

Chapter 3

Educational Development and Strategic Planning

Shân Wareing

Why strategic planning?

The University of Natal changed over a twelve year period from recruiting predominantly white students with conventional educational backgrounds and recognized entry qualifications to recruiting predominantly black students, often without standard entry qualifications and with incomplete school education. The university put in place support structures and curriculum changes to reduce the impact of some of the disadvantages experienced by its black students. Over time the university found a pattern emerging of students with non-standard entry qualifications performing better in their degrees than those from traditional educational backgrounds.

Teaching is an intervention which allows someone to learn as fully as they are able. Universities and colleges should provide students with the structures and support they need to learn, and recognise and minimise the barriers to learning which do not relate to a student's ability. We are still only part of the way along the journey of understanding what we need to provide our students with in order to enable them to learn best, what kinds of interventions can and should be made, what skills and attributes are needed by teachers and leaders in post compulsory education. Strategic planning in educational development is about finding out what should be done to improve our provision for students, and putting the resources and infrastructure in place to enable those changes to happen.

The need for strategic planning in educational development, and indeed in any field of organizational endeavour, is indisputable. Strategic planning is necessary to align institutional priorities or, in everyday terms, to ensure the right hand knows what the left hand is doing. It enables the delivery of institutional goals by focussing effort. It can increase the effectiveness of resources through appropriate deployment. It can increase the institutional influence of educational development. It is a necessary stage in translating high level institutional direction statements into concrete operational plans. It is a mechanism for demonstrating accountability internally and externally. It can contribute to the recognition and acknowledgement of achievement, fostering a culture of success. It can be a means to set the agenda and provide leadership. It should be integral to the effective, ethical and prudent use of resources. It can aid communication and provide relative stability and security in times of uncertainty and change.

There is another side to strategic planning though, which we must fully consider, which is the gap between the rhetoric and the reality. Smith (forthcoming) explores the discourse of institutional learning and teaching strategies, and how alienating it can be for the staff on whom the strategy depends for implementation.

As a consequence of the lack of buy-in from staff in the front line of university activity, there is 'a gap between what is designed into policy and what is achieved' (Newton 2000, cited in Smith, forthcoming). Joep Schrijvers (2004) makes the same point more savagely: 'Much of today's professional training is little more than language training. People suddenly start coming out with such terms as "paradigms", "step plans", "typologies", "action plans", "audits", "governance models" and the like... At some point in their careers, professionals realise they've been taken in by intellectual drivel. Sure, they've got an arsenal of neat professional models, but they're faced with a day-to-day existence that's light years away. It grates and groans; nothing fits any more' (Schrijvers 2004 p15).

This chapter attempts to navigate a pathway between the empty rhetoric of strategic planning (Schrijvers's 'intellectual drivel') and the possibility of implementing productive institutional change which results in better education for students.

Strategic planning in Learning and Teaching has been officially on the national agenda in England since 1997, when the report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE, or the Dearing Report) recommended that HEIs should develop Learning and Teaching Strategies. From 1999, the Higher Education Funding Councils in England required higher education institutions to write institutional learning and teaching strategies, in order to attract a stream of funding called the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund.

At that time, according to a review undertaken by Graham Gibbs, most English higher education institutions reported that they either had or were working on an Learning and Teaching Strategy, although "about 90 per cent of learning and teaching strategies are either drafts or in their first cycle of implementation."

HEFCE 1999 paragraph 28

Of course, the production of institutional Learning and Teaching Strategies is only one aspect of the strategic planning which a leader in educational development might undertake. They might also undertake strategic planning with their unit, or in other aspects of university or college policy, such as the overall Strategic Plan for the organization, or in a specific related area, such as human resources, widening participation or research. However, the processes, benefits and potential problems will be common to any strategic planning process. The remainder of the chapter will be concerned with strategic planning either in general terms, or in terms of institutional learning and teaching strategies. It should be understood however, that this is intended to refer to all kinds of strategic planning.

Defining Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is an abstract term. What it actually consists of, and what is 'the best thing to do' in a given situation, is highly context dependent. Being strategic could mean:

- Thinking long term
- Prioritisation
- Perceiving chains of cause and effect
- Analysis of levers for, and obstacles to, change
- Factoring in cost benefits
- Identifying and seizing opportunities
- Setting goals and milestones
- Being politically astute e.g. brinkmanship; engineering trade-offs; mapping indirect pathways to goals; camouflaging real intentions;
- Balancing leading from the front with consultation and joint decision making

Some of these ideas are explored in more depth below.

