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## PGR Student Partners – Empowering doctoral students through partnership and co-creation in institutional equality, diversity and inclusion change projects

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### Introduction

Whilst research from the last ten to fifteen years has evidenced growing issues related to postgraduate research (PGR) (Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010), how often do we consider PGR students when we think about student experience, student engagement and student-staff partnership? Numerous studies have detailed several inequalities impacting PGR students (outlined below) yet practice to understand and dismantle these inequities has only recently come to the fore. With student engagement principles and practices becoming more mainstreamed and embedded within universities' 'business as usual' approach, how might we consider utilising, empowering, and encouraging doctoral students to support efforts to dismantle myriad issues existing within PGR culture and the wider doctoral landscape?

This article outlines our approach to addressing this by implementing a student-staff partnership scheme within the University of Southampton's Doctoral College – a Russell Group university in the south of England comprising over 3000 doctoral students. We describe our approach to actively addressing systemic inequalities within the PGR landscape through our PGR Student Partners scheme. We highlight the importance of values underpinning our partnership and the outputs of the scheme. Whilst creating institutional-level impact, the article also describes the personal and professional development of PGR students involved in the scheme through a conversational dialogue. We end with recommendations for staff interested in more actively and meaningfully collaborating with PGR students within their context.

### Inequalities at the postgraduate research level

To contextualise this article, complexities related to access, success and progression at the PGR level must be understood as they identify multiple pinch points hindering how students consider doctoral options, thrive within these routes, and professionally develop during/following completion. As PGR students represent the academics of tomorrow, we must equally support their transitions and development at this pivotal stage where they are forming their academic/professional identities. However, we recognise that access into PGR remains for those with the cultural, social, and material capital to navigate this landscape, as lacking information, advice and guidance inhibits

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under-represented students from pursuing doctoral study (Pásztor and Wakeling, 2018). For example, whilst over-represented at UG and PGT level, there is little qualitative explanation into the under-representation of racially minoritised students at PGR which has resulted in 'broken pipelines' (Williams *et al.*, 2019).

Furthermore, PhD journeys are often characterised by loneliness, isolation, and wellbeing concerns (assumed to be normal aspects of doctoral study), with such issues being more acutely felt by minoritised students. These inequities are further compounded where doctoral students report lacking access to wider professional development opportunities and, despite most PhD students wanting to stay in academia, ~70% leave within 3-4 years of their academic careers (Hancock, 2020). Without consciously addressing these injustices, our ability to diversify and produce a more equitable doctoral landscape is redundant.

## Realising possibilities through partnership – The PGR Student Partners scheme

One tool used to disrupt inequalities within HE has been the use of student-staff partnerships. Whilst the past decade has seen an explosion of literature and practice espousing and advocating values of student-staff partnership, much of this has been in the context of undergraduate students and their roles within learning and teaching (Matthews *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, many of these schemes do not often meaningfully consider diversity and inclusivity as core elements of practice (Mercer-Mapstone *et al.*, 2019). Taking the view that partnership can and should authentically hold values of social justice and must directly centre under-represented and minoritised students, we describe our approach of embedding a PGR Student Partners scheme within the University of Southampton's Doctoral College. The ethos of the scheme ensures our endeavours to promote strong, inclusive, supportive, and equitable research cultures should be achieved in partnership with PGR students themselves.

The scheme was formally launched in June 2023 and operates along the following key characteristics:

- A team of PGR students are hired on a paid, part-time basis (7 hours per week) to work alongside Doctoral College staff. As will be evident, students and staff seek to uphold values of partnership, co-creation, mutuality, equity, and participatory methodologies aligned to liberatory theories
- The scheme is advertised and recruits with a clear focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within the scope of the work to be undertaken and encourages representation of minoritised groups
- PGR Student Partners work with and are fully embedded within the Doctoral College and the projects they contribute to, operating in genuine co-creation and equal footing with colleagues, rather than considered assistants or support staff.

PGR Student Partners' ownership and empowerment transpire in activities that they lead or co-create, where they have opportunities to convey their own perspectives as well as act as a conduit for their peers.

## Enacting values of partnership

Whilst claims of working in partnership with students are simple to state, they must be underpinned by specific values which are collectively agreed to and continually reflected upon. Trust was one core value necessary in establishing partnerships between PGR student and staff partners. Maisha (as the staff partner) consciously embodied 'trust moves' (Felten *et al.*, 2023), which are actions/behaviours that aid trust-building with students. For example, when Nandini, Lilian and Fabien (*i.e.* the PGR Student Partners) were appointed, their induction included articulating intentions for the partnership-relationship clearly, agreeing to work patterns which accommodated all parties, and ensuring space for Student Partners to develop formal and informal relationships. Using learnings from relational pedagogies, the enabling of connection becomes a meaningful and effective tool for personal, academic, and professional development. For example, safe spaces were created by Maisha for Student Partners to discuss their developmental needs and how, within and outside of the scheme, they could be facilitated.

As projects deliberately focused on EDI issues within PGR, it was crucial that the student engagement principles adopted related to social justice and liberatory theories such as Critical Race Theory, Participatory Action Research and decolonial methodologies (Islam, 2022). Therefore, another value was the intentional *naming of inequalities and injustices* facing under-represented and minoritised students (de Bie *et al.*, 2021). This required both student and staff partners to play an active role in ensuring research spaces were inclusive and respectful of students' lived experiences, which in turn allowed for the creation of spaces for listening, mutual learning as well as un-learning (*i.e.* of our existing biases and assumptions). These principles are at the heart of genuine co-creation and transformational change, which place high value on equitable knowledge and knowledge exchange.

## Outputs and impact

Since the launch of the scheme in June 2023, three main areas related to PGR access and success have been explored and are detailed below. These projects are collectively unified in their social justice and community orientation and largely shaped within PGR Student Partner relationships.

### 1) Understandings of PGR research culture

As a research-intensive university, we are committed to developing a research culture conducive to high-impact outputs. Feedback from our institutional PGR student experience survey showed sub-par responses to questions relating to research culture. To better understand how we engage with our PGR community and understand how to facilitate the development of a healthy, inclusive research culture, PGR Student Partners co-led two engagement activities. This included engaging with students during our Doctoral College Research Poster Showcase, where PGR students could contribute to an interactive word cloud or physical board to share perceptions, experiences, and priorities of PGR research culture (see Figure 1). These learnings formed the basis for two PGR focus group discussions (chaired by PGR Student Partners) to further explore feedback gained. This peer-to-peer approach supported honest discussions, where PGR Student Partners could contribute their own experiences to the focus group discussions, guiding the conversation flow and being empowered to share their knowledge. These discussions provided rich insights into PGR support required from the Doctoral College such as students' communication preferences, engagement and inclusion enablers and blockers, and community-building events. Importantly, these outputs fed into the Doctoral College's tangible plans and practices where PGR students can appreciate the impact of their involvement.



Figure 1 PGR Student Partners at a poster showcase

### 2) Exploring Black and Asian PGR student experiences

Given our university's strategic recruitment aims to increase the proportion of UK-domiciled Black and Asian students, we prioritised exploring any barriers experienced by our existing students that could explain this under-representation. As Lilian and Nandini come from racialised Black and Asian ethnicities, respectively, we co-created an approach to exploring this issue. From creating research aims and gaining ethical approval to facilitating focus group discussions with Black and Asian PGR students and disseminating findings, Lilian and Nandini had an active voice in all elements of the project. The findings from the project highlighted complexities in the experiences of Black and Asian PGR students at Southampton. For example, some students believed they were 'tokenistic recruits' and others highlighted institutional discrepancies in how race equity was exercised. Importantly, in line with the values underpinning our partnership, we disaggregated findings by racialised identities to not conflate the experiences of Black and Asian students together. A final research report was co-authored by Maisha, Nandini and Lilian, where recommendations emerging from the project will feed into the Doctoral Colleges' ambitions and strategic aims to further grow and support our Black and Asian PGR student cohorts (Islam *et al.*, 2023).

### 3) Supporting under-represented students into PGR

Broadly supporting the aims of the last project, this project explored how the University of Southampton's 'PhD offer' is understood by prospective doctoral candidates from under-represented backgrounds (*i.e.* those pursuing undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate taught (PGT) degrees who were interested in PhDs), and how they navigate a user journey to find out about PGR degrees and research-related careers. Arranging a survey and two focus groups with under-represented UG and PGT students, we discovered students' lacking awareness of the PhD application process and PGR study more broadly. However, students' motivations to pursue doctoral study were driven by intrinsic, extrinsic, and social justice aims. Findings of the research were formally produced in a report which was disseminated internally among stakeholders at the university. Similarly, all these activities were undertaken collaboratively between PGR student and staff partners and have directly contributed to practice taken since to support students into doctoral study by providing more accessible information, advice, and guidance (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 PGR students supporting our 'Demystifying the PhD' programme

## PGR Student Partners reflections

In keeping with the values underpinning this partnership scheme, we engage in dialogue as PGR Student Partners to describe the multiple benefits that engaging in this scheme has enabled – both within the Doctoral College and PGR community, but also our own personal and professional development.

*Fabien:* As PhD students, there tend to be two types of opportunities to get involved in the life of the university. One is through paid work, be it teaching, tutoring, or supporting research activities, all of which follow pre-established sets of tasks and expectations. The other might be through taking part in student engagement initiatives or sharing feedback in informal discussions with academics and university leaders. What felt unique to the PGR Student Partners scheme was how these two aspects were combined.

For us, it was a paid opportunity where PGR students are genuinely empowered to define how they wish to shape their contribution, where their positionality is embraced and serves to enrich collective work. It addresses the otherwise often misjudged initiatives where minoritised students are expected to give up their time to take on activities to try and improve their conditions, by recognising this as actual, remunerated work.

*Lilian:* Absolutely! Moreover, within this role, I have been able to reflect on the growth I have experienced in different aspects of my life since starting my PGR journey. Prior to this role, I have always been passionate about projects with an EDI focus, and so having the opportunity to work on these projects has been a privilege. I now have deeper insights on race, intersectionality, and the experiences of other under-represented students. As a minoritised PGR, connecting with the experiences of other PGR students (and prospective PGR students) from similar backgrounds allowed me to see myself in some of their experiences. Most importantly, I understand how unique our PGR journeys and challenges are as students. This made me more conscious of my own biases and aware of areas that I can improve on as an individual.

*Fabien:* In addition to this personal and professional growth, our impact has allowed other PGR students a channel to share their experiences and ideas more freely, with people who can genuinely relate, and have a route to make these challenges or ideas known to those in positions of change.

*Nandini:* I agree! It is therefore pertinent for universities to consider the diverse range of PGR students' experiences, where so many of us are in different life stages and come from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Importantly, the PGR Student Partners scheme is not designed as a one-off role/position but an ongoing relational activity that has engaged with several PGR students, allowing for the representation of so many voices and experiences.

Whilst I have worked in different capacities in the field of EDI in the last few years, this scheme was unique in the way that it really encompassed so many values of EDI – from the creation of the roles to the scheme itself. As a PGR Student Partner, I was on an equitable standing not only with my fellow student partner, but also with members of the Doctoral College, to share my voice, provide feedback and discuss ideas

I had related to PGR research culture, training, and capacity building.

*Fabien:* I do think that the way we were encouraged to bring our own lived experiences into this work enabled us to form strong bonds as fellow Student Partners, and a general atmosphere of support and solidarity. It also enabled a sense of belonging with Doctoral College staff, creating relationships and open channels for dialogue which will last way beyond our time on the scheme.

*Lilian:* Building on that, because we were able to work collaboratively on various projects as students and staff partners, there was a nourishing and safe professional environment for me to develop my interpersonal and research skills, without any pressure, fear, or judgment. I was able to be my authentic self, where differences amongst the team were acknowledged and encouraged.

It was also refreshing to work on a different project to my own thesis and see it come to completion. Inadvertently, it has been a great motivator for completing my thesis, which I was able to work on alongside this project without feeling its progress was being compromised.

*Nandini:* I really appreciate this recognition by the Doctoral College for the scheme needing to be a continuous and flexible process of engagement. The peer learning and support that Lilian and Fabien also mention meant we learnt so much from each other's experiences and PhD journeys. We also had the space to ensure our own, as well as each other's, wellbeing throughout because of the collaborative nature of the scheme. An unintended but wonderful result was the development of lasting relationships and friendships outside of the role itself.

## Recommendations

We hope this article has inspired colleagues to consider more meaningfully how they might work in partnership with their PGR students. To support the development of similar initiatives and activities within different institutional contexts, we humbly offer the below recommendations for colleagues:

- Embed practices of co-creation with PGR students regarding PGR (and early career researcher) experiences at all levels of the university structure, *i.e.* Doctoral College/School, Faculties, Departments *etc.*
- Intentionally budget for paid PGR work when seeking to improve university life and research culture that engages with PGR students
- Actively involve PGR students in projects relating to EDI, wellbeing, and social justice, in small groups rather than as lone contributors, to ensure there is no weight of responsibility to 'fix' complex institutional issues
- Ensure that the values of partnership and working patterns with PGR students are discussed and agreed upon at the start of the partnership, whilst leaving room for flexibility as these relationships evolve
- Utilise the learnings from critical, social justice and liberatory theories when implementing schemes premised on equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Strive for institutional transparency and involvement of PGR students in the life of their faculty or department to give them exposure to university dynamics and smooth

their potential transition towards academic life

- Where possible, Staff Partners should facilitate opportunities for Student Partners to professionally develop and gain confidence in a range of skills, e.g. methods of disseminating project outputs through report writing or presentations should recognise Student Partners as contributors/co-authors (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 Maisha, Nandini and Lilian presenting at the University of Southampton's Festival of Learning and Teaching

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# Reflections on enabling transformative educational change

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## Introduction

This article is the outcome of a Heads of Educational Development Group (HEDG) initiated collaborative writing group. We came together to critically reflect on our practices in leading educational change across our universities. We share values of leading change through facilitating collaborative learning in inclusive communities-of-practice, rather than through top-down

management of change. We found Pleschová et al. (2021) valuable as a point of reflection about our approaches to leading change. However, Pleschová et al. focus primarily on promoting small-scale change between individuals. We wanted to test these ideas when applied to leading faculty and institution-wide change initiatives – could they still be applied? Did they need to be adapted? What other frameworks were needed?

