



# 6 | The Ed Wood Teaching Award 2009 – Finalists’ Reflections

**T**he Ed Wood Teaching Award provides an opportunity for bioscience academics to receive national recognition for their outstanding learning and teaching practices. The Award is open to all UK bioscience academics who work in higher education or who teach higher education in a further education establishment.

The 2009 Award received 19 applications, of which 6 were short-listed. Short-listed applicants worked with a member of the Centre team to develop a 2 page case study based on: observation of the teaching practice; interviews with the applicant; student questionnaires; and student focus groups. These case studies are available on our website [www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/funding/recognition/award09.aspx](http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/funding/recognition/award09.aspx).

The Centre would like to extend their congratulations to all six finalists and the overall winner, Mark Huxham of Edinburgh Napier University who was presented with his award and received £500 towards future professional development activity. Here the finalists reflect on their participation in the Award.

## Debbie Bevitt

Applying for the Ed Wood Teaching Award has been a really worthwhile process for all sorts of reasons. Why did I apply? Firstly, the new practice which I described in my application (a final year practical project module) seemed to be working well for us here in Newcastle and the Award Scheme seemed a good way to share that with others. Secondly, I liked the idea of getting some independent evaluation of the practice. And finally (and honestly!) it seemed a good way to get evidence of my attempts to innovate my teaching practice. Achievements in science research are relatively easy to evidence, but it seems less straightforward to “prove” your worth in teaching. The process was surprisingly straightforward and undemanding in terms of time commitment. The application process itself was brief and uncomplicated and once I made the short-list the time involved was again minimal, amounting to two enjoyable visits from Jackie Wilson (my Centre contact) and a few email exchanges to fine-tune the student questionnaires and case study. The feedback from the students (positive and negative) was enormously helpful and I’ve made several changes to the module for the coming year in direct response to comments and suggestions made. Having the chance to present my work at the Science Learning and Teaching Conference in June was another bonus and prompted some really useful discussion with other delegates. The final icing on the cake was that I was able to use my short-listing for the award as evidence in my recent (happily successful) promotion application – proving the worth of the Award Scheme in providing participants with some concrete evidence of achievement in teaching.

**Debbie Bevitt**  
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## Momna Hejmadi

Being in the final short-list for the Ed Wood Teaching Award did wonders to my confidence. It is always reassuring to have one’s peers appreciate your teaching. The next stage of the process was the case study put together by Steve Maw, based on his observation of my teaching and feedback from students. I found it to be an enriching experience, mainly because Steve’s astute observations helped me reflect on aspects of my teaching I had not considered before. I have always enjoyed the Science Learning and Teaching Conference and it never fails to be inspirational. As usual this year, I came away from the conference buzzing with new ideas and meeting like-minded colleagues who genuinely love their teaching. The formal award presentation was a lovely surprise and I was really pleased Mark Huxham received the Ed Wood Teaching award. His presentation on using verbal assessments to create conversations was one of the inspiring sessions I attended. Personally, the recognition of being a finalist was a surprising but not unpleasant experience. It has opened new doors, I have made new friends along the way and it certainly has helped me develop as a teacher.

**Momna Hejmadi**  
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## Mark Huxham

“What sort of person enters a national teaching award? A vainglorious self-publicist looking for CV padding? A teacher lacking confidence with something to prove? Or a practitioner convinced of the central importance of teaching and of the need to raise its profile and status? These were my thoughts when I saw the Centre’s teaching competition advertised. Well, I convinced myself I was closer to the latter than the former types, but something else worried me; just how much work and stress might an entry entail? Inevitably some, but equally I welcomed an incentive to think hard about my teaching and to articulate a clear pedagogical philosophy. So after considerable dithering I pressed the ‘send’ button.

