

Research-engaged School/College Award

Application



South Dartmoor Community College is a Trust School with specialist Sports College and Training School status. An 11-18, co-educational comprehensive school with 1650 on roll and situated within the National Park, it serves a wide rural area of over 350 square miles. OFSTED (07) graded as 'outstanding' the leadership and management, the curriculum, personal development, care, guidance and support, and the Sixth Form.

1. Values, leadership and culture

1.1 - Is research/enquiry at the heart of the organisation?

OFSTED (07) praised 'The vision of an organisation dedicated to promoting collaborative learning by students and adults alike. The highly effective leadership team have successfully united staff, parents and students behind their vision of South Dartmoor as a learning organisation'.

Teaching and support staff are offered opportunities to engage in research contributing to CPD. The College has funded bursary research projects that are directly related to specific areas of improvement in the Management Plan, together with research associated with MAs, Meds and National College programmes. The Leadership Team and subject leaders provide support and guidance for researchers.

A key element of the College's work as a Trust school is its relationship with partners that are helping drive innovation and research as members of the South Dartmoor Leading Practice Trust. The career-long training and guidance of teachers as learners is valued within a culture of reflection, experimentation and research. We believe that what teachers and support staff learn each day is as important as learning by children because it helps secure improvement in teaching. Every adult has regular opportunities to carry out research, extending professional knowledge, based on what happens in their own classrooms and those of colleagues. Our trainees are integrated into the life of the College and training extends beyond initial courses with a commitment to invest in the continuing development of the workforce; experienced and practising professionals provide much of our training with the innovative use of ICT.

We have a formal link with Exeter University, whose head of education, Professor Debra Myhill, is chair of our Trust Board. Two departments, Maths and Science, have staff working on classroom research with the university. Papers are available on the college website in the Trust section. Plans are advanced, and supported by Trust partners, for a South Dartmoor academic research publication in spring 2010.

The following statement outlines this partnership from the perspective of the university:

The University of Exeter's vision for excellence in education includes establishing innovative partnerships with local schools which will help raise standards in the region, and support the maximum engagement of all students with learning and the curriculum, regardless of their background. The University is a Trust partner with two Devon schools including South Dartmoor Sports College Pathfinder Trust.

We became a Trust school partner principally through the invitation of the two schools involved. As a School of Education and Lifelong Learning we embrace innovation and are unafraid of new enterprises. Our goals are centred towards educational excellence and achievement in the South West region. As the leading School of Education in the

region, with an international reputation for research and initial teacher education, our goal is to share that expertise with partner schools in their pursuit for excellence. Through our work with Trust schools we aim to:

1. Broaden the notion of what standards are
2. Raise aspirations in both students and teachers
3. Offer challenge
4. Support change and innovation
5. Generate creative solutions to educational problems and issues, such as:
 - Re-professionalising teachers to take control of their own practice
 - Developing teachers as learners through research-engaged models of professional development
 - Using teacher enquiry as a catalyst to transformation
 - Creating a rigorous progression framework for teacher research
 - Addressing the issue of 'new professionalism'
 - Creating an interface between university research and school practice
 - Strengthening subject specialism

**Professor Debra Myhill,
Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning**

1.2 - Is school culture supportive?

The College encourages all staff to engage in research. Recently colleagues were able to bid for a number of bursaries to conduct research into areas identified as in need of improvement in the College Management Plan. Research is on-going in some cases and can be quite small-scale in other cases; however, findings are typically disseminated via Learning Hubs and our in-house journal. Colleagues have submitted articles that have been published in magazines, periodicals and academic journals. The College is constructing a 'Research' area that will be incorporated into an already comprehensive website in the near future. Research that has been recognised officially includes that conducted by Phil Atherton, teacher of Science, in conjunction with Exeter University 'Girls into Physics' (Rolls Royce Award); and, the submission of a PhD thesis (Education and Psychology) to Exeter University and subsequent publication of a co-authored article by Dr Voldis Kudliskis relating to Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and learning in the journal 'Thinking Skills and Creativity' (2009).

