Hadawi, attributes directly to the impact of O'Leary et al's work [S06].

Another beneficiary from our work is Bedford College Group (BCG) which has benefited directly from staff involvement in the #ReimaginingFE conferences [S02]. Following her experience as one of the convenors of the Research and Scholarly activity working group at #ReimaginingFE, Sam Jones, a teacher educator at BCG, went on to lobby the senior leadership team for the formal recognition and financial support of research and scholarly activity in her workplace. BCG has now “transformed into a research college with funding commitments to its staff to support practitioner research and uses research as basis to make their strategic decisions” [S02]; Jones was appointed BCG research and scholarship lead. One direct impact of this has been the college group’s investment in a practitioner-led research initiative - the Bedford College Group Research Network Blog [S06] – which embodies the key message from our work on the importance of FE practitioners’ role in knowledge production and dissemination. Since its launch in 2017, the blog has developed international reach and regular readership with over 100 views for each blog post [S06]. They also developed a collaborative partnership with Central Bedfordshire College on a funded teaching, learning and assessment project which reached 200 staff across the two colleges and focused on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment practices across the two colleges; this was an outcome of their staff participating in #ReimaginingFE conferences [S02].

Dublin Adult Learning Centre has adopted the digital methods of gathering, exploring and sharing life stories and education biographies [S06] developed by Duckworth and Smith (R03) to “capture the wider benefits of adult literacy” [S06]. The Centre recognises that capturing the wider benefits of adult literacy is a difficult and complex challenge due to the diversity of learners’ needs and achievement but the methodology developed by Duckworth and Smith enables inclusiveness when capturing the diverse range of adult literacy practices [S06]. “It is underpinned by equality principles, it is in their own words, it is accessible and it is powerful”, and “as they are videos they can be understood by the learner, it is not a piece of research done on them that they cannot read” [S06].

Informing the debate

Nationally, our research work has informed policy and political debates on a re-imagined vision of FE that empowers learners, practitioners and their communities. Duckworth and Smith’s work (R02, R03, R05) provided tangible evidence which was used to inform Labour’s education agenda at the 2019 General Election on a transformative FE sector that recognises the “substantial social, as well as economic, benefits to lifelong learning” [S07]. This body of work has also provided evidence to support UCU’s campaign for the improvement of FE in the UK and for the provision of high quality education with greater investment in FE teaching [S08]. Jeremy Corbyn (then Leader of the Labour Party) spoke about the party’s support of UCU’s campaign for improving FE provision with reference to Duckworth and Smith’s work [S09]. Robert Halfon (then Conservative Minister of Education) referenced the project in a speech on skills saying “I have been impressed by stories that the UCU are sharing, which demonstrate the transformative role FE can have on people’s lives and shows how it helps us to achieve social justice” [S09].

Increasing recognition of FE

In her foreword to Duckworth and Smith’s report (R05), Angela Rayner (then Shadow Secretary of State for Education) welcomed the report for its recognition of the transformative effect of individuals’ micro encounters with FE and the benefits students’ perceive for their lives, families and communities as a consequence of their participation. [S09]. One of the outputs from Duckworth and Smith’s work is an open website sharing resources aimed at raising public consciousness of the impact of FE teaching and learning: <https://transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk/>. It includes many inspiring stories from FE learners and teachers. By June 2019 when the project concluded its research, the website had attracted 14,000 users and more than 87,724 page views accessed from across the UK, Europe, North and South America, Asia, Africa and Australia [S10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)**S01: Corroborating evidence of impact of #ReimaginingFE conference on development of practitioners' research engagement and capability**

2017, 2018, 2019 #ReimaginingFE conference data

Research in Post-Compulsory Education Special Issue, 2018, 23(1) and Special edition

CSPACE Journal (2019) Vol 2 (1)

S02: Corroboration of impact on practitioners across the FE sector

Testimonial from Advanced Practitioner of The Bedford College Group [Named Corroborator 001]

Social media account #FEresearchmeet

S03: Evidence of impact on UCU's decision to invest in FE practitioner/sector development

UCU FE scholars scheme funding call

S04: Corroboration of impact on sector-wide workforce development body's national programmes

Education Training Foundation's learning materials

S05: Testimonial on impact on leadership and teaching and learning in FE sector

Testimonial from President of the Further Education Trust for Leadership [Named Corroborator 002]

S06: Corroboration of impact on FE institutions

Principal of Central Bedfordshire College statement in FE Week article

Testimonial from Principal of Central Bedfordshire College [Named Corroborator 003]

Reports of Central Bedfordshire College staff development activities

The Bedford College Group Research Network Blog

Testimonial from Director at Dublin Adult Centre

Blog post 'Now I can read' by Dublin Adult Learning Centre

S07: Corroboration of impact on Labour party policy development

Labour's Lifelong Learning Commission report, pages 15 and 16.

S08: Trade Union's policy campaign on FE investment

UCU campaign on FE Transforming Lives

S09: Recognition by Members of Parliament in national political debates

Labour Party Leader Jeremy Corbyn's speech on the importance of FE

Conservative Minister of Education Robert Halfon's speech on the transformative role of FE

Shadow Secretary of State for Education Angela Rayner's foreword to UCU report

S10: UCU Transforming Lives website visit data

Transformative Teaching and Learning in Further Education report pages 16 and 20.