

2008

Introduction to The Plymouth Student Scientist

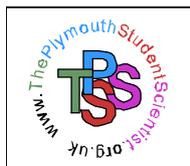
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The Plymouth Student Scientist
University of Plymouth

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Dr Mick Uttley, Associate Dean (Learning & Teaching)

I'm delighted to welcome you to the first issue of the Plymouth Student Scientist. This electronic journal showcases some of the best work from our undergraduate students. Unusually, the journal is not focused on a single academic discipline; the current issue features papers on subjects as diverse as invertebrates in ditches, syllogistic reasoning, and sea breezes. We hope that it will encourage you to read outside your usual area of interest.

Research informed teaching, in its broadest sense, is a defining feature of the provision across all three schools in the Faculty of Science; as many staff are quick to point out, "it is what we do". Many learning activities are inquiry-based and at early academic stages, group or mini projects are common (both in the laboratory and the field). The final year honours project, however, is the culmination of the inquiry-based approach and many project students will work in the research area of academic staff and in their research laboratories. Each year we are pleased to see work from some of our projects published in the mainstream international scientific literature. However, the rigorous requirement of formal publication often leads to some pertinent and high quality work lying undiscovered and unread, except perhaps by a proud parent. The Plymouth Student Scientist provides a new forum for projects, literature reviews and other articles of special interest produced by our final year undergraduates.

The rewards are many. First of all, final year students experience the nature of scientific publishing first hand, are able to see their project work in the context of the wider scientific community, and at the simplest level can enjoy seeing their work in print. Secondly, the e-journal format allows project work to be easily cascaded down to the earlier stages of our courses, so that students will appreciate what is involved in the final year project (providing a good introduction to the nature of research activity for students at the very start of their studies). Finally, we can spread this celebration of the abilities of our students among the wider community including local schools, our partner colleges and, indeed, anyone with an interest in science.

Whilst these papers represent student work that is among the best in the Faculty, they are deliberately presented warts-and-all. It is our intention to show what undergraduate research is really like, not only to illustrate the highest standards possible but to encourage aspiring scientists that good science isn't out of the reach of undergraduates.

The Plymouth Student Scientist has relied on the support and involvement of staff and students across the Faculty but it could never have appeared without the considerable efforts of a team of staff who have been committed to it since the outset; Dr Tim Auburn, Dr Ken Kingston and Philip Tubman have all played key roles but my particular thanks must go to Dr Karen Gresty, who has led the project throughout, and Andy Edwards who has put in much of the hard work in bringing this first issue to its successful release. The project was made possible by funding to the University from the Higher Education Funding Council for England's support for measures to strengthen the link between research and teaching, through the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund.