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An unexpected Community of Practice

Jo Peat, University of Roehampton

COVID-19 is the dramatic and unexpected catalyst for change that we never imagined. The speed at which higher education institutions have had to move to keep learning and teaching available to students is testament to the agility, flexibility and resourcefulness of the sector when under pressure. Although our current situation is not one we would ever wish for, to quote Einstein: 'In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.'

For some time at Roehampton we have wanted to move to a more blended mode of teaching. 75% of our students commute to Roehampton. Of these, the majority have work commitments, many are parents and carers and a blended approach would certainly serve the learning needs of this demographic. Our shift to emergency remote teaching has meant that academic colleagues have embraced technologies that hitherto they had not explored. To do this in these circumstances is clearly not ideal; however, the legacy will be that COVID-19 has been the impetus to shift the ways in which we teach and facilitate learning to a more hybrid model, considering the needs of our prospective as well as our current students.

Within the space of a week, the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit (LTEU) and eLearning team had created a rich resource on the VLE to support colleagues in their move to remote teaching. More importantly, perhaps, a number of colleagues from across the different departments and disciplines had been invited to come together to form a remote Learning and Teaching Community of Practice. As Lave and Wenger (1991) explain, a 'community of practice' is a group that shares a common interest and a desire to learn from and contribute to the community with their variety of experiences. Three components are required in order to be a CoP: (1) the domain, (2) the community, and (3) the practice. These components are exactly what resulted from the impetus of COVID-19. We already had proactive groups regularly discussing higher education pedagogic approaches, but these have historically been those with the responsibility for leading work in this area as part of their role remit or have been colleagues 'conscripted' onto different working groups because of their expertise. The change with our Remote L&T Community of Practice is that we now have colleagues coming together voluntarily and purely out of interest to discuss how to shift practice across the institution from emergency remote teaching to measured, quality-led development of blended learning opportunities.

This shift from the 'usual suspects' being involved in decisions around Learning and Teaching to a more democratic forum recruited on the basis of enthusiasm and expertise has shown the wealth of good practice and experience in learning design across the institution. Colleagues who had never before been overtly at the forefront of pedagogic change, even at a module level, are now engaged at a university level in suggesting and leading change and this is something that we will work hard to sustain. The democratisation of pedagogic know-how is leading to a wealth of rich practice that is now being showcased and recognised at all levels.

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Special COVID-19 edition of *Educational Developments*

This issue arose from a request for articles around two themes. Students have reported their academic experience of recent weeks and their thoughts on the benefits and difficulties, and we thank them for their contributions. We thank also Helen King at the University of the West of England, Bristol, and Roisin Curran at the University of Ulster for arranging these articles.

We also asked our Educational Development colleagues 'What do you think will be the major long-term changes in learning, teaching and assessment resulting from the current situation?' The articles were written between mid-May and mid-June, and we want to thank our contributors for their extra work at this very busy time.

We hope that this Special edition, together with SEDA's webinars and Wiki on recommended sources, will contribute to strengthening the community of educational developers in their vital work in helping to protect and enhance the quality of student learning. We are always interested to receive further contributions. Guidance to authors can be found here: <https://www.seda.ac.uk/educational-developments>.

Peter Gossman and James Wisdom, Co-Editors

The main advantage of this approach is that it gives us significant credibility in the departments with our more reluctant colleagues. Rather than advice on blended pedagogies coming from a central unit, who may not be aware of signature pedagogies within the different disciplines, momentum is being created by peers who work within the same discipline with the same disciplinary, pedagogic mores. The claim cannot be made that 'this does not work in our discipline' as the approach suggested/supported comes from a departmental colleague. We know that the student voice helps to motivate students; in much the same way a disciplinary colleague's voice helps to convince peers of the validity of certain approaches in their context.

To have those at the coal face of learning and teaching working with the LTEU to drive pedagogic change is refreshing for us as educational developers. It is easy to become entrenched within an educational development silo – although collegiality and cooperation are at the heart of educational development practice, working so closely with academic colleagues to drive pedagogic change is long overdue and has been a very welcome development in these uncertain times.

Our current remote way of working has led our community of practice to move beyond perceived disciplinary signature pedagogies and to consider practices from non-cognate disciplines that could refresh and dynamise theirs. It is still quite rare to find a colleague from biomedicine working on learning and teaching with an academic from English Language and Linguistics, but this is exactly the change that we have seen of late. Discussions within this community of practice have ranged from considering proximate and remote pedagogies, technologically-driven learning and teaching, to socially distanced face-to-face learning and teaching. The discussions and outcomes have been rich and varied and are ongoing.

But what of the students? There has long been a discourse across the sector around students as change agents, (Healey, 2012) and students as partners (Cook-Sather *et al.*, 2014). At Roehampton, as at many institutions, we continue to have a number of student-led initiatives, including curriculum design, student/staff academic and pedagogic research projects at all levels of study, and closing the attainment gap, through our Reimagining Attainment for All (RAFA) project and our Student Senate. We are justifiably proud of the ways in which students engage with the University beyond their academic curriculum and, therefore, wanted to ensure

that their voices were heard and used to inform curriculum development and pedagogic change going forward from COVID-19.

To do this, we began with a short survey. The survey was designed to be do-able on the most rudimentary of devices and posed just eight questions beyond asking for the students' discipline and level of study. Having interacted with our students along the way, we already had an insight into certain experiences of remote L&T but wanted more detail about what they were finding particularly positive and challenging. The limited number of questions was designed specifically to encourage the best response in a short time frame. In fact, we achieved a 26% response rate (n=7590). Our questions asked about technologies that had been used for remote L&T; the remote activities the students had found most useful; the modes of teaching that had had the greatest success in terms of engagement; aspects of remote learning that the students most enjoyed and further suggested enhancements.

The results were, for the most part, not surprising:

- Our students actively want to come to campus – after all, they chose a campus university for their studies
- They miss the social aspects of the university experience. For our students, university offers them time to be themselves, away from families and other commitments and the opportunity to be part of a supportive learning community. This is particularly important for some of our most disadvantaged students, who relish the facilities, the fast, uninterrupted internet connection and the sheer space of our campus
- They miss being able to talk to their peers and academics about their learning face to face and in the moment. They know that they can do this online, but online interaction is not as clearly mediated by facial expressions, gestures and context, and is a mode of interaction that is not yet a norm for them in terms of academic learning
- They find online learning alienating and isolating.

Happily, there were positive outcomes too:

- The flexibility of remote learning was seen as positive, as was the fact that recordings of taught sessions can be accessed numerous times to consolidate learning
- Students greatly appreciate the lengths the academics and professional services staff have gone to in order to keep learning going and to support the students to make progress towards the completion of their modules
- Students enjoy synchronous sessions, as they feel that these are more personal and there is some degree of contact, albeit virtual. They do, however, want these synchronous sessions to be made available asynchronously too
- Students were unanimously positive about the campaign run by the Academic Guidance Tutors (AGTs) to contact

all undergraduate students by phone or online via Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate, Skype or other, to check on progress and wellbeing. Individual calls were made between 2-3 times, depending on the level of support the students needed, despite the clear demand on staff time. Students reported that they felt supported and cared for in very uncertain times. For some, this had been the only real contact with another adult since lockdown had begun

- Additional online resources being available is a real advantage, particularly for students with caring responsibilities and those who live in households with vulnerable people or who may be shielding themselves
- And the feeling that a sense of normality is being maintained even in such strange times. Many students are living through very difficult times: one student talked about trying to study in a bedsit with three young children; others spoke about bereavement and not being able to attend funerals or celebrations of life; international students worried about the situation at home and reported feeling particularly isolated, confined to a bedroom on campus. The fact that learning is still taking place and is happening online is very much appreciated.

This information has been fed back to our community of practice to inform curriculum development and planning, not just in terms of pedagogy and learning and teaching, but also in terms of student support, guidance and wellbeing.

These pedagogic changes and innovations and the feedback from students came together recently in our learning and teaching festival. For the first time this was a digital event and over two days colleagues and students from across the university met online to share their new experiences, new ways of learning and teaching and new ways of interacting with each other. This has expanded our new community of practice still further and has resulted in hitherto unforeseen collaborations. The challenge will be to maintain this enthusiasm and regular interaction as we prepare for our new semester, but this is a development for which we have striven for a long time and something that we will work hard to strengthen and further develop.

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Jo Peat is the Head of Educational Development at the University of Roehampton.

Rear view mirror: Objects may be larger than they appear

W. Alan Wright and **Nick Baker**, University of Windsor, Canada

‘Ontario universities are planning now for a fall term and are focused on finding ways to create an enriching university experience. While each institution will develop its own approach to the fall term, we are united by the common goal of delivering university programs that will support student success.’

(A message from the Presidents of Ontario universities)

More than 20 universities in the province of Ontario, Canada, were a part of the massive international effort to provide emergency remote teaching to some 800,000 students when the immediate need for COVID-19 physical distancing meant that face-to-face teaching would be suspended, almost literally overnight, for the remaining weeks of the winter term.

This account stems from the experience, in particular, of the University of Windsor, an institution with an enrolment of 16,000 students situated in Southwest Ontario and directly across the River from Detroit, Michigan, one of the USA’s COVID-19 hotspots, with over 43,000 confirmed cases and 4000 deaths from the virus. Like our colleagues in SEDA, we think it is important to immediately take stock, reflecting on what we have learned and to prepare, as far as possible, for a Higher Education future that may look somewhat different from what we have experienced over the last decade.

The authors write from their experience as the current Director of the Office of Open Learning and the former Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning of the University of Windsor. An initial reflection on the events and the experiences of the last few months suggests several lessons learned in our context. Some of these observations may have widespread application, while

others may have a somewhat more restricted application:

- 1) We found that it was indeed possible for us to make the fundamental shift to online teaching within the severe constraints imposed by a limited time frame
- 2) Our remote emergency teaching functioned adequately, for the most part, to allow for the successful completion of the academic requirements of the term
- 3) Our University and Office investments in online education expertise and infrastructure over the last few years paid off in the emergency context
- 4) Resolving technical issues and ensuring teachers felt high-touch support was available to them were the two main concerns requiring constant attention
- 5) Some academic units were better prepared to make the necessary shifts because they have solid curriculum maps and both the wherewithal and flexibility to successfully respond to new demands in general and online modes in particular
- 6) We were reminded that our systems, both technological and human, were not designed to support a dramatically increased volume of online activity in a simultaneous manner. In fact, however, the technology performed well because of a combination of rapidly setting up additional computing resources, and the consistent and urgent messaging with cautions to avoid certain high-risk activities with the potential to cause failure. (For example, not taxing the system by requiring hundreds of students to simultaneously sit the same examination within a short period.)

