

Editorial

We are back, and Jane P is well on the road to the recovery. So hopefully we will catch up with the backlog very soon.

This issue contains five papers, which cover the student life cycle. Starting with issues of recruitment and induction, looking at sustaining students through the process, through to teaching, assessment and feedback.

The first by Caroline Gibson and Kathleen MacDonald reports on a very simple idea, letter writing and how this simple act can assist the induction of new entrants to a nursing programme. The letters are written by final year students about to graduate reflecting on what they thought and felt at the start of their own programme some 4 years earlier. It is clear from the analysis that students experience very powerful feelings and emotions at the start of their degrees and this opportunity to reflect on them and share them was welcomed by both the letter writers and the recipients.

Retention of students is an issue that faces many universities and with increasing fees and pressure from governments this is an issue that is not going away any time soon. Jennifer Jones and Stephanie Fletcher look at the retention of international student in a post-92 university in the UK (this means they became a University in 1992 after a government reform of the ex-polytechnic system). Whilst the reasons for non-completion are diverse, as many others have noted, the important ones identified in this study were the stress of studying in English, and students' experiences of teaching, learning and assessment, which were often culturally very different from their previous experience. I suspect that many of us forget that learning at degree level in a language which is not your native tongue is likely to be very stressful. When combined with all the others pressures of studying and living in a different country it is all the more amazing that so many international student successfully complete their programmes of study. A follow up study of these students would make very interesting reading.

Many of us in educational development have advocated the use of active lectures as means of enhancing student engagement with the academic subject. It is therefore rewarding to read the paper by Jana Hackthorn and her colleagues in the US. Their study showed that not only were active lecture cues feasible in the classroom, they had a positive benefit when teaching higher level abilities and thinking. Given that we espouse that these higher level abilities are what higher education is all about, this article demonstrates just what can be achieved by the use of very simple ideas in the classroom.

As we follow the student life cycle from induction, retention, teaching and learning, we now have a paper that looks at assessment. The paper by Paul Rea and John McClure looks at an idea which is not new but is perhaps under used in higher education, namely students developing their own assessments. In this case the students developed

Multiple Choice Questions, rate them and then discuss them. This activity was carried out in a special study module for medical undergraduates and the evidence from this small study is that those who participate in such a module achieve higher final examination results than those who don't. Many years ago I had an external examiner who suggested that the 'best' question he had ever seen in a finals paper was one which said, 'think of an area of the course that you feel particularly comfortable with, devise a suitable assessment question and provide a specimen answer'. Well this study seems to prove that getting students to engage in thinking more deeply about assessment matters has a positive benefit on their performance.

Finally in our student journey we come to assessment and feedback. Michael McEwan provides us with a case study from an international college based in Glasgow, Scotland. The study reports on the use of feedback which is 'useful' to the student; that is direct and explicitly targets weaknesses. This is what the students said they wanted and the evidence is that they were happy with this when instituted. Perhaps a lesson for us all on feedback which might just help the NSS scores!!

Editors PESTLHE

Bob, Jane and Jane

Bob Matthew, Jane Mackenzie and Jane Pritchard