



# REFLECTIONS

## About *Reflections*

Welcome to the fifth issue of *Reflections*, the newsletter which focuses on teaching, learning and assessment in Queen's and more generally in higher education. *Reflections* is published once a semester by the Centre for Educational Development and provides a forum for discussing learning and teaching initiatives in Queen's. We aim to balance articles from the various support units within Queen's with contributions from academic staff and guest writers.

Our cover article is on the very current topic of Encouraging Student Engagement and Attainment by Professor Lorraine Stefani, who is Director of the Centre for Academic Development at the University of Auckland, New Zealand and a former Queen's member of staff in the School of Biological Sciences. Professor Stefani was a recent keynote speaker at the CED conference on this topic held in September. This issue of *Reflections* also includes an article on the conference, which featured three internationally known keynote speakers and a number of workshops presented by local speakers.

We also feature a report on Queen's National Teaching Fellowship 2007 winner, David Gibson from the School of Management and Queen's own internal teaching award winners. In addition we have thoughts on the usefulness of field trips as a way of engaging students with the science curriculum and articles on recent initiatives to provide students with opportunities to enhance their skills development.

## Contributing to the next *Reflections*

We are delighted that we have a record number of articles sent in by Queen's staff in this issue. We would very much welcome contributions for our next issue of *Reflections* to be published in Spring 2008. Contributions can take several forms:

- Articles on an aspect of teaching and learning or student support (generally 500 - 750 words);
- Shorter "newsflash" items, e.g. reporting on a recent event or advertising a new venture or up-coming event (100 -200 words);
- Brief synopses of recent interesting articles on teaching and learning from the educational literature (100 - 200 words);
- Letters or responses to previous articles or to recent developments in H.E.



Contributions can be submitted via e-mail to Linda Carey, (l.carey@qub.ac.uk) or Susan Shields (s.shields@qub.ac.uk) Centre for Educational Development.

**Linda Carey**  
Editor of *Reflections*



## Encouraging Student Engagement and Attainment

**Lorraine Stefani**

Professor and Director of Academic Development University of Auckland

Student engagement is currently a 'hot topic' in higher education. While the overall mission of universities should surely be to engage students in learning through providing the conditions and the environment in which learning will flourish, the current (re) emphasis on 'engagement' is due to many factors including: increasing diversity of the student population; globalization and the new marketing of higher education; increased competition between universities and internationalization of the curriculum; changing expectations of the student population – partly but not exclusively – due to the power and the capabilities of the new technologies.

The current emphasis on 'engagement' brings, or should bring students and the student experience to the forefront of our thinking with respect to our academic practice. The increasing diversity of the student population should not be simply a mantra that rolls off the tongue to emphasize the complexities of teaching and learning. Rather it is a phrase that requires some un-packaging to interpret the notion of 'diversity'. What does diversity mean for us in the classroom, the lecture theatre, the laboratory – indeed what does it mean for us at institutional level?

At its simplest 'engagement' in an educational context refers to the time, energy and resources students devote to activities designed to enhance their learning at University. Krause (2006) expands on this definition and posits that:

"The well-adjusted and engaged student is one who assesses and re-assesses their thinking as transitions and opportunities to engage in different ways continue through and beyond the first year of university."

This definition offered by Krause (2006), while eloquent and succinct, may embody some implicit assumptions. Given the heterogeneity of any student body, it is quite likely that 'engagement' will mean different things to different students. It has to be unlikely that within an increasingly heterogeneous student population, there is one measure or one definition of 'engagement' that encapsulates the level of motivation or the learning goals of each individual student. We might consider that motivation to learn is a factor associated with one's willingness and ability to 'engage' in the way that academics or funding bodies interpret the concept of engagement, and to be fully 'engaged' in the learning process according to an ill-defined term of reference.

Haggis (2006) in her research on pedagogies for diversity, takes issue with the assumptions we make in higher education that 'all students' know that higher education study is about questioning, challenging, debating and creating knowledge as well as being about exploring and coming to know what is already known!

Barnett and Coate (2005) argue that a curriculum for engagement calls for a teaching that is likely to engage, to lift, to enthuse, even to inspire. In other words, curricula for engagement call for pedagogies for engagement.

However, we must be careful within institutions about how we 'promote' engagement. It is not reasonable to put the total weight of student engagement onto academic staff. 'Engagement' is not a simple concept. It requires a whole of institution commitment to create the culture, ethos and environment that will contribute towards enhancing levels of student engagement.

At the recent successful conference hosted by the Centre for Educational Development at QUB, the levels of 'staff engagement' with the concept of 'student engagement' were very high indeed. However, as one delegate commented, it is always the 'already converted' who enthusiastically participate in such conferences.

**Encouraging student engagement and attainment requires a holistic strategic response. At the present time we lack a body of institutional research on what constitutes engagement – and crucially, how students describe and define 'engagement' at different levels of study – or how strategic students are in 'being engaged'. At the present time we lack a body of research pertaining to student engagement in an increasingly complex educational context. Some potential areas for research include:**

- Enhancing our understanding of the relationship between levels of student engagement and student outcomes – e.g. with respect to learning, academic progress, personal growth.
- The validity and reliability of institutional assumptions about levels of preparedness for university level study and access to the culture of the disciplines.
- Identifying the characteristics of significant learning experiences in a mass higher education context.
- How we might transform the current academic culture to develop disciplinary-based professional educators without disrupting disciplinary-based research.

While there may be a lack of appropriate research available to us, there is no lack of initiatives to promote and enhance 'a culture of engagement'. In Australasian universities there are a number of interesting developments occurring – with, of course, the ultimate goals of enhancing student attainment, retention and success. Some of these developments and initiatives are listed below:

- Provide clear statements regarding the University's expectations of student responsibilities in all publicity materials intended for potential and actual students.
- Create a University web-site specifically for first-year students.
- Create a Student Engagement Research and Development Unit.
- Celebrate teaching through recognition, support and awards.
- Research and document teaching and learning practice from a first-year perspective.
- Review the academic agenda and support and promote academic development.

The topic of 'student engagement' is likely to be high on the education agenda for some time. Taking the issue seriously and promoting a 'culture of engagement' that impacts positively on both students and staff is undoubtedly the way to go – even if it is difficult and challenging.

**The strategic response is a holistic response and universities need to adopt integrated, institutional approaches that promote student engagement and involvement from an early stage. From a range of conference presentations on student learning and the plethora of published work on how universities operate, the following points are suggestions as to how universities might change in ways that could potentially create at institutional level, a culture of engagement:**

- Institutions could shift incrementally from being fixated on structure to promoting a culture and ethos which is more meaningful to our students. In other words, create communities of practice where teachers recognize they are also learners – learning from their students.
- If we are to actively promote student engagement there is a greater need to emphasize, and create conditions for, faculty wide commitment to the mission of their institution.
- Universities are hierarchical in nature, whereas the global environment in which we operate is becoming much more fluid. The development of leadership capacity may be more important than hierarchy.
- The current emphasis in universities is on delivering products – whereas more emphasis could be put on coaching for change processes.
- The hierarchical nature of universities can and does create empires and silos whereas what is required in a 21st century university is the development of a shared vision on curriculum standards, pedagogy and the skills necessary for change. This requires commitment from all staff, better integration of institutional processes and better means of communication within universities.
- There is a pressing need for academic initiatives designed to integrate technologies into our teaching and learning strategies with the aim of providing new learning experiences for our students.
- Students do not only 'study', they have very full lives, and we could endeavour to create conditions whereby they can make better use of their time in and out of the classroom through improved communication and enhanced interaction with course materials using technologies as a tool.

There is no blueprint for effecting such change within universities but the above suggestions all require institutional commitment because such transformations cannot be left to a few committed individuals. Hopefully, this short paper will encourage dialogue and debate on how universities can transform themselves to be responsive and adaptable to the changing needs, expectations and aspirations of our students – which is, after all, a primary purpose of higher education.

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# New Flexible Teaching Space

Gill Kelly, CED

In 2006, the JISC e-Learning and Innovation Team published the report "Designing Spaces for Effective Learning: A guide to 21st century learning space design". Giving examples of new style physical learning environments developed by HE institutions across the UK, it put forward a vision for flexible teaching spaces to "accommodate current and evolving pedagogies".

