Editorial

Welcome to this issue of *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*. Our thanks go to the authors of articles, the essay and the reviews, the anonymous referees who read the articles and the essay, the publishers who provided review copies of the books, our own publisher Berghahn and the Editorial Board.

Learning and Teaching invites students and staff to explore their education practices in the light of changes in their institutions, national higher education policies, the strategies of international agencies and developments associated with the so-called international knowledge economy.

The overall theme of this issue is change – managing it, initiating it and experiencing it. The issue opens with Helle Bundgaard's analysis of change management at a Danish university. She examines the ways in which a decision to establish a uniform academic year and timetable across the institution was presented as a common market that would widen student choice and improve student recruitment. Administrators drew on 'change management' literature to explain how they designed 'interventions' aimed at changing academic behaviour and values. Each intervention was classified according to three criteria, reducing complex human interactions and motivations to questions of 'nature', 'level' and 'depth'. 'Communication' was also deemed important, but educational considerations did not feature in the way the plan was communicated to academic staff. In the faculty Bundgaard studied, many academics objected to the nature and timing of the plan but their criticisms were toned down by faculty leaders in their report back to university management. Even the concerns that were communicated were ignored by the university administration. Faculties were given the task of putting the original plan into practice.

Bundgaard describes how implementation meetings in the faculty were chaired by the chief administrator in ways that closed down discussion of the problems the common market would cause for students and for staff. At the first meeting, the chief administrator responded to open resistance by one director of studies with a scarcely-veiled threat to the latter's continuation in that role. This silenced nearly all the other directors of studies. The

one who continued to raise implementation problems at subsequent meetings was just ignored by the chief administrator.

In the end, public compliance masked private resistance and the common calendar and timetable were never fully implemented. Bundgaard points to the possibility of what she calls 'improvisational leadership' that would recognise the concerns of academic staff and seek to mobilise their professionalism. She suggests that such an approach would have been more likely to achieve the desired ends.

In the second article, Nathan Hughes, Sue Wainwright and Caroline Cresswell explore a major change in the role of academic tutors. Rather than just providing pastoral care and referrals to support services, academic tutors became responsible for helping social work students develop their writing skills. All students on the Social Work degree programme at the University of Birmingham are allocated a personal academic tutor to support their academic progress through a minimum of four mandatory tutorials over the year. The teaching team developed a form for students to use when reflecting on the feedback they received on assignments and these completed forms provided a basis for the discussion with the personal academic tutor.

After a year of operation, the authors held a focus group with students, interviewed four tutors and facilitated a workshop and email discussion with the whole teaching group. They found that students in general perceived the personal academic tutor as a distant figure only to be approached by those students having difficulties. Tutors, on the other hand, saw themselves as a resource for all students. Both students and tutors valued the feedback form but students tended to want more specific guidance on how exactly they could improve aspects of their writing. As a result of the research, the Social Work team has decided to give more publicity to the role of the personal academic tutors, to provide study skills sessions early in the programme and to develop reusable resources to aid study skills. Most importantly, they have addressed students' misunderstandings of what is meant by 'independent learning'. In future, staff will emphasise that students are not expected to be fully fledged independent learners right from the beginning, but to become so gradually with the support and advice of their academic tutors.

In the third article, Phil Wood, Paul Warwick and Derek Cox evaluate changes to teaching spaces at the University of Leicester. Developments in information and communication technologies, greater diversity in the student body and more emphasis on active and cooperative learning have all contributed to a growing interest in how learning spaces can be designed to

be flexible and stimulating. The authors questioned students and staff who were using three refurbished seminar rooms. Each room contains a digital projector, WiFi, DVD, audio, an interactive whiteboard, boards or walls for the students to write on and adaptable furniture. Two also have plasma screens and one has a fixed camera.

The student users were all postgraduates and most of them preferred active learning methods over more passive activities such as listening to lectures and taking notes. They valued furniture that could be rearranged to suit different activities in class and the provision of learning materials on the Virtual Learning Environment for use outside class time. Lecturers were positive about the way the rooms facilitated group work and felt that these new spaces conveyed the message to students that the university cared about their learning experiences. Lecturers' views about the technologies available varied according to their own level of confidence with them. It became clear that more training on the use of digital technologies should be offered and that older teaching aids such as flip charts and overhead projectors should be reinstated.

The authors conclude that the provision of writing boards and walls and the flexible furniture are as important, if not more important, than WiFi and digital projectors for enabling students to collaborate in their learning. They offer a model for the design and use of innovative learning and teaching spaces. Spaces need to be dynamic rather than static and to engage the learners actively. They should offer an environment with natural light and the sight of trees and vegetation, and staff and students should participate in their design and evolving use.

Xavier Landes, Martin Marchman and Morten Nielsen's essay aims to instigate a discussion about changes to the conditions of work for junior academics. Because those applying for jobs, tenure or funding are judged on how much they have published compared to their competitors, junior academics are caught in a 'rat race': each is pressurised to publish more and more to stay ahead of the pack, yet because all are doing so, the differentials remain the same. This publishing frenzy is not good for research and it detracts from academics' teaching role and their contribution to the wider society. The volume of publications produced makes it impossible for anyone to keep up with new research in their field without defining their research interests extremely narrowly. The authors treat the situation as a 'collective action problem'. Analysing it in terms of the 'prisoner's dilemma' and 'Nash equilibrium' and making analogies with male sea elephants and

quarrelling lovers, the authors show how this form of competition damages individuals, the quality of publications and the sharing of knowledge. They also show that, while the behaviour of each individual contributes to the creation of these unviable conditions, they are powerless to bring about change through individual action. Withdrawing from the competition is not an option for most academics as it is the rules of the game and the distorted incentives that need to be changed. Cooperation in knowledge creation and contributions to teaching and other forms of knowledge dissemination inside and outside the academy need to be given more value. Collective action to achieve this could be started at institutional level, but ultimately requires national and international action.

We invite responses of 800–1,000 words to the authors' analysis of why academics are unable to put a brake on their deteriorating conditions and the dilemmas especially facing junior academics. Contributions to this debate will be published in a future issue.

This issue concludes with reviews by Katherine Nielsen, Beth Perry and Alan Scott of books about global citizenship, the relationship between the university and the state and the relationship between academics and their managers.

Penny Welch and Susan Wright