1.3 - How does research contribute to learning?

Findings from research are disseminated to management colleagues via senior leadership team meetings, management meetings and curriculum team meetings. Findings are disseminated to teaching colleagues via Learning Hubs, our in-house journal and staff briefings. Sharing of information in this manner permits colleagues, at all levels, to reflect upon practice and the learning and teaching that is occurring in classrooms. Students gain indirect research skills by acting as participants. Expertise is passed on by teachers in subject areas such as Sociology and Psychology where excellent research practice is essential. Recent research conducted by Jim Sutton has led to a greater appreciation of the appropriate application of AfL techniques and key ideas from his findings are being shared with all stakeholders. The sharing of these research findings associated with AfL has led a number of departments to review current practice and this, in turn, has led to both direct and indirect changes to the curriculum and enhanced facilitation of learning.

The Principal, Ray Tarleton, has worked on secondment with the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services since 2003. During the last academic year he co-authored, with Professor David Reynolds of Plymouth University and the head of another school, a publication for the National College/TDA to be distributed to all schools in the spring. This publication reports on teacher research into the issue of variation within a school as opposed to the variation in performance between schools. He has also helped author:

- Narrowing the gap (reducing within school variation in pupil outcomes) - NCSL 2006
- Answers that Lie Within. David Reynolds, Peter Kent & Ray Tarleton. TES 27 June 2008
- SecEd article "A varied approach" Ray Tarleton and Dr Peter Kent 19 June 2008
- Effective Practice for all: Learning from Within and Reducing In-school Variation (2010 NCSL/TDA)

1.4 - How do senior leaders demonstrate active support?

The Principal and members of the Leadership Team publicly promote the importance of research through their own work and that of the Leading Practice Trust. Research successes are shared with colleagues by the senior management team via briefings and in various team meetings. Research evidence is frequently embedded in whole College decision-making processes and shared with leaders at a variety of levels in departmental meetings, management meetings and curriculum team meetings.

1.5 - How is commitment to research/enquiry evident in the school?

Results are shared with colleagues in a variety of ways; typically through Learning Hubs and our in-house journal and, as indicated previously, by dissemination to colleagues at various meetings. Tangible and visible evidence of the impact of research has been shared by Richard Jenkins (Head of Religious Studies) associated with AfL strategies that are effective in sixth form teaching, and Sarah Fisher (Head of English) who has spent time investigating and subsequently sharing the value of the dialogic approach to learning. Findings from research can be found in our in-house journal that is free to the public (upon request from February 2010). Colleagues are made aware of research findings and are able to share, enthusiastically, information with a variety of stakeholders.

A student research group, The Learning Forum, has been operating for a year and subject reports are available now for most departments. These offer staff student perspectives, based on the methodology of Professor Guy Claxton. The interest in this research is such that it was shared at the national conference of Trust Schools in June 09, at SSAT in November 09 and has been filmed by Tribal for inclusion in their Inspirational Schools Project. Research reports by students are available on-line and are contributing directly to teacher knowledge and changed practice.

2. Support systems

2.1 - How is time made available?

The equivalent of two days a week is given to colleagues in Maths and Science to work in partnership with Exeter University, Trust partner. An additional day a week equivalent is allocated to a staff team, CREATE, working with Advanced Skills Teachers at the school to drive creative practice through research as part of our Creative Schools Partnership with CCE (funded by the Arts Council, England).

Some research is bursary-funded; 'time' is provided by our research co-coordinator to offer support. One research colleague, Sarah Gotting, teacher of Religious Studies, has secured funding and support from the Farmington Foundation and has secured 40 days of release to conduct inter-faith dialogue research.

2.2 - What access do you have to other resources from the school?

