

Something to Celebrate

– an Active and Supportive National Bioscience Learning and Teaching Community

Ten years ago a network of 24 Subject Centres was established in the UK to support learning and teaching in Higher Education. In 2004, the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), as it was known, became part of the newly formed Higher Education Academy. During the last decade the UK Centre for Bioscience has been privileged to work closely with colleagues in bioscience departments and institutions across the UK.

The Centre started with a team of eight following Ed Wood and Andrew Booth's successful bid to host the Centre at the University of Leeds. Over the past ten years, and having grown to a team of fourteen, the Centre has undertaken a wide range of activities and has built up an extensive network of bioscience learning and teaching contacts across the UK (and beyond).

Professional Development Events

Events are an important part of the Centre's programme of activity and we have held over 90 events in 46 institutions with over 2,500 delegates attending. Within our events we aim to give opportunities to hear about and explore new and effective teaching and learning practices in the biosciences. Perhaps most importantly, events are a chance to meet and discuss teaching and learning with colleagues from across the UK.

"The Bioscience events are always well thought-out and provide plenty of stimulating discussion, which can bring out ideas that you can take away and further develop."

Spotlight on: Ethics Events

In conjunction with our ethics Special Interest Group (SIG) our first ethics event was held in 2002, and with an ethics event every year since, we've covered a variety of themes from the ethics of being a scientist to teaching environmental ethics.



Funding and Recognition

The Ed Wood Teaching Award, launched in 2009, gives bioscience teaching staff the opportunity to gain national recognition for their outstanding teaching practices. The first winner of the teaching Award, Mark Huxham (Edinburgh Napier University) described the process of taking part in the Award as "stimulating, supportive and fun" and all the 2009 finalists highlighted the opportunities the Award provided for personal

development and recognition, both within their department and nationally. We are currently working with the finalists for the 2010 Award and applications for the 2011 Award open now – perhaps you could be the 2011 winner?

Over the past 10 years we have funded over 70 teaching and learning-focused projects on a wide variety of themes. Project activities and outcomes are wide-ranging and might involve production of a teaching resource, introduction of a new teaching method across a department or module or a piece of pedagogic research. Recently we offered funding to our Representatives (key contacts within bioscience departments) and articles highlighting projects led by Kay Yeoman and Anne Tierney were published in issue 30 of the Bulletin.

Spotlight on: Student Award

Our Student Award, launched in 2005, has had over 160 entries and gives students the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences of learning in the biosciences. The entries bring together a wealth of ideas and views on topics such as "What makes the best learning experience for you?" and "How would you advise new bioscience students to make the most out of practical work?" The entries give a fascinating insight into student's views on teaching and learning and the value of a bioscience degree.

"I am delighted to have come runner up in the Centre for Bioscience's Student Award, was a lovely surprise to come home to today! I had great fun making the film, so I hope the judges enjoyed watching it too."

Publications

Our publications are an important aspect of our work. Many publications include contributions from the bioscience community and provide an excellent vehicle for sharing practice. Over the past 10 years we have published:

- 30 issues of our newsletter, the Bioscience Bulletin
- 15 volumes of our peer-reviewed journal *Bioscience Education*
- 3 Learning Guides
- 6 Bioethics Briefings
- 9 Short Guides
- 8 Audit tools

And much more, including "How to" sheets, reports on Practical work and Problem solving...

Our publications and resources for academics are popular and in 2009/2010 we distributed over 500 copies of our New Lecturers' resource folder. Our publications

and resources for students are also growing in number – from employability profiles to guides on getting the most out of a bioscience course.

“I have found the guidance on student research projects most useful. As a new lecturer I was faced very early on with a number of project students but no active research for them to work on. Seeing case studies of the different styles of projects was really useful and sparked ideas for some really interesting and enjoyable projects.”



Website

With over 35,000 visitors a month our website is a popular way of engaging with the Centre, finding out more about our current activities and viewing and downloading our resources.

“I know where to go if I have a query – the website is excellent and has superb downloadable resources and guides.”

Spotlight on: ImageBank

Launched in 2002, ImageBank brings together copyright cleared bioscience images for use in teaching and learning. Developed entirely through image contributions from the bioscience community, including learned societies, industry and individuals and now with over 7,200 images, ImageBank is our most popular online resource.



Representatives

Over the last ten years our network of Bioscience Representatives (Reps), named contacts in bioscience departments and faculties across the UK, has grown and we now have 121 Reps. Each Rep keeps their department up-to-date with news and developments from the Centre and keeps the Centre informed of learning and teaching activities and issues in their department. Our annual Representatives' Forum (held for the first time in 2003) brings together Reps to network and share practice which they can then take back to inform their own teaching and teaching in their own and other departments.

Looking Forward

What does the future hold for the Centre? With cuts in funding to higher education in general, and with the Centre also facing significant funding cuts, we are likely to encounter many challenges over the coming years. However we are hopeful we will continue to play an important role in supporting higher education teaching and learning across the UK. We believe that as the demands on bioscience teaching staff increase, the Centre will have an increasingly important role in supporting bioscience academics as they strive to deliver the best possible learning experience for their students. Over the next few years it will be important for us to keep up-to-date with, and respond effectively to, the new challenges bioscience academics will face. Changing technology will also impact on both the teaching sector and the Centre and we hope to make more effective use of Web2.0 technologies in bringing together communities of practice, and ensuring effective sharing of good practice across these communities.

We recently asked you to tell us what you thought about the work of the Centre and your response was overwhelmingly positive. You also highlighted a number of areas you, as teaching staff, find challenging. These ranged from increasing class sizes, to limited staff and staff time, to students' numeracy and literacy skills. These are all issues that the Centre hopes to address in the near future. In addition we intend to continue with the many activities outlined above that are well regarded and have a positive impact on our community. In conjunction with the learned societies we are also hoping to provide a more “discipline specific” focus in some of our activities and resources.

It is important for us to stay in touch with the many groups who influence our work, from policy makers and those who employ bioscience graduates, to bioscience students and bioscience teaching staff. Our unique position enables us to help keep policy makers informed about the challenges of teaching in the biosciences and hence influence policy issues in bioscience education. It also enables us to keep the bioscience community informed about changing policy and the implications for teaching in the biosciences. With the recent amalgamation of the Biosciences Federation and the Institute of Biology, to create the new Society of Biology, UK bioscience has, for the first time, a unified voice. We hope to work closely with the Society of Biology in a number of key areas including provision of high quality support for practical work in the biosciences.

Many thanks to all of you who have worked with us over the last 10 years – we look forward to your continued support as we continue to champion the role of teaching in the biosciences.

What would you highlight from the last 10 years of the UK Centre for Bioscience?