Thinking long term: getting the timing right

Question: What's the secret of a good double act? Answer: ... [long pause]... timing.

Timing is as essential to institutional change as it is to humour. Institutional strategic documents are written for a specific period of time, commonly in the region of five years. Strategies are often revised fully after three or four years, when either many of the substantial targets have been achieved, or it is apparent that they are no longer appropriate or achievable. Increasingly we recognise that strategies should not be regarded as if set in stone but should be adapted year on year as our understanding of the context changes or indeed as the context itself changes. Getting the timing right for change is very hard. Too slow, and you lose all sense of momentum and urgency and everyone carries on as before. Too fast, and you neglect the infrastructure and the cultural changes, nothing happens... and everyone carries on as before.

One reason for setting milestones (i.e. interim targets) is that they provide a measure of change in the short to medium term. This helps focus effort and raise morale. Under- or over-achieving against your milestones enables you to reshape your strategy after six months or a year, instead of having to wait five years to see if it was effective, when it is too late to redirect resources and rhetoric.

Milestones also ensure you consider what early signs of success or progress would be. This in itself is helpful, because it helps you visualise the future more clearly, which assists with identifying previously unseen obstacles and therefore increases the chances of avoiding them. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, visualising the future helps you believe in your plan, fostering confidence which you can communicate to others.

Quick wins

When a Head of Educational Development produced the final version of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, a canny colleague praised it for containing a significant proportion of goals which had already been or were nearly

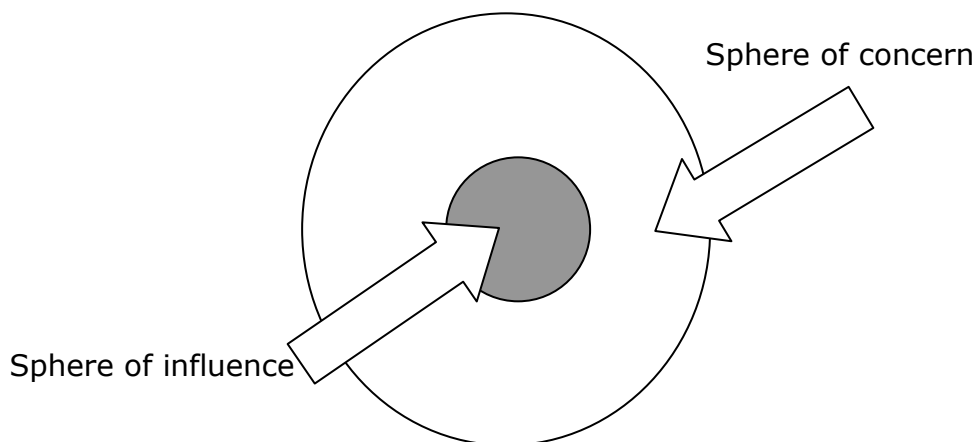
met, ensuring (one hopes) that at least the first year's report would be positive. The importance of an early positive report should not be underestimated: you will undoubtedly be seeking flexibility or increased resources – this is obviously much more likely to succeed if the first report is favourable.

Identifying and seizing opportunities

Another benefit of detailed strategic planning is to enable you to identify and seize opportunities. Most people in higher education feel they have too many things to do. They cannot get them all done. But currents of opportunities stream by every day: opportunities to bid for funds; other teams of people who are trying to do the same thing with whom to collaborate and share resources; eager, able people whose energy and enthusiasm will provide buoyancy on tough days. Seizing opportunities is a necessary part of getting what you want done. However, it is important to be discerning about opportunities, in order not to spread yourself too thinly or disperse your efforts.

Covey's model (Figure 1) of the spheres of influence and concern is valuable for analysing opportunities and preventing you going too far off course. The inner circle represents the areas of your work which you have the power to influence, where you can take action and marshal resources. The outer circle represents the areas of your work where you may feel concern for their outcome and their effectiveness, but you have no direct capacity to take or prevent actions. By concentrating your energies of the sphere of influence, you become more effective, which increases your sphere of influence. By focussing your activities in your sphere of concern, you become less effective because you are unable to deliver results in this sphere, which results in your sphere of influence contracting. Evaluating whether an opportunity fits into your sphere of influence or your sphere of concern is a quick way to screen a proposal.

