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Abstract

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) has become synonymous with online learning in HE. However, with the rise of Web 2.0 technologies, social networking tools and cloud computing the architecture of the current VLEs is increasingly anachronistic. This paper suggests an alternative to the traditional VLE: one which allows for flexibility and adaptation to the needs of individual teachers, while remaining resilient and providing students with a seamless experience. We present a prototype of our vision, combining our new development software and a number of existing tried and tested tools into a single flexible interface, and built on established pedagogical and technical standards.

The origins of the modern VLE

The modern concept of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) or Learning Management System (LMS) first appeared soon after the advent of the World Wide Web, which made the Internet accessible to non-technical users. Prior to that online learning systems had required custom software on the user’s computer, or considerable technical skills from both the students and their teachers, and so were much more specialised than the modern VLE. A VLE is simply an interactive website where software running on the server creates web pages on-the-fly in response to a client request. One of the first systems to make use of web technology for teaching was Clyde Virtual University (CVU) (Whittington and Sclater, 1998) developed by Strathclyde University. CVU contained web pages for individual courses which were only available to registered students, and which contained links to pages of learning material, quizzes and discussion forums.

More than 15 years later, surprisingly little has changed in the VLE. The typical format still consist of course pages which list relevant information, and links to web pages, forums and quizzes. Newer additions to this list include assignment upload, wikis and support for peer reviewing. Although each of these functions is quite separate from the others, all of them were built into the same large software system, typically either running on a single server or with servers split between database and other functions. These VLE systems typically take on the full online course material delivery role at the University, however they are quite separate from back-end systems that deal with student course selection and grades.

Current UK situation

In the U.K. higher education sector two VLE platforms, Moodle and Blackboard, each have a substantial share of the market, while a number of other platforms including Sakai, Desire2learn and local customizations of Sharepoint are used in very small numbers of institutions. Moodle and Blackboard both provide similar facilities for teaching staff and students. For support staff the platforms are very different, as Moodle is open-source, and adding custom features is fairly simple. Blackboard is proprietary software, and an additional licence is required to carry out any customization.

Issues with current VLE provision

While these VLEs have been very successful, and are widely used almost all universities, they do have a number of limitations. It is difficult to customise the VLE to suit specific needs of different courses, as a single instance is generally used across the entire institution, and
in addition the individual components of the VLE, such as wikis or quiz systems, inevitably trail behind the features of the best specialised systems for these tasks. Where the VLE is locally hosted, a further problem faced by computing services is the issue of scalability and predicting future use. The VLE is a major application which needs to run on high specification hardware, which will be expected to last for several years. The level of use of VLEs has increased dramatically over a fairly short period, and so making predictions about the future hardware requirements is not easy. An alternative approach is to run a large number of small servers, connected to appear as an integrated whole. This approach requires software designed to run as separate small services that can be distributed over variable numbers of servers. Recently this approach has been popularised as cloud computing, however the concept of a VLE running as a large number of small services has been around for some time.

A previous attempt to challenge this: JISC eLF
The JISC e-Learning Framework, or eLF, (JISC 2004) was intended to address the need for methods to integrate systems supporting both institutional processes and e-learning, and provide a structure that would be flexible both for pedagogy and technical innovation. The vision was for a large number of service applications, each addressing a relatively small, specific need, and communicating through SOAP web-services. This would mean, for example, that a student taking an online quiz might login using an ‘Authentication’ service, be guided to the assessment through ‘Sequencing’, and ‘Activity Management’ services, and then take the quiz using an ‘Assessment’ service. A number of projects were run, which created some of these services (and in the case of Assessment, at least three similar variants of the service) however a coherent whole failed to materialise. Fundamentally, although a good concept, the vision of eLF was too complex and the projects lacked well defined standards for communication between modules.

One of the key features of the JISC eLF was to be the use of standards where applicable, for example assessment systems were designed to be compliant with a draft version of IMS QTI 2.0. However, an appropriate standard for communication between modules was lacking. The use of SOAP web services to provide this communication was (at the time) an obvious choice, however without considerable detail about the data structures that would be passed over the SOAP communications it would be impossible to design interfaces for interoperable services in isolation.

Our Backgrounds
The presenters approach this challenge from a blend of perspectives: one is a University tutor who also works as a learning technologist; the other is a professional programmer with 25 years of experience of teaching in HE. We thus bring together pedagogical and technological considerations and incorporate both strands into one conversation.

I (Niall) have been working with learning technology for over 20 years, and when appropriate also getting involved in teaching. Initially I worked with desktop software which supported small well-defined sections of learning, sometimes written by myself and sometimes from third parties. Some of these pieces of software were intended to be complete tutorials on themselves, while others were simulations that could be used as the basis for laboratory style tutorials. While some of these pieces of software were very useful, it was clear that there was a very high ratio of software production cost to the level of use the software would get. It was certainly not viable for a single institution to be developing this type of teaching material for just their own students. The advent of the World Wide Web showed a way of producing courseware more rapidly, whilst also making it available to a much greater number of students. In 1996 I took the lead on a project developing web tutorials for anatomy, which were to be used by students at all universities in the West of Scotland. Our package included web pages containing text, illustrations, animations and videos to teach students about functional anatomy and biomechanics, and interactive quizzes for self-
assessment, however other VLE features were completely missing. Frustratingly, no real assessment was done with regard to the effectiveness of this teaching material, although it continues to be available for students. My next job was as a teaching assistant for a postgraduate IT course, where I spent my time in the computing lab providing one-to-one help as required. I realised that in this context the experience of the tutor is essential, because there are a huge number of ways in which a student can be stuck with a problem and without the guidance of the experienced tutor a relatively minor issue can become a major blockage. This highlighted to me how much difference there can be in the requirements of different subjects. Previously, teaching aspects of physiology or biomechanics to zoology students I had to explain difficult concepts, however I never saw zoology students being blocked by a single small problem.

More recently I have switched from being a developer at a department level to being part of the central support team for Moodle at the University of Glasgow, where I am mainly involved in developing new features. Moodle is a large piece of software, with a huge amount of code loaded into the server's memory every time a page is viewed. Developing new components for Moodle requires not only following the coding standards, but also making use of the underlying code wherever possible. Although the Moodle coding standards are largely sensible guidelines which prevent security issues, having to adhere to coding standards and make use of extensive existing libraries like this also make it harder to integrate software from other sources. The design of Moodle means that we cannot reasonably provide different facilities to different teaching units, and more importantly that we must be very certain of the reliability of any component that gets added to the system.

My experience providing support both at a departmental level and as a member of central services has led me to believe that we need a more flexible system, where the core features supported at university level can easily be mixed with features supported at a department level (but posing no risk to the centrally supported features.) I have also come to believe that we need to be able to embrace new ideas more rapidly, by making use of smaller specialised pieces of software rather than large relatively difficult to maintain software where appropriate.

I (Sarah) began as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) in Philosophy at Glasgow over ten years ago. We Philosophy GTAs have a fair amount of autonomy with regard to how we deliver our teaching, but the primary method is weekly face-to-face tutorials of groups of about 15 students. Philosophy has a Moodle course for each of its pre-honours courses, but these are mainly used to host lecture slides and other documents. For the last few years, the course convenor has also provided each GTA with a tutorial group forum and encouraged us to use these to inform our students about tutorial timetables, topics and office hours. Occasionally students will post a message to one of the forums, but on the whole students are passive consumers rather than active participants.

Three years ago, for a variety of reasons, I began to want a more structured approach to my tutorials, and in July 2010 I secured funding from the (sadly now defunct) Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies in order to develop collaborative learning techniques for my tutorials (Honeychurch, 2012). I call the method I developed for this project Jigsaw wikis (this method was inspired by Aronson's jigsaw classroom technique, see Aronson 1978 for example). My initial vision was one where I would deliver tutorial questions to groups of eager students prior to the tutorial, and small groups of students would somehow collaborate online in order to fill in the answers to all of the questions prior to arriving at the face-to-face weekly tutorials. This turned out to be over-ambitious, although some aspects of the technique were successful. I have since had time to reflect on my project and think about why it might not have worked as I initially expected.
When I devised my project in 2010, I had very little experience of using Moodle (I only had non-editing staff rights to Moodle courses) and no background in learning technology. This led me to making assumptions about how easy Moodle was going to be to use, both for me and for my students. In particular, I assumed that students would be far more competent at using Moodle than they were, and also that Moodle was far more flexible than it actually is.

I assumed that because my students had grown up with web 2.0 technologies such as Wikipedia and Facebook, they would all be “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001): that they would find Moodle easy to use and would be confident in writing forum posts and wiki pages. In fact, very few students posted to the forum or edited the wiki pages, although they did use the wiki in order to download questions into a word processor and write their own, private, answers. Feedback given to me at the end of the course taught me that many students are not as digitally competent as I thought, and that they see a big difference between using the technologies they are familiar with (such as Facebook) and others such as Moodle. Although I firmly believed that the same skill set was needed, I had no way of tapping into their familiar media and embedding it into my own Moodle course.

In late 2010 I began working at the University of Glasgow as a learning technologist, and now support staff and students on a day-to-day basis (part of my job involves answering staff and student queries sent to our help desk). This has taught me that my students and I were not unusual in our attitudes towards the VLE. Moodle 1.9 has a dated look and feel, with few of the web 2.0 features that modern students and academics have come to expect. Moodle 2 is little better. It suffices as a place for staff to upload resources and students to submit assignments, there is limited potential for self and peer-assessment, but there is little incentive for most academics to expend effort in building and maintaining courses there.

Requirements
Recently the concept of cloud computing has become popular, where large numbers of relatively low powered physical or virtual servers are used together to provide a flexible and scalable solution. Although cloud computing is normally associated with hosted services such as Google docs, or hosted virtual computing and storage such as Amazon EC2 or Microsoft Azure, the same approach can be used to provide flexible scalable computing facilities locally.

By making use of some of the ideas of cloud computing it should be possible to create a more flexible system than the current generation of VLEs. As the VLE has become a core part of the systems at university level, it has become necessary to treat changes to the VLE with the same caution as with core business systems. In effect this means a VLE which cannot be customised for specific needs, and is only upgraded at widely spaced intervals. This also means that when it is necessary to change provider or make a major upgrade (for example from Moodle 1.9 to Moodle 2), it is difficult to stage a gradual migration. These thoughts have led us to come up with a list of requirements for a future VLE capable of replacing the current generation with a more flexible alternative.

- The system should be designed to run either on a single large server or on multiple small servers or on a mixture of the two.
- It should be easy to extend the system as required by adding further servers.
- The system should support gradual revolutionary change, with the possibility of mixing more than one version in in a university's system.
- It should be possible to add external tools, so that an individual course might consist of core tools hosted within the central IT systems, local specialist tools hosted in the Department's own server, and external specialist tools hosted with publishers or on commercial hosting services. The link to these external tools must be designed so that there is no risk of the external tools interfering with core services.
- All personal/academic data must be held in safe locations, with the minimum necessary being passed to external tools.
- The system needs to be flexible in order to:
  - support the best emerging practice,
  - adapt to the changing needs of the academic community,
  - accommodate the diverse pedagogical requirements of a multi-disciplinary institution.

Standards that can underpin a new approach

A key requirement for systems which are to be used over a long period, or which will host material which will be needed over a time period greater than the lifespan of the system is that they have good interoperability. Whilst most of us rarely consider the issue of software interoperability, we are very dependent on it. We routinely exchange documents in Microsoft Word format, which has become the de facto interoperability format for word processing, and colleagues making use of alternative word processors are able to open and edit the same documents. All digital cameras support the same variant of the JPEG file format, meaning that our digital photographs are easy to share and open with any standard photo viewing or editing software. Interoperability standards specific to education are less well-established however a number do exist. Of particular interest to our vision of a more flexible distributed VLE is the IMS Global Learning Consortium’s Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) specification. (McFall et al. 2012) LTI is a lightweight single sign-on system based on the well-established OAuth specification which allows external websites to be securely launched from a VLE with the minimum transfer of data needed.

![Diagram of LTI Launch Sequence](https://www.websequencediagrams.com)

LTI Launch Sequence

We have already implemented a slightly modified version of LTI to allow courses in multiple instances of Moodle to be in a customised "My Courses" list on each Moodle instance, with single sign-on enabling students to transfer between Moodle servers without having to login again. This is facilitating a staged migration from Moodle 1.9 to Moodle 2.3, without requiring students to be fully aware of the separate servers. A further enhancement intended to go live this summer replaces the navigation through categories to find courses in Moodle with a separate system that links directly into courses in in several different Moodle servers. As well as assisting with the staged migration process, this tool is expected to reduce overall server load as it is able to make use of a much simpler authorisation system than Moodle (which has to manage multiple different roles with different levels of editing and viewing rights.) Whilst developing this new front-end, we realised that there was no fundamental reason why it should be used only with Moodle, and other systems supporting the same modified version of LTI could also act as individual course servers as part of a near seamless integration.
While LTI has provided us with the basis for communication between modules a modular VLE, further interoperability standards are also incorporated in our vision. The IMS Common Cartridge (Kahn 2011) specification provides a basic format for transferring the learning material for modules and courses between VLEs. Common Cartridge includes links to external LTI resources, and so is very compatible with our vision. Common Cartridge also includes a profile of IMS QTI version 1.2 for exchanging simple assessments, however we believe that QTI 2.1 (Kraan et al. 2012) is now ready to become the standard for this type of assessment. The e-assessment projects that were part of the JISC eLF provided the basis for a number of further projects, and two of the most recent projects, QTI-DI and Uniqurate have delivered the basis for a flexible open source LTI connected e-assessment platform which is substantially more powerful than existing systems.

Our university, like many others, has back-end systems that support the IMS Enterprise Web Services and Learner Information Profile (LIP) specifications. These will provide the basis for communication between the modular VLE and backend management systems, acquiring information such as student course enrolments, and returning grades. Although LTI provides the basis for transferring logins between modules, some further information also will need to be transferred to make a fully integrated system. We have started defining some simple REST web services to handle this information.

Other emerging standards may also be of great relevance, in particular ePub version 3 which looks likely to become a popular standard for delivering textbooks to multiple different types of digital reading system. EPub 3 is built on an XHTML representation of HTML 5, and so is very compatible with a web delivered platform.

Our structure
The structure of our modular VLE consists of a front-end application which communicates with the central information management system to acquire enrolment information, and which broadly resembles the course structure areas of Moodle. Links from this application use LTI (with optional extensions) to provide a single sign-on into separate course delivery applications. While our system has its own specific lightweight course delivery application, Moodle could also be used. The course delivery application is able to directly provide a basic overview of the course and also static web page content. All more interactive features such as forums, wikis and quizzes are delivered through separate LTI applications, again with optional extensions to a greater appearance of integration. In the current prototype the course page is a fairly static page, not unlike that in Moodle, however we are also considering an option of a main course page which is modelled more on a Facebook group page. As well as using LTI to link to external modules, we are exploring the use of widgets to provide more personal tools such as bookmarking, personalised dictionaries, or optional facilities such as feeds from discussion forums.