Over the last academic year Queen's had its own project group (drawn from Schools, Estates, Information Services and Academic and Student Affairs) designing and developing a Flexible Teaching Space situated on the top floor (room 307) of the Peter Froggatt Centre. A large open space to support different modes of teaching and learning, the room can be configured in many different ways. Although it is possible to set up the room with the focus on one teacher "at the front", the room is primarily designed to support a range of learner centred activities which can be supported by provision of the following movable facilities:

- **modular folding tables**
- **folding chairs**
- **stools**
- **whiteboards**

## and the following technologies:

- **20 charged, wireless tablet PCs**
- **7 plasma screens**
- **40 Personal Response System handsets (voting technology)**
- **DVD/VCR**
- **Solid state digital video cameras**
- **USB flat bed scanner**
- **Colour laser jet printer**
- **Flexible lighting.**

All of the above can be easily and quickly set up during a session to allow large (up to 60 students) or small group work. Initial reaction from staff making pilot use of the room is very positive with regard to the range of ways it can be utilised to support effective student learning.



If you would like to see the **Flexible Teaching Space** (Room 307 Peter Froggatt Centre), it will be open for viewing **2.30pm - 4.30pm on Thursday 24 January 2008**



# Queen's Teaching Awards

## 2007

### Experienced Teaching Staff



**Dr Philip Hanna**

School of Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

This award is made to a highly-committed teacher whose enthusiasm for his subject has influenced his approach to learning and teaching. This has enabled his students to engage actively and deeply with the difficult topic of computer programming early in their degree subject. By doing so, their enjoyment of the subject is enhanced and they are motivated to spend time, outside of formal teaching time, on their projects. This is backed up by sound educational practice linked to pedagogical literature.



**Dr Tracey Wilkinson**

Anatomy, Division of Basic Medical Sciences, School of Medicine and Dentistry

This award is made to a highly-effective teacher whose commitment to her students and teaching practice is very evident and who has developed a variety of teaching methods to facilitate her students' diverse range of learning styles. She has effectively reorganised the teaching in her modules in order to provide a more stimulating experience for her students and introduced a range of appropriate assessment practices in line with those changes.



**Ms Shelley Tracey**

School of Education

This award is made to a highly-reflective practitioner whose own professional development is key to her teaching. Her innovative teaching methods inspire and stimulate student learning effectively and she makes creative use of resources and assessment methods.



**Dr Fiona Magowan**

History and Anthropology

This award is made to a highly-effective teacher committed to research-led teaching and the use of innovative and varied assessment techniques. She is providing her students with skills which will have value beyond their degree, such as self-awareness, the ability to be reflective and effective communication skills. Her teaching methods enable her students to become active agents in their own learning.



**Dr David Marshall**

School of Nursing and Midwifery

This award is made to an enthusiastic and dedicated nurse lecturer who is effectively bringing his professional experience to the teaching of nurses training to work with people with learning difficulties. He provides a stimulating and supportive learning environment for his students and has sensitively and appropriately included two people with learning disabilities in the delivery of various aspects of the curriculum in order to bring the lived experience to his students.



Eight Queen's Teaching Awards were awarded in 2007. The Award recipients are a mix of teams and individuals, new and experienced staff using innovative and traditional methods. Five awards were presented in the category of experienced teaching staff, two awards presented to staff teaching for less than five years and one award in the final category of learning support staff.

The Teaching Awards panel was chaired by Professor Ken Brown. Professor Phil Race from the University of Leeds was the external assessor and a number of academic and academic-related staff from across the University completed the panel.

#### Staff Teaching for less than five years



**Dr Claire Mitchell**

School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work

This award is made to an enthusiastic teacher who, in the short time she has been working in higher education, has made a dramatic impact on the engagement of her students with their subject. Her innovative teaching methods have inspired her students to become active participants in their own learning and have enabled her students to discuss openly and reflect on difficult topics related to Northern Ireland issues.



**Dr Melissa McCullough**

Medical Education, School of Medicine and Dentistry

This award is made for a team teaching approach to introducing medical students to ethical law. The team has used their enthusiasm for the subject to stimulate students' interest and has developed innovative and varied teaching methods to engage students in active learning, including a moot to stimulate debate and introduce a number of topics within the module. The panel particularly noted the transferability of many of the methods to other subjects.

#### Learning Support Staff



Team of  
**Dan Holden** (Senior Subject Librarian)  
**Janet Drake** (Subject Librarian) and  
**Carol Dunlop** (Subject Librarian)  
from Library Services and Research Support

This award goes to a learning support team in the University's Library Services and Research Support for their effective and well-considered delivery of the RefWorks package. The team has recognised the different learning styles of their learners and developed a training course appropriately. Their success is evidenced by learner feedback. The team continuously reviews and evaluates the training to maintain its currency and relevance for learners, drawing on appropriate educational theory.

***The 2008 round of the QUB Teaching Awards will open in January 2008 and will be advertised widely at that time.***





# Enhancing the Classroom Experience

**David Marshall**

As an educator, I have a passion to impart knowledge to student nurses related to best evidence-based practice which will meet the health care needs of people who have a learning disability and their carers. In my 26-year professional career, I have never lost the 'vision' to be in a place where I can play a significant and influential role in maximizing the opportunities for this client group. I see my current role as educator allowing these aspirations to come to fruition – through the use of innovative teaching methods that maximise the student learning experience.

It appeared to me as lecturer in Learning Disability Nursing, in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, that bringing people for whom we care into the classroom to talk about their lived experience as recipients of care would be an innovative idea. In order to put this idea into action, I approached two people who have a learning disability and their carers. Both Paddy Harland, who is employed as a gardener at QUB, and Peter Thompson, who has Downs Syndrome and lives in accommodation provided by the Triangle Housing Association, enthusiastically agreed to speak to students. Hearing Paddy and Peter speak at lectures, which included question and answering sessions, fostered the idea of creating DVDs for teaching purposes.

Paddy's DVD – 'A Gardener's Tale' includes his employer - Paul Wallace - Estates Dept Manager, QUB, and Paddy's dad (main carer). The DVD gives students an insight into the life of a person with a learning disability and his employment at QUB. The teaching skills highlighted in the DVD are transferable and could be used for teaching purposes in other disciplines e.g. social work and psychology.

Peter's DVD 'Peter's Moving Story' – includes his carers at Triangle Housing Association and traces Peter's past, highlighting different types of 'housing' in which he has lived.



*Mr Peter Thompson and Dr David Marshall*

Students from the Learning Disability Branch Programme have been fully involved in producing the DVDs which has included acting as interviewers. Evaluation by students has been excellent with one student stating that 'it is a unique experience to see and hear Paddy and Peter share what it is like being employed and having a learning disability and to hear how specialised housing schemes work in reality.– you just wouldn't get that out of a textbook.'

Working in conjunction with Paul Morris (Audio Visual Technician, School of Nursing & Midwifery), the Estates Department, carers and nursing students has been challenging. Both Paddy and Peter have triumphed in the face of adversity and hearing and seeing it in a 'real-life' situation in the classroom has proven to be a highly effective pedagogy.



# My life as a **National Teaching Fellow**

**David Gibson**

**In July 2007 I was fortunate enough to win a National Teaching Fellowship awarded by the Higher Education Academy. It was the culmination of four years' work in embedding enterprise into the curriculum in forty-six disciplines throughout Queen's.**

As someone primarily focused in learning and teaching activities in a research university, I found it was very motivational to receive a National Award vindicating the quality standards of our entrepreneurial teaching strategy.

As the first person in the UK to win a National Fellowship for enterprise education, I received a lot of publicity nationally and locally. I was interviewed by Frank Mitchell on UTV radio and have had extensive coverage in the local papers. Fame at last! Most pleasing of all were the sincere congratulations from many colleagues at Queen's.

The National Teaching Fellowship award ceremony was in September. What was exciting was not only meeting the fellow award winners who came from various disciplines, but also the availability of mentoring to develop as a National Teaching Fellow. We were linked with people with similar areas of educational interest and a system put in place to help with personal development. The prize of £10,000 available for 'professional and personal development' was also useful. There is also an opportunity to participate in group projects with other National Teaching Fellows from mainland UK.

There is now an ongoing dialogue online with the Association of National Teaching Fellows and a great opportunity to access learning and teaching expertise in a variety of subject areas. This is vital as the Queen's enterprise education system is based on embedding within existing subject areas with the challenge to embed within the Humanities Faculty over the next two years.

Although it was a little awe inspiring to see some of the excellent practice throughout all academic disciplines, HEA and the Association of National Teaching Fellows have a collaborative spirit and a willingness to help new Fellows to develop.

