fOCUS II Transfer

Interim report from Professor Margaret Harris (Oxford Brookes University)

Background
Funds were granted so that the excellent work completed with the production of fOCUS II could be extended to a wider group of users. fOCUS was initially developed as a training tool for the use of undergraduates who were learning about observational methods. It soon became clear that fOCUS could also be used to provide training for clinical psychologists. With the support of both undergraduate and postgraduate tutors the fOCUS software and sets of supporting materials were developed, culminating in fOCUS II.

There were a number of aims for the transfer phase. The first was to identify potential partners in disciplines allied to psychology, especially those involved with the training of other health professionals. The second was to explore ways in which the fOCUS materials could be adapted for the specific training needs of each group. The third aim was to develop sets of assets that could be used for the teaching of developmental psychology.

Progress to date
Perhaps inevitably, securing the agreement of partners in related disciplines had been a time-consuming exercise and progress has been slower than originally anticipated. However, as can be seen on the summary table, a number of partners have now been identified and case studies have either been completed or are in the process of being arranged. It is pleasing to note that the fOCUS materials have already been used with students on postgraduate courses in education and plans are well advanced for their use in professional training in the Plymouth Peninsula Medical School.

A number of new Psychology departments have been exploring the use of fOCUS software and supporting materials and my own department will be introducing them in the coming academic year.

The developmental psychology teaching materials are close to completion. The CD-Rom on attachment has been completed and the Child Development Assets will shortly be available. Having already seen some of the materials, I know that they will be an invaluable resource for the teaching of developmental psychology.

fOCUS III is scheduled for completion by the end of 2006. This will also improve the utility of the software even further.
Future developments
There are clearly more opportunities for fOCUS to be developed both as a teaching and research tool. One issue discussed at the final meeting last year was the potential for developing fOCUS as a resource for teaching outside the UK. This is a long term plan and may require additional funding for the development of specific international collaborations. Within the UK, there are likely to be further opportunities to develop collaborative links, especially outside psychology.

I understand that a significant part of the budget remains unspent. This would allow the Transfer phase to continue for another year. I am sure that additional time on the project will result in the development of additional assets that will add to the utility of fOCUS II and III. One issue worthy of comment is that the team has developed a clear and careful framework that addresses the important ethical issues involved in the use of case studies. This model will allow them to produce suitable assets for the training of a number of professional groups who deal with vulnerable members of the population.