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Taking the plunge

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Launching a new taught-student research journal – how and why we took the plunge

Why we wanted to do it

There has been increasing interest over the last few years in both integrating research and teaching practices, and making undergraduate research more discoverable (Healey, 2005). The driving force behind improving access to undergraduate research is based on a reluctance to let this body of work remain unread and unused by anyone other than the student and their supervisor (Walkington, 2008). The implication here is that the research cycle is completed when results are shared via publication and peer review and this may lead to further questions and comments, whereas student feedback on assignments is limited and does not benefit from the subsequent refining and re-drafting required for the publication process which closes the research loop (Walkington, 2008).

At the University of Huddersfield there is a strong focus on continually developing both research and teaching strategies and practices in order to deliver an excellent student experience alongside encouraging high quality academic research. Launching a taught-student research journal was considered an ideal opportunity to give students the chance to develop key skills in research, publication and profile raising as part of a supportive learning environment, whilst also helping to progress both the University Teaching and Learning Strategy and the University Research Strategy.

What kind of publishing platform to use?

We already had in place an open access publishing platform at Huddersfield, established by the University of Huddersfield Press, which was re-launched in 2010. The Press publishes several peer-reviewed journals on a regular basis, including [Teaching in Lifelong Learning](#), the [Journal of Performance Magic and the British Journal of Pharmacy, which is launching in 2015](#). In line with our recently developed open access strategy, this platform allows the University to make high quality peer-reviewed research highly discoverable and freely available to public, academic, industry and practice sectors. As we wanted to ensure our taught-student research also had the potential for being widely read and used, it made sense to follow the lead of our established journals and use the open access ePrints platform to launch our new journal, [Fields: Journal of Huddersfield student research](#).

What benefits has the journal brought to the students?

A review of the publishing process for Fields was carried out early in 2015 to consider the experiences the students had in producing articles for the first issue. At the launch of the journal, several of the students spoke about how the publishing process had helped them to develop new skills, both academic and professional, and given them valuable experience which would come in useful for further career progression.

“The experience of writing for the journal has certainly been a positive one. It has allowed me to develop publication skills, improve my academic work and take on board different perceptions and criticisms. The opportunity has also allowed me to revisit a piece of work that I am particularly proud of and present it to a wider audience.”

Reece Goscinski, student author, on [Harold Wilson’s Pipe](#)

Overall, the process of refining academic work for publication has provided the students with the opportunity to develop and refine their research, writing, editing and communication skills. Alongside this, being involved with Fields also gave the students valuable insight into the publishing process and a chance to draw on the knowledge and experience of the School and University editorial Boards. The journal has received almost 500 full text downloads in the first 2 months after publication and these downloads have

come from a number of countries around the world, showing the discoverability of using the open access platform.

Next steps

The success of the first issue, from both a student and staff point of view, has been very encouraging to all those involved. Potential plans to further build on and improve the Fields process include a potential conference to communicate and discuss the published work. This would provide even more potential for developing student experience and understanding of the opportunities and expectations involved in an academic career. Another option being explored is the integration of a writing workshop into the process, where students would be able to work with a mentor during a writing retreat to help refine and repurpose their work. This supportive environment would help the students to become more confident in their ability to take existing work and develop it to a suitable standard for review and publication.

Healey, M. (2005) Linking Research and Teaching to Benefit Student Learning, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 29:2, 183-201, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03098260500130387>

Walkington, H (2008) Geoverse: piloting a National e-journal of undergraduate research in Geography. *Planet*, Issue 20, 41-46. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11120/plan.2008.00200041>

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