

Editorial

Completion of this volume of the *Bioscience Education Electronic-journal (BEE-j)* comes at a time of transition for higher education in the UK. As many readers will already know, October 2004 saw the official launch of the Higher Education Academy, a coming together of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) and the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund National Co-ordination Team (TQEF NCT) into one body. As well as being a small step towards a reduction in the number of acronyms in the sector, the Academy has the potential to be a strong voice nationally and internationally on matters relating to learning and teaching, as well as broader enhancement of the student experience.

What does this mean for the Centre for Bioscience and for the journal? For the foreseeable future, it is business as usual; the LTSN Centre for Bioscience becomes the Centre for Bioscience, The Higher Education Academy, but retains the same commitment to the sharing of good practice and innovation that was a hallmark of its previous incarnation. Papers for this journal will continue to be posted on the website (now best reached via <http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk>) as soon as they have been reviewed, accepted and formatted, with articles being formally collated by volume in May and November of each year to facilitate citation.

The sharp-eyed may notice two departures. Firstly, the bee insignia, which was created to complement the former LTSN 'honeycomb' but does not sit so well with the new Academy logo, has been allowed to fly away. Secondly, and more significantly, Allan Jones has found that increasing responsibilities elsewhere have required him to step down as Editor of *BEE-j*. On behalf of all at the Centre for Bioscience, I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his very significant contribution in steering the journal through its first two years, up to and including the review and collation of articles for this volume. Even in this relatively short period of time, the journal has already become a repository of interesting and innovative pedagogic approaches that are characterised by having been developed at the 'chalkface' and with the potential to be transferable into different contexts.

In this volume, two papers directly address the issue of final year projects, and a third looks at the preparation of students for fieldwork-based research. Firstly, Jim Ryder draws on evidence from interviews with students and their project supervisors to identify a range of learning outcomes that might reasonably be expected to develop from a traditional final year research project. Amongst other benefits, a list derived in this way can serve as a checklist when considering the relative strengths and weaknesses of alternative projects. Secondly, Michael Hollingsworth and colleagues review more than ten years experience of web authoring projects being offered as alternatives to laboratory work. They report a comparison of the marks awarded to students undertaking web projects with those lab projects, and evaluate the knowledge and skills acquired by each group. Taking a step further back in the development of research skills, Debra Panizzon and Andrew Boulton describe a series of exercises that have been used to educate students regarding project design, the peer review process and the application of statistical analysis to 'real-life' scenarios.

Many academics have a sneaking suspicion that students on parallel programmes may not be experiencing parity in the nature of the assessed activities, their timing, nor indeed the overall assessment burden under which they are placed. Is it possible to have anything more scientifically robust than a hunch on which to base these concerns? Module literature can be a starting point in describing the type of activities undertaken, but does not usually include information on submission dates or the time students have been granted to complete the task. Anne Crook and Julian Park describe an electronic assessment diary that they have designed to monitor and evaluate the assessment experience. They include some reflection on the practice they uncovered when employing the diary method in the academic year 2003/04.

The General Medical Council's 1993 report *Tomorrow's Doctors* precipitated a dramatic restructuring of the content and delivery of Medical Education in the UK. This process frequently included a stripping out of basic biological content from the core programme, in order to make space for earlier contact with patients and, frequently, a greater emphasis on problem-based learning. A decade or so on, it is possible to reflect on whether some of the omitted material needs to be reintroduced. In his article, Roger Downie argues that learning about evolution has significant relevance to the training of clinicians. He describes a unit on *Evolution in Health and Disease* introduced as one of the optional special study modules (SSMs) for medical students in Glasgow, and reports the findings of three surveys; into coverage of evolutionary biology in UK undergraduate curricula; into medical students' attitudes towards evolution; and views on the merits of evolutionary education by students that had completed the SSM.

Finally, Beronda Montgomery introduces us to a service-learning model for teaching about biotechnology. I must confess that before reading her paper, I was unfamiliar with this approach. Service-learning involves students performing a service to the community as an integral part of their coursework (Gascoigne Lally, 2001). It is distinguished from simple voluntary work by the embedding of subject-specific and generic skill development into the experience. Students benefit by recognising how their studies relate to the outside world, the community benefits from the actions of the students, and their university or college benefits by having closer integrations with its neighbours.

BEE-j represents an excellent way for you to share your work in any aspects of pedagogy pertaining to biological scientists. As an open-access electronic publication, the journal has the advantages of being freely available to fellow practitioners around the world and, without the constraints of traditional publishing, your educational research and developments can be shared with colleagues whilst they are still topical. We look forward to receiving your manuscript.

Reference

Gascoigne Lally C. (2001) Service/community learning and foreign language teaching methods: an application. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 2(1), 53-64

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