

Essex Student Journal Conference 2025: conference proceedings and reflective report

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Abstract

The 2025 Essex Student Journal Conference enabled eight published authors from the Essex Student Journal (ESJ) to present both about their recent publications, and their experiences of publishing. The aim of this conference was to enhance the opportunities of the authors beyond their publications, as well as to raise the profile of the ESJ amongst the University of Essex' community. The conference covered a wide range of topics, reflecting the multi-disciplinarity of the ESJ, and allowed student authors from across faculties to provide insights into how publishing in a diamond open access journal has helped to develop their skillsets and academic reach.

Keywords: Essex Student Journal; student publishing; student journal; multi-disciplinary journal

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Introduction

In April 2025, the Essex Student Journal team hosted the second Essex Student Journal Conference. This event provided an opportunity for a selection of authors from the most recent issue of the Essex Student Journal (ESJ) to speak about their publications, the inspiration behind those publications, and the process of becoming a published author. Attendees included Essex students at all levels, as well as academic staff members, members of the ESJ Advisory Board, members of the library team, and friends and family of the presenters. The below reflective piece summarises some of the key themes and discussion points explored at the Conference. All presentations from the Conference are available to download alongside this summary.

A truly multi-disciplinary journal

Something that shone at the Essex Student Journal Conference this year was the truly multi-disciplinary nature of the journal. Presentation topics ranged from biotechnology to a French literary movement, and motor systems to the exploration of Old English, with a wide range of discussion in between.

Daniel Harris opened the Conference, explaining how his work (Harris, 2024), inspired by research by Dr. Marcus Edwards, led to the idea of the Sheffield Cell. Daniel briefly explained his impressive and complex theoretical work around this, as well as exploring his motivations around this work; namely the impact of the British steel industry on the environment, alongside a desire to show why this kind of research is important for the green economy. It was testament to the novelty of Daniel's work that comments from the audience on the day included a thanks to Daniel for making this research publicly available, with a member of the ESJ team acknowledging the difficulty of finding peer reviewers for such a specialised essay.

Following this, Maja Futrell-Fruhling, a previous Psychology student at Essex and now registered therapeutic counsellor, provided a thought-provoking insight into her qualitative study of suicide bereavement (Futrell-Fruhling, 2024). Maja's presentation outlined some of the key findings of her work, including three grief stages the suicide bereaved tend to experience: chaos and disorientation, survival and reorganisation, and living with duality. Maja finished with some lasting recommendations, including the need to reduce the stigma around suicide, and calling for more research with suicide bereaved individuals.

Nasima Rahman then delivered an inspirational insight into her creative writing with the ESJ. Beginning by discussing how journalling had brought her toward creative writing by allowing her to better understand her emotions and inspirations, Nasima explained that this led to a realisation that her voice was somewhat poetic, bringing about two poems submitted to the ESJ. The topics of these poems were visibly moving to the audience, as Nasima explained the first to be a letter to her former self (Rahman, 2025), and the second to be about a healthcare placement in which Nasima was treated differently to her fellow, white, placement student. When it came to questions from the audience, Nasima was asked to elaborate on her experience of sharing such personal elements of herself via her publications, and she explained that she felt if she didn't break down these barriers, then no one would.

We then heard from Marc Viau, who discussed his case study on feline ownership and well-being during COVID-19 mandated lockdowns (Viau, 2024). Marc explained that his qualitative research enabled the human experience to be explored in more depth than a quantitative analysis would allow. Marc's research found there were mutual benefits to cat ownership for both the owner and the cat, and saw parallels between attachment theories of parent-child relationships. Marc also explored how lockdown had amplified these effects, explaining that feline ownership did improve wellbeing during this time.

Following a short break, the conference continued with Somidha Ray discussing her paper on how being labelled as a refugee affects refugees' identities and experiences in the post-displacement context (Ray, 2024). Somidha explained that by labelling an individual as a refugee, an assumption is made that the whole person is defined by this one experience. It was discussed that this label may have both positive and negative connotations depending on the perceptions of the individual using that label. Somidha also stressed that the label itself can be actively challenged or reframed by the individual given it, or instead be either passively accepted, or used with pride. Somidha concluded by asking the audience to remember that labelling has a complex impact on identity, and terminology should be used cautiously.

Sean Smith then brought discussion back to creative writing by discussing the nuances and techniques used in his published poetry (Smith, 2024). Sean explained that he focuses on the element of nonsense in his poems, as he was inspired by *Oulipo*. After talking through some of the different experimental writing styles of his work, Sean spoke about his translation of some of the *Great Gatsby* into Anglo Romany, which will form the basis of his upcoming PhD work. The idea of this is to juxtapose images of wealth in the *Great Gatsby* with the negative image of poverty associated with gypsies. Sean summarised his work by explaining that none of the writing itself need necessarily make sense, and instead the idea is to make a mark through creativity.