Custom extra parameters for LTI
The main original use case of LTI was to provide a way for publisher hosted content to be securely accessed from university VLEs with the minimum necessary information being passed to the external publisher. The standard LTI parameters include information about the context of the launch, a context specific user identifier, and information about the user roles (such as learner or instructor). LTI makes no guarantee that the user identifier identifies the same user in different contexts, and more user specific information (such as name and e-mail address) are optional parameters that can be passed to more trusted tools.

In our distributed VLE vision we will sometimes require more detailed information about the user, and would also like to support other features such as common page templates and stylesheets to provide a coherent user interface, and breadcrumb trails to provide navigation. For this reason we are in the process of defining a set of extension parameters to LTI which will allow a tool to appear to be a more integrated part of the system. However, it is important
to note that these will be optional parameters, and standard LTI tools will also work with our system.

Our extension parameters will include:

- A parameter containing a URL for the tool to retrieve activity settings.
- URLs for an HTML template and CSS to allow tools to follow the main course page appearance.
- An organisational level user ID, which can be used for reporting back to a central gradebook for example.
- A breadcrumb trail, allowing the user to navigate back.
- Personal settings, which may include accessibility information and links to private bookmarks or notes.

LTI is an evolving specification, and if any of our extensions are duplicated by new features of LTI the extension will be deprecated with the standard feature replacing it.

Distributed Modular VLE Deployment Diagram

Benefits
There are a number of benefits that our modular approach to VLE provision will be able to deliver:

- The use of LTI, which is a lightweight standards based protocol, means that it is easy to add interfaces to external tools. Our design allows for the best external tools to be utilised where needed.
- The VLE becomes a collection of small extremely orthogonal modules that can be maintained individually, simplifying development and allowing greater flexibility. Modules can be written in different languages and deployed on different platforms - our prototype’s course module is a LAMP (Linux/Apache/MySQL/PHP) application, while the assessment module is a Java/Tomcat application.
- Where teachers have different preferences, or subject areas have different requirements, it is possible to use completely separate modules that fit with particular needs.
The system is extremely scalable as it is built on a collection of small servers (like Google) rather than a single large server. As capacity requirements grow extra low-cost servers can be added to share the load. Where the extra capacity requirement is temporary, or appears rapidly, it is possible to make use of virtual Cloud servers from Amazon or Microsoft Azure on a pay by the hour basis.

Because the system is built on large numbers of small machines, and single large purchases are not required, planning can take place over shorter timescales.

Being a highly modular system based on publicly available standards, and designed to be a collection of small open source projects rather than a single large open source project, there is very little risk of getting trapped in a vendor tie-in situation.

The modular approach simplifies management of users' roles, which in turn reduces processing overhead. This means that our system is likely to be usable for MOOCs as well as for replacing a conventional VLE.

The future
Our prototype, which we have named Orinthia¹, is still a proof of concept piece of software. Some aspects of the code will need change before widespread use, however we believe the core design is solid. The current LTI implementation is LTI 1.1 with extensions, however LTI 2.0 is likely to slightly reduce the need for extensions so will be adopted soon. Our main components have been designed using a 'Product Family Engineering' approach, where a combination of shared libraries and generated code I used to create related applications, and we expect this will be the approach taken to create other modules designed specifically for the system. These modules that make use of our customer LTI extensions will be known as ‘Orinthia modules’. They should also be able to work with any other LTI enabled system, but will have a more integrated appearance when used with Orinthia.

References
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¹ Orinthia is a name coined by George Bernard Shaw, who also coined the word Moodle - "intr. To dawdle aimlessly; to idle time away. Also with about, on." (OED)
Empowering staff internationally: professional development in Learning and Teaching for global Approved Learning Partners

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Abstract: This paper discusses the preliminary findings of a pilot project evaluation study lasting six months from March to August 2013. The study sought to obtain a detailed description of the institution’s globally placed Approved Learning Partners’ (ALP) developmental needs in the area of learning and teaching. These ALPs deliver the university’s programmes remotely, with all summative assessment done at the institution. The study aimed to establish a recommended syllabus for their academic development. The pilot evaluation phase of this new teaching support programme, provisionally called “GlobALPD” (ALP Professional Development in Learning & Teaching) had been planned to commence in January 2013, but was delayed to March 2013. Two test tutor groups from two different institutions in Russia enrolled in March and April respectively, and by the time of this paper (June 2013) evaluation data from the first group has been analysed, with the second group not being taken into consideration. The evaluation is ongoing with the final questionnaires being delivered to the first group by the end of June. The findings from this paper will support institutions across the sector with similar needs of providing developmental activities to international partners or campuses.

1 Introduction

The author developed an online educational development programme (GlobALPD) on the university’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for its Approved Learning Partners (ALPs). ALPs deliver undergraduate and postgraduate courses globally to more than ten-thousand students and comprise over forty overseas learning institutions in thirty-five countries.

The aim of GlobALPD is for ALP partners to:
- adopt a theory and practice-informed approach to teaching and learning in line with the university’s community
- add depth and understanding to their educational practice
- be better informed about a range of educational ideas and how these relate to practice
- engage with professional development opportunities in Learning and Teaching

GlobALPD is designed for independent distance learning with online learning activities on the VLE, as well as virtual classroom group tutorials, workshops and Microteach session.

1.2 Background

The development of GlobALPD was driven by a combination of external and internal factors:
1. the QAA Scotland highlighted the need for increased developmental activities for the institution’s network of ALPs, to continue ensuring the high quality student learning experience
2. several partner institutions requested academic development opportunities
3. requirements arose from the institution’s Learning & Teaching Strategy (current and in-development).
2 Design and Key Educational Concepts

GlobALPD, as an educational development provision, incorporates key concepts which frame the curriculum of Higher Education Teaching and Learning courses in the UK, Australia and NZ (Kandelbinder & Peseta, 2009). These five main concepts are:

1. Reflective practice
2. Constructive alignment
3. Student approaches to learning
4. Scholarship of teaching
   (at the core of GlobALPD)
5. Assessment-driven learning

It is also aligned with level one descriptor (D1) of the Higher Education Academy’s (HEA) UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) for teaching and supporting learning in higher education (2011)².

GlobALPD’s online learning design and philosophy is based on the constructive perspective (social focus), where learning is seen as achieving understanding (learners actively construct new ideas through collaborative activities and/or dialogue) by being required to work together and to reflect (Mayes and de Freitas, 2004). According to these principles of the constructive perspective, in which “learners are no longer seen as passive recipients of knowledge and skills but as active participants in the learning process” (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007, p 2), GlobALPD was designed on the institution’s VLE as an interactive environment for knowledge-building, and also uses Skype as a virtual classroom. It incorporates activities that encourage collaboration and shared expression of ideas, with opportunities for reflection, peer- and teacher feedback.

2.1 Content

In the pilot, GlobALPD is separated into two learning modules, each covering six learning units, with a duration of one week per unit. An online group Microteach Skype activity takes place after the end of the first learning module, in week seven.

While the right choice of educational concepts was of substantial significance for deciding on the content, the importance of opening a dialogue with participants, rather than prescribing techniques and approaches lie at the heart of GlobALPD. As Sadler (2012) found during the investigation and description of challenges that teachers faced when adopting student-centred approaches to learning, the challenges of change and implementation have to be transparent to be addressed within educational development opportunities.

Learning Module one covers the Kandelbinder & Peseta (2009) key concepts one and three (Reflective practice, Student approaches to learning), with a practical focus on interactive teaching methods in a variety of classroom situations. Learning Module two covers the key concepts two and five (Constructive alignment, Assessment-driven learning), with particular support for formative assessment and feedback. Initial content of the learning modules changed after early feedback from test tutor group one. These changes are discussed in the Findings section of this paper.

Original Learning Module one – Effective Teaching and Supporting Student Learning

- What is learning and teaching?

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• The reflective practitioner
• Lecturing and teaching large groups: Facilitating active learning
• Learning in small groups: Facilitating group work
• Intercultural aspects of learning and teaching
• Supporting student with special needs

Updated Learning Module one – Effective Teaching and Supporting Student Learning
• What is learning and teaching?
• Theory and Practice of learning and teaching
• The reflective practitioner
• Lecturing and teaching large groups: Facilitating active learning
• Learning in small groups: Facilitating group work
• Intercultural aspects of learning and teaching

Original Learning Module two - Assessing learning and giving useful Feedback
• Assessing student learning
• Giving constructive formative feedback
• Student engagement with feedback
• Methods for evaluating learning and teaching
• Introduction to constructive alignment

Updated Learning Module two - Assessing learning and giving useful Feedback
• Assessing student learning
• Giving constructive formative feedback
• Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Prevention
• Supporting student with special needs
• Introduction to constructive alignment
• Methods for evaluating learning and teaching

2.2 Learning Design

Conole (2008, p 188) stated that “learning design refers to the range of activities associated with creating a learning activity and crucially provides a means of describing learning activities.” Consequently, each of the learning units is prefaced with intended learning outcomes, and each contains a core learning activity, which “can helpfully be defined as a specific interaction of learner(s) with other(s) using specific tools and resources, orientated towards specific outcomes.” Beetham (2007, p 28).

Laurillard (2002) determined four main aspects of the teaching-learning process, and this framework offers practical guidance for the design of educational environments. Within the framework, different forms of communication and associated activities are considered:
• Discussion - between the teacher and the learner (mutually accessible conceptions)
• Adaptation - of the learners actions and of the teacher’s constructed environment (mutual adaption to existing conceptions)
• Interaction - between the learner and the environment defined by the teacher (feedback on activities that are situated in appropriate environment)
• Reflection - of the learner’s performance by both teacher and learner

These communication and activity forms have to be included within the four main pedagogic components of Teacher’s concepts, Teacher’s constructed learning environment, Student’s concepts, Student’s specific actions (related to learning tasks).

With the conversational framework at the core of GlobALPD’s learning design, each of the 12 units was set up the same way, and engagement with the first four areas is crucial:
• Learning Outcomes and short introduction/overview
Learning materials, which guide participants through the key topics
Key reading, which is the one important reading for each unit
Activity which is related to the unit and contains reflective elements
Additional external resources, such as further reading, links to websites
Additional multimedia resources, such as video, audio or slideshows

One of the aims of the pilot evaluation study was to investigate the coherence between the four main components.

3 Evaluation Methodology

The main focus of the qualitative evaluation, which investigates the suitability of the proposed key concepts, is based on Brookfield’s Four Critical Lenses framework (1995). For Brookfield, the most effective evaluation of any teaching situation was through critical reflection, enhanced through access to a variety of viewpoints. He proposed four lenses: self-reflection, student feedback, peer feedback, and engagement with scholarly literature. Using these four lenses in the evaluation of the GlobALPD Pilot Project lead to:

2. Student Lens: Gathering feedback from the two groups of ALP test tutors, thus gaining valuable insight into the effectiveness and affordances of GlobALPD. For example: online questionnaires, follow-up semi-structured Skype interviews.
3. Peer Lens: Colleagues can provide insights and solutions that the self lens might have been blind to. For example: feedback from colleagues from within the author’s own unit, feedback from the local ALP contact/co-ordinator.
4. Literature Lens: Educational theory provides the contextual factors that form the basis of teaching and learning, and thus the design and content of GlobALPD.

3.1 Data Collection

In collaboration with one of the Schools of the University, a group of seven test tutors from a Russian technical university in Moscow was identified. The evaluation project accepted that the small sample size from only one country would invariably result in a bias, and would not be representative for the whole range of international ALPs. However, useful qualitative feedback and in-depth insights into the suitability of the proposed content were expected.

After ethics approval for the project had been obtained, the ALP test tutors consented to the research participation and agreed to engage with the evaluation of the pilot, which involved:

- An initial self-confidence survey which consists of twelve questions and uses a Likert Scale (based on Angelo, TA and Cross, KP, 1993)
- A critical incident questionnaire (CIQ) after each of the twelve learning units, which consists of four open questions (based on Brookfield, 1995, and Keefer, 2009)
- A final self-confidence survey which consists of twelve questions and uses a Likert Scale (based on Angelo, TA and Cross, KP, 1993)
- A final end-of-pilot questionnaire, with consists of a combination of thirty questions, using a sliding scale, and three open questions
- Potentially semi-structured Skype follow-up interview

3.1.1 Critical Incident Questionnaire

To gather feedback for the main focus of the evaluation through the student lens, Brookfield’s (1995) critical incident questionnaire (CIQ) was employed after each learning unit. The CIQ was adjusted for the purpose of this online project, using a combination of Brookfield’s first two original questions and Keefer’s (2009) last two adapted questions. The CIQs are delivered online, using the Bristol Online Survey tool.
Brookfield’s original CIQ asked learners in five questions after each teaching session to describe their response. This was designed to help them reflect on what was helping or hindering their learning so far. Keefer (2009) presented adaptations to the CIQ, and Phelan (2012) investigated the successful use of the CIQ in online education. The author reduced the original five questions to four, aiming to elicit responses regarding issues of engagement with the educational concepts and the GlobALPD learning design. The CIQ for the evaluation, delivered to test tutors after each unit, was finalised as:

- At what moment during this unit did you feel most engaged with the subject matter? (Brookfield)
- At what moment during this unit did you feel most distanced from the subject matter? (Brookfield)
- What was the most important information you learned during this unit? (Keefer)
- Do you have any questions or suggestions about this unit? (Keefer)

4 Findings

4.1 Self Lens

Keeping a reflective log throughout the duration of the pilot project showed that the author’s perception of learner engagement and usefulness of activities and resources usually coincided with perceptions and feedback from the test tutors. For example, realisation that the first learning unit of the original learning module one ‘What is Learning and Teaching’ contained too much information and an overwhelming amount of resources. This was mirrored by CIQ comments such as: “I think this Unit contains a lot of information and it should be shorten and concentrate according to requests of necessity” and “the information for reading is very interesting, but it too much for one week if the student can’t spend all days for reading because of the work.”

4.1.2 Student Lens

Feedback from the first group of ALP test tutors offered valuable insight into motivation for participation, the suitability of the learning design, activities, and content resources.

4.1.2.1 Critical Incident Questionnaires

Respondents felt that they were most engaged with the subject matter throughout the units, when they could apply theory to their practice: “Conference video was interesting and engaging. I liked this article: Psychology Teaching Guide: Working with Small Groups. Higher Education Academy. It’s clear and useful.” Participating actively also rated highly: “When I read the information and was trying it on myself and when I was choosing which scheme I like more.”

Resources that were not obviously and immediately applicable to their practice, caused respondents to be engaged the least. The test tutors were vocal if they felt that publications were not well written in their opinions, which included some eminent education authors: “Well, I didn’t find the chapter from Ramsden’s book inspiring, it takes the author too long to tell the simple matters, and he permanently re-tells the same things in the book.” Responses also showed that several of the units which were less practically orientated, were not as successful: “For some reason nothing remained in the brain after reading the module ‘Contextual approaches to learning’.” Also, English itself was occasionally seen as a barrier: “It was difficult to understand key article. Probably because of my knowledge of English.”