There have also been more tangible results from winning a National Teaching Fellowship. I was offered external examinerships in entrepreneurship with the Universities of Huddersfield and Glasgow Caledonian. I was also asked to join the Editorial Board of a new HEA online journal for Sociology and Politics. Professor David Kirby, a leading enterprise education academic, has offered me a Visiting Professorship at the new British university in Egypt.

Perhaps the most valuable part of the process has been reflecting on my teaching practice in preparing my submission for nomination. After winning the internal teaching awards at Queen's, it was a considerable step up to win a National Award and I was greatly encouraged by the help provided by the Centre of Educational Development at Queen's.

The award has given me encouragement not only in that my work has some credibility but has made me reflect and provided a process for me to become a more reflective practitioner, learning from best practice internally and externally. I now hope to play my small part in helping Queen's become a world class centre for enterprise education in line with its excellent research base.



*David Gibson*



This short article is based on a presentation made at a CED conference (Enhancing the education environment at Queen's) in September 2006 during which I reflected on benefits staff and students gain from field courses in marine biology in the context of the biosciences CEAIL.

## Dai Roberts

Director of Education,  
School of Biological Sciences &  
Queen's Biosciences CEAIL



# Why bother with field courses?

**Field courses** are frequently perceived by laboratory-based scientists as 'jollies' (Moore, 2001); they are expensive, time consuming, logistically challenging and raise health and safety (liability) issues. However, they offer science students in disciplines such as Geography, Geology and Biology opportunities to observe and make sense objectively of the real world in all its messy complexity.

There is also huge demand from students who want to gain field experience (particularly overseas) as part of their personal and career development. Academics involved in environmental research and education are committed to retaining field courses in the curriculum. This is because they see field experiences, which have stimulated major scientific discoveries (Darwin 1845; Herdman, 1923), as fundamental to their disciplines.

Field courses have a long tradition of using active and interactive learning and team work to develop field and laboratory skills, key objectives of the biosciences CEAIL.

Between 1998 and 2004, I coordinated a module in Practical Marine Ecology which provided a broad-based introduction to the diversity of current approaches used to study coastal communities. The module involved directed sampling in the field, laboratory work and data analysis. This was followed by a team project which employed learnt field skills to investigate an area of the shore selected by the students. The project involved defining, planning and executing an agreed task (active, problem-based learning) and was assessed through individual oral and written presentations and a poster produced by the team; one group's poster was published (Brady et al., 2002).

During the project the students enhance their skills in negotiation, communication and time management, including working under pressure and gain increased confidence through ownership of the work and getting to know staff. At the same time, academic staff have opportunities to get to know students and improve interactive approaches to learning and teaching; some staff also collect preliminary and long-term field data for research (research-informed teaching).

In the 1970s, undergraduates in Botany and Zoology spent up to four weeks on residential field courses during three-year degree programmes. Today, students in Biological Sciences have similar opportunities; the School runs three residential and one non-residential field courses annually, and is encouraged to retain them by external examiners. These modules retain their popularity as evidenced by student evaluation [scores >4/5] and comments '*field course was excellent – brings lecture material to life.*' [Level 2 Marine Ecology May 2007]; '*I definitely think each module should have a choice of either field trips or lab work/ practical classes because field trips are much better!!*'

[Level 2 Applied Ecology September 2006].



Field courses offer opportunities to develop a wide range of generic skills within cognate disciplines. We need to encourage staff and students to reflect more on why we bother with field courses in order to capitalise on the educational opportunities they offer and how these relate to the 'real world', a vision shared with the CDIO initiative in engineering education.

Nowadays, virtual field-trip software means students can experience fieldwork, such as investigating processes in rock pools, without getting wet; although simulations can offer opportunities to those who would otherwise not be able to undertake fieldwork, they are no substitutes for the real thing (Spicer & Stratford, 2001).

Perhaps the last word should be given to John Steinbeck (1945) who recognised that an appreciation of the natural world is primarily gained by observing it:

*'Doc was collecting marine animals in the Great Tide Pool on the tip of the Peninsula. It is a fabulous place; when the tide is in, a wave-churned basin, creamy with foam, whipped by the combers that roll in from the whistling buoy on the reef. But when the tide goes out the little water world becomes quiet and lovely. The sea is very clear and the bottom becomes fantastic with hurrying, fighting, feeding, breeding animals.'*



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Biopic:

Dai Roberts has participated in field courses for over 30 years in Queen's and throughout Europe as part of a European ERASMUS network in 'Environmental Science and Education'.





## ADVENTURES IN INTERDISCIPLINARITY: A BRAND NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTS MA EXPERIENCE

Anna Newell, Artistic Director, Creative and Performing Arts

**The Centre for Excellence in the Creative and Performing Arts (NI)**  
– one of Queen's three Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has just launched a brand new interdisciplinary arts MA experience.

Students from across the creative and performing arts disciplines come together for intensive task-focused practice-based weekend workshops and one-off business skills workshops as part of the innovative new Adventures in Interdisciplinarity module that is at the heart of this new set of MA pathways.

What this model for the MA is about is creating an adventure playground where learning can happen in a broad range of ways

– some of them not necessarily predictable. It's much more than the simple transferral of knowledge. It's a journey with several maps, some of them which will be drawn and redrawn during the journey: it's a voyage where the direction of the ship is determined as much by the crew as by the ship's captain; it's a hothouse full of fertile earth; it's a conversation with many disparate voices.

In preparation for this new way of working, the Centre trialled a version of this module last academic year, attracting a volunteer group of 18 students, ex-students and young and emerging arts practitioners who went on a novel journey together between November 2006 and March 2007.

The brand new interdisciplinary arts MA experience is now up and running and has attracted seven full-time and two part-time students as well as five students who are taking the Adventures as a non-credit-bearing addition to their own MA programme. This group is from a wide range of arts backgrounds including theatre, design, choreography, social anthropology, psychology, music and creative writing and are aged between 21 and 51.





*"I wasn't sure what to expect but I went home buzzing"*

*"it was brilliant. I've never really been involved in any project like this before."*

*"absolutely amazing - the level of expertise condensed and imparted in less than 48 hours was inspirational"*

*"it was an adventure in the truest sense of the word...exploring the unknown.."*

Leading Adventures this semester are Eric Lyon from the Sonic Arts Research Centre at Queen's, Forced Entertainment - one of Britain's most exciting experimental theatre companies - and poet Sinead Morrissey and photographer Sylvia Borda.

For each of the Adventures the student group meet with the visiting artist(s) on a Friday lunchtime and by the end of Saturday they will have created a performance or an installation or a presentational pitch.

These informal performances are open to all interested parties, will last no more than an hour and are free of charge.

For further information please contact Anna Newell –  
a.newell@qub.ac.uk

To book a place at the performance contact Juliana Licinic –  
j.licinic@qub.ac.uk

Coming next semester...

**FURTHER ADVENTURES IN INTERDISCIPLINARITY!**

Public performances arising from the second semester module FURTHER ADVENTURES IN INTERDISCIPLINARITY will take place at 7pm on the evenings of 2 Feb, 23 Feb and 15th March - these Adventures will include collaborations with conceptual artists, a film-maker and with an artist from Scotland whose area of speciality will only be revealed to the students halfway through the Adventure.

In addition the FURTHER ADVENTURES module includes workshops on multi-platform documentation, starting your own business and a Dragons' Den pitching challenge.



The Centre for Excellence in the Creative and Performing Arts (NI) – one of Queen's three Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning - is creating a unique opportunity for students to play, to explore, to go on a creative adventure with their peers from all over the University.

## are you coming out to play?

This is a six-week course that will run from 2-4pm for six Wednesdays starting Wednesday 6th February and finishing Wednesday 12th March. It will be run by the Centre's Artistic Director, Anna Newell, an experienced theatre director and interdisciplinary artist and will be highly practical, task-focused and, above all, fun. Each session will explore practical creative collaboration using a variety of games, exercises and tasks.

Through these sessions, students will gain confidence and skills in creativity, innovation, team-work, presentation, working to a deadline, negotiating a group dynamic, problem-solving and self-presentation etc.

Places are limited to 25 participants altogether with an initial limit of 3 participants from each subject – and will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis.

