

# Learning Highlights

## Autumn 2011

**It is an honour to welcome the first appearance of UEA's own "Learning Highlights".**

Several different pressures, both external and internal, make a renewed emphasis on Education particularly timely and relevant. The shift in the centre of gravity of funding from mainly public to mainly private, increasingly insistent questions from students, parents, and government about the nature of the HE educational experience, and our own shared passion about the worth of what we teach all point in the same direction. UEA has many wonderful attributes, from internationally significant researchers to inspirational lecturers, from the campus and buildings to the social life supported by the Union of UEA Students - but underneath it all, and the reason we are all assembled here, is learning. The quality of the student educational experience, the commitment of all our staff, and the willingness of our increasingly well-qualified students to engage intensely with their studies, is the way in which we can continue to express our shared belief that HE can change lives and change society.

In addition to the enormous external changes, and largely in response to them, we have embarked on significant changes ourselves. The New Academic Model opens the door to greater emphasis on student engagement with all modules, the development of a real coherence and character to each degree course, and expresses a wish to see high educational standards at the heart of our regulations. The integrated Learning & Teaching Service, following a Summer of huge effort by all involved, promises to deliver consistent services to students and in the long run will enable us to



deal with student engagement far more coherently. Both of these changes have involved enormous amounts of work by many people, and have required some difficult changes in practice. I appreciate the patience and tolerance that have been demonstrated, and hope that as the new frameworks become familiar we will all see real benefits.

I am grateful to Sarah Yeates, Harriet Jones and Kay Yeoman for the effort that has gone into this first edition of what I hope will be a regular product. Please read it and discuss it, and think about how you could contribute your own experiences to subsequent editions.

Thomas Ward  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic)



## Introducing 'Learning Highlights'!

Learning Highlights is an internal publication that aims to raise the profile of teaching and learning across UEA. We will publish articles on a wide range of subjects relating to learning and teaching at UEA, for example; teaching practices; evaluating different teaching methods; articles from students on their experiences; funding; the Higher Education Academy; new modules, courses and degree programs; teaching excellence awards; events; new initiatives; innovation; recent publications relating to education and more.

If you would like to contribute please contact the editor Sarah Yeates (pictured above) directly at [s.yeates@uea.ac.uk](mailto:s.yeates@uea.ac.uk), x2182

**Next issue: Submission deadline 31 January 2012**

## The Learning Enhancement Team at UEA: What Can They Do For You?

The Learning Enhancement Team, based in the Dean of Students' Office, offer a range of ways to help students study more effectively and improve their work.

### Writing and Study Skills Workshops

The Learning Enhancement Team is running a series of workshops to support students in their studies at UEA. Dr Jeremy Schildt, Head of the Team, said: "These weekly workshops will be full of practical information, tips and exercises to help students study more effectively and improve their work." Particular focus will be given to helping students become better writers, critical thinkers and inde-

pendent learners.

The workshops will take place in the Library on Wednesdays (3-5pm) throughout the Autumn and Spring semesters. The programme is open to all students registered on UEA courses. No booking is required, but places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

Full details of the programme can be found at [www.uea.ac.uk/dos/let/workshops](http://www.uea.ac.uk/dos/let/workshops)

### Mathematics Support

The Learning Enhancement Team has been improving its support for students having trouble with their numeracy and algebra. Their study guides in these areas have been re-

-written to account for changes in student needs and then recorded in webcast form. These recordings are obtainable in a variety of ways, using smart phones via qr-codes, YouTube, Twitter and via the Learning Enhancement Team website. The guides for Steps Into Algebra have also been collected in an interactive mind map using Prezi: [http://prezi.com/yiwi94q8b\\_br/steps-into-algebra-mind-map/](http://prezi.com/yiwi94q8b_br/steps-into-algebra-mind-map/). Students are free to explore this environment or be guided through by a path set by the Team.

### Support for lecturing staff

The Learning Enhancement Team's role includes supporting lecturing staff in maximizing the student learning experience. This support can take the form of tailor-made workshops for particular cohorts, support for peer learning initiatives and drop-in 'clinics'. The team offers individual tutorials to students who would like more in-depth, personal support developing particular skills, and welcomes referrals from lecturers of students who could benefit.