The framework of Pleschová et al. (2021) identifies five key elements that are necessary for conversations that lead to meaningful change: *cross-disciplinary participation, trustful relationships, conducive spaces, co-construction practices, and caring attitudes*. We identified case studies that would enable us to reflect on the elements that were most relevant to our experiences leading change in our different institutions,

highlighting the way our case studies shed new light on the framework, as well as its limitations in articulating our approaches to leading institutional change.

### Case study 1: Leading educational innovation through Learning Circles

This case study focuses on the establishment of an institution-wide Community for Innovation in Teaching and Education (CITE) in response to a shift from an individualised, performative approach, to encourage collaborative, enhancement-led educational innovation, led by a new PVC Education.

Based in a central academic development unit, I was asked to lead the establishment of CITE with a faculty-based colleague. We seized this opportunity to reconnect and revitalise educational innovators across disciplines to reshape educational practice, while creating opportunities for strategic leadership of educational innovation as the basis for recognition of teaching. CITE activity is rooted in Learning Circles, which are emergent communities-of-practice, formed around members' interests. The five conditions for promoting transformative pedagogical conversations of Pleschová *et al.* offer insights and points for reflection on a bottom-up approach to implementing institution-wide educational innovation.

Pleschová *et al.* argue *interdisciplinary conversations* overcome hierarchy, and move from individual to collective learning to bring about change, by surfacing and challenging tacit assumptions. At the first CITE meeting there was an unfamiliar buzz as we shifted from senior leaders telling a passive audience about the education strategy, to invite participants to define and lead the university's innovative education. Colleagues initiated Learning Circles including Generative AI, Experiential Learning, Students as Partners, and Inclusive Transitions; there was a remarkable synergy with institutional educational objectives. Learning Circles are self-formed, comprising academics on different contracts alongside technical and professional support staff, and students – so it's not just the interdisciplinary conversations of Pleschová *et al.*, but

interprofessional learning that has been important in challenging tacit assumptions and generating institutional policies and best practices.

Pleschová *et al.* identify the importance of *trust* to enable participants to talk openly about uncertainty and things that are not working. This was articulated in Learning Circles' ground-rules, including respecting everyone's contributions, and inclusive participation. However, the realities of conversations involving participants with differing roles and status challenged these ground-rules, and have had to be worked at to become a lived *co-construction of practices*. We have identified and addressed feelings articulated by professional support staff and students that their voices carry less weight.

Pleschová *et al.* argue that people are loss-averse, and will only tolerate the risk of investing in *trustful relationships* for potential gains, proposing the concept of 'win zones'. This took on a new meaning in relation to influencing institutional policy, as CITE participants questioned whether senior leaders would act on proposals generated by Learning Circles. We had to address a lack of trust in the institutional commitment to valuing bottom-up involvement in the *co-construction* of educational practice and policy development, through proactively engaging the PVC Education and senior leaders to gain their visible commitment and support for Learning Circle proposals, and mechanisms we have proposed for integration into policy processes. While leading CITE, we do not have senior leadership roles, so our dependability and professionalism, and support from educational leaders, are under scrutiny in building confidence in CITE's bottom-up practice-sharing and policy development.

Pleschová *et al.* advocate the importance of *informal and conducive spaces*. We found that in addition to enabling informal and agentic spaces through Learning Circles, we needed to create regular *times* for time-poor academics to meet. CITE meetings take place twice per semester, both face to face and online, with time for focused Learning Circle discussions, including developing activities for the first institutional Celebration of Education. Learning Circles are encouraged to

arrange additional communications through Teams sites.

Pleschová *et al.* advocate values of *kindness, mutual care and respect* as the foundation for enabling transformative learning. Universities can be hard and instrumental environments, and the prioritising of research over teaching can lead teaching quality to be driven by punitive approaches. This can drive colleagues who want to invest in their students' learning out of institutional conversations, and in the worst case out of higher education altogether through early retirement or severance packages. It is important to remind ourselves that qualities of kindness and caring need to underpin institutional culture, particularly as these are so important in underpinning transformative learning relationships with our students. Reflecting on our experiences of CITE has highlighted that these qualities require change from performative to enhancement-led approaches, if educational innovation is to flourish.

### Case study 2: Changing assessment and feedback

Assessment and feedback practices are a key concern across the sector, with this NSS metric traditionally scoring lower than other parts of the survey (Harkin *et al.*, 2022). This case study focuses on a university-wide *collaborative* project, which led to the emergence of new assessment and feedback practices. As in the case study above, the five conditions for promoting transformative pedagogical conversations of Pleschová *et al.* provided an appropriate framework for reflecting on how the project played out and the key relationships that ensured its success.

As Head of Enhanced Academic Practice, I was commissioned by the PVC Education and Student Experience (ESE) to lead a university-wide project examining student and staff experiences of assessment and feedback. This required high levels of *cross-disciplinary participation* as the project comprised a number of key stakeholders from across the University including senior academics and professional services. I brought key stakeholders together for monthly meetings, which served as effective touch points for project updates, discussions for future data-gathering and *co-construction* of project recommendations. At times,

conversations were not easy given some of the emerging findings were somewhat critical of current practices.

Bringing such diverse voices together therefore relied on *trustful relationships*, which became an important aspect of the project's progress and success. Following the completed report and its concomitant recommendations, we were asking staff to change their practice to address the issues that students had raised during our interviews with them. The main proposal was to reduce the number of assessment points per module. This led to some troubling conversations where resistance, based on disciplinary needs, was articulated. Despite these conversations, there was a deep feeling of *trust* established across the project working group as differing perspectives and views were given space to be articulated. In addition, the emphasis placed on changes being *guidance* and not policy enabled staff in Schools to interpret and apply the guidance within their respective contexts. This dismantled any strong-held belief that *the centre* was dictating what staff were to do in their practice. As in the first case study, proposed changes were *co-constructed* from the working groups that had been set up as part of the project, thus contributing to the buy-in achieved from individual Schools.

An important learning point for me as a result of leading the project centres on what Pleschová *et al.* describe as *caring attitudes*. The values of *kindness, mutual care and respect* underpinned my leadership throughout the project. My concern was not only for students and the burden and experiences of assessment they had described in quite emotive language (anxiety, panic and stress), but also for staff workload. I understood that for some Schools changes to pedagogical practice would be challenging and needed to be handled sensitively.

We are still in the process of change, with *meaningful conversations* continuing. We achieved a considerable amount through the assessment and feedback project, with staff coming together to drive forward pedagogical change. To date, we

have seen a 16% increase in student satisfaction on the assessment and feedback metric, but importantly, we continue to use the project findings to develop ways to support reduction of staff workloads. Learning from this project centres on the importance of *collaboration* and the ways in which individuals can be empowered through *trustful relationships* – an essential aspect of the project and its ongoing work.

### Case study 3: An approach to academic development?

This case study reflects on engagement with our Learning Enhancement and Development department to make it more inclusive, reaching a wider range of staff, using the five conditions Pleschová *et al.* outline. Currently we have good engagement with some groups of staff who are motivated to engage with our programmes, projects and initiatives, but these do not reach all. This is due to time pressures, competing demands, and not being clear enough about how initiatives might enhance practice and reduce time pressures. I reflect on how we currently use the five conditions of Pleschová *et al.*, and how we might use these to increase engagement.

Our programmes engage colleagues across the institution as they work towards gaining a qualification and/or AdvanceHE Fellowship. One aspect MA Academic Practice participants particularly value is *cross-disciplinary participation* and practice-sharing. When we engage in projects and initiatives, we invite colleagues from all Schools and appropriate professional services to collaborate. This enables us to gather a range of views, while ensuring we take into account disciplinary differences. However, often the same colleagues are involved and we need to reach out to a broader range of colleagues. One approach is to ensure that for each initiative we implement we have a range of staff and roles represented.

Many of our projects are *co-constructed* having been shaped by colleagues' views. However, sometimes a proposed project plan is already well formed, which prevents the initial shaping of projects being

*co-constructed in practice*; one approach to enhance this is to have an initial discovery workshop for each project to explore the topic and gather views on what works and what issues participants wish to resolve. It is important that any practice-sharing is undertaken in a *conducive space* that is supportive and inclusive. This may focus on practice that needs to be enhanced or where colleagues want to question policy, practice and assumptions. Some colleagues are comfortable with this, but some are concerned about the potential negative impact of suggesting colleagues' practice needs improvement. For this reason we often make use of technology such as Padlet to sound out opinion and feedback anonymously so that colleagues can contribute and not feel judged.

Lastly is ensuring the *relationships* we build are *trusting* and *caring* and we display empathy with colleagues. Most of the team already have good relationships across the institution that have been built up over time. However, as we strive to work with a wider group of staff, we need to ensure that all relationships develop with trust and care. Whilst some colleagues are willing to engage with programmes, others engage because of a new policy or institutional priority that they feel does not recognise issues, such as workload. It is essential from the start that conversations focus on the opportunities of an initiative, but also recognise the time involved. Providing support and advice on how to make initiatives manageable is key.

Using these conditions as underpinning principles for engagement will support wider engagement with colleagues.

### Case study 4: Transforming curricula through 'learningful conversations'

This case study focuses on a faculty-level initiative that aimed to create the conditions in which 'learningful conversations' (Senge, 2006) about pedagogy could take place to support meaningful change in teaching and learning practices. This five-year project in the development of HE pedagogy and linking curriculum reform was aligned to strategic developments in learning spaces.

The overall aspiration was activity-led curriculum reform that would support improvements in student retention, engagement and achievement, including the development of professional skills in disciplines that included mathematics, engineering, computing and engineering management. This case study centres on exploring the approach used to create the conditions in which experimentation and learning about the pedagogical approach could take place. This was essential for the pedagogy to become embedded in day-to-day practices. In this exploration, the important point is not so much what the pedagogy was, but the approaches used to facilitate conversations and change.

A starting focus was to nurture a community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998). This researcher-practitioner community was initially facilitated through a mini-project action research fund (one per department) and a Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) enhancement advisory group comprised of those leading these projects and other L&T leads, and involved *cross-disciplinary participation*. The initial projects provided evidence of 'what worked' (building confidence) as well as what hadn't worked so well, allowing the community to refine the design and implementation. This required the *trustful relationships* that the CoP, facilitated by a Teaching Development Fellow lead, enabled. The main outcomes from the learning and conversations were formally reported into L&T committee at faculty level which had student representation so that the learning could be shared, and the learning was also disseminated and discussed at internal and external conferences which included the production of peer-reviewed conference publications.

A programme-level first-year pilot then ensued, which was evaluated using appropriately aligned indicators of engaged learning that student partners had tested (*co-construction practices*). This formative evaluation was essential in supporting learning and learningful conversations around the developments being implemented. A full-scale roll-out across all undergraduate programmes then followed in the next academic year with (paid) student partners involved in the evaluation. The CoP provided *conducive spaces* for significant

conversations about teaching, that extended beyond advisory group meetings to one-to-one conversations in corridors and other spaces, and in the focus groups that discussed the findings from the evaluation and supported reflection on next steps. *Caring attitudes* underpinned the pedagogical conversations that took place within the CoP and the rationale for the initiative to improve student experience and involve students in the developments. Ultimately, practices became embedded in mainstream curriculum and ongoing conversations facilitated through the module and annual review cycle as well as ongoing internal and external dissemination of the action research around the initiative that led to other collaborations and research projects, national and international.

While the five conditions of Pleschová *et al.* were enabled through this initiative, there were other factors at play here and my next analysis draws on factors in managing complex change (Knoster, 1991). The facilitated conversations for meaningful change helped to build a *shared vision* and *consensus* around the teaching initiative. One of the key approaches that supported the shared vision and consensus building was that the definition of the pedagogical approach was sufficiently open-ended to allow different interpretations within the different disciplines each catering for its own unique mix of students, but clear enough that the principles that underpinned the initiative were realised and the associated outcomes achieved. The CoP and the conversations within it helped support the development of the *skills* needed to design and implement the teaching approach, and seeing how student and staff (learning) experiences were benefiting from the changes helped to *incentivise* engagement. Supported by an evaluation strategy, there was a clear road-map (*action plan*) with the other elements that needed to be in place including curriculum framework, timetabling arrangements *etc.*, and other *resources* including technological tools that enabled innovative formats to be implemented also being put in place.

This illustrates that while learningful conversations can make meaningful change within individual practices, if the aim is to enable sustained and

sustainable change that last beyond one individual or annual cycle, other enablers such as those suggested here need to be present so that the new practices are underpinned or reified by supporting structures and processes. For example, if active learning is the new practice but the teacher is constantly presented with learning spaces that don't support that format, or a timetable that presumes (another) delivery format *etc.*, then implementation becomes difficult to sustain even though learningful/meaningful conversations are taking place.

