



Celebrating the achievements of the *Getting Practical* programme

■ Georgina Westbrook

What a difference six months can make! Not only to the weather (thinking back to January and a snowy Nottingham ASE Annual Conference), but also to the progress of the *Getting Practical – Improving Practical Work in Science* Programme. Wednesday 7th July saw the *Getting Practical* team host their Celebration Conference at the National Science Learning Centre in York.

This event marked the end (almost) of the first academic year of the CPD programme and reflected upon the successes during that time. *Getting Practical* trainers have been delivering the training across England since January 2010. Delegates were invited to celebrate the achievements of the programme and look forward to its future development and legacy as a professional development tool.

The morning programme consisted of a series of short talks offering a variety of different perspectives on the Programme. Marianne Cutler, Director of

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More information about the Conference, including the presentations from the speakers, can be found on the *Getting Practical* website, www.gettingpractical.org.uk

the *Getting Practical* Programme, introduced Professor Robin Millar (University of York) and John Wardle (Centre for Science Education, Sheffield Hallam University). Robin and John have played instrumental roles in the background research and effective implementation of the CPD programme respectively.

A primary focus was offered by Zoë Crompton (NSLC) and Janet Chetwood, one of our primary trainers in Cumbria. They highlighted how the programme's Review Tool had helped teachers to spot the gaps in their teaching and focus the learning outcomes of practical work in science, both individually and as a group, across a Key Stage.

In addition to the core work of the Programme with teachers, a number of Initial Teacher Education tutors have become involved with the Programme and have used the materials with their trainee teacher groups. The Conference heard from Leigh Hoath (Bradford College – secondary tutor) and Lois Kelly (Liverpool Hope University – primary tutor) about how their respective courses have incorporated the key messages of *Getting Practical*, and how this encourages student teachers to be more reflective about their teaching from the start of their teaching practice. This builds on the work of Tiffany Prince at Goldsmith's University, which was reported in the April 2010 issue of *EiS*.

The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) has played an important role as a Contributing Partner in the *Getting Practical* consortium. Steve Jones presented feedback to the Conference from the nine Lead Practitioners (LPs) involved in the Programme during this first year. He was able to emphasise how the LPs considered the materials and resources to be excellent, particularly the Review Tool, and were able to use them to complement 'How Science Works' (HSW) and Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) training. One LP was quoted as saying:

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'In my own school, practical has moved from an ad hoc idea in lessons to a more focused, objective-led task that I feel has improved learners' understanding of investigative skills.'

Steve also made the point that, for a school to fully embrace the Programme either as a Key Stage team or science department, it is essential to have the support of the senior leadership team.

Sarah Dalby, an AST from Trinity Academy in Doncaster, is a *Getting Practical* trainer. She was able to offer a different perspective on the Programme and reiterated how the Review Tool particularly had been instrumental in triggering many 'light-bulb' moments for her course attendees.

The impact of the *Getting Practical* Programme is being evaluated by the Institute of Education. This process is under way and Dr. Ian Abrahams presented a summary of the findings so far. Ian has been observing a series of practical sessions in schools before teachers undertake the *Getting Practical* training. He will be visiting them again in the autumn term to see if the training has been effective. His final report will be presented in the New Year.

As with many conferences, delegates find the networking opportunities particularly useful. The 'Marketplace of Ideas' offered delegates the chance to talk to partners in the *Getting Practical* consortium, look at their resources and meet with Programme trainers and staff. It was great to see some of the primary school delegates showcasing their best practice practical work with some excellent displays.