

# Evaluation of ADM-HEA Subject Centre's *Networks* Magazine

## *Background*

*Networks* magazine was created in 2007 to replace an existing Subject Centre newsletter. The aim was to provide a higher calibre of content that stopped short of becoming a refereed academic journal.

An initial investment was made in commissioning a professional design for the magazine but for budgetary reasons, responsibility for the layout and production transferred to the Subject Centre and a local graphic designer following production of the first two issues.

Each issue aims to identify a theme, such as Creativity, ESD, Widening Participation etc., and contributions are regularly invited from staff working in the art, design and media sector. An editorial meeting is held before each issue is produced and team members are invited to offer ideas for content or to identify potential contributors known to them in the sector. *Networks* is co-edited by Alison Crowe and Debbie Flint who write content, manage submissions received, edit copy and manage the production process in partnership with the graphic designer and printer.

The magazine currently has seven sections:

- Editorial: providing current news from the Subject Centre and an overview of the content, which is written by a member of the ADM-HEA team.
- ADM-HEA News: contains information about all Subject Centre news and activities, providing opportunities for engagement.
- Sector News: is made up of items on education policy and initiatives of interest to the sector as well as submissions from readers.
- Events: reports from ADM sector related conferences, workshops etc., written by the team or submitted by readers.
- Features: the largest section of the magazine, providing substantial articles from teaching staff on various aspects of learning and teaching such as assessment, ESD, widening participation. All submissions, whether published in the magazine or not, are available on the Features section of the ADM-HEA website.
- Projects: Either ADM-HEA project news or submissions from the sector about current or completed project work.
- Reviews: Usually book reviews carried out by staff from a selection of books on the Subject Centre's website review list.

*Networks* is published three times per academic year, coinciding with the beginning of the Autumn, Spring and Summer terms. It was first published in Summer 2007 and is currently in its eleventh issue. It is available as a hard copy magazine and also as a downloadable PDF file from the ADM-HEA website with plans in hand to make its online content more accessible. There has been a steady increase in submissions from readers since the magazine's inception as well as a rise in the magazine's readership.

## Evaluation

The evaluation was carried out between February/March 2010 by means of paper copy and online surveys. The paper copy was inserted into issue 09 of the magazine and mailed out with a postage paid, return envelope provided. The paper questionnaire also included the web address for the online version of the survey. The entire mailing list, including those who subscribe to the magazine as an online publication only, were also emailed the survey link. Two follow up reminders were sent out via email to encourage responses.

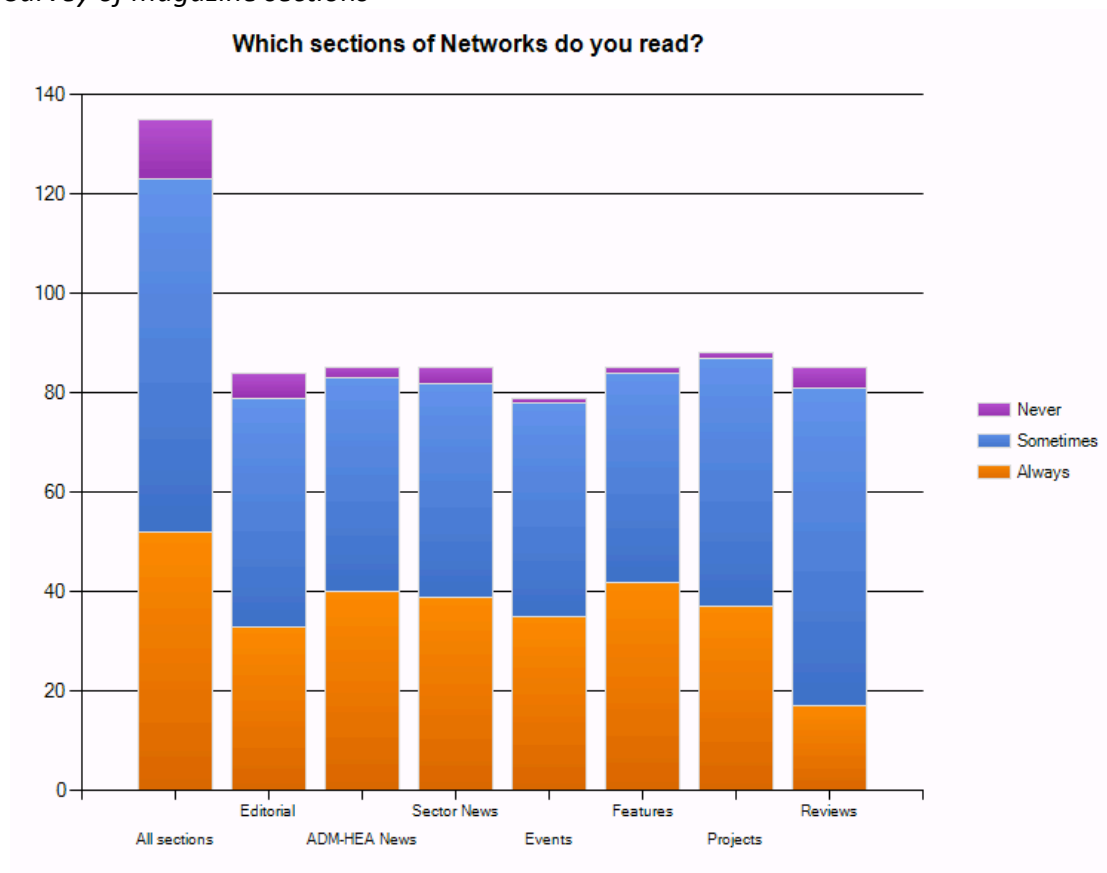
The evaluation was undertaken to establish the impact of the content on the readership for the purposes to the Academy reporting requirements and to inform ADM-HEA of ways in which the publication could be developed and improved in future.

