

Bioscience Representatives' Forum 2006

6th - 7th September 2006

imago Conference Centre, University of Loughborough

The Representatives Forum is held annually as a "Thank-you" to Bioscience Representatives for the work they do for the Centre during the year. The Forum is held over two days to give time for informal networking and more formal exchange of practice.

This year twenty-six Bioscience Representatives and key contacts attended the Forum, held at the University of Loughborough and feedback about the event was positive;

"...most useful – meeting other representatives, exchanging experience"

"...always a very inspiring meeting – after the meeting you want to engage much more in the teaching / learning process.."



Welcome and Introduction to the Forum

Ed Wood, Co- Director, Centre for Bioscience

Ed welcomed all the Representatives and opened the Forum with a brief summary of some of the Centres' successes over the past year and a thank you to the Representatives for all their work.

First-Year students' Experiences of Learning and Teaching in the Biosciences

Dai Hounsell, ETL project and the University Edinburgh

Dai gave a very interesting introduction to the Forum, speaking about the work carried out by the [ETL \(Enhancing Teaching and Learning\) Project](#) on the experience of first year students in teaching and learning environments in the biosciences. He focused on questionnaire and interview findings from three first-year bioscience course units surveyed. For the most part, the students' experiences were positive ones, and staff were generally perceived as friendly and approachable. Three areas of challenge emerged where the experiences of the students had been more varied: engagement with students' diverse backgrounds and aspirations; the provision of guidance and feedback on assigned and assessed work; and managing large and diverse course teams.

Swapshop - Developments in Bioscience Learning and Teaching

Analysis of groupwork in students

Nigel Lindsey, University of Bradford

It is often assumed that students follow a standard pattern in groupwork – forming, norming, storming and performing. Nigel presented the outcomes of a study which investigated the dynamics of student group work and demonstrated that students groups do not necessarily follow this pattern and that one individual can have a big impact on the overall activities of the group.

Student Failure in the first year: An interview based investigation

Jon Scott, University of Leicester

Jon spoke about the results of a study conducted after it was noticed that despite increasing the grade requirements for a course, retention and module failure was still increasing. The study was conducted through intensive two hour interviews with students who had failed exam modules being invited to interview.

Feedback to students on exams – are specimen answers from previous cohorts useful?

John Green, Napier University

If students are unfamiliar with a type of assessment and there is little time available to give formative feedback, problems can occur. John worked around this by using specimen answers to previous exam questions and asking his distance learning students to comment upon them. He also explored the possibility of making a similar resource available in the writing of project reports.

Biomathtutor: The next steps

Vicki Tariq, UCLAN

Biomathtutor was designed to support Bioscience students with their math skills, giving bioscience related maths problems to make the subject more relevant, for example calculating the size of an organism from an electron micrograph. Vicki described the recent biomathtutor project funded by the Higher Education Academy which will evaluate the skills students gain from using biomathtutor and investigate whether Biomathtutor does have an impact on students' math skills. Data collection for this project will start in the Autumn 2006 semester.

Swapshop - Developments in Bioscience Learning and Teaching with a focus on e-learning

Using Blogs, Wikis and Podcasts to enhance learning

Terry McAndrew, Centre for Bioscience

In his talk Terry introduced blogs wikis and podcasts and the ways in which they can be used for teaching purposes and how they could be used to the benefit of both students and teaching staff. He gave some technical background to how blogs and wikis can be set up and illustrated his talk with some examples.

Using Profile for research skills mapping

Gillian Fraser, University of Reading

PROFILE (<http://www.profile.ac.uk>) was originally developed to monitor the progress and achievements of students undertaking a year-out in industry during their sandwich degree. Gillian spoke about how the format of Profile had made it ideal to enable the mapping of skills within degree programmes and modules and how this had been achieved by the AURS CETL within a number of modules at the University of Reading .

A podcast on podcasting in the biosciences

William Ashraf, University of Bradford

Unfortunately, due to technical reasons, Bill Ashraf's podcast was not available on the day of the Forum. Bill gives a very interesting introduction to using podcasts for teaching purposes, the technical background behind making and distributing the podcast to his students and his reasons behind giving podcasts.

A brief introduction to the new Teaching Bioscience Enhancing Learning Guide

Steve Maw, Centre for Bioscience

The new Teaching Bioscience, Enhancing Learning Guide was launched at the Representatives Forum. This follows the success of the first guide, "[Self- and Peer- Assessment](#)", and is titled "Effective use of IT: Guidance on practice in the Biosciences". Steve gave a brief introduction to the new guide which includes chapters on: Exploring the use of technology in teaching and learning; a focus on e-learning in the biosciences; Assessment of student learning in an e-learning context; and case studies on the use of e-learning within the biosciences.