Looking at what was considered to be the most important information from each unit, it became obvious how much practical applicability and an immediate positive reward were
ranked highest: “I think I got good tips for my future teaching”, and a specific “PPT rules. And also tips for lecturing well (dividing the lecture into 10min fragments, giving in-place quizzes et al),” and “I think I got useful prescription for feedback practice. For example Minute Paper by T. Angelo is a very good recipe.” Respondents felt inspired to make immediate changes and additions to their professional practice: “I have learned about strategy of self-reflection and self-analysis. For example it is a good idea to start teaching journal. I am going to do it.”

In the fourth question, which asked for suggestions for each unit, respondents requested more practical resources: “I think it is necessary to include more practical examples.”

Despite each unit containing a collaborative activity, respondents wanted further activities and engagement: “The unit organization is ok, although a shared activity would be nice to engage discussions and talks in the forum.”

4.1.3 Peer Lens
The academic member of staff from the School that provided the ALP contact not only gave valuable feedback, but also engaged with some of the activities such as posting on the discussion board and sharing their own experiences, as well as joining the first Skype tutorial and the Microteach session. This proved to be stimulating for the learners, who had access to a colleague at the university who was part of their discipline. The peer feedback on the initial learning design praised the richness of material and the structure of the learning units and suggested improvements which resulted from their work with the ALP tutors. In fact, this early feedback mirrored later findings which saw video presentations and face-to-face Skype activities being considered as the most useful opportunities for learning.

4.1.4 Literature Lens
Educational theory provided the framework for the design and content of GlobALPD, and is discussed in the section ‘Design and Key Educational Concepts’.

4.2 Discussion
It has become evident from this evaluation of the pilot project that the acquisition of new teaching strategies was the main motivator for test tutors. This was followed by engagement with new and different concepts, while challenging existing ones, such as supporting students with special needs: “It is important topic and I learned useful information for everyday life. Unfortunately, in our country little attention is paid to the people with disabilities. It is necessary to raise this topic and then maybe situation will be changed.”

The findings from the CIQs led to the realisation that the motivation for undertaking this development opportunity were subtly but significantly different to those of academic staff enrolled in accredited courses. GlobALPD at this stage is non-credit bearing, and motivation is focused on immediate gain and possibility for changes to teaching practices.

Reflective activities such as an early SWOT analysis and a Teaching Philosophy were seen as useful (Boud & Walker, 1998; Larrivee, 2010) but as test tutors mentioned in the CIQs, they did not feel that these activities were sufficiently linked to content and collaboration. As Wang (2009) found: “This study has confirmed that social activities must be seamlessly integrated into a learning environment.” Further work and reflection by the author is required to ensure that reflection will be met with reaction (Hickson, 2011).

5 Conclusion
The evaluation of the pilot project has shown that the key concepts in higher education teaching and learning academic staff development are suitable for staff at Approved Learning Partners teaching the university programmes internationally.
However, further findings have raised the need to re-focus on the motivation (and consequently emotion) of ALP tutors (Trigwell, Ellis & Han, 2012; Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2011) in taking part in this developmental opportunity. Authors such as Efklides & Petkaki (2005) and Pekrun (2005) suggested that mood and emotions are essential for generating interest and motivation for learning, while Wosnitza & Volet (2005) show that emotions in online learning are identical to emotions in face-to-face learning situations, from which follows the necessity for a renewed focus on the purpose of GlobALPD and consequently its learning design and delivery. This re-focus should improve the alignment of learner expectations regarding activities and resources, with the significance of practical implementation and applied theory at the centre.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Learning Design

Redesign from two learning modules with six learning units each, into two core modules with three learning units each and an additional advanced learning module, which features more in-depth theory. Feedback from the pilot evaluation has shown that motivation to learn focused on practical application and all theory needed to be applied. Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure clear guidance and signposting through the units, which are restricted to key content, to be explored further in each unit’s activity. As one test tutor put it: “I like this unit. It was full of useful information. The unit wasn’t overload with information and there were only essence of the matter.” This could be summed up as: restrain and reduce, focus and guide.

The author recommends to drop the learning unit on intercultural aspects of learning and teaching, because it was found to be less helpful for tutors who are placed internationally, teaching a Scottish degree programme while within their own culture. This area is to be investigated in the future, when further ALP tutors are available for comment from a variety of countries and educational backgrounds.

While topics such as contextual approaches to learning were considered to be too complex and challenging to be studied within the core learning module, and outside of the immediate motivation of wanting to learn to enhance teaching practice, it is suggested that areas with low confidence such as “Helping students connect new information to their prior knowledge” and “Helping students recognize and unlearn mis- and pre-conceptions” could be enhanced by an advanced learning module with the concept of transformative and troublesome knowledge of Threshold Concepts (Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005, 2006) as its framework.

6.2 Content and Structure

The proposed new content and structure, with capstone virtual session at start and finish:

Core Module One

- What is learning and teaching?
  - An introductory unit that familiarises participants with approaches to learning and teaching, including learning styles
- Lecturing and teaching large groups: Facilitating active learning
  - Explores techniques for helping students learn: including questioning, delivery and use of resources, and interactive teaching/lecturing
- Learning in small groups: Facilitating group work
  - Explores the process, management and benefits of working with groups for in-class tasks, including group dynamic
Synchronous Activity
- Microteach using Skype (or alternative virtual classroom)

Core Module two
- The reflective practitioner (addition from phase one: evaluating teaching)
  - Explores the benefits of reflection as a marker of the teaching professional, and introduces peer observation/dialogue models
- Assessing student learning
  - An introductory unit that investigates the purposes of assessment, and explains how assessment supports learning
- Giving constructive formative feedback
  - Examines the diversity and variety of feedback, its importance for student learning, and the value of student engagement with feedback

Synchronous Activity
- Assessment and Feedback ladder activity workshop using Skype (or alternative virtual classroom)

Advanced Module
- Theory of learning and teaching
  - Explores the underlying principles of learning, which guide the way we should be teaching
- Introduction to constructive alignment
  - Explains the principle of constructive alignment in curriculum design: the alignment of learning outcomes, teaching-learning activities and assessment
- Supporting students further: 1-Accessibility and 2-Academic Integrity
  - Offers a new look at 1-how to make learning more accessible for everyone and 2-good practice to avoid plagiarism.

6.3 Resources

Key reading to be applied and embedded within disciplinary practice, such as publications from former Higher Education Academy (HEA) subject centres, which received the highest feedback. All resources to be open access, removing any potential subscription barriers.

Links to Slideshare presentations were considered to be less useful, with disengagement reported in the CIQs such as “I think PowerPoint presentations aren’t useful without video or audio.” The opposite is true for narrated PowerPoint screencast videos: “All unit is very interesting. There are a lot of useful recommendations. Videos are brilliant!”

The recommendation is to create narrated PowerPoint videos for all learning units, initially as introductions to the topics, followed by an increasing range of short active video presentations similar to those of the successful Khan Academy³ (www.khanacademy.org).

6.4 Activities

Create additional opportunities for active learning, with respondents asking for further collaborative activities to engage with concepts: “I want to discuss ‘7 things to think about’ in the future.” Even if not all activities are taken up by every participant, it was felt that should they wish to, the chance to share and discuss would have been helpful.

Synchronous online activities such as the group Microteach and the virtual sessions, were seen as most useful. However, with the pilot project still ongoing, and a virtual workshop planned for the second half of June, data collection has not finished. While all signs point to

³ For a discussion of the Khan Academy style videos and their educational influence, refer to the keynote by Dr Lori Breslow (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA) on Tuesday 12 June 2013 at the QAA Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education conference, Glasgow.
the positive effect on learning, an end-of-pilot questionnaire, which will ask test tutors to reflect on the impact of activities, will not be provided before the end of June 2013.

6.5 Next Step

The author recommends a GlobALPD evaluation project phase two with ALPs from different countries, educational culture, and institutions. Phase two of the GlobALPD pilot aims to evaluate the recommended changes from phase one, and will focus on the impact of this educational development opportunity on the ALPs’ professional practice.

This pilot evaluation study has found that the coherence between the four main components (Laurillard, 2002) of Teacher’s concepts, Teacher’s constructed learning environment, Student’s concepts, and Student’s specific actions (related to learning tasks) was not always aligned. Phase two would allow the detailed evaluation of changes made to the learning design, caused by the discussion of conceptions between teacher and learner, which resulted in the adaptation of the teacher’s constructed environment according to the learners actions. This follows on from the alignment with and the challenging of conceptions, which was facilitated by interaction between the learner and the pilot project environment as well as the teacher. This had been informed by the reflection on the learner’s performance by both teacher and learner, in addition to peer feedback and educational literature.

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New Technologies, The Curriculum and Higher Order Skills

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ABSTRACT: Recent work highlights the difficulties that academic staff face in applying new technologies to higher order assessment outcomes such as critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. They note that although higher education institutional mission statements and unit outilines purport the value of these higher order skills, often aligned with graduate attributes, there is still some question about how well academics are equipped to design curricula and, in particular, assessment strategies accordingly. Despite a rhetoric avowing the benefits of these higher order skills, it has been suggested that academics set assessment tasks up in such a way as to inadvertently lead students on the path towards lower order outcomes.

This is a controversial claim, and one that this papers seeks to explore and critique in terms of challenging the conceptual basis of assessing higher order skills through new technologies. It is argued that the use of digital media in higher education is leading to a focus on students’ ability to use and manipulate of these products as an index of their flexibility and adaptability to the demands of the knowledge economy. This focus mirrors market flexibility and encourages programmes and units of study to be rhetorically packaged as such. Curricular content has become a means to procure more or less elaborate aggregates of attributes. Particularly in light of the current worldwide economic situation, higher education is now charged with producing graduates who are entrepreneurial and creative in order to drive forward economic recovery. Learning in a slower deliberative fashion, once considered as the path to independent learning, is being displaced by a focus on making connections between different kinds of knowledge.

Despite this zeitgeist, it is argued that critical independent learning can take place through the democratisation afforded by cultural and knowledge digitization. In other words, it is suggested that far from letting this process move beyond students’ ability to analyse it, higher education should instead work from within digital culture in terms of engaging with the changing relations between audience and author, expert and amateur, and creator and consumer.

1 Introduction

This essay focuses upon the assessment of higher order skills in the context of wider pedagogical discussion and debate surrounding the expanding use of new technologies in higher education. It posses questions about the pedagogical value of these technologies in terms of their utility in addressing curricular reform as a means of developing higher order skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity (Bath et al. 2004; Winchester-Seeto et al. 2011). Within the literature these skills are considered as fundamental to the ‘higher’ nature of higher education and have been associated with graduate attributes (Barrie, 2006; Moore, 2004). Graduates are expected to be able to make connections between what they have learned and various academic and professional practices and between their knowledge and its creative application to new or ill-defined problems (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Furthermore, these skills in critical analysis and problem-solving are also increasingly being related to graduates’ ability to think and act as citizens in an increasingly globalised world where the pace of technological and associated change in the world of work
requires flexibility in ways of operating never before. However, whilst these higher order skills are recognised as crucial to the development of modern graduates, integrating them into curricula and their associated assessment strategies has proved to be more controversial and challenging. This is particularly evident with respect to the new technologies as tools that can support the development and demonstration of these skills. Some of the key arguments that surround these issues are developed in the following sections.

2 New technologies and the problem of higher order skills

Assessment is fundamental to the ways in which students engage with curriculum. The kinds of assessment tasks that are set, their role in shaping how much time students spend on various associated activities, and their importance for progression and course completion all testify to the significance of assessment within the student experience (Brown and Knight 1994; Ramsden, 1992; Rust 2002). The nature of assessment within higher education sends out a message to students about what they are expected to achieve in terms of being able to demonstrate the kinds of skills that mark out a graduate (Brown 1997). In other words, assessment is a key component of what constitutes the higher nature of higher education. For example, there is a qualitative difference between the kind of skills involved in critical analysis that are expected of a secondary school pupil tackling a history essay and those of a third year undergraduate who is also doing an essay on what may well the same or similar topic. The difference cannot be simply expressed in terms of an index of difficulty associated with the curricular content but in the way that students are expected to engage with this content. In other words, the practice of critical thinking within higher education is expected to be qualitatively different from what would count as critical thinking in secondary school education. This may come down to the ways in which arguments are counterposed against each other or challenged, familiarity with and use of original sources, and originality of argument. This is just one example of how higher order within higher education are demonstrable through assessment.

However, whilst these kind skills are considered important for many courses, there is also a recognition that students require a portfolio of these skills as part of what are now know as graduate attributes, and as part of a wider recognition of the need for metacognition and lifelong learning (Boud and Falchikov, 2005; Falchikov and Thompson 2008). An over-reliance on essay-type assessments and unseen examinations has been questioned in light of the need to develop a fuller range of higher order skills to meet the needs of modern society (Falchikov and Thompson, 2008). Indeed some of gone so far as to suggest that the gap between the intentions of lecturing staff and the reliance on assessment strategies that focus on the reproduction of knowledge rather than its manipulation or transformation, raises the question of whether higher odder learning is in fact being assessed (Arum and Roska, 2010). This is considered all the more pressing in light of the uptake of new technologies for the purposes of assessment. A decade ago Northcote (2003) suggested that academics’ views on the role of assessment in learning and teaching influenced their choice of online learning assessment tasks and despite the affordances of new technologies “online assessment has remained predominately summative” (p.68). Coming forward to almost the present day and McNeill, Gosper and Xu (2012) in a study of academics at an Australian university found that despite intentions of higher order learning outcomes for students, there was a tendency to use online tools such as quizzes to assess recognition and understanding. There were examples of respondents using wiki, blogs and online portfolios to assess higher order outcomes such as metacognition, creativity and evaluation. However, the relatively low uptake of these tools suggested to the authors a tendency to avoid using them as a means of engaging higher order learning. McNeil et al. conclude that their study emphasises the importance of academic development work, for example through online and on-campus workshops, to aid academics in integrating new technologies in their curriculum
and assessment design.

Whilst the uptake of new technologies to assess higher order learning skills and outcomes may well be problematic, at least in some institutions, the opportunities to support the design, delivery and administration of diagnostic formative and summative assessment have been attested to in the literature. In particular, a new assessment paradigm that involves a transformational approach to computer-based assessment whereby the integration of students’ performance over time is monitored as well as the integration of assessment with teaching (Bennett, 2010). The extent to which such an approach can evaluate the higher order skills is open to question but other approaches such as immersive environments and games are being used to assess such skills as problem-solving, collaboration and inquiry (See Dede, 2010; de Jong, 2010; Means & Rochelle, 2010). It has recently been suggested that electronic assessment is at a critical juncture between the ‘old’ testing paradigm where the linkage between pedagogy and technology is mostly one-directional, and the ‘new’ paradigm of a two-way ‘dialogue’ between new e-assessment technologies and pedagogy (Redecker & Johannessen, 2013). However, whilst these new technology assessments can inform pedagogy and vice versa the learning outcomes are framed in terms of “competences need for life in the 21st century” (Redecker & Johannessen, 2013, p. 91). Such claims seem to be framed in instrumentalist and functional terms rather than connect with learning that promotes higher order learning outcomes. This issue of the problematic nature of the promotion of new technologies in relation to assessment is developed in the next section.

