

## PERSPECTIVES ON PRACTICE

### **The University Forum for Human Resource Development: Its History, Purpose, and Activities**

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The University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD) is a relatively young organisation with old roots, and its nature reflects these. It is best described as a voluntary network or an informal association stemming from two separate initiatives in the UK in the late 1980s. The first of these was at national government level and was the introduction of national competence based vocational qualifications (NVQs) following extensive consultation with professional bodies, providers, and potential recipients (see Lee, 2004; Lee & Stead, 1998). The second was an initiative by the Institute of Training and Development (ITD), which was at that time the professional body for human resource development (HRD) practitioners. The ITD already had qualifications at certificate and diploma level with some universities established providers of programmes leading to those awards. The initiative sought to encourage provision of masters' level degree programmes in universities to provide for the continuing professional development of its members. The ITD also at around the same time decided to reform its established qualifications at certificate and diploma levels to incorporate the new national competence based qualifications.

Universities providing ITD related qualification programmes were faced with two challenges: first to develop new master's level programmes and second to reform existing certificate and diploma programmes so that they would also meet the requirements of the then new national vocational qualifications. Other universities that provided non-vocational higher degrees in such areas as management learning, behaviour in organisations, and education more generally were also challenged by the increasing focus on vocational education to review their curricula and incorporate professional requirements or lose their student body. Yet others were interested in researching the dilemmas of dual qualification programmes and the impact of vocational education on the discipline.

As a response to these challenges, some universities took advantage of the help and resource of a man named Alan Moon, a retired college Principal, who was funded for some of his time by the ITD to promote and support the two initiatives embraced by the professional

body. These universities began a cooperation facilitated by Alan Moon and hosted by the government body, The National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) that was charged with supporting the development of NVQs. They met to share ideas and discuss ways forward. The focus was to develop master's programmes and to reform certificate and diploma programmes in a way that reflected new national policies, the needs of the profession, and the requirements of higher education institutions rooted in non-vocational qualification structures. Out of this cooperation arose a loose network of academics, which became known by its members as the Euston Road Group (ERG). The name derives from the Central London location of the NCVQ, which was next to Euston station, as they provided a room in their premises and usually a free lunch for meetings of the ERG.

University members of ERG spanned a range of institutional types and needs – each university having its own systems, requirements, and understandings. Notwithstanding the difficulty of aligning university systems, the ERG also sought to associate these to national vocational requirements and the expectations of the Professional Body. After much discussion (and many sandwich lunches), some general principles were agreed and applied. The early programmes sought and gained recognition from the ITD and contributed in part or whole to NVQ's – thus the universities of the ERG, with the support of ITD and the NCVQ, offered the first dual (or triple) qualification Master's Degree courses in HRD in the UK and supported the development of many later programmes in other institutions. At the same time, and in a reflexive manner, some members were looking at the implications of such provision and opening this up as an area for research.

In the early 1990s, the name ERG became redundant as the NCVQ withdrew support, and so the loose association had to decide whether or not to continue and, if so, what name to adopt. There were at the time around 15 academics from around a dozen or so universities actively involved in the ERG, and they decided the benefits were worth continuing. Alan Moon suggested UFHRD as a name. And so the Forum came into being. A key purpose and characteristic of the work of ERG was a focus on developing qualification programmes, and so, because it is universities rather than individual academics that provide programmes and award qualifications, it was judged appropriate that the word 'university' feature in the name and that universities rather than individuals should constitute members. A constitution was agreed and operating principles established. The ITD continued to fund the time of Alan Moon, who at this point became the first Executive Secretary of the Forum. In 1994 a merger of what was then the Institute of Personnel Management, a body strongly focused on personnel professionals, and the Institute of Training and Development created what is now the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), which in 1998 withdrew funding for the time of Alan Moon and so for the activities of UFHRD. A new constitution was adopted, which allowed for subscription fees to be charged to University members. The current constitution, adopted in 2004, continues and expands the original aims of UFHRD, which are captured in the mission statement and principles below:

### **Mission Statement**

The Forum will create, develop and inform leading edge practice and research in HRD through a network of universities, practitioner-researchers and learning-orientated

organisations from across the globe, including the promotion of both professionally-focussed qualifications and co-operative research initiatives.

