Education Matters - August 2013

Education Matters brings you the latest education news from University of Birmingham and Higher Education.

University of Birmingham

- Upskilling our students - how the new Academic Skills Centre is contributing to undergraduate development
  
  The Academic Skills Centre (ASC) was introduced in September 2012 following a project which reviewed general academic, writing and mathematical skills support for our undergraduate students across the University. The ASC was established to complement local provision through the development of a single, central and prominent skills support service for undergraduates based within the Main Library. Study skills provision is managed from within Library Services; mathematics provision is provided in close partnership with the STEM Education Centre under the umbrella of the ASC. We encourage academic colleague to raise awareness of the centre amongst current as well as prospective students. During our first year, we have had 770 visits from students who participated in either our maths support drop-in service, academic skills workshops, or who received confidential 1-1 support from a learning or writing skills adviser.

  We also offer specific activities to support undergraduates through their transition to university, the University’s Transition Review, and the examination and resit period. Additionally, we support students who have failed a module through workshops, 1-1s, telephone, email and Skype. Details of the forthcoming support opportunities can be found here.

  In preparation for the new academic year, we would like to draw your attention to our Welcome Programme of activities which will be available via the ASC homepage shortly.

  As part of its blended learning approach, the ASC also offers a range of online support tools: Guide to Effective Learning (GEL) website and Skills4 Study Campus.

  Our main focus is to ensure that all undergraduate students have the opportunity to fulfil their academic potential and develop
strategies to help them to achieve their academic goals. As part of this remit the ASC is contributing to one of themes of Curriculum Review on ‘skills training’ by:

- Developing an offer of core activities informed by ongoing demands from our undergraduate students;
- Developing, in collaboration with academic staff, a range of relevant subject-specific bespoke skills workshops.

We are keen to develop such provision in conjunction with academic members of staff, and so if you are keen to be involved or have ideas you wish to share, please contact us.

**Mathematics Support Centre**
Mathematics and statistics are relevant to many discipline areas. Many students, however, experience difficulties with these subjects throughout their university studies. The Mathematics Support Centre is a place where all undergraduate students can receive additional help with the mathematical and statistical content of their courses from experienced and friendly tutors in a confidential environment.

The drop-in support is aimed at foundation and first-year undergraduate students from all disciplines and programmes of study within the University, and at undergraduate students from other year groups identified as having particular difficulties with basic mathematical and statistical techniques.

Students can drop-in to the Mathematics Support Centre at any time during its opening hours. There is no need to make an appointment.

**Peer Assisted Study Scheme: PASS**
Peer Assisted Study Sessions is a developmental model of peer support and encourages student engagement with the academic elements of a course. It is managed in close alignment with the work of the Academic Skills Centre. PASS is a voluntary, student-led scheme whereby students who have completed an academic module facilitate sessions for students who are new to the module.

PASS is now entering its 5th year and 418 students will have completed the PASS Leader training. The overall average attendance across all disciplines has risen year on year since PASS has started and now comfortably exceeds 30% (which is the National benchmark for the scheme).

For 2013/14 the following PASS schemes will be running:

**College of Arts and Law**
Archaeology, Drama and Theatre Arts, English, History and Theology

**College of Social Sciences**
Accounting and Finance, Education, Russian Studies and Sociology
College of Engineering and Physical Science
Chemistry (both analytical and physical), Computer Science and Mathematics
College of Life and Environmental Science
Bio-Sciences, Environmental Science, Psychology and SportEx

Academic colleagues are encouraged to contact us if interested in developing a PASS scheme in their area.

Find us at:
Mathematics Support Centre: Room 115a, 1st Floor at the back of the Main University Library in the Academic Skills Centre. Monday – Friday (term time only) and visit our website for details; Twitter: @UoBMSC
Academic Skills Centre: Room 116, 1st Floor Main University Library. Monday – Friday (throughout the year) we are open 9am to 5pm and 7pm on Wednesdays. Website; Twitter: @UoBASC; email
PASS: G12 Nuffield. Monday – Friday (throughout the academic year) and visit our website for details or email us.

University bookshop and reading lists

Following the closure of the campus branch of Waterstones, the University recognised that a bookshop is still a vital service to provide on campus, and a group comprising Professor Jeff Bale, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education; Diane Job, Director of Library Services; Stuart Richards, Director of Hospitality and Accommodation Services; and Rob Arnold, Head of Infrastructure Services, was convened to consult on a new bookseller for the University campus.