3 Higher order skills and the problem of new technologies

Assessment practice has become a central topic higher education due to a changing emphasis on student engagement with higher order learning outcomes that reflect ‘new’ literacy skills in response to changing methods of accessing information and communicating brought about by new technologies, globalization and changing workplace needs (Johnson and Kress, 2003). Thus the higher order skills of critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity have become inter-twined with other generic high level skills such as information literacy, superior communication ability, and team working. These skills are driven by the changing pace of new technologies and communication mediums, and although they are not always explicitly taught, they do form a major part of the student experience and are often assessed implicitly within the courses that students undertake.

However, whilst these kind of generic information literacy and communication skills are important, it may be the case for some at least, that they have become the ‘tail wagging the dog’, so to speak. Thus whilst learning technologists have been keen to stress the benefits of new technologies, the have formulated these within an overarching discourse of digital literacies (Beetham et al. 2009). However, this recasting of higher order learning outcomes leaves wider concerns with academic and textual literacies behind and strips the these outcomes of their association with disciplinary knowledge and instead promotes a competency-based agenda (Lea, 2013). This has resulted in the term ‘digital literacies’ in higher education being associated with more instrumental purposes such as producing graduates that are ‘fit for purpose’, that is that have a range of transferable skills and competencies that can be applied to lifelong learning and the world of work. Those who are enthusiastic about promoting learning technologies in this way tend to base their arguments upon: (i) the need for higher education to respond to a generation of students who are familiar with these technologies (e.g. wikis, blogs, social media, twitter etc.) so that they are aligned with practices in higher education, including assessment practices, and (ii) that educators need to develop their own skills in utilising these new digital technologies to enhance and improve their teaching and learning strategies and practices.

The wider implication of this conceptualization of digital literacy is that it extends beyond
higher education to digital society, as something that higher education must engage with itself if it is to adapt to a changing world. This view of literacy presents an 'impact model' in which new digital technologies impact upon higher education which in turn must produce students who can use these technologies to make an impact upon themselves and the their world. It is an autonomous conceptualization of literacy as if it were a stand-alone facet of learning, as something concerned with technical skills and proficiencies including cognitive skills. What this view does not engage with is the ways in which literacy is bound up with practices of knowledge making and representation and power. It is of course that latter than many academic would argue are the very things that students should be engaging with in a reflexive manner within higher education and that these constitute higher order learning and skills within disciplinary and inter-disciplinary contexts.

Lea (2013) also makes the point that higher education is often presented by enthusiast for new learning technologies as conservative and slow to change. In other words, teaching staff are viewed as requiring more training through workshops and the like to engage with these new technologies so they can see the benefits of them for their pedagogical practice, include as noted above, assessment practices. This presents staff as being deficient in their pedagogic knowledge and practice, which they need to keep up with the pace of modern technology. Moreover, it also promotes the idea that teaching staff need to adapt to their learners as competent professionals. This discourse marginalises the role of teachers and places them in the position of 'playing catch up' with the technology. In this way it is not only that curriculum and assessment that required to be aligned but also that teaching staff need to be aligned with the requirements of new technologies.

Brabazon (2007) argues that being a student in today’s world of higher education is like living in someone else’s iPod given the need for permanent reskilling. This is considered as necessary in order to mirror market flexibility and produce graduates whose programmes of study develop the skills associated with such a requirement for flexibility. It is claimed subject content has become a means to procure more or less elaborate competencies, and as a result, graduates are considered as no more than aggregates of attributes. (Brabazon, 2007, p. 163) argues that: “The transference from a manufacturing to an information-driven economy necessitates permanent reskilling [and that] the cost of labour market flexibility is educational standards and scholarly excellence.” The danger here for higher education is that student learning is reduced to solely being an index of employability. It is easy to understand why this is the case given the present economic climate but it is arguable that higher order skills should be considered as something more than simply developing the student into a ‘future worker’. The capabilities of new technologies and new forms of assessment can still be utilised alongside ‘old’ technologies in such a way that we ensure that scholarship, critical thinking and creativity are the drivers of higher education. The next section explores the practices associated with the development of higher order skills.

4 Higher order skills and practices

Slow learning through reading has in some instances given way to instant access, to snippets of ‘information’ that are downloaded for specific instrumental purposes such as assessments that test for specific and sometimes narrowly defined learning outcomes. This can be thought of as analogous to the way in which popular music is now downloadable in terms of specific songs. It is now easy to personalise your own choice of songs and download them at relatively little cost. Meanwhile, the idea of buying an album as a coherent body of work by an artist is to some extent on the wane. Likewise, students now download academic material to garner specific bits of information rather than to gain depth of understanding through extended reading. This might seem a depressing state of affairs, and although perhaps exaggerated, higher education is arguably moving in the direction of elevating the agency of the student in terms the ways in which students select and download
material. Such a learner-centred focus is not new and has been a feature of constructivist primary school education since the 1960s. Exploration, problem-solving and creativity are often associated with this form of learning and, in particular the focus on the agency of the learner.

This is now certainly the case in higher education. Take, for example, the practices involved in constructing wikis and blogs. These may take time and certainly can be said to involve creativity and teamwork. However, the focus on digital literacy perhaps at the expense of academic literacy means that these practices, as Lea (2013) argues, have come to dominate the agenda on nature of higher order learning outcomes and skills. Failure to engage in using these technologies, to link them to innovation in terms of curriculum development and assessment seems, on the face of it, to overemphasise a conservative view of teaching and learning as the reproduction of knowledge. However, this is perhaps an oversimplification of the position. Practices of assessment such as extended essays or unseen examinations may be justifiable and worthwhile but for different reasons that in the past. If these practices were preserved simply on the basis of tradition then this would indeed represent a straightforward conservatism. However, some practices may well be characterised as conservative but in fact provide a function that can be seen as valuable in today’s world. For example, in a world where students can instantly access information at the flick of a finger it might be useful to counter this with slower forms of learning that require reading, re-reading and reflection. Information communication technology can do many things such as permit collaborative learning through working together on a wiki, or searching databases of information without having to spend weeks tracking down articles. However, whilst being accomplished in these practices may well constitute higher order skills they do not permit slower paced reflective learning which may be just as valuable. In other words just because we live in a fast paced world does not necessarily meant that students must learn to cope with the demands of that world and nothing else.

The point being made here is that what may seem like conservative practices can in fact provide a useful counterpoint to so-called innovative practices and may be just as transformative. The new pathways of information communication technologies have, and are, transforming the higher education landscape, particularly where library visits and reading book are being replaced by the retrieval of information from websites. A culture of ‘fast knowledge’ whilst useful in some contexts and subject areas, can be inhibiting in other contexts and subject areas. Likewise, as noted above there has been a rise in diagnostic assessment and instantaneous feedback. Again without wishing to come down in favour or against the use of such approaches, the main focus should be on the higher order skills which students acquire as part of their higher education experience. Whilst the growing use of information and communication technology has transformed the nature of learning for students such that they can now choose to engage at a distance at any time, this has also led to a shift in self-identity, from that of novice and student, to that of participant and consumer. As educational practices become more learner-centred and teachers become more resource providers and mentors then the change in relations between students and their teachers becomes itself more problematic. This is particularly the case in light of assessment where for the most part teachers are still the final judges of the quality of student learning.

Being able to access, select, evaluate, synthesize, and collaboratively transfer information between one another in an online environment is part of the array of higher order skills that require assessment. However, theses generic skills cannot be extracted from the subject areas and types of knowledge that students must work in, and with. Some practices are normative in this sense that the are a performative part of the know-how of how to get things done, what steps need to be taken and how these can be achieved in an efficient manner. This does not mean to say that they are fixed in that interpretation and adaptation are always a potential part of them. On the other hand, other practices that educators might wish
students to engage in are more critical and directed at changing thinking, perceptions, values and the like. These practices often require reflection, careful thought, and develop over time in an unhurried fashion. Indeed they could be characterised as a state of mind that is reflective of the spirit of lifelong learning. In both cases it is the student's relation to these practices that is of crucial importance.

5 Practicing higher order skills

Despite the changing landscape of higher education that new technologies have, in part, brought about, there still remains a core set of activities that constitute teaching, learning and assessment. Practices such as lectures, seminar discussions, coursework assignments, examinations, and so on, form the core activities of what staff and students are engaged in. Some of these practices are likely to be the subject of change and transformation over time or perhaps be replaced by new practices. However, the main point is that practices are activities that involve both continuity and change over time. It is the very fact that these practices involve complex interactions between learners, staff and curricular materials that make for a set of dynamics that makes change possible. There may be aspects of assessment practices that are more appropriate at certain stages than others, or fit learners' needs more readily or require updating in the light of new relations between staff, students and the curriculum. For example, it is often the case, as in any educational endeavor, that learners requires understanding certain fundamental aspects of a subject, discipline or practice before being able to engage in a critical evaluation of that knowledge or set of practices. In higher education, although learners typically join their courses with pre-requisite knowledge and skills these are usually not sufficient to engage in being able to critically engage with the new material that they learn. Thus, even at an advanced stage of learning there is an aspect of ‘taking in’ a fundamental knowledge base and set of principles that define what the subject or discipline is about. In some cases this may be familiar and lead on from school or further education learning but in other cases a whole new knowledge paradigm may be opened up to learners. In either case this early advanced education necessarily requires a degree of unquestioning acceptance in order to acquire this fundamental knowledge base. Indeed it is only through the acquisition of this knowledge that learners also acquire other kinds of tacit understanding about the nature of subjects and disciplines such as their epistemological paradigms. It is only after having acquired both this explicit and implicit knowledge that students can then go in the later stages of their programmes of study to learn to unpack their understandings and subject them to question, doubt and critique, and to appreciate the provisional status of knowledge. It is therefore integral to the learning process that higher order skills of critical analysis, problem-solving and creativity are necessarily built up from such ‘unquestioned’ knowledge. Therefore, learning in an unquestioning manner early on does not mean that unquestioning acceptance is being learned tout court. Teaching staff may well utilise Socratic methods of questioning with students throughout their higher education but this does not mean that such questioning is being used in the same way at each stage.

It is for the reasons outlined above that we should be thoughtful about how and why new technologies are used in assessment practices. Getting students to be creative early on in their programmes of study in for example, producing a blog or wiki, may serve the purpose of collaborative working and may make the experience engaging. However, the higher order outcomes of this practice will need to be carefully considered as it may help or hinder the acquisition of ‘baseline’ knowledge and principles and their initiation into the practices of a subject or discipline. That learning requires an initiation into practice is certainly the case but it also the case that as students’ progress through their programmes of study that they develop in a relational way to their subject or discipline. This will at first be mostly about learning the ‘craft’ of the subject or discipline, or inter-discipline in terms of education about its methods and practices. However, later in their studies students can engage in higher
order skills that evidence a critical or creative engagement. It is here that within their assessments student can be encouraged consider how practices are themselves developing via new information and communication technologies. This is one of the great advantages of the sharing capacity of new technologies. The blurred relationship between consumption and production of wikis, social networks, blogs, etc. throws into relief questions about how subject and disciplines are developing through the information that is accumulated, posted, traded, and shared. This requires a self-reflexive relationship between students and their learning, or what was referred to earlier as metacognition. This is indeed a higher order skill and one in which higher education can attach to it the concept of merit by acknowledging a commitment to critical thinking that is beyond the image of performativity in relation to simply digital literacies. This critical and more reflective mode of practicing is rooted in an enactment of participating in practices of knowledge generation and exchange whilst also at the same time maintaining a ‘distance’ from these in terms of subjecting them to scrutiny, question and potential transformation.

6 Conclusion

Student learning is driven to large extent by assessment practices. As has long been recognized these practices need to be aligned with the curriculum in such a way that students develop the higher order skills that are deemed to be in line with the ‘higher nature’ of higher education. There are certainly many drivers of change in assessment, of which new technologies have come to play a major part. However, as this paper has argued educators need to be careful that the ‘tail does not wag the dog’, I the sense that these technologies are used without sufficiently careful thought about the pedagogical rationale behind them. It is not enough to simply make use of them on the basis of their face value in engaging students because these are the very technologies they are familiar with. Like all technologies, be it pen and paper or tablets and social networking platforms, they have multiple uses like tools in a toolbox.

There are a number of assumptions made about the higher order skills that are capable of being developed through assessments that utilise new technologies. These are often framed in terms of an aligned curriculum that a positions learner as active enquires. However, these assumptions are rarely tested but are grafted onto the rationales for making use of such technologies. In the case of collaborative exercises it may well be the case that learners are passively consuming information by reproducing information from online sources through cut-and-paste operations rather than engaging in a genuinely collective construction of a wiki. Thus what is superficially labeled as ‘collaborative’ learning may be nothing more than an exercise in co-operation or co-ordination (Selwyn, 2013, p.205). This kind of learning can be characterized as developing a competence rather than a higher order skill. Indeed there is often more than not the assumption that learners freely engage with digital learning technologies in some independent and autonomous manner that underplays the role of formal teaching and learning.

It is not a case of either accepting or rejecting new technologies but of recognizing that the development of higher order skills is not rooted in the technology per se but rather in the kinds of skills that in practice students engage in and with. As Selwyn (2013, p.207) points out, there is often a tendency to discuss educational technology in terms of what should happen and what could happen through the introduction of new technologies. His point is that we should focus on the “‘state-of-the-actual’ rather than the state-of-the-art”. To this could be added that we should focus on the pedagogical state of both as we attempt to define what we mean by the development of higher order skills in higher education.

References


Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to offer some preliminary evaluation findings from a six month pilot that will explore the viability, usefulness and potential of the online platform SocialLearn in providing an academic community for social sciences tutors. The new SocialLearn platform developed by the Open University has the potential to combine both active learning and collaboration opportunities in a monitored environment. This paper firstly introduces the potential of online environments and the application of ‘communities of practice’. The methodology behind the evaluation is then outlined along with an introduction to the Open University SocialLearn platform. The findings from the focus groups that were conducted with the research group are then outlined to show both the potential of an online environment and the barriers to successful implementation. The paper concludes with a discussion of the key themes of privacy, usability and multi-level communications in understanding the process of creating a successful online academic environment.

Introduction
This presentation will offer some key findings from an evaluation of a six-month pilot exploring the viability, usefulness and potential of a virtual Open University platform called SocialLearn in building an academic community. For many users, social networking has become integrated into their daily activities as one of the most common ways of communicating virtually, through different platforms such as, Facebook, Twitter and forums but, as yet, none of these platforms have been able to provide both a dynamic and controlled learning platform. The networking potential of social media within HE is acknowledged within the Open University and this pilot aimed to assess its current potential.

A crucial aspect of the lecturer or tutor role is continuous professional development and reflection on good practice (Schon 1991). In the Open University social networking is used to facilitate collaborative practice amongst geographically disconnected individuals, such as the OU body of Associate Lecturers (module tutors). Over the years some Associate Lecturers (ALs) have commented that they can feel isolated from the University, at least in terms of feeling part of a vibrant academic community where they can participate in a culture of debate and argument. The geographical spread of tutors across the length and breadth of Scotland means that face to face participation in events such as workshops and seminars, as well as the opportunity to meet with colleagues, is not always possible or practical.

