



Exploring both sides of an undergraduate e-journal:

Celebrating excellence and supporting academic writing

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Presentation Aims

- To explore the boundary between staff and student use of an in-house electronic journal.
- To evaluate whether a single e-resource can effectively meet a dual pedagogic purpose.



Background

- HEFCE funded, research-informed teaching initiative at the University of Plymouth.
- We use Griffiths' (2004) model of research-informed teaching which can be viewed as **pedagogic enquiry** and **reflection**.
- Faculty of Science project: development of **The Plymouth Student Scientist** e-journal



Why an e-journal?

- Jenkins et al. (2007) highlighted the value of embedding good practice in linking teaching with research (including e-journals).
- Help to raise profile of student research and highlight research interests.
- Surge of new e-journals in the UK (for list see Walkington & Jenkins 2008). Tatalovic (2008) explores student science publishing.
- Most emphasise celebration & dissemination.



Purpose of TPSS e-journal

- To make research process more accessible.
- To publish final year science research (inc. honours projects) moderated as excellent.
- In addition to dissemination & celebration of student work, need to support teaching.
- Staff time, editorial support and web hosting all have a cost...
- Can you maximise stakeholder benefits?

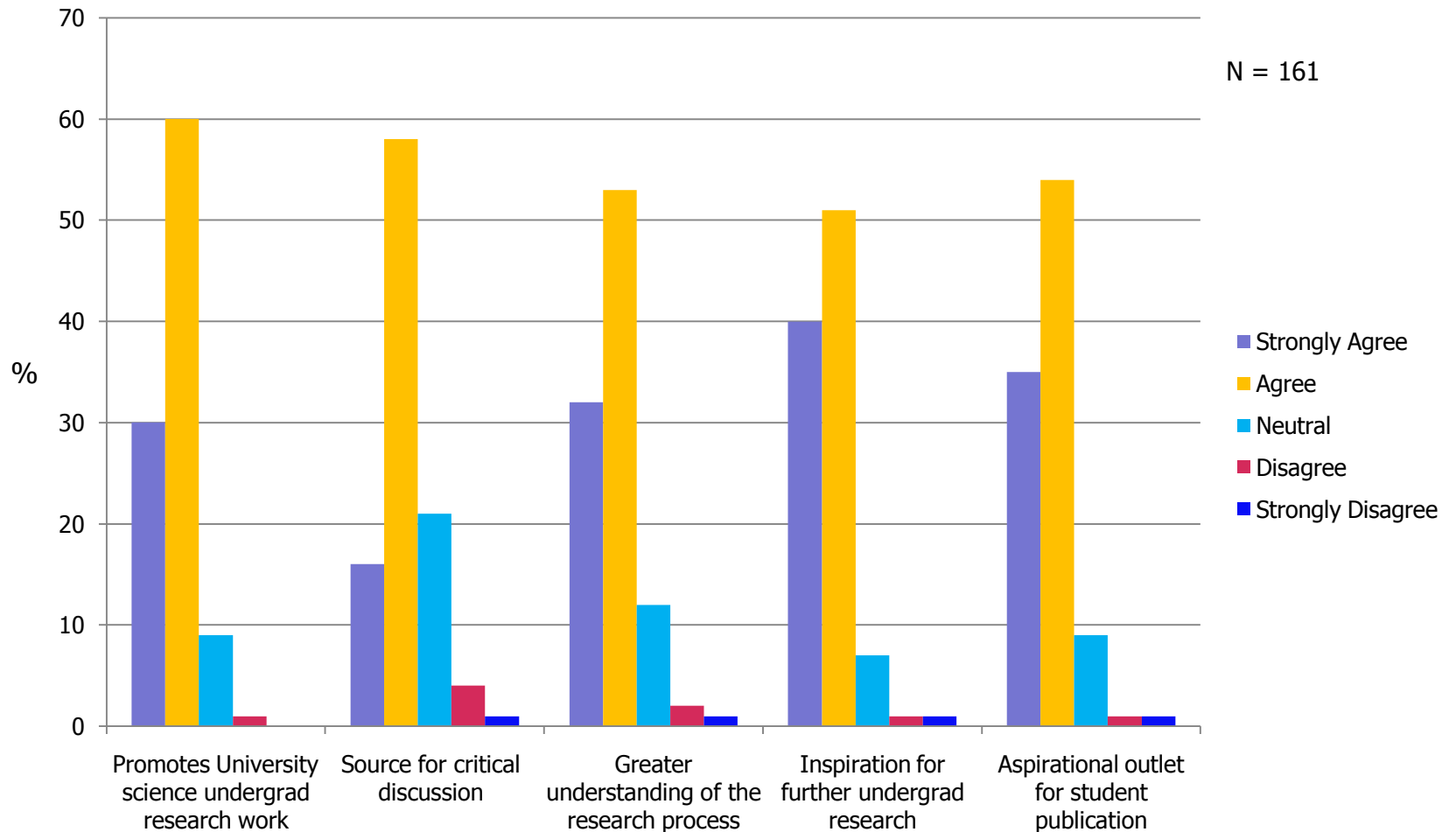


Is the Journal Being Used?

- 2.2 million hits, 283,000 visits, since launch in Jan 08 (Webalizer stats report)
- 14,000 full-text article requests
- 276 users registered for new issue prompts
- Most heavily accessed articles = 1,000+ views

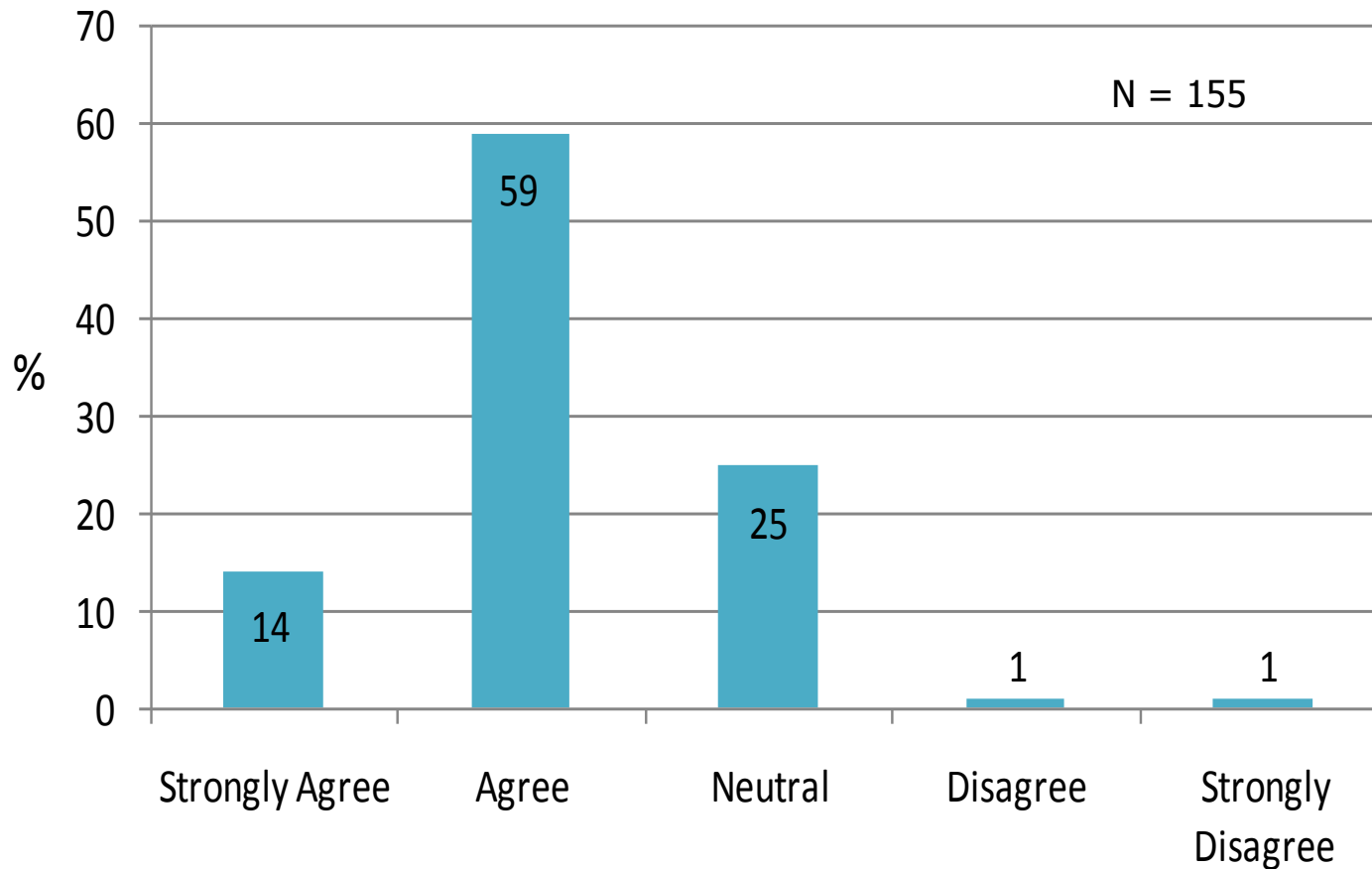
Student Perspectives

Perceived benefits:



Student Perspectives (cont.)