John Smith’s have been approved for their well established status at other universities, award winning service, and commitment to high quality delivery for staff and students. The shop will open on the ground floor of University centre for the start of term.

“We are delighted to be opening our doors on campus at the University of Birmingham” said Jonathan Verity of John Smith’s.

“We are thrilled to be working at such a prestigious university; we currently operate out of 24 other university campuses in the UK, and John Smith’s as a bookseller has been around since 1751”

John Smith’s will offer a wide range of services including an Amazon price match, and second hand books ‘buy-back’; and are also keen to work with University staff to ensure a good stock of reading list items. As the new academic year approaches, it is vital to note the importance of academic staff forwarding their reading lists to the Library. The Library will share information it receives with the Bookshop to ensure it also stocks the right material and to reduce the need for multiple communications.

Library Services have also embarked on a major piece of work to tackle reading list concerns from a number of different angles. It will also address issues around integration of reading lists with the iVLE and the
supply of reading material online within copyright restrictions.

**Higher Education news**

- **New Student Engagement Unit to be launched (extract taken from HEFCE website)**

  A new higher education student engagement partnership unit, hosted by the NUS, will work to involve students more fully as partners in their own higher education. The unit is jointly funded by HEFCE, NUS, the Association of Colleges and GuildHE. It will work to support a vision of students and their representative bodies as partners in the educational experience. It will support students’ active involvement as partners in the development, management and governance of their institution, its academic programmes and their enhancement, and in their own learning. It will provide a unique partnership between students, NUS, students’ unions, universities and colleges, sector bodies and higher education funders. The unit is expected to be launched in autumn 2013.
  
  More information on the [HEFCE Website](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/).

- **£75 million investment in removing barriers to postgraduate study**

  An initial £25 million fund will distribute grants of between £300,000 and £3 million to universities and colleges to attract and support disadvantaged students into postgraduate education.

  After studying its success, the government will then invest an additional £50m in removing financial or cultural barriers to participation in postgraduate education, as announced in the Spending Review. Extra funding will be expected from universities and businesses, bringing this to around £100 million. Taken from the [Department for Business, Innovation and Skills website](http://www.bis.gov.uk/).

- **EUA’s monitoring of the impact of the economic crisis on public funding for universities in Europe**

  EUA has been monitoring the evolution of public funding to higher education institutions and the impact of the economic crisis on higher education systems in Europe since its onset in 2008 and has published several reports (see below). The EUA [Public Funding Observatory](http://www.europe-analyse.org/en/pep) interactive online tool gives the user the opportunity to look at the data and the developments over years in a customised way.

- **UK-China collaboration on technology transfer: call for applications**

  British Council China, which operates as the Cultural and Education Section of the British Embassy and Consulates-general, has been organising a series of successful technology transfer activities in Chongqing municipality and Wuxi city in collaboration with local partners of Chongqing Academy of Science and Technology and Wuxi Association for Science and Technology. Building on previous successful events, British Council China is now calling for expressions of interest from the UK higher education institutions for the second round of UK-
Chongqing and Wuxi Collaboration on Technology Transfer programmes. This year, the programmes in Chongqing and Wuxi will be organised back to back in November, giving UK institutions the opportunity to join the programmes in both cities. Following the call for expressions of interest, shortlisted UK universities will be invited to come to Chongqing and/or Wuxi in November 2013 to demonstrate their scientific excellence and visit local enterprises and HEIs.

Delegations from Chongqing and Wuxi, if they identify any potential collaboration opportunities from the UK visit, will be invited to visit the UK in 2014 to firm up collaborative activities.

Click for more information on the Chongqing event or the Wuxi event.

**International Enhancement Themes conference**

The International Enhancement Themes conference was held on 11 June 2013. The conference brought together 550 delegates from 24 different counties to Glasgow, making it one of the largest learning and teaching conferences in the UK. Materials from the conference, including presentations and photos, are now available on the Enhancement Themes website. QAA Scotland supports and facilitates the Enhancement Themes.

Each Enhancement Theme has produced a large number of materials. To ensure this information is easily accessible we have produced a guide to the Outcomes of the Themes. The guide has been divided into five areas which chronicle the student journey from application and settling in, to graduation and beyond.

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www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/educationmatters

Contact Dr C.Teeling for information, or with any comments.