

Editorial

Assessing feedback and offering feedback on assessment

With final year students in the England, Wales and Northern Ireland having recently completed the second annual National Student Survey (NSS), academics, funding bodies and student representatives have been evaluating the data arising from the preceding NSS. I believe everyone involved in Higher Education can generally be encouraged by the levels of satisfaction reported by students (see Richardson, 2005). Regarding the questions on feedback and assessment, however, responses to the survey have highlighted aspects of the student learning experience where certain concerns are apparent. It is timely, therefore, that several papers in the current volume of *Bioscience Education* address these issues.

Firstly, Ian Hughes describes the development and application of an assessment audit to equip colleagues in HE institutions to identify areas of their assessment practice where improvements could be made. Secondly, Chris Glover and Evelyn Brown share some more findings arising from the Formative Assessment in Science Teaching (FAST) project. In particular, they have looked at the emphasis placed by tutors on content versus issues of grammar and presentation, and on whether the comments merely looked back critically, or looked forward constructively in suggesting how a student might improve their work. Thirdly, Alasdair Thin reports enhanced student engagement and exam performance following the introduction of regular, short, online assessments throughout a physiology module.

Elsewhere in this volume, Jon Scott reports on an investigation into the relative influence of different criteria in the decision by undergraduates to enter into HE at all and in their selection of both a bioscience programme and the institution at which to study. Two further articles shed light on areas of biology in which our discipline is finding increasing congruence with other subjects. Poppy Turner and Andrew Curran make some interesting observations at the interface of educational research and neurobiology, as they consider the influence of environmental factors that promote or discourage student learning and how these may find their manifestation via the underlying alterations in neurochemistry. Gülnur Birol and colleagues work instead at the boundary between biology and engineering and describe some resources for teaching tissue engineering.

There has been a suspicion that many of the great songs of the sixties were written under the influence of various pharmaceutical products. Here, the situation is reversed as Ewen MacDonald and Jarmo Saarti share some of their songs about pharmacology and describe the beneficial effects these have had on their students' grasp of the subject.

As always, I am grateful to colleagues who have taken time out to review books for the journal. Unsolicited reviews are always welcome, if any readers have found a text particularly helpful (or indeed unhelpful) we would be happy

to receive your critique. Similarly, we believe that there is great potential for the sharing of novel teaching ideas via the Short Communication section of the journal. Contributions can be ideas that have not yet received the same measure of evaluation expected of a full paper, but are nonetheless timely and potentially beneficial to others in the field. An example, on obtaining copies of television programmes for teaching purposes, is included here.

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Reference

Richardson J.T.E. (2005) National Student Survey: interim assessment of the 2005 questionnaire available at
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/2005/rd20_05/rd20_05.pdf
(accessed 31 May 2006)