## Conclusions

Pleschová *et al.* have proved a useful jumping-off point for our reflections on our approaches to engaging colleagues in transformational learning through diverse change initiatives. We all embraced the five conditions as core to our effective academic development practice, but at times extended their definitions, for example in recognising the importance not just of interdisciplinary conversations, but of interprofessional learning and co-creation with students to transform understandings and practices. Similarly, issues of trustful relationships extended beyond the communities involved in conversations, to trust in educational leaders that they would continue to support initiatives, and enable policy to be shaped by bottom-up priorities. Our reflections highlighted the broader institutional structures and cultures in which transformative learning and change happen, and the impact of contemporary HE with its time-pressured and resource-challenged contexts that can drive uncaring and performative spaces, where colleagues are reluctant to risk being open to new learning, instead perceiving proposed changes as a threat. We highlighted the value of academic development work in creating time and space within such pressured environments where meaningful change can happen, through interdisciplinary interprofessional conversations, involving students as partners, and where all voices are heard and have influence. As academic developers, creating spaces for transformational learning is a means for leading complex and diverse change initiatives, but our work requires structural and strategic management alongside facilitating collaborative agency.



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# Crisis and opportunity: How Generative AI could be the disruptor to produce meaningful pedagogical changes to education

**Chris Whiting**, York St John University

I don't think many colleagues would disagree with me when I say that we haven't perfected assessment yet. I don't think this is an unfair criticism - learning is an ancient process, but assessment is by comparison very young, especially in higher education. The issues we so often find ourselves asking are: Does what is submitted really represent what the student is capable of or that they have learned what is required? Did the student cheat? Was the assignment appropriate? Was my judgement correct and fair? I will raise a few of the broad key questions as I perceive them, followed by a scoping exercise to draw out the wider contexts and values that are involved in utilising GenAI as a disruptor for positive change.

The Covid lockdown highlighted many of the issues with assessment (such as access, inclusivity, and sustainability), forcing universities to drop or redesign exams as well as processing more extensions and alterations to assessments than in previous years. I place myself alongside colleagues who would consider such extensions, alterations and 'plan B's' as potential indicators of inclusivity issues. GenAI is further highlighting these and other issues (such as authenticity, the value of outputs, and how the modes of assessment and learning are relevant to lifelong learning). SEDA members are probably wondering why these issues have not yet been resolved when the literature offers so many solutions (some dating back decades!).

Following similar questions raised across several decades, Alex Buckley (2023) questions why, despite a wealth of negative research, so many colleagues still choose to use exams for their summative assessments. Like David Boud's 'practice perspective' (Boud *et al.*, 2018) but specifically

using Viviane Robinson's 'problem-based methodology' (Robinson, 2014), Buckley suggests that assessment research fails to address the problems of the practitioners it hopes to engage. In short, what are the problems of our colleagues that we (researchers and developers of academic practice) should be answering?

Regarding GenAI, it feels all too easy and dismissive to say that all the necessary information for staff to learn how to incorporate GenAI into their teaching practices is already available (I recommend King's College London's online two-week course). Further still, that if colleagues are applying up-to-date pedagogical practices (competency-based education, process-based learning, co-creation *etc.*), GenAI does not pose such an issue to our assessments (I have been guilty of thinking this). This does not help those colleagues who either believe that their current practice is the right choice despite a clear and present danger of academic misconduct, or do not have the time to either read the research or implement the changes (I've also been guilty of thinking this too). At a couple of recent GenAI workshops across the country, I found my previous assumptions challenged when a significant proportion of the attendees had not ever logged into a GenAI tool, let alone explored its potential impact or use in their teaching practice. I admit to underestimating their intrinsic curiosity and technological literacy baselines, as well as colleagues' time capacity to explore these topics.

My own curiosity and investment of time is given as I am one of those who believes GenAI will very quickly be a normalised tool in our day-to-day lives. Ben Goertzel's (2012) suggestion that if AI can obtain a degree it should be

considered conscious, is an interesting alternative to the Turing test, but with ‘Lawrence the AI paralegal’ passing the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (Rose, 2023) this light-hearted notion is close to a reality. If students can cognitively offload the work of their degree studies, this certainly presents a clear risk of academic misconduct. Given further serious thought, this notion could have greater value still as a challenge to education by asking, are students being trained as robots, and what are the humans supposed to be doing in our teaching, learning and assessment?

Since the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022, literature and discussions around GenAI have been concerned with either the threats to education posed by GenAI (such as Morrison, 2023) or how GenAI can be integrated into education (Gimpel *et al.*, 2023; Chan and Hu, 2023). Broadly speaking, colleagues will either be keen to integrate GenAI into their teaching, therefore seeking out such answers and experimenting with the tools, or will want to know how they can prevent students from using GenAI tools to ‘cheat’ in their assessments. At York St John University, we are encouraging our colleagues to approach the issue with the assumption that our students are already using GenAI as part of their learning and assessment practices. As such, it is our responsibility to guide them to use these tools effectively, appropriately and ethically.

I propose we take this moment to explore how changes to pedagogical policies and practices in Higher Education (HE) can, and should, be made to drive pedagogical development and not simply assimilate GenAI into our current systems. We must take a big step back and evaluate our current principles, beliefs, biases, and culture. For this we need a framework from which to value these judgements. From a refreshed perspective, we will then be able to ask what does not fit into our current systems and beliefs, why it does not fit, and whether we need to resist these changes or adapt our systems to incorporate them. By taking such a broad and holistic approach to our response, we can implement changes that address the current circumstances as well as cohesively incorporate the near future circumstances more readily into our pedagogies and curricular.

From here, I shall lay out the context of the problem as I see it, but from this the broader evaluation can be conducted.

## Challenges our colleagues face

As a lecturer in Academic Practice, having supported colleagues new to teaching in HE over the last 5-years, I have been aware of the challenges and concerns of my colleagues both new to teaching and those with many years of experience. Being rather brutal with my summary, I would suggest that the two main categories of concern I have heard are:

1. How do I get my students to engage in learning?
2. How do I make my assessment valid?

As I have confessed, this is a brutal summary of many, many questions. I shall refrain from listing them here as I suspect SEDA readers will be as familiar with these types of questions. My area of focus is on the second question, assessment.

Before I move into discussing the issues in assessment as I perceive them, I wish to acknowledge what I consider to be the biggest obstacle for our colleagues, and in turn those of us

who are responsible for development and support of teaching and learning in our institutes. Our colleagues are time poor. The UCU’s 2021 workload survey (University and College Union, 2022) indicates that staff are doing the ‘equivalent of two days unpaid work every week’. I see the evidence of this when talking to colleagues who do not have the time to attend CPD, develop their curriculum or attend to their research. The financial pressures on the HE sector are well documented and discussed, and there does not appear to be a saviour any time before the forthcoming general election (and judging by current sound bites and manifestos, not much can be expected immediately afterwards). I’m neither going to point fingers, nor propose theories or solutions to the problem of being time poor. It is a very real factor in the context in which we are all currently working and places restrictions on what can be achieved.

## Issues of assessment

Assessment design practices that seek objective results akin to exams are fundamentally flawed by this intent. The flaw is that open-ended assessment methods (such as essays, presentations, reports or portfolios) are being subconsciously closed by the expectation that students will produce comparable results. I refer to these as the bricks and snowflakes of assessment: exams produce brick results where each output is expected to be comparable, and open-ended assessments produce snowflake outputs where each is unique (even if only subtly). ‘Write a [insert assessment type] analysing [specific topic]’ can often confirm or encourage student expectations of a ‘right answer’, further distancing their attention from their learning experience and prompting the desire to use GenAI to give them the ‘right answer’. Such practices can contribute to students’ desire to ‘cheat’ by presenting the opportunity to cheat (Waltzer and Dahl, 2023). This will only be exacerbated by easier access to GenAI, such as Microsoft’s Co-Pilot (which is available through most University Microsoft licences at the time of writing).

Prior to the recent GenAI developments, scholarship on teaching and learning has been advocating for a move toward more socially just pedagogies that emphasise the social value of assessment activities, and towards more process-based learning that emphasises assessment-as-learning by flowing between learning and (ipsative) assessment. GenAI is not causing our previous pedagogies to be less authentic, inclusive or meaningful - it’s just highlighting where and how we can be more authentic, inclusive and meaningful. Instead of listing the wealth of literature on this, I will extend David Baume’s (2023) call to focus more on learning. Where he suggested we need to think less about teaching, I join him by saying our colleagues (and students) should spend less time and effort thinking about assessment. I suggest that GenAI is the disruptor that our colleagues must address, regardless of their beliefs in assessment and the challenges of the current context of working in UK higher education.

In short, along with the many and great affordances GenAI offers to the world, it offers to us a means of connecting our agenda of pedagogical development with the immediate needs of our colleagues that is meaningful and sincere. But there is still work to be done.

## What needs disrupting?

If what I have presented so far has been based on the dichotomy

of those who teach and those you support, then other dichotomies to be addressed are the practices and policies, and individuals and the institute. These are of course false dichotomies but represent two far-apart points on a spectrum of perspectives and thinking. I suggest whenever possible, these points must be brought closer together.

A lot of my job is in developing and supporting the practices of my colleagues, but I must do this within the University's policies. I have some say in these policies along with many other colleagues, but in the current situation of addressing GenAI I am proposing those practices must adapt and flex. To do this the policies must enable this adapting and flexing, while it is my responsibility to encourage it. An unresolved issue here is how and when do we move our baseline expectations and requirements to ensure the quality and currency of our students' learning experience, whilst supporting staff with the time to adapt and upskill as necessary. A shared question with the earlier discussion on assessment might be 'how much is enough?'

Regarding individuals and the institute, I am compelled to quote a York St John mantra 'We are YSJ', something that a colleague often cites during institutional committees. Decisions made at the various committees within all institutes are made by colleagues with representatives from all interested parties (senior management, faculties, departments, and students), but the outcomes of these committees can be perceived as being 'dropped upon our hard-working colleagues from above' and that those committees are mystified as town elders meeting in secret. In short, it's us and them.

To connect this challenge with my previous point on assessment, I propose that the issue of assessments that attempt to objectify subjective judgements will be put under greater pressure and subsequent scrutiny as GenAI tools become the primary resources for students to respond to these assessments. Colleagues cannot and should not ban these tools in their teaching practices or their institutional policies as they are part of the future working practices, and to do so would undermine the quality and value of the learning experience. Colleagues who are waiting on the detection tools should consider that we cannot rely on these AI detectors, as any degree of false-positive results is an unacceptable degree of collateral damage. In other words, no student should be wrongly accused of cheating. The burden of proof that they have misused the technology will be with the teachers, not the students. The technically able will be awarded grades for skilful 'cheating'; the less technically able will be punished. As such, GenAI represents a disruptor to the beliefs and practices of colleagues that cannot be ignored.

The response should be to support our colleagues not by crowbarring GenAI into their curriculum or adding it to the list of upskilling required, but to integrate GenAI into the pedagogical practices that promote and support high quality learning experiences. We will need to develop resources, training and opportunities for dialogue that are piecemeal, accessible and timely for our colleagues. We must also ensure that barriers are removed, whether these are in terms of knowledge, skill, technology or policy. There should be

no reason why our colleagues 'cannot'. Institutional policies must enable colleagues to develop and innovate, and the institutional principles and practices must promote a culture of encouraging.

## How to respond to such a mess of big and small challenges?

This wide and discursive (often pinballing) approach to change requires some form of unification, a project, policy or framework. One option I am proposing is the Inclusive Higher Education Framework (IHEF) (Derby, 2023) which is currently available to all. The IHEF was developed as part of a QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project led by the University of Hull in collaboration with six other UK HEIs (including York St John), and is an all-encompassing framework that presents ways of exploring the areas of activity of Higher Education, the principles that should be considered, and all through the various positions that we all occupy within our institutes. I'll not list or discuss the entirety of the IHEF, but I would urge you to look at it in your own time. I will highlight a couple of ideas that I feel would benefit what I have discussed here.

In the principles of the IHEF is the 'Development and training to *empower* individuals and teams' (my emphasis) which I would connect with my earlier points on supporting colleagues in their development as well as the need to remove barriers in terms of policy and technology (both policy and digital infrastructure are included in the Area of Activity: Structure and Processes). The framework suggests that as part of Curriculum Design and Delivery (the second Area of Activity) there should be 'decolonised, diversified and personalised learning' which corresponds with the approaches to assessment that the literature proposes, emphasising the learning ahead of the assessment. And within Assessment and Feedback (the third Area of Activity), there is 'coherent assessment design and manageable workload' which when cross-referenced with the principle of 'wellbeing, empathy and authenticity' would support the development of process-based assessments (such as projects, portfolios, ipsative assessments etc.) and reducing the false belief of an objective judgement solely through a product-based assessment (for example, essays).

At York St John University, I have already included the IHEF as one of the four core units of our Academic Induction, ensuring that all staff involved in teaching and supporting learning are aware of the principles we hold and require our colleagues to work towards. In the academic year 2024-25, YSJ will be using the IHEF as a guide for the design of programmes in validation and re-validation. Our 2024 re-accredited HEA fellowship scheme will be requiring all applicants to demonstrate how they respond to and incorporate the IHEF into their approaches in teaching and/or supporting learning.