Day 2

Centre for Bioscience Update, News and developments from the centre

Katherine Clark, Centre for Bioscience

Katherine gave a round-up of some of the developments at the Centre for Bioscience over the previous year, including the new Centre logo, student essay competition, the ImageBank competition, events, the themes of e-learning and enterprise and the Departmental teaching enhancement scheme and Teaching Development Fund.

Life in the Biosciences - views and experiences from secondary school bioscience teachers and bioscience students

View from a Biosciences student

Sue Willis, winner of the [Centre for Bioscience Student Essay Competition](#)

Sue gave a very engaging talk about her experiences of starting at university as a mature student. She highlighted some of her concerns before starting her degree, the positive experience of lab and fieldwork and spoke about what had attracted her to her course and university.

The transition from school to university

Roy Nichols, student at the University of Reading

Starting a degree course can be an anxious time for many students. Roy discussed some of the concerns he had when starting his degree, compared the teaching practices he experienced at school during his A-levels with his experiences during the first year of his degree and spoke about some of the teaching methods and practices he found particularly useful or engaging.

An insight into teaching GCSE and A-level Biology

Interview with Daniel Rose, Secondary School Biology Teacher

Daniel spoke about the pressures facing teaching staff and students in secondary school biology. He discussed the emphasis placed on various aspects of the curriculum, such as practical and investigative skills and how the changing curriculum has affected students' skills.

Facilitated discussion fora, enterprise and transferable skills

Julian Park, Centre for Bioscience

Julian discussed why students benefit from enterprise skills and how they may already be gaining many so-called enterprise skills during their time at university. Introducing the Enterprise Matrix, which aims to get students reflecting on the enterprise skills they may have been taught or have practiced at university, Julian asked delegates to put themselves in their student's shoes and fill in the matrix with examples of where enterprise skills may be taught and practiced during their time at university.

Swapshop - Developments in bioscience learning and teaching

Outcomes of the STAR (Student Transition And Retention) Project

Brian Rushton, University of Ulster

Brain described some of the work and research conducted by the [STAR project](#) into the experiences of first year biology students in higher education. Brain discussed how first year students are often at different points, in terms of education and experience, when they start at university, and highlighting some of the differences between teaching and curriculum design at A-level and degree level. Brain also introduced the new [STAR booklets](#), which draw together the work of the STAR project.

Is a dedicated Foundation Year more appropriate than level one of an established degree programme?

John Morton, University of Glamorgan

The University of Glamorgan offers a specific Foundation year for students who wish to complete a chiropractic degree but have no background in the biological sciences. However many students choose not to take this specifically designed foundation year and instead took the first year of a biomedical sciences degree and then swapped to chiropractice.

Biology for the Blind

Peter Chevins, Keele University

Peter gave an excellent introduction to a "work in progress", a project funded through the TechDis HEAT scheme. The project aims to provide visually impaired (VI) students with learning experiences that give them learning outcomes similar to those of their sighted peers.

Peter also demonstrated the [Tactile Talking Tablet \(T3\)](#), which will be using during the project; tactile diagrams are placed on a touch sensitive screen, touching the diagram gives users a description of the part of the diagram touched. Basic diagrams can be bought to accompany the tablet and users can also design and create their own individual diagrams.

Working with Representatives

Steve Maw, Centre for Bioscience

In his presentation Steve spoke about the role of Representatives (as outlined in the discussion paper available below) and how this could be strengthened. He asked Representatives if they had any feedback or comments on the suggestions made and any thoughts about how the Centre could strengthen the role of Representatives.

Reflection on the Forum and closing remarks

Brian Rushton and Iain Coleman provided an excellent finish to the Forum with a round-up of the events over the two days and what they had gained from the Forum.

Both Brian and Iain commented on the opportunities to hear about and discuss new projects and developments, such as Peter Chevins' project involving the Tactile Talking Tablet and the chance to discuss the new technologies (blogs, wikis and podcasts) demonstrated by Terry McAndrew. Brian spoke briefly about some of the changes facing higher education especially that of student diversity and international students. Iain also said he would be "Taking away reassurance" from the Forum, that many teaching staff had the same thinking and the same solutions to very similar issues.