- 7) We were reminded of the importance of leveraging all of our political capital, as educational developers and technologists, to persuade senior academic administration to assist us in advising their communities to avoid the potential problems of overloading our information and communications technology systems
- 8) We were reminded of the vital importance of close collaboration with the Centre for Teaching and Learning and with IT Services to support and co-ordinate change.

An important take-away from this crisis is that although we may be considered the ‘technology people’ on campus, our role is very much a human one – to provide support, comfort, and reassurance for faculty who suddenly found everything they thought they knew about themselves as teachers and teaching in their discipline turned upside down. They found themselves in the uncomfortable space of once again being a novice and uncertain of their own expertise in a significant part of their role and identity. The other human side of our role is to remind faculty to be humane in these times, to use technology wisely, judiciously, and ethically, and not to dehumanise their teaching by thinking only of mastering the technology. Technology can and will exacerbate existing inequities if not careful.

Educators have had little time to catch their breath after the events of the spring of 2020. Educational developers and technologists have been required to put in very long and taxing work days, all the while juggling family responsibilities and working from home. Yet we join university staff at all levels and in many jurisdictions in preparing for the future and speculating on what this future holds in store with regards to the models of HE we may retain, modify or necessity or choice, or leave behind.

In terms of models of teaching and learning, the experience of the rapid pivot to emergency online teaching has required vast numbers of academics to re-examine, or perhaps, to closely examine for the first time, their pedagogy and assumptions about teaching and learning. In some cases there has been a malaise as rather poor pedagogical practices have been uncovered, highlighted by the sudden spotlight shone on them by the shift to remote teaching. Teaching professors have been challenged to adapt their practices, employing unfamiliar tools and practices, and managing student rapport in new ways. Previously, the teaching staff who took on online courses did so as willing volunteers for the most part, and those who adopted effective and innovative teaching practices consisted of a group we might call 'a coalition of the willing'.

Suddenly the shift to online teaching was a necessity and an obligation. Despite this significant and immediate imposition, the community has shown a remarkable resilience and cohesion in coming together to address the challenge. Many teachers have made the leap and, despite nervous beginnings, have come out of the winter session feeling somewhat more confident after exploring new territory and bringing their modules to a relatively successful end. They now see that it is not a matter, for most, of simply dumping all of the old, but rather adapting (and potentially improving) their former practices to a new reality, new tools, new environments. Re-imagining and explorations became the new 'order of the day'. On the other hand, the challenge was not a positive experience for some, and still others will undoubtedly contemplate retirement as the best alternative as they face a fundamental change in their teaching experience at an advanced stage of their careers.

Models of assessment have been a constant concern at our institution over the last few months as uncertainty arose about how to ensure the integrity of assessment in an online environment. Changes in thinking and modalities were required to meet the needs of the online environment. Professors were challenged to think about assessment and their evaluation

and grading practices in new ways with both greater complexity and nuance called for. Academic integrity became an important concern in many departments. Even though many of the same challenges exist in the face-to-face classroom, online learning brings with it data and metadata that can challenge assumptions about integrity of prior examination practices, and shine a sometimes uncomfortable light on practices that were previously hidden. The experience forced the community to address the place of 'high stakes examinations', attitudes with regard to academic integrity and honour codes, and to ponder the meaning and practicality of authentic assessment.

The experience of these past months has underlined existing inequities among full-time and part-time students, face-to-face and online learning, applicable fees and available services, as well as socioeconomic gaps in the student body. Suddenly, students across the spectrum found themselves, in theory, in the same boat. But there were wide gaps in student support from one milieu to another, and many international students were faced with additional challenges due to language and cultural differences, and societal practices that create barriers to international students accessing services effectively (for example, access to internet service providers and other services that require local credit checks).

Provisions for experiential learning – including co-op, work terms, internships, clinical placements, practicums and the like – have been emphasised in Ontario these last few years as HE responds to employers' demands for 'job ready' graduates. Professor Judy Bornais, an experiential learning specialist tasked with leading our institution's efforts to make active and experiential learning a reality, has been faced with many cancellations of these community experiences for thousands of students, although the move to remote work has also opened opportunities for some students in industries poised to take advantage of the disruption. There has been no easy alternative to the practical skills gained in these 'real world' and professional settings. Though simulations and virtual labs are helpful, they cannot completely replace the hands-on experience

in many disciplinary contexts, and curricula have necessarily had to be re-arranged and re-examined at the program level to ensure the necessary learning outcomes can be achieved across the program, rather than at the course or module level. We anticipate that there will be many challenges facing university units as they attempt to promote and organise off-campus experiential learning in the years to come, as global economies acutely contract and opportunities for such learning are reduced.

Our University pursued the engagement of new academic staff as planned, but many of the new hires may be, in practice, starting their careers in higher education without the immediate support and presence of colleagues and without the physical presence of students in their first semesters of teaching. We wonder how the norms of the universities in our jurisdiction with regard to tenure and promotion, criteria for teaching excellence, and demands regarding research productivity, may change in the current context. Will senior academic administration place a new emphasis, as students re-evaluate their programmes of study and their institutional loyalties, on the importance of student satisfaction with the fundamental pedagogical, educational, and community experience they encounter in HE?

Priorities of HE institutions may change rapidly in the months to come. Some will face a severe budget shortfall in the short term, at least, due to a decline in student enrolment. Universities and colleges with large numbers of international students will inevitably be faced with a major issue as prospective students may not be able to travel even if they are willing, and if they can, will find themselves isolated when they arrive. We foresee an important decline in enrolment.

Perhaps units such as our Office of Open Learning and the Centre for Teaching and Learning will continue to play central roles, pivotal roles in the jargon of the moment, in identifying and implementing solutions as HE adjusts to new realities. They may no longer be seen as luxuries with a precarious place in the academy, but rather, as an essential part of the

fabric of HE institutions globally. It is important, emerging from the absolute rush of this spring's experience, to acknowledge that quite possibly the calamity we see in the rear-view mirror is even larger than it may appear. The experience of the last few months has potentially enormous implications as we address the move from adequate 'emergency remote teaching' to high quality 'online learning' and we re-assess the traditional pedagogical frameworks we cherish.

The Presidents of Ontario universities have pledged their continued commitment to 'providing high quality education for our students'. The demands on educational developers and educational technologists may well continue at a very high level. We may be on an important new wave of opportunity and development in the field of educational development and support services. The work has just begun, and a lot of people are now counting on the leadership of

educational developers for the provision of workable and sustained solutions as teaching and learning continues to evolve in higher education.

Nick Baker is the Director of the Office of Open Learning, and **W. Alan Wright** is the former Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning, both at the University of Windsor, Canada.

Paddling madly like a duck: One professor's reflections on adapting to a remote teaching model

W. Alan Wright, University of Windsor, Canada

In the winter term Professor Dave Andrews, former Department Head and Teaching Leadership Chair at the University of Windsor, Canada, was teaching an undergraduate class titled 'Human Factors and Work Performance' (104 students in 3rd and 4th year Kinesiology) and another called 'Introduction to Kinesiology – Movement Science Perspectives' (16 non-Kinesiology students who ranged from 1st to 4th year, from Nursing, Arts and Social Sciences, Science, and Business programmes). Suddenly the University put an end to face-to-face classes and went entirely online for the remainder of the semester. What follows describes Professor Andrews' experience.

Alan: As an award-winning and dedicated teacher you deliver carefully crafted lectures and getting to know each of your students through face-to-face contact is important to you. Suddenly your teaching world was turned upside down when you had to shift your courses, quite rapidly, to an online format. What was that experience like for you? What were the challenges?

Dave: As an instructor in higher

education for more than 20 years, I wish that I could say that I handled the rapid changeover calmly and with grace. I think the students would say that I did better than they expected. But like the duck who looks calm above the surface of the water, I was kicking with panic underneath as I tried to piece together a plan that would both satisfy the requests of the senior administration of the University, and continue to provide an experience that all of my students would appreciate, and take something of value from.

I found it hard not to be preoccupied with infrastructure at first, but I decided to take some time to think about what makes my classes work. Having done that, I realised that communication was most important, followed by setting a plan that was doable for everyone, me included. I kept in touch with my classes regularly and outlined what I was going to do, which I then stuck to every step of the way. I polled them to determine what they would prefer in the way of delivery (e.g. recorded vs. virtual classes), and to find out what limitations they might have in the way of technology.

The biggest challenge after that was to learn how to execute the plan

using new approaches that satisfied everyone's needs, as much as possible. In a few days, I learned how to record lectures, create and upload them to YouTube, run a mid-term and several online tests through our learning management system in a way that addressed academic integrity concerns, and to learn new virtual meeting tools that I could use to coordinate with teaching assistants and guest speakers that I had lined up previously. I tried to keep the structure and content of my classes as similar as possible to my original outline, while balancing the stress that students were experiencing and the pressures from the university to not overload the system.

Knowing how much to dial back and to trust in my preparations was really challenging because I had no basis for comparison. Keeping in contact with students and considering their feedback closely, really helped in that regard. I actually had one student tell me that they appreciated how 'tech savvy' I was. It was then that I realised that many of my worries were unfounded and that I was on target and should see things through.

Alan: Now that the term is over, are you satisfied with the teaching and learning experience?

Dave: Overall, I am quite satisfied with what I was able to learn and do in such a short amount of time. I have received many emails from students who thanked me for managing things the way I did. I think I was successful because I communicated well, and let them know that I was in their court. I assured them that if things turned out badly (e.g. if the system crashed during an online test), I would make it right and not disadvantage them. I still had a job to provide a quality learning experience and to meet the learning outcomes for my courses, which I am proud to say that I did. I think I accomplished this in a humane and realistic way that took into consideration what the students were capable of managing and what the resources available for me to use could handle.

Every student in my two classes (total of 120 students) finished all of the assessments and completed the course requirements. When the stress of the situation was minimised by being there for them, even though it was not in person, they settled in, and showed me that they learned some important things about the material and about who they were as people. They appreciated that I kept to my plan, and provided them

with breaks to make it more tolerable under the circumstances.

Alan: You may have the obligation to teach online in the immediate future but that may come to an end in 2021. Are there elements of what you incorporated into your courses you plan to maintain or build on in the future?

Dave: I firmly believe that there is value in every teaching experience. I learned many new things that I was reluctant to try previously, or did not feel I would like personally. Based on the positive response from students, I will definitely record personal video messages to classes in the future...for example, to provide a permanent record that they can go back to, to explain something in a different way than in class, or to just reassure them with a goofy story that things will be okay during challenging times.

I have used computer testing for over 20 years in two courses, but they have always been delivered in a lab with proctors present. Having now used the online testing system through our learning management system, there are assessments that I can see doing remotely in the future. This could open up access to my courses from outside the university. Having said that though,

I still prefer having proctored tests, mostly because I can see how students are doing and what they think of the test. That is really rich feedback for an instructor who is looking to learn about, and from, their assessment practices, and to develop themselves as teachers.

