

## **Student as Author: Mapping the field of undergraduate research publications in the UK in Social Sciences**

**Dr Kate Strudwick**

Dean of the Lincoln Academy of Learning and Teaching (LALT)  
University of Lincoln

### **Abstract**

*This reflective article discusses the evolving role for Student as Author through the development of opportunities outside of the curriculum. Part of the reflection is a proposal for the development of an undergraduate journal to recognise and disseminate student voice. There has been a recent development in externally facing outputs of this type, enabling students to be producers of their own published work, across different disciplines during the course of their study. The article also reflects upon a mapping of the practice for undergraduate students, being framed under the Student as Producer model, with links to broader student engagement opportunities and students as researchers being considered.*

Keywords: Student as Author, student engagement, undergraduate journals

### **Focus and context: Student as Author**

This reflective article addresses the role of Student as Author. There has been a recent rise in opportunities for students to be producers of their own work, as shown within cross-disciplinary journals. These journals host peer reviewed publications on dissertations, research reports and discussion papers. The purpose for the scoping exercise presented here was to explore this output as a different form of pedagogical practice for undergraduate students, framed under a broader exploration of Student as Producer. For clarification, Student as Producer is a model which seeks to bring together research and teaching and develop opportunities for collaborative relationships in research and project work between students and academics.

Student as Producer is a teaching and learning strategy developed by Professor Mike Neary. In 2010, under HEA funding, Mike Neary institutionally embedded '*Student as producer: research-engaged teaching, an institutional strategy*' (Neary, et al. 2014). Student as Producer has been developed at all levels of study, across all disciplines, at the forefront of teaching and learning at the University of Lincoln. The model was a critical response to the increased marketisation in Higher Education and was based upon 8 key principles (Discovery, Technology in Teaching, Space and

Spatiality, Assessment, Research and Evaluation, Student Voice and Support). These principles all work together to be the foundation for the institutional framework for curriculum and module development, research engaged teaching and partnerships in research between students and academics.

The University of Lincoln, with Student as Producer, has led the way with supporting and enhancing student experiences and teaching and learning initiatives. This is demonstrated where students work together with academics, in partnerships and collaboration, through active participation to enhance their learning, both in and outside of the curriculum. At the University of Lincoln, 'student experience' has been firmly embedded enabling the core principles of Student as Producer to become practice, as emphasised by research-engaged teaching models, student voice and student engagement in practice.

The Student as Producer model has successfully impacted upon quality assurances and also facilitates student engagement opportunities. Development of the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Scheme (UROS) in 2007 provided competitive internal bursaries for students to work collaboratively with academics to develop research projects over the summer. Successful projects are awarded a student bursary of up to £1,000 with students preparing an output such as blog report or poster on the research findings and presenting at the annual UROS Showcase Event.

UROS, as one form of practice, encompasses all key values of Student as Producer, designing, conducting research and disseminating findings. A key element of UROS is the process for both the students and academics, the process is reciprocal with both learning from each other and from collaborative scholarly activity. In sum, UROS enhances the role that students can have over their own learning, being an enabler and promoting a collective research relationship.

### **Timely initiative: Undergraduate journal proposal**

In January 2021, I was appointed Dean of LALT. A key focus to my manifesto was an evaluation of Student as Producer as the institutional teaching and learning model. This consideration for future use was timely given it was a decade since its inception by Mike Neary. The revised model plans to be updated but some elements remain to be centred on key principles, facilitating student engagement in collaborative projects. By developing such opportunities for students, they are able to shape their learning in an engaging and participatory way, in and outside of their studies and the curriculum.

Part of this initiative were plans to develop an undergraduate journal, enabling students to become part of the design and creation. In this proposal I was drawing upon my role as joint editor for IMPact journal, specifically with experiences of leading on the student edition in 2019. This new vehicle for student voice can provide a new path for Student as Producer to become student as author, with

students showcasing their activities in published work. The new undergraduate journal will be organised with an editorial board of postgraduate students, building links between undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts and developing from the already successful peer mentoring projects at the University of Lincoln.

The undergraduate journal is another practice to publicise student engagement and share student experiences and voices beyond the University in digital format. The outputs will supplement practice from UROS and present examples of student projects and dissertations. By incorporating principles of Student as Producer the undergraduate journal will be also be forward looking, adapting the model to new digital online approaches to teaching and learning in a participatory format. Working with Students as Producer is a positive way to embrace the role of students in the learning process and also the value of student experiences.