**This course is open to all students – from dentistry to drama, from medicine to maths, from physics to film: no prior experience of the arts is needed, just a willingness to collaborate creatively and take a journey into the unknown!**



To find out more about  
**are you coming out to play?**  
please contact:  
**Anna Newell**  
a.newell@qub.ac.uk  
028 9097 5112



# CED Annual Conference -

## Encouraging student engagement and attainment

Alison Skillen and Susan Shields, CED

**On 17th and 18th September 2007, Queen's hosted a 2-day conference on the theme of 'Encouraging Student Engagement and Attainment'. The conference, organised by the Centre for Educational Development, featured three national/international speakers and nine parallel workshops covering subjects such as curriculum design, blogging as a tool, threshold concepts and experiences of implementing PDP within Schools. In addition to the three keynote speakers, the conference also featured colleagues from within Queen's, St Mary's University College and the University of Ulster, Jordanstown.**

**The conference proved popular and attracted over 60 delegates ranging from Queen's, Stranmillis University College, the University of Ulster, Waterford Institute of Technology and Dundalk Institute of Technology, some of whom are members of the All-Ireland Society for Higher Education (AISHE).**

**Professor Ken Brown**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Planning), welcomed the delegates to the conference and referred to the achievement of David Gibson, Senior Teaching Fellow in Entrepreneurship, School of Management, who has become the first recipient of a National Teaching Fellowship for Enterprise in Education in the UK.

**Lorraine Stefani**, Professor and Director of Academic Development from University of Auckland, New Zealand, opened the conference with an address on "A southern hemisphere perspective on student engagement". What does Student engagement mean? – "The well adjusted and engaged student is one who assesses and re-assesses their thinking as transitions and opportunities to engage in different ways continue through and beyond the first year of university" (Krause, 2006). Key points included "Why is the concept of student

engagement a hot topic?" (changing demographics, government imperatives on retention and attainment) and measuring student engagement (how can we realistically measure engagement/do surveys provide meaningful data?). She referred to the complexity of student engagement, touching on issues such as the importance of student induction/orientation along with keeping abreast of technology in teaching.

### Following the keynote, three parallel workshops were offered:

- **Professor Lorraine Stefani**  
Curriculum design to enhance student engagement
- **Mr Jonathan Worley** (CETL(NI), St Mary's University College)  
Encouraging student attainment through peer tutoring in academic writing
- **Ms Karen Fraser** (University of Ulster)  
Blogging as a tool to encourage and monitor student motivation and engagement

**Ray Land**, Professor of Higher Education and Director of the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, delivered the second keynote address entitled "Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: a transformational approach to student learning". This presentation highlighted a new conceptual framework to inform programme design and assessment. The approach builds on the notion of 'threshold concepts' (Meyer and Land 2006) which can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. Professor Land suggested that it 'represents a transformed way of understanding without which the learner cannot progress'. Conceptual boundaries and different aspects of troublesome knowledge (difficult, alien and tacit) were discussed: 'such troublesomeness and disquietude is purposeful, as it is the provoker of change that cannot be assimilated, and hence is the instigator of new learning and new ontological possibility'. To conclude, Professor Land put forward ten considerations for course design.

### After the keynote address, three further parallel workshops were held:

- **Professor Ray Land**  
Using threshold concepts to inform course design
- **Mr Clive Cochrane (QUB)**  
Developing students' information literacy
- **Ms Shelley Tracey (QUB)**  
Enhancing student engagement through creative reflection



Day two was opened by Professor **Sally Brown**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Assessment, Learning and Teaching) and Professor of Higher Education Diversity in Teaching and Learning at Leeds Metropolitan University. Her presentation on "Using formative assessment to foster student engagement and achievement" explored how staff can maximise the scale and scope of the formative assessment they give students without overloading themselves in the process. Feedback from assessment was discussed from the students' perspective - when and how feedback was best received so that it can be constructive and allow students to build and work on improvement. Whilst accepting that detailed and timely feedback is hugely demanding of staff, Professor Brown highlighted that assessment and feedback are at the heart of retention.

### To give feedback more effectively and efficiently, Professor Brown suggested:

- Using model answers;
- Using assignment return sheets;
- Writing an assignment report;
- Giving feedback to groups of students;
- Using statement banks;
- Using computer-assisted assessment;
- Involving students in their own assessment.

In conclusion, Professor Brown advised that concentrating on giving students detailed and developmental formative feedback is the single most useful thing we can do for our students, particularly those who have had a struggle to achieve entry to higher education. To do so may require considerable re-engineering not just of our assessment processes but also of curriculum design as a whole.

### Delegates then divided into three further parallel workshops:

- **Professor Sally Brown**  
Combating and deterring plagiarism
- **Dr Alan Masson and Mrs Aine MacNeill (University of Ulster)**  
Teaching and learning practice – the view from both sides of the fence
- **Ms M Boohan, Dr J Vyle, Mr D Foster and Mrs E Gallagher (QUB)**  
Experiences of implementing Personal Development Planning within Schools at Queen's

The final plenary and closing remarks were delivered by Professor Sally Brown. She emphasised the importance of promoting student engagement as a means of improving student retention and the whole student experience. She also urged staff not to be complacent and to look forward and engage with new technology with which so many of our students nowadays are familiar.

Feedback from participants about the event has been extremely positive. Delegates' comments include – 'inspiring, stimulating, challenging', 'educational, enjoyable, entertaining', 'insightful, thought-provoking, well-organised'.

The PowerPoint presentations from the keynote addresses from this year's conference can be downloaded from the CED website at [www.qub.ac.uk/ced](http://www.qub.ac.uk/ced).



*Professor Ken Brown, Professor Lorraine Stephani, Professor Ray Land and Ms Linda Carey*



*Professor Sally Brown, Professor Lorraine Stephani and Ms Linda Carey*

**Next conference to be held May 2009 -**  
*see CED for details closer to the date*

Student attainment and retention is an important focus for the University and a good first year experience is fundamental to ultimate

**success.** In order to illuminate our understanding about what makes for a good (or bad) first year experience, the University took the decision last autumn to abandon its Survey of Current Students – which had become redundant by the introduction of the National Student Survey in 2005 – and replace it with a new First Year Experience (FYE) Survey. The FYE offers enormous potential, particularly because it will be repeated every year. Not least the longitudinal data will help us assess whether or not any new initiatives that we introduce into the first year have an impact.

The questionnaire used in the survey was based on current research into the first year experience taking place nationally; this includes research on the inter-related issues of retention and progression, and drop-out and withdrawal. Academic staff and colleagues in academic support were also consulted in order to maximise the value of the survey.

The eventual questionnaire was divided into six sections: Teaching, Assessment and Feedback, University Services, Advice and Information, Work/Life Balance, Learning Resources, Personal Development. Students were also asked to comment on the best aspect and worst aspect of their experience so far at Queen's. The survey was distributed online to first year students on programmes leading to either a Bachelors degree or an undergraduate Masters using a new tool called Questback. Students in the University Colleges, the Theological colleges and on University programmes in further education colleges were not included.



# The First Year Experience Survey

Susan Harte and Sarah Hannaford, CED

Work/Life Balance	Personal	Learning Resources	Teaching	Assessment and Feedback	University Services
3.1	3.4	4.0	3.6	3.6	3.6

The survey was a complete success achieving a good response rate (29.5%). The results of the FYE survey are detailed above.

The results of the survey also complement other work that CED is currently undertaking on the characteristics of students who complete their degrees successfully and those who withdraw. A detailed summary of the results can be found on the CED website at [www.qub.ac.uk/ced](http://www.qub.ac.uk/ced). The new software, Questback, enabled easy production, distribution and management of the survey and the survey process. Questback is very user friendly and has several capacities for analysis from very general to very statistical. Currently, we are reviewing the questionnaire for the 2008 survey with the majority of it staying the same to allow for year on year comparisons. If anyone has any suggestions for questions or would like any additional information regarding the FYE survey or Questback please let us know (at [ced@qub.ac.uk](mailto:ced@qub.ac.uk)).





# 83%

## International students are satisfied with the Queen's learning experience

of international students at Queen's are satisfied with their learning experience, according to the findings of the **International Student Barometer**

The barometer, which is carried out by the International Graduate Insight Group, gathers feedback and opinions from the current student population. The latest research was carried out at the end of academic year and 55 universities participated, including 14 Russell Group universities.

The study shows that international students at Queen's place most value on library facilities, fair and transparent assessment of their work; technology; and support from academic staff when they need it. Queen's achieved satisfaction levels of over 80% in all of these areas and is ranked in second place in the Russell Group Index (RGi) and 11th place against the overall International Student Barometer (ISB).