When it comes down to it for me in the end, I do not feel that teaching online can ever capture the meaningfulness of in-person interactions or engage students in the same way as if I was walking amongst them in a classroom. Technology will never replace personal connections. If done well, online teaching can be a great way for students to learn in diverse ways, but I think there is a big difference between putting resources online to deliver information (in order to save a term), and actually designing courses in pedagogically sound ways to address learning goals that rival what I have seen that in-person delivery can achieve. Addressing this latter point is what this panicked duck will be aiming for in the future when teaching in an online environment.

W. Alan Wright is the former Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning, at the University of Windsor, Canada.

The evolution of Higher Education

Nicole Parkinson-Kelly, Ulster University

This has been a year of adapting to big changes in Higher Education for students. Students have had to become more familiar with online tools and resources for learning as a result of industrial action and the coronavirus pandemic. Institutions across the United Kingdom and beyond have been focusing on providing the same quality of education online as face-to-face classes provide. How important are these face-to-face classes for students? Will we see an increase in the use of online teaching in higher education? What are the main areas of concern for students and gaps we need to plug in online teaching before we potentially incorporate it into the next academic year? Will students still get the university experience this incoming year?

I was born in 1998. I don't remember a time in my life without technology. I remember the old dial-up system and the arguments my parents would have when one was on the phone and the other wanted access to the internet. I remember when my mum got her first touch-screen phone and I remember getting mine a few years later. My brother, who was born in 2005, could change VHS tapes and DVDs before he could walk (albeit the DVDs were badly scratched as a result). We are a generation who have grown up with digital technology, a field that is always developing and introducing new products. It is true that a lot of us are fast learners when it comes to technology, as the ability to use a PC, laptop, tablet and smartphone

is becoming a necessary skill not only for the workplace but for home entertainment too. It is easy to assume that our generation would also be content to rely on technology for our learning, and this year has been a test-run on this theory.

Online learning does work for some courses, but it would be unfair and inaccurate to say that every student would be comfortable with this approach. There are many courses which rely on face-to-face for practical learning and access to essential equipment which students don't have the money to finance or the space to use in a home environment. Students who have expressed the most concern usually come from our Arts

and Humanities courses and Life and Health Sciences courses. Students in these areas highlighted that access to studios and laboratories were essential to complete assessments. However, not every module includes a practical element. Students on these courses do also learn theory for their subject area and this is where online learning could be used temporarily until it is safe to return to business as usual. There is an opportunity to postpone any assessments which require a physical campus presence to a safer time and swap modules that can be taught online to earlier in the academic year. However, our online environments need development and our teaching staff need to be heavily trained to use these resources.

On the topic of assessments, whilst the situation of COVID-19 continues and government advice is subject to change, when students do begin semester one of 2020/2021 they will start asking questions about winter examinations. Over recent years, there has been debate around the correlation of stress, mental health and the impact of mass unseen examinations on academic performance in comparison to the potential of the student. In some courses at Ulster we have seen a drop in this style of assessment and an increased focus on setting assignments which will prepare students for their chosen field of work. We have seen a massive shift nationally from the examination form of assessment to increased written assignments in a rush to test that students have achieved learning outcomes before the end of the semester. Students have raised concerns particularly around the clustered deadlines they have faced with the conversion to written assignments and the stress this causes (not including the stress of fearing to die with the virus). If we are to continue relying upon these open-book forms of assessment, course teams must work together to ensure module assessments are scattered both throughout the semester and in the time which would have been used for exams, to mitigate the impacts of stress.

With this reliance upon open-book forms of assessment or unsupervised online exams, there have been concerns around cheating and the use of essay mills. The temptation of

using essay mills or cheating comes with desperation and pressure, so assessments need to be drastically reduced to only what is necessary and deadlines must not cluster together. Essay mills have been a hot topic of discussion this year within the QAA Student Strategic Advisory Committee. Essay mills are illegal and if students use them, we must consider why they feel the need to take the risk and do so. In some institutions Academic Writing Bureaus exist to support students with advice and tips on how to improve their essay-writing skills. With these supports in place, it is less likely for students to use essay mills as support is readily available. For online learning, Studiosity is a great resource for students to go to for similar support. With the increase in reliance upon written assessment for the next semester, services like Studiosity need to be in place and promoted in order to support students. On the topic of accessibility, some students have additional supports in place which help them write their assignments and examinations. University PCs also come with additional software to help these students structure their essays. These additional supports must not be forgotten and must be provided to ensure that students are not negatively impacted by lack of access to the supports they would usually receive on campus.

When I put myself forward for my role as VP Education, one of my goals on my manifesto was to help bring teaching methods into the 21st century. We needed engaging and exciting lectures with more chances to participate and work in partnership with staff to give feedback into the design of our curriculums. I did want to see a better use of our online resources and engaging every learning style through videos, podcasts, PowerPoints (that weren't just black text on white slides) and eBooks to reduce textbook costs for students. I could not have predicted how relevant that goal would become.

Moving onto an online environment has brought some welcome progress but has also highlighted areas that need work. An area which people often forget about is accessibility. Some students have expressed frustration at the difficulties an online environment brings. At Ulster University, the Digital

Learning Sub-Committee has been exploring the use of Blackboard Ally which gives students the option to download documents in a variety of formats to suit their needs. This is a particularly great tool for continual staff development and awareness on accessibility, as from the staff member's perspective on Blackboard, they can see how accessible their uploaded content is through a traffic-light system and a percentage rating. It also gives feedback on how to make the content more accessible. An example of this may be adding a caption to images describing their content for screen readers. Similarly, a simple change may be suggested in the formatting on the document such as writing with clear, consistent font styles (such as Arial) and using headings, subheadings, headers and footers in documents. Although these changes may seem small, they are areas which are often forgotten but can have a major positive impact for students who need them. This is an area that we must prepare for if we are to use online teaching practices to make sure that no student falls between the cracks and can access every resource needed to participate in their course. These changes force the Higher Education system to be more inclusive and therefore need to be long term, as any resource uploaded on portals should be accessible to all students.

Whilst we can make positive advancements in the accessibility in online resources, we can't forget the accessibility of IT equipment for students too. At Ulster we have students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. I have had students contact me panicking because they don't have laptops or Wi-Fi in their homes so they rely on libraries or computer labs to support their online access needs. For computing, engineering, digital design courses and social sciences students, their laptops or home PCs are not always able to support the software they need to complete research or assessments. This is where students need additional government support in their finances, and bursaries need to be extended to help students cover the costs of essential equipment and software for those who can't afford it. This was conducted in a similar fashion to equip MPs and their employees to be able to work from

home and this is the kind of support that our students need too. If additional financial help is given, students could have the ability to develop their projects and research from home during the gentle release from lockdown rules.

In my experience, I have been pleased with how my institution has managed this crisis. Ulster strives to be a civic university, with a focus on widening access and participation, making higher education accessible to all. The financial cost of IT equipment has been considered and discussed in top academic boards in the institution and they are strategising a method to try and help students from lower economic backgrounds cover the cost of IT equipment for the next academic year. This approach needs to be adopted by all institutions considering partial or full online teaching from September and needs to be supported by our government to ensure funds are in place to make these projects a success.

Furthermore, students have stated that there needs to be a debate around live learning or uploading materials for students to learn in their own time. For student parents and carers in particular, live learning may not be a reasonable ask with trying to balance at home responsibilities such as home-schooling children or increased caring responsibilities with coronavirus still prevalent across the country. This resurrects the debate around recorded lectures. For students with disabilities, under non-pandemic conditions, they aren't always well enough to attend class in person and some have advocated for recorded lectures so they aren't operating on a 'catch up' method of learning with a lesser quality experience due to their absence for medical reasons. The argument against this was that attendance would decline even more if too much was provided online. Under these circumstances we need flexibility for students to learn in their own time when children are in bed or when social care workers call in periodically to help with responsibilities.

However, students are also very aware of a need for an online learning community and engaging with your course mates, as watching, listening and reading do not hold our attention span. If you look at social media today we

have Tik Tok and we had Vine, both of which are platforms for short video clips for entertainment. We do also have YouTube but the community on it is very different with users subscribing to content creators who discuss or engage in the user's passion. Even on this platform videos do not usually exceed an hour, with vlogs and discussion videos usually being 10-15 minutes long each. These platforms have been successful in creating content, so if teaching staff are creating online learning content, while I don't expect lecturers to try and recreate academic lyrics to the 'Renegade' dance, they should consider the timings of videos, accessibility (for example the use of subtitles) and making the video visually appealing. Moreover, students have expressed the importance of engaging with course mates to make friends and to be actively involved in their learning. In order to create this community we should not forget online inductions. Zoom has become a popular platform for social video-calling and it is particularly unique as you can see everyone in the call and participants can be divided into breakout rooms within the meeting. This tool could prove very useful for live seminars, inductions and group work activities. However, Microsoft Teams is included in the Office 365 package, so may be more appropriate and accessible for teaching staff while providing the same functionality.

Additionally, building an online community is not just the responsibility of teaching staff. Student unions, equally, have their own role to play and have been organising online social events across the country. In Ulster University Students' Union, we have hosted awards nights (Student Excellence Awards and Colours), quiz nights and on World Tea Day during Mental Health Awareness Week we hosted a Tea and Chat drop-in Zoom call from 9am-5pm. Our societies have also hosted quiz nights, Minecraft nights and arts and crafts video calls. All of these union events have received a fantastic response and I have personally really enjoyed reconnecting into the UU community. If the next year is online or if it is face to face, we can and should continue to create and build these communities, so students don't feel disconnected from the university community and overall student experience. An online community will

of course feel different to sitting in class together, but creating a community spirit and support network is essential, online or offline.

To conclude, there are some gaps that need to be plugged before we can fully rely on online learning. Whilst our generation have grown up using technology, some still do not have access to the essential equipment or software to be able to complete a university course online. Some courses are simply not built to be accessible online so face-to-face learning and access to resources are essential for these courses to proceed. However, we can't forget vulnerable students who may not feel safe to come onto campus for classes until the pandemic passes completely, so there will need to be online provisions too. In order for students to have the best learning experience at university whilst also balancing the health and safety government recommendations, we will need some online teaching and some face-to-face teaching with access to studios, libraries and laboratories. This can be done in a timetabled or monitored way to keep ourselves safe but access to campus resources needs to be granted. It is possible to create a student community and university experience if we are partially online. A heavy focus needs to remain on creating a university community through video calls, discussion boards and online events. Depending on government advice, small gatherings may also be possible for course mates to be able to engage in group work together or socialise.