The penultimate presentation was delivered by Juliana de Oliveira Guerra, who explained that she had submitted all her essays to the Essex Student Journal when she was an exchange student at the University of Essex. Juliana introduced the audience to mirror neurons, which were discovered in macaques but also exist in humans. She then went on to discuss her research around motor systems (Guerra, 2024). Whether motor systems can ascribe intentions was considered, and Juliana presented arguments that prior knowledge of outcomes is needed for correct simulation in

experiments around the role of motor systems in ascribing intentions. The presentation concluded that while mirror neurons identify actions, action understanding requires context.

Llinos Evans, who is studying teaching English as a foreign language, was the final presenter of the day. Llinos' presentation explored the concept of Middle English as a koiné language (Evans,2024), explaining that a koiné is the coming together of multiple intelligible languages to form a whole. Through providing examples of several different texts ranging in origin from c.700-1000AD to 1476, it was demonstrated how these extracts become increasingly recognisable to speakers of modern English. It was then explained that this happened through Old English and Old Norse coming together, thus demonstrating the theory of English as koiné language.

Through the exploration of this wide range of topics, the novelty of the Essex Student Journal as a multidisciplinary journal was clear to see. Additionally, as the Conference itself facilitated discussion between students and staff across such vastly different subject areas, the benefits of interdisciplinary communication and idea sharing was evident.

The importance of student publishing

Alongside the diverse topics explored at the Conference, what resonated both during and after the event was the importance of student publishing. With each presentation, the audience came to understand further the impact publishing with the ESJ has for the authors and their careers, as well as the wider impact enabling student publishing brings to academia.

In some cases, the presenters had published papers directly linked to assignments. Where this was the case, the Conference had allowed these works to become something more than a completed essay filed away and forgotten. Instead, the specific interest that individual had found in their study could be further developed, and communicated in a way that others could learn from, as well as potentially leading to connections with others interested in similar topics. This was something Marc highlighted as a motivation behind publishing his small-scale case study, and was also alluded to by Juliana, who had been able to reach a completely different audience to those she may otherwise have been able to, having only studied at Essex for a short time as an exchange student.

The ESJ Conference and the underlying publications are also important for allowing student voices specifically to be heard on a range of important issues, with the topics chosen highlighting themes that cut across the concerns of future researchers. For example, Maja presented about suicide bereavement and explained that her research found environmental issues are increasingly leading individuals to feel a sense of helplessness. This followed immediately after Daniel had been discussing his work around preventing environmental damage from the steel industry. These

two seemingly unrelated topics therefore had subtle connections, illustrating that student research can play an important interconnected part in identifying and addressing key issues affecting society.

Providing a platform for students to speak on these kinds of issues is one of the key motivations behind the ESJ Conference, and the importance of this was also evident through Nahida's presentation. When reflecting on her experience of publishing with the ESJ, Nahida explained that prior to studying at Essex, she hadn't ever thought she would publish anything in her life. Having never seen any writers who look as she does, nor heard stories about people like herself, publishing didn't seem to offer any opportunities. However, after encouragement to submit, becoming a published author proved to be possible, and allowed Nahida to break down some barriers to show that everyone's voice is worthy of being heard.

Finally, the student-led element of the ESJ Conference and ESJ more widely, was shown to empower students to gain confidence, pursue their goals, and reach their potential. Sean spoke about how the idea of getting published has helped to establish him as an author, and described the ESJ as being a communicative, friendly, and open publishing experience. Marc also discussed that publishing with the ESJ has allowed his journey from Masters to PhD study to be much smoother and allowed him to stand out. Similarly, Nahida spoke about the confidence she had gained through publishing, and the encouragement this confidence gave her to collect data for her dissertation.

The ability for student publishing to empower students to reach their potential was summarised none-more-so than by Daniel, who explained that publishing a paper with the ESJ helped him get onto a mentorship programme and participate in a conference at the ICC in Birmingham. At this event, Daniel presented a poster and gave a student flash talk, for which he won an award. Publishing a paper also helped Daniel apply to PhD programmes; he has since been accepted at the University of Glasgow. Daniel summarised that publishing with the ESJ enriched his academic life, led to meeting fellow life scientists, and enhanced his university experience.

The beneficial impact enabling student-led research brings, for the individual authors, for the wider community reading their work, and for open research more generally, therefore shone through all presentations on the day, and brought an extra element of positivity and motivation to the ESJ Conference.

Conclusion

The second Essex Student Journal Conference provided a platform for a selection of ESJ authors to speak about their research; but it did so much more alongside this. It enabled around sixty members of the University of Essex community to learn about eight fantastically wide-ranging topics and reflect on some of the key issues studied by Essex students. It provided avenues for multidisciplinary discussion and potential future collaboration. And finally, the ESJ Conference exemplified that student voices can and should be heard.

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