The College has a fully qualified librarian who constantly reviews available texts and, funds permitting, ensures access to the latest research materials. The IT support team at the College provide excellent levels of support to researchers and colleagues. Furthermore, members of the SLT, share their specific areas of IT expertise with researchers thus providing another level of support. Nat Parnell, Director of Teaching and Learning has an overview of research within the College and Dr Voldis Kudliskis provides in-house general support for researchers. Professor Debbie Myhill is Chair of the Trust Governing Body for South Dartmoor Community College and she is heavily involved in providing support relating to research matters associated with the College research programme. Finally, Pete Kensington is in a position to provide data, and support analysis of such data, when appropriate, for researchers.

2.3 - What mentoring support is available?

The College has research links to partner schools. For example, Kagan learning strategies are being investigated at South Dartmoor Community College, Newton Abbot Community College, and Ivybridge Community College. Our relationship with Exeter University, as a Trust partner, provides opportunities for liaison with key research staff at the university. Dr Voldis Kudliskis adopts the role of tutor, mentor and coach and provides support either through face-to-face meetings or via email. Dr Kudliskis is, himself, supported by members of the SLT from the College and through liaison with Professor Debbie Myhill and Professor Bob Burden at Exeter University. Colleagues who are members of the College's bursary research group receive support on a regular basis. All researchers are able to 'drop in' to these sessions or seek support on an *ad hoc* basis.

2.4 - What other ways do people gain access to research findings and expertise?

Researchers have access to a highly qualified librarian, Lyn Barnes, who provides guidance and access to relevant research information. The library carries a wide range of research books and magazines. Our relationship with Exeter University provides researchers with access to a plethora of educational research material via the School of Lifelong Learning (SELL). Research findings are disseminated through presentations to organisations such as the Training School and our Trust partners such as Exeter University and The Learning Organisation (TLO). It is our intention to become more involved with research organisations such as National Teacher Research Panel (NTRP) and the DCSF Schools Research Newsletter in the future.

3. Research activity

3.1 - What is the system for encouraging research engagement?

Research projects will typically have clear goals that emanate from the College Management Plan. To this end research at the College is planned and the College has offered bursaries to researchers to support this process. However, a number of research projects emerge from areas of interest associated with colleagues completing MA, MEd or LfTM courses. This provides research engagement at two levels and thus provides appropriate degrees of breadth in relation to learning and teaching. Research progress is monitored at two levels; firstly, by the research co-coordinator; and secondly, by the Director of Teaching and Learning. Success is evaluated in terms of outcomes at a number of levels; for the College, the department and the individual researcher. Results are disseminated to all stakeholders and findings are used to inform professional practice.

3.2 - How do research areas reflect the interests of the organisation?

Research is directly linked to the College Management Plan. Research is frequently linked to specific areas that require improvement and are directly identified in the College Management Plan. Research will, typically, be associated with staff development and provide colleagues with an opportunity to research areas of interest to them, but also as areas of action for the College. Recent research by Jim Sutton can be indirectly linked to OfSTED reporting as the College has endeavoured to reflect upon AfL as a college-wide initiative. Whilst current research is not linked to the special status of the school it should be acknowledged that much of our research has very clear links to the requirements of our role as a training school.

3.3 - Main research activities in the last three years

Dr Voldis Kudliskis has recently completed a PhD thesis that explores the value of a 'psychological' concept known as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) when applied in a sixth form context. In short, it was identified what are referred to as 'Techniques of Change' could have a profound impact upon learners. Utilising techniques such as goal-setting, anchoring, visualisation to address states of mind and individual belief systems appeared to have a profound impact on self-perception which, in turn, led to student perceptions of enhanced learning outcomes. A journal article relating to this study is available in '*Thinking Skills and Creativity*'. This has led to further research into the value of the NLP Communication Model in an educational context with reference to students with SEN. It is

hoped that an article will be published relating to this research towards the end of 2010 or the beginning of 2011. Finally, as a separate, but interlinked strand, a colleague who is a Teaching Assistant has conducted research into the value of NLP in the classroom by exploring the notion of 'altered states'. This is the idea that for learning to occur it is important to ensure that learners are in the right 'state' of mind to engage with their learning. The reference for the previously mentioned article is:

Kudliskis, V. and Burden, R. (2009) Applying 'what works' in psychology to enhancing examination success in schools: The potential contribution of NLP. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*. (4) 3.