It may seem that at the last moment of this article, I have jettisoned GenAI as the locus of my consideration. In many ways I have. I don't believe that education (pedagogies, curricular, policies, practices, cultures, measurements of success) should be driven or dictated by a singular or narrow agenda of the value of education. GenAI is a significant and

powerful disruptor to education, but we should not respond with knee-jerk reactions (it has already been a year since the big bang of ChatGPT). Dr Richard Harrison emphasises an important value in decision making in not being quick. During the Covid lockdown we had to make quick decisions with very little information to guide those decisions. In that context, speed was necessary. Following Harrison's sage counsel, I am emphasising how we might take a deep breath, step back and retain our core values in decision making regarding GenAI as well as the near future developments, whatever they may be.

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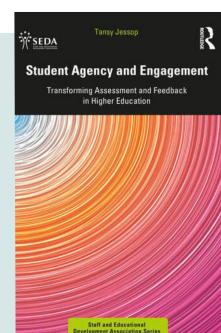
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## Student Agency and Engagement: transforming assessment and feedback in higher education

by Tansy Jessop

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*The whole is something besides the parts.* (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VIII, 1045a. 8-10)

For more than a decade 'Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment' (TESTA) has focused on enhancing the overall student experience by refocusing assessment away from individual modules towards a programme perspective. Within her book Jessop presents consistent evidence from over 60 higher education institutions which have used TESTA to highlight themes of high levels of summative assessment, absence of formative assessment and wide varieties of different types of assessment.

There are four parts to this book, which begins by describing the background to TESTA and the seemingly simple shift in perception to consider the whole of a programme's assessment regime rather than its modular parts. In the early stages of this Higher Education Academy funded project, Jessop and her TESTA co-founder Yaz El Hakim, together with Graham Gibbs, gave into 'a hunch' (p.4) to document students' experience of assessment and feedback. Central to this was repositioning the university *programme* as the unit of analysis rather than the traditional module review perspective. The result is a methodology and practical framework which resonates with the educationalists who engage with it.

Early sections of the book explain the tripartite TESTA methodology upon which TESTA is built. These are an audit of assessment and feedback, the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ) and TESTA focus groups for staff and students. The audit quantifies and gathers information about the volume and variety of summative and formative assessment within individual modules across a programme. With feedback as one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, the audit also elicits commentary on the volume of feedback staff provide for students.

TESTA is first and foremost a student-centred project, a tool through which academics gain insight into the

volume of assessment competing for students' attention, and the variety of assessments students encounter throughout their programme of study. One of the virtues of TESTA is that undertaking a programmatic view of assessment and feedback involves significant discussion, bringing people together, in the first instance, to expose and then reflect upon the local assessment environment. This leads into a process of creating a shared philosophy of assessment and feedback linked to programme specifications and the educational principles of the discipline. A key goal for the success of any programme engaging with TESTA is to take this shared philosophy and use it to minimise and dissolve discrepancies between staff and students' perceptions of quality feedback and assessment practices.

TESTA at its best explores the idiosyncratic positions, dispositions and actions of students and tutors within programmes, highlighting the subjective nature of modularisation and the narrow view of student learning and assessment which arises when such perceptions are drawn from single module experiences. Research findings from approximately 30 publications implementing TESTA repeatedly demonstrate the subjective

nature of assessment environments, exposing how learning, achievement and progression mean quite different things from module to module and level to level within the same programme. Furthermore, within the same programme, different teachers implement (formative) assessment processes differently depending on the task, resources available, and student numbers. This raises further issues around our (academic) assessment literacy; if we as educators struggle to rationalise and define these concepts for ourselves, how can we support students' understanding of assessment processes?

When engaged with reflectively, TESTA provides powerful evidence for how students' ability to engage with assessment is constrained by the social conditions in which the assessment is conducted. In an environment of atomised and decontextualised testing, students face difficulties meeting the assessment demands placed upon them and risk disengaging from their institution. A central tenet to arise from this book is that it is not sufficient for individual teachers to design good assessments without attending to the environment in which assessment and feedback are embedded. Instead, holistic assessment and feedback processes

can encourage student agency and engagement, especially for those students who struggle academically and emotionally.

This book is of interest to anyone involved in assessment and feedback processes in higher education, particularly those with a programme lead perspective. It highlights local practice at University, School and Programme level to bring assessment and feedback practices under scrutiny and provides an impetus for individual programmes to act as best fit their discipline. How assessment practice and theory are integrated into the curriculum at programme level is currently underdeveloped and in the final chapters of this book Jessop challenges the readership to reflect on the changing role of academic development in HE and in particular how this is disciplinary specific. The overwhelming answer is to have fewer but larger summative assessments that address programme level objectives with more opportunities for formative assessment. The question still remains around how to do it.

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## Hidden truths and collaborative development: How the process of creating a MOOC brought to light surprising aspects of doctoral study and took our course to a whole new level

**Tom Graham** and **Nancy Weitz**, Bloomsbury Learning Exchange

It all seemed so simple...

Following a digital education-themed event, organised by the Bloomsbury Learning Exchange (BLE), a member expressed the need for more support for people coming into doctoral study, especially those from under-represented communities (which we define as referring to ethnicity, social background, age, disability and life circumstances). As one of our interviewees later expressed it: 'Academic

institutions play a very important role in supporting diversity and ensuring that students who decide to enter into doctoral studies have equal opportunity and equal access to thrive.' From this suggestion came the first plans for us to create a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) offering advice about approaching doctoral study.

We assembled a *working group* from amongst our institutional members to establish the overall goals, and we

decided to develop the course with the active participation of current PhD students as writers and contributors in order to make sure we were capturing authentic experience. This idea was greeted with enthusiasm and it seemed – at that time anyway – to be perfectly straightforward: the BLE would use questionnaires and interviews to find out what PhD students really need and what the academics and administrators who support and guide them think they actually need; practical expert input from the working group would scaffold and help to focus this; and we would bring in three current PhD students, as course authors, to work with the BLE to design and develop this material into an approachable and engaging online course on FutureLearn: ‘Is a PhD right for me?’.

The aim of the course never wavered: from the start, we intended to raise awareness of what a doctorate is and why an individual might (or might not) want to do one. Embedded in this simple goal was the knowledge that many people are put off from applying not because interest or ability were lacking, but because their assumptions about *who* does doctoral study and *how to* apply and do doctoral research made them feel excluded. Conversely, some people might apply who didn’t really understand the level of commitment and desire required, and it might not be the right decision for them. Our course would help fill the gaps and dispel misconceptions.

What none of us at the BLE foresaw when we started out on this project was that the whole process of creation would prove to be much more nuanced and revelatory, not just for those of us tasked with putting the course together, but also for the academics and students who so generously shared their experiences and insights with us. Indeed, this process is still continuing in the feedback we are receiving from those potential PhD students currently accessing the course online.

This article aims to give a picture of how the collaborative and iterative approach to design and development that naturally evolved in the making of this course brought to light *hidden truths* about PhD research and the individuals who undertake it.

## Design and development

‘Is a PhD right for me?’ was built upon three foundations. The first was the substantial questionnaires sent out to current and recent doctoral students and to supervisors. This elicited personal testimonies from individuals actively engaged in the day-to-day business of doctoral research, including matters such as the application process, approaching a supervisor, applying for funding, practicalities about living accommodation, and their feelings about the whole experience. The surveys also asked meaningful questions about what students knew about the experience of doctoral study *before* applying and what they wished they had known. Similarly, supervisors were asked what common misconceptions they saw students exhibit and what they wish students knew before they approached them. We knew these questions would bring up interesting tips and bits of advice we could glean, but it went way beyond that (as we shall see).

In addition, a broad range of students, supervisors, and academic staff were approached to give video interviews that would be included at each step of the course. Amongst others, these would give voice to the survey participants: many of our

contributors had indicated in their surveys that they would be happy to talk to us and eventually be interviewed for the course.

The second was the working group: specific champions of doctoral study representing academic experience and expertise across various disciplines and educational bodies came forward from the BLE partner institutions to form the working group. From these discussions, the essential remit and requirements of the course were developed.

The third foundation was the writing and development team. The Project Lead established the topic coverage and organising structure of the course, and the course authors, three PhD students (University of Glasgow, Coventry University, and Birkbeck, University of London), were brought in to do further research and write up the content. The course authors infused the course with their personal, first-hand perspectives not only on contemporary PhD experience but also on what kind of support they themselves would have found most useful when they first considered applying. Having to fit within FutureLearn’s week-based nested structure anchored us to rigid constraints, and the general shape of the course became: Week One – ‘Considering doctoral study’; Week Two – ‘Applying for doctoral study’; Week Three – ‘Life during doctoral study’.

With that, we started designing the course with the intention of blending what was inescapably an informational and personal objective (being able to work through their own desires, needs, goals, anxieties in order to decide whether a PhD was right for them), with variety and interactivity in a rolling entry, non-cohort-based asynchronous MOOC. A complicating factor was that it soon became clear that our approach to the course design needed to be flexible and continually responsive to the new perspectives introduced via interviews, which were taking place at the same time. One key element that emerged and undergirds all activity in the course is the *workbook* (devised by one of the course authors), where learners chart their own unique progress and record their personal reflections and engagement with practical activities, which provides a practical takeaway.

## Top-down, grassroots, and a blend of the two

We soon saw that we were working with two modes of experience concerning doctoral study: what might very loosely be called ‘top-down’ and ‘grassroots’ knowledge. The ‘top-down’ aspect came from the experts, professional academics, supervisors, and support staff – that is to say, those well-acquainted with the formal aspects of PhD research and who, in the course of their careers, have been involved with and overseen the entire progress of numerous PhD students from the initial approach through to graduation and beyond. The ‘grassroots’ aspect came largely from the students, who gave their own personal accounts of why they commenced PhD research, how they went about applying, the nature of their relationship with their supervisors, how they managed their research and how they coped with the many practicalities of life during the process. Of course, our ‘top-down’ experts had themselves all been ‘grassroots’ students in the past, and there is constant and close interchange between experts and students throughout the entire course of PhD study, so the two modes overlapped and were readily compatible.

We had thought that the course would move between the 'top-down' and 'grassroots' modes, juxtaposing information from expert professionals with individual accounts of the lived experience of students. But what began to come about, by itself at first and then later through conscious development, was not a series of juxtapositions between these two modes but rather something more resembling an alloy of the two: a process of collaborative development that became something greater than the sum of its parts.

## Collaborative development

This collaborative – and iterative – development resulted from the non-linear process by which the many elements of the course were put together. We all know that busy academics and students are not the easiest people to pin down for a meeting. This meant that the many video interviews we arranged with academics and students became staggered across time. Given that the video content and the written content had to integrate fully in the final course, we sometimes found ourselves waiting on interviews to create the written content, or else waiting on the written content to be produced that would guide a relevant interview.

Interestingly, what at first seemed like a frustration revealed itself to be a bonus, one that we came to cultivate and which had crucial significance in the content of the course. A student in one interview would make a very personal observation about their experience of study, which would then be raised with an academic in subsequent interview; this would prompt an equally personal response from the academic that would then be raised in the next interview, and so on. This generated a free-flowing, back-and-forth between students and staff that saw comments and observations gently gaining in significance as each interviewee responded to some particular idea, put their own unique spin on it, and passed it on. At the same time, these generative ideas continually informed the design and content that was being prepared in correlation to the interviews, and in turn prompted new lines of inquiry to feed back into future interviews. A natural and organic form of collaboration took shape between the course developers and the numerous interviewees, even when the majority of these individuals never met or communicated directly at all.

'Top-down' and 'grassroots' mutually informed each other in a progressive development that brought to light sometimes surprising aspects of the PhD experience that we recognised as *hidden truths*.

## Hidden truths and authentic experience

From the outset, one of the important elements of our course was the nature of the individual's experience of engaging in PhD study. Such study will always exact some sort of toll on the student, no matter how rewarding and enriching the research may be. Funding and living expenses are issues for almost all students. The energy and commitment demanded by PhD research can be highly stressful, and even the most able and determined student can find their mental health to some degree depleted. Universities increasingly offer advice, support, and counselling services to students from the moment they arrive. Study groups and social functions can help alleviate

the loneliness and isolation that PhD research can often entail, and the welfare of minority groups is increasingly being promoted and developed.

We determined from the start that, at its heart, our course would be dedicated to authentically addressing the individual needs, concerns, and issues of prospective doctoral students. In fact, during development, this concern impressed itself so strongly on us that it became central to the course. Above all, we didn't want these stresses to hit students without warning and snowball once their studies had already begun. Workload, money, self-doubt, isolation – these assaults on a student's mental health and general wellbeing are well-known dangers that most universities openly address. But, as the collaborative development of our course began to bring to light, there are other dangers that exist which are just as relevant but which tend to remain more hidden.

One such issue was introduced by a PhD supervisor we interviewed. Encouraged by us to say something about particular personal problems that students had raised with us, he took the topic into a wholly unexpected direction by introducing the idea of *guilt* – guilt for neglecting one's family and friends to spend time on one's research, or else guilt for choosing family and neglecting research. We raised this issue with the next PhD student we happened to interview, and it prompted her to move the topic onto *alienation* – that is, how a PhD student is prone to inhabit an esoteric intellectual world that well-meaning acquaintances can politely ask about but with which they are simply unable to meaningfully engage. Conversations can devolve into simple questions about practicalities (*When do you finish? What are you going to do afterwards? Are you okay for money?*), or process (*Why don't you have lessons to go to? Why isn't there an exam at the end?*), or simply questions of incomprehension (*What is your PhD actually about?*). These conversations cannot bridge the gulf of understanding, and the subject of the PhD will be avoided altogether.

