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Editorial

We start this edition with reflections from three current Vice Chancellors – Claire Taylor, Julie Hall and Shân Wareing – on the role that educational development (and SEDA) has played in their professional journeys. With our focus on enhancing student experiences, supporting and nurturing colleagues and working with agility within contexts of flux and change, education development has given these exceptional leaders the skills to address key challenges in contemporary higher education. The education development theme continues for the next two papers. Hoping to inspire its application in educational development contexts, Kerry Dobbins and Helen King report on the practicalities of researching within a participatory paradigm – a project funded under the SEDA Small Grant Scheme. Gemma Mansi and Jo Peat then offer insights into the development of SEDA/JISC's Student Partnership Impact Awards and the way in which the scheme offers a lens through which to explore the health of partnership cultures. Continuing the student partnership theme, Nigel Page, Hilda Mulrooney and Gemma Shearman offer an example of how they reimagined a first-year curriculum by adopting design thinking to facilitate a greater understanding of the needs and concerns of stakeholders and the role of empathy in curriculum design. Duncan Hindmarch, Juan Raman Mullor and Leonard Stuart also focus on student partnership and dialogue by providing a fascinating account of piloting live learning dialogues. The final papers offer new insights into transformational practice in higher education, with Andrew Whelan and Duncan Hindmarch providing a comparative analysis of student engagement across face to face and online environments – a critical discussion as many universities move to a blended approach to learning to support commuting students and the increase in students in paid work. In their article, Yasir Alfadhl, Yue Chen, Michael Chai and Xue Zhou offer a practical and scalable model for embedding structured AI into higher education assessments while preserving critical thinking and academic integrity, and finally, Rachel Horrocks-Birss, Tom Cunningham and Tracy Galvin share their experiences of leading TESTA work as educational developers. The editorial committee would like to thank all the authors for their contributions. The committee would also like to say a special thank you to Steve Outram for his contribution to the magazine. Steve has commissioned some fascinating articles including The View from the Top in this edition. Steve is stepping down from the editorial committee but will continue to write for the magazine.

The view from the top: Three vice-chancellors talk about their educational development journeys

Claire Taylor, Plymouth Marjon University, **Julie Hall,** London Metropolitan University, **Shân Wareing,** Middlesex University, and **Steve Outram,** Higher Education Consultant

Introduction

One cannot fail to have noticed that there are currently three vice-chancellors of English universities who have not only achieved Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive status at their respective universities but have also made significant contributions to the Staff

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Educational Developments' and the SEDA Blogs' readership ranges from full-time educational developers in units to everyone who is interested in matters such as learning, teaching, assessment, course design and the wider process of educational reform.

If you wish to contribute an article (max. 3000 words) please find the contributor guidelines on the SEDA website for useful details, and send your article to the SEDA office (office@seda.ac.uk).

and Educational Development Association (SEDA) and to *Educational Developments*, more specifically. We asked them to share a little about their careers, and their thoughts on the role of educational development in supporting the success of both staff and students in universities. We are enormously grateful that they agreed to give up some of their precious time to share their reflections with us. Here are their stories.

Progression to vice-chancellor: From schools to scholarship to strategic leadership (Claire Taylor)

I qualified as a primary school teacher in 1990 and embarked on what became a ten-year 'first career' in schools, including as a head teacher. But in 1998, my career trajectory was changed forever by a newspaper advert in the *Times Educational Supplement*. The ad was looking for teachers who taught without reference to ability labelling. I was intrigued and I thought (although I wasn't sure!) that I fitted the bill.

I became part of the 'Learning without Limits' research project at the University of Cambridge which considered the problematic practice of labelling by ability where a person described as being of 'low ability' now, in the present, is assumed to have more limited learning potential than those who may be judged as 'more able', and the expectation that these differences remain predictably fixed. Contrary to this view, the 'Learning without Limits' book (Hart *et al.,* 2004) contains case studies (including of my own classroom practice) that show how it is possible to develop effective practice free from determinist beliefs about learner ability – practice which expands opportunity for individual success.

The project name was coined from Stephen Jay Gould's book *The Mismeasure of Man*:

> *'We pass through this world but once. Few tragedies can be more extensive than the stunting of life, few injustices deeper than the denial of an opportunity to strive or even to hope, by a limit imposed from without, but falsely identified as lying within.'* (Gould, 1981)

Before that project, it hadn't occurred to me that learners were being written off because of a 'limit imposed from without, but falsely identified as lying within'. My attitude and approach to teaching and learning was different and was positively validated by the research. Critically, a desire to work with purpose, identifying and removing those barriers to educational opportunity that are systemically embedded in the fabric of society (including clumsy and often self-fulfilling labels around achievement and ability), has stayed with me ever since.

In my early 30s, as the research project came to a close, I started my second career, in higher education, as a lecturer at Bishop Grosseteste University (now Lincoln Bishop University). During this time I worked with trainee teachers, ran a work-based foundation degree programme for teaching assistants in schools, and did my PhD part time 'on the job' – a longitudinal study of what enabled my students (typically identified as 'widening access' learners) to succeed within the academy and the workplace, applying much of what I'd learned through the 'Learning without Limits' project.

In 2007, I was promoted into a newly created role as Head of Learning and Teaching and was officially unleashed into the world of educational development. I discovered HEDG (Heads of Educational Development Group) and SEDA; networks brimming with thoughtful, generous and values-led individuals. As an educational developer in a small university, I had no 'team' to speak of, so used HEDG and SEDA to test ideas, validate practice, and develop my approach. I got involved in the SEDA Conferencing and Events Committee and with the *Educational Developments* magazine. Whenever I interacted with a colleague on a committee, at a conference or in an editorial team meeting, I always came away with new knowledge and insights.

A stint on the senior leadership team at Bishop Grosseteste as Dean of Students was followed in 2012 by four years at St Mary's University, Twickenham as Vice-Principal and then Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic). This was where I could really get to grips with learning and teaching strategy, setting the direction of travel for several years ahead, convincing the vice-chancellor and senior colleagues of the need to prioritise great teaching, and ensuring structures and resources were aligned to deliver our goals. Again, SEDA featured heavily as a trusted network for developing my thinking and sense-checking ideas. In 2016, I joined Wrexham University as Deputy Vice-Chancellor, with a broad remit across professional services and academic leadership. It was at Wrexham that I fully developed the idea of Distributed Educational Development, recognised by Advance HE with a CATE (Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence) in 2021.

In 2023, I took up the role of Vice-Chancellor at Plymouth Marjon University, pitching in my interview to develop a university committed to ending social inequity and to being a beacon of opportunity and possibility for the people of Plymouth, the region and beyond. I wanted to build on Marjon's foundational purpose, traced back to 1840 and rooted in the work of brave educators who acted outrageously by daring to provide life-changing educational opportunities for those relegated to the very margins of society. Coming full circle…the parallels with 'Learning without Limits' are clear.

With limited resources what do you see as the main priorities for educational development in your university?

For me, strategic alignment is critical for educational development priorities. Our institutional strategy, Marjon 2030, is simple and clear, with three core priorities related to Student Success, Research and Knowledge Exchange, and Place and Social Purpose. Educational development work straddles these priority areas, notably through the development of a new Curriculum Framework focusing on not only what, but how, we deliver our programmes to maximise student success.

In addition, educational development activity has much to contribute in relation to risk mitigation. Again, alignment is key, this time with the strategic risk register. All universities will have identified key risks related to People and Culture, Student Experience and Government Policy (and more besides). Whether it be ensuring we have appropriately qualified people to deliver great teaching or support learning, or assuring quality and consistency of student experience across our institutions or with academic partnerships, or being proactive in the wake of external policy and regulatory changes – all of these are areas of priority for educational development.

Finally, I have never come across an educational developer who has not been secure in their values-base, especially if they have been involved with SEDA. Operating within a values-led framework continues to be important for me because I know that my practice as a senior leader in education is better for it and I would suggest that it should continue to be critical for every educational developer. Therefore, a major priority for me is to ensure that educational development at Marjon can inhabit not only our organisational values of behaving with humanity, ambition, curiosity and independence, but also SEDA's values related to understanding how people learn: being scholarly, professional and ethical; developing learning communities; valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity; and being reflective practitioners.

Claire: you have in the past discussed how distributed educational development is a solution that is both efficient but also enhancing – have you been able to achieve that at Marjon?

It's critical to understand that distributed approaches do not just happen by accident and that there is a need to create the conditions for such approaches to thrive in order to achieve maximum impact across learning and teaching initiatives. I have previously described (Taylor, 2020) that such conditions are encapsulated by the principles of invitational participation, the dis-establishment of leadership boundaries, and the need to embrace varieties of expertise by welcoming participation from any member of staff who volunteers to do so.

I have certainly seen these principles enacted in the work currently being taken forward as part of the 'Student Success' strand of our university strategy, Marjon 2030. A good example is how our Dean of Teaching and Learning, Professor Jennie Winter, has led development of a new Curriculum Framework, through offering opportunities for colleagues to lead clearly defined curriculum change projects working across academic and professional staff teams alongside their substantive role. I have also written in the past about the need to ensure senior leadership 'buy in' for such approaches – we achieved this at Marjon as an Executive Leadership Team by designating the Curriculum Framework development work as one of four annual strategic priorities. This has signalled to colleagues that not only the content, but also the approach, is of strategic importance and valued.

Like Claire, Julie Hall, Professor and Vice-Chancellor at London Metropolitan University, began her educational career as a teacher.

From part-time sociology lecturer to Vice-Chancellor at London Metropolitan University via educational development (Julie Hall)

I finished my undergraduate degree in 1984, which is a long, long time ago. It was the year of the miners' strike – sometimes described as the biggest industrial dispute in post-war Britain. I spent a year as an administrator at an insurance company, supporting the miners' cause on weekends while learning that I needed to find a meaningful job.

I came upon a local FE college in South London that had over-recruited and was desperate for teachers, and that changed everything for me. Ten years later, a passionate teacher with further academic qualifications, three children and lots more experience, I joined a higher education college. It was then I discovered learning and teaching centres and SEDA. Encouraged by SEDA people, I began my educational development journey focusing on inclusive teaching, co-creation with students and the spaces where education impacts equity, eventually becoming SEDA co-chair.

From course leader, I moved to delivering the PGCert in Learning and Teaching at the University of Roehampton, joining an educational development team on a fractional appointment so that I could look after my family. Later, I became the Director of Learning and Teaching at Roehampton, leading the learning and teaching strategy during a period of great change – the National Student Survey, Professional Standards for Teaching, changes to funding, and the creation of the Office for Students. As SEDA co-chair at this time, I valued this community immensely and learnt so much from working at a national level on behalf of the organisation. I gained a National Teaching Fellowship Award and a Chair in Higher Education. Proving myself, I suppose, as an effective leader and a safe change manager, my teams grew, and I was asked to temporarily act as Dean to the Business School – the largest School in the university at a critical time. This experience encouraged me to consider moving into senior management and I was delighted, a couple of years later to become PVC, managing the Deans. Four years in that role prepared me to broaden my influence through a Deputy Vice-Chancellor role.

I left London and joined Solent University as Deputy Vice-Chancellor in 2017, serving under two vice-chancellors and also enjoying eight months as acting Vice-Chancellor before returning to London as London Metropolitan's Deputy Vice-Chancellor in 2022. I became Vice-Chancellor in August 2024. London Met's history of working-class resilience, great teaching and deep commitment to transformative education speaks to my campaigning origins and ambitions to lead one of the most equitable universities in the UK.

From educational development I gained powerful experiences that contributed to being a vice-chancellor: a focus on the student experience, the importance of nurturing communities, agility in a context of constant change, awareness of audience, patience and the need for planning, continuous learning, and leading by example with hope.

I understand, as Rebecca Solnit says in her book *Hope in the Dark*), 'hope locates itself in the premise that we don't know what will happen, and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty there is room to act' (Solnit, 2016, p. xii).

With limited resources what are the main priorities for educational development?

A colleague regularly asks, 'will it make the boat go faster?' This frames my current approach to educational development priorities. The financial context is harsh, student expectations are shifting rapidly, and as Vice-Chancellor, I am held to account across audit and risk management, health and safety, financial sustainability, Office for Students (OfS) compliance, a community of colleagues, a Board of Governors, and external partners, all of which require care and attention.

There are three clear priorities I suggest for educational development that, more or less, should be applicable at most universities:

1. To be the engine room of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, highly tuned to university key performance indicators, relentlessly focused on continual improvement
2. To be at the forefront of pedagogical change to ensure the university is best placed to adapt to changes in technology, government policy, course design and student demands
3. To be at the centre of a growing community of colleagues focused on 1) and 2) above whether it is through the PGCert alumni community, course leaders, technologists, academic mentors or researchers. This includes knowing who the staff representatives are on Academic Board, Senate and the Board of Governors and working with them to keep educational development on the agenda.

In summary, this means being strategic and ensuring the most significant impact on the university.

How can SEDA engage more with VCs and Principals?

On one level, SEDA doesn't need to engage more with vice-chancellors and principals if SEDA helps its members in the priorities above. I sometimes think I was at my most stressed as Director of Learning and Teaching. I now realise I was busy doing some things that I felt were of critical importance, but if I had asked, I think my VC or DVC might have disagreed.

Not every change to teaching or assessment needs to be rooted in educational development. SEDA might encourage members to work more effectively with colleagues across the university, like timetabling, Human Resources or estates. A new curriculum management tool can provide for large-scale curriculum change more than workshops for lecturers. SEDA colleagues might welcome more support in operating on strategic committees and utilising the vast knowledge and good practice found in SEDA to influence strategy and policy. Ensuring a PGCert in Learning and Teaching in HE or FHEA is a condition to apply for promotion is another good example.

Another way SEDA can encourage a strategic approach to educational development is to work closely with other bodies like Advance HE, Universities UK, mission groups like Million Plus and the Heads of Educational Development Group. A SEDA position paper on the use of AI in Learning and Teaching and Assessment or on ensuring high quality student outcomes with franchise partners would meet the need of busy leaders from a trusted voice on critical matters. To SEDA members I would say – send SEDA publications to your senior managers with a note to your boss indicating how the examples there might meet the needs of your strategy.

Professor Shân Wareing, VC and Chief Executive Officer at Middlesex University also started in educational development early in her career.