Figure 1: Spheres of influence and concern



timeframes against under-resourced activities is a recurrent reason for failure. To

avoid this, you must identify what needs to be in place prior to achieving a specific target, and factor these preliminary stages into your estimate of the time it will take to do it. You must have something in your head, if not on paper, similar to a gantt chart where it is clear to you how time and resources will be spent in the accomplishment of a target. Some things will take longer than you would hope. However, a benefit of laying out your plans with their foundation stones in this way is that you see where there are quick wins to be had: strategic prizes that will contribute to your overall direction with no additional effort. By making these explicit, you can offset the negative effect of the longer time frame for the projects with many resource-intensive stages. You can also identify times when resources will be under particular pressure, allowing you to intervene to prevent disaster, and identify slack times, when you will be able to redirect resources.

In case this seems too optimistic a perspective on planning, here's Schrijvers' view:

Every one of today's professionals has undergone massive training in long-term strategic planning and has learnt all about models and step plans. Yet most of them can't think beyond today's lunch appointment. Sure, they have plans, but they are seldom able to explain how those plans relate to the current climate or the company's present-day situation.

Yet this is something a good politician can easily master. Determine now what the next three steps could be. What will happen if I do this? And what will I do if somebody else does that? And what...? Not only is the "what if" method suitable for analysing scenarios, but it can also help you anticipate possible results.

I believe many professionals find this difficult because although they have the intellectual prowess needed to design a step plan, they lack the imagination to visualise how a power play might develop from the current situation. Anybody who combines analytical ability with imaginative insight can gain a distinct advantage in any power play.

Schrijvers 2004 38-39

To illustrate Schrijvers' point, here is an example of a failed strategic plan. A Dean went to see a Head of Educational Development on a cold wet Friday afternoon. 'We've finally agreed to close down the department of philosophy' he said, 'and the letters have gone into the post. The department staff will receive them by Monday. I've come to let you know that I'm recommending two members of staff are redeployed into your unit. I'm afraid you won't have any say in the matter; I've just come to tell you as a courtesy before the staff in question come to you to discuss the matter'. The Dean's goal was to eliminate the financial burden of a department with poor student recruitment without incurring the costs of redundancies or the accompanying risks of legal action. However, the Dean had not factored into his plans the agency of the Head of Educational Development, and his capacity to discuss the situation with Human Resources, nor any of the HR

guidelines around redeployment (that there must be a vacancy, that there must be a match of skills and experience, or at least the assumption that a match could be achieved with additional training and development, and that all parties must be consulted beforehand). Once these guidelines came to light, the Dean's plans came to nothing: a clear example of failure to plan past lunchtime.

Obstacles to change

Understanding levers for change and barriers must be incorporated into any successful strategic planning. Universities are often very stable organizations, and for good and for ill, do not change readily. Some of factors responsible for this are:

- (1) The psychological contract with the university is different for an academic compared to employees in many other organizations. Academic staff often perceive themselves as semi-autonomous professionals, accountable primarily to the community of their academic discipline, not to the name that appears on their monthly salary notification.
- (2) Within the university, organizational units can have a high level of independence. Colleges, departments, schools, course or programme teams may have distinct and independent sub-cultures.
- (3) Effective communication is difficult. There are too many mailings, too many emails, too much to read; staff rooms and noticeboards hardly exist. Getting messages out is very hard.
- (4) Power and resources are often distributed according to historical development, not any rational current analysis of the needs of the organization. Finding out who you need to talk to get something done is not transparent, and indeed can take years of close anthropological observation.

Levers for Change

The strongest and most effective advocates for learning and teaching are students. You can involve them directly, through focus groups and surveys, Student Union representatives, and student partnerships. You can make use of their opinions and actions as indicated by the National Student Survey, and by recruitment, retention and achievement statistics.

External sources of funding are another source of leverage. The great success in recent years in terms of impact on university behaviour has been the Research Assessment Exercise, which has profoundly permeated the consciousness of the Academy. RAE success promises personal status in the eyes of the academic discipline community, which largely controls research opportunities and career prospects of individual academics. The RAE, unlike many initiatives, is understood at all levels of management in the university. Sources for external and additional funding for teaching are increasingly impacting on HEI behaviour and status.