Student as authors can be seen to work closely with, and compliment, students as researchers, explained by Walkington (2015: 5) as

*'...a pedagogic approach to supporting students in their engagement with undergraduate research within and/or beyond the formal curriculum with the aim of furthering their own knowledge and understanding, and in some cases contributing to, the broader knowledge base of their discipline.'*

Both students as authors and students as researchers enhance student engagement opportunities to further knowledge and increase levels of understanding through research. Students as researchers, has also been seen to be framed within broader concepts of student engagement (see Baron and Corbin 2012; Kahu 2013, 2013a; Trowler and Trowler 2010; Zepke 2015) and the Student as Partners model (Healey et al. 2014). All of these consider the variety of roles by which students can be involved in research during their undergraduate studies. This proposal of an undergraduate journal seeks to further contribute to this broader knowledge base by providing students with the opportunities for engaging with wider opportunities outside of the curriculum.

This discussion presents student as author as a progressive and evolving form of Student as Producer, situated under the broader theme of student engagement. In sum, it is an alternative interpretation of Student as Producer with longer term impact.

### **Mapping out undergraduate journals**

Currently there are a number of undergraduate journals across many disciplines in the UK. Some examples from the UK are provided below:

- *The Reinvention Journal for International Undergraduate Research.* Established at the University of Warwick in 2007. This journal has developed

global reach by expanding to partnership between Warwick University and Monash University in Australia.

- *Diffusion - the UCLAN Journal for Undergraduate Research*. Founded in 2008 at the University of Central Lancashire.
- *The Plymouth Student Scientist*, for undergraduate research in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects. Developed in 2008.
- *The Oxford University Undergraduate Law Journal (OUULJ)*. Founded in 2009. This is Oxford's only publication for undergraduate legal writing and is staffed entirely by students. The journal empathises the opportunities for students stating it provides “a platform for discourse on legal developments”.
- *EducationUndergraduate*. Bishop Grosseteste University’s journal of student research. The journal “showcases education-based research projects” by foundation and undergraduate students across programmes. This journal was first published in 2007 in both paper and electronic formats.
- *The Undergraduate Journal of Politics and International relations (UJPIR)*. A more recent addition, with its first edition in 2018.
- *Kent Student Law review*. Developed in 2014 and provides “a platform to promote the best work produced by Kent Law School students”.
- *What is The Student Researcher*. Trinity Saint David’s journal of undergraduate research which is merged with Swansea Metropolitan University and has a broad focus being multidisciplinary.
- *JUST Ug SJ Undergraduate Science Journal*. Launched by the students from the College of Life and Environmental Sciences at the University of Exeter.
- *The Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies*. Developed in 2007, enabling students; undergraduates and postgraduates to write “mentored publications of their research activities within the sport’s world”. This journal has international impact with open calls for international scholars.
- *Geoverse*. A national e-journal of undergraduate research in Geography publishing articles on Undergraduate Research, and also has scope for international institutions.
- *Ethnographic Encounters journal on History, Focus and Scope*. Founded in 2011 as a student-run undergraduate e-journal. Its primary purpose is to publish outstanding ethnographic projects completed by students in their second year of social anthropology at the Uni

Aligned to these journals is the British Conference of Undergraduate Research (BCUR) as another vehicle which promotes undergraduate research in all disciplines and meets annually in different UK universities. Undergraduates are invited to submit papers, posters, workshops and performances to the conference with abstracts being peer-reviewed and those accepted invited to attend the conference. Conference fees are usually paid by the student’s own university but BCUR also accepts submissions from students outside of the UK, with the call for papers usually published in the autumn. As an established additional platform BCUR has some history, being founded in 2010 with its first conference held in 2011 at the University of Central Lancashire. The conferences has expanded over the years with further details

provided at: <http://www.bcur.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Developing-Undergraduate-Research-20151.pdf>.

## Exploring student authorship

In 2020, I conducted a small-scale project to map the rise in undergraduate authored published work within Higher Education. The focus was to scope out the breadth of undergraduate student authorship in leading journals in the UK. This preliminary exercise addressed the shifting role of undergraduate students as researchers/ authors and connected links to supporting and resourcing Student as Producer agendas (e.g. UROS). The project applied a mapping of information on journals, followed by semi structured interviews with a small sample of editors. The methodology sought to ascertain the scope and nature of the review practice, understand the remit for journals and the role for students. Ethical approval was gained, with data gathered being destroyed and no questions containing personal information about the participant, therefore ensuring anonymity.