We had not conceived of these issues when we began creating our course. And yet these issues emerged spontaneously from the collaborative process of development. They were important enough to our interviewees' personal experiences to be raised with us as material for the course. And there were many other nuanced, evocative, and highly individual issues arising from cultural expectations and class distinctions: about the perils of youthful enthusiasm and the crises of middle-age; about families and children; about caring for ailing loved ones; about bereavement and loss; and burn-out.

It must be stressed here that these interviews were not unremittingly bleak. There was plenty of positivity, humour and personal enrichment apparent in the people we spoke to, and at least two of the interviewees who shared the ups and downs of their experience have recently successfully attained their PhDs. But, while happy productivity tends to hum along quietly and take care of itself, problems need airing and support. What drew our attention was the variety of issues that were raised, the individual nuances of which seem more often than not to go unspoken and unaddressed during the course of university life.

Some of these issues were the source of self-censoring thoughts whereby individuals were inclined to write themselves off in advance as essentially unsuitable. Lack of familiarity with doctoral study might lead a prospective student to come to the conclusion that they are too old to apply, or that the demands of their domestic situation preclude them, or that they are simply ‘not the right kind of person’ because of their ethnic or social background. This was clearly expressed by our survey respondents and learners on the course:

*‘Where I come from, nobody even does Higher Education.’*

*‘I am uncertain whether I am too old, and if I am up to the challenge.’*

*‘I always felt that I didn’t know enough. I didn’t have the right experience.’*

*‘The system is set up for young single people. Family may be an obstacle.’*

*‘I had certain struggles and anxieties which put me off applying.’*

The prospective student doesn’t raise these self-doubts with university staff during their first approaches to doctoral study because they feel ashamed to do so, as if admitting to a personal inadequacy will itself debar them from entry, which inclines them to step back from their application silently before they have even begun. The sad irony is that the academy in general is open to addressing inequalities and, on the individual level, academic and professional staff are eager to find ways to manage and work around these perfectly legitimate issues. Professor Richard Freeman, Head of the Centre for Doctoral Education at UCL Institute of Education agrees:

*‘As a sector we cannot afford to continue to lose outstanding potential doctoral students from traditionally under-represented backgrounds simply because doctoral study is unfamiliar.’*

Our collaborative development had unearthed many of the hidden dangers that could occur throughout the whole of doctoral study – and even before that study had begun. We did not press our interviewees to share these personal testimonies with us. On the contrary, they proved eager to discuss their experiences of these hidden dangers, often in more detail than we could include in the final course. And it was this eagerness that encouraged us to incorporate these issues so centrally in the course.

To do many of the personal dramas justice we decided to present them in suitably dramatic ways while protecting the privacy of the interviewees. To this end, we had actors play a cast of potential students starting out together on their PhD journey, and filmed them in dramatic episodes wherein they could embody and reflect multiple aspects of the hidden dangers that our real-life interviewees had so movingly shared with us.

The neat and orderly combination of ‘top-down’ and ‘grassroots’ information we had planned to work with

when we commenced our course transformed through collaboration and flexible development into a far more nuanced, authentic and *human* course than we had originally envisioned – one that really takes the wellbeing and concern for the widest variety of individuals into its fibre and faces head-on the hidden truths that affect doctoral students before and during their studies.

## Conclusion

As learners enrol and begin working their way through it, their comments and feedback reveal that the course is clearly hitting its mark:

*‘An eye-opener to me. The perfect resource.’*

*‘Amazing course, summarised important points, focused on what we really need, and enjoyable.’*

*‘Really encouraging, has made me think more broadly.’*

*‘I have researched completing a PhD a lot, but I found this course covered matters not addressed so far. Thank you!’*

But the process of collaborative development did not stop when the MOOC went live. Much of the feedback within the course shows that the learners are just as eager to discuss these personal issues as our survey participants and interviewees were. Through this feedback, we carry on learning about the hidden truths that had so spontaneously come to the surface during the course development, seeing new aspects of these dangers, which we can then incorporate back into the course itself in subsequent updates. It is our hope that potential doctoral students coming to this course will leave as enlightened as we are ourselves.

Perhaps this is best expressed by one of our academic contributors:

*‘The thesis is not the great achievement of PhD research. The great achievement is the researcher themselves.’*

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## Information for Contributors

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# Towards staff engagement with SoTL: The case for supporting SoTL coherently and sustainably

**Petia Petrova**, University of the West of England, **Paul Chin**, University of Bath, and **Sabrina Vieth**, Solent University

## Introduction

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is at the core of academic practice. It is clearly positioned as such within the Professional Standards Framework and often underpins expectations for staff awards and career progression (particularly where Teaching and Learning pathways exist). However, SoTL can be seen as a discretionary activity in terms of how institutions support and encourage staff to engage with SoTL activities, and how staff prioritise these. This may be exacerbated by a commonly experienced separation of research and teaching and how these activities are resourced and organised (Petrova and Hadjianastasis, 2015). Thus, academic cultures have developed that foster a divide between the core activities of teaching and research which, despite both being essential components of higher education, are often seen as at odds with each other (Hattie and Marsh, 1996).

This research-teaching divide has led to a reality for many academics where disciplinary research is prioritised over teaching and related activities, with teaching being perceived as secondary in terms of recognition and career development. Hence, scholarly practice is not always seen as rigorous or as valuable compared to disciplinary research, resulting in a common assumption that teaching is a practical rather than 'scientific' skill and, thus, not a subject worthy of scholarly attention. Staff, therefore, often see SoTL as something that is not part of their core activities but instead should be done at the margins, often in their own time.

As educational developers, we face common challenges, including time pressures, institutional infrastructures and priority setting, cultures and legacies of practice, or limited resources to promote SoTL to the colleagues we support. In addition, many of us encounter obstacles that limit our own scholarly activities and our ability to influence others. For example, although we may all be united in the desire to engage in SoTL activities and research, some of us are on academic contracts whereas others are not, leading to large discrepancies in how our SoTL activities are supported and disseminated. Consequently, our abilities to support others in their SoTL activities vary greatly.

Where SoTL initiatives exist or have existed, these can generate great ideas and enthusiasm but are often short lived once the funding ends or attention is directed elsewhere. Experienced practitioners may recall past projects from recent decades such as the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP), the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL) and Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) as examples of broad initiatives that sometimes struggled to establish lasting effects across the sector. Others will also, no doubt, recall more local institutional examples too.

This cycle of growth, decline and regrowth never has the chance to establish roots, in effect a desert flower, where SoTL activities temporarily flourish when it showers to experience short-lived blooms. Indeed, SoTL activities are often created as

passion projects of the individual staff leading them, unlike the permanency that characterises centralised support for research activity. Consequently, these SoTL activities struggle to grow roots and gather fruits, limiting opportunities to sustain and evidence their impact. It also hinders the accumulation of collective wisdom that would allow staff to implement SoTL initiatives effectively and efficiently in the long term. To avoid the fate of the desert flower, there needs to be a shift from tacit support for SoTL activities to a more strategically coordinated or resourced approach across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

In this article we offer an overview and reflection of SoTL initiatives that support academic staff to engage in *and* be recognised for their SoTL. Reflecting on tried and tested practices of encouraging staff engagement with SoTL, we present practices within three areas (SoTL communities, SoTL infrastructures, and rewards and recognition of SoTL) that are centred around a core objective: individual support for our colleagues.

We hope this overview will encourage Educational Developers and their institutions to consider, plan and resource SoTL activities more strategically and systematically, enabling their longevity and ability to embed appropriate evaluation and enhancement processes. We hope to encourage institutional efforts to move SoTL activities beyond the short-term 'desert flower' approach and instead to create stable institutional structures and practices that are supported sustainably and strategically aligned.

## Reflecting on SoTL practices

Universities typically offer a range of schemes and activities to promote the development of SoTL, many of which are facilitated by educational development units. These have been mapped out below (Figure 1) to enable explicit discussions about which of these are most important for your specific institutions and warrant resourcing that should be supported and sustained over time.

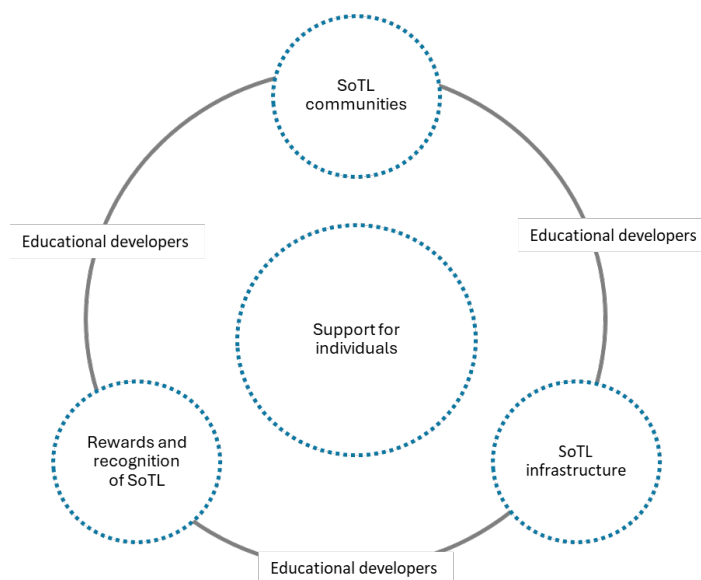


Figure 1 Overview of SoTL practices

## SoTL communities

There are a range of tried and tested community-based interventions that support SoTL where the learning and development takes place with others. These include reading, writing and research groups. Reading groups are spaces for staff to come together to explore and discuss the reading of SoTL literature. Research groups offer opportunities for staff to meet to share research ideas and research in progress. Where research groups are more established research networks with associated funding, these can become part of the fabric of structural support offered. Writing groups provide spaces (physical or virtual) for staff to write in a social setting for a short period of time (often from an hour up to a day). These offer discipline, focus, peer support and develop regular writing habits (Murray, 2014). In some cases, institutions or departments may choose to fund (annual) writing retreats which are typically longer than a day and focus on producing specific written scholarly outputs (Petrova and Coughlin, 2012).

Reading, research and writing groups can form parts of activities of a community of practice (CoP). CoPs are typically networks of staff with shared interest. CoPs can be themes based (*i.e.* digital, inclusivity), or role based (*i.e.* programme/module leaders), or location based (*i.e.* some communities may be based locally within a department/school/faculty, others may be cross-institutional or sector-wide). CoPs drive the development of collective expertise and scholarly practices. CoPs can increase enthusiasm, engagement and innovation related to SoTL.

Communities of practice would often host events where SoTL outputs can be shared. Many universities host annual teaching and learning conferences that offer a space to celebrate and share expertise that may have been supported by the different communities noted above. For those new to SoTL, these can be a great first opportunity to present SoTL work to peers. The trend more recently is for these institutional conferences to be open to external audiences and participation showcasing impact.

## SoTL infrastructure

SoTL infrastructures should provide educational developers and our colleagues with frameworks, policies, resources and systems to support and facilitate staff engagement in SoTL. These enable SoTL activities to be appropriately structured and funded, moving away from relying on the good will of colleagues to engage in SoTL activities, and on to an explicitly resourced institutional support infrastructure. This may include monetary support to advance SoTL activities through dedicated internal funding schemes with clear guidelines on how financial resources are allocated for SoTL activities across disciplines, how the funds should be used, and how to ensure accountability for transparent and responsible use of the allocated resources.

In addition, SoTL infrastructures can allow educational developers to provide targeted advice to colleagues on how to access external funding (from bodies such as: Advance HE, Quality Assurance Agency, Staff and Educational Development Association, Society for Research into Higher Education). SoTL infrastructures create spaces where staff are assured that they can seek advice and develop their skills with explicit focus on SoTL. This is particularly important against a backdrop of a wide range of disciplines and research backgrounds of the

staff we support. SoTL infrastructures may include mentoring schemes and annual review processes that have clear criteria on how SoTL activities can be fostered, supported and rewarded. It may also comprise of formal sabbaticals or secondments whereby colleagues can be bought out of their roles to work on specific SoTL projects. This would most likely be linked to funding to address key strategic goals – AI in assessment would be an obvious example.

SoTL infrastructures could also include initiatives such as new staff engaging in Postgraduate Certificates in Academic Practice as part of their probation (including apprenticeships), or PhD programmes in Higher Education or Educational Development, shining the light on the systematic study of teaching and learning practices in higher education. These may be attached to a research centre within the institution. It is important that SoTL research is clearly positioned or attached to research centres, ensuring that SoTL research topics and the scholars who engage with them (including us/educational developers) have a 'home'. It also allows SoTL scholars to benefit from the knowledge-sharing, creation and dissemination taking place within the research centre. SoTL activity within research centres might also be linked to scholarly networks such as central pedagogic research networks and/or faculty-based communities of practice which may promote their own mentoring schemes or support for external funding bids.

## Rewards and recognition of SoTL

Relatively recent positive trends in supporting staff engagement with SoTL include formal staff promotion routes that recognise teaching and scholarship. Developments like the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) have no doubt driven the increase in SoTL-based promotion opportunities. Promotion legitimises SoTL by formally recognising and valuing its importance. Educational Development Units (EDUs) may not always be able to directly influence promotion routes and their criteria but would typically provide support for staff to build their portfolios of SoTL work.

