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Jones, Sue, Hubbard, Katharine and
Smith, David (2021) Inspiring, developing, and supporting the future stars of Bioscience Education - Launch Event for Cohort 2. In: Inspiring, developing, and supporting the future stars of Bioscience Education - Launch Event for Cohort 2.

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Heads of University Biosciences, Royal Society of Biology

Biosciences Educators' Network

15 September 2021 | Launch Event (Cohort 2)

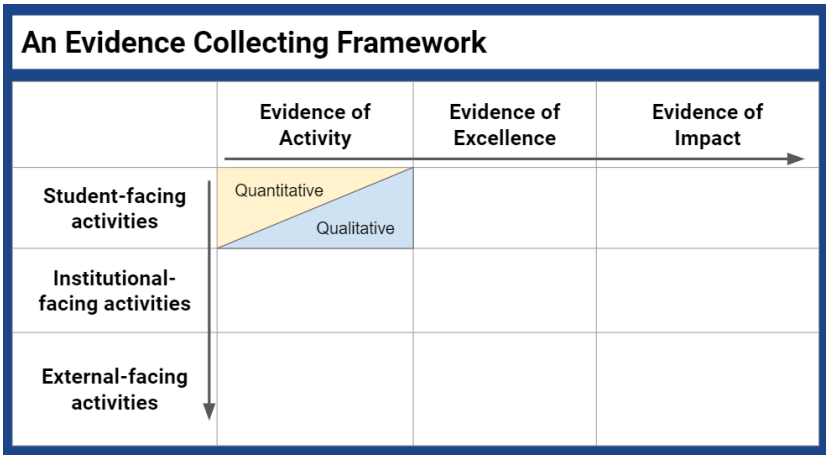
This event was held as an online workshop with 13 participants from across the UK and was co-created and co-delivered by Dr Katharine Hubbard (Hull), Dr Sue Jones (York St. John) and Dr David Smith (Sheffield Hallam). This half day launch event for our second cohort was both collaborative and interactive, providing practical advice for biosciences educators at different career stages to identify their short term and longer-term goals.

We asked all participants to complete a prepopulated google slide stating what they want to get out of the Biosciences Educators' Network and summarising their own career plans. David then outlined the planned sessions for this event followed by an ice breaker of short mentimeter questions on identified career goals and institutional promotions / national awards. Structured around this information, three short tasks were shared for discussions in breakout rooms. Participants were allocated into small groups (approximately 4 participants) to reflect on their careers to date, discuss both short-and long-term goals and plan a basic route map to achieve these and / or to prioritise goals. Themes that emerged from these detailed and enthusiastic discussions were:

- A desire for more collaboration and networking opportunities with peers and / or more experienced colleagues with a passion for learning and teaching / pedagogy
- The push-pull of science-based research versus learning and teaching / pedagogical work
- Negative perceptions that persist about teaching focussed colleagues and the need to align with like-minded colleagues for support / positivity
- How to build evidence of increased impact through the network using shared research and collaborative projects across institutions / the UK
- How to identify niches of good practice in our own work and how to align this with external colleagues' work / passion
- Importance of having head space to focus on our own career progression plans / activities through regular and uninterrupted time slots

Having identified these key themes and aspirations, a short discussion around practical hints and tips that Katharine, Sue and Dave have found helpful in their careers took place. This discussion helped to trigger thoughts about similar roles / responsibilities that participants already have or identified to help them gather evidence of impact going forwards.

Following a short break, Katharine outlined useful and practical ways to first identify and then evidence impact. Using the simple but effective grid below, quantitative and qualitative evidence that demonstrate excellence and impact can be recorded and untangled.



Regular scheduled sessions for self-reflection to review, collate, organise and record activities were strongly advocated. Once relevant activities have been identified and recorded, further evidence (quotes, feedback or quantitative data) can then be gathered in an organised and cumulative way to demonstrate sustained evidence of impact.

Participants were encouraged to use the final 30 minutes for quiet time to document their current and ongoing evidence, identify any gaps and find strategies to address these.

The launch event concluded with a brief summary of next steps that:

1. Enable participants to identify career goals, and the means to gather evidence for applications.

2. Signpost individuals towards existing resources (e.g. RSB HE Teacher Career Progression Framework; Advance HE Fellowship Category Tool)

3. Establish peer-mentors and mentor / mentee pairings to support career development in a sustainable way.

4. Facilitate ongoing online discussions and interactions through the Biosciences Educators' Network Slack channel and Advance HE web page.

Feedback on the event has been very positive:

“Really fantastic morning. Tips for promotion/HEA fellowships. Felt very personal and discussion focused on issues raised by participants. Hopefully will be part of a community/network for support in the future. Very excited to be paired with a mentor, and act as a mentor.”

“Providing practical tips. Creating a comfortable, friendly environment and encouraging participation.”

“Excellent tips to consider career progression.”

Following the event, we have shared all co-created resources and provided all participants with a useful tool kit of ideas that they can apply to their own situation and career aspirations. Having collected feedback from cohort 1, we understand the importance of regular scheduled sessions that allow participants dedicated time and space to think about their applications, build their networks and discuss progress. We have therefore organised a networking event early in October for both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 to meet and discuss themes that have emerged from our ongoing discussions. We will continue to hold regular catch-up sessions to allow collaboration, interaction, support and mentoring to flourish across the Biosciences Educators’ Network.