If you would like to talk about ways that the team might be able to collaborate with you please contact Jeremy Schildt x1836; [j.schildt@uea.ac.uk](mailto:j.schildt@uea.ac.uk)



## The Higher Education Academy (HEA) Shake Up

The HEA is an organisation that provides support for discipline groups and individual academic staff in HE institutions. They identify and share effective teaching practices to provide the best possible learning experience for students. For many individuals in HE it is working at the discipline level where most networking and exchange takes place. The highly regarded Subject Centres provided teaching and learning support within disciplines for more than ten years.

However, due to funding cuts the

HEA no longer provides grant funding to support the network of Subject Centres. They have been replaced by a new programme of subject specific support for learning and teaching coordinated from the HEA's York site. This is delivered with the support of a network of associates including subject experts drawn from academic staff based in, or linked to, a wide range of higher education institutions.

Changes in the funding and in student expectations of HE have focused increased attention on the

quality and recognition of teaching. The HEA's future work will concentrate on activity that sup-



ports institutions and their staff in improving teaching in HE. This will be built around three aspects of the student learning experience: teacher excellence, developing academic practice, and institutional strategy. The HEA will include support for new academic staff and graduate teaching assistants, teaching development grants, specialist CPD workshops and subject-specific resources.

Other initiatives include teaching grants worth £1.5 million, awarded to individuals, departments and institutional partnerships over the coming year. Of this cash,

£315,000 is available to individuals who can claim a maximum of £7,000 to encourage "innovations in learning and teaching that have the potential for sector-wide impact". Competition for this funding is fierce. In the recent call for funding around employability there were 750 proposals but only approximately 10 were funded. The HEA will also continue to offer online resources for academics and there will be workshops, events and publications in different disciplinary areas.

The implications of these

changes are that there will be far less support for individuals trying to make the move to being a teaching specialist, and far less money for teaching projects. Those left at the HEA will have to spread themselves far more thinly so, whereas before there was the potential for significant support for individual projects, this will almost certainly disappear. Many valued and experienced staff have lost their jobs and this loss from the support network for HE teaching staff will be sorely missed.

Sarah Yeates (BIO)

## Enhancing Student Engagement Through Pre-Session Reading

The BA Physical Education and Sport degree programme in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning (EDU) was established in 2008 and faced a common challenge of how to engage students with reading during their degree. The PE and Sport team decided it would introduce pre-session readings to all modules and all staff would follow up readings during their sessions. These pre-session readings are designed to give students a taste of the topic that will be covered during the lecture and seminars that week and to get them connecting with the topic area before any teaching has taken place. Lecturers on the course spend ten minutes at the start of sessions exploring the readings and asking students questions on the content to facilitate a discussion. The details of the pre-session readings are included in the module outlines that are distributed at the start of each module; ensuring students have the necessary information from the outset.

As with all new initiatives, some students initially thought they would be able to avoid doing the pre-session reading but soon realised that all staff in all modules were following up on the pre-session readings. They also were



unable to 'hide' from the questions posed by staff, as within smaller seminar groups it has been possible to have questions for each student to answer. Even in larger groups students do not know who will be asked the questions and are 'kept on their toes', so to speak. During the early periods of the initiative, staff found that most students wanted to contribute to the discussion and put their opinions across; leading to the vast majority of students, in all modules, coming to sessions having completed the readings and prepared to answer questions.

Student feedback on the introduction of pre-session readings has been positive. They like the structure it provides and being able to come to sessions with an idea about a topic area rather than getting a new topic introduced during a lecture. Further to this, it has enabled them to question the topic area during sessions rather than

having to book tutorials with staff after sessions. From a lecturer's perspective, the introduction of pre-session reading has helped to improve the quality of sessions and promote more of a dialogue between students and lecturers. It has also enabled the topic areas to be more fully explored during contact hours. The PE and Sport team would certainly not claim that this method is a failsafe one and does not work with all topics, but it has proved to be a very useful 'starter activity' for lectures and seminars on the programme, providing students with a focus. Hopefully these pre-session readings go some way to encouraging the students on the course to be more engaged with reading at university.