Other levers for change include all your colleagues who care about their teaching. The commitment of staff to their students and the desire to teach well and support students effectively can be located throughout an HEI, even if it takes more searching out in some places than others. In a study into academic career

trajectories in a research-led university, I concluded from interviews with staff that there was a far greater and more passionate commitment to teaching than was perceived by the senior management team, and this was a huge source of potential energy and inspiration. (Wareing 2004b)

Cultural change in relation to learning and teaching is vital to institutional change. For this reason it is important to prioritise activities which will develop institutional support, and create a multitude of well-informed and confident voices in support of learning and teaching initiatives. Examples of initiatives which can promote this include Postgraduate Certificates in Learning and Teaching and other professional development activities; grants and secondments; promotions for teaching activities; and pedagogic research. If you are in an institution where you sometimes feel like a lone voice, a priority should be to create a community of like-minded people.

Levers created from external imperatives need careful handling, in order not to provoke cultural opposition to outside impositions. However, they can be enormously powerful aids to change, and include legislation (for example, on disability, and race and ethnicity) and quality assurance processes.

Your money where your mouth is: resource as a indicator of intuitional commitment

We should be wary of undertaking under-resourced projects. By and large you can only deliver according to the resources you've got, and if there's a mismatch between what was put in and what is expected out of it, someone will be disappointed. An extremely simple but powerful model of resourcing is the 'pyramid of purpose'. It requires alignment of at every level of organizational activity (mission, strategy, operational plan, financial planning and activities). Where alignment is created, there is a hugely increased chance of success. Surprisingly often, there is a lack of alignment institutionally between stated priorities, organizational structures, activities undertaken and funding. It is important to recognise this aspect of organizational behaviour, and while not allowing it to make us cynical, to take account of it in our own planning processes.

Michael had a salutatory experience where he was asked by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee to write a paper on how to reward excellent teachers. He went away and started work, and as he typed, the phrases and structures began to seem strangely familiar. Eventually, prompted by a strong sense of *déjà vu*, he searched his electronic folders, and finally found a paper written three years previously for the same committee on the same topic, in which he had argued the same points as in the paper he was currently writing. Rather shocked at the implication that in a role where he was supposed to be contributing to institutional change in learning and teaching, he was in exactly the same place as he had been three years previously, he asked his mentor, Sue, about it. Sue said that this was typical committee behaviour; committees can pick up and drop

ideas very easily without necessarily thinking through the implications. They can also delegate as an indicator of progress, but with no intention of supporting the recommendations of the eventual report. The production of Committee Minutes which record progress towards a target which is never achieved is one device HEIs use to placate demands from external bodies with which they do not intend to comply. Sometimes the best thing to do was confront the committee with the real implications of their request in terms of resources, Sue said, in order to point out that although it might seem like a good idea, the institution did not really care enough about the idea to fund it properly.

Picking your battles

Another aspect of strategic planning illustrated by the story of Michael's committee is that it is sometimes strategic to put battles you don't want to fight on the back burner, or kick them into the sand or the long grass (pick your cliché here). This is the strategy adopted by the committee, which did not actually want to achieve a target but needed to be seen to be taking action. In the case of educational development, it may be expedient to delay on an area of activity in order to prevent the alienation of staunch supporters and loss of credibility through fighting a battle that won't be won this century. It is also a risk that by focussing resources on a venture predetermined to fail, other, more valuable, projects may be sacrificed. As Schrijvers (2004) writes "You have two sources of power within easy reach: the power to delay and the power of the network." (p39) Networking as a source of power is explicit in Wenger's concept of Communities of Practice, which is discussed below.

Communication, or the Learning and Teaching Strategy that no one could understand

Anyone who becomes successful at institutional change will learn that if you email out a new policy in the expectation that one single person in your institution will follow it, you are deluded. Do not imagine that you can communicate anything to people by email or by means of any document in a way that will make them change their behaviour. The same applies to sending out hard copy handbooks on quality assurance, guidelines on how to minute a committee meeting, full economic costing, Intellectual Property rights, consultancy fees, staff appraisal and finance, and sadly, Learning and Teaching Strategies. Etienne Wenger's 'Communities of Practice' model offers a very powerful explanation of this phenomenon.

Wenger (1998) identifies two central concepts: participation and reification: "...in participation we recognize ourselves in each other, in reification we project ourselves onto the world"(p58).

