Project Title
Plymouth Student e-Journals: Expanding the Vision

Details of Project Team
Karen Gresty (Project lead), Faculty of Science; Ray Jones, Faculty of Health & Social Work; Claire Pettinger, Faculty of Health & Social Work; Orla Kelly, Faculty of Education; Rod Parker-Rees, Faculty of Education; and Andy Edwards (Research Assistant), Faculty of Science.

Additional support has also been provided by the EDaLT team and other members of staff in the Faculty of Health & Social Work, and the Faculty of Education.

Background to the Project
FHSW and FoE have traditionally been faculties in which the curriculum has been dominated by professional requirements and finding time to include student research projects has often been difficult, especially in clinical environments due to ethical approval issues. As a result, finding novel ways to support staff and students (such as through an undergraduate e-journal) are an important part of a strategy to improve research- informed teaching. The rationale behind this proposal was to build on the success of 'The Plymouth Student Scientist' (TPSS) e-journal (http://www.theplymouthstudentscientist.org.uk) and to contribute towards the creation of a defining characteristic of the 'Plymouth Student Experience' for our University. The value of e-journals to support research-informed teaching activities has been highlighted by Jenkins, Healey & Zetter (2007), Walkington & Jenkins (2008), and Healey & Jenkins (2009) with typical emphasis on dissemination of student work rather than supporting teaching activities. Our recently established TPSS e-journal has already received critical acclaim by external sources: it was commended by the British Psychology Society during an accreditation visit to the School of Psychology in April 2008 and Prof. Alan Jenkins used it as a case study in his article on 'Embedding Undergraduate Research Publication in the Student Learning Experience' (2008) and in a new HEA resource on 'Developing Undergraduate Research and Enquiry' (2009) . Alan is impressed with TPSS's innovative approach to promote student research dissemination <u>and</u> provide pedagogic support for staff, demonstrated by his willingness to write the TPSS second issue's guest editorial in autumn 2008.

Summary of the aims of the project
We aimed to develop two new e-journals to enable students in both the FHSW and FoE to demonstrate and disseminate their research skills, particularly relating to professional practice. Our aims for these two new journals were similar to the original TPSS aims and have been to:

- Encourage and facilitate academic staff to develop a more explicit approach to supporting the research process.
- Promote the active engagement of our students in the research process from Level 1 up through to Level 3.

- Disseminate the results of high quality evidence-based student work, relating to both theoretical and practice contexts.

Methods

<u>Data and Material Required</u>

- For The Plymouth Student Educator: electronic copies of Level 1 to Level 3 student research work, including projects, reflective practice and pieces on topical issues (peer-reviewed by academic staff following assessment as 1st class).
- For The Plymouth Student Journal of Health & Social Work: electronic copies of Level 1 to Level 3 student research work, including projects, literature reviews, case studies, reflective practice, research proposals and poster presentations (supported by academic staff following assessment as 1st class).
- Consent forms signed by student authors of submitted work, as well as the academic tutor involved.
- Expressions of interest and support for the e-journal initiative from staff within both Faculties, prior to establishing the first issues.
- Survey information from undergraduate students indicating their level of support for the initiative, together with suggestions for enhancing the journal experience.
- Survey information from staff indicating their level of support for the initiative, views on how the journal might enhance their own teaching, and their attitude towards the e-journal.

<u>Methods of Obtaining Data & Material</u>

- This was an action research case study that enabled a study of both product outcome and process.

- Each School representative of the project team took responsibility for promoting the journal and ensuring the collection of student research material prior to publication.

- The publication of the online journals provided outputs that could be used as primary sources for online data collection e.g. tracking statistics.

- Promotion tactics were employed to enable collection of student work and staff feedback: these included introductory lunch events, a multi-disciplinary web cast, and conference presentations. Activities were supplemented by internal posters, emails, hyperlinks on web sites and by word-of-mouth.

- An online questionnaire was conducted, targeting 1st, 2nd and 3rd year Faculty of Health & Social Work students, using Perseus Survey Solutions software.

