

## Engaging in Critical Business Enquiry

Dr Paul Bennett, Dr Hilary Drew & Dom Page

Centre for Employment Studies Research (CESR),  
University of the West of England, Bristol



Hilary.Drew@uwe.ac.uk Dominic.Page@uwe.ac.uk

In the July 2013 edition of the CESR Review, we published [an article](#) showcasing the UWE first-year undergraduate module *Engaging in Critical Business Enquiry*. This module, taught primarily by CESR members, provides our students with an introduction to research methods and gives CESR staff the opportunity to utilise their own research in the undergraduate classroom. All students engage with the research process during the course of *Engaging in Critical Business Enquiry*, producing a review of the literature around a contemporary work theme and a research poster identifying research questions and the research methods that might answer these. Although it is not a requirement, many students choose to undertake primary research to support the conclusions they draw from the study of their theme. A key – and perhaps the most exciting – element of the module is a research conference at the end of term.

The conference allows students to congregate as a cross-disciplinary cohort and as researchers, to present their work and critique the work of their peers. Building on the success of our inaugural conference in 2013, this year's event attracted over five hundred students and also welcomed an invited audience of academic staff, senior management, and representatives from industry, trade unions, advocacy groups and the press. Once again, this year, guests remarked upon the quality and diversity of the research produced by our students and the clear link between the topics explored and the ongoing research priorities of CESR. Students also appreciated the value of the event. **Jennifer Berwick**, a first year accountancy student, saw the benefits of the module on multiple levels:

"As an all-female group studying business we were really interested in finding out more about the gender pay gap in banking [...]. [The conference] was also a good opportunity to develop our research skills and to carry out extensive academic research which will be useful [...] in the future when applying for jobs."

Three prizes were awarded for the best research posters, with the students receiving vouchers from our sponsor, Blackwell's. Professor Stephanie Tailby, the co-director of CESR, presented the prize to the overall winners. In addition to these prizes, students from the winning research groups have been given the opportunity to obtain funding to continue with their research. Allowing students insight into the research process is an overarching aim of *Engaging in Critical Business Enquiry*; hence, a chance for dissemination represents the final stage of the research path.



The opportunity to publish so early on in a student's career clearly illustrates the impact research can have, as well as providing a rare, yet tangible means of demonstrating their skills and abilities to future employers.

The research conducted by our prize winners was diverse, yet engaged with contemporary issues and the core themes of the module around diversity, control at work, globalisation and Corporate Social Responsibility. **Samuel Senior, Tom Ower, Tom James** and **Gintare Kavoliunaite** presented research focusing on the implementation of lean management techniques within call centres. Their poster outlined the challenges associated with lean methods and presented some suggestions from the literature on how to address these.

**Melissa Barnes, Matthew James, Kelly Walker, Stacey Horseman, Kim Luscombe** and **Christina Fuhrer** choose to investigate the causes of poverty for 18-25 year olds in the South West. They critically evaluated the competing explanations offered by the literature around in-work poverty, the rising costs of living and the benefits trap before arguing that more empirical evidence was needed to find a conclusive solution to the problem.

Our final winners conducted some short empirical research in order to examine the extent to which young Muslims perceive themselves to be the victims of discrimination at work. **Masuma Begum, Ivana Ujkic, Carlos Darpoh, Michael Matute** and **Adnan Rahman** found that, despite evidence from the literature of high unemployment amongst young Muslims, in their study there was little evidence of reported discrimination on the basis of religion, instead the impact of race was seen as far more significant. Having said this, the group argued that their sample size was relatively small and, therefore, their study may have been unrepresentative.

These groups of students will be offered the opportunity to develop their research further and present their work at national undergraduate research conferences in 2014 – 2015, with up to £200 support provided by a former UWE business student, Peter Fane, as a Nurture Award.

To conclude, this has been another outstanding year for *Engaging in Critical Business Enquiry*, with some really excellent work being produced that is evidences how research-led teaching is effective, challenging and encourages students to become researchers from the outset. The module continues to grow! We are expecting around 750 students to enrol in January 2015 and hopefully you will be amongst the guests we welcome to our next *Engaging in Critical Business Enquiry* research poster conference in April 2015.