Students are also satisfied that they are being taught by lecturers who are expert in their field (93% satisfaction); and the fact that they have the flexibility to decide how they want to study (89% satisfaction). Students are also satisfied with the level of research activity ongoing (88% satisfaction).

The International Student Barometer also investigates student opinions on the support services provided by the University and their day-to-day living experience at Queen's. If you would like more information on the results of the survey, please contact Julie Thompson, Marketing and Recruitment (Extension 1150; [julie.thompson@qub.ac.uk](mailto:julie.thompson@qub.ac.uk))



Queen's  
University  
Belfast

**Julie Thompson**  
Marketing And Recruitment

# Pre-final Year Students actively experience London Law Firms

## Roisin Copeland

Careers, Employability and Skills

Gaining experience, as a student, in a professional work environment is a desirable goal for developing 'employability' but placement and internship opportunities are highly competitive, especially in London City Law firms.

Over a five day visit at Easter 2007, twelve pre-final year students from the School of Law participated in a programme of workshops with eight City of London Law firms who regularly attend the Queen's November Law Fair to recruit students.

The trip, organised by the Careers, Employability and Skills unit, has taken place for the past eight years. Over this time the quality of the experience has continued to be developed through increased investment of time and resources by the firms. Students are no longer passively absorbing information through presentations about the firms but are actively engaged in skills and problem solving related to modern legal practice.

This year the workshops ranged from Alternative Dispute Resolution and Solicitor Advocacy to Negotiation and Commercial Awareness skills. Each firm offered a distinctly different activity that provided an insight into the nature of work carried out by a leading corporate and commercial law firm.

A significant factor underlying the quality of the experience is the range and depth of collaboration. The main parties involved in the organisation of the trip include the Law Firms' Human Resource staff, the School of Law and Queen's Careers. However the workshops are often delivered and facilitated by Law firm partners and Law trainees who in many cases are alumni of Queen's.

The workshop activities include case studies and exercises that provide simulations of legal practice work which are used in the selection process for the recruitment of graduates.

This year the amount of firms visited was doubled on the previous year to allow for canvassing of support for the second edition of the Queen's Careers publication "Moving into Law" guide. Without the financial funding and contribution of graduate profiles from the London Law firms, this resource for students would not be feasible.

The students visited two firms per day except on the arrival and departure days where only one firm was visited. This was both challenging and tiring but the students remained dedicated to their ambassador roles and the opportunity to make a positive impression on a potential employer.

The students who participate in the trip are required to contribute to the dissemination of the experience to the wider School of Law students. The students work individually

or in pairs to review the experience of a chosen firm and capture their impressions on a PowerPoint presentation.

The following personal insights and quotes are taken from the student PowerPoint presentations:

"Oh my...the reception area is bigger than the average Belfast law firm's entire building."

"We were greeted with Danish pastries and coffee before moving into a large boardroom for informal introductions from the head of recruitment and two of the firm's lawyers. All three were from Northern Ireland so there was a lot of good humour flowing!"

"Amenities: swimming pool, gym, doctor, dentist, games room, hairdressers, restaurants and bars, show how the firm cares for the welfare and morale of their staff, but also create the impression that you never need to leave!"

"Very impressed with the firm – the size, international nature, ethos and work environment."

"Great diversity of people and cultures with everyone very friendly and approachable."

In addition to the resource provided by the PowerPoint presentations, the students from the trip also agree to promote the experience through participating in on-campus workshops organised by Careers, Employability and Skills. So far this semester four of the students were involved in facilitating first year groups of students as part of a two-hour careers induction. Also planned is a workshop on the day of the Law Fair (21st November) to launch the City Law trip 2008 to pre-final year students.

Although only a small number of students directly benefit from the week with the London firms, the impact can be far reaching. There is a significant 'word of mouth' marketing of the experience that has generated greater interest and aspiration to aim higher and further afield.

The firms too have been impressed, not only with the calibre of student, but also the fact that Queen's is the only University to bring its students to the 'City' marketplace. As with all collaborations the 'return on investment' is evaluated and a measure of success is significant for each of the partners to continue. This year's feedback augurs well for City Law trip 2008!





# The Virtual Lecture

Amanda Sefton, Media Services

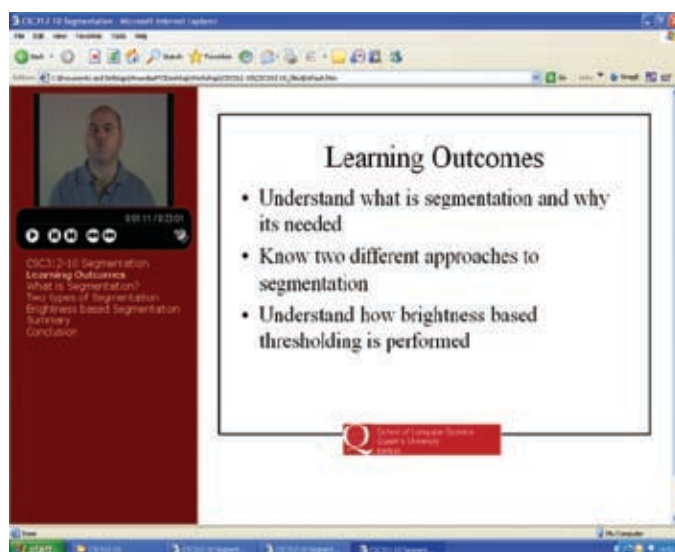
**Multimedia resources on Queen's Online are fast becoming an integral part of the student learning experience at Queen's University. The "Virtual World" is now 'the norm' for the average student; however it may be a new and undiscovered area for the lecturer. A good starting point is the "Virtual Lecture". It is an easy product to create and has proven very popular with both students and staff.**

Media Services can assist in all aspects of the production of the Virtual Lecture and online learning and teaching materials.

Typically a Virtual Lecture includes PowerPoint slides and video. The video plays at the top left corner of the screen and is accompanied by a synchronised PowerPoint presentation. Slides are indexed so that students can move instantly to different parts of a lecture or review parts of the lecture they may not have fully understood. Web links embedded in PowerPoint also remain active so that students can browse additional materials before returning to the presentation. Staff have used the Virtual Lecture as a revision tool for students, as a means of providing lectures in their absence and as a means of freeing up lecturing time for more small group contact with the students.

The Virtual Lecture is a first step but some Schools, such as Medicine, have developed sophisticated websites which incorporate lectures, video demonstrations, downloadable audio for MP3 players, online study materials, tests and recommended reading. Feedback from students has been very positive.

"I've been revising away! I have found the recorded lectures to be most useful. They were well put together by the computer experts. Just thought I would email you this because it is genuine 'positive feedback'. They really detract from the boredom of continual reading. They should suit ALL auditory learners."



## So how can staff create a Virtual Lecture?

Media Services provide advice on how to structure PowerPoint presentations for this type of delivery. The lecture is then filmed in their studio. This is a simple head and shoulders shot of the lecturer and the video is compressed into a streaming format that can be played on a wide range of computers and mobile devices. The Virtual Lecture is created using a programme called Microsoft Producer, a user friendly editing programme which synchronises PowerPoint slides with the video. Lecturers edit this themselves at Media Services with as much assistance as they require. The completed Virtual Lecture is then added as a resource into Queen's Online.

To view an example of a Virtual Lecture go to <http://www.mediator.qub.ac.uk/ms/producer/MitralStenosis.htm>

Media Services run training courses on all aspects of creating Virtual Lectures. For further information contact Amanda Sefton, Educational Media Producer, at [a.sefton@qub.ac.uk](mailto:a.sefton@qub.ac.uk) or ext. 5625.