For more information contact Lee Beaumont by email: [Lee.Beaumont@uea.ac.uk](mailto:Lee.Beaumont@uea.ac.uk)



## Social Learning Aids Lower Achievers

I was at an HEA meeting in Bristol on 22<sup>nd</sup> September entitled 'Using assessment to engage students and their learning' organised by Phil Langton. There was much emphasis on peer learning and Paul Orsmond (Staffordshire University) gave a plenary talk about student-centred learning. The talk explored the issue that, just because you tell a student something, it doesn't mean they learn it. The type of teaching being delivered can affect the type of learning. Paul said that tutors need to develop their ideas about what they actually mean when they talk about learning. Much of the learning takes place away from the tutor. He described this type of learning as a social process rather than a cognitive one, where students could spontaneously form themselves into learning groups and engage in a form of self-assessment or error detection. This latter point is an important process because, as tutors, we correct errors the students make, errors which the students are not detecting themselves. The social learning groups occur away from the main teaching arena, perhaps

over coffee breaks, in residences, or other places not associated with formal teaching. This learning goes on in parallel with the teaching they receive from university staff.

We have all been aware of this student-centred learning process but Paul Orsmond has produced data that demonstrates its significance. His data showed that it tended to be the high achievers who engaged in this social learning, self-assessment process. The lower achievers were not so comfortable with self-assessment and tended to need to be more tutor-led. As tutors, we need to facilitate these lower achievers to engage in social learning with their peers. These are students who rarely engage with feedback and do not appear to take on board instructions. Perhaps we need to engage these students in more tutor-led self-assessment groups to give them confidence and to help them engage with this extremely important aspect of learning. Learning comes through practice and the lower achievers are missing out on practice gained

through student-centred learning. It may be that there is little point in writing feedback comments on a very poor script because a student who has not engaged with the teaching process up to that point is unlikely to learn from traditional written feedback. One option may be to run small seminar groups for these students. This could perhaps be after the autumn exam board has highlighted lower achieving students and those that aren't engaging. These groups would be tutor-led to begin with, to work through their assignments and other aspects of teaching, so that they can start to learn. Another might be to pair them up with high achieving students who could help integrate them into their social learning groups. These lower achieving students are often those most at risk from dropping out of university, and may be either or both these practices may help reduce the risk of this.

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## Writing Skills

Nigel Norris (EDU), Jeremy Schidlt (DoS), Chris Bishop (DoS), Harriet Jones (BIO), and Dr Crozier Kenda (NSC) have begun to explore how we might improve writing skills across the university. The ultimate aim would be that all students receiving a degree from UEA should be able to write clearly and accurately. This small group met at the beginning of September to begin exploring this issue.

If you feel you would like to contribute in any way, such as providing information on best practice, or experience or knowledge of how this is tackled in other institutions, please e-mail the editor, Sarah Yeates at [s.yeates@uea.ac.uk](mailto:s.yeates@uea.ac.uk)



## Peer-guided Group Learning: A Success in Maths

In the School of Mathematics, peer-guided groups have been trialled successfully for Analysis and Algebra, one of the more difficult first-year modules. Student reaction has been broadly positive. Groups of 10 first-year students gather for one hour and, under the direction of two peer guides (chosen from the second-year cohort), work through carefully structured discussion sheets, which have been distributed one week in advance. The content of the sheets is chosen in order to reinforce the acquisition of lecture material, but also with the purpose of developing the students' ability

to engage in quasi-autonomous discovery of new related ideas and proofs, and to develop confidence in independent problem-solving. The peer guides intervene as discussion leaders; they also provide weekly verbal feedback to the module organiser. No summative assessment is involved. Critical factors in successful peer-guided learning appear to be (1) the selection and structuring of the material to be explored by the participants, so that they can progress through the sheet without the assistance of a lecturer, and (2) the academic quality and personal confidence of the peer guides

leading the sessions. It is vital to allow small open natural groupings to form, rather than to enforce rigidly engineered social learning units. Anecdotal evidence suggests that exceptional learning benefits accrue to the peer guides as well as to the participating students. This is perhaps an underappreciated feature of mathematical learning, where successful concept acquisition frequently requires significant periods of maturation."

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**Year 1 Biology students recently enjoyed the opportunity to learn from specimens at the Cambridge Zoology Museum.**

## The Swap-Shop Corner

Academic staff use an array of different teaching strategies to engage students with the taught material on their courses. These methods can be very innovative and include the use of lecture podcasts, personal response systems, the use of games, role play and problem based learning (PBL), to name just a few. These techniques have often involved a lot of development time and in some cases extensive evaluation on the impact of these developments on student learning and experience.