In all there were 149 responses to the survey, representing a rate of 8%.

## Methods of access

Respondents were asked to indicate how they received the magazine. 95% indicated that they received it as a hard copy publication, 11% accessing it online. 2.8% stated that they did not receive it directly or read a colleagues copy.

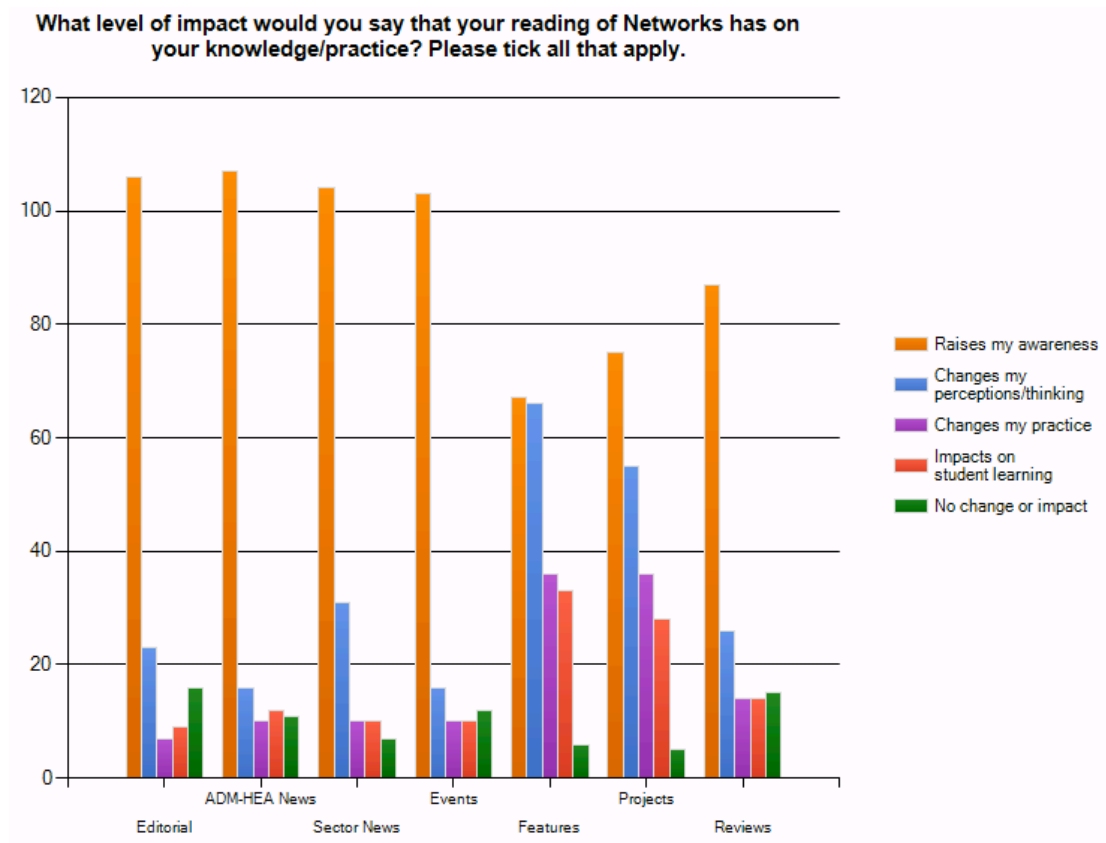
## Survey of magazine sections



91% of respondents indicated that they sometimes or always read all sections of *Networks*. The most read sections were Features and Projects, which 98% of said that they read, closely followed by the Events and ADM-HEA News sections at 97%. The least read section was the Editorial although this was nevertheless still quite high at 94%.