- Staff and students involved in the publication of the first issue of The Plymouth Student Educator were invited to submit any comments regarding the new journal

- An online questionnaire was conducted, targeting academic staff from the Faculty of Health & Social Work and the Faculty of Education, using Perseus Survey Solutions software. In addition, internal staff discussions and communications took place within the Faculties prior and post publication, resulting in a small number of feedback comments.

- The journals feature a built-in feedback mechanism that provides an online anonymized opportunity for readers to provide comment and suggestions.

- Decision-making processes regarding methodologies, actions and priorities were recorded via meeting notes, online communications and diary notes.

Methods of Analyzing Data

- The traffic use of the online journals is monitored by a built-in stats package. Data include the number of site hits and visits, the methods by which users access the journal, and the geographical distribution of journal users. These statistics are retrievable on an hourly, daily or monthly basis.

- The journal software (Open Journal Software) also provides figures for individual article and abstract viewings.

- The data resulting from the student and staff surveys were collated and graphically presented within the Perseus Software Solutions programme, and then edited using Microsoft PowerPoint.

- The results of all surveys, together with any staff or student feedback i.e. via email contact with the project team, will continue to be used to make any iterative changes to the journals.

Ethical Issues

- Approval for all research methods was granted by the Faculty of Science Human Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of the project.

- Student and staff involvement in the online surveys was entirely voluntary.

- All survey and evaluation data has remained anonymous.

Number of Students Involved
Total number of graduates that consented to have their research work published in the first issues of 'The Plymouth Student Educator' and 'The Plymouth Student Journal of Health & Social Work' = 14 (seven articles in each).

Total number of current Health & Social Work students that responded to the online questionnaire = 65.

Number of Staff Involved
Total number of staff members from both Faculties involved in introductory lunch session and webcast = approx. 30.

Total number of academic tutors contributing to the article submission process = approx. 20.

Total number of staff that responded to the online questionnaires = 13.

Findings
95% of the respondents in the Faculty of Health & Social Work student survey thought that 'The Plymouth Student Journal of Health & Social Work' would be a useful and positive development for the Faculty. Comments supporting this view included:-

> *"Especially for first years, as this will enable the students to have an insight of what is expected of them."*

> *"A journal like this one would help students get a better understanding of what is expected and by being able to have a look at samples then we can see for ourselves."*

> *"Definitely, good resource"*

The majority of respondents agreed with the type of publication material that had already been identified by staff contributors, although an additional section for 'Research Proposals" was added to the journal as a result of survey feedback. Other general comments received from students included:-

> *"Excellent idea"*

> *"Why is it limited to undergraduate work - is this due to funding?"*

> *"Bring it on! Any literature resources are good news as far as I am concerned."*

> *"Looks like an exciting and excellent tool."*

> *"Just keep it clear, in PLAIN English [for all of us technophobes!], and SIMPLE to use / access."*

When consulted about the proposed new journals, via an introductory lunch event, a multi-disciplinary web cast, and a FAQ information sheet, staff members indicated strong interest and support for the initiative. Faculty leads were identified, and a number of discipline based staff contributed toward the collation of student copy in preparation of the launch publications planned for Spring 2009. Post publication, brief surveys of staff views within both Faculties regarding the journal received very few responses, although those that did respond were extremely positive about the introduction of the initiative within each Faculty, with comments such as the following:-

> *"If it can help to integrate or link the three areas of practice within the School [of Secondary & Further Education] I think it is an excellent idea."*

> *"Excellent idea, [currently] not much engagement with research by students in social work."*

> *"It allows student work to be disseminated to a wider audience."*

Project Outputs

Conference Contributions

Edwards, A. & Gresty, K. (2009) *Exploring both sides of an undergraduate e-journal: Celebrating excellence and supporting academic writing.* Paper presentation at the 4th International Inquiring Pedagogies (iPED) Conference, Coventry University, Coventry, England. 14-15 September. Available at http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/iped09presentations/

Gresty, K., Kelly, O., Jones, R. & Edwards, A. (2009) *The Plymouth Student E-Journals: Expanding the Vision.* Poster presentation at the Vice Chancellor's Teaching and Learning Conference, University of Plymouth, Plymouth. 6 July.