From educational development to vice-chancellor (Shân Wareing)

I started teaching when I was a student, supplementing my income as an English Language and Literature undergraduate, and then as a PhD student studying socio-linguistics. In my mid-twenties, applying for a temporary summer job to teach English for Academic Purposes in Kobe, Japan, I replied to the interview question, 'why do you want the job?,' with 'I love teaching, but I suppose everyone says that'. My interviewer laughed and said, no, that wasn't always the case, which was perhaps my first inkling of how important and precious it is to find a job doing something you really love. I've never lost the sense that it's an honour to teach, and the privilege of having an education carries the responsibility of enabling others to benefit from their education.

I returned from Japan to take up my first full-time lecturing job, at what is now the University of Roehampton, and there I came across SEDA, and I was immediately captivated by the generosity of the community, and its expertise, scholarship and wisdom. I wanted to learn about teaching, not just to be a better teacher but to enable better teaching all around me. In learning how to create the conditions for better teaching, I moved jobs frequently. Over 34 years, I have held ten different full-time jobs in nine universities. The lectureship in English Language at Roehampton was followed by a lectureship in Learning and Teaching at Kingston University, from where I returned to Roehampton for a temporary Headship of an Education Development Unit, before taking a permanent job establishing a new Educational Development Unit in what is now the University of South Wales. The next job was Director of the new Educational Development Unit at Royal Holloway, University of London; five years later I moved to be Dean of Learning and Teaching at the University of the Arts London. In seven years as a Dean, I had opportunities to lead digital innovation, student enterprise and employability, and whole university change. My next step was to a Pro Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning position at Buckinghamshire New University, and then a second PVC position, in Education and Student Experience at London South Bank University. That job evolved into Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer, before I became the Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Northampton with leadership of the Faculties (the first time I had directly line managed academic staff). Over time, I became better at navigating institutional politics, working effectively with the Board, managing risks, planning budgets and capital expenditure, and public speaking. I grew confident in my ability to learn quickly when faced with a problem I hadn't encountered before, and I worked with lawyers and consultants on complex cases and projects, learning from their professional cultures and expertise. Four years after taking the Northampton job, I became Vice-Chancellor at Middlesex University and by then, as well as three faculties, I had line managed every professional service area.

From the start, SEDA was a constant and reliable support for me. Through SEDA I pursued my commitment to teaching and educational development, and as Co-Chair of SEDA, I gained experience of the executive functions of a membership organisation and of collaboration with national and international peers. It was a SEDA small grant that led to one of the publications of which I am most proud, in Studies in Higher Education, and that success increased my confidence in my ability to write and to publish. Many years later, that ability was vital to being a successful VC candidate, as it was through writing blogs for publication I tested and refined my views about higher education and developed a 'voice' to share my ideas.

Being an educational developer has fundamentally influenced my approach to change; concepts like growth mind set, and zone of proximal development are just as relevant to strategic planning and organisational transformation as they are in a classroom. So as a senior university leader, I see educational development not as optional but as vital to an effective university, where we are curious about how people learn and always seeking ways to help more people learn more effectively and reduce barriers to learning, and this applies to our students and to our staff as well.

Universities evolve and look different over time while still delivering our core mission as bridges to satisfying professional work. Similar educational development may be structured in different ways but the skills and knowledge will always be essential to organisational development and to teaching excellence.

Thank you Claire, Julie and Shân for your continued contribution to SEDA and Educational Developments!

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Insights from conducting a participatory educational development research project: Navigating the challenges

Kerry Dobbins, University of Warwick, and **Helen King,** Bath Spa University

Participatory research (PR) prioritises a collaborative approach to the research process *with* those 'whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study' (Bergold and Thomas, 201, p. 192). PR can be seen as an umbrella term for varied research designs, methods and frameworks that share the common element of doing research *with* those affected by the issue or topic of study, rather than *on* them. As well as promoting inclusion through collaboration with participants across the research process, participatory approaches shift the power structures and dynamics apparent within more traditional researcher-led projects.

In education, there has been growing interest in using PR approaches with students in research or evaluation studies to amplify their voices and interests, as well as ensure projects are built on foundations of meaningful partnership and dialogue (see for example Austen and Donnelly, 2023). It was this focus on centring diverse voices and foregrounding shared decision-making and mutual learning that led us to adopt a PR approach for our 2024 SEDA Research and Evaluation Small Grant project. This project aimed to explore the features that characterise educational developers' expertise.

We offer this article as a personal account of our experiences in researching within a participatory paradigm. As well as proving to be a wonderful and fascinating way to work with the community, there have also been tensions and compromises to navigate. We hope that sharing our insights borne through our practical experience with PR will both inspire its use in educational development contexts and inform others in their own implementations of the approach.

Our SEDA Small Grant project

Our project developed from research that Helen conducted previously into teacher expertise, which led to her influential model that categorises the characteristics of teacher expertise into three key areas: pedagogical content knowledge, artistry of teaching and professional learning (King, 2022). It is the specific remit of educational developers to support teachers to develop their expertise; yet we found this meta-layer concerning the development of educational developers' expertise to be an under-explored area. Our project aimed to gather an evidence-base that characterises the development of educational developers' expertise as well as helping to inform professional learning support and creation of outputs for those within the field.

Whilst we are members of the community, the educational development field is incredibly diverse in many ways, including disciplinary backgrounds of practitioners, institutional positioning and professional status. Additionally, the role is practised in differing institutional contexts. Our aim for the research was to support reflection on journeys of learning to become an educational developer and developing our practice. Considering the diversity of the field, we had to recognise the limitations and potential biases that we could bring into the study if collaboration with the community was not a central feature of our research design. Without this collaboration, the research methods would have been designed through the lens of our own experiences, which may not have connected with or allowed others to meaningfully engage with and reflect upon their own experiences.

Furthermore, it was important that we were doing the project *with* the community, so that implications of, and actions from, the study can be decided through group dialogue and shared decision-making. It is for the community to decide how we act on the results and where our findings take us.

Implementing our PR approach

Conducting a PR project was a new experience for both of us. As such, we found it incredibly helpful to review the guides and frameworks discussed within the literature, as well as learn from the research experiences shared by others.

Vaughn and Jacquez (2020, p. 5) highlight that 'the ways in which stakeholders participate will vary at each step of the research process, and there are infinite options as to how to share decision making in each research task'. Figure 1 shows the steps in the PR cycle – partner, design, collect, analyse, disseminate, act – and the 'choice points' that indicate the degree of participation that may be involved within each step.

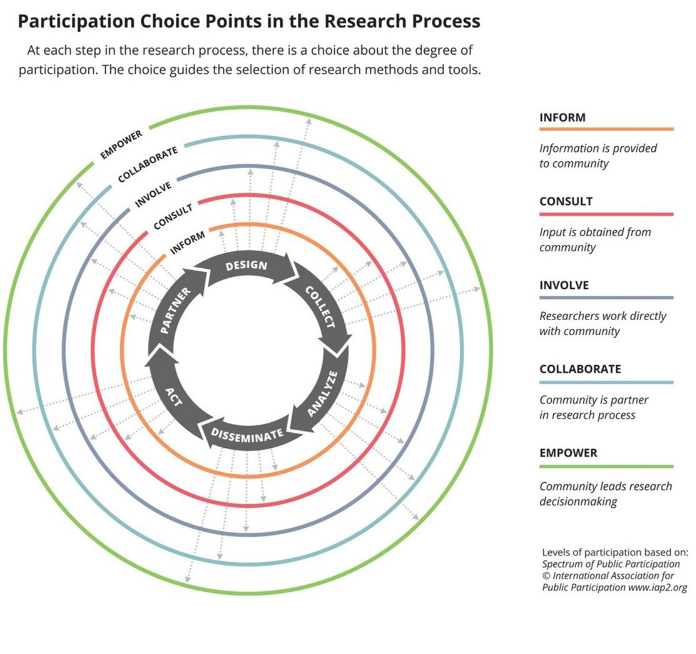

Figure 1 'Choice points': the intersection between participation and steps in the research cycle (image from Vaughn and Jacquez, 2020)

This framework helped to guide our PR process:

Partner: drawing on Austen and Donnelly's (2023) participatory evaluation insights, we created a small Informal Advisory Group (IAG) of members from the educational development community to inform and co-construct all the steps in the research cycle.

Design: the research methods were decided and trialled with the IAG. Research methods within PR are frequently emergent and qualitative in nature. Our project implemented three methods that are often utilised in PR research:

- *Photo elicitation:* this participatory visual method uses images to stimulate reflection and discussion. Participants were asked to choose an image (from a diverse range) that resonated with their experiences of being an educational developer
- *Oral storytelling:* this method captures participants' lived experiences using stories and engages them in making meaning of that experience. In paired discussions, participants were asked to share stories about key milestones, turning points or significant moments in their journeys as educational developers
- *World café method:* this method engages participants in rotating small group discussions where specific questions and ideas are discussed. Participants engaged in discussion on three topics:
  - o Identifying the activities they do as educational developers and how they go about doing these things
  - o The learning that helped them in their journeys as educational developers
  - o The knowledge and skills they need in their roles as educational developers.

Collect: via the SEDA Jiscmail, the wider UK-based educational development community were invited to participate in an online workshop where the co-designed research methods were implemented. Participants engaged in all three methods within a 1-hour and 30-minutes online session. Three sessions took place with 18 participants in total.

Analyse: initial analysis of data was conducted by a project research assistant, supervised by us as project leads. These findings were then shared and discussed with the IAG to inform further interpretation of the data.

Disseminate: we are in the process now of sharing findings with the wider community in ways that allow for dialogue and shared decision making. In line with our PR approach, we are not rushing to publish project findings and are taking time to consult meaningfully with the community regarding interpretation of the data and appropriate next steps.

Act: following the dissemination stage, we will be acting on decisions made with the community regarding legacy and next steps for this work.

Benefits of the PR approach

There are incredible benefits to working within a PR approach. In particular, the qualitative and reflective research methods typically used in PR enabled the amplification of diverse voices that we hoped to achieve. Through this, what we heard, and didn't hear, in the data was at times unexpected and surprising. We are still considering the data, as well as the silences or gaps within it, with the community, but we share below three important points from our initial findings that are informing our discussions:

1. Emerging across the data for each research method are the values, traits and aptitudes that underpin how educational developers carry out their roles. Ways of working as an educational developer are well-captured across the data. What we do as educational developers was less evident (though we must consider if the research methods and questions asked influenced this)
2. Knowledge, skills and ways of working were largely situated within the interpersonal realm, *i.e.* how we work with people
3. 'Expertise' of educational developers may be appearing within our small data sample more as the intangible ways that we work with others to lead and facilitate change.

Navigating the challenges

As Figure 1 demonstrates, there is no one way of conducting a PR project and decisions are required at various points about the extent of participation that can be achieved. What we have found is that conducting a PR project is, in effect, a balancing act between achieving the goals of collaboration across the research process and working within study parameters. We share below some of the challenges and tensions that we had to navigate at the various 'choice points' of the process. We hope that witnessing some of our practical decision making and the compromises we had to make may be helpful for those embarking on their own PR project. In sharing, we do not suggest that our decisions were the only 'right' ones that could be made. Others may have made different decisions. Our aim is to surface the challenges inherent within the balancing act of our project to support readers in pondering how they may navigate such tensions in their own projects.

Forming the Informal Advisory Group – Who and how to include?

The Informal Advisory Group (IAG) played a central role within the project and was a key aspect of our participatory approach. We established the group in two ways – we targeted colleagues who we knew had an interest in the project topic and we put a call out via the Heads of Educational Development Group mailing list. To be workable, we needed to keep the group small and decided upon a maximum size of 10 (including both of us). Our first tension to navigate was in recognising that we as co-leads were making the decisions about who was to be involved as an IAG member. To steer ourselves through it effectively, we ensured that we had a clear rationale for the decisions made about who to select. In this case, it was about ensuring geographic and institutional-type representation within the IAG. Setting out and being guided by this rationale was very important in a context where we already know and have existing professional relationships with colleagues across the community.

In forming the group, we also needed to recognise the busy working contexts of colleagues and that the IAG would be an additional task. To be transparent in our invitation for membership, we gave an indication of time commitment, which included the number of meetings and hours of engagement expected. This information meant that we were deciding their time commitment upfront; however, we were also mindful of having care for our members and ensuring they were able to make informed decisions about participation.

Gaining ethics approval – Constraining the PR process?
Austen and Donnelly (2023) highlight that ethical approval can be a challenge for participatory research where methods emerge rather than being designed in advance. We were conscious that it may be difficult to gain approval if we could not give an indication of the methods we would be using and types of data we might be collecting. From an ethics perspective, we needed to show how participants would be fully informed about what their participation would involve, how we would treat and secure the data collected, what anonymisation or confidentiality might look like, *etc*. To address this, we gave a 'diet' of methods in the ethics form that we might use following refinement with the IAG, for example, the IAG might decide to use one or a combination of them and would decide the specific prompts to be used in each method. The methods proffered in the ethics application form were the three listed above and by identifying them, we could discuss what participation would mean and look like for each method, what data would be collected and how anonymised, stored, withdrawn, *etc*.

An argument could be made that we diminished the co-design aspect of the PR approach by giving this detail within the ethics application; however, we felt it was a compromise that had to be made to secure approval. Additionally, a fully co-creative approach would require considerable time from the IAG and a certain knowledge or understanding of participatory research methods. Our rationale for inclusion in the IAG was geographic and institutional-type representation rather than research background or expertise. Consequently, we believe it was more productive that we as leads used our expertise to create a menu of methods that we discussed and refined further with the IAG. Ultimately, the group decided to employ all three methods in our data-gathering sessions.

Project leading – When to step in and step back?
A tension that is possibly inherent to some extent in PR is the balance of leading and being led by the community. As a SEDA Small Grant project, there are perhaps more elements of leading than might be found in other PR projects. For example, a project outline had to be submitted as part of the grant application process, and successful completion against certain timelines is a condition of funding. These aspects necessitated more direct leadership by us at certain points than may have been the case outside of this context. Importantly, we discussed together where we felt that 'stepping in' to lead was necessary and ensured that we had a rationale for doing so. This rationale could be articulated to the IAG to assure transparency with the group.

There were also times where we were conscious of wanting to 'step back' to reduce the possibility of our voices or experiences overly influencing discussions or decisions. We had to be constantly aware of the risk of us 'stepping in' when we wanted to 'step back' and we stayed alert to this risk by constantly discussing together what we wanted to achieve from our IAG meetings. These discussions helped us to question our purposes for the meetings and surface where we might inadvertently lead or influence the members. We were then attentive to staying quiet when we needed to in our group meetings or posing questions to enable further dialogue rather than giving answers.

