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## **PTAS Project Report (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)**

**Project Title: Asking the Right Question**

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**Principal Investigator : Christine Sinclair**  
**School / Department : Moray House School of Education**

**Team members : Anna Wood (Research Associate, Education), Paul Anderson (Informatics), Jessie Paterson (Vet School), Hamish Macleod (Education)**

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Grant recipients are expected to submit a brief report at the conclusion of their project which outlines briefly the following : nature of work completed; outcomes; benefits to student learning/student experience; dissemination activity (where relevant – actual and planned) and how the activity could inform future work or be transferred to other subject areas in the University. The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

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### **Brief Report (maximum 500 words)**

Our starting point was a concern that sometimes the right questions don't get asked in University classrooms and this leads to unsuccessful dialogues. Other causes of problems with dialogues might be talking at cross purposes or erroneous assumptions.

### **What did you do?**

We interviewed 7 teachers and 7 students across our three Schools (Vet School, Education, Informatics) about successful and less successful dialogues between students and their teachers and made a thematic analysis of the findings. The participants included first year undergraduate students, masters students, PhD laboratory demonstrators/teaching assistants, and lecturing staff.

### **What did you find out?**

It was clear from all the responses that teachers were generally happy to receive and answer questions. However, there were some barriers: teachers thought that students might be reluctant to ask questions because of not wanting to lose face, cultural and language issues and fear of failure. In talking about these issues, students particularly worried about phrasing questions, especially when English was not their native language and how explicit they needed to be. Students also stressed their concerns about taking up teachers' time. Teachers did indeed wish they had more time for deeper discussions. Dialogues worked well when students felt they were being listened to, but this was perceived to be a problem sometimes. Some useful strategies emerged: turning a question into a different one, asking open questions to generate additional information, being proactive and clear about expectations.



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### **How did you disseminate your findings?**

We contacted the SoTL and Experienced teachers' networks towards the end of the project with mindmaps of our main themes. We have prepared a sheet of key themes and case studies from the findings for circulation to anyone interested and which we hope can go on the PTAS website. There is already a website for the project <https://homepages.inf.ed.ac.uk/dcspaul/homepage/live/work/teaching/ptas2016.html> and we plan to cross-link as we disseminate more widely. In November 2017, we published in the Teaching Matters blog - <http://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/?p=2152>. On 25 January 2018, we gave a presentation and had a discussion with the Medical Education Forum, and plan a similar session in the Vet School on 27 March. We are also presenting at the Learning and Teaching conference on 20 June. A paper has been submitted to *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*. We were also approached by a publisher (Vernon Press).

### **What have been the benefits to student learning?**

The process of reflecting was valuable for participants; the results are valuable for other teachers and learners.

### **How could these benefits be extended to other parts of the university?**

We shall keep seeking opportunities to have discussions with groups interested in teaching and learning and hope more might emerge at the June conference.

### **Who can be contacted for further details?**

Our main contact is our Research Associate Anna Wood who conducted the interviews and did the main analysis. Any members of the team can be contacted for further details, as there may be interest in specific domains.

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### **Financial statement**

This project has utilised the funding awarded to it by the PTAS adjudication committee and the Principal Investigator or School Administrator appropriate can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trusts who may require it for auditing purposes.

**Please send an electronic PDF copy of this report to:**

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