Edwards, A. & Gresty, K. (2009) *Using an undergraduate e-journal to support research-informed teaching.* Paper presentation at the UPC Joint Subject Forum Event, University of Plymouth, Plymouth, England. 28 May. Available at: http://staff.plymouth.ac.uk//upcpd/UPCConferenceMaterials/intranet.htm

Online Works

'The Plymouth Student Educator' ISSN 1758-9312 [Online] ©University of Plymouth is an online undergraduate research journal, first published on 9 April 2009. The launch issue showcased seven student research articles from across the Faculty, featuring several levels of study. The full text and abstract PDF articles have been accessed 817 times from publication to the date of this report.

'The Plymouth Student Journal of Health & Social Work' ISSN 1758-9320 [Online] ©University of Plymouth was first published on 21 April 2009. The launch issue of

this journal included eight student research articles, again from a range of disciplines within the Faculty, and from different levels. The full text and abstract articles for this journal have been accessed 753 times from publication to date of report.

The Plymouth e-journals site received 240,340 hits and 33,948 individual visits in the period between 01/04 – 24/7, during which the two new journals were launched.

Case Studies

As part of the LTHE551 Teaching Research module (on the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education course) a case study presentation regarding this project was delivered to course participants within the research-informed teaching workshops by Karen Gresty in May 2009.

Dissemination

Posters were distributed around strategic teaching and learning areas within the University of Plymouth campus prior to, and following, the launch of the journals.

Within the Faculty of Health & Social Work, the journal has been on the agenda of each School's Programme Leads meetings, with the aim of raising the profile amongst the Schools that have yet to benefit from their students' work featuring in the journal.

Leading national figures in the field of mainstreaming undergraduate research (Profs Mick Healey and Alan Jenkins) have been kept fully advised of these additions to Plymouth's nest of e-journals, and have included reference to the Plymouth e-journal initiative in their publications.

Continuation/Dissemination Plans

Suggested Further Research or Development Work

An online survey of all students within the Faculty of Education is proposed following the publication of the second issue in spring 2010. It is anticipated that by then the journal will be more familiar to students, and more student authors would have contributed to the publication, hence response rates may be higher.

Develop editorial policies to take any useful feedback into consideration.

Examine options for alternative submission processes.

Embed use of the journal within specific programmes and modules.

Increase awareness of the journal amongst staff and students at the University Partner College (focus of latest RiT/TQEF award).

How does the project meet the TQEF funding aims?

1. *Ensuring that students are made aware of the most up-to-date knowledge in their field:* the journals provide an explicit opportunity for current research work carried out by students (including staff/student collaborations) to be disseminated to peers.

2. *Ensuring that staff are aware of developments if they were not previously:* the journals (and research-informed teaching ethos) have been extensively promoted to staff within the Faculties of Education and Health & Social Work via an introductory event, a web cast, e-mails, posters, internal staff meetings and conferences and by word of mouth. Staff have been invited to collaborate at many stages of the project and have contacted the project team for information and to submit work.

3. *Familiarising students with some of the research being undertaken in their institution:* with the Faculties involved in this project spanning a wide number of Schools and many disciplines, the journals provide a rare opportunity for students to be reconciled with some of the research themes being pursued outside of their own immediate research environment.

4. *Embedding RiT into institutional structures and policies (including HR and quality assurance processes):* These journals represent an expansion of a successful initiative across several faculties and disciplines, enabling many other students (and staff) to benefit from a proven resource. Evidence from staff survey responses indicate that within some sections of the Faculties, the journals will be used explicitly as a teaching aid for critical discussion and research methods.

5. *Exposing students to a research-informed learning environment at all levels (stages) in higher education*: the journals provide explicit vehicles for students in all years to experience aspects of a real research publication process.

Report Submitted by

Mr Andrew Edwards (Research Assistant)

Dr Karen Gresty (Project Lead), October 21st 2009.

List of References

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