

The Plymouth Student Scientist Project Information Sheet for Project Advisors

Q: What is The Plymouth Student Scientist?

A: The Faculty of Science has been awarded a considerable sum of TQEF money (from the Teaching Quality & Enhancement Fund) to develop, embed and disseminate more research-informed teaching activities. This money was competitively tendered for by a team of academics representing all three Schools in the Faculty, with the intention of developing an electronic journal. The journal will publish a range of internal articles from both staff and students, to promote and encourage different aspects of the research process. One key purpose of the e-journal in the first instance will be the dissemination of student honours projects that are considered to be excellent examples of work from:

Biological Sciences

Earth, Ocean & Environmental Sciences

Psychology

Q: What are the aims of this project?

A: The key aims of this project are:

- To encourage and facilitate academic staff to develop a more explicit approach to supporting the research process.
- To promote the active engagement of our students in the research process
- To provide an opportunity for Plymouth staff and students to reflect and share their ideas regarding what 'doing research' means.
- To disseminate the results of staff and student research projects.

Q. What do I have to do as an academic tutor?

A: We do not intend this project to be particularly onerous for academic staff. Staff will identify appropriate honours projects during marking and then contact the relevant student, to see if they would like their work to be published in the journal. This will ensure that we only publish work of a high standard and that we do not have to reject work that is of poor quality (avoiding a demoralising impact on our student). Project advisors will be provided with consent and information forms to send to selected students, requesting an electronic copy of the project (if one is not already submitted). **This should be done preferably before the student leaves!**

Q: What do I have to do with the electronic version of the project?

A: Andrew Edwards is the research assistant for this project and he will be collating material for the journal. Andy is responsible for liaising with academic staff and for collecting relevant resources, as well as having a copy-editor role. Once you have identified some relevant work and have an e-copy, please contact Andy. We are exploring the possibility for staff and students to submit work directly online in the future and more information will be provided when this system is functional.

Q: What will happen to my student's work?

A: It will be accessible both internally and externally, highlighting the type of science projects that can be carried out at Plymouth. This may help students to decide on a possible area of study for their own projects and also allow students to see the sort of style or language that should be adopted when writing up their own research. In addition, the intention is for other Level 1 and 2 students to be encouraged to critically review the work in tutorial sessions, by trying to decide how the work could be developed ('Future Work') or how it could be improved ('Limitations for Study'). We will be exploring how the journal could support this intention in the near future, but this could include the removal of any 'Future Work' and/or 'Limitations of Study' elements, before being made available online. We anticipate this peer review will encourage self-reflection regarding their own work and we can make provision in the e-journal to include these 'reviews'.

Q: What sort of comments might be made about my student's work?

A: The honours projects will be published with the caveat that they are in their original form 'warts and all'. The editorial team will not critically review student work in order to improve it, although this may be something that we want to consider and develop in the future. During tutorial sessions with Level 1 and Level 2 students, academic staff may outline the sort of things to consider when reviewing scientific work. As a result, any critical evaluation comments made by such students on published work in the journal can be submitted (for publication) as part of the peer-review process. Project advisors can be provided with copies of any removed sections (if they don't already have them) and may want to share these with other students, to see if they are able to identify the same issues during the review process. Remember, we are only inviting contributions from students that have produced excellent research, so work is unlikely to be deeply flawed but it may benefit from a larger sample size, data gathered over a longer period of time etc...

Q: Won't other Plymouth students just copy the work?

A: Work held in the e-journal will be available to all staff and students. Prior to publication, all articles are subjected to the University's electronic software (Turnitin) which can be used to detect plagiarism. We believe that our students are unlikely to copy from work that is so publicly visible and widely known to project advisors in our Faculty. As always, academic staff need to be vigilant and the project supporting

notes (laboratory notebook) will continue to play a role in determining conduct of study.

Q: What about students copying from other institutions?

A: Work published in the e-journal by Plymouth staff and students will be accessible internally and externally. As a result, we cannot stop students at other institutions from accessing this work for fraudulent purposes. It should be noted that we are not alone in developing an online resource, as there are other journals available that publish undergraduate science. For example, see University of Leeds:

<http://www.biolog-e.leeds.ac.uk>

Consequently, we are not doing something unusual and our students may already be accessing these sources!

Q: What if I want to publish my student's work in another journal?

A: Every year some students produce work of exceptional quality that is suitable for publishing with their project advisor in an international, discipline-specific academic journal. As a result, we accept that project advisors may be reluctant to recommend or submit such honours projects for publication in this journal. Our intention is for this journal to publish excellent research that would otherwise not get published and disseminated. However, it may also be appropriate to include summaries or abstracts of student work that is going to be, or has been, published in other sources, to highlight the collaborative success of our staff and students in this context.

Q: What about student consent and copyright?

A: We will ask student contributors to sign a consent form in the first instance, which identifies that they have discussed this with their project advisor and that they consent for their project work to be included in the journal. This consent form will also have a space for tutor signatures. The consent form also serves as a copyright form, identifying that the work is their own, that they have the necessary permission to reproduce material where applicable, and that intellectual property rights for any published articles will be shared by the individual and the project advisor, on behalf of the University.

Q: How many student projects are needed?

A: We do not expect every member of staff to identify a project for this journal every year! We anticipate that we will eventually publish approx. four projects from each School in the Faculty, making a total of up to 12 pieces of work per journal issue. In addition, we hope to be able to collate enough resources to merit two journal issues a year.

Q: What else will be in the e-journal?

A: In addition to student honours projects and associated research items, we propose to have a letters/discussion section in the journal, available for staff and students to submit short articles. We also intend to have a section for pedagogic use, where staff may find case studies or resources that could be useful to support and enhance research-informed teaching. There is already a section with hyperlinks to generic student research skills e.g. 'how to reference' documents. (This section may duplicate other University resources but could offer a one-stop-shop option for basic research skills).

Q: What is the journal style and format?

A: In Biological Sciences, the honours project takes the form of a separate literature review (max. 3, 500 words) and a report in the style of a manuscript version of a scientific paper from an appropriate journal (typically ~ 5,000 words). However, in SEOES and Psychology, the honours project takes the form of a more traditional report, including an integral literature review, making the overall project longer in length (e.g. 10 – 15, 000 words). The e-journal can support both types of formats, within different sections of the journal. Guidance on overall format and referencing styles can be obtained from the project team member in your own School (see names below). We may move to a common journal style in the future but to start off, we will publish honours projects in a range of formats.

Q: When will the e-journal be up and running?

A: The journal's first issue was published on 31 Jan 2008 and the second issue in Sept. 08! You can access the journal now by following this hyperlink:

<http://www.theplymouthstudentscientist.org.uk>

Q: What if I want to know more?

A: If you have any further questions about the project please contact the relevant person in your School (below) who will also form the journal's editorial board:

Karen Gresty, Project Director, e-mail: kgresty@plymouth.ac.uk

Ken Kingston, e-mail: kkingston@plymouth.ac.uk

Tim Auburn, e-mail: tauburn@plymouth.ac.uk

Andy Edwards, e-mail: andrew.edwards1@plymouth.ac.uk