The pilot project aim is to gain some insights into the process and usefulness of creating virtual ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998). To enable evaluation, the pilot project focus is on building an academic community among OU Associate Lecturers: to foster a sense of an academic community amongst peers within the OU initially, and with other academics in different institutions within the UK and internationally. The pilot project includes a number of Social Science Associate Lecturers (ALs) in Scotland, who in October 2012 were invited to join and interact within a specially formed group called the ‘Social Sciences Academic Engagement Pilot Community’. The pilot project evaluation on the participants’ engagement with the ‘virtual community’ will be through workshops, focus groups and several surveys conducted throughout late 2012/early 2013. The key findings identified in the evaluation are intended to facilitate a discussion on the usefulness of social networking in enabling potential development of academic communities.
The potential of online environments

A learning community can be defined as “a body of individuals who use computer networks to share ideas, information, and insights about a given theme or topic to support the ongoing learning experiences of all the members” (Fontana 1997: 4). The potential of online learning communities can foster creativity, help problem-solving, facilitate decision making and act as ‘incubators’ for social participation (Fontana 1997: 3). Collaboration is key to successful learning environments (Palloff and Pratt 2005) and social media platforms have great potential for collaborative learning and the ‘social construction of meaning’ (Palloff and Pratt 2007: 19). There is, therefore, potential to utilise online environments to build successful, social and collaborative communities.

This potential is seen to be mirrored in successful social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn as well as a wide and diverse range of discussion forums but, as yet, none of these platforms have been able to provide both a dynamic and controlled learning platform. There is also ongoing privacy and commercial considerations linked to social media platforms. The Open University have proposed an answer to this problem by offering staff and students the chance to interact on their new online platform SocialLearn. This is aimed to be a platform open only to those with an Open University web access password could access discussions. It also aims to let users share information and engage on both a social and educational level. For ALs there was also an element of professional development and the potential to share research and scholarship.

A controlled academic environment is very important as online concerns include issues in people developing their ‘social presence’ as they need to define themselves and engage emotionally. This can lead to performance anxiety on social media platforms (Palloff and Pratt 2007) and reluctance to engage. Non-engagement can lead to isolation, which can also affect how people engage with wider communities.

Open University Associate Lecturers are unique by teaching in generally isolated environments, at least in terms of face to face interaction. AL’s have limited means of interacting formally with other peers in this regard. Furthermore, their students may also be geographically dispersed. The potential feelings of isolation led to the piloting of SocialLearn as a new online environment for Open University AL’s. McInerney and Roberts (2004) show that combating isolation is one of the main factors for successful or unsuccessful online learning environments. The social elements of online learning communities are central to successful online communication. If a sense of ‘self’ is encouraged within the online environment, this assists the learning process by combating feelings of isolation.

The evaluation is intended to facilitate a discussion on the usefulness of social networking in enabling continuous professional and social development and the creation of an academic community.

Online social and learning platforms

An online learning community is an “emerging network and accompanying applications are powerful tools for teaching and learning, which place even greater responsibility on individuals” (Fontana 1997:3). This individual responsibility is important and linked to the establishment of self-within online environments as:

“The technology that makes virtual communities possible has the potential to bring enormous leverage to ordinary citizens at relatively low cost... But the technology will not in itself fulfill that potential, this latent technical power must be used intelligently and deliberately by an informed population” (H. Rheingold, in Fontana 1997: 1).
There is not much known about how this ‘latent technical power’ is really used or implemented. The literature suggests that although there is a lot of potential in online platforms, it is the users of that community that are central. In regards to this, a key aspect of the lecturer or tutor role is continuous professional development and reflection on good practice (Schon, 1991). SocialLearn was created as a potential route to facilitate this professional and social development in an online environment but also to enhance the sense of a shared academic community among a network of like-minded peers.

SocialLearn is a new platform made by and run by the Open University and is still in its beta phase. On the website it states that it is a learning, sharing and social site for anyone who is interested in connecting with people. Users with an Open University password can use it to chat, share and discuss social issues, or collaborate with research and scholarship projects or even to have a debate around a particular social or political issue. SocialLearn has been placed as a useful tool to share information and connect with like-minded people who all have an interest in learning and connecting whatever their background or academic status.

SocialLearn is a hybrid of different media platforms. For example, you can build a profile such as on Facebook, follow people as with Twitter. There is the ability to post publically, only to your group, as well as privately with other users.

What is different about the platform is how it organises information, thoughts, events and so on under ‘Collections’. Collections aim to hold all your thoughts, paths, events etc in a coherent way. You need to link your posts to a collection. When making a new collection users must modify permissions and make others a ‘contributor’. Public collections could be seen in multiple ‘communities’ across the platform.

A separate and private ‘community’ was created for the AL’s involved in the pilot scheme. This was built by the research team to include both learning and social aspects of a social community (please see appendix A to see full layout of the community).

The SocialLearn platform was viewed as an opportunity to link existing networks to create peer communities. The aim has been to create an academic community using this on-line platform. This platform aimed to have both social and scholarship elements within it. This pilot project aims to assess the capacity of this type of interactive and social community.

Methodology
This evaluation has been conducted using a mixed method approach. The mixed methods can be shown as three phases. Phase 1 included an initial period of time on the formation of project goals and methods and an examination of supporting literature. The pilot sample of 55 Scottish social sciences AL’s was confirmed, drawn from across the undergraduate curriculum and from across Scotland. Furthermore, the SocialLearn community platform was created and populated by the research team in preparation for AL participation. The ‘Social Sciences Academic Engagement Pilot Community’ group has been is open to ALs since November 2012 and is designed to allow ALs to share ideas, experiences, knowledge and interesting thoughts, ideas and useful web and other links (for full visual please see appendix A). This has been the main ‘interface’ component of the project and has been monitored by the research team.

For phase 2 it was decided that the best way to maximise ALs participation was to utilise focus group methods. Two focus groups were conducted in November 2012 with two groups of DD101 Associate Lecturers (ALs) and several other interested parties (approx. 50 in total). The focus groups explored a range of issues including AL thoughts on and use of social media in general, potential barriers and AL participation on platforms such as
SocialLearn. The focus group data was analysed on QSR Nvivo the qualitative software platform to explore cross-cutting themes.

Phase 3 of the pilot scheme is currently underway and includes generating viable quantitative results from both the online platform and a survey of the AL population. The survey was created to complement the findings from the focus groups conducted in phase 2. The current analytics and engagement of the SocialLearn platform are outlined in appendix B. The tables show the results from a 6 month period from November 2012 to April 2013. The results show that from the 55 members of the pilot group there are 17 active users (a take up of 31%). The 17 active users have created six collections, three events, four thoughts and 51 comments. This averages three comments per active user over the six month period. This paper now outlines the focus group findings and the learning points we have derived from the project so far.

**Focus Group Findings - the possibilities linked to an online community**

Overall, there was a general appetite for a social and learning community from the pilot group. At the time of the focus groups, the majority of ALs did not feel that they were part of a general AL community.

“you don’t feel part of the professional community because you don’t know the people” (Focus Group 2).

Although ALs felt some kind of disconnection, they did express a need and a want to connect to other tutors in some way. Many of the participants did engage with social media already. Facebook and LinkedIn were the most popular, with only about 4 people on Twitter. There was only 2 ALs (1 in each group) who said they wrote a blog (in focus group 2 there was confusion to what a blog was). About a third of participants tried not to engage with any social media in a significant way. However, all but 1 participant said they would be willing to try SocialLearn. This is a very important point in that there was a general willingness from the pilot group to try and build some type of AL academic and social community.

“I’ve been an AL a long time and an OU student a long time and isolation is a problem and the idea of being able to talk to a very particular group of people attracts me” (FG1)

“we’ve had our awareness raised about it, go on and try it out. I’m willing to get into this pilot I’m not a great one for social media but I’m absolutely willing to find time here and there to have a look at this and contribute and see where it goes” (FG2).

Importantly, SocialLearn was seen as having to go hand-in-hand with face-to-face communication. The group generally felt that online engagement must augment face-to-face social interaction that rather than replace it. ALs liked to idea of professional engagement and focused social communication.

There was a minority of ALs in the focus groups who were active champions of social media. They were quite vocal in advocating the use of social media for ALs on a personal level. Some of the potential of the platform was discussed as a tool for professional, social and learning development.

Some of the main advantages of using social media were seen to be around the area of personal development. ALs mentioned included publishing and advertising your own work,
becoming more visible in your discipline, finding employment (1 AL mentioned she had got 3 job offers through LinkedIn) and managing your online reputation. It was clear that SocialLearn could be an arena to share research and scholarship interests in this way.

In focus group 2 there was a key theme of increasing the “voice” of ALs. Some ALs would also like more engagement with full time OU faculty staff, such as their line managers (in the OU these are Staff Tutors or Senior Faculty Managers) as well as those directly involved in curriculum and module development and a forum to share their views on particular courses.

“I would agree and I think ALs need a voice. For example, students get a survey and give all their comments and give their feedback, now when do we ever really” (FG2).

For this to work there would need to be a high-level of engagement from the Open University in general. ALs mentioned that there has to be something there for them to see or they will get “fed up” with it.

The benefits of using social media also included key social interactions. For example it was seen as a medium to communicate with other ALs, arrange face-to-face ‘meet-ups’ and finding people with similar interests and engage on a social level. Overall it could “plug a gap in finding out what ALs are actually doing” (FG1) and “make people human” (FG2). Furthermore, engaging with people on a day to day basis could be seen to help some participants feel less isolated.

Learning outcomes in relation to taught courses or general knowledge exchange were also perceived as a key area for development in the platform. One of the main benefits has been access to a “wealth of links”. Specific links that were mentioned included events, conferences and funding bids etc. An example from the ALs on desired and useful context was the email announcement regarding the OU/BBC Why Poverty? TV series that was sent by the Staff Tutor before the focus groups. Many ALs found this helpful on many levels and it was brought up in both focus groups.

“The Why Poverty programme was on, on Monday night, that’s the sort of thing I might have, if I was already in the groove of this thing, that’s the sort of thing I might have gone on and said did anybody else see that, that was fantastic” (FG1).

Some ALs would like to share people’s research interests and establish connections between ALs. Particularly on opportunities for research grants for example. There was also an element of linking people to useful information. ALs said they would be more inclined to use SocialLearn for professional outcomes linked to the content. Lectures, conferences and events were also popular potential topics as well as social events.

The above evidence shows there is a need for some kind of AL community and professional, social and learning opportunities were seen as possible outcomes. There were a number of interesting advantages expressed in regards to being engaged with such a community. There were questions, however, on participation and non-participation. This was set as a question of what type and level of participation was expected from ALs.

**General mistrust of social media**

Although many ALs involved in the discussions used social media in some way, a number of other ALs expressed some kind of distrust in regards to social media. Issues of mandatory involvement in social media for tutors, monitoring and privacy were key themes that were
raised in this regard. These were all linked to an overall questioning of the use of social media by other users.

[talking about Facebook and Twitter] “I’ve consciously avoided them because I don’t want that kind of contact with the general population that talk about absolute s*** most of the time, and when they don’t do that they lend themselves towards litigation” (FG1).

There was an underlying hint of suspicion in regards to social media in both focus groups. This was underlined by a worry of the past pace of technological change in general working life. There was almost an argument between two ALs in focus group 1 in regards to the use of social media for “good” or for “bad”.

ALs expressed an immediate concern to whether their engagement was being monitored on the platform, i.e. would someone from the OU be recording those who engaged and those who did not. This was linked to ALs trying to understand the expectations of their involvement in the platform.

SocialLearn as “mandatory”

There was a lot of concern that the engagement with the platform was mandatory. ALs did not like feeling forced to engage with social media. Engagement needs to be voluntary:

“I mean ultimately if I was forced to take part in any social media platform, I would tell them to go and (!**!) because anybody will never be coerced or forced whether it’s by contract or not to take part in discussing my own views” (FG1)

In regards to SocialLearn, AL’s were concerned because the information and encouragement to engage with SocialLearn came from a Staff Tutor who had responsibility for many of the study participants. Any potential mandatory expectations linked with use of social media were met with reserve:

“is there an expectation there that I’m supposed to be committed to this, because I would feel much more comfortable if there wasn’t an expectation that I have to give an immeasurable amount of time to it because my time is so precious as it is, with so many different commitments workwise, personally and so forth, but I’d feel very comfortable about it being a comfortable friendly place where you can pop in and out and join things and so forth” (FG 1).

To combat this, focus group 2 participants discussed the need for reassurance from the Open University and to set out guidelines and principles in regards to ALs mandatory engagement with social media.

Privacy and Social Media

In the focus groups there was particular concern about students having access to the AL community: ALs would not wish to engage if they had to worry about not being candid in their responses. On the same note, there was concern regarding the engagement of Staff Tutors in a potential AL community:

“that’s a serious issue if you feel that people from within your employment organisation have the possibility to know how I act professionally may be very
different to how I might vote politically and I think there is a serious issue there” (FG1).

There was an explicit request for reassurance in regards to comments and other engagement being confidential and would not be used for managerial/contractual, circumstances. There was an ‘us’ and ‘them’ feeling expressed by some ALs in regards to a perception of the OU hierarchy. Ground rules need to be set for social media engagement for ALs so they feel more secure for the future.

The ALs involved in the pilot were clear that they wanted their postings in the community to be private. However the permissions and connection options in SocialLearn are so confusing that people did not know who had access to collections and postings. After making everything ‘private,’ a person not part of the community was able to comment on the Scottish Independence debate. This is one of the more important and pressing issues to get right if the SocialLearn platform is to be a viable place to build an AL community, especially as students also have access to their postings. Privacy options must be clear and manageable.

Barriers to using Social Media

Barriers that were mentioned to using social media included technical difficulties. There was a sense of a “generational problem” felt by some AL’s who were struggling to keep up with the fast pace of social media. First, access to these platforms was key to its success, and they had to be very simple to access and use.

“when I’m in front of that blasted machine, arguable after a few seconds, if there isn’t a button that is really colourful, then really I’ll start to lose interest” (FG1).

There were also practical time related issues as the demands of teaching and social media compete. Motivation for using platforms dropped when there was a lack of engagement and response to posts.

There were also mixed understandings on what the platform was to be used for. There are mixed expectations in regards to social media where there are multiple platforms and forums with underlying expectations to engage with them all. With these multiple platforms comes a high amount of information and some AL’s found it difficult to pick out key and important messages.

AL’s also worried about the engagement of other users. AL’s thought other media sites were often used as a platform for others to complain or vent their issues. If the platform was seen as a social site for AL’s they were worried about student access. It could also be “another place where you might be judged” (FG2). This point was linked to the previous benefits as stated by AL’s in that social media was seen as another platform where people need to manage their ‘sense of self’ (Goffman, 1959).