# Topical Issues in Biomedical Education:

## a report of a recent conference

**Etain Tansey and Aisling Keane,**  
Division of Basic Medical Sciences

**The Basic Medical Sciences (Physiology and Anatomy) are fundamental to the teaching of not only Medicine but also Nursing, Dentistry and Physiotherapy, amongst other clinically-related disciplines. In recent times the provision of biomedical education has been evolving to meet the changing demands of new curricula. With this in mind, teaching fellows from the Division of Basic Medical Sciences at Queen's University Belfast held an education conference entitled "Topical Issues in Biomedical Education" on September 13th and 14th. The five main subject areas chosen for this conference were Problem Based Learning (PBL), Student Selected Components (SSCs), Intercalated Degrees, Ethics in Biomedical Science and Standardised Assessment. The aim of the conference was to discuss these relevant and topical issues through keynote lectures and workshops. There was also an opportunity for interested academics to present some of their own research. The conference was advertised widely and resulted in keen interest.**

One of the major strengths of this conference was the standard of the guest speakers. All were experts in their respective fields and included distinguished professors, as well as recipients of National Teaching Awards. Professor Maurice Savage (Director of Medical Education, Queen's) opened the meeting, emphasising the importance of teaching and learning at Queen's. The first speaker, Professor Jim McKillop (Deputy Executive Dean of Medicine and Muirhead Professor of Medicine, University of Glasgow), spoke of the impact of PBL on the University of Glasgow's medical teaching over the past ten years. Professor Deborah Murdoch-Eaton (Head of Medical Education, University of Leeds) then discussed SSCs, highlighting the General Medical Council's stipulation that 25-33% of the five year curriculum be devoted to SSCs and underlining their importance and benefits in the medical curriculum. SSCs are now acknowledged as fundamental to developing lifelong learning skills required by physicians. The motives of and benefits to medical students carrying out an intercalated degree were explored by Professor Anthony Payne (Professor of Anatomy, University of Glasgow). Later in this session, he was joined by two former Queen's intercalated students (Dr Patrick Campbell and Mr Gerrard Sloan) who spoke of their experiences on the Queen's intercalated degree programme.

On the following day, the first speaker was Dr David Lewis (Senior Lecturer, University of Leeds). He explained why ethics should be integrated into undergraduate and graduate curricula within the biological sciences. His presentation was followed by a workshop where delegates were divided into groups and asked to discuss the ethical considerations in various cases. The final presentation, given by Professor Trudie Roberts (Head of the School of Medicine



Aisling



Etain

and Director of the Medical Education Unit, University of Leeds) and Dr Kathy Boursicot (Head of Assessment, Barts and the London, Queen Mary's School of Medicine and Dentistry), was extremely informative and entertaining. The two speakers are well known experts in standardised assessment, running workshops on the topic for the Higher Education Academy. Their lecture gave a broad overview of the different methods that can be used to set examination standards (including the Angoff, Ebel and Borderline Group methods). The delegates then had an opportunity to use standard setting techniques to set a pass mark for a 'mini-exam' designed for second year medical students. The concluding remarks were made by Dr Etain Tansey (Teaching Fellow and Chair of the Conference Organising Committee) who thanked all of the speakers and delegates that had travelled from all over the UK and Ireland to attend and contribute to the inaugural meeting.

Feedback from the conference was extremely positive. Some examples of comments made include: "The themes were very relevant and the speakers were excellent"; "Standard setting – very good format. The two speakers worked very well together. I enjoyed the visit"; "This was an excellent conference which I look forward to attending each year". Queen's and the University of Manchester are already discussing ideas for future conferences, planning to hold the conference at each institution on an alternating two year cycle. A proposed date for the next conference is September 2009.

The organising committee gratefully acknowledges the funding awards received from the Learning and Teaching Conference Fund provided by the Centre for Education Development, the Physiological Society and the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland. We would like to thank all of our sponsors for their support.



Dr Alasdair Thin, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh presents his research concerning text-to-speech software



# The Undergraduate Ambassadors Scheme (UAS)

Linda Ryles, CED

**Launched in 2002 by the science writer and broadcaster, Simon Singh, UAS enables undergraduates to explore the teaching profession, with a particular (but not exclusive) focus on science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) disciplines and at the same time, to gain modular credit and develop their transferable skills.**

The scheme offers significant benefit to all stakeholders:

- It is a tried and tested model of curriculum development for academic staff who are seeking a framework for embedding and accrediting student skills, a development in the curriculum, fully in keeping with the University's Education Strategy and the new Student Employability and Skills Policy;
- It provides school teachers with practical and enthusiastic help in the classroom;
- Pupils become more fully engaged with STEM subjects and are encouraged to aspire to higher education;
- Students are able to explore the reality of a teaching career and contextualise their own learning, whilst enhancing their skills profile and gaining academic credit.

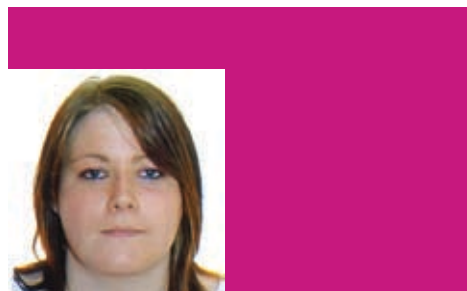
The University's first UAS pilot ran last academic year in the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, co-ordinated by Dr Paul Stevenson, Director of Education, and supported by Linda Ryles, Senior Educational Developer in the Centre for Educational Development.

A number of students completing second year (many aspiring to a teaching career) had expressed tentative interest in the scheme during pre-enrolment in June 2006, so contact was made with local schools in the greater Belfast area to gauge their potential uptake.

The Level 3 Project Module provided 'an academic home' for the scheme, with the UAS component counting for 25% of the module marks. Semester one was used as a planning and lead-in phase to set up appropriate procedures for the scheme, such as Child Protection Training for students and staff.

The UAS website ([www.uas.ac.uk](http://www.uas.ac.uk)) provides a comprehensive range of guidance materials for academic staff, supervising teachers and students, all of which may be customised to suit the discipline and module. Students are expected to spend the equivalent of at least ten half days during a semester in a school, although they may also spend some time researching or preparing materials in the University or elsewhere. In schools, they work in partnership with a teacher providing valuable help and subject expertise in the classroom or laboratory and carry out a 'special project' which is agreed in advance between student, University tutor and school.

**Rachel McLaughlin** signed up for the pilot, spending time in Methodist College, where she worked in classes with a range of age groups and abilities. Rachel's experience was very positive:



Rachel McLaughlin

'A scheme like this is a great idea. The main reason for taking part in this Undergraduate Ambassador Scheme was to achieve a sense of what teaching actually entailed. I wanted to experience working with pupils to help my communication skills and also working alongside a group of teachers to aid my team working skills. I have gained confidence in approaching people in a hectic environment as well as being able to work in an already well-established team.

I had a "reality check", so to speak, in that the idea of teaching is a whole lot different to the reality of teaching. I now feel I am more prepared for a teaching career, I have been shown the ups and downs of this profession. I am grateful for the opportunity I was given. I would recommend this scheme to anyone who wishes to have a career in teaching or other child-related professions.'

Rachel is now a PGCE student in the University's School of Education.

Dr Michael Dorrity, Head of Chemistry in Methodist College, commented that the scheme was an excellent idea which gave undergraduates an insight into what life was like in a busy school, whilst at the same time providing additional support for teaching staff.

Dr Paul Stevenson is offering the scheme to students again this year and is confident that interest will be high: 'Teaching chemistry is an aspiration for many chemistry undergraduate students and UAS gives them some proper work experience before they make their application to teacher training college.'

## Lessons learned from the pilot:

- Marketing the scheme to local schools is best done face-to-face, rather than by mail-shot - 6th Form visits to University departments can provide an opportunity to share information with teachers;
- The requirements of the scheme must be balanced with student effort demanded by other parts of the degree programme, particularly in final year when the stakes are high;
- Time for pre-placement student and staff training should be built into the lead-in phase;
- Customisation of materials should be repeated at each iteration to ensure currency of information relating to the Northern Ireland school curriculum etc.;
- Feedback from staff, students and teachers should be used to fine-tune the scheme to achieve optimum benefit to all stakeholders.

If you are interested in exploring how UAS might add value for your students, please contact Linda Ryles in the Centre for Educational Development ([l.ryles@qub.ac.uk](mailto:l.ryles@qub.ac.uk) or telephone 028 9097 6605).



# The Learning Development Service

**Paula Moran and Tim Crawford,**  
Learning Development Service

The Learning Development Service (LDS) is a new service located within the Student Guidance Centre which is open to all students to help with the development of generic skills needed to succeed at University.

Students need to be able to organise their time, communicate their needs, problem solve and learn effectively to achieve their potential at Queen's. Many students develop these skills naturally and respond effectively to the challenges presented but if they do not, sometimes it can lead to non-attendance and withdrawal. You may recognise that students are struggling but it is not always possible to allocate the time needed to work with students on these areas. The LDS has been established to help you provide this support to students. We work with students in a friendly and informal manner to help them identify what problems are affecting their work and the skills they need to develop to solve these problems.