During the last academic year the Principal co-authored, with Professor David Reynolds of Plymouth University and the head of another school, a publication for the National College/TDA to be distributed to all schools in the spring. This publication reports on teacher research into the issue of variation within a school as opposed to the variation in performance between schools. He has also helped author:

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3.4 - How is ethical practice ensured?

The ethics of any research is considered through the implementation of a two stage process. Proposed research must meet ethical criteria as directed by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and, as such, is screened to this level, prior to research commencing. If a particular research study presents concerns with regards to ethics the College will seek guidance from the Ethics Committee at Exeter University. The research co-coordinator takes the necessary steps to ensure that ethical best practice is adopted at all times. This is monitored on an on-going basis and updated as necessary. Permission is always sought from parents, even when participants are over 16, in relation to participating in research studies. (No student is permitted to take part in any research study if the College has not received a Consent Form.) Moreover, the College adheres to the Data Protection Act, Copyright, and Patents Act.

3.5 - How is quality of process and outcomes assured?

The quality of process and outcomes is assured through a monitoring process. Typically, any research study (process) will be discussed by Director of Teaching and Learning, the Research Coordinator, and the researcher. The Research Co-coordinator will monitor progress on an on-going basis and any concerns will be directed to the Director of Teaching and Learning. Moreover, colleagues from Exeter University are provided with an opportunity to act as a 'critical friend' and help identify any shortcomings that may have been missed earlier in the process. This, in turn, permits shortcomings to be addressed prior to 'publication' of findings.

4. Impact

4.1 - How does the organisation show its commitment to sharing results?

The College demonstrates its commitment to sharing results by disseminating research findings via SLT meetings, Management meetings, Curriculum Team meetings, staff meetings, Learning Hubs, presentations to partner schools and the publication of our in-house journal. Research colleagues are requested to submit findings to the journal through a 'call for papers' process. In some cases, colleagues may provide a 'teaser' designed to 'whet the appetite' for a future edition of the journal. Colleagues have been encouraged to attend conferences. For example, Dr Voldis Kudliskis has attended the last two national NLP Conferences in London, a regional Training School conference in Taunton, and is shortly submitting an abstract with a view to present at the International NLP Conference at Cardiff University in July 2009.

4.2 - What opportunities are there for sharing results outside the school?

The College will be incorporating a 'Research' area into its comprehensive website. It is anticipated that the in-house journal will also be produced as an electronic version; this will provide all stakeholders and interested parties with an opportunity to view and comment on research that has been conducted by the College. Research findings will be disseminated to partner schools through seminars and by invitation to Learning Hubs. It is hoped that in the future we may be in a position to host an annual 'Research Conference'. As mentioned previously an article relating to NLP and learning was recently published in *'Thinking Skills and Creativity'*. Similar articles about the value of NLP have been published in *'SecEd'* and *'ReSource'* magazine. Dr Voldis Kudliskis is submitting an abstract with a view to present at the International NLP Conference at Cardiff University in July 2009. Richard Jenkins is currently crafting an article for *'SecEd'* about sixth form AfL.

The Principal's work with the National College/TDA has been published, with further work to be published in a forthcoming completed publication in 2010 NCSL/TDA. The school's work with CCE, as a School of Creativity, has been deemed leading edge and contributing to system leadership.

'South Dartmoor is in an excellent position to continue to influence and lead national research.' is to be published on the CCE website.