Therefore technical issues, time constraints, other users and mixed messaging around the use of social media were seen as the key barriers to creating a successful social and learning community.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our conclusion is that there is appetite for a dynamic and controlled academic online environment from the pilot group. The online platform SocialLearn that was utilised,
However, was not dynamic or quick enough to be viable for time-constrained users. Furthermore, there have been some key learning points that have come from the pilot include issues around privacy, usability, outline expectations, audience and communication plans.

Firstly, the privacy settings of an online community must be set out clearly at the beginning. Those that have potential access to the community must be communicated and set out clearly. If the community is being monitored in any way it must also be stated in advance. By offering this transparency this could help elevate user’s potential worries over privacy and monitoring. Expectations also need to be established/made clear from the outset of creating online academic communities. Issues around mandatory use cannot be linked to the expectation of social elements within a community. If this is clear at the beginning this can assuage any worries from the potential user group.

The online platform must be quick and easy to access and use. If you need a tutorial to use it, it will not work. The SocialLearn platform was visually accessible but users struggled with new concepts such as ‘collections’ and access paths were not at first obvious. This is particularly important in a world of where social media appears to be ever gathering more pace. Furthermore, any online platform must be augmented with other types of contact such as face-to-face contact, e-mails and the use of other media to maintain momentum and engagement. The establishment of a successful online academic platform must include an overall communication plan for the user group as well. Multi-level communications can keep momentum and interest in the online community.

Finally, the nature of the potential audience or users is very important. In this case, the context of changing tutor roles around online and blended learning must be considered in conjunction with the creation of academic communities. There is also the element of users negotiating their online ‘selves’ online. When creating a potential online academic community the nature of the audience must be considered in advance.

Overall, this pilot has given valuable insight to the creation of online academic communities. It has shown clearly that there is potential in this area. To be successful, however, issues around privacy, online expectations and potential users of the community should be overt and transparent. This would help overcome barriers that users may have to engaging in online communities. The nature of the audience matters very much for the uses of an online academic community and it must be embedded in a multi-level communication strategy to really engage a wide set of potential users.

References


Appendix A – SocialLearn Platform

Appendix B – SocialLearn Analytics, November 2013- April 2013

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User Breakdown

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ABSTRACT: Over and above the formal curriculum that every postgraduate (PG) student undergoes as a critical part of his/her disciplinary training, we argue that informal mentorship for PG students are just as essential. University curriculum has traditionally privileged disciplinary content over various other types of critical literacies (such as critical thinking and communication skills) and the basic competencies that many (successful) academics take for granted. These are critical skills that many supervisors “do not have time for”, and yet they are the kind of skills that many PG students need.

Our paper discusses a one-year-old workshop series that provides informal PG mentorship from the platform of a teaching and learning centre, and asks:

a) How does this form of informal mentorship offered by a Teaching and Learning Centre fit (or not fit) current understanding of PG mentorship?

b) Would such mentorship be better served by faculties/departments?

1 Introduction

In many universities, the formal curriculum places great emphasis on imparting disciplinary knowledge. A few decades ago, such an emphasis is an accepted practice. However, both the times and university practices have changed. In the past, university graduates were expected to have sound and full command of subject knowledge. Today’s world however, recognizes that much of subject content becomes rapidly obsolete, and instead calls for graduates who have the more enduring life skills such as critical thinking and good communication skills. The university has moved to some extent with this shift in the new requirements of the global workplace through emphasizing applied skills in its curriculum but judging from the local experience of many postgraduate students and the feedback we have gathered from employers, the training for life skills still has some ways to go in many educational institutions.

In spite of the professed needs of the global workplace, the approach adopted in many universities today is to devote much of the formal curriculum space to disciplinary training rather than to infuse the curriculum with the critical literacies of thinking and communication, skills that many of us recognize are important. The reasons often offered include a crowded curriculum space that is not able to accommodate the teaching of critical skills in addition to the requisite disciplinary content. Some instructors readily admit to have neither time, nor inclination, and especially with respect to communication skills, the relevant expertise, to teach these critical literacies. At the same time, we have abundant anecdotal evidence that many students are lacking in such skills, and many would like to be in receipt of such support and guidance. And this lack is confirmed through regular feedback exercises with employers.
This paper provides one way—a postgraduate workshop series—in which we have attempted to address this gap in the formal curriculum, and discusses the nature, value, and place of postgraduate mentorship as an avenue for imparting critical skills.

2 Answering the need for mentorship: The Postgraduate Student (PGS) Workshop Series

As explained above, the gap that is detected between the formal curriculum and the postgraduate students’ need for critical skills training is the primary motivation that led us to provide a platform to address this lack. In our capacity as people directly involved in teaching and learning, we often receive feedback through various channels about the need among our postgraduate (i.e. Master, PhD) students for academic mentorship in general, and training in critical skills in particular. In the August Term of 2011, we answered this need by introducing a postgraduate student workshop series (that we called ‘PGS’), for any postgraduate student in our university who needs help in developing specific skills. This section provides details of this series.

PGS started modestly with the introduction of six sessions that took place between mid-August and mid-December 2011, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date of Session</th>
<th>Title of Session</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>17 August</td>
<td>PGS Welcome Tea</td>
<td>estimated 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9 September</td>
<td>Planning &amp; managing your postgraduate journey</td>
<td>&gt;300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19 September</td>
<td>Identifying a research topic &amp; managing the</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>supervisor-supervisee relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14 October</td>
<td>Effective oral communication: Know it, use it, ace it!</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 November</td>
<td>Taking an analytical approach to thesis writing</td>
<td>&gt;100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>13 December</td>
<td>Components of a research paper</td>
<td>&gt;90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: PGS 2011 (August semester)

Our teaching and learning centre (called CDTL) has been offering regular staff and student workshop series for over two decades but we have not had a student workshop series that is dedicated to the slightly over 10,000 postgraduate students enrolled in our university. The PGS is therefore a first for CDTL. We launched this new series on 17 August 2011 by extending invitations to all postgraduate students to join us for a tea reception. Though this is an open call, for logistical and budget reasons, we had to restrict the number of participants to a maximum of 400 students. All 400 places were swiftly taken up, but on the day of the tea, close to 200 showed up. Though this number was admittedly only half of available capacity, this was a good start, given the large number of student activities happening all around campus at the start of the August term. More importantly, we got the word out about the PGS, and we explained our plan for the semester ahead (see Table 1 above).

The topics in Table 1 were identified by taking the following matters into consideration:

(a) Our first priority was to identify a few topics that would address key issues.
(b) We wanted to have on average, one session every one or two months, spread across the 13 weeks of a semester.
(c) An important factor was the availability of colleagues who were both able and willing to facilitate a session.
(d) The capacity allowed for each session was dependent on facilitator’s preference and the availability of a suitable venue.

Happily for us, within a month or so of planning, we were able to confirm the slate that is reflected in Table 1. Some of these sessions were held in a lecture theatre that could accommodate between 150 and 400 participants (e.g. sessions 2 and 3 above). Some had smaller numbers because the facilitator preferred a smaller, ‘cosier’ group (e.g. sessions 5 and 6). In this first offering, we did not plan any of the above sessions to address discipline-specific issues – they were pitched at students from all disciplines.\(^4\) In total, the above sessions brought together close to 1,000 PG students (non-unique count) for about two hours per session, and in all, 10 colleagues were involved in putting up the first slate.

Students’ feedback at this inaugural August series included the following:\(^5\)

- Very informative! It is very nice for the profs to share [their] personal experience with us as [their experience] are all very relatable. The structure of the programme is also very digestible (S2).
- More workshops on this topic in future (S2).
- All in all, the programme was so helpful. The panel members were informative and inspiring. All that needs to be improved with regards to the programme is increasing the frequency (S2).
- Having faculty members representing all the faculties would be more beneficial for the students (S3)
- The content is too general. I am expecting more specific skill on special situation of oral communication (S4).
- I think the session was well-covered and I learnt a lot! It would have been good to expand this session as a full module/half module as I think the actual practice of writing and planning thesis organization will enhance learning and understanding (S5).
- Thank you! This was so beneficial (S6).
- The session was great; there was sufficient interaction with the speaker. He was very articulate, informative and the sharing was extremely helpful (S6).

As is easily discernible from the above samples, we felt deeply encouraged by the positive reception of our newly instituted PGS. The only ‘negative’ comments we obtained involved comments like the one received for S4 – a call for a more domain-specific session, more depth, and longer duration of the workshops like the comment received for S5 above. In any case, this enthusiastic reception by our PG students reinforced our conviction that this kind of (informal) training and frank discussions about issues that lie outside the formal curriculum are much needed.

Spurred by this initial success, we went on to offer PGS regularly in the subsequent semesters, and at each offering, we repeated the topics that were constantly in high demand (e.g. on effective communication, thesis writing, literature review, preparing for the PhD defence, etc), and also devised new topics that either we thought useful, or the PG students felt were needed. Some of the new sessions that were introduced also took on a more domain-specific slant, something that the feedback requested us to do. To date, we have completed three cycles of PGS (August Term 2011, January Term 2012, and August Term

\(^4\) In subsequent offerings, we occasionally offered discipline-specific sessions, to address some students’ feedback that a more directed, customized session would be more productive.

\(^5\) We did not ask for feedback at the tea reception (S1) – instead we invited students to tell us what topics/issues they wish us to offer for future PGS.
2012; January Term 2013 is currently in progress\(^6\), and in the three cycles, we offered the following topics (in addition to the welcome reception):

1) Academic integrity  
2) Components of a research paper  
3) Effective oral communication/presentation skills: Know it, use it, ace it  
4) Getting the most out of graduate school  
5) How to frame the good and right research question  
6) Identifying a research topic & managing the supervisor-supervisee relationship  
7) Planning & managing your postgraduate journey  
8) Planning the right experiments  
9) Preparing for the qualifying exam/PhD oral defense  
10) Presentation skills for scientists  
11) Quantitative and qualitative approaches to research and data collection  
12) Staying motivated throughout the postgraduate journey  
13) Taking an analytical approach to thesis writing  
14) Turning a paper into an oral presentation  
15) Writing literature review for a thesis/dissertation/research paper

These three cycles have been facilitated by 15 colleagues (several of whom have kept up their involvement across the three cycles) across 15 departments on campus, with more expected to be involved in future PGS as word spreads and the series gains momentum. The participation rate has also kept up the initial trends, with sessions as large as 200-300 in some cases, or as small as 25 in some of the more customized and domain-specific ones.

In the context of our PGS, the topics offered in each cycle map into the skills and attitudes related to the various stages of the graduate student life. PGS has been conceptualized in ways that align with RISE (see below) and emphasizes on providing a loosely structured, informal and secondary mentorship model along the lines of Kram’s Mentoring Mosaic (MM) or Relationship Constellation (RC) model (see Kram (1983, 1985, 1998) and Kram and Higgins (2008)).\(^7\) As seen in Figure 1 below, PGS sessions span four dimensions: the Relational, Intellectual, Self-management and Employability dimensions of skill development through a group-mentoring process:

\(^{6}\)In the fourth run of PGS (January Term 2013), we offered a session that covered CV writing, preparing for interview and how to start well in the first year at work.  
\(^{7}\)The RISE model is based on what we have learnt from a presentation given by colleagues from KU Leuven on “Competence Profile for Graduate Students” (2012). Though they do not use the competency profile to run a programme like PGS, we applied the idea to our PGS and created the acronym RISE to guide our PGS structure.
These four aspects of RISE are all essential as they contribute towards both personal and professional effectiveness, but are unfortunately for the most parts neglected by the formal curriculum.

Though our PGS has been well-received by students, we have met with various kinds of challenges in facilitating the PGS series. One challenge we faced was, especially in the early days of its conception, resistance from certain pockets who felt that a T&L centre does not have the academic expertise to run such a series. Some put it bluntly in this way: “Who are you to teach our students how to work on their thesis?” We were also mindful of the potential conflicts that may be generated between our facilitators (who are academics from different disciplines), the student and the student’s supervisor. The question of who should have access to the PG student, who should/can influence his/her life as a PG student, and so on, can become fairly political issues on campus. However, challenges aside, whether in terms of continuing demand for PGS workshops, or the slow but growing number of colleagues who voluntarily came forward to help us conduct specific sessions, or in terms of the consistently positive feedback we received from the participants, we believe we can rest assured that PGS has enjoyed success in ways that are both expected (because of the clear need for it) and unexpected (because the enthusiasm level and gratitude felt by students were much more than we had expected). Also importantly, a positive outcome from PGS is that many of our colleagues have gotten involved in dialogues about graduate student mentoring at local levels. In addition, PGS facilitators have learnt from one another about various effective approaches or practices in specific subject domains, thus gradually establishing a community of practice. For what it is – the modest aim of PGS to help our PG student body, a largely informal student workshop series that is voluntarily kept going by willing and generous colleagues, facilitated by and on a T&L centre platform – we think PGS has added much value and has played an important role, even if in small ways, to make the postgraduate journey easier, and more enjoyable, for at least those students who have joined us at one or more of these sessions.

Our questions then are: Do activities like PGS fit or not fit current understanding of PG mentorship? Where is PGS best located? In a T&L Centre? Or localized in departments where PG students call ‘home’? In the following section, we situate our work in the relevant
literature on postgraduate student mentorship, and provide an evaluation of how best to view the PGS workshop series, and the future of such an endeavor.

3 Mentoring postgraduate students: Different mentorship models

More than 50 definitions of mentoring can be found in the published literature according to Crisp and Cruz (2009). Some of these are based on activities of a mentor while others focus on mentoring as a concept or process. Some definitions are discipline-specific, while others are extremely broad. Despite this diffused situation, Jacobi (1991) identified three broadly accepted views of mentoring - it must:

(i) lead to the growth and accomplishment of an individual;
(ii) include several forms of assistance and support aimed at professional and career development; and
(iii) work on psychological well-being of the mentee.

In a similar vein, Miller (2002) noted that mentoring can be development-oriented or work-related or subject-related. Nora and Crisp (2007) identify the following four key domains or latent structures that characterize the mentoring support system viz.

(i) psychological and emotional support;
(ii) support for setting goals and choosing career path;
(iii) academic subject knowledge support; and
(iv) the specification of a role model.

We are happy to note that our PGS sessions have explicitly or implicitly attempted to provide precisely such forms of mentoring and guidance, whether it is in terms of discussions about career development or simply allowing for an avenue to render emotional support.

Barnes and Austin (2009) have described mentoring as “woefully uneven experiences of supervision”. There have been comparatively fewer empirical studies on the effect of mentoring on graduate student populations than on undergraduate students, minorities and at-risk students. Recent studies on graduate student mentoring have largely focused on the process or characteristics of mentoring. Relatively fewer investigations have been on aspects such as identifying the factors that contribute to the potential for mentoring, prevalence of mentoring or the impact of mentoring on student outcomes. This gap ought to be addressed in the future, as it is important that we understand the outcomes of mentorship, especially given the heavy investments required of such mentoring programmes.

Working from the perspective of students, Fason (1996) indicates that graduate students conceptualized mentoring to comprise of several components: academic, facilitative, professional development, career and personal support. The longitudinal study of Paglis et al (2006) on graduate students belonging to engineering and science faculties was based on Kram’s model but adjusted for student attitude and ability. While their study did not clearly delineate the confounding factors, they concluded that mentoring may positively impact subsequent productivity and self-efficacy of graduate students but appears to have no significant impact on commitment to a research career.