It's important to remember that this can be an opportunity for development and experimentation. We can make some long-term positive changes in our approaches to online learning, particularly in the area of accessibility. This mass movement to reliance on online teaching will ultimately improve the content and resources provided, even when we return to face-to-face normality, and we could see an increase in the availability of online courses. This would be fantastic for those with parent or caring responsibilities, those living with disabilities who can't necessarily attend every mandatory class in person, or those who work full-time to balance academic progression without

interfering with a working day. This is an opportunity for making Higher Education more inclusive and accessible if we choose to do so.

However, for the immediate future of 2020/2021, most importantly, institutions need to listen to their students, not forgetting their postgraduates and researchers too. It is paramount that the Student Voice is heard on top academic boards and key

decision-making areas. Students are the people experiencing the teaching and learning so it is important that they have representation in these decisions. They provide an alternative perspective as the grassroots, directly affected group and can give direct feedback on their experiences and their course mates' experiences. As the generation who grew up on technology, we may also have some hints and tips on how you can make your online learning

environment more engaging and accessible. So, if you take nothing else away from this piece, please remember this: Listen and include students' opinions on every key decision you make because ultimately you are deciding the fate of their degrees and their university experiences.

Nicole Parkinson-Kelly is Vice-President, Education, at Ulster University Students' Union.

The experience of COVID-19

James McCarthy, Ulster University

As students across the UK have been adapting to a changing working environment as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, it has presented us with many challenges to the way that we learn and how we view education. As a postgraduate student, I had undertaken my undergraduate degree with the same institution and over this past four years I have seen many positive changes to the way in which our University views education and the learning environment, with moves towards greater usage of collaborative learning and teaching methods. As such, we as students have become accustomed to changing and adapting how we learn and as such we were probably in a better position than some when it came to telecommuting.

One of the first benefits that I have noticed has been a reduced cost in my expenses. With the campus being closed, I am no longer using as much fuel as I would be if I were commuting and I am not spending as much on coffee and snacks. Aside from this being good for my pocket, it has also worked wonders for my waistline.

From an academic perspective, my Masters course is predominantly assessed through external National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) exams. With the current situation, these exams have been postponed until August at the earliest and as such, our course staff have had to amend and adapt how we are assessed in order to allow us to complete the course on time. To that extent, our coursework now carries a greater weighting and the rest will be

assessed through online open book exams. This has been a welcome change among my peers and has gone some way to relieving their anxieties around the impact that the current situation will have on their attainment. This will allow us to complete our MA within the original timeframe and allows us to complete the NCTJ Diploma when it is safe to do so.

Whilst this current period has been challenging and presented difficulties for some of my peers, the majority of us have been in agreement that it has led to more flexibility in when and where we choose to learn. Under normal circumstances, my timetable would be almost full from Monday to Thursday, 9 to 5. However, since the university has closed and classes have moved online, I have felt that I have had more freedom in deciding the hours that I work around my classes.

This has also resulted in many students having more time to themselves which they have been filling through activities that they wouldn't have had time for prior to the pandemic. From a personal perspective, for what feels like the first time in a number of years, I have been able to read for pleasure. As someone who cannot walk past a book shop without buying something, I have had an ever-increasing pile of books that is now slowly but surely shrinking.

It is important to recognise though that this has not been the case for some. Like many students, I have noticed that the current situation has led to a decrease in

my productivity and I am not completing as many tasks within the same timeframe that I would under conventional teaching. I have also had great difficulty sticking to a rigid timetable with an increased number of distractions such as streaming services and having my family at home constantly. This has also been a problem for some students who have younger siblings who are now also reliant on the use of technology and the internet to learn from home. This has been a particular problem for students from a disadvantaged background who may only have access to one computer within the family home.

The availability of resources has also been an issue for some. As COVID-19 has fallen in the middle of dissertation season many students have been restricted to online resources to carry out their studies. Whilst my university has a wealth of online resources in the form of e-books, e-journals and datasets, other resources and software have been harder to access. In addition to this, access to equipment has been limited especially for those on courses such as my own which require access to visual and audio recording equipment. This has had a negative impact on the quality of work that has been produced but this should be taken account for in assessment.

Whilst I feel that I have adapted well to a new way of working, one aspect that I am greatly missing is the social interaction. As I continue to complete my work as I would had I been on campus, I can't help but long for the days when you could have a catch-up

with your classmates over a cup of coffee or the ability to collaborate on a piece of work as a team. While telecommuting has worked in the short term, the lack of

a social aspect and the added challenges that that brings in terms of mental wellbeing would make it difficult for me to commit to it as a feasible long-term

way of learning.

James McCarthy, Student, MA Journalism, Ulster University.

COVID-19: Lockdown experience from a final year undergraduate International Business student perspective

Edina Opoczki, University of the West of England

At the beginning

The 17th of March, Tuesday, was not a typical day. I should have attended a tutorial which I decided not to, due to the increasing news and warnings about the presence of COVID-19 but also the lack of actions from the British Government. I did not want to put myself at risk using public transportation or by sharing a tutorial room with potentially sick students. On that evening, I had a working shift to attend but just before it started I found out about one of my housemate's symptoms potentially related to COVID-19. I informed my line manager about that; the reaction was that as a household we have to self-isolate for 14 days and I would be on sick pay during that time. However, throughout the week I developed all symptoms and by 21 March I was already hospitalised at Southmead Hospital due to COVID-19. Needless to say, as a final year student I was traumatised by all the news, but the most important thing was to become better and to fight off COVID-19. It took over three weeks until my health was somewhat back to normal and I was able to start planning my university commitments.

Coursework and online exam

My anxiety level was difficult to keep under control especially when UWE Bristol announced there would be no more face-to-face teaching and the closure of the campuses. The very first thought I had in my mind was how am I supposed to finish my dissertation and all my coursework with no access to the campus? I had

several e-mail conversations with my tutors and programme leader asking them for help and advice. All I was hearing was to hold fire because the University was working on a new deadline for the submissions which was then announced. I was beyond happiness to find out that all my coursework submissions were due on 23 April which meant plenty of time to prepare and get used to the situation and studying from home. In the meantime, I found out about the way exams would be held and I have to say I still cannot decide whether the online 24-hours coursework-based examination is better or worse. It has its advantages, but it also has disadvantages such as the challenges of living in a difficult home environment, unreliable internet connection or no quiet room for studying etc.

Emotional resilience

I always find it difficult to adapt to doing the same things in new ways e.g. writing my exams online or attending tutorials online. It takes a lot of effort and patience to manage emotions related to the current situation and to not allow these emotions to cause damage but to be a source of motivation to keep on going and not to give up. It is challenging in normal circumstances to build emotional resilience, but when we are under more pressure than normal for a longer period of time this can be even more difficult. Meditation, mindfulness practices, mandala colouring or practising yoga can all help to relax our mind and put emotions at ease; therefore, I focus on doing

these activities to help me cope and to manage my anxiety and emotions to become more balanced. Emotional resilience takes time to build and requires continuous efforts to maintain but with practice one can learn to make it part of everyday life.

Going forward

At this moment, we still do not know / unreliable how life is going to be restored after the lift of the lockdown and after facing the economic challenges of the pandemic. I hear a lot of people say they want the 'before the virus' state, but I say I want the world to be as caring, as united and as quiet as it is right now because it gained us less pollution, clean sky, more wildlife and more sea life. Mother Earth needed to take a deep breath which was only possible by the restrictions and lockdowns across the world. We learnt to be more human by caring for each other and by appreciating how precious time spent at home is while key workers are keeping us alive in hospitals and replenishing shelves in supermarkets. The past weeks taught us very important lessons about our relationships and friendships but most of all about ourselves. For myself, I think about this as a detox from the everyday life, e.g. detox from social media or detox from coffee shops. Such detox allowed me to realise who my real friends I can count on are, it taught me that I can beat COVID-19 and that I can still produce quality work from home. What has COVID-19 taught you?

Edina Opoczki, Student, International Business BA (Hons), University of the West of England.

Being an Art student during lockdown

Rebecca Edery, University of the West of England

I am a Fine Art and Visual Culture student in my first year at the University of the West of England (UWE). My academic experience, since the university closed due to COVID-19 around seven weeks ago, has informed my opinion on how I believe I, my course and my university can adapt and emerge from this situation in the best way possible. I am optimistic about the future in spite of our current odd circumstances. I'm also sure that universities are preparing for the new academic year as best they can, but it would be good to know what is going on behind the scenes.

I understand the current approach of taking our existing course and moving it online. This is understandable given the time we all had to respond to lockdown. However, I and many of my peers currently feel like our department's approach isn't working for us.

During my last term at UWE, I had been working collaboratively with ten other students on my course. As you can imagine, my end-of-year project has therefore had to adapt drastically. But luckily, through the power of Zoom and instant messaging, we were able to find

alternative ways to collaborate. I have been particularly proud of something I started within my peer group I am calling 'chain painting', where someone sends a piece of art to one person in the group, they visually respond to it, and message their response to someone else in the group, and so on. Its aim is to connect students during lockdown and open a visual dialogue.

That was the independent side of my course, though. On the institutional side of things, our guest speakers, seminars and workshops were all cancelled. We've had some limited face-to-face (video call) contact with our tutors. Aside from this, my work has consisted of independent research and learning. I know that the department at UWE has made efforts to keep us in contact with the staff, and there are plans to try and take the exhibition of work and move it online, but we still feel we've lost so many essential elements of our course.

Assuming things don't return to normal in September, and online learning replaces our seminars, studio work, and workshops, I would love to see the current fine art course structure redesigned to work alongside whatever social distancing measures are

introduced. For example, my course at UWE includes a lot of guest speakers throughout the year, but if a guest speaker simply pre-recorded their talk to be watched from home, the intimacy and opportunity for discussion would be lost. This is something that needs to be accommodated for in the redesign, since, in my opinion, students find a lot of value in active participation. I understand it would take considerable time and hard work to re-work the course in this way, but in the long term I believe it will make the course more popular for current and future students.

In conclusion, I think individual departments need to create conversations that involve students in how the course is going to adapt. Nobody expects us to get it right the first time, but I do think we need to get experimental with new teaching techniques. I'm optimistic about the future of my course, and I would love to see constructive conversations start to take place between staff, course leaders, and students.

Rebecca Edery, Student, BA (Hons)
Fine Art and Visual Culture, University of the West of England.

Life and learning during lockdown

Telisha Heslop, University of the West of England

March 23rd 2020, the UK officially goes into lockdown due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, suddenly a reel of post-apocalyptic movies started playing on repeat in my head. This is the beginning of the end; very dramatic I know, nonetheless, those were the thoughts running through my head. However dramatic and exaggerated my thoughts were, the COVID-19 virus was the beginning of the end of life as I know it. I have had to make changes to the way I work, how I attend lessons, how I interact with lecturers and how I interact with my peers and society in general.