Extract from CCE inspection report November 09:

[South Dartmoor Community College] is in the forefront of creative, innovative approaches and 'walks the talk' in terms of exemplifying the values and foci inherent in being a SoC. However, there is no hint of the college resting on its laurels as many might be tempted to do. The emphasis is on continual improvement and striving for excellence. There is compelling evidence that the college is fulfilling the plans and putting its strategic vision (Doc B) into practice. The school continues to place creativity and innovation at the heart of all its plans..They have formed a 'Create' Team, comprising 4 ASTs with Arts Specialisms and 2 Drama teachers, one of whom is a subject leader. The team launched their work this year with 'School of Creativity Two Stars and a Wish'- through which Staff/Depts celebrated their successes and identified the next steps of planning and realisation. The key drivers for this were: Student Focused (eg Personalised Learning, Student Voice, Learning Councils, Peer Mentoring); Professional Development (eg Research Projects, Learning Hubs, Classroom Observations); Curriculum Development (eg Deep Learning Days, Cross-Curricular Projects, Working with External Partners, using New Technology) and Focus Group Driven (eg G&T, Narrowing the Gap, AFL)' (CCE Inspection Report, 2009).

4.3 - How has your school contributed to external research-related partnerships, networks, events or publications? (Two specific examples to be given.)

Phil Atherton has been working closely with Exeter University on a research project *'Girls into Physics'*. This has been particularly successful and led to the project being nominated for the Rolls Royce Award 2009. The interim findings have had an impact upon the teaching of physics to girls within the College and have, indirectly, had an influence on the approach to teaching physics. The Principal of the College, Ray Tarleton, has presented findings at the national conference for Trust Schools 09 and the annual conference of the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (09).

Dr Voldis Kudliskis has recently completed a PhD thesis (Education and Psychology) that explores the value of a 'psychological' concept known as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) when applied in a sixth form context. In short, it was identified that specific aspects of NLP referred to as 'Techniques of Change' could have a profound impact upon learners. Utilising techniques such as goal-setting, anchoring, visualisation to address states of mind and individual belief systems appeared to have a profound impact on self-perception which, in turn, led to enhanced learning outcomes. A journal article relating to this study is available in *'Thinking Skills and Creativity'*. This has led to Dr Kudliskis being invited to facilitate workshops at Exeter University on the third year undergraduate Educational Studies course. These workshops have been so successful that he has been invited to deliver further workshops in the forthcoming academic year.

5. Sustainability

5.1 - How many staff have been involved in research in the last three years?

A number of staff have participated in research previously. In 2005, the whole College was involved in the SWIFT project. This required all staff to conduct a small-scale piece of research that was 'written up' in a very simple format by some, whilst others who sought accreditation were able to submit their research for assessment and an award from the University College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth.

All subject leaders have been involved in student-focussed research, as part of the Learning Forum subject investigations.

Three teachers in Science and three in Maths have been involved in Exeter university seconded research time through the Leading Practice Trust. A member of the RS Department has a day a week research with the Farmington Trust. The Deputy Principal had a one day a week secondment in 08/09 as Lead practitioner with SSAT to research new forms of curriculum delivery. Until 2006, she was also a member of the National Teacher Research Panel.

South Dartmoor Community College has been awarded the Investors in People (IIP) Gold Standard. Our assessor indicated that we are one of the only schools in Devon or Cornwall to achieve this. Our teacher research and dissemination programmes were critical in achieving this standard.

Each of ten areas are graded out of 4, with national averages hovering around 2. We were graded full marks in six of the ten areas:

- Learning and development is planned to achieve the organisation's objectives
- The capabilities managers need to lead, manage and develop people effectively are clearly defined and understood
- Managers are effective in leading, managing and developing people
- People are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility by being involved in decision-making
- People learn and develop effectively
- Investment in people improves the performance of the organisation

5.2 - Which members of your organisation have been involved as researchers?

All members of staff are offered opportunities to participate in research. However, it is predominantly teachers and support staff who become involved and contributions have been discussed elsewhere in this application. Students have been involved as 'researchers' associated with Student Voice. A number of students have been trained as lesson observers and observations have fed into a broader understanding of learning and teaching. Student Voice observations have then contributed to the production of a document that reflects student perceptions of teaching and learning experiences. Whilst this may not be 'hard science' the research, through lesson observations, conducted by students has positively impacted upon departments. The College has plans to engage parents in research through its Trust partner, Capita, by taking the school into the home electronically, a key Trust aim.