A study by Hadjioannou et al (2007) on a small cohort of doctoral students highlighted the need for socialization in professional/academic settings, gaining skills to navigate through the doctoral programme, receiving emotional support to alleviate the stress and anxiety that accompanies doctoral work and participation in academic discourse. Support received from the programme advisor during PhD studies and while transitioning into their post-PhD
careers were evaluated by over 3,000 social science doctorates. Examining this mass of information, Rudd et al (2008) noted a strong unmet need for guidance in planning doctoral education strategically, for information that would help connect PhD education to career goals and exposure to multiple career paths. Analyzing narratives and data provided by their subjects, Rudd et al (2008) suggest that universities and PhD programs could provide more in the way of career guidance, career preparation, exposure to a variety of career options, and access to diverse professional networks. Our PGS experience informs us that an informal platform such as the one we provided can go some way towards answering these needs.

In surveying the mentorship literature, we encountered many studies that identify the role of demographic factors and supervisor support in creating a good PhD experience and subsequent outcomes for students. Platow (2012) mentioned that many universities see the need to develop generic qualities and skills, preferably interwoven with the students’ research (content) area. The study by Manathunga et al (2009) surveyed people who had completed their PhDs in science. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which skills developed during their PhD studies prepared them for their current employment. While 58% or more respondents felt they did have sufficient skills, many respondents indicated needing further development of complementary skills such as time management, and goal setting – yet these are the types of issues usually not given coverage in the formal curriculum.

McAlpine and McKinnon (2012) used evidence from weekly logs and personal interviews with 16 social science doctoral students to conclude that students depended almost to the same level on peers, friends, and family as they did on the supervisor. The doctoral students seemed to draw different kinds of support from each relationship. The authors conclude that it is necessary both for research and policy/practice to articulate “supervision as a pedagogy which positions the student as able and willing to draw on a range of resources, often beyond the university - with the department, faculty (and institution) creating structures to support this student agency. Such structures would have the added advantage of creating equity of support for both students and supervisors …”. All the above indicate that graduate students could benefit significantly from forms of support beyond the academic socialization afforded by the supervisor and the department, and confirm the need for a student series like the PGS.

Finally, the impact of mentoring is known to depend on several factors related to student background, attitudes, mentor skills and attitudes. Mullen et al (2010) explore a graduate intervention that intends to promote understanding, empowerment, and skills building of doctoral students in education. They discuss the usefulness of the Mentoring Mosaic (MM) or Relationship Constellation (RC) model proposed by Kram and her colleagues (1985, 1988 and 2008). The MM or RC model can be organized formally or informally, and can be a primary or secondary system of mentorship. They function as a network, community or simply as a resource; they can be non-hierarchical, compensate for gaps in existing traditional mentoring relations and even expand academic and career opportunities. Having students benefit from a development network is perhaps essential in today’s environment characterized by the rapidly exploding knowledge base, and the need for multidisciplinary and multicultural skills.

This broad survey of the literature renews our conviction at three levels:

(i) beyond the formal curriculum, PG students need guidance relating to their studies along the RISE dimensions;
(ii) successful mentoring will depend on the investments that universities are willing to make in providing the resources to develop both informal and formal supportive networks and platforms;
as a form of modeling, mentorship provided by the academy, through explicit discussions about the postgraduate journey can go a long way towards developing a positive learning and induction culture.

These needs served as the underlying motivations for our PGS workshop series, and the findings in the literature reinforced our views of the importance of PGS, and the role a CDTL can play within the university in providing such postgraduate student mentorship.

4 Locating PGS and postgraduate student mentorship

The informal success enjoyed by the CDTL PGS series provides sufficient motivation for us working from the CDTL platform to continue making the workshop series available to our postgraduate student body. However, as administrators (and educators), we are often confronted with issues of fit, efficiency and what may be argued to be the ‘proper’ locations of our programmes. We therefore ask: is a teaching and learning centre the best place to house such a programme? If no, then where should a postgraduate student mentorship programme, in whichever sense we understand ‘mentorship’, be best located?

There is much to be said for the fact that mentorship for any segment of the student population ought to be the purview of departments where these students are most immediately located. There are three main reasons for this view:

(i) It may be argued that students identify most closely with their department or faculty.
(ii) For reason of scale, it may be more feasible to provide mentorship to one’s own ‘home’ students.
(iii) Departments and faculties are the best places to provide domain-specific mentorship and support, especially when dealing with academic aspects of the mentorship.

We could however, also think of at least three other reasons for the provision of mentorship by a more ‘global’ body, at university level, like in a teaching and learning centre:

(i) A university level teaching and learning unit like CDTL is well-positioned to provide a broad overview of academic practices and informal support or network structure for students across the university campus.
(ii) The pedagogical expertise and specially-trained personnel that is often available in a teaching and learning centre makes it a good place to locate such a mentorship programme.
(iii) A university level mentorship platform is essential in instilling a sense of community among students from across different disciplines, providing an occasion for students to meet peers from other parts of campus.

Most likely, there is no one good answer for adopting either the local/department or global/university approach to mentoring, but at least two things are clear – (i) mentorship of some kind is needed by our students as they embark on their journey towards becoming full-fledged members of the Academy; and (ii) a mixed approach that involves two levels of mentorship at the department/faculty and university level may work best as issues relating to disciplinary practices are perhaps still best handled by departments/faculties, and broader issues relating to time management and career-related matters could conceivably be helmed by university units like a CDTL. Ultimately however, where this mentorship programme should be located is perhaps not such an important question. Instead, what is important is that PG students are provided ample opportunities to acquire not just disciplinary knowledge that the formal curriculum caters for, but also learn the skills needed to successfully navigate the world of academia.
References


ABSTRACT: This qualitative investigation was undertaken with students on one specific postgraduate programme, who were also studying at that level in the UK for the first time, and was conducted in response to the greater prevalence of international students studying on postgraduate programmes in the United Kingdom. While previous research points to general transitional challenges, this study looked more specifically at the study experiences of these students. It found three critical themes, the learning, teaching and assessment culture; academic convention and plagiarism; and the role and nature of support. Following discussion of the potential practice implications of those themes, it goes on to make recommendations for future practice when working with students.

1 Literature Review

There are growing numbers of international students arriving in the United Kingdom (UK) to study in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) from a variety of European and non-European countries. The top five non-European countries that send students to the UK to study in order of numbers are: Peoples Republic of China, India, Nigeria, United States of America (USA) and Malaysia (UKCISA, 2013). The UK has a long history of welcoming international students to study in its universities and colleges. In the UK last year there were 1,800,000 full-time undergraduate students in higher education, which included over 104,000 international students (UCAS, 2013).

Pearce and Johnson (2012) ask if the next generation of world leaders will be educated in the UK. The world-class universities in the UK explain why it is the second most popular destination for international students to study after the USA. The students gain friendships and loyalties that later become trade links, cultural bonds and diplomatic ties.

It is crucial for the UK and for UK HEI’s to build a national brand as a safe and exciting place to study, offering a rich life experience and enhanced career prospects. Tapping top-flight student talent globally will mean that the UK gains in terms of innovation, research and a broader science and skills base. This greater exchange of students will not only mean stronger relationships later, but will also go a long way to meeting the sustainability, financial and otherwise, of institutions (Pearce and Johnson, 2012).

It was clear from the literature around the experience of international students in the UK and other similarly developed countries, that transition from one country and education system to another is important, relevant and often challenging (McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Wang, 2012). In order to support these students adequately, it is important to acknowledge some of the challenges that they face. McLachlan and Justice (2009) believe that most international students become integrated with the new local culture successfully, but some face challenges of cultural and academic difference, social isolation and difficulties with English language proficiency.

Although there were many earlier studies carried out in relation to the experiences of international students studying in the UK (Asmar, 2005; Ward, 2001), more recent studies exploring this very pertinent topic are less prevalent. Brown and Holloway (2008) undertook an ethnographic study of the adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at a university in the South of England. They expected to discover that the students would be
initially excited about their new experience, but the students appeared to be overwhelmed by negative symptoms more commonly associated with culture shock.

Several studies have been conducted in the USA. A study by Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) examined how international students adjusted to their new environment academically and socially. Focus groups were conducted and revealed a considerable number of barriers to their ability to adjust. The barriers faced were in relation to academic life, health insurance, living on or off campus, social interactions, transportation, and discrimination. Williams and Johnson (2011) reported that limited social contact with members of the host country contributed to the international students feeling depressed, anxious and alienated. There is also evidence that international students have a marked impact on host students and that those host students who had engaged in friendships with international students were found to be more open-minded and were less apprehensive about forging international friendships (Williams and Johnson, 2011). Olivas and Li (2006) reported on a literature review they undertook in relation to international students in universities and colleges in the United States. They explored stressors such as adjustment issues and coping strategies, which reflected in some ways Poyrazli and Grahame’s (2007) barriers. Although the experiences of some international students studying in the US appear to be negative, McDermott-Levy (2011) identified the positive aspects also. A phenomenological inquiry into the experiences of 12 Omani nurses studying in the USA revealed that although they felt alone and at times discriminated against, this experience also enabled them to mature, grow and experience a sense of freedom and independence not possible for them at home.

The issues are not just for international students studying in the UK and the USA, they apply also to international students studying in other countries. Wang (2012) undertook a study to examine the study experiences and coping strategies of Chinese students in Singapore. The issues identified were academic and social marginalisation, aligned with a marginalisation within the student/supervisory relationship.

Fritz, Chin and DeMarinis (2008) believe that all international students cannot be considered together as one homogenous group and that they all have differing cultural needs depending on their country of origin. They also identified common stressors similar to other studies. In addition they believed that before we can measure anxiety in international students, it is important to measure the stress and anxiety of students studying in their own cultural environment experience. At this point, it is worth acknowledging that variety in approaches and preferences for learning is not restricted to an international student population and that this study is conducted within a complex and heterogeneous educational environment.

The aim of this study was to develop a better understanding of the experiences of international postgraduate students who had moved to the UK and to use this understanding to inform future developments in the learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) strategy and the support made available to them.

2 Research Method

This study was undertaken at an institution with 4,000 international students on campus from 109 different countries and 3,500 more studying overseas on courses delivered by partners.

The authors were interested in testing the nature of the transition experience of international students in the UK to assess its relevance and how this transition manifested itself within their own programme and institution. As such, focus was concentrated on students’ transition to their own study experience and the HEI in question. The study was designed to explore variables of specific local relevance which could inform future developments for enhancing the curriculum and LTA strategy for international students.
The study set out to achieve a richer and more detailed appreciation of the experiences of postgraduate international students in the UK for the first time and, as such, qualitative data was gathered. A focus group approach was selected as the appropriate method for this piece of research in order to facilitate the participation of those who might find one-to-one interviews intimidating and to enable less communicative participants to make contributions of greater quality and candour (Barbour, 2007).

The criteria for inclusion were postgraduate students undertaking one specific programme of study who had not previously studied at this level in the UK. There were only a small number of students eligible. As such one focus group was sufficient and this was facilitated by the researchers. While all the students were from India, their previous educational experiences differed greatly. This was in terms of subject and discipline studied (Medicine, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy), previous level of study (two students having previously studied at postgraduate level and one with a purely undergraduate background) and place of previous study (while all had completed their undergraduate studies in India, one had also studied in Singapore and another had historically studied in the UK).

The group discussion was scheduled at a time and venue which fitted in well with the students’ existing timetable. This both minimised any inconvenience to participants and also increased the likelihood of a good level of involvement from those eligible. It was, however, clearly separate from timetabled classes so that any potential concerns about coercion or uncertainty about the voluntary nature of participation was minimised.

This discussion was led by the questions listed below, but the raising of any others issues of relevance and importance to the participants was encouraged.
- Describe your experience of studying in the UK
- How has this compared to home?
- How have you found the support, both academic and pastoral?
- Do you feel the university took any steps to make the transition more positive for you? What more could have been done?

This discussion was recorded and the researchers employed thematic analysis to identify the participants’ key responses.

2.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were taken into consideration and the study was approved by the relevant institutional committee. Participants were asked to read a participant information sheet and were not able to take part unless they had signed a consent form. The transcript and any other information that might reveal participants’ identities was anonymised wherever possible and kept in a locked drawer within the researcher’s office to which they had exclusive access (other than permitted staff). Once the research had been completed and written up, any confidential information was destroyed.

3 Findings

Following thematic analysis, there were three distinct sets of findings, ‘the learning, teaching and assessment culture’, ‘academic convention and plagiarism’ and ‘the role of support’.

3.1 The Learning, Teaching & Assessment Culture

The first overwhelmingly common feature was that the nature of studying in the UK is completely different to that in India.
“over here, the teacher will not sit beside you and teach you each thing, he will give you a brief idea about it and you are the person who will have to go back and study deeply and write your own thinking” [STUDENT A]

This difference further manifested itself in the expectations of UK academic staff around self-directed learning compared to those of their teachers in India. The students described the latter as being a culture of rote learning and precise replication of what had been taught.

“Back in India, whatever we read just - you know - read it and write it down in the paper” [STUDENT A]

“we had classes where he… would just give us enough to spark up our interest and then we were free to read accordingly how we want ” [STUDENT C]

All participants described the experience as one of culture shock, compounded by additional pressure of only having a short time in which to successfully complete the programme.

“For students not from the West, it is incredibly difficult… from a postgraduate perspective, we have just one year to get it right and the first three months are pretty difficult and that, I believe, is the most formative part of our understanding of the university’s functioning.” [STUDENT C]

While the LTA culture in which they found themselves was clearly very different, the students were largely positive about it. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they were well aware that study in the UK would be very different to that in India and, indeed, described that as informing their decision to enrol on the programme.

They talked about how the experience of studying in the UK had encouraged them to challenge, question and develop ideas and knowledge and that this was done through ongoing communication and collaboration between them and both their peers and members of academic staff. As well as seeming to enjoy this culture of learning there was also a sense of it potentially enhancing their professional practice in the future.

“it’s never that the tutor is talking and we’re just listening, it was always like a two-way interaction which is really good as we can actually challenge, question and develop and talk as a group” [STUDENT B]

“It makes me understand the importance of questioning why things are done so that I can be a better professional in the future” [STUDENT B]

They talked about a kind of encouraged risk-taking in their learning in the UK (a climate whereby even if what you say is wrong, then that engagement with ideas is still seen as a positive thing) and a greater incidence of informality between students and staff (as opposed to a more hierarchical relationship being the norm in India).

“we were encouraged to give forward our ideas…. I was never said that you should shut up because I was completely wrong. Even if I was wrong I was then encouraged to say and then we’d discuss on it” [STUDENT B]

“I’m not saying that we can’t approach our tutors in India because we can, absolutely. It’s just that, over here, we have more of an informal relationship” [STUDENT B]

“It makes you more comfortable and feel like you can share anything regarding your studies to your tutor” [STUDENT A]
The students felt that the greater informality in staff/student relationships, encouragement of discussion and critical analysis, expectation of self-directed learning and use of assessment methods other than timed, handwritten exams all worked well together as a coherent whole.

