

## **Report on LT&A Issues for the Teaching of Biosciences in Wales, June 2007** **Sue Assinder (HEA Bioscience Country Consultant - Wales)**

### **The National Context**

In October 2006, Jane Davidson (Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills) launched *The Learning Country: Vision into Action*, the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) strategic plan for education, lifelong learning and skills in Wales until 2010. The document represents the second stage in *The Learning Country* programme that began in 2001 and describes the key objectives and actions that the WAG will be taking to make this a reality. The *Learning Country* vision for HE is to widen access, improve income generation, lift research activity and exploit knowledge transfer to maximise the contribution of HE to the benefit of the Welsh economy. Key objectives are to strengthen research by strategic investment in world-class research groups and to promote reconfiguration within the Welsh HE sector, particularly in relation to merger of post-92 institutions in South-East Wales. There is an undertaking to commit funding to ensure that the strengths in science are matched with the strengths in the Welsh economy to secure the maximum benefit to Wales, an ambition that could yield positive benefits for the bioscience research base. In addition, there is an expectation that all Welsh HEIs will access the resources of the HE Academy, including expertise in excellence in teaching through the medium of Welsh.

### **Student Funding**

After a year of being out of step with English universities, Welsh HEIs will see the introduction of variable tuition fees from 2007/08. However, Welsh students who permanently live in Wales and non UK EU nationals who choose to study at a Welsh university will be eligible for a tuition fee grant of up to £1,845 a year from the WAG that offsets entirely the additional fees which they would otherwise have to pay. The existing Assembly Learning Grant, a means-tested non-repayable grant of up to £2765 per year, is also available to Welsh-domiciled students. The additional income provided by higher tuition fees will be used to develop a National Bursary Scheme to provide additional targeted support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It will be interesting to follow the effect of this favourable fee regime on the number of Welsh-domiciled students choosing to study the biosciences at Welsh institutions.

### **Learning and Teaching Strategies**

HEIs in Wales have been invited to submit updated institutional learning and teaching strategies for the three years 2007/08 to 2009/10 by November 2007. Strategies must take account of the key priority areas identified in the HEFCW remit letter for 2007-08 (Assessment, Work-based Learning/Employability, Research-Informed Teaching Practice, e-Learning, and Welsh Medium). The first four of these are clearly already central considerations for bioscience teaching and learning, and the latter is gradually growing in importance as a result of recent WAG initiatives aimed at increasing the number of lecturers able to teach through the medium of Welsh (see 2006 Annual Report). HEIs have also been asked to ensure that their strategies comply with legislation relating to equality and to consider the impact of the Bologna Agreement and related European developments. They are also required to include evidence of action resulting from linking with the enhancement activities of the HE Academy, both thematic and at subject level.