The trends from the interviews with current editors outlined the processes for some of the journals, demonstrating the variance with practice. Some journals adopted a closed disciplinary focus for applications from students, as argued by one editor; *'the main remit for us is to stick to the stem subjects so that's the only thing we are quite rigid on, we don't go outside of stem subjects...'* While another adopted a more interdisciplinary approach: *'...another thing, again because we are interdisciplinary is accessibility. How accessible will this paper be to an audience or reader not from the field'*. The diversity for some journals, in the remit, submission criteria and publication is demonstrated in the framework of undergraduate journals presented as shown (Figure 1). The breadth in disciplines is shown, with some being multi-disciplinary, and indicates the differences with submission criteria and institutional restrictions. Some journals did not accept work from external contributors while others were more flexible accepting from all institutions. One editor noted that this variety was not just with the remit of accessibility, but also the typologies of submissions: *'A mixture it tends to be dissertations but it can be Independent studies, it's a national journal so a mixture'*.

There were some common trends with the regularity of publications, generally annual but some had bi-annual publication cycles. This was commented upon by one editor as being flexible and primarily led by submissions:

*'Bi-annual at the moment but that might change in the future at the moment it is definitely bi-annual. We have one a year about October/ December it depends on how quickly the students are getting back to me with the publications. We make those allowances that's how its bi-annual but we still we have a good number of applications at the end of the summer before they leave we try and catch them.'*

Name of journal	Discipline/subject	Submission criteria	ED team	Publishes
Reinvention Journal	Multi-disciplinary	UG students (All institutions)	Student and staff	Annual-Special BCUR issue
Surrey UG research journal	Multi-disciplinary	Only UG student Surrey	PG Student and staff	Bi-annual
The Student Researcher	Multi-disciplinary	Wales	Student and staff	
Debut	Lang/linguistics /area studies	UG students (All institutions)	Unknown	Bi-annual
Geoverse	Geography	UG students (All institutions)	PG students	Unknown
EducationUndergraduate	Education	UG students (All) institutions	Unknown	Unknown
Transformations	Education	UG students (All institutions)	Student and staff	Annual
Diffusion: UG Journal	Humanities & Soc Science	Only UG student UCLAN	Staff	Bi-annual
Kent Student Law Review	Law	Only UG student KENT	Unknown	Unknown
Durham English Review	English Lit	UG students (All institutions)	Student and Staff	Annual
British UG Journal of Ophthalmology	Ophthalmology	UG students (All institutions)	Unknown	Annual
The Plymouth Student Scientist	STEM	UG students (All institutions)	Staff	Bi-annual
JUST:the journal of UG Science and technology	STEM	UG students (All institutions) stem background	Unknown	Annual
BURN	Bio Sciences	Only UG students Nottingham	Unknown	Annual

Figure 1 Information on undergraduate journals

There were some associated challenges identified by one editor, which may affect the publication cycle, depended upon levels of support for undergraduate authors:

*'We have a lot of submissions...it does take a long time for the peer review process to happen...So what I am saying it's a long process, it takes a long*

*time to publish a singular appear. So the fact that we constantly have submissions coming in and we look at submissions every month and half, sometimes every month, as we would look at around 6-10 submissions every time.'*

Regarding the different types of submission, there were some journals that focused upon broader remits, including dissertations, while others were more disciplinary led published research reports:

*'It's always something, different some people will sort of re work an essay into a research project...Other people will cut down their dissertations to have smaller focus so that it will be feasible for five thousand words.'*

One editor further noted a similar flexibility in types of submissions accepted:

*'Usually the target audience we go for at the moment is those who have received a first in their projects or dissertations...they don't have to get a first in overall degree it's only the projects or the dissertations it gives more scope for other people to step onto the publication ladder.'*

The remit of the journal scope and aims were tailored to the journal. Walkington (2013, 2015) explains the broad dimensions for framing undergraduate research contexts, which can also be applied to undergraduate journals, notably the student-centred focus, inclusivity, whether the work is collaborative and the intended audience/ community.

Reflections upon the benefits for student authored published work were furthered acknowledged by Walkington (2015:18), seen through the lens of different strategies to widen engagement. With acknowledgment of best practice the variety in research dissemination in undergraduate research journals can be seen as one form of externally facing dissemination for undergraduate research. The aims for dissemination and showcasing undergraduate work was also commented upon by one editor, identifying the positives with this output:

*'So we kind of had two main aims- one is basically showcase high quality work produced .... giving them access to a wide audience beyond their immediate lecturers who marks they work. The second aim which is really important to the journal is the developmental aims to support skills development of UG students as authors and also PhD students who act as reviewers and copy editors, so this nurturing nature of the journal is very important to its ethos.'*