Our positionality as educational developers and members of the community was something we had to navigate continually throughout the project. A constant challenge for us was not to over-emphasise our own experiences and perspectives on being an educational developer when having discussions with the IAG or participants within the workshops. We had to be mindful of this aspect of 'stepping back' throughout the process, and particularly at the analysis stage where we risked our own professional backgrounds biasing how we may interpret the data. To mitigate this risk, we employed a project research assistant (who was not in the educational development field) to conduct the initial data analysis.

Advice from our experience

The benefits of conducting a PR project are worth the challenges and tensions that must be navigated. We cannot imagine running this project in any other way and it has been a privilege to work with our valued IAG members. The strength of the project lies in their participation and the contributions they have made. From our experience, we offer four pieces of advice to help you navigate your own PR projects:

- If forming an IAG or similar group, think carefully at the beginning of the project about potential project members' contexts and what can be responsibly and ethically expected from them. This focused thinking at the very early stages of the project was incredibly helpful to us to clarify our expectations for the participatory approach
- Consider how the contributions of the IAG (or similar) will be acknowledged. This may include thinking about aspects such as authorship of papers sharing project findings and other outputs informed by the data collected
- Keep a research diary throughout the process. Kerry kept a diary and used it as a reflective space after particular or significant moments of the project. This reflective exercise particularly helped to continually gauge our effectiveness at 'stepping in' and 'stepping back'
- If you are researching with a community of which you are a part, consider how to build in opportunities for you to 'step back'. If you have funding, this could involve employing a research assistant at certain points as we did. Through collaboration and sharing, an IAG (or similar group) can also help to mitigate potential for your own biases to creep in.

We hope the insights shared here from our practical experience are useful and we wish you the best of luck with your own PR endeavours.

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Student Partnership Impact Awards (SPIA): From concept to impact

Gemma Mansi, University of Greenwich, and **Jo Peat,** University of Roehampton

Why partnership still matters

Over the past decade, the concept of 'students as partners' (SaP) has moved from the margins of educational discourse into mainstream higher education policy and practice. Initially focused on enhancing teaching and learning, particularly through collaborative curriculum development and pedagogic innovation, SaP has evolved into a comprehensive framework for reimagining student-staff relationships across the institution (Lowe and Moxey, 2024). Today, partnership work spans curriculum co-design, assessment reform, digital learning, quality assurance, governance and institutional decision-making.

At its most transformative, SaP disrupts traditional hierarchies, positioning students not as consumers or feedback providers but as co-creators of educational practice and culture (Bovill, 2019). This reconfiguration rests on three core principles:

- *Mutual respect*: where staff recognise students' lived experiences and perspectives as valid forms of expertise; and students value the knowledge, insight and responsibility held by staff
- *Shared decision-making*: where the goals, processes, and outcomes of educational activity are negotiated collaboratively, rather than led solely by staff
- *Student agency*: where students are empowered to take ownership of their roles, make meaningful choices, and see the impact of their contributions (Martens *et al*., 2019).

However, as the language of partnership becomes more widespread, tensions around interpretation and implementation have emerged. Matthews and Dollinger (2023) argue that the term is increasingly blurred by overlapping institutional narratives and policy rhetoric, which risks diluting its critical intent. Similarly, Peters and Mathias (2018) warn that without clear guiding principles, 'partnership' can become a rebranded form of consultation, inviting student input without sharing power.

To preserve the integrity of partnership practices, many institutions have introduced formal recognition mechanisms, including bursaries, co-curricular awards, paid roles, micro-credentials, and national or institutional award schemes (Lewis, 2017; Office for Students, 2024). These initiatives do more than reward participation: they signal institutional commitment, create visible pathways for student leadership, and validate the often-unseen labour of co-creation.

SEDA's rationale for a new award

As the student partnership agenda gained momentum across the higher education sector, the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) identified a significant gap in the recognition landscape. While many institutions had created local schemes to acknowledge student engagement, often linked to co-creation, peer mentoring, or curriculum enhancement, there were no opportunities for students to gain recognition from an external professional body with sector-wide credibility.

Inspired by examples such as Queen Mary University of London's Student Enhanced Engagement and Development (SEED) Award, and the University of Queensland's Students as Partners initiatives (Coombe *et al*., 2018), a small working group of SEDA-affiliated educational developers and a postgraduate student from the University of Edinburgh set out to design an international scheme that could address these gaps. Their vision was threefold:

- *Accreditation beyond the home institution* – providing a recognised certificate from a professional body that students could reference as part of their academic and career portfolios
- *Visibility for diverse forms of partnership* – including collaborations in digital services, student support, community-based projects and cross-institutional initiatives
- *Expansion of the SEDA community* – bringing students and recent graduates into SEDA's professional networks and fostering intergenerational dialogue of educational developers.

The result was the launch of the Student Partnership Impact Award (SPIA) in 2022, developed with support from Jisc. SPIA represents not just a recognition mechanism, but a strategic move by SEDA to foreground student voice, leadership, and innovation within the professional sphere of educational development. In doing so, it signals that partnership is not only an institutional concern, but also a sector-wide priority, deserving of external validation, visibility, and sustained support.

Co-creating the process

A central commitment of the development team was to ensure that students were not simply the object of the award but co-designers of its values, language, criteria and processes. This approach aligned with sector-wide calls for more inclusive and authentic forms of partnership that centre student voice in the structures that shape their participation (Mercer-Mapstone *et al*., 2017; Bovill and Felten, 2016). A steering group of five students from Roehampton University, Edge Hill University and the University of the West of England co-designed every aspect: timelines, word limits, submission formats, inclusive language and a modest fee structure to cover administration. Crucially, the students piloted the process themselves, submitting exemplar applications based on their real partnership work. These exemplars were used to test the assessment framework and were later published (with permission) as guidance on the SEDA website.

Two application routes emerged:

- *Team* – up to 12 student partners
- *Individual* – a single student or recent graduate (within 12 months of completion).

Each application is double-blind reviewed by two trained assessors against the SEDA guidance and applicant criteria, with moderation by the development team to ensure consistency.

Applications nearly doubled in year two (Table 1), yet the overall rejection rate remained stable (≈ 24 %). Only three of eleven unsuccessful 2023 applicants resubmitted, even though SPIA offered structured feedback and fee-free resubmission. For the SPIA team, this has become a strategic priority: to better understand why so few students returned to resubmit after an initial setback. The SPIA development team undertook analysis of unsuccessful applications providing a critical lens through which to understand potential issues and barriers.

Cycle	*Applications*	*Countries/Continents represented*	*Success Rate*
Aug 2023	45	Scotland (12); Wales (2); Northern Ireland (2); England (26); USA (2); Asia (1)	76%
May 2024	89	Scotland (10); Wales (2) Northern Ireland (2); England (71); Australia (1); USA (1); Asia (2)	75%

Table 1 What the data tells us

Where applicants stumble and what that tells us: Leadership narratives

A key challenge identified in unsuccessful SPIA applications was the inability to articulate leadership, not because leadership was absent, but because students struggled to name, evidence, or frame it. This issue frequently emerged even in applications where the student's role was clearly pivotal, raising important questions about how students interpret and communicate their influence in partnership contexts.

Through analysis of applications across two cycles, the development team observed that students often described tasks they had completed, organising events, running workshops, creating resources, but stopped short of claiming leadership of these activities. Even when students coordinated teams, initiated projects, or brokered staff-student collaboration, their narratives frequently used deferential language: 'I supported,' 'I helped with,' or 'I was involved in.' This modesty, while admirable, obscures the strategic thinking, relational work, and decision-making that underpin effective leadership in partnership initiatives.

This trend reflects broader issues in how leadership is taught, framed, and valued within higher education. As Cotronei-Baird (2020) notes, employability skills such as teamwork, communication and critical thinking are routinely embedded and assessed in university curricula, but leadership often remains informal, extra-curricular, or poorly defined.

Power dynamics

A key factor shaping how students express leadership in partnership work is the power dynamic between staff and students. In many cases, students are stepping into spaces where their voices have historically been limited or excluded (Cook-Sather, 2021). Without a strong culture of collegiality and shared ownership, students may hesitate to see themselves as leaders, even when their contributions are central.

The literature consistently identifies power imbalances as a major barrier to authentic student-staff collaboration (Bovill, 2017; Murphy *et al*., 2017; Scoles *et al*., 2021). As Bovill (2017) notes, effective partnership depends on how far students are genuinely involved in shaping decisions. Yet, as Lowe and Moxey observe, many initiatives remain confined to staff-controlled 'safe spaces', where students' roles are defined in advance (Lowe and Moxey, 2024, p. 36).

These boundaries often stem not from resistance, but from staff uncertainty. Healey and France (2024) suggest that staff may feel vulnerable or unsure about how to share authority. Partnership challenges established role identities, and without structures for open dialogue and support, it risks reverting to hierarchical norms (Healey and France, 2024, p. 655).

For educational developers, this highlights the need to acknowledge and address power dynamics. Enabling students to confidently articulate leadership begins with fostering cultures of trust, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, both in projects and in the institutional practices that support them.

Conceptual drift

Another theme that emerged from SPIA applications was the variation in how students interpreted 'partnership'. While some described genuinely collaborative work grounded in shared decision-making, others equated partnership with representation, consultation, or participation activities that, while important, do not always reflect the mutuality and shared authority central to authentic partnership (Peters and Mathias, 2018).

This lack of clarity is not surprising. In higher education, 'student partnership' is used to describe a wide range of practices, curriculum co-design, governance, mentoring, and peer learning, but these vary significantly in how much power students actually hold. As Peters and Mathias (2018) warn, such misunderstandings risk reducing partnership to tokenism, where students are involved but lack influence.

Moreover, postgraduate students working in hybrid roles, such as teaching assistants or mentors, sometimes struggled to distinguish between being a student in a professional role and partnering with students or staff to co-create educational development. This role ambiguity can obscure the collaborative dimensions of their work and lead to applicants indirectly positioning themselves in an authoritative role to the students.

These challenges point to the need for greater conceptual clarity within partnership schemes and recognition processes. Without shared definitions, students may unintentionally misrepresent their work or underplay its value. Equally, assessors may misinterpret the intent or scope of the student's contribution if the language of partnership is applied too loosely or inconsistently.

Lessons for educational developers

Table 2 itemises the lessons for educational developers following on from the launch of the Student Partnership Impact Award.

Mentoring underpins all these challenges and plays a vital role in helping students recognise and articulate the skills developed through partnership. Ongoing, informal relationships help students contextualise achievements and rehearse persuasive narratives for awards, internships and postgraduate study (Law *et al.*, 2019; Healey and France, 2024). Mentoring also supports students in navigating the non-linear and often complex nature of partnership work. Peer mentoring, particularly by previous SPIA applicants, offers additional value by fostering trust and shared experience (Seery *et al.*, 2021).

Challenge	*Why it matters*	*What educational developers can do*
1. Students struggle to narrate leadership	Students may lead effectively but lack the language or confidence to articulate their impact.	Integrate reflective prompts into modules and co-curricular activities. Provide exemplars that unpack influence, change, and agency.
2. Power imbalances mute student voice	Hierarchical norms may prevent students from recognising or claiming their authority.	Facilitate discussions on positionality. Model vulnerability. Redistribute control in meetings and project structures.
3. Lack of shared definitions and conceptual clarity	Without a common understanding of partnership, students and staff may misapply the term or undervalue authentic collaboration.	Co-create working definitions of partnership with students and staff. Use these to inform award criteria, audit projects, and guide communications.
4. One-off recognition vs lasting engagement	Award schemes can feel transactional if not connected to longer-term development.	Align awards with institutional strategies. Create progression routes such as blogs, networks, or co-design roles for past applicants.
5. Fragmentation across initiatives	Partnership efforts are often isolated within departments or services, limiting shared learning.	Act as connectors. Map existing activity, create cross-institutional communities of practice, and host collaborative events.
6. Staff turnover and shifting priorities	Without continuity, partnership work loses visibility, champions, and sustainability.	Embed partnership into policy and practice. Promote documentation, handovers, and staff development that support continuity.

Table 2 Lessons for educational developers

SPIA 2.0: Next directions

As SPIA matures beyond its pilot phase, the development team is focusing on how the award can evolve from a recognition tool into a strategic driver for embedding partnership more fully across the sector. Insights from the first two application cycles have informed a new phase, SPIA 2.0, which centres on broadening access, deepening impact, and sustaining engagement.

A key priority is expanding submission formats. The current written-only model may exclude students with different communication strengths or access needs. SPIA 2.0 will pilot alternatives such as video, audio, or visual artefacts, enabling students to present their leadership and impact more inclusively.

Another focus is post-award engagement. Rather than ending with recognition, SPIA will support awardees to blog, mentor, or present building a community of student change agents and reinforcing leadership development.

While most applications to date have come from UK-based institutions, early submissions from the United States, Australia, and parts of Asia have demonstrated clear interest in international engagement. A key ambition for SPIA 2.0 is to extend its relevance and visibility beyond the UK, positioning the award as a globally recognised benchmark for student partnership excellence.

Finally, SPIA 2.0 seeks to engage the 'silent majority': students who do not apply or disengage after initial setbacks. By simplifying guidance and raising visibility of diverse contexts, SPIA aims to reach more students who lead in less visible ways.

Conclusion: From recognition to culture

SPIA offers more than a certificate: it is a lens through which to examine the health of partnership cultures. Application trends reveal where students feel empowered and where structural barriers persist. For educational developers, the message is clear: recognition schemes must go hand-in-hand with curriculum design, mentoring, and explicit work on power relations. Only then will students see themselves not just as contributors, but as leaders of change.

While SPIA has provided a mechanism for celebrating student leadership, it has also surfaced inconsistencies in how partnership is understood and supported. It shows that recognition, on its own, is not enough. Lasting change depends on building inclusive definitions, addressing hidden hierarchies, and sustaining communities of practice.

Educational developers are central to this work. By shaping frameworks, enabling reflection, and championing student voice, they help move institutions beyond one-off acknowledgements toward cultures where partnership is embedded, equitable, and transformative.

