Let’s Talk About [X]: active student participation in Glasgow’s undergraduate research conference (and new journal, [X]position)

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**Concept:** We present research findings from the first two years of our campus-wide, interdisciplinary undergraduate research conference, titled Let’s Talk About [X], wherein we analyse active student development of Graduate Attributes and the impact of research engagement opportunities for undergraduates.

**Background:** Engagement in undergraduate research is one of the key determiners in continued academic success and development into advanced study (Laursen et al., 2012), but that research represents an effort and a contribution to knowledge that is often overlooked outside the boundaries of course assessment procedures. In addition, with increasing pressure in UK HEIs to demonstrate scholarly impact, high-achieving students who intend to progress in research are implicitly expected to go beyond mastering the academic presentation, and must also develop their public engagement skills. We sought, therefore, to allow students a new platform on which to present their scholarly contributions.

**Implementation:** Abstracts were invited from all four Colleges and successful speakers were drawn from all years of undergraduate study, with a majority from Honours. The speakers and audience all attended as an extra-curricular activity after widespread marketing through email, MyGlasgow, and a print and social media campaign (@TalkAboutX). Most presenters’ research topics were based on the work from their dissertations and projects. Other research topics included summer work undertaken voluntarily by engaged students. The main criteria for selection were evidence of an undergraduate research project where the student had made an original contribution to knowledge, and where they could engage the public in accessible discussion.

The conference was organised by staff in, and funded by, the Learning & Teaching Centre, and the Writing Centre postgraduate teaching assistants played a central role in the presenters’ development. Each speaker was paired with a postgraduate mentor from outside their discipline to help develop their 10-minute presentation for a non-specialist audience. Public engagement was emphasised in order to develop the presenters’ Graduate Attributes. In feedback from all involved, the mentoring process is repeatedly heralded as a significant and novel strength in the conference organisation. Without this mentoring, many of the presenters felt they would not have been able to talk comfortably and ably to a large audience.

**Outputs:** This opportunity has never before been provided at Glasgow and is not widely practised in UK HEIs. We hope to impress upon delegates the benefits of increased, diverse engagement with high-performing students, the untapped ability of undergraduate research presenters, and the impact of mentorship on developing engaging dissemination skills.

We will further discuss plans to expand into an online research journal, [X]position.

**References**