**Education Matters - October 2013**

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

**University of Birmingham News**

**University Senior Tutor (UST)**

Dr Regina Santos from the School of Chemical Engineering is the new University Senior Tutor. The role of the UST is to work with students and staff to resolve academic concerns and related problems that may arise during a student’s studies. She provides strategic leadership and support on issues related to personal tutoring across the campus. She works closely with the PVC Education, the Director of Students Services, the network of Senior Tutors and Welfare Tutors within the five Colleges as well as colleagues from the Centre for Academic and Learning Development (CLAD), Academic and Student Services, Student Admissions, the Guild of Students and the Planning Office. She can be consulted (in strictest confidence) in relation to any serious academic matters and difficulties a student may be experiencing with their studies or with the University and its staff. In the first instance, a student is encouraged to contact their personal tutor, or the School Senior Tutor or Welfare Tutor. If this does not resolve the issue, then Dr Santos as UST may be able to help. If you would like to know more about the UST, or if there are any matters you would like to discuss, please email or telephone 0121 414
Assessment Review
One of the key strands of Curriculum Review is the Assessment Review, and this is based around the Birmingham Assessment for Learning Initiative (BALI). The BALI Project was set up in January 2012 with the aim of using the TESTA approach (Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment - follow this link for details) to collect evidence on assessment and feedback practices in taught UG programmes. TESTA uses information from audits of current activity, assessment evaluation questionnaires and focus groups, brought together in a report that is presented to the School/Dept. The work is largely done by a group of researchers and the report will allow the identification of issues that require some action and a plan can be put in place. So far, 16 programmes have been reviewed and there are plans to complete the cycle with a further tranche of 12 programmes.

The BALI Project was designed to address issues around the current practice of focussing assessment and feedback at the level of the module, rather than considering this across whole years of programmes. The consequence of a module focus is that assessment and feedback is often not coherent across the year, and it is frequently the case that feedback on assessments is not used effectively to feed-forward to subsequent related exercises. There are also problems apparent in the balance between assessment primarily for learning (formative assessment) and for evaluation of student performance (summative assessment). Good practice in the use of peer assessment, audio and online feedback, and peer review of marked essays linked to marking criteria needs to be promoted across the University. In addition, it is clearly important to ensure that assessment and feedback is considered with respect to student and staff time, effort and other resources. Information and resources incorporating aspects of good practice that arise out of the BALI reviews are currently being assembled for dissemination to staff through the Education Matters website and other routes.

The Assessment Review is being coordinated by the DPVC (Education), Prof. Jon Green, as well as representatives from each College and from CLAD.

Educational Enhancement Fund
Do you have an idea to improve the academic experience of students?

Applications are now open to fund staff and students project ideas under the overall theme of education enhancement.

Find out more and apply here.

Student led projects (deadline 17th November 2013)
Up to £1,000 is available per project to engage directly with, and contribute to, the enhancement of students’ academic experience at the University, whilst also gaining valuable project-related skills and experience.

Staff led projects (deadline 27th October 2013)
Between £2,500 and £30,000 is available for project ideas under the overall theme of education enhancement. Proposals under the following priority areas
(identified by College Directors of Education) are particularly encouraged:

- Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), including:
  - Expanding the effective use of TEL into new subject areas;
  - Enhancing assessment and feedback through TEL;
- Novel approaches to effective use of laboratory space, particularly in the areas of ‘pre-practical online training and demonstrations’ and ‘virtual labs’;
- Enhancing and integrating international and home students’ experience;
- Effective mechanisms for the dissemination and adoption of innovation and good practice

CLAD Project Advisors are available to assist all applicants with initial project ideas, the application process and to answer any queries that arise, please email us.

**Higher Education News**

**British Council partners with QAA to promote UK HE internationally**

QAA has teamed up with the British Council in order to promote the value of British higher education on the international stage. Over half a million international students are studying for UK degrees at non-UK locations (more than the number who have come to the UK to study), and there is potential for further growth. While QAA assures the quality of this education, the British Council is well placed to make potential international students more aware of the great opportunities on offer.

The British Council has a long and prestigious track record of fostering cultural relations between the UK and other countries. The newly signed Memorandum of Understanding between the British Council and QAA, the UK's trusted authority on quality and standards in higher education, forges a partnership that will ensure broad international recognition of the high quality and reputation of UK higher education, and will facilitate further developments. The partnership will ensure that the quality of courses offered under the UK banner is safeguarded, and their reputation is enhanced.

Taken from the [QAA website](http); also see the [British Council](http) website for more information.

**Massive open online courses and online distance learning: review**

A [report](http) published on 18 September by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) - The maturing of the MOOC: literature review of massive open online courses and other forms of online distance learning - updates our knowledge on the development and impact of massive open online courses on learners and institutions at further education and higher education level.
The study assessed available literature from various sources, including academic research articles and formal comprehensive reviews; blog posts; commentary and journalistic coverage. It concludes that massive open online courses are likely to become a standard element of university education with new teaching and learning methods that provide revenue and lower costs. A major challenge is finding suitable business models.

Taken from the BIS website, click here for more information.

**Where student fees go**

Universities are often asked to explain how they are using the income from variable fees. This report from Universities UK provides an answer.

Drawing on examples from universities across England, it illustrates the way in which universities are changing in response to a rapid shift in the way they are funded, with public funding for teaching being replaced by income from fees, backed by income-contingent loans. Case studies illustrate how universities are investing in financial aid, improving teaching, creating new facilities to support students as they learn, and investing heavily in measures to help graduates secure good jobs.

The examples given in this report provide a snapshot of the way tuition fees are starting to change universities. Following cuts in direct public funding, this income is essential to ensure students get a truly world-class higher education.

Taken from the Universities UK website, more information here.

See the Education Matters web pages

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