5.3 - How do you encourage people to become involved for the first time?

All colleagues are aware of **Educational Research in Classrooms** (ERiC) research forum and there is an open invitation for anyone to attend and this is 'advertised' regularly. The College offers bursaries to encourage colleagues to become involved in research and such research is frequently linked to achieve meaningful outcomes associated with addressing areas for improvement identified in the College Management Plan. Research work is recognised and celebrated by staff and Line Managers during the Performance Management cycle. Research is 'marketed' and perceived as a high profile activity within the College. The importance of findings and the impact that this can have on learning and teaching is continually reinforced. Research opportunities, when available, are advertised in our Weekly Information Pamphlet ensuring that all in the College are aware of the research

opportunities that are available. As indicated previously support for new researchers and 'old hands' is provided at two levels; one by the Director of Teaching and Learning, the other by the Research Coordinator.

5.4 - How sustainable is your organisation's research engagement in the next three years?

Research at South Dartmoor Community College is sustainable. The College Management Plan makes clear reference to the long term commitment to research in the Training School and more broadly within the College. A three-year plan is in place with funding committed from the Training School budget and resource from Trust partners; research is clearly embedded within the plan, but more importantly into school systems. Research findings are frequently used to inform decision-making at a variety of levels. Staff, at all levels, are involved in research; teaching assistants, teachers and senior managers. New staff members are encouraged to take part in research projects, as are colleagues who are established members of the team. The Leadership Team, particularly the Principal, actively promote a research-engaged culture at the College.

5.5 - How do you intend to build your school's research skills, capacity and impact in the next three years?

As indicated in Section 5.4 the College Management Plan makes clear reference to the long term commitment to research in the Training School and more broadly within the College. A three-year plan is in place and research is clearly embedded within the plan, but more importantly into school systems. Funding and a budget for research work has been assigned for the future. Research findings are frequently used to inform decision-making at a variety of levels. Staff, at all levels, are involved, and will continue to be involved, in research. The College Management Plan identifies the commitment to research; continuing Performance Management and development plans will ensure that all colleagues will be provided with the opportunity to engage in research. As always, the impact of research on the broader College Management Plan will be considered on an on-going basis as will the effects on professional practice.

. Our creative research, one strand of our work, has the following mission statement:

'We wish to capture, develop and then share the varied and vibrant creative practice that is a feature of work at South Dartmoor. The College has a range of projects in progress, many of which would be enhanced by greater internal networking and synergy, but also by being exposed to external response and evaluation. We believe that 'the parts' are extraordinary and that 'the sum' will be transformational. Details of this work with success criteria are given in the plans listed with cross-reference to our overall plan and the College list of priorities.

We believe that our own work will be further sustained and deepened by engaging with this network in developing innovative materials, leading conferences, hosting events and small group visits, influencing policy and evaluating impact.

We have leadership expertise in running innovative partnership projects locally and nationally from sport and the arts through to new solutions in reducing variation in outcomes between subjects. Now we can bring new partnership expertise to share from our Leading Practice Trust with Exeter University and other partners.

Our AST team and associates have formed a new group, Create, to lead this work. They will focus on the development and delivery of creative projects, providing the leadership needed to ensure dissemination and impact. Our Creative Agent, Nick Stimson, has considerable knowledge of the College, offers outstanding creative stimulus and a wealth of contacts both locally and nationally. The opportunity to work with him in a systematic way- with him as a member of the team as well as in an evaluative role- offers significant opportunities.

Our driving focus is on creativity as the catalyst for changing practice, improving the way schools work and raising standards. We will share our work through the Creative Partnerships network, using on-line exchanges, Webex virtual conferences (in which telephone communication is supplemented by on screen presentations), and the development of interactive materials to continue recent work, in particular the powerful student voice strand. We will contribute the expertise of staff with track records in creative applications, networking and leadership' (November 09 submission to CCE).

South Dartmoor Community College is a research-engaged learning community with commitment to sustainable research. Our research dictum is **research provides more than knowing; research provides the knowing how to.**