### Impact

In response to questions regarding the levels of impact the magazine content had:



Answers indicated that all sections of the magazine succeeded in raising the awareness of readers. In terms of changing perceptions Features (49.3%) and Projects (40.1%) had the highest impact. These two sections also scored highest for impact on student learning: Features 24.6% and Projects 20.4%. The sections with the least impact across the board were the Editorial 11.9% and Reviews 11.5%.

Thirty positive, narrative responses were provided to the request for examples of the impact *Networks* had had on their learning and teaching. These included:

“I am delivering a newly developed module on Web 2.0 and am enormously interested in the idea of open courseware so the recent issue feature Media 2.0 and other literature around these areas have directly informed my course and the delivery of that course.”

“Fascinating projects and schemes, keep them coming. All your featured awards are an inspiration and often effect my teaching.”

“Inclusive practice re PG/MA Applied Arts. Broadens students awareness – website and projects essential to know of other projects/practice which in turn will encourage confident new ‘moves’/ideas.”

“I recently completed degree in Design and Development of E-Learning. The items and features have combined with knowledge gained on my degree course to enable me to provide better support to staff and student in the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning experience.”

“ Features and reports delivering ideas for student workshops e.g. recent issue Pg.31 will inform my own input into our Department’s future training plans.”

“I read a piece about scaffolding writing and reading comprehension by a Media tutor. I tried the techniques outlined with my students and had success.”

### *Longevity*

66% of respondents indicated that they retain Networks for future reference. 28.5% said they sometimes did and 5.6% said they never did.

### *Timing*

The survey asked for responses regarding the suitability of the tri-annual publication date. 83% either definitely or mostly agreed that the timing was appropriate. 13.2% were undecided and 3.5% gave a negative response.

### *Design and presentation*

Traditionally a contentious issue in the sector; 77% of respondents definitely or mostly agreed that Networks was appropriately designed and presented for its audience. 11.2% were undecided and 11.9% thought it inappropriate.

### *Interest*

50.7% of readers definitely agreed that the content of Networks was interesting and informative and 42.3% mostly agreed. 5.6% were undecided and 0.14% gave a negative response.

### *Development*

Respondents were asked for suggestions of how they thought Networks might be improved. Fifty-one replies were received and the following exemplify the range of comments received:

“The new design is great. I wonder if the photos would have more significance without the superimposed photo mechanical dot pattern.”

“Some colleagues have mentioned that they find the type difficult to read (too faint).”

“Smaller in size, A5 instead of A4.”

“Sometimes over-reliant on jargon and buzz words!”

“More about engaging staff with the work of and opportunities offered through ADM.”

“Send it electronically. Add more dynamic up to the minute features. Redesign and use colour and movement.”

“Ratio of headings to text – less heading would allow more text – possibly with abstracts in heading space making more room for odd images in text?”

“More coverage of vocational education in ADM and placement opportunities.”

“More visually interesting, using visual imagery to better illustrate the points made and projects featured.”

“It doesn’t feel very personal, interactive or collegiate. More information about raising contact, network and learning.”

“I would like to see a slight expansion of the Features section. Perhaps one or two more features, but this is because I enjoy them and find them so useful.”

### *Contributions*

The content of Networks relies heavily on submissions from staff in the ADM sector and respondents were asked if they were aware that they could submit items for publication in the magazine. 86.1% knew they could, 13.9% did not.

When asked if they had ever contributed, 18.9% said that they had, 81.3% that they hadn’t. Those who had contributed had mainly sent in items about projects (57.7%) and Reviews (38.5%). The lowest category for contributions was Events 15.4%.

When asked if their contribution to Networks had resulted in any contact from colleagues within our outside the ADM sector, 54.5% of Project item submitters reported that they had, 27.3% of Sector News items received a response. Events and Features sections both received an 18.2% response rate. Reviews were lowest at 9.1%.

Thirteen narrative examples were given, including:

“A couple of people/lecturers did express interest in the project I was running and asked for further details.”

“Invitation to events and networking on topics.”

