Editorial

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In April 2011 the University of Central Lancashire hosted the first British Conference of Undergraduate Research (BCUR, http://www.bcur.org/), following a precedent set by the National Conference of Undergraduate Research in the U.S.A. (http://www.ncur.org/). The two-day conference at UCLan was attended by over 150 students from 50 universities. BCUR represents a significant advance in undergraduate research initiatives: highlighting the importance of undergraduate research and providing an opportunity for students to share their research findings, thereby participating in the further diffusion of knowledge.

The focus of this inaugural conference was ‘Being Human in the 21st Century’; it embraced three main categories: society and culture, the body, and the physical world. Of the many speakers who presented their research, 29 were UCLan students. Several produced research posters, whereas others presented papers and took part in discussion panels and workshops. The students discussed research carried out whilst undergraduate interns on the UCLan Summer Internship Scheme, or from their final-year dissertation or capstone project. Some of the research papers presented at BCUR 2011 are already destined for publication in subject specific, peer-reviewed academic journals and others were published earlier this year in a special issue of Warwick University’s Reinvention: a Journal of Undergraduate Research: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/ejournal/issues/bcur2011specialissue/

Selected papers by UCLan students will be published in Diffusion Volume 5 (2012), but here, in 4:2, we have simply included some of the abstracts, to provide a sample of the diverse range of topics undergoing research at UCLan and to offer a taste of publications to follow in the next issue. I am particularly pleased to include abstracts from several subject areas and schools not previously represented in Diffusion, which are, nonetheless, equally active in undergraduate research: Business Studies, Computing, Environmental Management, Molecular & Cellular Biology, Neuroscience, Pharmacy, Physics and Politics.

In addition to the abstracts from BCUR, Diffusion 4:2 includes seven articles from four different disciplines. Again we have an outstanding contribution from the Lancashire Law School – Jennifer Foote’s analysis of access to Judicial Review. From Archaeology, John Horrocks provides a fascinating account of the use of DNA samples in the study of Anglo-Saxon migration, combining forensic science with archaeological investigation. Belinda Mellor’s article, from English Language &
Linguistics, considers the changing critical and theoretical approaches to language and gender, and we have a first from Acting, with Joseph Cooper’s examination of the value of Logical Space and Hermeneutics in relation to acting. But this issue is also greatly indebted to Religion, Culture & Society, since we have included here three articles from this discipline. In spite of their similarity in terms of genesis, these pieces are very different in subject matter. Nassima Dalal focuses on the traditional religious practices of North American Indians and the effects of European colonial contact on their culture. Paul Ryder’s article is concerned with social change in Poland since the 1970s and the role of the Catholic Church in that transformation. Romy Waddington’s article also focuses on the Catholic Church, but Romy’s interest lies with the clergy’s involvement and the church’s handling of notorious child sexual abuse cases which have received much press coverage in recent years.

As always this issue of Diffusion is greatly indebted to the members of staff (first readers) who singled out these contributions, recommended them for inclusion and took the time to check the final versions of those extracted from longer dissertations. The new Student Editor, Jennifer Lane, has also provided invaluable assistance in preparing this issue for publication. However, the final credit must go to the student contributors themselves: the authors of these outstanding examples of undergraduate work, some written in the final year of an honours degree, but others – Ryder and Dalal – in only the first and second years of study respectively. I hope they will inspire other students to follow their example, to strive for higher levels of academic achievement and, most importantly, to recognise the value of research.