Participation refers to a process of taking part and also to the relations with others that reflect this process. It suggests both action and connection...I will use the term participation to describe the social experience of living in the

world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises. Participation is both personal and social. (Wenger 1998 pp55-56).

Reification is "to treat (an abstraction) as substantially existing, or as a concrete material object"... Etymologically, the term reification means "making into a thing"... We project our meanings into the world and then we perceive them as existing in the world, as having a reality of their own. (Wenger 1998 p58)

When we write a strategic plan, it is a process of reification. When the plan is interpreted and implemented, that is a process of participation. Participation and reification are complementary. 'If participation prevails – if what matters most is left unreified – then there may not be enough materials to anchor the specificities of coordination and to uncover diverging assumptions. This is why lawyers always want everything in writing'. (Wenger 1998 p65) If however, reification dominates at the expense of participation, the Learning and Teaching Strategy will have no impact because it will remain a document on a shelf or a website: it will not be part of people's daily activities, conversations and plans. Learning and Teaching Strategies are only effective if they are implemented by lecturers, technicians, study support tutors, departmental administrators, librarians, Heads of Department and all the other categories of staff whose work has a direct impact on the student experience.

Karen Smith, in her forthcoming study of nine Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategies, emphasises that 'staff are not passive recipients of policy... they are fundamental in how the policy gets played out in practice; they can have ways of 'not making it happen' (Smith, forthcoming, including a citation from Newton 2003 p436). One of the main aspects of the language of Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategies that Smith criticises is how 'highly impersonalized they are'. She notes the absence of staff and students as actors or agents.

Mention of staff is ...infrequent either as the object or the subject of a clause. When they do occupy subject positions, they are often referred to in the passive voice; they are, then, affected by an action, rather than its actor. Such representations, especially of staff, seem to represent a rather managerialist approach to higher education, an approach which is defined by 'centralizing control and an erosion of the contribution of academics to institutional policy' (Harvey and Knight, 1996, p69). If staff do not feel that they can contribute to policy, that their voice is not heard, and that they are not represented, they are less likely to engage with it.

(Smith forthcoming)

Results from a small study conducted amongst academic and senior managers into their reactions to the language of learning and teaching strategies resulted in comments such as:

"pure corporate university speak which we all do in our College documentation - a shared (if stylistically and ideologically repellent) discourse."

"full of mantras and management speak. The use of market language (human resources, delivery, resources etc) is especially flagrant here."

"very difficult to follow - uses all the usual jargon often not defined."

"It reads as though it was composed by Microsoft Auto-summarise,"

"a management-strategy-jargon thing"

Wareing 2004a

The hostility to the language of strategic planning in learning and teaching is clear in these comments. It may well be that the hostility is in part a response to the feeling of exclusion which the language instils, as Smith identifies. To engender institutional ownership of a strategy, it is advisable both to examine the language in which is written, and the processes of its creation. However, there is still a wide gulf between identifying the need for wider institutional ownership, and actually achieving it.

Leadership vs. ownership

One of the most difficult balances to strike in strategic planning, as already illustrated in the section above, is between leadership and ownership. Learning and Teaching Strategies depend on staff across the entire organization for their implementation. Implementation usually means doing something differently, and perhaps something additional. In order to accomplish this, people need to feel a sense of ownership for the strategy. However, there are very good reasons why people do not readily change what they do. These may include:

- 1) People feel they already have too much work to do, so they cope by ignoring anything extra
- 2) They feel they have too much work to do, so they don't have time to think through the implications of change
- 3) They feel change has been imposed on them by someone who doesn't understand their job or share their values
- 4) They feel change has been imposed on them by someone whose authority they do not recognise
- 5) They don't understand the change
- 6) They don't perceive any benefits to accrue from the change
- 7) They perceive the change to be detrimental to themselves or to others
- 8) They don't know about the change because they weren't communicated with effectively.

Strategic planning must recognise these perceptions and engage with them. It is also important to recognise that there may be a genuine conflict of interests

associated with some changes, as illustrated in a review in the *Times Higher* of a television programme, which emphasised the extent to which politics is about dealing with competing interests. *The Amazing Mrs Pritchard* was first screened on British television in the autumn of 2006. It is the story of an 'ordinary British housewife' who becomes Prime Minister. The *Times Higher* review was bracingly entitled: "Politics for Morons".