It is this foundation to support students' learning that facilitates wider student engagement opportunities and academic development, as shown by one editor:

*'I look at it as a means to allow them to develop themselves further and having that experience would actually take them into new territory so to*

*...speak...I have had students who have published and found that that has helped them obtain a PhD elsewhere.'*

There are clearly significant benefits for students publishing through undergraduate journals. As one form of support, it offers opportunities which have long term benefits for the student. One editor acknowledged that students recognise these advantages within the process:

*'The ones we have spoken to, yes they have definitely recognized the benefits, in fact those that submitted their papers in their second year were saying it helped them with their final year dissertations and projects. Because they could apply what they have learnt in the process of publishing research to write in their dissertations as well.'*

Another editor further saw the remit in a broader way, as a mechanism for enhancing collaborations:

*'Some journals been used as a strategic lever for partnerships which is an interesting way of doing it...you can put any topic in...For mine it's a quality indicator that the work that student has clear ownership, can be a groups, we have published some pieces but it is the student that owns the work...'*

The purpose of the journal was to positive impact upon transferable skills and graduate attributes. This was reflected upon by one editor:

*'We wanted to give UG authors an authentic audience, but also another aim was work published in the journal to provide examples of high-quality writing in different disciplines. Which can be used essentially as resources for learning development writing ...in fact I know that my former team for LD colleagues has started using excerpts from published articles in the journal in the resources they develop.'*

It is fair to assert that principles of partnerships and benefits for students is one of the remits for the undergraduate journal. Walkingham (2015) identifies these benefits as just one form of dissemination for undergraduate research and acknowledges that such practices showcase and enhance student learning about the research process. Her work identified key advantages with one being a sense of pride for students with their work seen as part of the creative process. One editor supported this stating *'they find it motivating as well, those who have published they are very proud of their achievements....'*

The process was seen to provide formalised support, through the development of writing skills, with benefits for students to identify as a researcher. However, there were some challenges, one was with longevity for this student driven dissemination. Publications do enable transferable graduate attributes /skills to be incorporated as

part of the process, allowing the process to be supportive for student authors . One editor stated:

*'I've been trying different approaches... actually what I have found it that some of the students are so keen and so willing to do things right that I've actually got a number of them to actually make the amendments for me...'*

Part of the challenges was linked to the editing process and ensuring there are sufficient postgraduate student to act as reviewers. This is affected by the length of their postgraduate programme, indicating that there may be a preference for those on PGR. One editor commented that their journal has PhD students as peer reviewers recruited from an open call for volunteers:

*'In fact, over the years we have had more volunteers than been able to allocate papers. If anything, we have not had enough UG submissions. We basically invite volunteer students to create a database and train them as and when we need reviewers from a particular discipline, we match the by discipline.'*

These conversations with editors have provided some background context setting to both the positives and the challenges with undergraduate journals. They addressed some of the intricacies to be considered with this proposal and framed these within a broader context of student engagement and our roles as enablers.

### **Proposal for an undergraduate journal at the University of Lincoln**

The proposal for an undergraduate journal at the University of Lincoln will involve students (undergraduates and postgraduates) in the publication process. The remit is to embed research dissemination processes and products outside of the curriculum, seeking to maximise the possibilities for students to engage in research dissemination. Key areas of focus for the aims and objectives are:

- Cross disciplinarity
- E journal- online- all articles will be published using digital platform
- Article/ submissions- authored by undergraduate students to a coherent style guide for authors and criteria
- Published bi-annually to align with dissertation submissions and opportunities to publish
- Editorial board of Postgraduate students, with academic oversight

This proposal has evident benefits, being developed under the principles and framework of Student as Producer, and showcases work conducted by students highlighting new knowledges produced by students. The proposal facilitates the role of student as authors, and as researchers, with their role as partners in Higher Education. Being developed within Student as Producer principles the proposal further seeks to:

- *Facilitate* Student engagement outside of the curriculum
- *Embed* Student as Producer ethos in teaching and learning
- *Enhance* student experiences
- *Provide engagement* opportunities through innovative learning and teaching approaches

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to provide some wider recognition of the expanding field of publication of undergraduate student research in journals in the UK. By exploring differing typologies of Student as Producer opportunities, it maps out the development of undergraduate student authorship in peer reviewed journals.

The proposal is framed within the wider ethos of Student as Producer, with core values enhancing and facilitating partnerships and collaboration. Student as Producer can be seen as one form of student engagement, that is expanding and evolving. It is indeed within this context that the relevance of student as author and the positive role it has in higher education should be flagged as an area for future consideration.

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