All face-to-face lessons and my planned assignment demonstrations were cancelled, the University of the West of England (UWE), where I attend, started moving to online teaching sessions from 17 March. It seemed like everything started happening suddenly, I was fully aware of the COVID-19 virus and the significant impact it was having globally; despite all that, all the changes that started to take place at UWE, I felt unprepared for.

Although the University had started making provisions to move to online

teaching when the inevitable happened, despite all that they are not a distance learning organisation and so issues were largely being dealt with as they arose. Yes, the University does have online facilities and software that allow students to work from home to an extent, but ultimately the University is very much a bricks and mortar organisation.

So, while I now had access to online lessons with my lecturers, I still did not have access to everything I needed. For instance, I needed access to my internal

student drive with my documents and access to the internal network to develop and run my website, which was part of my e-Business assignment. Provisions were later made so that these facilities were accessible externally, however, that was not possible in the initial stages of the lockdown. Hence, adjustments were made to the assignment specifications to address these issues.

I would be lying if I said I do not enjoy the flexibility and comfort of working and learning from home, but for all the benefits distance learning offers, it is riddled with difficulties and endless distractions. Especially, when you are a parent as well as a student, the option of going on campus and locking myself away in solitude to work for the day was no longer available to me. My space to escape to was suddenly gone and although the remaining work I had to complete for my course was less than half the work I had at the start of the academic year, it took me twice as long to complete it.

The solitude I desperately crave when working was MIA and there were days I felt like 'I was up the creek without a paddle'. Motivation had become a problem, concentration became a problem and I found myself working late nights or early mornings just to

work uninterrupted. That was not a long-term solution as I found myself tired most days and struggling to get through the day.

All the things I had taken for granted were no longer readily available to me and I was grateful that I was in the final stretch of my coursework, elated when I finally submitted my final assignment – I celebrated with a full eight hours of sleep. I was grateful that the lockdown was not implemented at an earlier stage in the academic year, because had that been the case, I would have struggled significantly more to meet my assignment deadlines or to get any work done.

While I am relieved that I have no further assignments due and that I can breathe a sigh of relief as there are no exams to worry about, I am still very concerned about what is to come and the impact the COVID-19 virus will have on how teaching will be delivered for the new academic year starting September 2020. In all honesty, I did not anticipate that the virus would be an ongoing threat that we will more than likely still be dealing with come September. It is now obvious that will be the case and social distancing rules will still be in effect, so it is safe to assume that online lessons will be continuing.

Therefore, I am worried about the additional stress of working from home, where there are countless distractions. I also question if the University campuses will be open in September and if social distancing measures are still in place, (which they are likely to be), how will this affect the amount of access I will have to the University campus.

Distance learning and online courses are nothing new and very much standard in this new technological age that we live in. However, it is not best suited to everyone; yes, it offers flexibility and convenience but at the same time requires discipline and commitment.

I am truly missing the not so long ago days when I had the option to work on campus, the days when I needed respite and had somewhere to go. Now, my only option is to work at home while two screaming toddlers run wild and scream incessantly for no reason other than that they're playing.

Telisha Heslop, Student, BSc(Hons) Information Technology Management for Business, University of the West of England.

Transforming practice and 'turnaround'

Steve Outram, Higher Education Consultant and Researcher

As Bob Dylan sang in 'Subterranean Homesick Blues', 'You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows'. It seems like a gale is hitting higher education around the globe right now and there is little clarity about where higher education is being blown to. In response to COVID-19 higher education providers have embraced online learning and have almost instantaneously transformed their teaching and learning delivery. It is unclear whether this will become a permanent feature of provision or whether, at some point deemed safe, there will be a return to a majority of classes being delivered face to face – or both! What is clear is that, for 2020-21, UK institutions are facing an enormous cut in funding with the likely loss of a large number of overseas students as well as the loss of a high proportion of 'home' students who have decided to postpone entry.

So, what can we do about it?

This article has the objective of reviewing the principles associated with 'turnaround' leadership and suggesting a number of activities that might assist in developing new plans for learning and teaching. It is not another piece of advice on how to transition to online learning – there are a lot of those already. Rather, it is about how to work with the dramatic changes that are currently taking place.

Seven years ago I described (Outram, 2013) how 'turnaround' leadership had emerged in the USA and elsewhere as a response to a number of challenges faced, in particular, by small institutions (often with fewer than 1000 students). It is useful to review the experiences of 'turnaround' institutions in the intervening years to assess how these principles might be endorsed. Crucially, this review will not be focused on how to react and respond

to a ‘crisis’, though that is an important feature. Rather, it is to suggest that it is possible to employ the principles of ‘turnaround’ leadership in higher education as a positive way of facing the future.

According to the originators of the idea of ‘turnaround’ in higher education, one can start by identifying ‘at risk indicators’ (Fullan and Scott, 2009; Martin *et al.*, 2009). These include:

- Frequent turnover in senior managers (new senior leaders are likely to focus on establishing themselves as leaders rather than managing a crisis)
- Poor retention of students and also of academic staff, demonstrated by the proportion of academic staff with ‘terminal qualifications’ (that is, highly qualified and experienced academic staff who either leave such institutions or do not apply for positions there in the first place)
- The average length of time working at the institution – where the leadership team averages more than twelve years (out of touch and ‘stuck in familiar ways’) or fewer than three years (insufficient experience to avoid the pitfalls).

Whilst acknowledging that there will be differences between higher education institutions, both between different countries and within a country, and that ‘one size does not fit all’, there are recommendations that emerge from a review of successful ‘turnaround’ institutions. These include:

- Having a focus on the institutional mission rather than on admissions
- Reviewing the institution’s strengths and reputation, and building on that at the expense of poorly recruiting programmes and programmes with a poor reputation
- Understanding fully the institution’s finance system
- Having an effective quality management system.

An examination of a recent case can serve to illustrate the nature and scope of ‘turnaround’ in higher education.

Harrisburg University of Science and Technology (HU)

HU’s turnaround, like so many small higher education colleges in the USA, was forced by ‘desperation and necessity’. Founded in 2001, approved to award degrees in 2005 and fully accredited in 2009, the Central Pennsylvania university had borrowed heavily to build a signature 16-storey downtown tower. In 2012, when a new president was appointed, the university had roughly \$300,000 in available cash and was about \$3.6 million in debt. It had an enrolment of 300 undergraduate and 50 graduate students. ‘It muddled through its debt payments with short-term loans and gifts, then quickly charted a new path’ (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2019).

As the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported, the new president implemented a turnaround plan that comprised:

- To avoid fixed costs, the university worked with partners to provide housing and catering for students
- HU also identified external business partners for parking and custodial services
- It delegated to outside firms key functions like marketing
- It introduced ‘flat’ governance, with no tenure and no departments, minimising hierarchy and ‘fiefdoms’
- The appointment of non-tenured (adjunct) faculty gave them flexibility for adding and phasing out programmes
- This non-tenured faculty were given voting power in faculty assemblies leading to them supporting new projects
- A new culture developed that is ‘tolerant of failure’, as long as it yields lessons, and aids experimentation
- Diverse revenue streams were created to subsidise core missions
- A focus on STEM subjects gave them a degree of stability
- Tight community-business ties were created to offer students practical work experience and role models without adding excessive campus infrastructure.

Changes included the introduction of twenty new degree programmes and the establishing of new provision in Philadelphia. The evidence for the success of this initiative can be seen in Table 1, including the increase in student enrolment, an increase in both full-time and adjunct faculty and a ten-fold increase in revenue.

| Changes | 2013 | 2018 |
|----------------|---|--|
| Annual revenue | \$8 million | \$80 million |
| Available cash | \$300,000 | \$30 million |
| Debt due | \$3.6 million | \$4.2 million |
| Faculty | 12 full-time and 33 corporate (adjunct) | 94 full-time and 318 corporate |
| Enrolment | 300 undergraduates and 50 graduate students | 6,500 students – 600 of them undergraduates from 103 countries |

Table 1 Changes at Harrisburg University (Source: *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2019)

Of course, Harrisburg University is a very small private institution in the USA where the reliance on non-tenured faculty, for example, might be one of several elements of their ‘turnaround’ that may not be easily replicated in the UK, even if it were considered desirable. Nevertheless, there are some principles that can be discerned and applied in other contexts. This case (and there are many more that might have been included) might be seen as an example of saving an institution from closure. In fact, it illustrates much more than that. It is a characteristic of successful ‘turnaround’ institutions that they demonstrate that short-term fixes are less likely to succeed than having an eye to the future, rather than trying to fix the past. Similarly, the evidence drawn from a growing number of such institutions is that they are successful as a consequence of a number of common factors – the appointment of a new vice-chancellor,

president or principal with energy, enthusiasm and a passion for supporting the institution and its students and, although they typically have financial challenges requiring rationalisation and process improvement, a successful 'turnaround' institution will have sought innovative and, at times, niche solutions as part of a wider vision. Similarly, they often have leaders who did not charge in heroically in an autocratic way to 'save the day'; rather, their leadership styles embraced appropriate responses according to different situations and are consultative and communicate extensively. Importantly, the evidence shows that it is vital that they enjoy the support of their trustees and governors, recognising that 'good governance' was an essential part of successful turnaround; governors and trustees who themselves understand fully what 'turnaround' entails.

An exploration of some of the ideas about 'turnaround' might demonstrate what might be done but also raises the question of how to do it. The higher education media are currently replete with suggestions, particularly in relation to a move to online teaching. *Inside Higher Education*, for example, an American media company and online publication that is not dissimilar to the *Times Higher* (though it is supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) has an ongoing compilation of ideas and resources to help universities and colleges plan for a future. Edward J. Malone and Joshua Kim, for example, suggest fifteen different scenarios for the future of higher education ranging from a complete return to the status quo ante to fully online delivery (Malone and Kim, 2020a). On the other hand, Bruce Macfarlane, writing in the *Times Higher* in May, suggests that the idea that universities and colleges have been irrevocably changed by COVID-19 might be premature, that UK universities have a long history of crises only to return to doing what they seem to have always done! (Macfarlane, 2020). Either way, as Malone and Kim conclude:

'To support this work, many campuses threw more resources into the process of developing and running courses, and of supporting students and faculty, than was customarily the case. Across the higher education ecosystem teams that pre-COVID-19 were in charge of online education, instructional design, educational technologies, educator development, and learning innovation were now placed at the center of academic continuity efforts. Campus units that had worked on areas related to digital learning now found themselves at the center of institutional strategies for instructional resilience. Instructional designers and educational developers were more and more acknowledged as a necessity..... Non-faculty educational staff, and the units that they work in such as centers for teaching and learning (CTLs) and academic computing groups, came to be viewed as essential for the continuity of the institution.'