Rewards and recognition schemes, which can be evidenced for promotion, help provide visibility and importance of SoTL within teams/institutions and as a tool to encourage staff to appreciate SoTL as a priority for professional development. Approaches to rewards and recognition include internal or external teaching excellence awards, gaining professional status, *e.g.* Fellowship of the HEA, funding opportunities or national awards such as the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme or Times Higher Education awards. Some of these enablers, mentioned in a recent QAA project (Chin *et al.*, 2023), are about recognising achievement and therefore help staff prioritise SoTL activities.

EDUs and educational developers are well placed to understand how SoTL can link to rewards and recognition activities, as well as their potential links to promotion. They can offer support for staff to engage with scholarship, and so enable them to make claims for professional recognition. This proactive approach to formalised and sustained levels of support for staff engaging with SoTL helps promote a positive culture of scholarly practice. Whilst the influence of EDUs on actual schemes may vary, they can certainly promote the benefits of SoTL and for professional development.

## The role of educational developers and educational development units (EDUs)

EDUs are often the central drivers of SoTL support activities – the glue that holds everything together and that can develop and grow a more structured support for SoTL. To do this, EDUs need sustainable and clear institutional support for such initiatives. What can help is a clear institutional SoTL strategy that identifies which of the above elements an institution is willing to support, resource and sustain, allowing for these initiatives to bear fruit, and a recognition of the role of EDUs and educational developers in relation to SoTL.

Educational developers play a crucial role in bridging the divide between teaching and research and encouraging SoTL activity, most notably by demonstrating and supporting the development of innovative and effective teaching practices and influencing and inspiring others within the academic community. Furthermore, by showing a strong commitment to their own professional development through ongoing learning, attending conferences and engaging in SoTL, educational developers can inspire others to do the same.

Educational developers who conduct their own research on learning and teaching and disseminate their findings through publication, may be particularly strong role models for their academic colleagues. Through research activity they can establish themselves as experts and potential collaborators in the learning and teaching field, rather than being seen as enforcers of practices, rules and frameworks. This allows educational developers to not only set a positive example and demonstrate desirable qualities and behaviours, but also enables them to shed light on educational topics and methods yet unknown to their academic collaborators. This can contribute to the creation of a more balanced academic environment and the promotion of a culture of collaboration, showcasing how collaboration can improve learning and teaching. Simultaneously, being open about their own learning experiences, challenges and successes in learning and teaching, can cultivate an environment of openness that encourages others to share and learn from their own experiences. It is, thus, important that any decisions on how SoTL is to be supported institutionally should start with a consideration of how the SoTL activities of educational developers are to be encouraged and supported.

## Conclusion

Many institutions have introduced rewards and recognition schemes to encourage staff to engage with SoTL. These are outputs-driven initiatives. Engaging in SoTL is, however, an ongoing process that involves personal growth and development, supported by an institutional SoTL infrastructure. SoTL engagement is often driven by personal and professional values that inspire staff to seek novel solutions to problems arising in their teaching delivery, collecting evidence that changes of their teaching practices are effective, and widening their horizons of available teaching pedagogies. Promoting deep, meaningful and ongoing engagement with SoTL is rooted in developing communities of practice to empower staff to find satisfaction from investigating the impact of their pedagogical practices.

SoTL empowers individual academics to not only teach more effectively but also develop confidence and agency within the

learning and teaching space. Indeed, those teaching-focused academics who are at the forefront of educational research can also develop hybrid teacher/educational developer identities that allow them to shape how teaching activities are valued within their institutions and, thus, influence their non-teaching-focused colleagues (Godbold *et al.*, 2023). By promoting these SoTL identities, it may allow staff to work effectively with educational developer colleagues widening the reach of SoTL activities across academic and professional communities. This may pave the way for a more collaborative approach to academic development.

Offering coherent structural support and resourcing for SoTL activities can support staff on a journey of SoTL engagement learning from each other, developing and sharing SoTL practices, and be recognised for their SoTL achievements. Having an institutional and strategic view of the SoTL support infrastructure can also provide clarity of the institutional SoTL journey, providing coherency, consistency and capacity for SoTL. Importantly, having appropriately and continuously resourced activities also allows for these to be monitored and enhanced, increasing their impact.

This article offers an overview of key initiatives that institutions may use to support SoTL, the central role educational developers can play in this work and emphasises the importance of coherently and sustainably linking SoTL initiatives together. We hope that this can help institutions to be more explicit in identifying and implementing approaches that are more strategically aligned and relevant for their staff and institutions.

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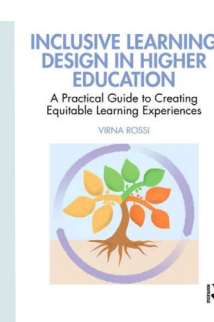
## Inclusive Learning Design in Higher Education: a practical guide to creating equitable learning experiences

by Virna Rossi

2023

Routledge

ISBN 9781032136189



*Inclusive Learning Design in Higher Education* by Virna Rossi offers a thorough exploration of inclusive practices for higher and further education. Rossi explores different aspects of inclusive learning design, providing actionable strategies and theoretical frameworks to help educators establish inclusive learning environments. The book opens with a metaphor of a tree, demonstrating the complexity, intricacies and interwovenness of the different elements of inclusive learning design, moving from 'roots' to 'shoots', and ending with the poem, 'Advice from a tree' by Ilan Shamir, an effective way in which to draw together the central tenets of her book.

The book stands out from others on this theme. It is designed as a practical guide, the theory illustrated by case studies and reflective prompts, ensuring relevance to real-world contexts. Rossi's primary aim is to demonstrate to the reader the importance of translating inclusive intentions into inclusive practices. Notably, the inclusive design Rossi advocates is reflected in the book's structure, with contributions

from educators worldwide, showcasing inclusive learning design in different educational and cultural settings. Rossi's focus truly is international, and this is a real richness of the book: it is all too rare that case studies are taken from contexts other than Western Europe, the USA and Australia and New Zealand. Here the global nature of higher education really is celebrated. With contributions from over 80 colleagues from across the globe, the book contains a wealth of different perspectives on inclusive learning design. This not only gives the reader a wide range of good practice on which to draw, but also underlines the commonalities and differences in higher education.

The book is divided into five sections, taking the reader through learning values, learning contexts, learning content, learning assessment, and finishing with learning evaluation. Each section follows the same structure: a graphic by the talented Nat Bobinski, illustrating the key themes for that section, underpinning theory, a reflective question and then a number of chapters focusing on different elements of the central thesis. The inclusion of reflective

questions invites introspection and application of concepts to different contexts. Additionally, a companion website offers supplementary audio-visual materials.

Key themes include the importance of addressing diverse student needs, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), accessibility, inclusive curriculum design, assessment practices, and leveraging technology for inclusivity. Rossi emphasises the necessity of proactive inclusive learning design, emphasising research-informed practices that enhance student engagement, participation, and success.

Rossi writes in a very persuasive manner, inviting us to reflect with her on inclusive learning design and what it means for us in our different contexts. Overall, *Inclusive Learning Design in Higher Education* serves as an invaluable resource for educators striving to foster inclusivity and create supportive learning environments that cater to the needs of all students.

**Jo Peat** is an Associate Professor and Head of Educational Development at the University of Roehampton.

## Building bridges in AI: Enhancing AI literacy for students and staff across disciplines

**Xue Zhou, Lilian Schofield, Joanne Zhang, Aisha Abuelmaatti and Lesley Howell**, Queen Mary University of London

### Introduction

Since the advent of Generative AI (GenAI) – ChatGPT – in November 2022, many opportunities have emerged for integrating AI into teaching and learning. Numerous studies have indicated that AI can enhance students' development of higher-order skills (Essien *et al.*, 2024), streamline the learning

process to boost academic performance (Chiu, 2023), and improve research capabilities (Kasneji *et al.*, 2023). As a new stakeholder in the learning environment, AI can provide round-the-clock support for student inquiries and aid in deepening their understanding of subjects (Zhou and Schofield, 2024). Despite these possibilities, concerns about the ethical use of AI

persist, particularly regarding its ability to foster crucial skills in students, like critical thinking and problem-solving. There is also the risk that over-reliance on AI might hinder students' independent learning and lifelong skill development (Zhou *et al.* 2024).

Industry has highlighted the critical importance of AI skills, with predictions by the World Economic Forum that over 50% of employees will require reskilling by 2025, with a focus on AI (World Economic Forum, 2024). In response to this dynamic landscape, higher education institutions have collectively agreed that all staff and students should be AI literate, with universities fully supporting staff in upskilling (Russell Group, 2023). Addressing this urgent need, Queen Mary University (QM) has initiated a transformative campaign to boost AI literacy among its staff and students. Spearheaded by a cadre of AI educational pioneers from various disciplines, this initiative involves colleagues from three different schools across two faculties at QM. It aims not only to adhere to the Russell Group's AI guidelines but also to cultivate a community proficient in understanding and applying AI.

## Approach and rationale

The AI training project was focused on enhancing AI literacy for students and staff across disciplines. The project was structured through a five-stage strategy, where each phase was designed to build on the previous, culminating in a holistic and engaging learning experience. This multi-stage methodology was inspired by the Queen Mary QM Active Curriculum for Excellence (ACE) approach and pillars, aiming to ensure that the project was not only educational but also actively engaged participants in practical, application-based learning within an AI-centric society. This initiative is characterised by three key elements: (i) co-creation with students, where students participate or lead in various sub-projects at each stage; (ii) cross-disciplinary collaboration, enabling students and staff from diverse backgrounds and varying AI literacy levels to openly collaborate and conduct the training project; and (iii) collaboration with both in-house and external AI experts, leveraging AI knowledge effectively and partnering closely with industry specialists. The project commenced in October 2023 and concluded in May 2024. In the following section, we detail the five stages of the AI literacy development project.

## Project implementation

### Stage 1: AI student discussion forum

We conducted a dialogue session with 35 students to better understand their experiences and needs regarding AI. The students shared valuable insights into how they have encountered AI in their academic work. Notably, they highlighted a gap in understanding how to use AI in learning. The students expressed a strong need for comprehensive training that would enable them to use AI responsibly and effectively - not only in their academic work but also in their future professional development.

### Stage 2: AI literacy training

We invited AI experts from the industry (e.g. Director of AI Governance) and AI academic experts from QM and beyond (e.g. the University of Leeds and the University of York). These sessions covered a range of topics from foundational

AI principles to technical subjects such as computer vision, generative models, the ethical considerations inherent to AI deployment and practical sessions including using AI for research, data analysis, and video creation. The aim was to improve students' AI literacy and support their learning through AI. This project aligns well with the ACE approach – a facilitated session 'Learning by doing' and pillars of excellence in student employability and education.

### Stage 3: AI case study collections and staff AI literacy survey

We collected case studies from various schools, which provide the different ways educators have applied AI in their practice. These case studies illustrate how AI is transforming teaching, learning, assessment, and research across different educational settings. Additionally, our survey, disseminated across QM, captured staff perceptions of AI usage in higher education, aiming to inform and enhance our teaching and learning strategies. The AI project team, along with three student research assistants, collected 20 case studies from students and staff, and conducted a survey completed by 106 staff members, providing insights into AI's current and potential impact on education.

### Stage 4: AI best practice sessions

Three AI best practices sessions were arranged and delivered from February to May 2024, covering topics of AI in teaching and learning, AI in assessment, and using AI in research. In these sessions, we showcased innovative ways in which students and staff are harnessing artificial intelligence to redefine teaching, learning, and research in our academic community. Students were also invited to present how they use AI for learning and research.

### Stage 5: Self-paced AI training module

Leveraging insights from the case studies and the virtual learning platform, and the QMPLUS module on Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry (FMD) learning and research, we developed a ten-hour, self-guided module aimed at equipping students with AI tools for academic and research purposes. This enables students to integrate AI tools into their learning and research effectively and responsibly. This project is well aligned with the ACE approach – a student-paced learning activity and pillars of excellence in employability and learning community.

## Evaluation and findings

### Student evaluation of AI literacy training

The two-day workshop attracted over 1100 registrations, with more than 640 attendees, highlighting a significant interest in AI literacy. 66 students who completed five out of six workshops have been awarded an AI literacy online badge. 92% of students reported that the workshop material was thoroughly covered, and an equal percentage felt that key issues were clearly explained during the session. Furthermore, 80% of the participants expressed a desire to apply the knowledge gained from the session. An impressive 90% of students would recommend the training to their peers or colleagues. Regarding the impact of the training on their learning practices, 65% of students believe it will lead to changes, while 27% consider it a possibility.

The feedback received was extremely positive. Students found the experience to be both enlightening and profoundly inspiring. A student shared their feedback, 'The AI literacy training was eye-opening. It made me realise how AI is interwoven with our daily lives and its potential for our future'. Another participant reflected, 'I never knew how creative AI could be until this training. It's not just about coding; it's about creating solutions that can change the world'.

### Staff level of AI literacy

From the case studies and surveys collected, we discovered various innovative approaches our staff have implemented using AI in teaching and research across different disciplines. These include using AI to create teaching materials, encouraging students to critique AI-generated content to enhance their critical analysis skills, utilising AI for personalised feedback and expedited marking processes, and employing AI for systematic literature reviews. However, the survey results indicate that only 11% of staff have undergone AI training, 56% feel uncertain about using AI in their teaching and research, and 58% are sceptical about AI's potential to positively impact student outcomes and enhance learning experiences. The qualitative data further reveals a significant gap in technological pedagogical knowledge, which pertains to effectively integrating GenAI into teaching and research practices.