## What is happening this Semester?

### WORKSHOPS

The LDS provides workshops on

Time management

Essay writing

Your Personality

Your Learning Style

Communicating effectively

Your motivation

Assertiveness

Problem Solving

Exam techniques

Preparing for Exams

Exam nerves

The schedule of workshops for this Semester is on our website and hard copies are also in the Student Guidance Centre. Copies of the schedule can be sent to your School or department on request. Workshops are normally organised over lunchtime and last approximately 50 minutes. Groups are usually small to facilitate student interaction. Students can book a place for workshops through the website or by emailing the LDS on [lds@qub.ac.uk](mailto:lds@qub.ac.uk) or by calling into the student information area in the Student Guidance Centre.

If you would like a workshop delivered to a group of your students we would be happy to discuss this. If there are other topics you think should be delivered please let us know.

### One to one

At any time during the year if you think a student would benefit from getting support, please pass on our details. We have bookmarks which you can give your students with details on how to contact us.

We will arrange to meet with your student to discuss and agree a plan of action. Meetings are held in rooms in the Student Guidance Centre. A student may attend a number of sessions depending on the action agreed. Students can book a one-to-one session by contacting the Student Guidance Centre. Appointment times will normally be between 9.30-4.30 and will last between 30 - 50 minutes.

Outside office hours can also be arranged when necessary.

### Website

A range of topics are covered on the website which give practical tips on academic-related subjects e.g. note taking, tutorials and time management. If you find students are requesting help in areas that are not covered on our website please email this information to [lds@qub.ac.uk](mailto:lds@qub.ac.uk) as we will be continually developing new courses and materials depending on student needs identified. We would also be delighted to get your views on what you think could be improved on the website or to include resources you have found beneficial in supporting students.

### Peer Support

Students often have difficulties settling into University and we have found that students will listen and talk more openly to other students than to staff. During Welcome and Orientation this year the student guides offered support to students with settling in e.g. finding Tesco's, getting a mobile phone and finding their way around Belfast. International students and other students from outside Northern Ireland found this help particularly useful.

We are keen to develop this aspect of student life and know that a number of Schools have peer support projects. We would like to hear about your

experience and we will use this information to inform our practice.

The LDS would like to hear from students who are interested in helping other students so please encourage your students to contact the LDS if they are looking for opportunities to develop their key skills.

Training will be given by the Learning Development Service to enable students to carry out this role.

### Other resources

There are a number of useful study skills texts that can be used by students in the Student Information area of the Student Guidance Centre. A list of these books are on our website along with a number of links to other web resources.

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/sgc>

There are also a number of self-help guides (stress management, time management) to help students study more effectively which can be downloaded from our website.

### Finally...

If you have suggestions for how the Learning Development Service can help students succeed academically at Queen's University Belfast please let us know or if you want to find out more about what we do just contact us (details below). We would be delighted to show you around the new Student Guidance Centre and talk about how we can provide practical support to your students.

**Paula Moran**, Learning Development Officer  
Ext. 2873 email: [p.moran@qub.ac.uk](mailto:p.moran@qub.ac.uk)  
**Tim Crawford**, Learning Development Tutor  
Ext. 2874 email: [tim.crawford@qub.ac.uk](mailto:tim.crawford@qub.ac.uk)  
**Learning Development Service**  
Ext. 2727 email: [lds@qub.ac.uk](mailto:lds@qub.ac.uk)

# The Let's Work Project

## for students with disabilities

Paul McLennan, Let's Work Project

### Background and Purpose

The *Let's Work* project was set up for Queen's students with disabilities to enable them to access work experience and graduate employment. The principle behind this project is to give students with disability an equal opportunity in the job market. Graduate Employers want all students to have employability skills as well as a good degree. Experience at Queen's University and elsewhere has shown that some students with disabilities will not have the same access to part-time job opportunities and work experience that others have had. The *Let's Work* project's main purpose is to change that and enable students with disabilities to be proactive in developing employability skills and therefore be in a better place to compete in the fiercely competitive graduate job market. The project also wants to change the negative perception that some students with disabilities and others' have of their own potential to compete successfully in the graduate job market.

### Preparing for Employment

Some students with disabilities, like the non-disabled peers, have stated that they have enough to deal with in regards to coping with their life at University and that they find it very difficult to have any time and motivation for anything else. The *Let's Work* project has therefore been very proactive in encouraging these students to become more focused by offering Careers Guidance through an intensive 1:1 approach, which could involve several meetings over a long period. The project has also been involved in helping these students set up placements in a very gradual way if necessary, such as making the initial contacts with employers or other organisations on the student's behalf. The project has helped students consider how to disclose their disability to an employer in a positive manner and develop their employability skills through a series of workshops and individual meetings.

The project has so far organised a number of events throughout the last academic year aimed at motivating and developing the student's confidence to do a work placement and make the most of the employability programmes delivered by the Careers Service. Such events include *The Blind in Business* event in Edinburgh University where two Queen's students who are Blind/Visual impaired had the opportunity to meet ten Graduate employers for ten minutes each to get interviewing practice and have valuable networking experience. There was also the *Let's Work* event held in the Great Hall in March, where 33 students with disabilities along with graduates, employers and voluntary organisations met together to address ways to prepare for employment.



The benefit of this event is reflected in this comment from one of the students, "Made contact with representatives from Northbrook. Great motivation and met a few people with disabilities, so I feel less isolated."

### Here are three examples of how the Project has helped students with disabilities:

**A second year student with disabilities has been supported by the project through individual meetings, workshops and events to develop her employability skills and find a placement with the Equality Commission in Belfast in June. She has become more aware of what employers are looking for and is starting to prepare for employment.**

**A recent graduate left Queen's last summer with no recent work experience and was unemployed. The project has supported him through individual meetings, a graduate workshop and the *Let's Work* event to gain a voluntary placement with the RNIB in Belfast. This has also helped him to become less socially isolated and become more confident.**

**A first year student with caring responsibilities felt he would not have enough time to do a work placement. The project through individual support and the *Let's Work* event has helped him to gain a place on *The Developing Employability Skills for Non-Vocational Disciplines* project and find a summer placement with a local theatre.**

### Further Information

If you are aware of students with disability who could similarly benefit from the Project, then direct them to Paul McLennan, Careers Adviser (Disability) Let's Work Project on 9097 2862 or email: [p.mclennan@qub.ac.uk](mailto:p.mclennan@qub.ac.uk)



# Work placement – an assessment solution?

The words 'Work placement' can result in academic staff running to lock their office doors.

## How do we ensure all students get the same placement experience?

## How do we assess them?

## We have no experience in assessing this type of work!

These are some of the issues which those involved in work placement have been wrestling with for some time. We know work placement is of value to students, but we do not seem to be able to identify why. What is it that students gain whilst on placement which makes it beneficial to them in terms of their personal and academic development?

If we cannot identify what the students are gaining, how can we assess it?

In the Institute of Agri-Food and Land Use at Queen's, all the undergraduate degree programmes have compulsory work placement. For those on a 3 year programme, 16 weeks of placement is required, whilst for those on the 4 year programme 46 weeks is the minimum. In the former the placement is assessed as a module in Stage 2, whilst for the latter it is a module at Stage 3.

During the last academic year, the first cohort of students completed the 16 week placement and this article describes the assessment of those students.

## Assessment and Learning outcomes

In determining the assessment for the module, the learning outcomes were the key. i.e. what did we want the students to gain from their placement?

The development of learning outcomes was approached in the same way as for all other modules, except that in order to accommodate a range of suitable placements, they needed to be at a higher level than would be usual for a taught module. This is similar to the approach taken for project or dissertation modules where the learning outcomes are not project specific as each student has a different project.

The learning outcomes agreed for the placement module were:

At the end of the module the student will:

- i. be able to relate academic learning to the work place,
- ii. have developed identified work related skills,
- iii. be able to critically evaluate their learning from the placement and
- iv. have enhanced their career knowledge.

The level of the learning outcomes ensures that their achievement by the student is independent of the type of placement attained. The nature of the learning outcomes also means that in terms of assessment, it is based on what the student has learnt whilst applying for and during the placement and not the activities they carried out whilst on placement. What the student does on placement provides evidence to support their achievement of the learning outcomes.

## Assessment

The assessment is based on enabling the students to demonstrate they have achieved the learning outcomes.