The premise of the programme is simple. Standing for election as a protest against the existing parties, Ros Pritchard is catapulted into 10 Downing Street in a surge of electoral enthusiasm for a different sort of politics: "I will never lie to you. I will never mislead you." ... The idea of "the people" being frustrated by the politicians is fundamental to the programme's reading of politics. [It]... is based on the assumption that there is no conflict between citizens about what they want.... But real politics involves winners and losers. It involves people not getting their way – and then complaining like hell. What's missing from *The Amazing Mrs Pritchard* is the very differences of opinion that are the stuff of politics. And that's what makes politics necessary in the first place.

(Cowley 2006 p13)

And that is what makes learning and teaching strategies necessary in the first place. How much people like your strategic plans may not be the most significant indicator of success. That is why consultation will not provide unambiguous or straightforward evidence of what you should do. A strategy cannot have the best interests of everyone (from their perspective) at heart. It must prioritise the interests of some over others.

The vision thing

I had always thought a 'strategic vision' was something very big and complex. While it was something I aspired to in moments of hubris, I assumed I hadn't yet reached the giddy institutional heights where I could claim to have a 'vision'. But one day I realised that I did have a vision, and perhaps had always had one. It wasn't something very grand and complex, it was modest and small like a photograph I'd carry in my pocket. My vision is of a student sitting at a desk in a university library, turning the pages of a book. When I look at this student in my mind's eye, I see her in two states of mind. Sometimes she is confused and bored and angry and anxious, not understanding the text in front of her, or what she is supposed to get out of it, or how she is supposed to turn it into an assignment to help her pass her course. She is aware she is using her time badly, but she doesn't know what else to do other than try to concentrate and keep turning the pages. In the other state of mind, she's found her own set of questions and her own voice. She can operate in the discourse, and present her ideas successfully. She is beginning to be aware of the academic system, its rules and games, and be confident in her own agency and agility, her capacity to weave her way through the system while following her own directions and calling. I can see this student so vividly that I could reach out and touch her. I see her in front of me when I

'Leading Educational Development', forthcoming, edited by B. Tomkinson, published by SEDA

prepare documents for committees and when I have to explain my papers at meetings. She is my touchstone when I'm faced with seas of initiatives and jargon. I think about how the initiative would affect her. In the rush of emails and deadlines and piles of papers, I can see her, sitting quietly at her books.

References

Covey, Stephen (1990) *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People* Free Press

Cowley, Peter (2006) 'Politics for Morons' *The Times Higher Educational Supplement* 6th October 2006 p13

Gosling, David. (1996), What Educational Development Units Do, *International Journal of Academic Development*, **1** (1)

Gosling, David (2001) 'Educational development units in the UK - what are they doing five years on?' *International Journal for Academic Development* **6** (1) 74-90

Harvey, L. & Knight, P. T. (1996) *Transforming Higher Education*, Buckingham, SRHE & Open University Press

HEFCE (1999) Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund: Funding Arrangements Paper 99/48 viewed on 24/10/06 at:
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/1999/99_48.htm

Land, Ray (2003) 'Orientations to Academic Development' in *The Scholarship of Academic Development*, edited by R. MacDonald and H. Eggins, Open University Press/SRHE, Buckingham

National Committee for the Inquiry into Higher Education (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society*, (The Dearing Report) available online
<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ncihe/index.htm> [last accessed 22 December 2006]

Newton, J. (2000) Feeding the Beast or Improving Quality?: academics' perceptions of quality assurance and quality monitoring, *Quality in Higher Education*, 6(2), 154-163

Newton, J. (2003) Implementing an Institution-wide Learning and Teaching Strategy: lessons in managing change, *Studies in Higher Education*, 28(4), 428-441

Schrijvers, Joep P. M. (2004) *The Way of the Rat* London: Cyan

Smith, Karen (forthcoming) "'Who do you think you're talking to?" the discourse of learning and teaching strategies'.

'Leading Educational Development', forthcoming, edited by B. Tomkinson, published by SEDA

Wareing, S. (2004a) 'It ain't what you say, it's the way that you say it: An Analysis of the Language of Educational Development' *Educational Developments* 5.2 pp9-14

Wareing, S. (2004b) 'Research vs. Teaching: what are the implicit values that affect academics' career choices?' Paper presented at the Society for Research in Higher Education Conference, Bristol, December 2004.

Wenger, Etienne (1998) *Communities of Practice* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.