Perceived relevance:





Staff Perspectives

"I think the primary benefit is to students so if you can make the Faculty aware that the best students can benefit or be rewarded slightly more than just grades on their final report and get students themselves to put pressure on their supervisor, this might be the best way to proceed."

"... I am a supporter of [the journal] and I see what it can do...publishing everything my students produce in Nature Medicine is, in reality, not going to happen so this is a valuable tool for getting them to a certain level where they are publishing"

"I think it's really good, a good thing. For me personally, and maybe for some other people who feel the same way, [however] there are some issues that give me cause to hesitate."

"..I'm not sure whether it's a good idea or not - I still think the emphasis should be on doing things that are good enough to be published in recognised literature."

"One of the reasons I haven't encouraged students to take part is that I have a lot of student dissertations at M levels, where the outcome could be a proper peer reviewed paper."

Celebrating Excellence

- students

- 15% of survey respondents selected 'dissemination' and 'celebration' as their main motivation for submitting work to the journal

"Well, first of all it's nice to be recognised that my work was that good, to be published in the first place."

"It just made me feel good to have it published. That it was a good bit of work and other people can see that as well. I'm actually quite proud of it."

"I think it's a very good opportunity for students to be able to do this because I think a lot of students don't think they could ever get their work published."



Celebrating Excellence - staff

"The aim of true research is that if it's any good..., to get it published. This [journal] gives students producing the best work...an opportunity to have their work put out there externally."

"I think it's a good vehicle for [literature reviews] and I think it's legitimate for projects which for one reason or another are not going to make it into the mainstream literature but nevertheless they are of sufficiently high quality to be published."

"I think it's a useful thing for publicity to say this is a journal that we publish of undergraduate research because it gives the message that we take what the undergraduates are doing seriously and it gives them something to aspire to."

"The idea of getting something into the 'Student Scientist' actually motivates a lot of them more than getting something into an academic journal, they don't quite appreciate the difference between them perhaps, they just know that their friends will see this stuff."

Supporting Academic Writing

- students

- 84% of survey respondents agreed that the journal would provide students with a greater understanding of the research process

"I think my article could be used as an example of good practice, a sort of model, to show other students, and also to give ideas for further research."

"..no-one really told us what we had to write in a lit review. They never really gave us an example... so maybe for students to look through what other's did, might give them ideas about what they want to do."

"I think it would be good to look at work that other students have done so that it links back to the lectures you're doing and use that as a teaching thing."

Supporting Academic Writing

- staff

"I did have the thought of 1st and 2nd years being involved as well... we would use the journal as a way of getting across various ideas and we could use examples from the journal for them to ..read and comment on, to focus on how research is done and what it means...and give them a feel of what in the end they are aiming for."

"I have referred students for their literature review, particularly. I have said have a look at these examples that are relevant to the field you're working in...and said this was a good one and got a grade A and that gives you an idea of the structure and approach."

"... I can envisage a use would be in first year tutorials where the students write...summaries... of what the main findings were of a study that's been done. It is quite nice if you can have, not just perfect papers... [where] students haven't much confidence in what they are critiquing... [but] less perfect papers that students can feel confident about criticizing."

"So although we could still publish papers [in The Plymouth Student Scientist] for the satisfaction and learning experience they won't be counting in the REF but then of course I would never have submitted a paper in the local journal to the RAE because it's not high enough impact."

"In terms of stimulating ideas for project work its' something you can send students away to look at. I suppose potentially it could be useful for that. Although I would prefer that they were using peer reviewed publications."



Conclusions

- Is it worth doing?
- Do the costs outweigh the benefits?
 - Money, roles, staff time, student time, rewards?
- Can an e-journal fulfil a dual pedagogic purpose effectively?
- Things to address in future...



Any Questions?



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



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