

Teaching in the Biosciences: Development of Networking Events for Postgraduates and Postdoctoral Fellows

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Project Overview

- **Personal experience & observation**
- **Literature**

The events

- **Collaboration**
 - People
 - Pre-event questionnaire
- **What an event looks like**

Future work

- **Challenges**
- **Further development of support for graduate teaching assistants**
- **Guerilla network**



Rationale for Development

The Literature:

A need for highly trained, effective postgraduate teaching assistants, giving undergraduates a consistent experience, especially in the early years

(The Boyer Commission (2004) on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University “Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities”)

Postgraduates are more approachable, less intimidating, and through their *inexperience*, a model of enquiry for undergraduate students

(Muzaka, V. (2009) “The niche of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs): perceptions and reflections” Teaching in Higher Education, 14: 1. 1-12)

Teaching as part of the academic apprenticeship

(Perlmutter, D. D. (2008) “Your first real taste of academic culture” Chronicle of Higher Education, 54: 45, A31-A134)

Personal Experience & Observation

Helped to identify the following project aims. To:

- **Provide PhD students and Post-docs with additional development opportunities to support student learning.**
- **Showcase the work of the UK Centre for Bioscience and provide an early opportunity for PhD students and Post-docs to become involved in the biology teaching and learning community.**
- **Empower an up-and-coming generation of potential biology academics and nurture their interest and enthusiasm.**

The Events

Origin:

UK Higher Education Academy Centre for Bioscience Reps'
Forum, 2008

www.heacademy.ac.uk

www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk

Pre-launch meeting held at the University of St Andrews, 2009

- Designed pre-event questionnaire
- Identified potential event locations and event champions
- Agreed event format and content

The People

Anne Tierney, University Teacher, University of Glasgow

Joy Perkins, Educational & Employability Development Adviser,
University of Aberdeen

Morven Shearer, Senior Teaching Fellow, University of St. Andrews

Kevan Gartland, Dean of Life Sciences, Glasgow Caledonian University

Katherine Clark, Academic Adviser, HEA Centre for Bioscience

Angelique Stalmach, PhD student, University of Glasgow

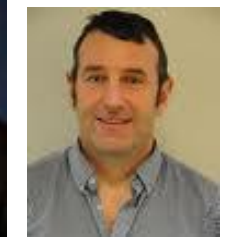
Hedda Weitz, PhD & Post-doc Careers Adviser,
University of Aberdeen

Kate Baker, PhD student, University of Aberdeen

Carol Wakeford, University of Manchester

Stephen McClean, University of Ulster

Julian Park, University of Reading



Pre-event questionnaire (circulated to 19 UK HEIs, 161 responses)

What do you think is the composition of the respondents? Males to females? Postgrads to postdocs?

What percentage of respondents had heard of the HEA or the UK Centre for Bioscience?

What percentage of respondents were interested in attending an event on teaching & learning in HE?

%	Female	Male
postgraduate	47	32
postdoctoral	13	8

Have you heard of:	Yes	No
HEA	17	83
Centre for Bioscience	10	90

	Yes	No
Are you interested in attending a T & L event?	76	24

Pre-event questionnaire cont'd

What information and resources would interest you at the proposed networking event?

Resource	No. of responses
Small group teaching	27
Practicals	26
Assessment & Feedback	19

Graduate Teaching Assistants *want* practical support with the kinds of teaching activities that they are normally given.

Challenges

Browne, J (2010) Securing a sustainable future for Higher Education: An Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance
www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report

Overhaul of the funding system in England & Wales

Recommendations:

Annual student fees of *up to* £9k (average now stands at approx. £8,600)

Coincided with cuts in both centrally funded research & teaching grants

One of the consequences of this was a review of the Higher Education Academy

Loss of the Subject Centres by December 2011

Retention of the Administrative Centre

What an event looks like

Event Programme

Introduction to teaching in Higher Education

Introduction to the HEA Centre for Bioscience

What makes you a good teacher?

Small group teaching OR laboratory practicals

Assessment & Feedback

Post-event questionnaire (time for reflection)

“You spend so much time in the lab doing research that it comes as a bit of a shock to realize that you actually enjoy teaching.”

“A must-do for all postgraduate students involved in teaching”

“It was really worth coming from Aberdeen to Glasgow for this”

“Boosted my confidence in teaching”



Project Outcomes & Outputs

- Short Guide – Small Group Teaching
- Short Student Guide – Teaching in Bioscience HE
- “Event in a Box” for use across the HE sector
- A YouTube Video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWdhZ47PhmU>
- Last but not least, 150 students are more informed regarding teaching, learning and assessment issues.

Future Work (any suggestions?)

Further development

Application for grant to develop t&l support for postgraduates in bioscience and physics – widen the role of graduate teaching assistants

Widen the number of institutions involved

Support of Physical Sciences Subject Centre Rep

Support of SUPA director

Guerilla network

Original suggestion by Sean Brocklebank (Economics, University of Edinburgh)

Three postgraduates were given funding from University of Glasgow Graduate School

organising a t&l event for postgraduates

innovation (You Tube video – viral advertising)

...it might just work...what do you think?