The assessment of the placement includes:

- i. a pre-placement portfolio (20%) consisting of a summary of applications and outcomes, CV's and covering letters, reflection on each application and a forward assessment of skills to be gained on placement (in line with those identified in the programme specification). Assessment of the preplacement portfolio has a heavy weighting on the learning elements. i.e. the reflection on each application (completed through a proforma) and the forward assessment of skills (completed through a proforma).
- ii. a placement folio (60%) consisting of a log book, two work based learning elements, a new CV including skills etc. gained from placement, a covering letter applying for a graduate job with their placement organisation and a reflective essay in which the student has to demonstrate achievement of each of the learning outcomes through evidence from their placement.

An assessment of the student by the placement host, based on their job performance and a range of 14 employability skills accounts for 10% of the folio mark. Each work based learning element involves the student writing a 500 word report on an overarching aspect of their placement organisation such as the Marketing Strategy, Health and Safety Policy, the Customer base or the Management structure. These require the student to do research outside their job area increasing their





## Dr Karen King

Director of Education, Institute of Agri-Food and Land Use

understanding of how their placement organisation functions. Assessment of the placement folio has a heavy weighting on the reflective essay, where the student demonstrates their achievement of the learning outcomes. The evidence to support this reflection should be referenced to the application reflection, the forward skills assessment, the log book and the work based learning elements.

- iii. a presentation (15 mins) (20%) in which students outline the activities they carried out whilst on placement and how they achieved each of the learning outcomes. The assessment of the presentation has equal weighting on content and presentational skills. The assessment has been structured such that certain elements of the placement folio and the presentation also meet the assessment criteria for the Queen's Work Experience Award offered through Careers, Employability and Skills.

The Queen's Work Experience Award is a new and innovative programme which was designed to enable students to gain an accredited award which recognises skills developed through work experience. The programme, delivered by Careers, enables participants to gain a theoretical and practical understanding of the skills they are developing. It also involves training on how to reflect on the experience and make the link between work experience, work based competencies and graduate employment.

In assessing achievement of each of the learning outcomes, the students have to demonstrate the following:

- i. ability to relate academic learning to the work place. Specific identification of elements/subjects within their modules. The quality of their ability rather than quantity is assessed.
- ii. have developed identified work related skills. Clear evidence of development of transferable, subject specific and/or cognitive skills.
- iii. be able to critically evaluate their learning from the placement. Indication of where, how and when the learning from i and ii will be of benefit to them.
- iv. have enhanced their career knowledge. This aspect includes not only specific jobs and types of work, but also the type of work environment the student feels most suited to. i.e. group or individual working, office based or more varied.

## Placement preparation

Key to the ability of the students to achieve the learning outcomes is their preparation. Compulsory elements of the Queen's Work Experience Award, included 2x3 hour workshops, facilitated by Deirdre Deery from Careers to students prior to their placement. As a result of these workshops, students were very clear on the reasons for undertaking their placement and what they could gain from it. They were also made aware of aspects such as networking and professional attitude.

It is essential to ensure the placement can provide opportunities to enable the student to achieve the learning outcomes. Each placement has to be approved and a placement agreement is established which includes the job description, the academic requirements in terms of assessment and a statement that all parties agree to support the student in achieving the learning outcomes which are stated. The student, placement host and module co-ordinator all sign the agreement and each receives a copy.

## Success

All the students taking the module during the last year excelled as evidenced by both their academic and placement host assessments. All the placement hosts were highly complimentary about the students and wish to take students next year. A number of students also secured job offers on graduation. The placement hosts were very supportive and encouraging to the students in enabling them to complete their academic requirements.

The reflective essays have clearly shown the increased personal development, confidence and honest self-analysis gained by the students through developing reflective skills.

Whilst review is needed to enhance the assessment in particular by reducing the number of assessed elements, the module has clearly demonstrated that placement can be assessed like other modules, based on learning outcomes.

## Future developments

The placement model will be rolled out into the rest of the School of Biological Sciences through the CETL in Active and Interactive Learning, which aims to enhance employability skills through active and interactive learning, including work placement.

Future developments include linking the placement module to PDP, specifically through the construction of student CV's and the placement process and an assessment of some higher level employability skills ( which many students have demonstrated this year) by the placement hosts. With respect to this latter development we have involved external stakeholders through our curriculum boards and specifically the relevant Sector Skills Council representatives.

Anyone who would like to discuss the issues raised in this article can contact me at [k.king@qub.ac.uk](mailto:k.king@qub.ac.uk) or Deirdre at [d.deery@qub.ac.uk](mailto:d.deery@qub.ac.uk)

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## Guest Speaker Series 2007

- Event:** Reap (Re-engineering Assessment Practices)  
**Presenter:** Dr David Nicol, Strathclyde University  
**Date and time:** 15 February 2008, 10.00am – 1.00pm. OSCR
- Event:** Enquiry-Based Learning, Manchester CETL  
**Presenter:** Karen O'Rourke and Bill Hutchings  
**Date and time:** 18 April 2008, 10.00 am - 1.00 pm, Council Chamber/Canada Room
- Event:** In at the Deep End  
**Presenter:** Professor Phil Race, Leeds Metropolitan University  
**Date and time:** 13 May 2008, 9.30 am - 12.00 pm, OSCR
- Event:** Encouraging Motivation and Active Learning in Lectures (and beyond)  
**Presenter:** Dr Kate Exley, University of Leeds  
**Date and time:** 16 May 2008, 10.00 am - 1.00 pm, Council Chamber/Canada Room

For details of these events, please visit the CED website at <http://www.qub.ac.uk/ced>

## Summary of Workshops January – March 2008

### JANUARY

10	Jan	2008	Linking Student Employability to Graduate Recruitment	2.00 – 4.30
16	Jan	2008	An Introduction to Disability Awareness	9.30 – 1.00
16	Jan	2008	Detecting and Preventing Plagiarism	2.00 – 5.00
23	Jan	2008	Small Group Teaching for Arts & Humanities	2.00 – 4.00
23	Jan	2008	An Introduction to the Features of QOL for Learning and Teaching (IT)	2.00 – 5.00
24	Jan	2008	The Dyslexic Student at University	2.00 – 4.00
24	Jan	2008	Laboratory Demonstrating	2.00 – 5.00
26	Jan	2008	Integrating Career Management and Employability Skills into the Curriculum	10.00 – 1.00
30	Jan	2008	Small Group Teaching for Science, Engineering & Medicine	2.00 – 5.00
30	Jan	2008	Using the Turnitin UK Plagiarism Detection Software (IT)	2.00 – 5.00

### FEBRUARY

4	Feb	2008	Teaching and Learning for Research Staff – Part 1	9.30 – 4.30
6	Feb	2008	Preparing and Giving Lectures – Part 1 – Tips & Theory	2.00 – 5.00
6	Feb	2008	PowerPoint for Lectures and Presentations: First Steps (IT)	2.00 - 5.00
7	Feb	2008	Supporting Students in Distress or Difficulty	2.00 – 5.00
7	Feb	2008	Teaching and Learning for Research Staff – Part 2	9.30 – 1.00
13	Feb	2008	Interactive PowerPoint Presentations (IT)	2.00 - 5.00
13	Feb	2008	Preparing and Giving Lectures – Part 2 – Practical session in small groups	9.30-12.30 or 2.00 – 5.00
13	Feb	2008	Higher Education Lunchtime Forum – Dr Geraint Ellis	12.30 - 2.00
14	Feb	2008	Preparing and Giving Lectures – Part 2	2.00 - 5.00
20	Feb	2008	Teaching Larger Classes	2.00 – 5.00
27	Feb	2008	Using Computer Assisted Assessment within QOL for Learning and Teaching (IT)	2.00 – 5.00
27	Feb	2008	Small Group Teaching for Science, Engineering & Medicine	2.00 – 5.00
29	Feb	2008	Small Group Teaching for Arts & Humanities	2.00 – 4.00

### MARCH

5	Mar	2008	Writing Learning Outcomes and Module Design	2.00 – 5.00
5	Mar	2008	Creating Audio and Video enhanced presentations for QOL (IT)	9.30 – 4.00
8	Mar	2008	Disability Disclosure, Confidentiality and Evidence in a Higher Education Context	2.00 – 5.00
12	Mar	2008	Assessment in Higher Education	2.00 – 5.00
12	Mar	2008	SEND0 – Understanding the Legislation and Responsibilities of Staff	2.00 – 5.00
28	Mar	2008	Students and their Careers: A graduate recruitment perspective	2.00 – 5.00

Please visit the CED website for further information on the courses and registration details