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Promoting change through empathy and design thinking: Reimagining a first-year bioscience curriculum

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Drivers for change

The expansion of higher education in the UK over recent decades has led to a significant increase in student numbers, particularly in STEM disciplines. While this growth has reflected broader national ambitions such as widening participation and promoting a knowledge-driven economy (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2025), it has also introduced new challenges (Wood and Labrosse, 2023). A post-COVID uptick in recruitment to biomedical science-related programmes has further intensified pressures on institutional capacities (Chao-Fong, 2021). One of the most pressing consequences has been the proliferation of large class sizes, now a common feature across many universities.

It has long been acknowledged that large class sizes can have a detrimental effect on student performance, reducing the quality of interaction and depth of learning (Gibbs *et al*., 1996). More recently, Kara *et al*. (2021) suggested that this issue was more marked in STEM subjects, where traditional, teacher-led delivery methods often dominate over student-centred learning styles despite the latter being known to support deeper learning, critical thinking, and skills development.

At Kingston University, our first-year (level 4) bioscience modules reflect this national trend, with each of the four core level-4 modules typically enrolling 350-450 students. Teaching on these large cohorts has often been didactic in nature and heavily based on the transfer of fundamental disciplinary knowledge. As a result, such classes have not always enabled students to develop critical active learning skills required for higher-level study or establish meaningful relationships with peers and tutors. This has also caused inherent challenges for staff aspiring to develop varied and authentic assessments. This, together with the need to weave our university's flagship Future Skills employability strategy into the bioscience curriculum, highlighted the need for a comprehensive re-evaluation of the curriculum and delivery.

Nonetheless, curriculum redesign is a complex, multifaceted process. It involves rethinking not only content and assessment, but also pedagogical approaches, inclusive practices, institutional processes and appreciating the wider national backdrop of quality assurance and performance metrics (Beetham and MacNeill, 2022). Despite earlier efforts grounded in best practice to address long-standing concerns about impersonal teaching and low progression rates, our attempts have not always been successful and only yielded small incremental gains.

Additionally, among some academic staff, there had been a degree of reluctance to move away from long-established teaching habits and delivery models. This resistance is often rooted in a combination of factors, including time constraints, concerns about increased workload, uncertainty about the effectiveness of new methods, and a lack of confidence or training in alternative pedagogies. Institutional inertia and the complexity of quality assurance processes can further compound these challenges, making it difficult to implement and sustain innovation.

Since our previous approaches had not reliably empowered stakeholders, broken inertia, or afforded empathetic understanding of the issues from the different stakeholder viewpoints, we felt it was vital to trial a new approach, one designed to disrupt the current conventions in curriculum redesign and drive meaningful change within our first-year bioscience modules.

Concurrently, Kingston University has been championing the contextualisation of design thinking across and within its broad suite of modules and courses. We decided to lead the way by applying design thinking to re-imagine the first-year bioscience curricula, with four main aims:

1. To stimulate new thinking into how the first-year bioscience curriculum at Kingston University could be re-imagined
2. To address long-standing concerns about impersonalised teaching and progression rates
3. To gain a greater understanding of the needs and concerns of each of the different stakeholders, and to explore the role of empathy in curriculum design
4. To trial the use of design thinking as a wider tool to rethink learning and teaching.

From insight to action: The design thinking process

We adopted design thinking, a systematic yet iterative process used to tackle complex, often nebulous problems. This approach prioritises the empathetic needs of users and stakeholders to ensure the usability and applicability of any proposed solution. Originally born out of explorations to understand creative processes more deeply, it was primarily associated with engineering and architecture. However, more recently, it is emerging as a novel and effective method for enhancing the quality of education (Bathla *et al*., 2025).

The current design thinking framework consists of five main stages: empathise, define, ideate, prototype and test, with no requirement to progress through the stages in a linear fashion. Instead, we adopted a flexible path tailored to our needs.

We launched the initiative with an all-day, in-person, activity-based design thinking workshop, which we felt would best engage the participants, foster collaboration and ultimately generate innovative solutions. All academic staff involved in the delivery of the four first-year biosciences modules were invited, including module leaders, course leaders, and heads of department. Students were also invited. By involving both staff and students, we hoped to create a collaborative design process through co-creational dialogue to bring closer alignment and mutual appreciation of the challenges faced by the different stakeholders.

Given the interactive nature of the workshop, room selection was critical. The final room design featured a cabaret style layout (with approximately 6-8 participants per table), plentiful whiteboards on each wall, and good lighting. The workshop was facilitated by our team, who were independent of the teaching teams and trained in design thinking (Figure 1).

To move toward prototyping, each participant completed a SMART action plan for one change they would implement. Each proposed change was aligned with three key themes, which had been identified earlier in the process:

1. Inclusive practice and engagement
2. Progression
3. Assessment.

Each plan outlined specific steps to bring the proposed change to life.

Insights gained from harnessing emotions in stakeholder engagement

Traditional problem-solving approaches in higher education tend to focus on improving efficiency and meeting performance metrics, relying on analytical methods to interpret data and generate solutions. Quite often these approaches involve top-down directives to address 'problems' identified by others, with prescribed solutions that may not reflect the lived experiences of those directly involved or secure appropriate buy-in. As a result, these approaches often overlook the full spectrum of stakeholders and narrowly address isolated aspects of the problem without considering the interconnected nature of the student experience or the emotional investment of staff on the ground.

Figure 1 Participants applying design thinking in a workshop

The first workshop was broken into five sequential activities where each activity was linked to a stage in the design thinking process, namely empathise, define, empathise, define, ideate. We began with an 'empathise' activity, encouraging participants to reflect on their own experiences and perceptions of the curriculum. Using EVOKE prompt cards designed to elicit thoughts, feelings, and emotions (evokecards.com), participants selected 2–3 cards, discussed their choices at their tables, and presented a refined selection that captured their collective views.

This led into a 'define' session, where participants identified the current state of the curriculum, including highlights, challenges, and limitations. Each table created two columns: one each for highlights and challenges. The third activity returned to the 'empathise' stage, focusing on understanding the students and stakeholders. Participants discussed student characteristics, identified broader stakeholders (e.g. the Office for Students, professional bodies, employers), and outlined the ideal skills and competencies students should develop by level 5.

Following the initial workshop, we conducted three additional sessions to further refine ideas, review existing content, and propose new topics. The empathetic insights gained informed the ideate stage, where participants articulated the core problems and generated a wide range of potential solutions. These ideas shaped the proposed future structure of the modules, learning outcomes, and potential new authentic assessments.

One of our key objectives was to challenge and disrupt these conventions by driving change through a human-centric lens, embracing emotional expression and the direct involvement of holistic teams. We found that using EVOKE cards, featuring evocative words, colours and images, was an effective way to stimulate participants' emotions about their current feeling and experiences. This served as a successful icebreaker, surfacing beliefs, motivations, and concerns that might not have emerged through direct questioning alone.

This empathy phase was where many of the more difficult emotions first surfaced, making it an important stage for acknowledging, understanding, and constructively working with them. It provided valuable insights into understanding staff and student needs, pain points, and lived experiences, which inevitably uncovered frustrations, anxieties, vulnerabilities, but also offered glimpses of hope and opportunity (Table 1).

1. Emotional Strain and Burnout Exhaustion and Frustration: *Exhausted, frustrated, powerless, discouraged, pressured* Negative Emotional Responses to Workload: *Horrible, distressed, annoyed, let down* Feeling Judged or Unsupported: *Judged, unsupported (challenges of extra workload and sheer sizes)*	**2. Vulnerability and Uncertainty in a Changing World** Broader Societal Shifts: *Vulnerable, concerned (resignations, frozen budgets, cost of living, global issues)* Flux and Transition: *In flux/motion, colourful* Surprise and Disappointment: *Surprised, disappointed (expectations vs. reality in post-pandemic world)*
3. Disconnection and Misunderstanding Student Engagement Issues: *Misunderstood, bewildered, worried (students not engaging with curriculum)* Isolation and Peer Differences: *Surprised* (students struggling to relate to peers/faculties)	**4. Hope, Interest, and Opportunity** Hopeful Engagement: *Interested, enthusiastic, full of life, pleased* Curiosity and Support: *Curious about how staff can help* Positive Student Sentiment: *Happy - to be part of the university and to study*

Table 1 Emotive themes identified through the EVOKE card activity

Participants carried these emotional insights into the next stage, where they assessed the current state of the bioscience curriculum, identifying both highlights and challenges, which we then themed (Figure 2). Positives included committed teaching teams, a supportive learning environment, engaged and rewarding students, diverse cohorts and community, and collaborative colleagues. Students valued passionate lecturers, peer connections, and confidence-building opportunities. However, significant challenges emerged: high workloads, poor timetabling, limited practical classes, and inconsistent student engagement. Staff also noted a lack of course identity, administrative burdens, and post-COVID behavioural issues. Students faced pressures from commuting, caring responsibilities, and financial strain. Despite these challenges, there was a shared sense of opportunity, collaboration, and a desire to make a meaningful difference.

A deeper empathetic drive conducted to better understand the student cohort involved reviewing and collating the many different characteristics and backgrounds they bring (Figure 3a), which informed the creation of student personas that staff could relate to. These personas reflected the diversity and complexity of real students, acknowledging that each one is shaped by a multitude of intersecting characteristics. As part of the activity, participants also identified the attributes and ideal competencies they felt students should possess as they progressed to the next level (Figure 3b).

1. Teaching and Learning Environment

Highlights:
- Rewarding "wow" moments & making a difference
- Helpful & passionate lecturers
- Amazing lab technical staff
- Collaborative module teams
- Vibrant, appreciative students
- Rich datasets

Challenges:
- Poor timetable
- Heavy curriculum content
- No lab practice before first experiment
- Teaching facts in an interesting way
- Overlapping deadlines

2. Student Engagement and Behaviour

Highlights:
- Enthusiasm of engaged students
- Those that are engaged are great!
- Rewarding when students engage

Challenges:
- Lack of engagement (significant minority)
- Rudeness, immaturity
- "10% of students take up 90% of the time"
- Post-COVID transition issues
- Irrational expectations
- Lack of pastoral & admin support

3. Diversity and Community

Highlights:
- Diversity in student body
- Meeting new people
- Student mentors
- Interconnected & collaborative
- We make a difference

Challenges:
- Commuting students
- Family pressures (caring, financial)
- Course identity lacking

4. Workload and Capacity

Highlights:
- Capable, committed module teams
- Collaborative & enterprising opportunities
- Blank canvas (potential for innovation)

Challenges:
- Large student numbers
- Admin workload
- Volume and capacity issues
- Time pressure
- Poor variety of practicals
- Work/life balance

5. Student Life and Wellbeing

Highlights:
- Extracurricular activities
- Practising public speaking & confidence

Challenges:
- Expensive food on campus
- Work/life balance
- Attendance
- KPIs pressure

Figure 2 Taxonomy outlining the 'current' state-of-play for the curriculum, identifying emotive highlights and challenges

Figure 3 Identification of (a) student cohort characteristics, (b) the ideal skills and competencies that students should or would have progressing into level 5, and (c) the wider stakeholders

Just as important was empathising with the role and impact of wider stakeholders. A common issue that emerged was that not all staff fully understood the broader institutional implications of addressing issues such as the awarding gap, graduate outcomes or progression metrics, nor the influence of external bodies like the Office for Students (Figure 3c). This made the activity particularly valuable. It revealed that while many staff members were deeply engaged in teaching and supporting students, they did not necessarily see how their day-to-day actions and practices connected with larger strategic goals. By surfacing these connections, the activity enhanced greater empathy for the complexity of decision-making at different levels of the institution. It also empowered staff to see themselves as active contributors rather than just implementers of top-down policies.

Translating empathy into outcomes

Perhaps the three most potent outcomes we could have hoped for were:

1. The development of a meaningful and holistic approach to create deeper understanding of the empathetic needs and concerns of the diverse stakeholders involved in curriculum design, achieved by surfacing hidden emotions and challenges, and appropriately channelling those emotions
2. The empowerment of staff at ground level to become active contributors by shifting agency to those directly involved in learning and teaching, and through amplifying their voices in the decision-making process
3. The ability to drive meaningful change, moving beyond a simple talking shop to deliver key actions that meet the requirements of all stakeholders.

We believe that through empathy and design thinking we were more successful in achieving this goal than in our previous attempts. By creating the space for stakeholders to express and explore their emotional responses to teaching challenges, from frustrations to feelings of disconnection from institutional decision-making, we opened new dialogue that enabled the sharing of wider perspectives and the channelling of emotional insights into practical challenges. We were also able to enhance stakeholder awareness and promote better alignment between individual and institutional priorities. Ultimately, we were able to support more informed, empathetic, and practical curriculum design decisions.

Staff feedback echoed many of our own hopes:

- *'Being involved in identifying where we can have an input rather than feeling we are always reacting to management decisions.'*
- *'The open-mindedness of colleagues (after working through initial mental blocks re: preconceived perceptions).'*
- *'Concerns of L4 module leaders being listened to and recorded - even though most have been raised before in various settings, it was good to see these views aired in a constructive and open atmosphere.'*
- *'Helped focus on our experiences of teaching at L4 and the dialogue that was created around the challenges and the opportunities.'*
- *'Colleagues who are not heavily involved in L4 teaching hopefully became more aware of challenges for L4 delivery and staff workload/student expectations.'*

Overall, substantive changes were implemented across all four level-4 modules and their associated courses, successfully meeting quality assurance deadlines. This marked the first significant, holistic overhaul of our bioscience curriculum in many years, moving beyond piecemeal or isolated module-by-module adjustments.

Guided by three development themes (Figure 4), participants created targeted action plans. As a result, the original four large modules were restructured into seven smaller ones to strengthen cohort identity. A supportive, small-group tutee peer network was introduced across the first year, alongside a scaffolded, embedded personal and professional development programme focused on reflective practice and key skill acquisition.

Traditional exams were replaced in part with more industry-aligned, authentic assessments. Duplicated content was removed, and the timetable was simplified to allow for more flexible delivery. Additionally, the success of the design thinking trial served as a catalyst for our Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre to begin developing an institutional programme based on this approach.