What happened then confirmed my expectations of challenge, but none of my fears of stress. Developing a succinct case study with Sheryl (assigned as my ‘guide’ from the Centre) made me focus on my core approach. Welcoming Sheryl for a teaching observation made me think again about class room dynamics and the practical constraints of large group teaching. And seeing the feedback from my class reminded me how teachers and students are engaged in a collective enterprise that should be based on mutual respect. The whole process was stimulating, supportive and fun. So are you the sort of person who enters a teaching competition? If you care about teaching, enjoy a challenge and have something to share with like-minded colleagues, then why not?

**Mark Huxham**  
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### Dave Lewis

Why did I apply? You may think what you are doing is good practice or innovative but there is a particular satisfaction to be gained when it is recognised as such by your colleagues or in particular, your students. The only hard part was completing the application form, trying to convey in a few short paragraphs what you did, why you did it and its effectiveness. The process made more difficult in my case because I was trying to describe a complete course running from Level 1 to postgraduate. Once this was done, the rest of the process was a pleasure. What was particularly gratifying was the interest and support shown by my students once they knew I had been short-listed. Has it affected my teaching? It has made me reflect on all my teaching to see whether I am delivering it in the most effective and interesting way for students. It has also encouraged me to continue with developing new innovative teaching which meets the ever changing needs of our students; I'm now focusing on developing alternative final year research projects. I would certainly go through the whole process again and would also encourage others to consider applying themselves.

### Dave Lewis

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### Katherine Linehan

What did I gain from being short-listed for the Ed Wood Teaching Award? Well a 20ft model of the digestive system made from old bed sheets for one and a lot of constructive feedback on my teaching for another. Having to explain the approach I take to teaching anatomy to an advisor from the Centre made me reflect upon why I do what I do in the classroom.

Many of my teaching strategies are founded upon the theory that all students have a preferred learning style, be that kinaesthetic, linguistic, visual, logical, musical, interpersonal or intrapersonal. I've always been clear in my own mind that teaching in a manner that incorporates as many of these different learning styles as possible will make the curriculum more accessible to all students. Having a third party from the Centre come and observe my teaching has corroborated that indeed the students are aware my approach to teaching is fundamentally different from many of my colleagues, and the strategies I use enable the students not only to learn anatomy more effectively, but also the other subjects they are studying for their degree. This was gratifying to know as I have always had suspicions my 'alternative' approach to teaching may have got lost in translation and the students view the activities we do in class as a bit of fun but that they don't always understand or appreciate the plethora of educational theory that underpins my teaching.

Despite not winning the award I have at least been left with a 20ft digestive system which my Mum and I spent many an

industrious hour crafting on my sewing machine. This model, married with a lovely pair of net curtains, was used to challenge students' misconceptions about the development of the gut. It will be brought out again this Autumn for the benefit of the new cohort of students. In the meantime Fred, the skeleton that resides in my office, is sporting it in much the same way that one would wear a feather boa!



Award Trophy

### Katherine Linehan

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### Jane Saffell

It has been a privilege to have been part of the very well organised, enjoyable and immensely useful process that has been the Bioscience Teaching Awards this year. The experience certainly surpassed my expectations and the various stages of the award process that unfolded after short-listing have been helpful in several ways. First was the experience of working with my very supportive Centre assignee, Dr Julian Park, to write a case study on the teaching for which I was short-listed. This involved Julian coming to Imperial to talk to me about the rationale for my module, observe the interactive teaching sessions, and lead a focus group discussion with students. The two of us then corresponded by e-mail to write the case study entitled 'Experiencing research through creative design and ownership of laboratory practicals'. It was invaluable to have the chance to discuss teaching practice and philosophy with an informed independent observer. Next was the opportunity to attend the STLC conference in Edinburgh and give a talk called 'Recipes or revelation? Influence of laboratory experiences on students' perceptions of bioscience research.' The first education conference I had attended, this was an excellent opportunity to meet, learn from and share ideas with members of the UK science learning and teaching community. Finally, since the Centre publicises award short-listing with candidates' institutions, I have received unexpected recognition and appreciation for my learning and teaching development efforts from Imperial. The key words that sum up my experience of the Teaching Award process are: encouragement, affirmation, support and community. Thank you very much Centre for Bioscience!

### Jane Saffell

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