

The Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Centre for Bioscience is one of 24 Subject Centres, funded by the four UK higher education funding bodies, to promote and support high quality learning, teaching and assessment in UK higher education

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PRODIGIOUS PRODIGY?

WELCOME TO THIS NEW EDITION OF THE LTSN BIOSCIENCE *BULLETIN*. THE LTSN AS A WHOLE HAS been under the spotlight recently and the August 16th issue of the *Times Higher Education Supplement* featured a whole-page article on the LTSN entitled "Is the prodigy ready to prosper?" LTSN has been undergoing an evaluation by a team from Lancaster University, and their Report tries to gauge the academic community's awareness of what they call the 'LTSN Brand', and also whether there is evidence to show that the Network is making a difference to tertiary level teaching.

In terms of awareness, the report concluded that junior staff were more likely to have heard of the LTSN than older staff (readers, professors, deans) and that smaller departments were less likely to have heard of it than large departments. The really good news though is that 49 per cent of those interviewed said that the LTSN was already changing their teaching activities, and 67 per cent said that it had the *potential* to affect teaching and learning. Professional bodies/learned societies thought that the LTSN was complementing their work at the educational level. The survey team received responses from 219 institutions and each university's PVC for teaching and learning was interviewed. There is therefore evidence that we are having a significant effect – but no one pretends that there is not still a long way to go. This is particularly true of the group of staff who see research as their only priority and have little interest in improving their teaching. Therefore, not only do we have to keep banging the publicity drum by whatever means we can – by visits to departments, personal contacts, the web site, the *Bulletin*, etc – but also we need to continue to work hard at building the network in the bioscience community. Although the Centre for Bioscience is the hub of activities, the really important thing is to develop an enduring network in which people in bioscience departments talk to each other rather than through us (although of course we are keen to be active and stimulatory, and to harvest and disseminate good practice). Consequently, our Departmental Contacts, Discipline Consultants and Special Interest Group Co-ordinators are vitally important in sowing the seeds and forming nodes out in the community. We are constantly on the look out for individuals who can help and provide the lead in these sorts of ways.

Another consideration is just how long it takes to put some innovative teaching ideas into practice. You can only change the course once a year, and you need to plan in advance for next year's session as well as convincing one's colleagues that it is worthwhile to do something differently! Everyone knows that, but as mentioned in the *THES* article, our Teaching Development Fund (TDF) grants can help people to try out an idea or develop something which may help to improve teaching practice. Have you an idea that could be developed given a bit of seed-corn money? You can look on the web site for details of previous projects and also find the details of how to apply.

In addition to all of the above, we will focus on the Government's agenda to widen participation, improve retention of students, and enhance employability. One particular role of LTSN Bioscience will be to support and encourage improvements in the teaching of, and learning by, incoming students with a wider range of abilities and backgrounds. To this end we are holding a discussion Forum on 12/13 September to discuss what is already in place and how good practice might be spread. The report on the outcome of the meeting will appear on our web site in due course.

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