(Malone and Kim, 2020b)

As Bruce Macfarlane suggested, responding to crisis is not new for UK universities and colleges. Presciently,

when she was Head of Leadership, Governance and Management at HEFCE, Alison Johns (now CEO of Advance-HE) commissioned an inquiry into how universities might cope with the oncoming financial crisis that was likely to beset them. Reporting to a HEFCE Conference in 2009, she concluded that the forces driving higher education in England over the next 10 to 15 years would mean that universities would have to address:

- Differentiation and distinctiveness
- New and different business models
- New leadership models and skills sets
- Sustainability
- Reputation and brand
- Technology
- Greater collaboration and partnering.

This is a reminder that all was not well with UK higher education before the pandemic which has exacerbated an already challenging situation. This has led many to argue that transformational rather than adaptive change is needed. Space does not allow us to explore each of Alison Johns' points in more detail, but it is possible to suggest a number of activities to answer the question of 'what can we do?' In relation to differentiation and distinctiveness much has been made of institutions developing a niche. The evidence from 'turnaround' institutions in the USA is that this often entails a focus on STEM subjects and the recent development of the new university in Hereford, the New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering (NMITE), illustrates a similar development in the UK. A quick scan of other new and proposed independent higher education institutions in England supported by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 shows that it is not just STEM subjects that provide a niche. The Schumacher College in the grounds of Dartington Hall in Devon, for example, has an aim to 'create a sense of global, ecological citizenship among our students who come here to study from around the world' by providing 'ecology-centred short courses, undergraduate and masters programmes'. Similarly, Futureworks is a higher education provider focused on supporting higher education for the creative industries. A different niche is that of the newly launched Co-operative University based on 'social justice and co-operative values and principles'.

So how does one find one's niche – as an institution, a programme or, indeed, for oneself? You may be familiar with the fable of the fox and the hedgehog! A hungry fox would like to eat a tasty hedgehog. Being a fox, it tries all sorts of cunning tricks to overcome the hedgehog. The hedgehog, however, can only do one thing but does it very well – it curls into a prickly ball and prevails over the fox. This fable is usually attributed to the Greek poet Archilochus. However, in 1953 the philosopher Isaiah Berlin took up the parable in *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, where one is invited to reflect on whether one is a fox or a hedgehog. The point is – what is it that, like a hedgehog, your institution or programme does very well? One can identify this by considering a Venn diagram of three overlapping circles. In one circle, address what you and your colleagues are deeply passionate about; in a second circle,

address what your institution or programme does better than anyone else, and in the third circle, address what can generate an income. Where the three circles overlap is the 'sweet spot' – the niche (Berlin, 1953).

In the HEFCE inquiry led by Alison Johns, PA Consulting – an international management consultancy firm – were commissioned to explore where universities in different parts of the sector might head in the future. To do this, to good effect, they used a standard organisational development tool – PESTLE – and this might be a useful activity for the academic or educational developer charged with the task of facilitating a discussion of where an institution might go. PESTLE entails an exploration of the Political, Economic, Socio-cultural, Technological, Legal and Environmental forces that are driving change – see an example on the Mindtools Pestle Analysis website. Another useful tool for exploring future developments is Jerome Glenn's Futures Wheel (1972), again a tool that successfully stimulates discussions looking to the future.

The HEFCE inquiry also suggested that universities and colleges need new and different business models – this would seem more urgent than ever. Whilst academic and educational developers may not be at the heart of such discussions, a tool that many colleagues have found useful is the Business Canvas – a tool described in Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur's *Business Model Generation* (2010) co-created by an amazing 470 practitioners from all over the world. Since its publication there have been a number of very useful variants of the Business Canvas, including:

- The Social Business Canvas (<https://www.socialbusinessmodelcanvas.com/>)
- The Lean Business Canvas (<https://www.growthsandwich.com/resources/what-is-the-lean-canvas/>)
- The Brand Canvas (many websites but often seeking payment).

In developing ideas about the future, institutions may be tempted to start developing a new vision – mindful of the Japanese proverb 'Vision without action is a daydream, action without vision is a nightmare'. However, as Gianpiero Petriglieri (2020) suggests, no-one had a pandemic in their vision for their university and a necessary leadership quality is that of 'holding' – a psychological term with a specific meaning. It describes the way another person, often a leader, reassuringly contains and interprets what's happening in times of uncertainty and it is axiomatic in times of transformational change that there is an emphasis on communication. One could do worse than follow John Kotter's imperative to find seven different ways of communicating and use each one at least seven times (Kotter, 1995).

Similarly, one of the ways in which the transition to a new way of working may be accomplished has been addressed by William Bridges in 'Managing transitions: making the most of change' (1991). Drawing on Kübler-Ross's (1969) model of coping with grief, Bridges proposed a three-stage model where one can identify where someone might be located and supported through a change transition.

A consideration of 'turnaround' entails reflecting on how to go forwards – it is not just a model for saving an institution from closure. It is a model for transforming a university, not just advancing it. As Scott *et al.* (2012) demonstrate in the Australian-led initiative to support the introduction of education for sustainable development, the 'turnaround' model is ideal for enabling transformation in a university in a positive way.

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A 'moonshot' moment for higher education

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'There are decades where nothing happens, and there are weeks when decades happen.'

(Vladimir Lenin)

This quote sums up for me the past few months of this crisis very well. Many words have been written by academics and others on the impact of this global pandemic on the higher education sector, so this piece will focus on how institutions can think of strategies to mitigate the challenges and harness the opportunities of embedding a new delivery model and what might higher education look like in the near future. I am calling this time in higher education a 'moonshot' moment, taken from what commentators have said of former US President, John F. Kennedy's speech of 1961 (Kennedy, 1961). If there is a silver lining in these times, it's that spending more time in our homes has slowed us down, made us reflect and value the human physical connection we have and this can only benefit education.

In this pandemic, if your senior leadership team thought your academic development unit was on the fringes of your organisation, I hope it does not think this now. We need to put some simple principles in place to value our hard-working staff in higher education. The World Economic Forum Workforce Principles for the COVID-19 Pandemic (World Economic Forum, 2020) are as follows:

- 1) Prioritise planning, wellbeing and communication
- 2) Focus on employee experience, engagement and motivation
- 3) Ensure responsible work redesign
- 4) Balance short-term cost concerns with medium-term resilience and rebound.

Most institutions moved to emergency remote teaching (as coined by Hodges *et al.*, 2020) online in mid-March – not a deliberately designed sequence of learning, that takes time to plan, design and deliver, but a switch from delivering content or a task in a physical environment to a virtual environment. As September approaches, our students may not be so forgiving. We have to remember that the online education market is full of tombstones of failed attempts. It's a myth that online education is cheap or easy or an individualistic endeavour, at least not the quality offerings that have been established for years.

What follows in the next months and years will test what it means to be educated. There are constraints and there is a 'wicked' problem, first defined by Churchman (1967) as 'that class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing'. This wicked problem is happening

in a world that has volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA).

Planning for rapid change

We don't have the luxury of time this summer, but that is not to say we cannot reflect on and deliver an educational experience that educates the students in front of us, doing something very different in higher education than what has come in generations before. The moment of teaching and not lecturing is here. The challenges we face need institutional strategies to overcome them that are strategic and long term in nature, as Van Valkenburg *et al.* (2020) allude to in their project of the EU-funded Embed Project.

The challenges of embedding blended learning

We have as a sector banded about the term Blended Learning for several decades, but now due to COVID-19, it counts. The way in which a university embeds Blended Learning is a key question and will depend on the organisation. As you read this, think how your institution is embedding this – is there a choice of options or one template for all? This will say a lot of what actually your institution thinks of the act of education: a tick box or a transformational act that the university teacher has the agency over?

As we grapple with the challenges of embedding blended learning into our institutions (which won't be a short undertaking), we must think of some the following:

- Staff morale and motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic)
- Staff academic pedagogic literacy including learning design and digital proficiency and ability to see what 'good' looks like in their discipline online. I have seen how difficult this is first hand
- Time to convert a face-to-face module to deliberate blended learning vs. an academic's other priorities
- Maintaining quality across the institution that meets QAA guidelines and the student experience via the NSS and PTES
- Responding to 'academic development initiatives' by academics, which can be classified in these five ways – rejection, no need, suffocation, absorption, subversion (Baume and Popovic, 2016).

Strategies to overcome the challenges

Whilst we have challenges, one must be optimistic at least that some of the challenges can be overcome, or at least lessened by the following:

- Find out what the culture is, before going for 'Star Trek

- Make It So’ management. Listen to the staff, they know how their discipline should be taught
- Consult with staff even if only briefly, given the rapid pace of change communication is very important. It must be timely and clear
- Provide training, facilities and time to learn how to sequence good learning design (Laurillard *et al.*, 2018) to promote cognitive, social and emotional connections to the topics of study
- Promote templates for staff to save time, guidance (not just text, but short videos), this creates quick wins and value. Not a one-size-fits-all template but a choice
- Quality assurance: create a small team. Create a checklist, so quality for staff is upfront and get a small group of academics checking each other’s work
- Build a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) with coaching and mentoring to support all staff
- Provide stable governance and long-term support to embed the change.

The opportunities of embedding blended learning

In this time of global crisis, there are opportunities. Firstly, it’s a chance to widen participation through this change in delivery (especially for mature students, carers and under-represented groups in higher education, e.g. black students).

Secondly, it’s a chance to engage quiet students through deliberately planned blended teaching delivery and tasks.

Thirdly, if we think of graduate employability, we have a chance to be more authentic in our assessment, relevant to industry needs, leading to potentially better jobs for our graduates.

Lastly, we have a chance to rethink the large lecture theatres. Make campus contact count for learning – think context, not content. We have the opportunity to plan for flexible learning spaces and not didactic delivery methods that have not changed since medieval times.

Strategies to harness the opportunities

We have the power in education to provide strong support for our learners, by working collaboratively with the support services in our universities. Remember that a student is educated and raised by the staff community, something that is often forgotten in western cultures.

Students need to be taught how to engage online – they have not come to university with this skill. We need to value and work with academic skills’ tutors on this.

We should be thinking careers from the first year, showing our students the pathway, helping them track their progress and raising their aspirations with cultural input and authentic tasks and assessment in all modules. This is where further collaborative working with the careers team will help.

Providing the resources in the physical and virtual learning environments that enable good teaching to occur is crucial for students to succeed. Continuous investment – that is, as the old adage says ‘don’t be penny wise, pound foolish’ – and evaluate what’s worked in your context. Another: work

collaboratively with your Information Technology (IT) and Estates departments.

This is our moonshot moment...

