

>>> The resources that ASTER has developed can assist in reflecting on the topics raised above. More generally, their aim is to help academics to make an informed decision about whether and how to introduce C&IT in their teaching, by weighing up the benefits against the effort required to ensure successful changes.

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FDTL4 PROJECT: STAR (STUDENT TRANSITION AND RETENTION)

SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS of and by students change as they move into and through Higher Education. Students need to adapt rapidly and institutions need to address these changing needs as student populations become more diverse. The STAR project will define the purposes of induction processes in the context of Biosciences, investigate practices that suit those purposes and disseminate this identified good practice. We are particularly interested in the needs of incoming students both before and after enrolment and of those returning from placement. In addition, we will sponsor a range of sub-projects in Years 2 and 3 in a wide range of institutions to implement changed practices and to report on their effectiveness at integrating students rapidly into Bioscience departments.

As a starting point, we are in the process of running a questionnaire to survey students' experiences of induction, as they approach the end of their first semester at university.

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STUDENT STRATEGIES ON ASSESSMENT WITHIN THE ANIMAL NUTRITION CONFERENCE

THANKS TO A LTSN TEACHING DEVELOPMENT FUND grant, I was able, during the last academic year, to change the curriculum of the Farm Animal Nutrition module (a Level 3 module within the Animal Science Degree scheme) to include a conference exclusively organised and directed by third-year students (see E. Clamp, LTSN Bulletin No. 6, page 5, 2002).

Twenty-six students, pictured right (by kind permission of E. Clamp, Real World Project, www.careers.ncl.ac.uk/realworld/), took the module and were monitored, through questionnaires, three times during the academic year. The students had clear ideas about the role they wanted to have within the conference organisation team. However, the financial requirements to run the conference were overestimated and they did not succeed in attracting external sponsors.

The students were worried about a task that they never had to tackle before and they hoped that the academic staff would have more control. Ironically, they often decided not to ask the staff to attend their weekly meetings (not included in the timetable of the module but organised by the students on the top of their normal teaching hours). Student replies after the conference showed that they had problems reaching consensual decisions but that they considered the experience a valuable one.

Students had to mark themselves on two occasions, once for an oral presentation and once for conference organisation. Students were also expected to peer assess the talks within their presentation group and the contribution of individuals (whole class) to the conference organisation. For the oral



presentations 16-26 returned an average workload mark while seven upgraded themselves, two downgraded themselves and one did not return a mark. For the conference organisation seventeen students returned an average mark while eight upgraded themselves and one did not return a mark. Interestingly 23-26 students decided to fail three of their colleagues yet these students returned average (or even top) marks when they evaluated themselves. Only three students decided to upgrade their marks for both oral presentation and conference organisation.

This study showed that on the whole students were able to fairly appraise themselves and the other students. At the same time the scientific quality of the conference was recognised by the audience. A recent funding of five years was granted to me through the HEFCE Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning Phase 3 project (FDTL3) to develop the conference activity further in a parasitology module and examine ways of making it more sustainable.

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