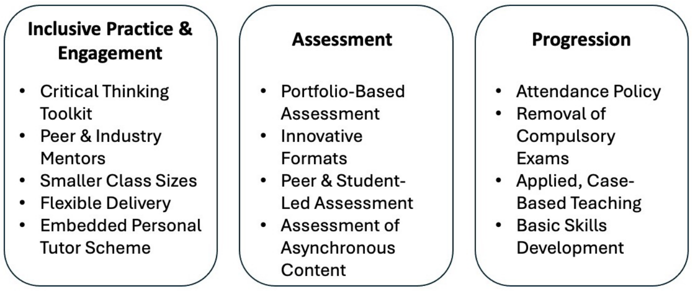

Figure 4 Actions identified for each of the three developed themes

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Piloting Live Learning Dialogue (LLD)

Duncan Hindmarch, Juan Raman Mullor and **Leonard Stuart,** University of Staffordshire

Introduction

During 2024/25, the University of Staffordshire ran a Live Learning Dialogue (LLD) pilot (Figure 1), an action research project inspired by University College London's Continuous Module Dialogue (CMD) approach (UCL, n.d.). Like CMD, it embeds live student discussions at key stages of delivery. LLD has additional objectives of promoting student reflection on their responsibilities, learning to learn and employability development. It also adopts a more flexible format, using question banks rather than a standardised list, tailored to a wide range of learning scenarios. This flexibility integrates academic expertise and agency in selecting questions that engage meaningful dialogue within their local subject areas. The aim of the pilot was to create a process in which students reflect on what they need to achieve their learning goals and career aspirations through:

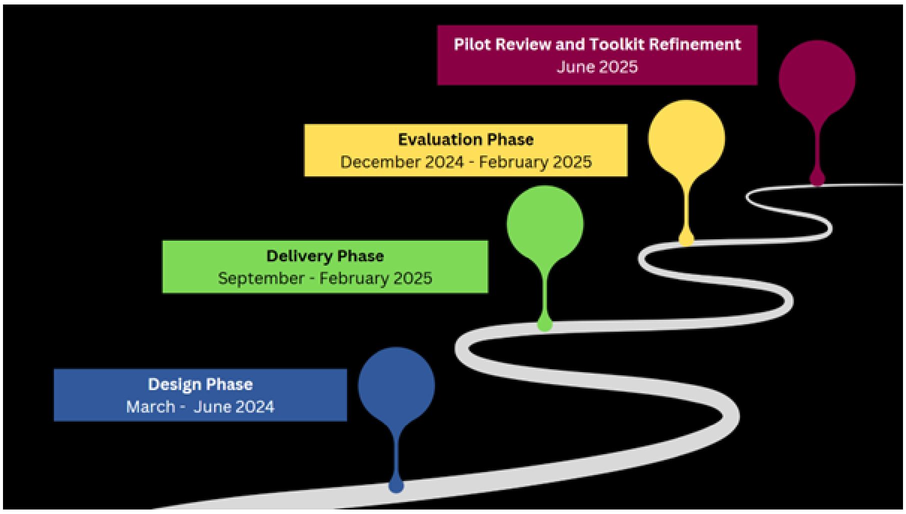

Figure 1 Live Learning Dialogue pilot

1. Fostering live discussions around shared expectations
2. Promoting student responsibility
3. Enhancing staff pedagogy.

Why use live 'in-class' dialogue?

The learner voice is a vital part of supporting quality improvement of teaching and learning approaches within higher education. However, gaining meaningful feedback can be problematic for many reasons. Typically, surveys which take place after the completion of a module may have poor completion rates as students feel that any changes to practice only impact future cohorts rather than their own experiences. Similarly, academics may feel reluctant to change practice based on a limited response rate, potentially contradictory responses from learners, and quantitative data that often highlights 'customer satisfaction' with provision but does not engage in finding solutions to problems. Finally, live dialogue separates student views on the learning experience from assessment outcomes, ensuring focus is on the learning process and limits the potential bias of final grades.

Rather than informing formal quality assurance mechanisms, LLD focuses on open dialogue to improve the learning experience of students in real time. Live 'in-class' student feedback and discussion is held at early, mid and late stages of the module. This means students have multiple opportunities to raise issues and leverage solutions, incentivised by a knowledge that that their contributions can improve directly their own learning experiences (UCL, n.d.). Such feedback loops are dynamic instead of summative and promote co-responsibility and accountability.

Co-designing Live Learning Dialogue (LLD)

The LLD pilot design took place from March-June 2024 (Figure 2). This phase was student and staff-led, with the LLD toolkit and guidance, design workshops, and research co-designed by a student research assistant (RA). Student and academic consultation were central to designing the approach, with separate student and staff workshops held to inform the design and validation of questions for each dialogue phase following an initial literature review. Design emphasised student reflection on learning expectations and responsibilities and what academic staff needed to know to inform their teaching. In total, eight students and seven staff were consulted via three workshops over five hours.

The toolkit includes duplicable Microsoft Forms templates and recommendations on how many questions to include and how to select, delete, and amend questions. Academics staff are also given a script, which can be used to support with explaining LLD in class to build student understanding of the process. There are also step-by-step instructions (Figure 4) on reviewing student feedback and holding meaningful discussions in face-to-face and remote learning scenarios.

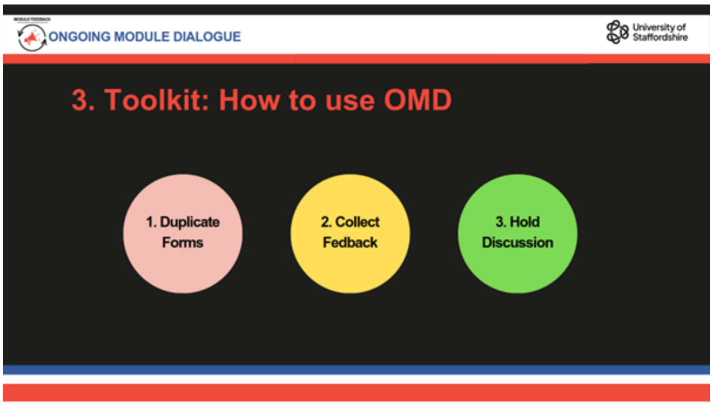

Figure 4 The module instructions

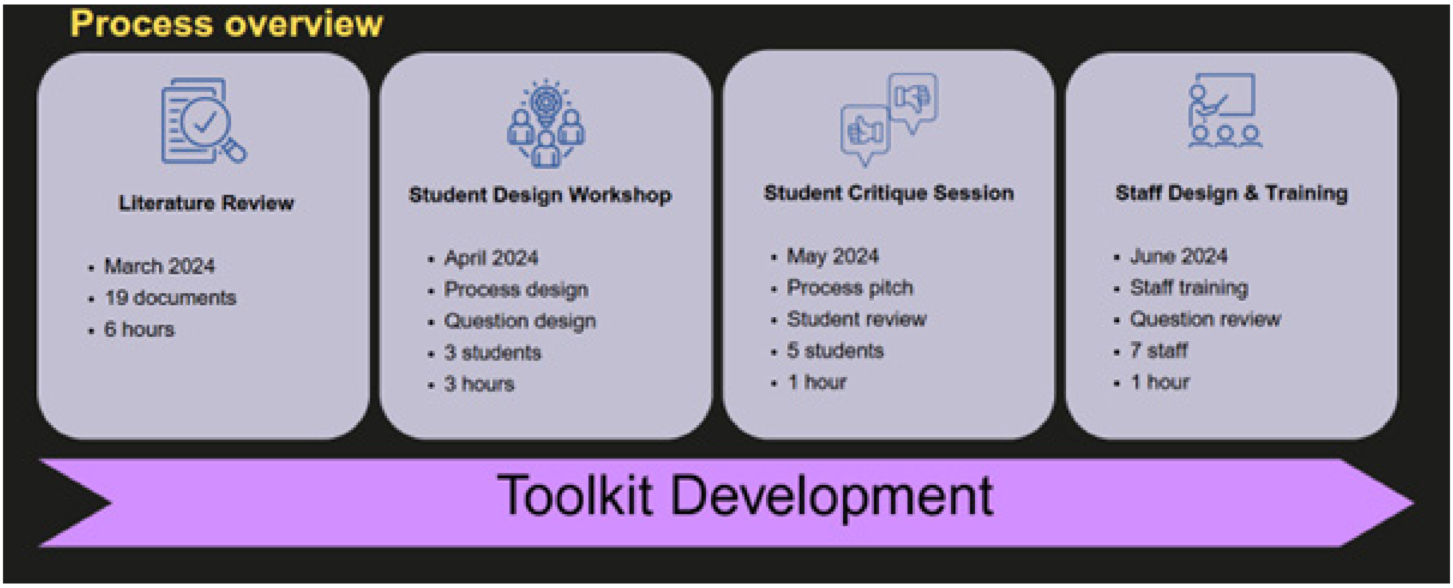

Figure 2 Live Learning Dialogue design and development

Toolkit and guidance

The toolkit (Figure 3) is available in both .pdf and .pptx formats and includes a bank of suggested questions for each phase followed by a usage guide with instructions on how to implement the approach.

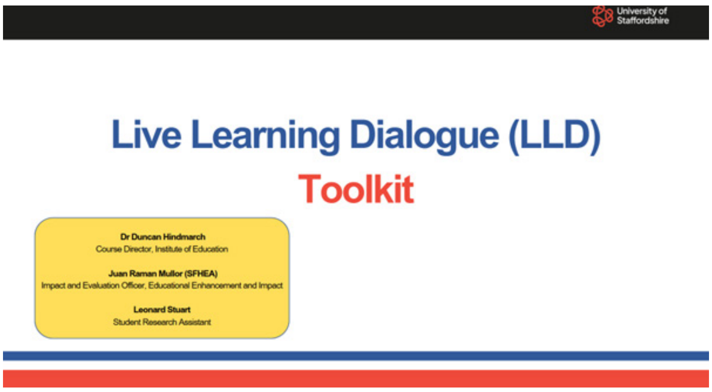

Figure 3 Live Learning Dialogue toolkit

The question bank (Table 1) focuses on what students need to have and know to succeed on their modules, which led to the conception of questions such as 'Can you access the resources you need for the module?' and 'Do you know how to apply the concepts you have learned to the assessment?' A question on employability was also included to understand teaching alignment with students' career aspirations: 'How is the module relevant to your future aspirations?' In addition to these, there are several questions across phase banks which create opportunities for academics to adapt their approach based on student comments. The question bank was refined following the programme team's review of the pilot.

Type	Question	Response
	Early module	
Text	What are your expectations for the module?	Comment
Choice	Can you access the resources you need for the module?	Y/N
Choice	Do you have any additional needs you would like me to be aware of?	Y/N (anon.)
Text	What else would be useful?	Comment
Choice	Do you understand how you're going to be assessed? [Yes/No]	Y/N
Choice	Do you know when your assessment is due?	Y/N
Choice	Are you understanding the content of the module?	Y/N
Choice	What are you finding challenging on the module?	Comment
Choice	Do you know how to access student support if you need it?	Y/N
	Mid module	
Choice	Do you know how to apply the concepts you have learned to the assessment?	Y/N
Text	Do you feel that your views are valued on this module?	Y/N (anon.)
Text	I feel most engaged on this module when…	Comment
Text	I feel least engaged on this module when…	Comment
Text	What skills do I need to develop for the remainder of your module?	Comment
Text	Do you have any suggestions for the remainder of the module?	Comment
	Late module	
Choice	Do you understand the assessment?	Y/N
Choice	Do you know when your deadline is?	Y/N
Choice	Do you know how to submit your work?	Y/N
Choice	Do you know when and how to access feedback for your assignments?	Y/N
Text	Do you need any additional resources or support?	Comment
Text	As we approach the assessment, are there any concepts you are still unclear on?	Comment
Text	How is the module relevant to your career aspirations?	Comment

Table 1 The question bank

Delivering the pilot

The delivery team did experience considerable challenges in piloting the approach. These consisted of capacity issues impacting the number of academics able to implement the pilot fully and survey fatigue for students due to the large volume running during Semester 1 at the University of Staffordshire. 21 module leaders initially expressed interest in taking part in the LLD pilot, of which 15 signed up. However, during delivery it was challenging to monitor the extent to which academic staff were engaging. Six drop-in sessions were held to support with staff implementation across the delivery period and nine staff attended in total. However, the delivery team was only able to confirm that two members of staff implemented the pilot in full. The delivery team also piloted training for the LLD approach with three cohorts in the Institute of Education, with three separate 30-minute workshops held and 47 students attending.

Evaluating our approach

Challenges with evaluation of the pilot mirrored those the programme team experienced during delivery. Despite nine responses to the pre-pilot survey, only two responded to the post-pilot survey and engaged with interviews. As such, the team pivoted its evaluation to a case study approach in order to capture the localised impact for the two module leaders who engaged fully with the pilot.

Findings of the case study indicated that embedding dialogue into module delivery is a highly effective way to engage the learner voice and enhance learning and teaching. Response rates were typically much higher than in summative module surveys. An additional benefit was that problems were being flagged in real time, enabling academics to check understanding of content and appropriateness of pedagogic practice. This also appeared to have a positive impact on student agency and responsibility, with academics reporting increases in peer-to-peer support. For the academics consulted, LLD's primary benefit as a teaching tool was its responsiveness to the needs of learners as they evolve. This trait enabled academics to pivot their approach and adapt learning content as required. All academics consulted valued LLD as a teaching tool and indicated they were likely to embed LLD in their future practice:

> *'[LLD has] moved me more into more of a dynamic pedagogy…of trying to consider what I'm presenting and how it's presented because I'm being told in real time.* (Module Leader, University of Staffordshire)

Next steps

Following the pilot, the programme team has reviewed evidence from the evaluation and held wider consultation with members of the Education Enhancement and Impact (EE&I) team. Following consultation, the questions, toolkit and training resources have been refined for the next academic year. During the review it emerged from some of the training sessions delivered in the Institute of Education that assessment questions needed to be included in the early phase of delivery to ensure early identification of gaps in student knowledge about how they will be assessed. The potential for overlap with inclusive pedagogies workstreams also emerged during the review. Questions such as 'Do you have any additional needs you would like me to be aware of?' and 'Do you feel that your views are valued on this module?' were added to ensure academics are checking on student accessibility and inclusion, while 'Do you know how to access student support if you need it?' was added to signpost relevant services where necessary. Additionally, a programme of drop-ins and bespoke training is currently being finalised for the next academic year, and the toolkit is being signposted across inclusive pedagogies toolkits as a core mechanism to put learner voice at the heart of pedagogy.

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Mind the engagement gap: Developing student engagement across online and face-to-face learning environments

Andrew Whelan, Birmingham Newman University, and **Duncan Hindmarch,** University of Staffordshire

Introduction

Technology's rapid transformation of education has sparked crucial questions about student engagement and learning effectiveness in digital environments. As teaching methods and business practices evolve, understanding how to maximise online engagement has become essential for educators and organisations; technology has fundamentally changed teaching methods, the way businesses operate and everyday life.

