

Case Study: The Warwick Young Student Researchers' Programme (WYSR)

On: Engaging 'Students with Potential' in research opportunities.

Purpose: To highlight the value to academic departments of involving young researchers.

Funding: None

Report Written by: Lisa Lavender

Date: April 2012.

This case study aims to highlight the work of the Warwick Young Students Researchers' Programme and through the example of one project encourages you to consider the impact it could help deliver for research projects that academics or departments in ANY field may be developing.

WYSR is the concept of Trevor Robinson (Research Development & Client Manager at Warwick Institute of Education) who saw the unique potential that direct, physical research opportunities involving young researchers (aged 8-19) could have for both schools and Warwick as a research-intensive university. The programme does benefit Trevor's role in WIE as it encourages the development of relationships with a wide range of schools and individual teachers, supporting the university's PGCE network. However, Trevor's underlying goal is to engage 'Students with Potential' in research, helping to expand their intellectual skills and raise their understanding of the expertise they will need to succeed in Higher Education.

There are three main drivers to setting up Warwick Young Researcher projects:

1. The idea can come from academic staff or researchers who want to involve young people in research.
2. Schools both nationally and internationally have also made contact, having a project remit that needs academic involvement: WYSR provides the link
3. WYSR designs a project and markets it to schools to encourage demand for learner-led research in a given field. If the demand is there, academic support is sought.

From whichever direction the project originates, the strategy, resources, delivery and support are met through Trevor's project management, the university and schools

benefitting from his experience and tested models for delivering successful activities.

Whilst the focus of WYSR is firmly on the development potential of the young researchers involved, academics also benefit in many ways, not least when needing to meet public engagement requirements in a funding bid.

It also seeks to be at the forefront of knowledge and research development in terms of:

- ethical requirements and questions involving young people in research and/or consultation;
- being able to evaluate critically, and in detail, a range of different ways of involving young people in research and/or consultation, from peer research to steering group membership;
- being able to apply a range of different methods of undertaking research and/or consultation with young people;
- being able to consider the ramifications of the above in designing research, from inception to dissemination.

A separate case study has been written on the specific involvement that WYSR has in the LYNCS project instigated by the Medical School, but it would be valuable to explore briefly a very different project, still highlighting the drivers behind Trevor's work with WYSR and the impact that it can deliver.

Simply as a result of Trevor facilitating a Book Group on campus, an author was approached to participate in a WYSR research/creative writing project. Students were invited to a Campus Day from a number of schools, where the author talked about how he carries out research as a writer, followed by an opportunity for the young people to research a time period as a setting for a piece of creative writing and discuss their findings. The students used their research in a creative writing assignment and were invited back to Warwick at a later date for a 'Booker Prize' Award-style event with parents and teachers. All participants received a WYSR certificate, with short-listed pieces receiving a highly-commended award and the winner being presented with a Talented Research Writers Certificate. The project had a very low drop-out rate, inspiring engagement to deliver research-led creative writing and an opportunity to participate in active research at Warwick.

This particular project involved the development of History and English skills, but there is potential for many departments to get involved with such public involvement and widening participation initiatives to help develop the skills of early career academics or meet public engagement funding criteria, whilst fulfilling the WYSR remit both directly and indirectly.