### Staff evaluation of best practice session

Over 150 staff attended these three AI best practice workshops. With 100% of staff satisfied with the best practices session, there's a clear indication of the session's success in meeting its objectives. The willingness to implement AI practices is substantial, with 42% of staff very likely to apply what they've learned and 58% somewhat likely to do so, suggesting a broad consensus on the potential benefits of integrating AI into academic and research practices. However, while there's a high rate of satisfaction and intent to apply AI best practices, only 41% of staff feel confident in their ability to do so, highlighting an area for further support and development to bridge the confidence gap and enhance AI application skills.

The staff provided positive feedback on the best practices, particularly praising the excellence of student presentations. These presentations underscored the necessary actions staff need to take to better educate students on the effective and efficient use of AI. Staff appreciated 'gaining insights into both lecturers' perspectives on AI and students' reasons for utilising AI in their work'. Hearing directly from students about their views on using AI was highlighted as particularly valuable, indicating a mutual learning experience that benefits both teaching approaches and student understanding. After the session, staff members shared how they adopted their colleagues' methods of using AI to enhance their teaching and marking processes. One staff member recounted: 'Following on colleague's demonstration in the last "Using AI for Assessment and Feedback" session, I created a JSON file containing form details, prompts, responses, and finalised discursive feedback. These files can be easily compiled for further reporting and analysis, which has significantly reduced the time I spend on marking'.

## Conclusion and reflection

Overall, the project was highly successful and provided a valuable learning experience in advancing AI literacy among both students and staff. It has been rewarding to see students leveraging AI to enhance their learning and staff gaining confidence in using AI for teaching and research:

- *Co-creation with students*: This collaboration with students at QM has proven to be an effective method for developing AI literacy and skills. Students took the initiative, using social media to promote the session and creatively designing posters for events. One of the students also authored a paper, with others presenting at different talks. By directly involving students, we gained insights into their needs, which allowed us to tailor the training more flexibly, thereby validating the importance of student input in shaping educational initiatives
- *Co-creation with AI experts*: Collaboration with AI-leading experts who serve on government boards enriched the training programme by incorporating a comprehensive blend of expertise from their practice, employer insights and policy perspectives. Their expertise ensured a strong theoretical foundation and demonstrated practical applications
- *Cross-disciplinary approach*: This approach was crucial in the initiative, enabling academics to think beyond traditional boundaries and explore the potential applications of pedagogical knowledge across different disciplines. This interdisciplinary strategy encouraged innovative thinking and application of AI in various fields.

However, we recognise that there is still a long road ahead:

- *Integrating AI literacy into curricula*: While extra-curricular activities to develop AI skills are straightforward to organise, integrating AI literacy training into everyday academic programmes remains a challenge. Programme leaders need to embed AI education within their teaching frameworks, ensuring that AI literacy and skills development are incorporated across all subjects and disciplines
- *Enhancing staff proficiency with GenAI tools*: Although some staff are familiar with GenAI tools, given the fact most of these tools are easy to use, there is a general gap in how to effectively implement these tools in subject-specific teaching. Additional training or best practice sessions focused on technological pedagogical knowledge are essential. These efforts will help staff build their confidence and capabilities in using AI effectively within their teaching practices
- Ethical considerations have presented challenges for staff in encouraging students to use AI responsibly. There is a notable absence of clear guidelines on ethical AI usage, which complicates efforts to instruct students on how to utilise AI technologies ethically and responsibly. To address this, it is imperative to establish clear policies that delineate the boundaries of AI usage for students and prevent potential biases that may arise when educators themselves attempt to identify AI use. These policies should help create a framework within which students can explore AI applications safely and ethically.

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# Transitioning to university

**Gerard Hanlon**, Queen Mary University of London, and **Nceku Nyathi**, Monash University, Australia

## Introduction

Business Schools face a multitude of challenges not the least of which is the tension between its somewhat Janus-faced academic and vocational nature. This is reflected in its undergraduate student body, which is a mix of A-Level sixth formers, International Baccalaureate students and more vocational entry qualifications, e.g. students with the BTEC in Business Management. In short, it is fair to say that the Business School is at the vanguard of this university-wide transition, but whilst BTEC students make up 16%-18% of HE students, they are concentrated in certain subject areas – computers, health related, and business and management. However, given financial constraints and pushes to accept more vocational qualifications in the interests of widening participation, e.g. Office for Students (OfS) (2018), what is a Business School issue today will be a wider university one tomorrow.

So, what are these issues? As has been well documented, BTEC students, and vocational students generally, are less likely to get good degrees, i.e. a 2.1 or

better, more likely not to progress after the first year, more likely to go to non-Russell Group universities, struggle with particular forms of curricula, assessment and pedagogy, and can feel somewhat unwelcome at university (Shields and Masardo, 2015; OfS, 2020; Katartzi and Hayward, 2020).

Having worked at various institutions such as Leicester, De Montfort, Royal Holloway, Queen Mary etc., and as academics with many years of teaching at Business Schools, we are very familiar with these issues and know that despite their equivalence, BTEC and A-Levels are quite different. This creates transition problems to university because, historically, universities have been A-Levels focused and academics themselves have generally done A-Levels or similar qualifications. With some brief examples, we will suggest that in a subject like business and management, there are important differences between BTEC and A-Level that matter in the classroom. We will do so by examining the A-Level and BTEC qualifications, highlighting an example of programme transformation in light of these

issues, and more closely looking at a compulsory module that was changed to address some of these concerns. But first, to the A-Level.

## Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment: A-Level

Generally, A-Level Business is one of three subjects combined with lots of possible other subjects – English, Maths and Business, for example. The subject at A-Level is described by the provider Pearson Edexcel (2017) as 'developing a range of experiences', 'holistic', 'critical', dealing with 'ethical dilemmas', and providing a 'range of experiences'. It is built around four themes – marketing and people, management business activities, business decisions and strategy, and global business – all equally weighted. There is also the potential to do an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) on any business subject of a student's choosing. Importantly, the EPQ is designed to build more critical, reflective and independent learners, develop and apply decision-making and problem-solving skills, demonstrate creativity, and reflexivity. It is rated as

half an A-Level.

The A-Level is assessed by exams across three papers (Pearson Edexcel, 2017). Paper 1 assesses the two themes Marketing and People and Global Business, Paper 2 examines Managing Business Activities and Business Decisions and Strategy. These are both two-hour long exams and ask two questions each. Paper 3 is a synoptic assessment designed to show a combination of writing, reading, and research skills, in-depth knowledge, and a breadth of understanding across all four themes. As such, it develops critical thinking, evidence use, it creatively links seemingly unrelated issues etc. It is in two sections; Section A is a broad question released in November for completion in the following summer, which students are supposed to research through independent study, class work, internal practice assessments etc. This is followed by Section B, which focuses on a segment of Section A but asks for more in-depth development. Data and materials are provided to students to evidence answers on the day. Combined with other A-Levels, the range of traditional university skills and knowledge developed is potentially high, making it a very recognisable qualification for academics.

### Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment: BTEC

In contrast, the BTEC Extended Diploma in Business is a different beast. It is a two-year course; however, importantly it is the only subject a student takes. Students who take BTECs typically have poorer Level 2 qualifications, e.g. in our experience students generally do not have GCSE English or Maths at Grade 5 or over, and then do not take English or Maths beyond GCSE. Pearson (2023) deploys terms like 'employer-led', 'grounding in the latest industry requirements', it is a 'practical' qualification that provides students with 'knowledge applied in project-based assessment' etc., to describe the qualification.

The total time qualification for the subject maps out at 1430 hours. These hours are made up of 1080 (75%) guided learning, i.e. lessons, tutorials, online instruction, marking, feedback, supervised study etc., and 350 hours of independent study. As such, the A-Level qualification reflects university

more because it places greater emphasis on independent study. This means the university demand that, for example, a 15-credit level 4 module has allocated to it 150 hours of study (largely made up of independent learning) is something BTEC students find difficult after being taught more in the classroom.

Furthermore, the curriculum is different to A-Level. The BTEC course comprises 13 units, seven of which are mandatory. These are Exploring Business, Developing a Marketing Campaign, Personal and Business Finance, Managing an Event, International Business, Principles of Management, Business Decision-making. There is also a range of optional units, e.g. Final Accounts for Public Limited Companies or Investigating Customer Service (Pearson, 2023, p. 5). Combined, the 13 units make up 960 credits of which six are 60 credits, four are 90 credits, and two are 120 credits. Most units are internally assessed with guidance, practice and feedback provided for assessments, which are then submitted following feedback and revision. These are then marked within the FE College, after which a sample is sent to Pearson.

Assessment is built around a 'vocational scenario or context'. For example, in the optional 60 credit 'Investigating Retail Business', (to paraphrase) the student is asked 'to imagine yourself as studying at FE and working in a retail outlet. For your upcoming appraisal gather information on the current retail structure in your area and changes that are taking place there. By doing so, you hope to demonstrate an understanding of retail and get promoted'. Students should then gather information on the local area, retail outlets, examine the area's retail history, highlight reputable retailers etc., to make a presentation in class, get feedback and after a short period be assessed via a renewed presentation. Research sources are accessed via Pearson's platform and/or websites such as Investopedia or Forbes, and perhaps a textbook like *The High Street Heroes: the story of British retail in 50 people* is used.

Indeed, this emphasis on finding new information via the website is a key transitioning point because having learned to access the web for evidence, at university BTEC students often think they need to immediately find

information to get taken away from assigned reading. Problematically, they find information in sometimes useful, but often less useful, or even damaging, web materials. Furthermore, there is very limited assessment by essay or exam. Generally, students are assessed via projects, use of case studies, role play, presentations etc., all aimed at developing skills. Synoptic assessment does take place via the mandatory unit, Develop a Marketing Campaign. However, this is a 90-credit unit and is worth less than 10 per cent of the overall qualification. Thus, learning across modules or creatively linking them is not encouraged as it is at A-Level.

### Transitioning and equity

Education has long been used in the UK for two things – to encourage economic growth and to enhance social mobility. Central to this has been the discourse of a 'parity of esteem' between qualifications, e.g. an Extended BTEC in Business is equivalent to three A-Levels (Katartzi and Hayward, 2020, p. 302). Unintentionally, this has perhaps undermined issues of pedagogy because if all students are equal, then potentially there are no pedagogic issues concerning who arrives at the university every September.

Based on our experience and research into the qualifications, this seems unfair. Why? It is unfair because academics, and A-Level students, have no real understanding of the BTEC, have negative views of it as a qualification, and generally have a 'deficit' view of BTEC students – they stereotype them as somehow lacking (OfS, 2020, 13, pp. 24-5). Given traditional curriculum, pedagogy and assessment models at university, this is unsurprising.

However, what this deficit view also glosses over is the success of BTEC students at university, even if they do not score as highly as A-Level students. One way to think about this is that like working class, disabled, BAME or any other disadvantaged students, getting to university, and surviving it to do well, is quite an achievement in an often-hostile space. For example, at De Montfort University, in the Managing Organisational Change module, Nyathi allocated the last 45 minutes – a specific section of each of the sessions – to group case study work where students had been put in



groups (mixing different backgrounds and academic qualifications) at the beginning of the term. The groups were asked to read through their case study and allocate management roles to each member of the group. At the end of each taught session, the groups were each handed a brief, which required them to review the case study, either in the light of new information, or to look at the ways in which newly learned theories and concepts informed management decision-making with regards to organisational change. Feedback from the work that the group had done was then presented in a 15-minute slot at the beginning of the following week. Groups alternated such that each session started with just one fifteen-minute informal presentation. These weekly group activities students exposed their strengths and weaknesses, and incomplete understandings, opening opportunities for the tutor to offer feedback that advanced learning. Having played to the strengths of the BTEC students, it eased transitioning.

Nevertheless, this 'success' should not be seen as enough, and given the Office for Students' (2018, 2019) desire to reshape what we mean by access and participation at university to stress equity of opportunity, not equality of opportunity, universities – especially elite ones - need to pay attention to change, and perhaps Freire-like, to think what does the student bring.

### Attention and change? Queen Mary, University of London

Within the Russell Group, Queen Mary School of Business and Management is at the forefront of this transition. Queen Mary prides itself on its access and widening participation. For example, 92 per cent of home students come from state schools, 75 per cent are Black, Asian or minority ethnic, 49 per cent are the first in their family to go to university, 26 per cent of home students have accessed free school meals, and 25 per cent of students come from families with annual taxable income of less than £10,000. Furthermore, eight per cent of Queen Mary's students are from a BTEC background (Queen Mary, 2022). The School of Business and Management reflects all these figures, if a little higher except for one: BTEC percentage of the School's total student body was 35.5 per cent in 2021/22. Thus, the

School is a good place to think about how vocational qualifications and more traditional academic pedagogy meet, and perhaps even clash.

Obviously, we need to do this whilst recognising that the qualification route into university is one variable in a wide variety of variables, e.g. class, disability, religion, ethnicity, gender etc., and because of this, it is unfair to isolate it as the key variable. That said, the School did notice some variation across routes. For particular areas, e.g. accounting, economics and modules like Hanlon's Business and Society, where reading and writing critically were important, BTEC students performed significantly less well. On average, BTEC students scored 15-20 per cent less well in 2017. Given the School's strong commitment to social justice and sustainability in every sense, we could not allow this to stand. As such, the School decided to take action via the 'First Year Transformation Project' wherein, following Basil Bernstein (see Kartarzi and Hayward, 2020), we examined our curriculum, pedagogy, assessment as a holistic unit and set about redesigning the first year.