Online webinar delivery is being used often and the integration of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) such as Zoom, Teams, Mentimeter and Kahoot!, suggests that its use can also increase student learning and engagement. It is also becoming more interactive and reachable with a variety of technical solutions now being designed 'to keep students more engaged in the learning process and improve motivation' (Daniela *et al*., 2019).

This study introduces the innovative 'Pedagogy Cognitive affective, behavioural and collaborative' (PCabc) framework that drives constant cognitive engagement whilst integrating three elements to maximise student learning and participation. It also offers valuable guidance on optimising training delivery methods with insights to help shape more effective teaching strategies that balance the flexibility of online learning with the proven benefits of classroom instruction in a synchronous environment.

Background

The study was completed as part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher and Professional Education course at the University of Staffordshire, which is aligned with the SEDA Learning, Teaching and Assessing (LTA) Award. It sought to identify similarities and differences in engagement across different learning environments.

In 2018, the Police Education Qualification Framework (College of

Policing, 2020) was introduced as it was recognised that change was required to enable policing to meet the challenges and needs of the 21st century and for policing to become a graduate-level profession. The framework is curriculum based and provides the accreditation of the specific skills and knowledge needed for the policing role, and the apprenticeship model adopted opens new pathways into policing, particularly for individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

The Institute of Policing (IoP) at the University of Staffordshire currently has over 2000 student officers enrolled from different regional policing areas and they adopted an 80/20 split between online and face-to-face delivery due to the logistical demographic difficulties of bringing students together. It is generally agreed that online webinar-type delivery and face-to-face modes do in fact both have their own strengths and weaknesses; however, for all stakeholders to benefit from the whole teaching and learning process a blended approach should be adopted (Ananga and Biney, 2017).

With the group setting or environment often consisting of between 40 and 60 students, this small practitioner-led study examined how different delivery modes impacted on student engagement and sought to identify the effectiveness of TEL and discover if a preference of a learning environment can motivate the learner to be more engaged and increase their sense of autonomy; the learning environment wellbeing of students would also be observed.

There is currently a paucity of research into apprenticeship student perspectives on online compared with face-to-face learning. This study therefore addresses two key gaps. Firstly, it examines both student and lecturer viewpoints, moving beyond treating students merely as customers of engagement and investigating staff attitudes toward technology adoption (Armstrong, 2019). Secondly, it examines an identified literature gap that was the lack of a 'one size fits all' engagement model that covers both online and face-to-face delivery modes. The online engagement framework (Redmond *et al*., 2018) and the face-to-face engagement framework (Fredericks *et al*., 2004) were designed specifically for a mode of learning, therefore this research aimed to develop a comprehensive engagement model suitable for both online and face-to-face learning environments. The term 'engagement' and its meaning from a HE perspective is a difficult one to define. We recognise it as 'the extent to which students actively engage by thinking, talking, and interacting with the content of a course, the other students and the lecturer' (Dixson, 2015).

Method

Given a population of about 100 students, key inclusion characteristics for participants was that students had been studying for twelve months or more and were currently on a degree programme, and lecturing staff must have been involved in delivering the programme for twelve months or more. 97 participants responded and gave a broadly representative yet manageable sample as appropriate for small-scale research. Participation was voluntary, in line with BERA (2024) guidance, and the data collection instruments chosen were a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The strategies selected aimed to address the research question and provide recommendations for future practice development. Prior to the study beginning, it was recognised that any model for supporting student engagement would need to be pragmatically implemented depending on the context and learning environment. The overall aim was to evaluate student engagement in *both* online and face-to-face environments to support student success.

Findings

Face-to-face TEL implementation garnered stronger support, with 68% (66/97) of respondents favouring its use. Students valued enhanced social interaction, improved cognitive engagement, and better accommodation of diverse learning styles. Notably, face-to-face delivery showed positive impacts on mental health and wellbeing, a crucial finding given the dual pressures of being on an apprenticeship journey.

Although face-to-face learning was preferred, 66% of participants (64/97) reported positive engagement when using TEL in online environments. However, success heavily depends on content type, learning approach, and technical proficiency of both the student and lecturer. Students highlighted improved interaction and focus through TEL, while also noting challenges such as technical difficulties, maintaining concentration, and limited personal connections. Social loafing emerged as a significant concern in online settings and suggested reduced individual productivity in group settings.

From a lecturer perspective, teaching methods have significantly evolved with online delivery, as 76% (13/17) of lecturers reported adapting their approaches which also reinforces TEL's crucial role in higher education teaching strategies, encouraging comprehensive training for staff in digital technologies and pedagogies. However, lecturers expressed mixed feelings about online delivery, with some viewing it as empowering while others noted technological limitations and student disconnection. This empowerment may suggest that it extends pedagogical capabilities beyond traditional classrooms, allowing instructors to engage with diverse learning styles while efficiently managing educational resources.

A clear preference emerged for face-to-face learning, with 64% (62/97) of respondents favouring traditional classroom settings over online delivery when using TEL, with strong preference for classroom-based peer discussions. The physical presence of instructors and peers also appeared to facilitate better understanding and knowledge retention. The data indicates that while online learning offers flexibility and accessibility, the high percentage of virtual instruction may impact student engagement and satisfaction.

Technical proficiency emerged as a crucial factor in successful TEL implementation. Both students and lecturers emphasised the importance of proper training and support in using educational technology effectively. The research noted that technical difficulties and lack of proficiency could significantly impact engagement and learning outcomes. Group size also emerged as a significant factor affecting engagement, particularly in online settings. Larger groups tend to experience more challenges with engagement and participation, where variables such as greater numbers can be better managed in small-group rather than whole-class activities. The study acknowledges that individual learning preferences play a crucial role; while the majority preferred face-to-face learning, a significant minority of 36% (25/97) favoured online delivery, highlighting the importance of maintaining a balanced approach to educational delivery.

Conclusion

The study identifies crucial factors affecting student engagement and suggests substantial changes to current teaching approaches. In online environments, TEL can boost student engagement through enhanced interaction and improved focus. However, its effectiveness depends heavily on content delivery methods and individual learning styles. HEIs should integrate TEL strategically during online sessions to foster motivation and collaborative learning while addressing students' cognitive, social, and emotional needs. Face-to-face learning with TEL shows particularly strong benefits, enhancing social interaction and cognitive engagement. Students particularly value the personal connections and immediate feedback possible in physical classrooms, reporting increased productivity and better knowledge retention.

The research highlights unexpected mental health and wellbeing advantages for students who experience TEL in classroom settings. Students who identify as neurodiverse reported better focus and engagement in face-to-face environments enhanced by technology. For lecturers, online delivery presents both opportunities and challenges; whilst TEL empowers educators to customise teaching strategies, maintaining student engagement during extended sessions and managing large groups prove difficult. The study reveals a clear divide between educators who embrace online teaching evolution and those who express concerns about its limitations. While TEL offers significant benefits across both online and face-to-face settings, success depends on careful implementation, ongoing support, and consideration of diverse learning needs. The findings suggest that higher education institutions should strive for a more balanced approach to blended learning, one that maximises the benefits of both delivery modes while maintaining flexibility and accessibility.

Recommendations

The study highlighted that cognitive engagement is imperative, especially for apprentices; the switching of roles periodically from that of employed professional to student may at times interfere with how much effort students dedicate to the task at hand. With previous online and face-to-face frameworks discussed and the acceptance of their flexibility and reflective benefits, the study led to the development of a new engagement framework: the 'Pedagogy Cognitive affective, behavioural and collaborative' (PCabc) framework (Figure 1). This model places cognitive engagement at its core while emphasising affective, behavioural and collaborative elements as crucial learning.

interaction and teamwork in both online and face-to-face settings.

The PCabc framework seeks to offer a structured approach to both online and face-to-face engagement that considers the unique challenges of students transitioning between professional and academic roles, and reflects an understanding of how cognitive engagement may be influenced by emotional states, motivational levels, and self-regulation capacity.

The model effectively supports learning through three interconnected states, with cognition or the cognitive state being a constant strand that runs throughout and acts as a foundation for all elements. This constant strand may also help lecturers/facilitators recognise when students are struggling with the mental transition between work and study. The affective element is based on emotional involvement where the attitudes, interests and feelings of the student's education are formed; the creation

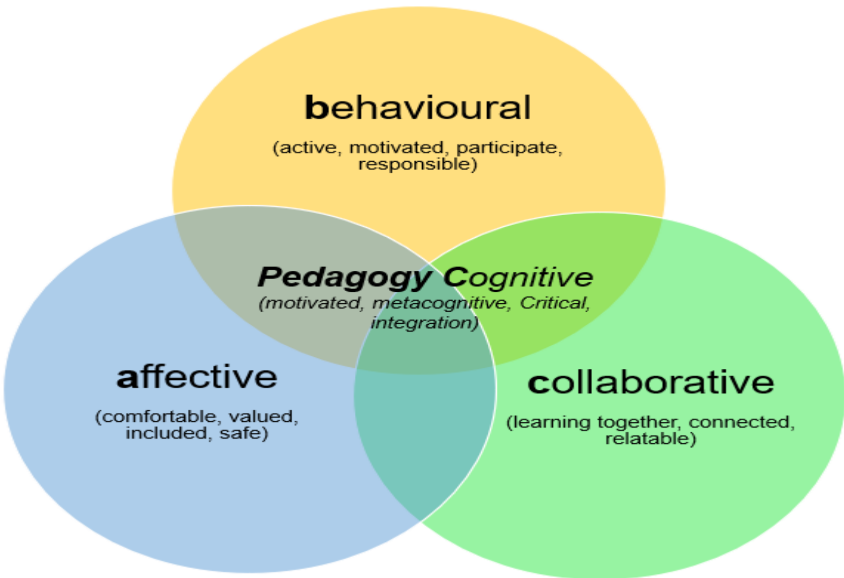

Figure 1 PCabc engagement framework (Whelan, 2024)

By introducing a cognitive element that runs through all elements this may assist in recognising the importance of fostering cognitive investment and self-regulation throughout. The PCabc framework recognises the strengths of both Fredericks *et al*., (2004) and Redmond *et al*. (2018) and incorporates the core elements of behavioural and emotional engagement which are critical for successful learning and collaboration; this underpins the importance of

of a supportive learning environment. Personal reflection opportunities are based on, for example, real-world relevance to the students' professional practice and, behaviourally, through active participation with collaborative team-based solutions. The cognitive thread here remaining constant through deliberate reflection points and self-regulation prompts throughout session delivery. The behavioural element will often evolve around observable behaviour and physical involvement, with activities being designed to encourage active engagement or the use of observable behaviours as indicators of engagement. Examples of cognitive components in action will be how students actively engage in group work or discussion and their own attention regulation. Their participation and social interaction will form the basis of the collaborative element, through professional experience sharing sessions, where the cognitive strand enables critical analysis of how workplace experiences relate to academic concepts or theory. This approach may also benefit apprentices by creating explicit connections between their professional and academic roles.

The study also recommends key actions for higher education institutions; first, they should integrate TEL thoughtfully during online delivery, focusing on fostering motivation and collaborative learning opportunities. Secondly, comprehensive TEL training for lecturers should be prioritised, along with fostering knowledge-sharing among institutions. Thirdly, online/face-to-face split should be reviewed and planned carefully, considering an increase in face-to-face components where possible. Other recommendations for consideration are:

- Higher education institutions (HEIs) should review and recalibrate their approach to blended learning, potentially increasing face-to-face components while maintaining the flexibility of online elements. For apprentices and professionals transitioning between workplace and academic environments, in-person sessions create structured opportunities for cognitive engagement through direct interaction with lecturers who can identify and address subtle signs of disengagement. The F2F environment facilitates behavioural engagement through structured activities that demand presence and participation, while simultaneously strengthening the affective dimension through community building and relationship development that online platforms cannot completely replicate. When students struggle with self-regulation or motivation – common challenges for those balancing professional and academic identities – the accountability and immediate support available in face-to-face settings can provide the scaffolding needed to maintain cognitive engagement.
- Comprehensive TEL training and ongoing professional development for lecturers must address engagement strategies for extended online sessions and large cohorts which go beyond technical expertise, to allow for development and sharing of opportunities to develop online affective and collaborative engagement.
- Institutions should reduce class sizes to more manageable numbers and foster knowledge-sharing about effective TEL practices among educators; however, the real-world practicality of being able to do this may not always be achievable. One suggested way of helping to achieve this would be by utilising the DRIVE model (Siddu and Hindmarch, 2024). This model considers the use of negotiated ground rules in (for example) online breakout rooms, and when developed and reflected upon by the learners, they tend to improve student engagement and participation considerably.

Overall, the PCabc framework seeks to offer a comprehensive approach to the engagement of learners in both an online and face-to-face learning environment by the integration of cognitive engagement as a foundational strand that runs throughout all aspects of the learning journey. Engagement, regardless of the environment, can be a dynamic interplay of elements that can create meaningful educational experiences and not just social interactions; the long-term effect being that learning outcomes have been achieved. Lecturers or facilitators should communicate the frameworks components to the students so that they have an awareness of how each element contributes to their learning, and assessment strategies should also align with the frameworks components. By integrating cognitive elements throughout the learning experience, the framework aims to create more engaging learning experiences regardless of the teaching environment.

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Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into assessments: The 3A Framework for Higher Education

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Introduction

The rapid development of Generative AI (GenAI) has prompted the need for a re-examination of assessment design in higher education. Traditional strategies need to evolve in order to account for Artificial Intelligence's (AI) role in academic work. Traditional constructive alignment theory (Biggs, 1996; Biggs and Tang, 2011) emphasises aligning learning outcomes (LOs), teaching activities, and assessments can be effective in supporting deeper student learning.

AI's potential must be balanced with integrity without undermining independent learning, skills' development, or fair assessment practices. The 3A Framework offers clear and structured categories, namely AIM (AI for Initial Mapping), ACT (AI for Cognitive Tasks), and APT (AI for Problem-Solving and Transformation), which enable practical guidance to ensure that AI use supports, rather than replaces, critical thinking and independent learning. By comparing the 3A Framework with existing models, we highlight its practical application across disciplines and propose strategies for implementation in assessment policy development in a way that preserves academic rigour and promotes meaningful learning.

