

## Editorial: The Value of Teaching

‘All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.’ George Orwell

As I write this editorial the [Reward and Recognition in Higher Education: Institutional policies and their implementation](#) report has just been published. The findings confirm what most academics suspect: their teaching is not recognised to the same extent as research. The discrepancy between the value placed on teaching compared to research is widespread and pervasive. Recently the Times Higher Education published a letter by Prof Peter Checkland which contained the sentence “All staff can learn to teach at least adequately, but research calls for more: it requires an uncommon combination of intellect, temperament and values.” Whether intentional or not the message conveyed is: ‘adequate’ will do for teaching but research requires more. With funding restrictions and potential cuts on the horizon the value and recognition given to teaching becomes more acute. To be brutal, does an equal weighting between teaching and research as claimed in an institutional mission statement translate fully in the decision of who stays and who can go? Are teaching fellows valued? And if so, is it in their own right, or as ‘pawns’ to protect researchers from the onerous duty of teaching?

Clearly the answers to such questions will vary between institutions but in such a climate it is particularly pleasing to be able to publish such a full volume of *Bioscience Education*. As a Centre we are keen to promote pedagogic research in the biosciences. Studies involving bioscience students ought to be informing the mainstream educational literature and we are keen that bioscience academics have a means of sharing their findings to the benefit of all — both staff and students.

Practical work features strongly in this edition, with Goulder and Scott describing an open-ended approach to fieldwork leading to a collective knowledge base and Scott and Maw highlighting the substantial role graduates still play in delivering laboratory practicals. In their study Quinn *et al.* reinforce the notion computer-based approaches have a role to play but care needs to be given around when they are used. Badge and Badge complete the practical theme with their short communication on online lab books as a way of supporting project students. This emphasis on practical work chimes with the Centre’s experience that there is growing disquiet (both from staff and students) around the undergraduate laboratory experience and dedicated teachers are beginning to make changes.

Again there is variety. Ahluwalia presents a reflective piece on using critical incidence analysis to inform teaching and I am sure the dilemma identified — a student entitled to extra help yet unwilling to let her peers know the reason — is one which will resonate with many readers. The Centre’s strong tradition of sharing (evaluated) practice is also evident: Burke da Silva and Hunter share their experiences of an alternative to a pre-requisite; Senchina and Laurson using playing cards to teaching difficult concepts; Phillips developing students’ critical appraisal abilities and Klappa using quizzes to promote engagement.

All in all a full volume in which I trust you will find something of genuine use and interest.

Stephen J Maw,  
Acting Editor-in-Chief,  
Centre for Bioscience, the Higher Education Academy, University of Leeds,  
Leeds LS2 9JT

s.j.maw@leeds.ac.uk

### Reference

Checkland, P. (2009) Curiouser and curiouser. *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 29 October 2009