This is the sector’s ‘moonshot’ moment – think of it as a window of opportunity before the autumn arrives to do the best job possible to ensure the student experience is one of quality. It is possible, think of what was achieved by so many institutions during emergency remote teaching. This summer we owe it to ourselves and our sector to build on this. Our students may have forgiven the emergency remote teaching earlier this year, but as the next academic year approaches, they may not.

In all that has been written about the emergency remote teaching, one thing remains – the role of the teacher. But maybe we need to rethink the role of the teacher and the design of a university for the new millennium. Dr David Helfand, former President of Quest University, Canada, so eloquently summarises this in his 2015 TEDx talk, entitled ‘Designing a university for the new millennium’:

‘So to educate, that’s the only goal we have at our university. To open up young minds and lead them forth, so they have the tools, the capacity, the will, the grit, to confront and to conquer the daunting challenges this new millennium presents. Thank you.’

(Helfand, 2015)

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Programme leadership in a time of crisis: Supporting educational leadership at pace

Jenny Lawrence, University of Hull

Programme leadership is recognised as a challenging and yet crucial role in ensuring student – and so institutional – success (Lawrence and Ellis, 2018). The programme leader is responsible for ensuring that a coherent programme of study is designed and delivered by a diverse collection of academic colleagues. Sometimes these colleagues work in teams, more often they are dispersed across faculties and work independently on their specific contributions to the programme of study.

Working within institutional structures, leading, managing and bringing together academic and professional service colleagues (Lafoe *et al.*, 2013) while addressing various other stakeholder requirements and quality assurance process can be difficult (Zutshi *et al.*, 2013) and isolating (Cahill *et al.*, 2015) at the best of times. In this current situation, this kind of educational leadership is all the more demanding.

Higher education institutions and staff have managed to transition to online delivery at a roaring pace, and have embraced a compassionate, student-centred approach to assessment to ensure student outcomes are not compromised yet retain academic rigour (Lawrence, 2020). These are quick-fire actions for remote delivery, which is quite different to designing a coherent and meaningful online programme of study.

Given we don't know how or if campuses will be open in September, and the multiple scenarios for containing COVID-19 post-lockdown go into several hundreds (Sutherland *et al.* have 270 possible scenarios in their work 'Solution Scanning'), contingency planning is, at best, complex. The most sensible approach seems to be redesigning a programme that is agile enough to be delivered using at least blended, at best online models. Blended and online programmes, to be effective, must be well structured and carefully thought out. They take a whole team to create.

Now is the time to support programme leaders in their educational leadership so they can bring together colleagues who deliver on their programmes in the creation of a 'programme team', a programme team who will work together to ensure a coherent programme that abides by the programme specifications, academic standards (QAA!), offers constructively aligned assessment for learning...and is agile enough to meet any eventuality. As a colleague leading a programme said recently, 'the moon on a stick'.

The SEDA Programme Leader Tool Kit offers evidence-based, practical wisdom, which the busy HE leader, educational developer or programme leader can use in addressing this.

Taking a whole-institution, strategic approach to understanding and then developing the role is crucial, as is understanding the context in which they are working (Lawrence and Ellis, 2018). This context has just changed dramatically. Properly understanding the role can be difficult when on campus – it must seem impossible when working remotely and all the challenges that balancing work and life currently entails. The kit will guide you in pulling together an up-to-the-minute profile of programme leadership in your institution. This can be achieved by getting the right people together for an hour and a half (online of course). Really, this works. The author of this element of the kit, Rowena Senior, offers evidence of how she has done this at Aston (Senior, 2018).

Once you have a picture of the role in our 'new normal', it's time to pay attention to working with others. The role spanned the whole university BC ('Before Covid') – when working at pace with a view to agile programme redesign it is even more important to work with and listen to colleagues in quality, the library, ICT, student support, and educational development

offices. Sarah Moore offers a suite of resources that can be adapted to use online to map who programme leaders need to connect with, why and the most effective and rewarding ways to do this. This element of work is based on Sarah's chapter 'Beyond isolation: exploring the relationality and collegiality of the programme leader role' (Moore, 2018). In these times this just speaks for itself...

With the learning community behind them, programme leaders can now start to address programme-assessment reform with their programme team. Carol Morris and Alec Goodyear (2018) found that bringing programme teams together to look at programme reform not only benefits the programme, it benefits the team. The process of a concerted, united effort and exploration of the student learning experience through the lens of assessment creates a team – rather than a collection of individuals delivering a collection of individual modules. Essential when streamlining a programme of study and preparing for remote delivery.

The toolkit is hosted on the SEDA VLE; institutional members can create a group for their colleagues and use all of the functions of the VLE – hosting online, asynchronous discussions amongst programme leaders, sharing resources and exploring how the wisdom therein can be adopted. Alternatively, all of the resources can be downloaded and adapted to suit your context and, important in these current circumstances, are suitable for online/remote working.

The toolkit is an institutional member benefit (institutional contacts should receive access to the kit over May and June) based on chapters in the SEDA Special *Supporting Programme Leaders and Programme Leadership* (Lawrence and Ellis, 2018). Details of the publication are available at: <https://thesedablog.wordpress.com/2018/05/09/ss39/>.

During lockdown a PDF version of the Special can be purchased from the SEDA Office.

If your institution isn't a member of SEDA and cannot access the kit, this publication may help you support arguably one of the most important roles in contemporary HE: the programme leader.

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'This, too, shall pass. We can figure this out'

Nick Botfield, University of Bedfordshire

The last few months have been hard. Hard on our mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. Hard on our friends, family, co-workers, students, and neighbours. Hard on our communities, services, businesses, society, and the economy. Hard on me, hard on you. So whilst this piece will attempt to reflect on some positives we can take from the current situation, understand how far we have come, and look forward to a brighter future, it does so on the understanding that we are working in a time of tragedy and that whilst even the deepest scars fade, the ability to go through a reflective cycle like this will differ for each and every individual. And that's ok.

With that thought in mind, I see this piece as an 'Open Letter' of sorts; a document to be engaged with at a time when the reader feels ready to be reminded of some positive observations, and to consider how those observations may manifest in our future practice. As it is a reflection and observation, this document may not stand up to academic rigour and scrutiny, and will likely be seen as the 'MiniDisc' to the plethora of 'iPod-standard' rigorous research that will certainly be completed about this era. But if 'we

can't reliably distinguish true memories from false memories' (Loftus, in Jacobs, 2013), this piece aims to act as a crib sheet as we in educational development teams (EDTs) sail further into uncharted territories.

'Lust for life'

So, what did we do when, in mid-March 2020, we were told, in no uncertain terms (looking at you, Dominic), to 'Stay At Home'? Well, we started learning and testing our knowledge. During the first few weeks of lockdown it was the essentials that were missing from our shops (toilet paper, medicines, canned food, and wine) but ten weeks into lockdown and it is flour, eggs, dumbbells, compost, and paint brushes that have become the Easter egg items. Zoom quizzes have become bi-weekly events, with one pub landlord gaining over 100,000 participants every week on YouTube (Griffiths, 2020). These activities point to people using the increased time they are spending in their homes to hone skills, test themselves, and enhance their immediate environments.

From the perspective of someone who leads an EDT, the attendance and engagement in our CPD offering has

grown exponentially and that growth is not limited to those opportunities that are specifically designed to assist staff overcome the emergency situation. Interest in our CPD route to HEA recognition has grown by over 50%, attendance at our Writing Retreats (now online) by 70%, as well as an increase in interest in our Academic Professional Apprenticeship from both internal and external employers. It would be tempting to point to 'time' as being the main reason for this peak in interest, but this would be an overly simplified, and potentially even churlish, explanation. Has the Senior Lecturer with three children under the age of ten really gained time in lockdown? It's doubtful, but her recent participation in our CPD activities suggests that lockdown has given her an opportunity to engage with our offering that she did not previously have. So, what has changed then? From an output perspective two things: access and alignment.

Since the lockdown began, all parts of society have re-evaluated their outputs and had to quickly adapt to the emerging situation. As universities have moved quickly to offer students an online learning experience, EDTs have rapidly made their development

opportunities remotely accessible and aligned to the emerging requirements of staff. With the knowledge that staff had been quickly upskilled in video-conferencing technology, the webinar/online workshop rapidly came back into fashion, giving staff the opportunity to quickly drop in to a short CPD session, which in a face-to-face environment may have been more challenging due to being on a different campus, in a meeting, with an employer, or sat in gridlock on the M1.

Acknowledging that staff needed swift development in the delivery of online teaching and learning, CPD opportunities were created, or adapted, to reflect this.

A potential action from this is that it might be pertinent for EDTs to revisit the opportunities we offer and consider whether they present the flexibility of access that is required by all staff. The second action is for a closer relationship between EDTs and Policy and Planning teams (Hughes, 2020) so that staff development opportunities are bound to the needs of the institution. Likely restructures of the physical, educational and technological learning environments will be an opportunity to achieve this alignment that EDTs should try to not allow to pass them by. By being integral to these changes, we can better measure impact and produce a data set that may give us added protection from a different type of restructure that is, frustratingly, never too far away from our office doors.

'A beautiful day in the neighbourhood'

'It's going to take a while but if we take care of each other, help where we can, and give up some comforts...this, too, shall pass. We can figure this out' (Hanks, 2020). This Tom Hanks tweet on 23 March (the day the UK went into full lockdown), summarised the work of networks and individuals associated with educational development that was occurring at that time, and has been nothing short of magnificent since. Colleagues from institutions all around the world have come together and supported one another in the most difficult of circumstances. This openness and sharing of practice need not stop when 'this too has passed', and if we can take one thing away from all of this,

it is that the more we collaborate, the stronger we are. The work completed by organisations such as AdvanceHE, SEDA, ALT and many more, has been effectively and conscientiously delivered and I would echo David Kernohan's (2020) recent call to have further cross-collaboration between these associations. From a personal perspective, I have re-engaged with my networks on social media, refreshed my commitment to open education, and even helped a local high school with their move to remote teaching. When I reflect on this time, I think of community being strengthened, be that local, social, technological or academic.

Without the ability of precognition, it is challenging to predict what the long-term impact all this will have on Higher Education Institutes and by extension EDTs, but some early developments might shine a light on a certain direction of travel. Coventry University has moved its 40,000 students onto a 'learning experience platform' (their literature frequently informs us that it is not a VLE) called 'Aula', stating as reasons for this move 'strengthening students' learning communities' (Turner, in Coventry University, 2020) and 'in a similar way to social media...building learning communities' (Dunn, in Coventry University, 2020). Glasgow University has recently developed an offer of Microcredentials, delivered through FutureLearn, with the aim of 'equipping [students] with in-demand professional skills and insights' (University of Glasgow, 2020). Meanwhile, the University Partnerships Programme (UPP) Foundation's Civic University Commission has been set up to evaluate how civic universities 'operate today, how they operated in the past, and how they should operate in the future' (UPP Foundation, 2019), with the Director of UPP recommending increased opportunity for 'university civic leads to discuss and collaborate with each other and key sectors...on joint approaches to supporting their local areas' (Brabner, 2020). This is supported by the Secretary of State for Education who in a recent address to the Education Select Committee reinforced the 'important role that universities play in the economies of their local communities' (Grove, 2020). This all could point to a slight

refocusing in Higher Education towards a provision of an online, social, lifelong learning which has an aim of servicing the needs of the local community. For Educational Development, this may necessitate even closer working with faculty management, careers teams, and broader student services, to ensure we are attuned to the necessary developments of curricula (co- and extra-), and the changes to staff skill-sets needed for this form of delivery.