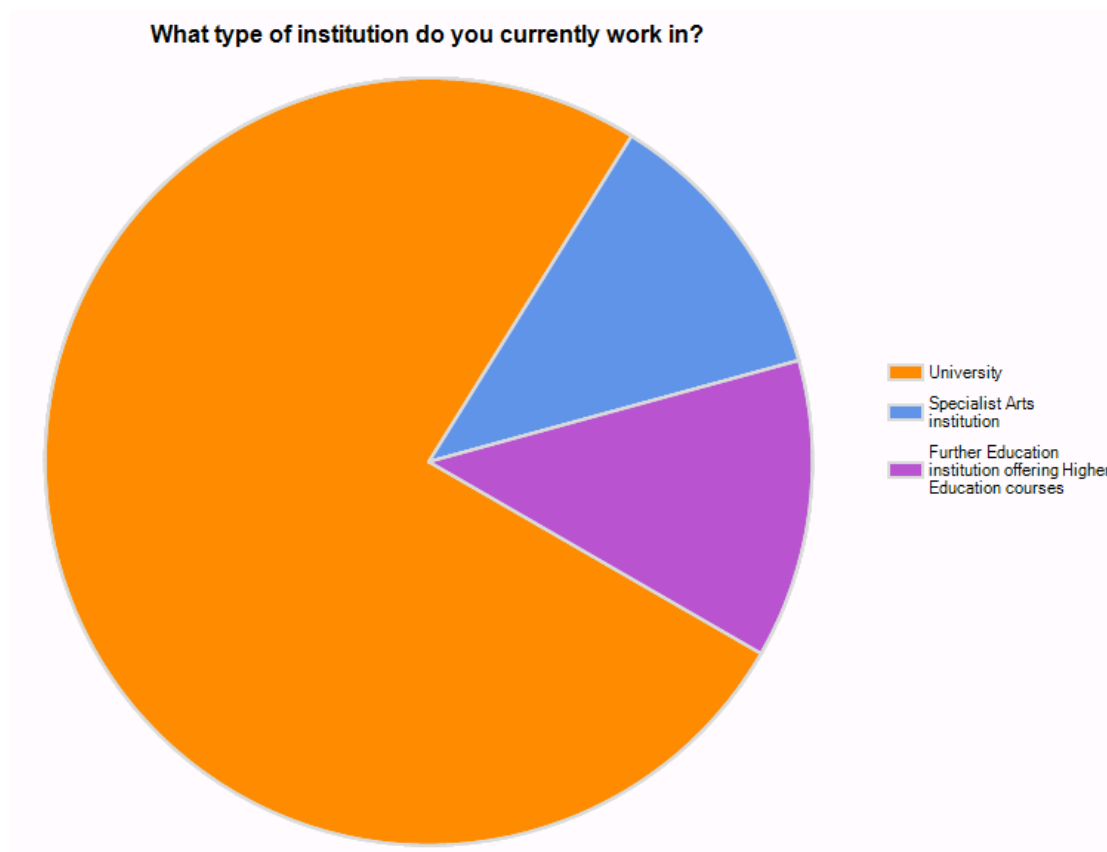
“Invited to present at other universities immediately after recent Networks article (All Rise) published – Thank you!”

“Other researchers asking for advice, but also recognition from colleagues at conferences.”

“Have written about the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network and conference and shortly after publication have seen people sign up to our mailing list and register for our conference. I suspect there’s a link there.”

### *Readers’ location*

75.9% of respondents were based within a university, 11.9% within a Specialist arts institution and 12.6% delivering HE in FE.



### *Roles*

75.9% of staff were Teachers, 10.2% worked in Student Support roles, 8.8% were Researchers, 4.4% Visiting Lecturers and 0.7% were Technicians.