The Transformation Project shifted to a skills base rather than a knowledge-oriented, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment format. This was supported by more intensive learning support in Year 1 to support the full range of required skills for successful continuation. A team comprising students, academics and professional services staff was assembled, and a student-led consultancy team examined the first-year experience. Changes were implemented to the programme structure, delivery and assessment. These included a set of new mission-aligned compulsory modules, themed around contemporary business challenges, delivered through double-staffed workshops and partly assessed through team projects. This transition was deemed a success because between 2017/18 and 2021/22, the differences in module failure rates between all students and, for example, South Asian males with BTEC qualifications, fell from -23 per cent to -2 per cent. (Queen Mary, 2022). To demonstrate how some of this is achieved we will briefly look at the Business and Society module.

### Business and Society

Business and Society is one of the

compulsory first-year modules that was revamped. It runs in the first semester. It was moved from a lecture/seminar format to a two-hour workshop wherein an academic (Hanlon) and a teaching assistant were in the room. The line of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment was very tightly integrated to form a whole. All lectures were recorded in four or five 15-minute videos, put online and made available to students in bite-size chunks that were accessible at a pace they controlled. A short summing up of the lecture was provided at each two-hour workshop, which then moved to mission-aligned real-world problems concerning corporations and sustainability, e.g. how is climate change impacting the insurance industry, what parts of the world and what populations have/do not have insurance, how are consumption-profitability-sustainability linked, what is a circular economy etc.

Where possible, students were assigned to groups containing BTEC and A-Level students within the module. In the workshop we deployed the jigsaw method where each group was tasked with reading a section of a paper and then presenting it and linking it to earlier sessions and/or earlier presentations. These readings and presentations fed into and prepared the groups for their first and second group presentation/mindmap assignments. As with Nyathi's Management Organisational Change module, the purpose was to broaden assessment forms into areas where BTEC students have historic strengths, enabling them to do some peer-to-peer learning with A-Level students who may be less familiar with the format, and not to deploy a deficit model and/or stereotype BTEC students, but to develop inclusive methods (OfS, 2020, p. 25). In short, to use the diversity in the room as an advantage.

This also allowed us to scaffold assessment so that assignment one linked to assignment two and both were building blocks to the individual essay assignment. Scaffolding assignments slowly eased students from group work to individual essays. This transition was facilitated by using the period after assignment two to write group introductions to the essay question and to present some anonymised examples and ask students to work out what the core argument of the essay was, what sources and evidence would be used from the structure of the

essay outlined, and if they could see the paragraphs that would potentially be developed etc. Given A-Level students have traditionally stronger writing skills, this theoretically enabled peer-to-peer learning. Then, we moved on to developing individual introductions, whilst all the while using the two hours to read short pieces useful to assignments. Again, this was a success, and the gaps were lessened so that BTEC students did on average as well as other students.

## Conclusion

This short paper acknowledges the lack of parity between different qualifications, and suggests that with extra resources and a closer integration of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, universities can ameliorate some of the transitioning difficulties for vocational students. In doing so, the OfS desire to establish equity of opportunity can be potentially welcomed. Importantly, we are not saying this is without challenge. One important question is how do we know that lessening the gaps between vocational and traditional students reflects a rise in academic capacities in vocational students rather than a lack

of stretching the capacities of traditional university entrants? Furthermore, teaching classrooms full of mixed ability students with different skills and experiences is time-consuming and resource intensive – the (cheap) format of lecture/seminar does not work and instead more academics and lower staff-student ratios are needed in the room – something OfS must consider as it pursues its laudable equity of opportunity agenda.

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# Just one more thing: Becoming a forensic educational developer

## Steve Outram, Higher Education Consultant and Researcher

You may be familiar with the Locard Exchange Principle. It stems from the work of Dr Edmond Locard, who created the world's first forensic science laboratory in Paris. Locard's principle holds that the perpetrator of a crime will bring something into the crime scene and leave with something from it. Both can be used as forensic evidence, a key concept in forensic investigations. This is summarised as 'every contact leaves a trace'. This is the staple of most crime procedural dramas and probably all taught forensics programmes.

Paul Kincaid (2024) has adapted this principle in his work on selfless leadership and created Forensic Leadership, arguing that the same is true of leadership as it is of crime scene investigation: 'every contact leaves a trace'.

Kincaid argues that there are three guiding principles of forensic leaders:

1. Lead from a position of care
2. Notice people and, where appropriate, give recognition or notice when they are struggling and lean in and help out
3. Be appropriately transparent and communicate your intent - your vision, purpose, and strategy – compellingly, so everyone understands their part in the plan.

He argues that doing the right thing always leaves **GREEN** traces on people, and doing the wrong will leave **RED** traces. He goes on to say that red traces last longer than green ones, which quickly fade, and that red traces are contagious. Word spreads quickly about a negative encounter or interaction. Forensic leaders, he argues, need to pay

attention to four key questions:

1. What will happen if I do it?
2. What won't happen if I do it?
3. What will happen if I don't do it?
4. What won't happen if I don't do it?

Perhaps the Locard Principle could be adapted to the work of educational developers.

As Kincaid acknowledges, the first thing to note is that one may intend a 'green' interaction or intervention. However, the reception may still be negative, a red one, because of the situation, the environment, and what preceded the encounter. This can be avoided, argues Kincaid, by imagining the worst beforehand.

Secondly, as educational developers, perhaps it is too simplistic to rely simply on red and green traces. There could be shades of green where dark green

denotes an enduring positive response, and so on.

A critical aspect of the original Locard Principle is that leaving a trace is a two-way process (something less well developed in Kincaid's work). As educational developers, one might look to capture the trace left on us by the colleagues we have been working with – and acknowledge it. In reverse mentoring, there is an expectation that the mentor will learn something from the mentee.

Similarly, with reciprocal mentoring, there is the principle that there is an expectation of mutual support and learning and the potential to co-create generatively - collaboratively, leaving a trace not only on each other but also within the institutional ecosystem. As David Clutterbuck (nd) says:

*'It's a partnership of co-learning equals despite the difference in status outside the relationship. The impact of the mentoring conversations on each other is only part of the picture. Equally, if not more important, is their capacity to change the system.'*

Leaving a digital trace must also be included in this discussion of the exchange principle; whether it is the tone of an email, interacting in Zoom or Teams, or more formally working online – every contact leaves a trace.

In these challenging days, when the work of higher education central departments may be scrutinised more closely, being mindful of the traces we leave behind and co-create is just one of the things that we might do. We might also seek out those parts of the institution where there has yet to be an educational development trace.

(I am indebted to my colleague, Agnes Fletcher, for bringing Paul Kincaid's work to my attention.)

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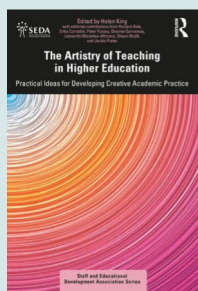
**Steve Outram** (steveoutram@protonmail.com) is a Higher Education Consultant and Researcher.

# New SEDA Publications

*In the Staff and Educational Development Association Series with Routledge:*

## The Artistry of Teaching in Higher Education: practical ideas for developing creative academic practice

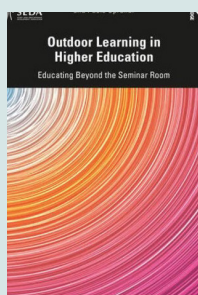
Edited by Helen King  
With 31 contributors  
Published in August 2024  
Pbk, £29.99



**Professor Helen King** is the Director of Learning Innovation, Development and Skills at Bath Spa, and is Vice-Chair of SEDA, having completed a term as a SEDA Co-Chair.

## Outdoor Learning in Higher Education: educating beyond the seminar room

Edited by Wendy Garnham and Paolo Oprandi  
With 28 contributors  
Published in August 2024  
Pbk, £29.99



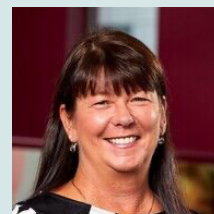
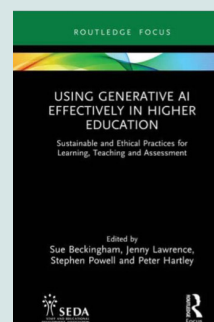
**Wendy Garnham** is Professor of Psychology at the University of Sussex, UK. She is also co-founder of the Active Learning Network.

**Paolo Oprandi** is a Doctor of Digital Pedagogy and manages the Knowledge learning environment at the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

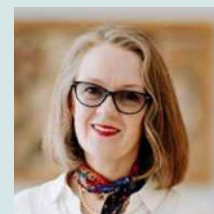
*In the SEDA Focus Series with Routledge:*

## Using Generative AI Effectively in Higher Education: sustainable and ethical practices for learning, teaching and assessment

Edited by Sue Beckingham, Jenny Lawrence, Stephen Powell and Peter Hartley  
Published in June 2024  
With 34 contributors  
e-book, £17.09



Sue Beckingham



Jenny Lawrence



Stephen Powell



Peter Hartley

## Educational Developments 25.2

Please note two corrections to the published text:

Dr Claire Goode's email is Claire.Goode@op.ac.nz

Dr Kevin L. Merry, PFHEA, is the Founder and Chair UDL UK & Ireland Education Network (drkevinl@icloud.com).

# SEDA News

## SEDA Congratulates New Fellows

Seda has awarded Fellowships and Senior Fellowships to:

### Fellowships

Stephanie Bourke, Western Sydney University  
Naima Iftikhar, Western Sydney University  
Carys Kennedy, University of the Arts, London  
Caroline Lunt, Western Sydney University  
Natalie Usher, University of Oxford  
Kate Wigglesworth, Scotland's Rural College

### Senior Fellowships

Gayle Brewer, University of Liverpool  
Ruth Healey, University of Chester  
Karen Heard-Lauréote, Independent Consultant  
Pollyanna Magne, Oxford Brookes University  
Gemma Mansi, University of Greenwich  
Alison Purvis, Sheffield Hallam University

You can find more about the Fellowship scheme at:  
<https://www.seda.ac.uk/professional-development-opportunities/fellowships-scheme/>

## SEDA/JISC Student Partnership Impact Award 2024

36 Individual Awards and 31 Team Awards have been granted in the latest round of this very successful initiative. For a full list of the 67 awardees, see: <https://www.seda.ac.uk/news/seda-jisc-student-partnership-impact-award/> Congratulations to all of them, and to the SEDA/JISC team which manages the process!

## SEDA's Executive Committee and Sub-Committees



Erika Corradini

Ros O'Leary

### SEDA's Co-Chair

**Erika Corradini** is SEDA's new Co-Chair, serving with Claire Saunders. Erika is a Principal Teaching Fellow in Academic Practice in the Centre for Higher Education Practice at the University of Southampton.

### SEDA's Vice-Chair

**Ros O'Leary** is SEDA's new Vice-Chair. Ros is an Associate Professor in Learning and Teaching at the Bristol Institute for Learning and Teaching, at the University of Bristol.

## Members of the Executive Committee and new Committee Chairs

SEDA welcomes **Maureen Royce** and welcomes back **Sue Beckingham** to the Executive Committee.

**Silvia Colaiacomo** is the Co-Chair of the PDF Committee.

**Chris Mitchell** and **Wendy Garnham** are the Co-Chairs of the Papers Committee, and co-editors of the SEDA Staff and Educational Development Series and the SEDA Focus Series, both with Routledge.

**Gemma Mansi** is the Co-Chair of the Fellowships Committee.

## SEDA's Online Conference, 28 November 2024

### New Challenges for Educational Development – National and International Perspectives



**Professor Roni Bamber** will be the keynote speaker. Amongst many other major contributions, Roni Bamber is the author of two of the most important SEDA publications – the SEDA Paper *Our Days Are Numbered: metrics, managerialism, and academic development*, and the SEDA Special 34, *Evidencing the Value of Educational Development*.

Full details of the Conference will soon be posted at:  
<https://tinyurl.com/3treswna>

## Coming Soon: SEDAtalk

From October, SEDA will be offering a monthly half-hour recorded webinar (with chat) on topical issues of interest both to SEDA members and the wider community interested in educational change and development.

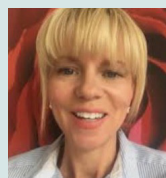
The first session will be led by Peter Hartley and Sue Beckingham on the impact and implications of Generative AI for educational change, starting with an introduction to the new SEDA Focus publication on GenAI.

More details to follow.

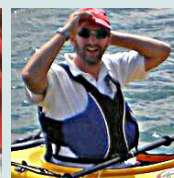
## News about Educational Developments

The Educational Developments Editorial Committee welcomes a new chair **Dr Annie Hughes**, Kingston University, who is taking over from James Wisdom.

Also, **Peter Gossman**, who joined the committee in 2013 and who, amongst his other talents, has been a reliable and prolific book reviewer, has retired from the University of Worcester and has stepped down from the committee. We will be publishing his final review in the next issue. Readers who may have noticed the occasional integration of Bob Dylan's lyrics into his reviews might be interested in the paper Peter gave to the 2014 International Consortium for Educational Development Conference: "There's no success like failure, and failure's no success at all." What Bob Dylan's lyrics say about education' (available at [eprints.worc.ac.uk/6259/](https://eprints.worc.ac.uk/6259/)).



Dr Annie Hughes



Dr Peter Gossman