Literature review and theoretical foundation

The 3A Framework builds on learner-centred and formative approaches to support analysis and evaluation across disciplines. The framework helps students develop higher-order thinking and encourages them to apply deeper evaluation across disciplines. It also aligns the AI use with Bloom's Taxonomy by focusing on the student's engagement in higher-order cognitive skills, such as analysis and evaluation, rather than merely relying on AI for knowledge recall and basic comprehension (see Table 1). The approach can potentially benefit qualitative and interpretative disciplines to allow students to critically engage with AI-supported methodologies in humanities and social science contexts, such as sentiment analysis, linguistic modelling, and qualitative data coding.

The 3A Framework: a structured approach

This proposed 3A Framework provides a structured model, which categorises AI integration into three distinct domains: AIM (AI for Initial Mapping), ACT (AI for Cognitive Tasks), and APT (AI for Problem-solving and Transformation). By defining AI's role at different stages of academic work, the framework provides a sustainable and ethically responsible approach for AI tools to be adopted in higher education. It ensures that AI's capabilities are utilised effectively while maintaining academic rigour and pedagogical integrity. This is particularly important within disciplines where AI methods increasingly shape both educational and professional practice. The structured approach of the 3A Framework has demonstrated applicability across humanities, business, and law, where AI-driven tools enhance qualitative research, analytical reasoning, and decision-making.

The framework categorises AI application into three distinct areas to cover the increasing levels of complexity and integration. AIM (AI for Initial Mapping) covers preliminary academic tasks across disciplines, including literature reviews and concept mapping. ACT (AI for Cognitive Tasks) supports analytical reasoning and decision-making tasks ranging from numerical analysis and diagnostic tasks to textual and interpretive analysis. APT (AI for Problem-solving and Transformation) engages students collaboratively with AI in advanced applications across disciplines, from generative modelling in science, medicine and engineering, to economic forecasting in business, legal analytics in law, and creative tasks in media and arts.

The framework establishes clear boundaries for AI's role while enabling students and educators to utilise its capabilities effectively.

To further clarify the framework structure, each of the 3A frameworks can be related to existing stages of other theories, where AIM aligns with Perkins' (2024) initial exploratory stages; ACT corresponds to Perkins' intermediate AI competency stages, and APT parallels his advanced collaborative AI integration (Figure 1).

AIM (AI for initial mapping)

The AIM category addresses AI's role in the early stages of academic work, including brainstorming, literature reviews, and concept development. AI may assist students in gathering information and structuring ideas but is strictly prohibited in assessment. Academic work must reflect individual critical thinking and problem-solving skills to ensure that AI does not replace the intellectual engagement required for foundational learning. AI-generated content is not permitted in calculations, reports, or coding assignments unless explicitly authorised. This restriction not only preserves academic integrity but also reduces the risk of AI-generated misinformation to allow students engage critically with sources.

This category is consistent with 'AI-Assisted Planning' level described in Perkins' AI assessment scale (2024); this links it to supporting tasks like brainstorming and initial research but maintaining human intellectual autonomy in final outputs.

ACT (AI for cognitive tasks)

The ACT category allows structured AI use in cognitive tasks including reasoning, data interpretation, decision support, simulations, and qualitative analyses such as textual interpretation. Students must critically justify and transparently annotate AI-generated insights to maintain intellectual ownership and accountability. For example, AI can assist in qualitative coding in social sciences, predictive analysis in business and law, and linguistic analysis in humanities.

The ACT category aligns closely with the 'AI-Assisted Task Completion' described by Perkins (2024). In this category, students are required to critically assess AI contributions, thus reinforcing independent reasoning and analytical skills.

This category supports structured reasoning, analysis, and evaluation across disciplines to facilitate tasks ranging from numerical analysis in engineering and medicine, to qualitative content analysis in humanities and social sciences, predictive analytics in business, and textual interpretation in legal studies. In social sciences, AI assists in qualitative coding, predictive analytics, and policy modelling, provided that students retain intellectual ownership of their work.

To ensure ethical AI use, students must validate AI-generated outputs to maintain transparency and accountability in cognitive tasks.

APT (AI for problem-solving and transformation)

The APT category fosters innovation by embedding AI within a structured learning environment while maintaining academic accountability by representing AI's role in advanced applications, particularly in higher-level modules involving optimisation, automation, and generative modelling. AI use in assessments is permitted under structured oversight. This helps students demonstrate clear understanding and judgement. AI applications must align with industry-standard workflows to reinforce their relevance to professional practice. Based on the fact that AI's influence is important in decision-making, human oversight is necessary to mitigate biases and to ensure ethical factors in AI-driven automation and design. This approach applies broadly across disciplines such as AI-assisted economic forecasting in business, predictive analytics in law, collaborative content creation in media studies, and generative modelling and advanced simulations in related fields. APT parallels Perkins' (2024) 'AI Exploration' level; this encourages innovative, collaborative use of AI in advanced problem-solving tasks across disciplines.

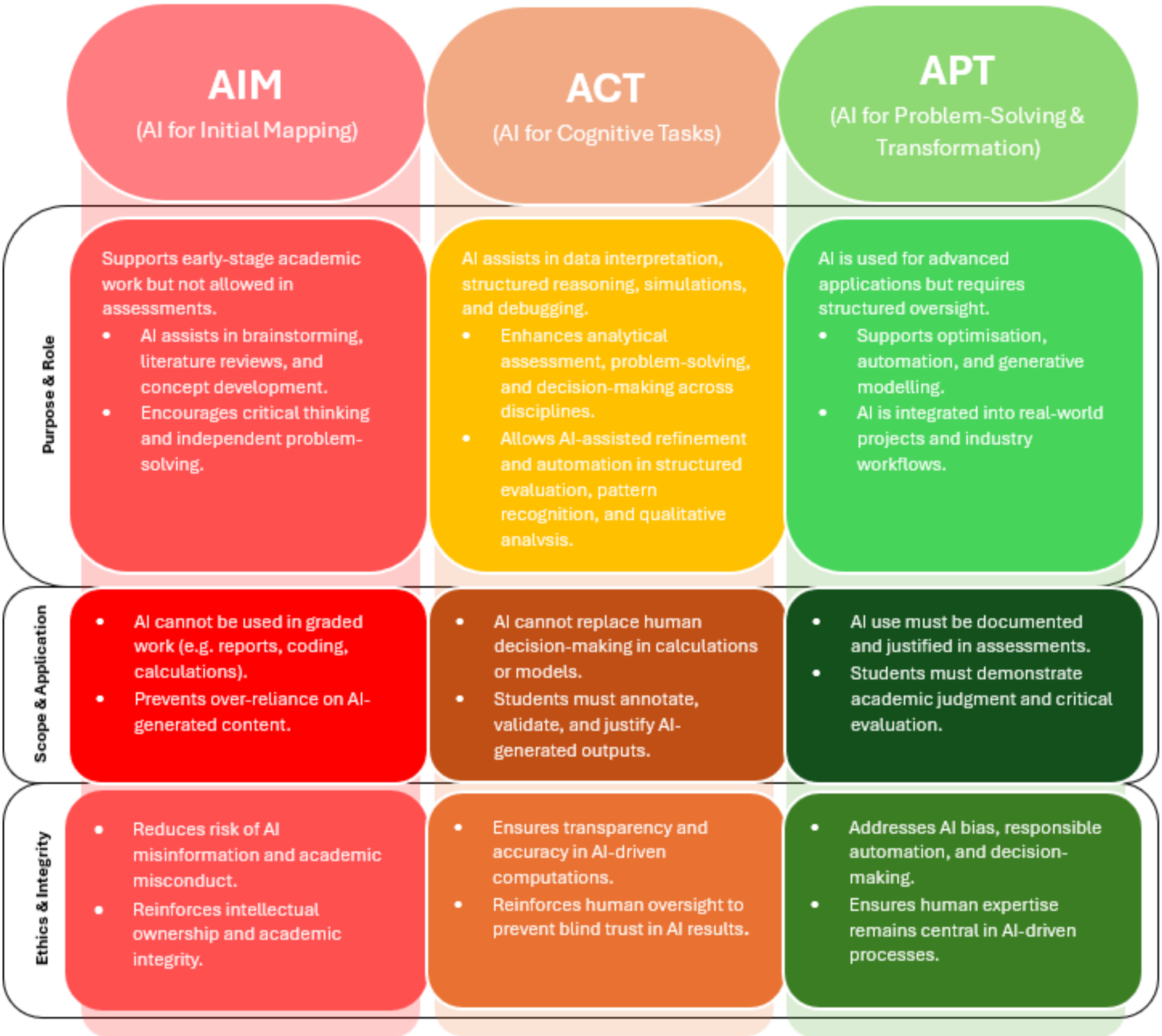

Figure 1 3A Framework for AI-aware assessment design

Comparing the 3A Framework with existing models

The 3A Framework builds on the Perkins' (2024) model by providing explicit, structured guidelines for assessment integration to clarify the AI's role across various cognitive and practical tasks. The framework can be applied across various academic disciplines, including STEM, humanities, business, and law. Unlike broader AI competency models, it is applicable for all disciplines, where AI applications require structured oversight, ethical considerations, and domain-specific adaptation.

A key advantage of the new framework is its explicit focus on assessment security and ethical AI use. While Perkins' model encourages AI literacy, it does not provide mechanisms for regulating AI's role in graded work. The 3A Framework embeds transparency requirements to ensure that AI-assisted outputs are annotated, justified, and ethically validated. This structured approach prepares students for real-world AI applications while maintaining assessment rigour.

Bloom's taxonomy level	*3A Framework stage*	*AI's role*
Remembering	AIM (AI for Initial Mapping)	AI assists with brainstorming, literature review, and information retrieval, helping students organise knowledge
Understanding	AIM ACT Transition	AI supports structured reasoning, pattern recognition, and summarisation, enabling students to comprehend and explain AI-supported insights
Applying	ACT (AI for Cognitive Tasks)	AI aids in problem-solving, structured decision-making, and simulations, allowing students to apply knowledge to practical scenarios
Analysing	ACT APT Transition	AI helps with data interpretation, qualitative coding, and comparative analysis, supporting students in evaluating and refining insights
Evaluating	APT (AI for Problem-Solving and Transformation)	AI enables optimisation, automation, and advanced modelling, requiring students to critically assess AI-generated solutions and validate their decisions
Creating	APT Advanced AI Integration	AI is used as a full collaborative engine, allowing students to develop AI-assisted innovations while enabling human oversight

Table 1 Mapping the 3A Framework to Bloom's taxonomy

Discussion

The implementation of the proposed framework has the potential to provide significant implications for educational policy and pedagogy. Institutions should develop clear guidelines to ensure that AI use aligns with academic integrity standards while enabling students to utilise AI's capabilities effectively. Assessment frameworks should be revised to incorporate structured AI support without diluting the learning outcomes. Staff/educators development programmes should include training on AI's potential biases, ethical concerns, and the importance of critical validation of AI-generated content to equip educators with the skills necessary to manage AI-enhanced learning. AI-assisted projects must ensure human expertise and ethical judgement remain central. This applies broadly to disciplines including qualitative research in humanities and social sciences, economic analysis in business, and predictive analytics in law, alongside traditional science and engineering contexts.

The adoption of the 3A Framework has direct implications for various types of assessments, necessitating a reconsideration of how AI tools can be integrated without compromising academic integrity.

Considering practical and project-based assessments, the application of the APT category offers AI-enhanced workflows, where students can work with AI as a co-design partner. Effective integration of this category into assessments allows students to demonstrate critical evaluation, transparency, and ownership of the intellectual process. This approach aligns with industry practices while allowing students to retain agency over problem-solving and decision-making.

Table 2 summarises key areas that require attention when implementing the 3A Framework across diverse disciplines.

Challenge	*Description*
AI literacy & educator training	Institutions require structured staff training programs to ensure responsible AI use. Without proper guidance, AI policies may be misinterpreted or inconsistently applied
Ethical oversight & AI bias	AI-generated content may introduce bias and misinformation, particularly in qualitative fields. Institutional policies must encourage students to validate AI outputs critically
Policy implementation & enforcement	AI policies vary across institutions, making it difficult to establish standardised enforcement mechanisms. The 3A Framework provides structured AI integration criteria to address this gap

Table 2 Key areas for implementing the 3A Framework

In spite of these challenges, the 3A Framework provides a solid foundation for responsible AI integration in assessments. Moving forward, institutions will need to focus on scaling enforcement, enhancing staff training, and refining policies to keep pace with developments in AI and education.

Conclusion

As AI transforms education, institutions must develop policies that balance AI's potential with ethical academic practices. The 3A Framework offers a practical and scalable model for embedding structured AI into higher education assessments while preserving critical thinking and academic integrity. Its adaptability supports policy, practice, and innovation in a rapidly evolving landscape.

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TESTA and the role of the educational developer

Rachel Horrocks-Birss, University of Dundee, **Tom Cunningham,** Glasgow Caledonian University, and **Tracy Galvin,** Ulster University, Belfast

Introduction

Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment (TESTA) is an enhancement-led methodology that provides a programme-level overview of assessment and feedback. TESTA's central tenet is that the modularisation of courses has led to increased fragmentation and 'containerisation' of assessment; which results in an over-emphasis on summative assessment and a disconnected experience of feedback (Jessop and Tomas, 2017; Wilder-Davis *et al*., 2021). TESTA began in 2009 as an AdvanceHE-funded project at the University of Winchester, aimed at understanding the impact of assessment and feedback on student learning from a programme-level perspective. Since then, the methodology has been adopted (and adapted) by many universities both in the UK and across the world. A recent SEDA book (Jessop, 2024) explores the theories informing TESTA, how the methodology works, and shares the impact (now and for the future) of TESTA on student learning.

Our aim here is to complement that book by sharing experiences of leading TESTA work as educational (or academic) developers. We each hold educational developer positions at our respective institutions, two in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland. We have each led TESTA projects as part of those roles. This paper is aimed at providing advice – things for others to draw on if they are thinking of piloting or using TESTA-like approaches themselves – based on our personal experiences. Educational developers support staff to enhance their teaching practice and to achieve professional recognition for their teaching and/or support for student learning (Baum and Popovic, 2016). The extent and scale of educational development roles is currently being debated in the literature, with voices seeking to extend the conceptual boundaries of educational development work (Sutherland, 2018; Cunningham, 2022; Evans, 2023). Leading institutional and curriculum projects like TESTA could be seen as one such extension (Dickens *et al*., 2025).

