

## From the editors

It is our great pleasure to welcome you to the fourth edition of *Compass*, the University of Greenwich's Learning and Teaching Journal. This edition is published prior to what will be a period of great change within the UK higher education sector. The reduction of the teaching grant, as outlined in the 2011 White Paper (BIS, 2011: p. 8), combined with the move to a graduate contribution model of higher education funding in 2012, is likely to have a significant impact on universities and how they operate in the future.

Two papers in this edition consider the nature of higher education post-2012.

- Patrick Ainley argues that the planned changes to funding, and the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), will bring to an end the progressive reform of society through education (that started with the comprehensive education system back in 1965)
- Chris Birch imagines what might lie ahead in an era of increased fees, an emphasis on customer (learner) satisfaction, and the desire to offset the cost of higher education against potential future earnings. Considering the impact of an aging population, space management, value for money and efficiency, and pedagogy, Chris suggests that it is time for universities to go back to basics and reconsider their roles within this changing environment. Innovative universities, he argues, should be playing a key role in shaping and developing the future, not fearing what it may bring.

The employability agenda has been a key sector-wide strategic initiative over recent years. The focus during this time has moved away from the development of transferrable skills for employment towards the development of 'broader attributes' that a graduate should have developed during their time at university.

The University of Greenwich has taken the graduate attribute agenda seriously and a year after the launch of the Greenwich Graduate Initiative, Karen Smith interviewed Professor Simon Jarvis, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development), to discuss the origins of the initiative, its importance to the university and its students, and its future development and integration into university policies and practices.

Sally Alsford also focuses on the Greenwich graduate but from the student point of view. In her paper, Sally examines the results of a workshop that was held to stimulate discussion about what being a Greenwich graduate means. Her findings indicate that students' views largely reflect those of staff and suggest a number of instrumental and transformative ways of achieving this.

Two case studies describe projects where the development of graduate attributes lay at the heart of the activity. Emma Abson's case study on the impact of group projects in a final year undergraduate course highlights the benefits of group work at Level 6, such as demonstrating learning across the degree and learning how to work with others. Emma also outlines some of the challenges of project work and shares ideas about how to enhance group projects and avoid some potential issues. Noel-Ann Bradshaw shares her experience of hosting a conference for undergraduate mathematics students at the University of Greenwich. The conference attracted undergraduate students from across the UK, giving them the opportunity to present their work to peers. Noel-Ann's experience was very positive and she could see that the Greenwich students involved were, following the conference, much more confident in presenting their work, more aware of the diversity of mathematics research, and more able to identify a topic for their final year projects. In addition, Noel-Ann argues that the inclusion of the conference presentation on their CV would strengthen applications for employment and give them something unique and interesting to discuss at job interviews.

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A further feature of the White Paper is the professionalisation of higher education teaching (BIS, 2011: p.9).

This follows on from already-established requirements in the school, further education and lifelong learning sectors, and proposals in the Dearing Report that led to information learning technology and, later, the Higher Education Academy. In her article, Charmaine Browne argues that the competency-based teaching approach to the professionalisation of teaching in the lifelong learning sector has had a detrimental effect on teachers. The increased administrative burden of compliance has actually led to a de-skilling of teachers rather than skills enhancement. It is these kinds of stories that the higher education sector should be listening to as it develops its own approaches to professionalisation.

In his opinion piece, Paul Dennison questions reflective practice – one of the key tenets of professionalism. Paul argues that there are difficulties in evidencing reflection and warns against coaching students to reflect in order to meet assessment requirements. He suggests that the term ‘narratives of professionalism’ might be a better way to describe the kinds of activity often used as a means of facilitating professional development.

How to retain and progress students through their university journey is an issue that all universities face (Jones, 2008). In her case study, Nola Stair describes a project to design learning objects to help facilitate transition at different stages of a university degree. Video clips where students outline strategies for coping with the particular challenges of transition were one output from the focus group discussions with students. The clips are stored within the student portal and are easily accessible to University of Greenwich students (both inside and outside the UK).

Finally, Heather Brunskell-Evans provides insight into the work of theorist Michel Foucault. She describes her own personal journey with Foucault and his impact on her work, career and intellectual development. In an open and honest account, Heather admits that the road with Foucault was not always a smooth one. Through this article, she helps to ‘demystify’ often seemingly impenetrable theory.

There is, as always, a wide range of opinion pieces, case studies and papers that reflect current issues within higher education represented in this edition of *Compass*. We hope that you will find something of interest here. We would also like to draw your attention to the Open Lectures in Learning and Teaching series. At the end of this edition you will find details of the final two lectures of this academic year. Both resonate with work included here. On 22 February 2012, Dr Anna Jones from Glasgow Caledonian University will continue the debate about graduate attributes, posing the question: ‘graduate attributes – spin or education?’. On 21 March 2012, Dr James Atherton from University of Bedfordshire will develop arguments about reflective practice and its appropriateness for higher education teaching and learning in his lecture: ‘reflective practice: an idea whose time is past’.

We hope to see many of you there and look forward to receiving your contributions to future editions of this journal, and comments on anything in this one.

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## References

BIS (2011) *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*. London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Jones, R. (2008) *Student Retention and Success: a Synthesis of Research*. York: Higher Education Academy. Available online at: <[www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/inclusion/wprs/WPRS\\_retention\\_synthesis](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/inclusion/wprs/WPRS_retention_synthesis)>. [Accessed 29 September 2011].