### *Hours of work*

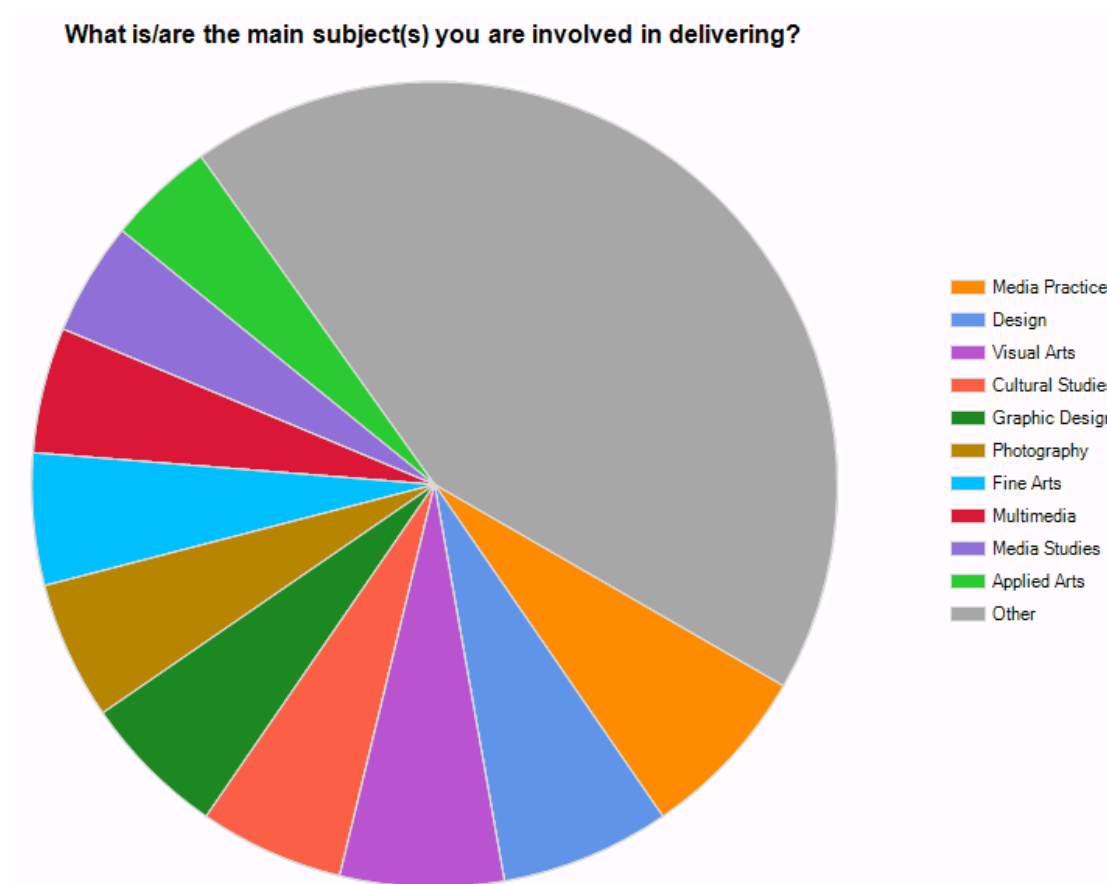
74.1% work full-time, 23% part-time and 2.8% are retired.

### *Time in HE*

75% have been in HE for over five years, 19.4% between two and five years, 5.6% between one and two years. There were no responses from staff with less than a year's experience.

### *Subject areas*

28 respondents skipped this question. The largest proportion of the remaining respondents was in the 'Other' category - 31%, and included: performance art, writing, architecture, computer technologies, creative therapies, careers education/information, advertising/creativity, participatory arts and public relations. Of those specifying one of the JACS code subject areas: Media Practice (23.1%) and Visual Arts (21.5%) were the categories with the highest response rates. The lowest responses were Screenwriting at 4.1% and Games Design at 5.8%.



### *Conclusions/Recommendations*

## *Design*

The appearance of Networks continues to be a subject of criticism despite the magazine having been professionally designed and every effort having been taken to maintain its quality and standard within the existing production budget.

There were a number of complaints about the legibility of the font, which has recently been increased in size to address this. To darken the existing font further would necessitate changing it completely, which is likely to compromise the whole design. In view of limitations on the publication budget, it is not feasible to re-design the magazine. Improved online accessibility would address this problem.

There were quite a few comments concerning the dot grid, which in some cases obscured the images. This problem has now been addressed in the latest issue.

There has been some valid criticism about the quality images used with content, however, this is difficult to address given that few submissions are accompanied by print quality images and ADM-HEA is still reliant on the use of purchased stock images. A greater emphasis on the importance of including images with submissions in the guidelines for contributions, perhaps with an example, may go some way to address this issue

## *Accessibility*

Networks is currently available as a PDF download from the ADM-HEA website. We received a few comments about improving the magazine as an online publication for budget and environmental reasons. A review and change to provide improved navigation, interactivity and appearance of the content for the ADM-HEA website is now in hand and it may be worth considering online publication only, at a future date once the online version has been optimized for users.

## *Content/Quality*

Other suggestions concerned the inclusion of case studies; more project reports and features as well as more information about how staff can benefit from being involved in ADM-HEA. It would be easy to address the first of these suggestions by publishing case studies we receive for inclusion in the Resources section of the website. We actively encourage the submission of project reports and features via the e-bulletin, website and the magazine itself and there has been a substantial increase in submissions over the life of the magazine. Items submitted are not always of sufficient general interest or quality to be appropriate for publication and the editors have had to exercise their own judgment in this area.

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