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, we share short vignettes of our own experiences with the TESTA process. Second, we synthesise these experiences together into three shared themes/ lessons learnt. These are: the efficacy of the TESTA methodology to enact change, the importance of institutional commitment to the process, and how TESTA encapsulates the need for EDs to be 'flexible generalists' (Stanton and Young, 2022) in their approach. We conclude with some thoughts for others thinking of implementing TESTA at their institution.

Vignettes of practice

Rachel: University of Dundee

As an early-career educational developer coming from a PhD at a research-intensive university, I was initially concerned about obtaining staff buy-in for the TESTA process. At my previous institution, I had observed frustration amongst academics when enhancement activities were mandated, with some of this frustration directed specifically at the educational developers leading the workshops. There was a sense that these activities were unnecessary, a case of non-experts telling experts how to do their jobs. At the University of Dundee, TESTA is a mandatory part of the six-year cycle of programme reviews, and I anticipated that the requirement to undertake TESTA would result in increased resistance.

Furthermore, having come from a humanities background, my assumption was that this resentment would be even more deeply entrenched in STEM subjects. As research is often emphasised over teaching within STEM subjects, lecturers are often more interested in and comfortable with research activities than teaching (Clarke *et al*., 2023). Consequently, when I took on leadership of TESTA at Dundee, I felt more comfortable approaching humanities programmes, as I expected that STEM lecturers would not be as interested in teaching-focused discussions and would view the mandatory TESTA workshops as an intrusion on their research time.

Over the past six years, however, my experience has been that most academics have been highly receptive to TESTA, with STEM and professional subjects (such as nursing and medicine) being some of the most engaged. For example, when I ran three iterations of TESTA across several interconnected engineering programmes over six years, staff welcomed the process, particularly the reflective approach I modelled in curriculum workshops. Subsequently, the team adopted a new assessment process including multiple stages for reflection: when setting assessments, when providing feedback, and when moderating grades. This new process has improved the consistency of assessment and feedback and instigated a culture of reflective enhancement across the programme.

As TESTA lead, it is precisely this reflective approach that I bring to programmes. At the early stage of my career, I could not claim to be an expert in curriculum design, and even as I have gained experience, I do not believe it is my knowledge that is most valuable to programmes. Instead, I see myself as a facilitator, guiding the discussion and asking key questions to encourage teaching teams to arrive at their own conclusions. The focus on facilitation assuages academics' concerns that they will be told how to do their jobs or forced into teaching strategies that are unsuitable for their discipline. Instead, a facilitatory approach acknowledges academics' teaching experiences and provides the space for them to self-identify what could be improved and how challenges could be addressed. Many programme leads claim that departmental politics can make reflective workshops difficult to run internally, but having an external educational developer as a facilitator can lead to a more productive discussion.

Tracy: Ulster University

Having shadowed TESTA in my previous institution, at Ulster University, I introduced and led an institution-wide TESTA pilot. This aligned with our well-established Integrated Curriculum Design Framework (ICDF). The pilot included six programmes across three faculties with fifty-two staff in attendance, run on a voluntary basis. Two programmes used the opportunity to support the revalidation process, while the others saw it as an opportunity to further enhance their programmes following revalidation. Faculty leadership was a key element of the pilot's success, especially with staff buy-in, as they attended all the TESTA sessions, provided support with the administration and catering, engaged in dialogue around data, assessment practices and arranged additional staff enhancement opportunities aligned to TESTA.

Being an educational developer and coming from a teacher education background, I often feel I have two different 'hats' when it comes to supporting others and embedding inclusive practices, including assessment. I sometimes find it difficult to separate my personal and professional identities as they are so intertwined, especially in my interest areas of inclusion and accessibility. This is from my own critical reflection and understanding of self-awareness that has a significant impact when discussing assessment in terms of equity, anticipatory design, learner accommodations and choice. It can sometimes be difficult to balance institutional processes/policies with inclusive anticipatory design. With TESTA, however, I encourage others to move beyond conforming to performance measures and expectations, especially considering current marketisation of institutions and seeing learners as customers (Galvin, 2024), that focus on student satisfaction instead of the learner experience.

My education background means I am comfortable to question and encourage others to critically reflect on their own practices, their power, privilege, and biases, within assessment decisions irrespective of the discipline. I encourage others to become more self-aware of the implications of their decisions around assessment and feedback, something that I believe is core to my use of the TESTA methodology. One way to counteract some difficult conversations is to build on the relational role dynamic that is so important, especially how academics perceive TESTA, the educational developer and why they believe they are doing TESTA in the first place. While TESTA can occur within such a short period of time to support a programme team to effect change, as educational developers we only get a snapshot of what impact or change occurs after the process is complete. The difficulty for an educational developer new to a university is having the opportunities to evidence credibility, foster relational trust, understand faculty cultural norms and university processes, and to do this in a fast pace through meaningful collaboration. What TESTA provides is an invitation into spaces where an ED may not always be included. You become part of team conversations, where you get a deep dive into faculty values, cultural norms across disciplines, gaining insight into where faculty are in their own professional learning, attitudes and belief systems. The ED gets to be a small part of the story in this new space, and through reflection, dialogue and building new relationships, this results in the possibilities around assessment, to question the why, and sometimes simply to stand back and see the magic happen.

Tom: Glasgow Caledonian University

I have used elements of the TESTA methodology at three different institutions over the last ten years. Each has been enjoyable and rewarding; I have seen staff make significant enhancements to their programme design, assessment strategies and feedback approaches as a direct result of the TESTA process. But what has struck me most, when reflecting on my experiences, is how much my approach to working with staff has changed over this time.

Initially, I took my role in TESTA meetings with staff to be one of facilitator. This involved setting up the room, collating relevant information, asking and prompting staff with questions. When writing up reports, I initially approached this from the perspective of asking questions for staff to reflect on or prompts to consider. Part of this approach was informed by my relative lack of experience, both as an educational developer and as someone working in assessment and feedback. But it was also informed by my understanding of the educational developer role as being one to ask questions, provide guidance and support academic colleagues to reach their own decisions about what was best for their programmes.

One formative example was going back to the academic department where I had completed my PhD and subsequently been a lecturer. This meant I felt a conflict of identity as being both an educational developer and a member of that academic tribe (or at least having a foot in both camps). It also made me feel I did have something substantive to offer in terms of advice and direction as I had taught on the programme, led modules and marked assessments. I found myself comfortable with being more directive about what staff should do as opposed to simply facilitating conversations. But this also came with challenges, particularly in relation to my imposter thoughts (Cunningham *et al*., 2023) as having 'failed' as an academic in the discipline yet coming back to tell them how to run their programme.

When working with staff now on TESTA I am seeking to find the right balance between questioning and leading – and feel much more confident in offering suggested areas for development or arguing against certain proposed moves. I think this is partly due to experience and knowledge in relation to assessment and feedback. But this is also an evolution of my understanding of the educational developer role: to be able to adapt as the context requires between facilitator, critical friend and leader (Cunningham, 2022).

Common themes

Leading a TESTA process will inevitably look and feel different across different institutions and disciplines. Institutional culture, quality assurance priorities, enhancement expectations, and senior leadership approaches will all play a factor. Nevertheless, we see clear threads from our reflections, which we hope will be useful for others.

First, we all agree that TESTA is effective in enacting change. The student data and staff workshops provide a foundation for programme teams to make enhancements that genuinely make differences to the student experience of assessment and feedback. Initially, reticent academics come to apply changes to their own practice. TESTA can also change the way we think about curriculum development, and each of us has had our own assumptions challenged in the process. Leading TESTA has caused us to question our role as educational developers and confront our insecurities working as generalists with specialist colleagues. We have learned so much from other disciplines, and we have also seen programme teams learn from us as they engaged with our varied philosophies and disciplinary backgrounds.

Second, TESTA's success is often determined by the level of institutional commitment, particularly from senior management. At Dundee, the process was instigated by a vice principal and embedded within the six-year periodic programme review cycle, where its mandatory nature leads to a level of acceptance. Similarly, Ulster has a long-established module and programme curriculum design framework where TESTA naturally fits, and senior leadership have taken a keen interest, even to the point of attending workshops. Where this institutional buy-in is less committed or obvious it can be much harder to run and deliver TESTA. A 'cascade' approach – where the educational developers train and support staff to deliver TESTA in their school/faculty – has had mixed success in our experience. Again, without senior leadership or support, this can struggle to gain momentum.

Third, TESTA highlights the skills required for educational development: to be a 'flexible generalist' (Stanton and Young, 2022) supporting expert specialists. We have all experienced uncertainty about whether we 'lead' or 'facilitate' TESTA and what our partnership with academics should look like. We work toward a co-designed approach with programme directors, encouraging them to set the goals for the desired enhancements. Then, as facilitators, we adapt and navigate a space that we can either be invited into or offer support as part of the quality assurance process. We must navigate among different disciplines, allowing the varied cultures and learning contexts to inform our approach. We actively negotiate our roles, transforming our approach to suit the culture of each programme, as well as build trust and intentional relationships and collaborations. Throughout, we enact the courage 'to challenge practices, suggest alternatives, ask questions, and tease out disciplinary rationales for certain approaches, to realise student learning from assessment' (Jessop, 2024, p. 13).

Conclusion

Our experiences demonstrate three different perspectives on implementing and leading TESTA. The methodology can be flexible and adapt to the requirements and processes of different contexts and cultures, but it also needs to take in the culture within institutions/disciplines as well as the role and responsibility of those leading the process. Regardless of where one is on the journey of taking a programme-level perspective on assessment and feedback, we hope our reflections and experiences provide some insight on how to proceed. We also hope this discussion resonates with ongoing questions of how best to support academic colleagues as an ED.

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Evidencing Teaching Achievements in Higher Education

by Marita Grimwood and Steve McHanwell

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Have you ever attempted to write an application for fellowship, and felt confused or lost? Perhaps you have been snowed under with 'evidence', or maybe the reverse, or not known what to prioritise or omit? If this 'sorrow-of-the-struggle' rather than 'joy-of-the-journey' experience is a familiar one, then you will welcome Grimwood and McHanwell's *Evidencing Teaching Achievements in Higher Education*. This deceptively slim volume is packed with sound advice whilst offering clear guidance and structure to anyone embarking on thinking critically about the impact of their teaching and how this is best presented.

There are six short chapters. The authors have resisted the temptation to focus specifically on a particular framework (such as the UK Professional Standards Framework (UK PSF)); it is written for a 'general audience' wherever they may be based – however, there is a passing nod to developments in countries such as Australia or Canada: the UK PSF does loom large.

The opening chapters explore the context in which evidence for effective teaching needs to be provided. In addition to personal applications, such as professional accreditation and recognition or career progression, the authors cite the value in collecting evidence for more formal reviews and, thus, individual performance and institutional need. Chapters four and five will, I suspect, be the sections of the book that are most pored over as they deal with evidencing the effectiveness of teaching and how best this can be presented, respectively. These are astute chapters that outline how best to reflect on the complexities of evidencing teaching impact. In particular, the authors offer counsel on taking time to evaluate and triangulating data. This is somewhat difficult in a setting of higher education that is both metric-driven (often biased toward quantitative data) and in an environment that is so fast-paced and can deflect one's appreciation of the finer points of one's teaching (Berg and Seeber, 2017). The framework and commentary on how teaching evidence is gathered and the context of that evidence ('sphere of influence', 'scope of activity', 'sources of evidence') builds on the research for AdvanceHE by one of the co-authors, and is extremely useful for anyone at any stage of their career progression (fellow, senior fellow, NTF) (McHanwell and Robson, 2018).

There's a lot to like about the book. I especially admired the short list of annotated references at the end of each chapter, together with a very useful summary of the chapter as well as a focus on 'critical issues'. The choice and number of references is limited to seminal texts and major studies: they are scholarly and accessible. There are also short case studies that detail personal stories which help illustrate development scenarios. Sometimes, these case studies can impede the flow of the text, but I found each of the five 'pen-pics' compelling. It is an accessible and well-structured resource that will appeal to a wide audience – a new or experienced teacher/education developer, a mentor/mentee, an institutional policy maker, including any HR professionals or institutional award co-ordinators engaged in developing schemes of reward and recognition. It is a book that is not prescriptive but underlines well the need to evidence the impact of teaching as an active and ongoing part of everyday practice.

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Berg, M. and Seeber, B. K. (2017) *The Slow Professor: challenging culture of speed in the academy,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

McHanwell, S. and Robson, S. (2018) *Guiding Principles for Teaching Promotion*, AdvanceHE.

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SEDA News

Books to review

We are looking for book reviewers from our readership to review the following books for *Educational Developments*. Please email a.hughes@kingston.ac.uk, and we will send you a hard copy.

King, H. (2025, ed.) *The Artistry of Teaching in Higher Education: practical ideas for developing creative academic practice,* SEDA Series (DOI:10.4324/9781003437826).

Garnham, W. and Oprandi, P. (2025, eds.) *Outdoor Learning in Higher Education: educating beyond the seminar room,* SEDA Series (DOI:10.4324/9781003436928).

SEDA Spring Conference 2026: Collaborative futures – sustainable, equitable and compassionate educational change

21-22 May 2026, at Liverpool John Moores University

Call for proposals is open now, closing on 26 January 2026.

See: https://www.seda.ac.uk/seda-events/seda-spring-conference-2026/ for more info.

SEDA Research and Evaluation Small Grants

This call is open for applications, closing on Monday 23 February 2026.

There will be a Grant Holders Showcase on Friday 9 January from 14.00-16.00, and a Small Grants Talk Shop on Friday 16 January from 14.00-16.00.

Further info on all of that is here: https://www.seda.ac.uk/research/research-and-evaluation-small-grants/

New publication from the SEDA Focus Series

Transformative Practice in Higher Education, edited by Alicja Syska, Carina Buckley, Gita Sedghi and Nicola Grayson.

This insightful book transforms crisis reflections into longer-term guidance for a responsive, engaged pedagogy within contemporary higher education (HE). It captures the ingenuity and resilience of educators as they rapidly transitioned to online and blended learning models and explores the innovative practices that have now permanently transformed the landscape of teaching and learning in universities.

See: https://www.routledge.com/Transformative-Practice-in-Higher-Education-Innovative-Approaches-to-Teaching-and-Learning/Syska-Buckley-Sedghi-Grayson/p/book/9781032821405