### **Operational principles**

- a. To develop national and international networking with groups having similar aims and objectives
- b. To work in close collaboration internationally with professional and qualification awarding bodies in the HR field to develop post-experience post-graduate university programmes in HRD and other related programmes as may be deemed appropriate
- c. To foster, develop and publicise professionally-focussed research and consultancy and to exchange information thereon
- d. To support, in collaboration with other appropriate organisations, an international HRD journal designed to forward the aims and core values of the Forum. (p. 1)

### **Membership and Activities**

The Forum currently has around 50 university members in the UK, Ireland, mainland Europe and the USA, each of which nominates two named individuals. Many take advantage of the possibility of naming additional individuals as associate members for a small additional fee. There are also individual members who are primarily but not exclusively students on HRD programmes. Looking back on the last 20 years or so, the Forum has much to be pleased about in terms of achievements. Some of these are detailed below, in rough chronological order, and it can be seen that the Forum has developed into an active and productive force.

1. In its earliest days the ERG established a series of seminars, which continue today. These include what we refer to as industrial visits, the most recent of which was to examine training practice in McDonalds. They have also included a Writing for Publication workshop, which ran for about 6 years and which supported many new researchers getting their work published. There is now a pattern of about three seminars a year, with topics of current interest to the members, each hosted by member universities.
2. Parallel to this and with support of European funding in the early 1990s, the UFHRD established a pan-European qualification in HRD and an organisation named Euroform to implement it. There were many problems associated with this, not least the need to reconcile different national systems of qualification. This was done through a focus upon the meeting of learning outcomes and has proved to be a template adopted by other European initiatives looking at similar issues more recently. There are many graduates of HRD programmes across Europe who enjoy the benefits of this qualification.
3. The seminars also led to the establishment of an annual conference. In the early days of the Forum, this was almost exclusively a UK event. In recognition of a wider European

membership, largely through Euresform, events were also held in Ireland and mainland Europe (including the Netherlands and France). In the late 1990s, the US-based Academy of HRD (AHRD) joined the Forum in sponsoring the annual European conference. This has become one of the great successes of the Forum with over 200 participants from most continents attending conferences in each of the last 5 years.

4. In 1995, in recognition of the increasing desire to support a research focus, the Forum and Euresform agreed to support Monica Lee in establishing an international journal in HRD - *Human Resource Development International (HRDI)*. Publishers were sought, and in 1996 Routledge and Monica Lee reached agreement about publication. As AHRD became more closely involved with the Forum, they also wished to act as a sponsor for the new journal. The first volume was published in 1998, sponsored by the Forum, Euresform, and AHRD with Monica Lee as founding Editor-in-Chief. She was followed by Jean Woodall in 2003 and Peter Kuchinke in 2007. *HRDI* has become one of the leading international HRD journals, and Peter Kuchinke has maintained and further developed the established success.
5. Forum members have produced a number of books as collaborative projects including the seminal 1996 collection edited by Stewart and McGoldrick (1996). This helped inspire the Routledge *Studies in Human Resource Development* monograph series, edited by Monica Lee. This is a very strong collection of books with nearly 20 authored or edited by members of UFHRD and with more in the pipeline. It includes the collection edited by McGoldrick, Stewart, and Watson (2001).
6. Forum members have also published collaboratively through other outlets – such as in a number of special editions of journals including *International Journal of Training and Development* and *Journal of European Industrial Training*.
7. This focus on publication has been supported by a related initiative of Research Honoraria, which has run for over 10 years. These honoraria have supported three projects annually for both new and established researchers and have produced published work in nearly all cases, including articles in SSCI accredited journals (e.g., Wasti, Cakar, & Poell, 2008).
8. Similarly, the Forum has provided support for members' research projects and applications for research funding and tenders for commissioned research. This has resulted in projects funded by the UK Government, the European Commission, the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and the CIPD. An example of these is a project funded by the ESRC, a UK government funded body, which distributes funding to academics on a competitive basis. This project supported six international research seminars and resulted in three edited collections being published in 2003 (Lee, 2003; Stewart & Beaver, 2003; Woodall, Lee & Stewart, 2003).
9. Although hard to quantify or demonstrate, the Forum has played a key role in establishing HRD as an academic subject in UK universities, in supporting HRD

programmes, and, arguably, in the increase from zero to now over a dozen full professorships of HRD.

Many of these activities, including the annual series of seminars, the annual European conference, *HRDI* journal, and the research honorarium, still continue. It is perhaps fitting given the origins of the UFHRD that the most recent initiative is a project to establish a Special Interest Group for teaching, learning, and assessment in HRD programmes. Over recent years there has been a greater emphasis on research in Forum activities, and that has been appropriate in relation to its aims and fundamental purpose. However, it is also appropriate that a focus on supporting qualification programmes has been returned to. The Forum though has never seen research and teaching as anything other than connected and complementary activities to support members, and this most recent initiative perhaps reflects that most clearly as we are now using the research honorarium scheme to target research into teaching, learning, and assessment within HRD programmes. As a final observation, the Forum continues to operate as a voluntary network; and as well as aiming to provide benefits, it also relies on and looks to its members to bring those benefits into being.

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