One of the biggest problems faced is how to disseminate this good practice across the university, many teaching techniques can be adopted and adapted for use across a wide variety of disciplines

(e.g. PBL can be adapted to fit many different modules and courses across faculties). There are also staff who would like to adopt new ways and methods of teaching, but perhaps lack the confidence in trying it, or would like to see it in action and personally see how students react to it before adopting it.

If you have any innovative teaching sessions coming up in the Spring semester, and you don't mind a few visitors to observe. Please let Kay Yeoman know (k.yeoman@uea.ac.uk) and we can advertise them in the Swap Shop Corner of Learning Highlights.



## HEA Funding Opportunities

The HEA has launched a new UK travel fund to promote exchange of ideas relating to teaching, learning and assessment. Staff and students can apply for funding to attend conferences, meetings and special interest groups that are being run in the UK. This is an open call running throughout the academic year 2011-12.

There are also grants of £500 available to institutions to host and deliver workshops or seminars.



A total of £1.5 million of funding will be available over the next year for individuals, departments and collaborations to pursue research and innovations in teaching development on the themes of internationalisation or employability.

For more information and to apply please visit  
[www.heacademy.ac.uk/funding](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/funding)

## Publications

### An Evaluation of a Problem-Based Learning Experience in an Occupational Therapy Curriculum in the UK



Nicola Spalding and Anne Killeth of the School of Allied Health Professions published an article in the journal *Occupational Therapy International* on an

adapted approach to problem based learning that they developed and evaluated for a Masters course in Occupational Therapy at UEA.

#### Abstract

The objectives of the study was to evaluate an adapted approach to problem-based learning (PBL) on a preregistration Masters course in Occupational Therapy at the University of East Anglia in the UK. The adaptation, named placement PBL, required students to write and select the material based on their placement experiences, for the cohort's learning. The evaluation purpose was to determine the students' views of the efficacy of placement PBL for facilitating their learning in the final 3 months of their pre-registration education. Placement PBL was evaluated using both questionnaires and focus groups, with two cohorts of students for data collection. Placement PBL was seen to provide current, relevant and complex learning scenarios that help students to move from a theoretical understanding to application of theory in the complexity of actual service situations. The authors conclude that placement PBL has the potential to prepare students for the transition from student to qualified practitioner. Both researchers were also the PBL tutors which may have affected the students' honesty in their feedback. Further research is indicated for ongoing evaluations of the effectiveness of PBL in helping students to become confident occupational

therapy clinicians, and comparative studies with other learning approaches, which may have affected the students' honesty in their feedback. Further research is indicated for ongoing evaluations of the effectiveness of PBL in helping students to become confident occupational therapy clinicians, and comparative studies with other learning approaches.

To read the full article go to:  
*Occup. Ther. Int.* **17** (2010) 64–73  
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### Development and Evaluation of an Undergraduate Science Communication Module

Kay Yeoman and Helen James in the School of Biological Sciences and Laura Bowater in the School of Medicine, Health Policy and Practice evaluate a final year undergraduate module that they developed on science communication. Their article was published earlier this year in *Bioscience Education*, an online journal published by the Higher Education Academy.

#### Abstract

This paper describes the design and evaluation of an undergraduate final year science communication module for the Science Faculty at the University of East Anglia. The module focuses specifically on science communication and aims to bring an understand-

ing of how science is disseminated to the public. Students on the module are made aware of the models surrounding science communication and investigate how the science culture interfaces with the public. During the module they learn how to adapt science concepts for different audiences and how to talk confidently about science to a lay-audience. Student motivation for module choice centres on the acquisition of transferable skills and students develop these skills through designing, running and evaluating a public outreach event at a school or in a public area. These transferable skills acquired include communication, interaction with different organisations such as museums and science centres, developing understanding of both the needs of different audiences and the importance of time management. They also develop skills relating to self-reflection and how to use this as a tool for future self development. The majority of students completing the module go on to further study, either a PhD, MSc or teacher training. The module can be sustained in its present formed if capped at 40 students, however it is recognised that to increase cohort size, further investment of faculty time and resources would be required.

To read the full article go to:  
[www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/journal/vol17/beej-17-7.pdf](http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/journal/vol17/beej-17-7.pdf)



**Late night drop box for coursework - not for the fainthearted!**