At a more local level the increase of support between academic staff has been noted during this lockdown period, with a clear feeling of camaraderie and teamwork between individuals and teams working towards a common cause. This has, for the most part, been encouraged by senior management who have acknowledged the size of the task and empowered staff to take it on. This staff-to-staff support demonstrates a will to scaffold each other's development that we all knew to exist previously but which was difficult for central teams to capture and encourage in a time of more siloed, office-based working. It would be beneficial for EDTs to use this opportunity to capture this collaboration and disseminate it as a reminder to senior management as to the advantages of empowerment and autonomy. It will also be important for us to harness this energy and create even more inventive and innovative methods of encouraging staff to support each other, through communities of practice that have an allied purpose of championing the work of those marginalised in our academic communities (*i.e.* through gender, age, race, disability).

'OK computer'

Even the most ardent Luddites will have quietly expressed thanks that lockdown occurred in a time after the outputs of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Sir Timothy Berners-Lee. Whether it be to help guide a morning exercise routine, connect with loved ones, see what a grotty old wooden pallet can be transformed into, or look up the recipe of a delectable syrup sponge – online content and services have been the net into which most of society fell after being thrown from the Cliffs of Covid. In HE we had the 'online pivot', the 'move to online', the 'emergency online teaching', and the 'ineffective use of

digital tools to poorly crisis manage a desperate situation'. Whatever the flavour of your description of the change to teach students in a non-face-to-face environment, it was never in any doubt that technology was going to be the altar upon which we prayed.

The impact of this move, I am sure, will be the subject of many a PhD thesis and PG research study for years to come, and I won't attempt to give any kind of a measurement here. Likewise, I write this with the crisis far from over and without the benefit of a crystal ball as to whether in September we will be in the 'Extra Hot' or 'Lemon and Herb' zone on the government's Covid-ometer. Nevertheless, the current strong likelihood is that teaching and learning provision in September will have an enhanced digital component, and it is likely that it is going to be undesirable for institutions to put that digitalisation back in its box after this period. From an educational development perspective, this will necessitate a mass upskilling of teaching staff from the 'emergency online pedagogy' currently being delivered (Reis, 2020), to one that has the ability to deliver distance, blended and face-to-face teaching, possibly in parallel...and by September. No easy feat, but there are positives that can be taken from such an undertaking.

In a meeting with one member of senior management recently it was said to me, 'Nick, I bet you couldn't have imagined that a mode of delivery [blended learning] your department has been talking about for years would be on every institutional agenda in 2020?' And it is true, most of those working in educational development have been promoting good online teaching practices for many years with varying degrees of success. The short turnaround of this upskilling will undoubtedly require centralised teams to work together with Faculty to develop threshold expectations for different modes of delivery and encourage innovative and creative ways to surpass them. This will give those involved in educational development the opportunity to embed the principles and practices we have been espousing, working with faculty in earnest to deliver appropriate, positive developments for our learners. I'm not sure this needed a global pandemic, but

it took one, and this staff development process can take place in an environment where most will appreciate the requirement for evolution and the necessity to engage.

In the longer term, EDTs need to find new ways of embedding digital learning into institutional strategic planning, teaching and learning strategies, annual development monitoring, and course enhancement plans. It is only when digital learning is included in these discussions that it will be given the resources and support required to be effective. This necessitates an approach whereby representatives of educational development are active in the conversations around enhancement that occur at all levels of an institution, including governance. At some point there should also be time taken to consider if the separation between Educational Development and Learning Technology in central teams is still appropriate. As we ask faculty to blend the lines between the online and the offline, what message does it send that we often separate our teams between 'learning tech' and 'EdD/T&L'? A unification of these two groups could see a richer output and potentially create an operation that would be 'fitter [for purpose], happier and more productive' (Yorke *et al.*, 1995).

'Be excellent to each other'

When the COVID-19 crisis began and the world was trying to understand its potential to disrupt our lives, the comparison to seasonal flu inevitably occurred. The huge flaws in this comparison were clear to see, but a statistic from this time stayed with me just by its normality – the seasonal flu kills approximately half a million people each year.

One of the positives that has been noted from the recent situation is an increase in the awareness of mental health issues and an acknowledgement that without action there could be a mental health crisis occurring out of the mourning and isolation brought about by the disease. At Bedfordshire, for staff, that action has included, but is in no way limited to, sharing media of their isolation experience (e.g. images of gardening projects, poetry, songs), the introduction of Fika and/or virtual coffee breaks with no agenda, and

the sharing of good practice, common pitfalls and small victories. From a student perspective, student unions and support services have been mobilised and active in getting information to the student body, faculty have been utilising learning analytics to follow-up on disengagement, and mitigation services have been promoted to be used when appropriate. This has been fantastic to witness and be a part of, but flu will most likely kill half a million people again next year, and the mental health issues of our staff and students will likely not subside. Therefore, Higher Education action on mental health needs to be for life, not just for Covid. Prof. Simon Tickell's (2020) sentiments that Higher Education cannot be held solely accountable for the failings of government and society around mental health provision are entirely fair; however, that's not to say there are not some key areas where the sector must improve its approach to preventing an exacerbation of mental health issues.

With regards to staff wellbeing, the practice of casual and fixed-term contracts for teaching staff (UCU, 2019), the use of workload planning models that bear scant relationship to reality to actual output (Kernohan, 2019), and a lack of clear development pathways (HEPI, 2019), have all been cited as reasons behind staff mental health conditions. The last of these is where EDTs can possibly have the biggest impact. Through closer collaboration with Organisational Development teams, we can play a key role in designing and promoting development pathways by unifying our offers to ensure that we treat staff development both holistically and individually. From a less extrinsic perspective, EDTs can offer safe, flexible spaces for open, honest, off-the-record conversations regarding academic practice, encouraging teaching practitioners to be less isolated even after they're back on campus.

In terms of student wellbeing, universities have long been grappling with the consequences that widening participation and massification of higher education brings. Access and participation plans 'seek to set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access,

succeed in and progress from higher education', and EDTs should be involved in informing the objectives, and delivering on the outcomes of these plans, reporting success against measurable targets. Finally, EDTs should continue endeavours to embed inclusive principles and practices, such as Universal Design for Learning and Assessment for Learning (formative assessment done correctly works...we clearly enjoy a quiz), in overarching institutional teaching and learning strategies and ongoing development of teaching and learning provision.

'It will be alright in the end... and if it's not alright, it's not the end'

Some of the recommendations made above have been occurring in many EDTs for a number of years, and my comments should be taken as endorsements to the work that has already occurred, and a call to 'double-down' on these efforts. Equally, some of the recommendations can only be enacted with institutional support and so should be read as an encouragement to senior management to utilise the extraordinary breadth and depth of knowledge and skills that sit within EDTs.

As universities prepare to be asked more and more to demonstrate their value to the country, so too must EDTs show their value to their institution. It is my contention that the more that we are able to demonstrate an approach that harmonises with significant international, national,

local, and institutional strategic drivers, and measure ourselves against indicators, the more we will be able to demonstrate that value. This is, in no way, to argue for those working in education development to abandon the more qualitative approach that has been so valuable to institutions up to this point. However, it would be a dream to sit down with a group of ED colleagues at some point in the future without starting the conversation with 'so, who is being restructured?' I believe that some of the recommendations above will help towards that, but then I also was convinced that MiniDiscs were the future...

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Book Review

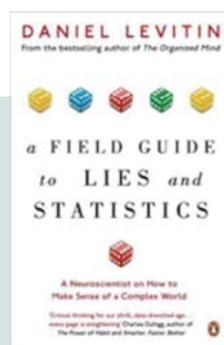
A Field Guide to Lies and Statistics

by Daniel Levitin

304 pages, Penguin, 2018

ISBN-10: 9780241974872

ISBN-13: 978-0241974872



At the time I was reading this book I also re-read an article by Gerry Dunne, 'Beyond critical thinking to critical being: Criticality in higher education and life'

(2015). Both read in preparation for the start of the year and the teaching of an undergraduate research methods module. What struck me was the clear

and present message that education is about the problems of 'can we really know that? And how do they know that?' (the quote is taken from the back

cover of Levitin's book) – criticality in a nutshell. The relevance, for academic developers, I feel lies in exactly these questions, within our own practice and then also within the practice of those who we work with (and their students).

Can we do context- (content-) free criticality? Levitin uses many examples throughout his work, some of which I will use for research methods but some of which will also feature in next semester's PGCLTHE – not least of which will be the four-fold table, a tool for framing probabilities and considering them in relation to effective decision-making. Levitin's book suggests that the 'skills' advocated for modern life in an information age can be applied in other contexts and learnt – hence his book. Dunne's earlier work also argues for the generalist side of this specific/generalist debate and here is a PGCLTHE question: where do you as a teacher sit in relation to this question (and perhaps the even bigger one of the purposes of an HE degree? Dunne says 'think critically',

Levitin says 'learn how to do this').

The book is divided into three sections: evaluating numbers, evaluating words and evaluating the world, roughly 100 pages, 60 pages and 80 pages – reflecting Levitin's scientific background. The book claims it shows how a neuroscientist makes sense of a complex world. However, for any teacher (and any teacher of teachers), there are some great sections on plausibility (California marijuana smokers double every year – an actual numeric impossibility), use of the four-fold table in decision-making, quotations and how they can be distorted (and misattributed), missing control groups, logical statements (fascinating), varieties of logical fallacies (again fascinating), and veracity of knowledge sources (for example, looking at a web page and seeing what other pages are linked to from it).

I found some parts challenging to grasp, particularly the one on conditional probability. Consider a blood match at

a crime scene with a defendant's blood type. The probability of a blood match occurring due to chance is 1%. This is not the same as a 1% chance that the defendant is innocent. Levitin points out that the probability of a blood match given defendant innocent is not the same as the probability of innocence given a blood match. A little baffling but his cancer/high risk group illustration of this principle using the favoured four-fold table is excellent.

Overall, more of a library resource than a course textbook, but certainly a thought-provoking one.

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