The British Conference of Undergraduate Research, 19-20th April 2011, University of Central Lancashire, Preston

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In 2011, the first British Conference of Undergraduate Research will be held at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston. BCUR will bring together undergraduate researchers from across the UK (and beyond) working in all disciplines. Undergraduate research will have a national platform to help maintain the momentum for undergraduate research that has been developed over the past few years by many people, especially Alan Jenkins and Mick Healey.

In March 2010, I visited the US National Conference of Undergraduate Research (www.ncur.org), which has recently merged with the Council of Undergraduate Research. I won funding to take 10 undergraduate students to NCUR, which was being held that year at the University of Montana. NCUR is an astonishing conference of 3,000 undergraduate students, who each year present papers and posters from all disciplines. NCUR is now in its 25th year and has established a very effective business model which is inclusive, cross-disciplinary and focused on giving students a high quality experience. NCUR moves from university to university on an annual basis and attracts further income generation through selling stalls to universities promoting postgraduate programmes, adding special events and tours, and merchandising.

We have some way to go before BCUR can match (in UK terms) the scale and ambition of NCUR, and there was an argument for playing a longer game and running BCUR in 2012 or 13 after careful consultation across the sector and thoughtful reflection on what would work and what would not. My UK party spent rather longer in the US than planned because of the Ash Cloud crisis, which gave me time to reflect on how to bring a British version forward. I was fortunate to meet Greg Young and Bill Campbell, who both encouraged me to be bold. Plus the funding in the UK for HE faced a grim outlook. For all these reasons, I decided the best way to make BCUR happen is, simply, to just do it: to establish it as an institution as soon as possible, and learn our mistakes as we go along. I put a business plan together and recruited over 20 institutions to a steering group - more representatives are always welcome. Alan and Mick have offered invaluable advice, and Nancy Hensel, Bill Campbell, Greg Young, Mike Neary, Simon Haslett and many others have done so too. The website - ww.bcur.org - went live in September and the call for papers was released shortly afterwards. So far, at the time of writing, we have had more than 3,500 hits on the website, and the first abstracts have started to come in more than a month ahead of the submission deadline, 3rd December. *Reinvention*, the undergraduate journal published by Warwick, has offerred to publish proceedings from the conference.

We are following the NCUR model for now but I hope and expect that as we start to bring all the elements together, BCUR will have its own, distinctive identity and will establish its own conventions and idiosyncracies. My ambition is that BCUR will be hosted by different institutions annually, with a London conference happening within 5 years, and by then will be self-sustaining. We will learn as we go along, and there will be mistakes but there will also be discoveries. That is the spirit of enquiry after all -- to put theories into practice and see what happens.