"Whether this informal relationship improves the learning process, I am not an expert to comment on it. One thing is for certain, it does suit the methodology of study that is accepted here." [STUDENT C]

They were, however, also clear that the LTA culture in India with which they were more familiar (which they summarised as involving more formal relationships, the desirability of replicating knowledge gained from staff or textbooks and formal examinations designed to assess recall of that knowledge) also represents a coherent and effective LTA system. It was almost as if the LTA approaches were so very different in these students' minds that there was little meaningful by way of like-for-like comparison or competition between them.

In summary, students felt that the self-directed nature of the programme and the interactive and collaborative nature of the LTA experience in the UK was something which they were not accustomed to from having studied in India. This was made more challenging due to their belief that one year was a very short time to adjust to this new learning environment and successfully complete the programme. There was general acknowledgement that the informal relationships with tutors were a supportive feature. Students recognised the above as positive aspects of the programme.

3.2 Academic Convention and Plagiarism

The students' reflection on the transition to this UK HEI LTA culture as a challenging, yet ultimately positive, experience was overshadowed, however, by a lengthy and emotive discussion about plagiarism. The discussion arose unprompted by staff and dominated a significant part of the group's discussion. The students' comments offer a helpful perspective on the international student experience of expectations around plagiarism and conduct and convention in terms of academic writing more generally. This area was deemed to be of particular interest and relevance, especially as the research was conducted at an institution in which all student work must be submitted through Turnitin.

The word 'plagiarism' was known to only one of these students previously and, even then, it was a notion which carried little real meaning for them. As such, their first meaningful exposure to it was while settling into study in the UK for the first time.

"I didn't even know that a word like plagiarism existed" [STUDENT B]

"It's a word that has been in the dictionary for me. In the UK it is considered to be 'serious academic misconduct'. This concept has never been brought out to us in such serious terminologies." [STUDENT C]

There were differences in the students' attitudes towards how effectively the nature of plagiarism had been communicated to them. One student felt that they understood clearly what constituted plagiarism and how to avoid it, while the others did not share that level of understanding. It is interesting to note that the former student had attended sessions on plagiarism and academic conduct during induction, whereas the other students had not. Perhaps relatedly, those students who felt less clear about the form and nature of plagiarism had both been subject to investigation into their academic conduct during the programme,

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8 Turnitin’s OriginalityCheck is a piece of text-comparison software used to identify incorrect referencing and potential plagiarism; turnitin.com. Areas of concern are presented in a range of bright colours.
while the student who had attended induction sessions and better understood how to work with UK academic convention had experienced no such difficulties.

While differences in understanding and perspective were evident, all three students shared one common feeling when being introduced to the concept by academic staff. When describing their feelings about plagiarism, the reaction was overwhelmingly one of fear.

“I was scared” [STUDENT B]

“is it like a crime?” [STUDENT A]

“Turnitin is a scary rainbow for us” [STUDENT B]

A certain positive can be found with this, in that one of the students talked about how the very clear and strict manner in which expectations around plagiarism were communicated had made them very careful and deliberate when preparing work for submission.

“Because I had attended the induction probably, that was why I was extra vigilant when I was writing” [STUDENT B]

On a simply human level, however, the idea that the early academic experiences of international postgraduate students might be coloured by such negative and emotional experiences is surely of some concern. The students themselves also identified further unintended consequences of this, specifically around it compromising their attempts to meaningfully engage with the collaborative, risk-taking LTA culture described above.

“It does sound very intimidating…. I believe it is a huge inhibitor.”[STUDENT C]

“Your confidence comes down so badly and it takes a long time to recover after that.” [STUDENT A]

At the time of the focus groups, the students were approaching successful completion of their studies and so it is reasonable to say that they had been able to negotiate and resolve their varying difficulties as regards academic convention and plagiarism. Two of the students had not, however, embedded the principles underpinning plagiarism into their own practice.

“It’s not that we’re just copying things out. It’s not that we are taking the easy way out. It’s how we have been taught: to know the text in and out.” [STUDENT C]

“Technically speaking, what are you changing? You’re just changing your words. What different idea are you giving? So what is the problem for me to write exactly the same words as the author has written…. I don’t see the point of changing things just so that Turnitin doesn’t catch it.” [STUDENT C]

The quotes above are representative of the sentiment of two of the three students. They suggest that while surface engagement with, and successful completion of, this postgraduate programme within a very different LTA culture was entirely possible, a transformational experience to a different academic mindset had not occurred for all.

In summary, there was a clear mismatch between both staff and student expectations. Issues around the ability of staff to educate international students effectively about UK academic convention and plagiarism were raised strongly. All students felt that information on the topic was focused too negatively, contrary to staff intent. The experience of some also suggests that there had been no transformational experience in terms of academic mindset.
3.3 The Role and Nature of Support

A third and final key theme that ran throughout the focus group was the potential value of support available to these students during their studies. When discussed on a general level, this was talked about in very positive terms by the students involved.

“The support is very good, with really helpful staff and lots of resources like the library that was not just for the academic but also for overall development, careers. A lot of advice.” [STUDENT B]

One key concern expressed about the availability and effectiveness of this support was, however, very much related to their transition and the difference between the study environment in India and the prevalence of online teaching that they found in the UK.

“the depersonalised nature of learning systems… does also have a huge amount of cultural difference. Back home if I had a doubt, then I would ask direct. That does happen here but dependent on when we have one-to-one sessions.” [STUDENT C]

When discussing the experience of their peers in other UK universities, the participants were able to identify a further manifestation of such ‘depersonalisation’ when compared to their earlier learning experiences in India.

“I have known so many students at different universities where the module or programme leader don’t even care. They don’t even know the names of their students, even if there are just 10 or 15 of them in the class.” [STUDENT B]

While this was not a criticism levelled at their own experience it does point to the negative associations that come with feeling that staff do not know you individually. It also inversely points to one of the resounding positives from their own study experience.

(About administrative staff) “She is really cooperative and helpful. I remember whenever I need help she was there.” [STUDENT A]

“At Edinburgh Napier the admin department had lots of information and on the occasions where they didn’t have the information they took down their number and they would call me back…. That was very good support, even before I started.” [STUDENT B]

“For me, all thanks to [name of Programme Leader] and a few other staff. Although the transition was not exactly smooth, it was not too difficult because we had enough support.” [STUDENT C]

This availability and proximity of key members of staff who were focused on them and their developmental needs was certainly something that these students felt should continue or, indeed, even be made a more defined and formalised phenomenon. One student suggested that it would be useful to have:

“someone who from a position of authority, but from a motherly aspect, tell about how to integrate culturally into the university.” [STUDENT C]

The important role that key individuals play in making these students’ experience positive and well supported was expressed clearly by all participants. There was a powerful sense of the potential benefits of people in positions of knowledge and/or authority taking time to get to know them and going above and beyond what is strictly necessary to ensure they have
everything they need. While the participants were very honest in describing their year of study as challenging and, at times, difficult there was a strong thread through the discussion of them feeling valued and respected as individuals by those responsible for their programme. This supportive foundation evidently made them feel better able to encounter and overcome these challenges and difficulties.

4 Discussion

The transition experience for these students was clearly challenging and also systemic in that it fundamentally affected the total experience of learning, of teaching and of assessment, not just one or two of these features. In analysing the qualitative data, it is argued that the way in which these students’ transitions are supported needs to be re-examined. The induction process for these students was identical to those entering the programme from UK HEIs, namely short and front-loaded in nature, which is probably due to an implicit expectation of student preparedness.

One specific manifestation of difficulties caused by this transition between LTA cultures was the issue of academic convention in the UK, seen through the prism of plagiarism and its relationship to academic misconduct. The way in which the notion of plagiarism was communicated particularly exercised the students, with them believing it to be overly draconian and deficit-focused, resulting in it actually impairing both their confidence and their ability to engage unreservedly with the new LTA culture. The students’ call for these issues to be communicated in a gentler and more encouraging manner should be heeded if UK Higher Education is to support international postgraduate students more effectively.

From the discussions about plagiarism, it was clear that two of the three students had completed the programme of study without having meaningfully engaged with the academic conventions around plagiarism, referencing, paraphrasing and synthesis of ideas which they found in the UK. They had both taken a very strategic approach whereby they had learned what was expected of them and how to present work in a manner and format which would be acceptable. They had not, however, made any kind of conceptual leap or wholesale adoption of these ideas which were new to them. This has led the authors to consider further whether this kind of ‘transformation’ is a necessary aim for UK HEIs offering postgraduate courses to international students. If so, then the situation described above could be indicative of a wider, more fundamental problem. There are, however, questions around whether this is, indeed, a necessary aim. When considering the situation whereby both of these students returned to India indefinitely following successful completion of the programme, the question might be asked as to whether it is even a desirable one.

Having described the challenging transition for this group of students a strong theme around the need for support has emerged from the findings. There is much within the findings to suggest that a perception of receiving personal, individualised attention is important and valued. Named individuals, and situations in which a member of staff was seen to have acted above and beyond the bare minimum, were both lauded by the students. The former in particular seemed to give students the experience of feeling supported and encouraged to make a success of the challenging programme ahead of them. This idea of trying to deliver a personal touch to the student experience is one the authors are keen to learn from.

5 Recommendations

From this research, the themes below are important in relation to international students coming to the UK for the first time and in identifying areas of potential good practice for future development. The data suggest that this can be considered clearly in three areas, induction; LTA; and support. Recommendations for practice include:
5.1 Induction

- A more intensive, bespoke induction should be introduced
- Induction should be viewed as a longer and deeper process, possibly embedded throughout the first trimester
- Staff awareness of, and ability to respond to, student needs should be increased
- Opportunities to work with these students pre-induction should be explored.

5.2 Learning, Teaching and Assessment

- Discussing the role, purpose and validity of alternative assessments with students more directly and pro-actively
- Can the idea of plagiarism be communicated differently? It clearly currently feels very up-front and threatening. There could be ways to scaffold it more effectively through the first semester or to invert it so that the focus is, perhaps, around effective referencing and paraphrasing, rather than the misconduct offence of plagiarism.

5.3 Support

- As relationship-driven support was favoured, ways of initiating and maintaining these personal relationships should be prioritised to increase staff/student proximity
- Identification of a named person, ideally who has relevant knowledge and some authority to action issues, was appreciated by these students and should be extended to include, as a minimum, all overseas students
- Staff development to include developing effective relationships through being positive and valuing in nature, flexible and accessible for the students concerned and carrying a genuine sense that this person is willing to go the extra mile.

5.4 Limitations

There were some limitations to this study. Firstly, all of the students involved in the focus group were from India and from just one UK HEI, therefore it is unlikely that these findings can be generalised to other student groups, however that was of no significant concern as the research was always intended to have a local, practice focus. The students were also undertaking a postgraduate programme of study and this level of study may produce challenges for all students. As no comparison was made with the home postgraduate student experience any different or additional concerns experienced cannot be isolated.

6 Conclusion

It was clear to see that the experience of these postgraduate international students was generally positive. That is not, however, to say that it cannot be improved for students in the future. Studying in the UK was evidently very different to the students' previous experiences, but the participants stated that, although challenging, this was not necessarily a bad thing. As educators, however, we need to take full cognisance of that difference and this involves not merely being aware that the students’ experience is different, but also taking account of the form which that difference takes and the implications for practice.

From the research conducted here, three areas of the international student study experience are pivotal, namely induction processes, how the LTA approach is communicated and the provision of effective support. These merit more detailed consideration and greater prioritisation when designing future curricula.
When reviewing the recommendations above, the authors were minded that these were closely related to what might be seen as good teaching practice for all students. It is reasonable to think that, if implemented, any and all of those recommendations would be to the benefit of all students and not just to those studying in the UK for the first time.

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Postgraduate student transition: how different is it from undergraduate transition?

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Abstract
This paper presents findings from an institutional research project exploring postgraduate experience of transition. Much of our institutional work on transition has focussed on undergraduate students. University policy on New Arrivals and Transition was endorsed in 2011 for undergraduates, raising questions about our primary focus on undergraduates and about the differences between undergraduate and postgraduate transition. This prompted our research, which included focus groups with staff and students and individual student interviews. Key themes emerged from this research: preparedness for postgraduate life and study; communication; socialisation; skills and resources; staff and student training; institutional systems. Our research suggests that the transition needs of postgraduates may differ in level and intensity but not in kind from those of undergraduates; postgraduate transition deserves the same attention, design and resource as that of undergraduates. Our institution has now accepted a range of recommendations about policy and practice.

1. Introduction
1.1 Sector context
At Greenwich, as at many higher education institutions, transition has received considerable attention in recent decades, as we have come to understand how students’ early experience at university impacts on success and achievement; how the development of a good “fit” between student and institution is crucial, and is shaped by multiple complex factors including personal, social, pedagogical and other institutional elements (Tinto 1993; Yorke & Longden 2008; Cook & Rushton 2009; McInnis 2001). Institutions have designed successful programmes to facilitate students’ induction into higher education and support their retention and persistence (Hussey & Smith 2010).

Widening participation agendas have led to an increase in the number of students who have an undergraduate degree within the UK, and market forces have pushed students to undertake postgraduate qualifications in order to be more competitive within the job market (McCulloch & Thomas 2012). For universities, the financial gains from postgraduate education have led to the development of taught master’s programmes aimed at international students, budding academics and practitioners (Bowden 2005). This expansion, however, has not resulted in a corresponding increase in resources to support master’s students specifically (Bowman 2005), nor an established body of research into postgraduate transition more generally (as noted by Scott et al 2011; O’Donnell et al 2009; Tobbell, O’Donnell & Zammit 2010).

O’Donnell et al (2009) suggest that a lack of focus on the transition needs of postgraduate students reflects the assumption shared by many within higher education that these students are already prepared for postgraduate study since ‘postgraduate-level study simply represents “more of the same”, or “taking things to the next level”, and thus that there is little (if anything) in the way of a transition to be undertaken’ (2009, 27). O’Donnell et al (2009) and a small but growing number of researchers refute this assumption which is predicated on the belief that only one transition (i.e. to higher education) is involved. In reality, students moving to postgraduate study can experience a variety of different transitions (Hussey & Smith 2010).
International students are challenged by transition into an alien academic culture (Brown 2007); students returning to education often find that they do not have the required study skills and familiarity with the new technologies that are integral to contemporary higher education (Masterman & Shuyska 2012); students may have changed institutions or subject areas and find themselves at odds in new disciplinary and institutional discourses (Bowman 2005); postgraduate students often have complicated lives, combining family responsibilities with part-time work and study (West 2012). Postgraduate students can no longer be seen as a homogeneous group of high achieving students who have decided to continue studying their undergraduate subject, rather they are a heterogeneous group with their own motivations, previous educational experiences, expectations and differing support needs.

This study sought to explore postgraduate transition within one institution. The aim of the study was to better understand student experience and to subsequently develop relevant policy and practice to support and enhance their educational experiences.

1.2 Institutional context

Driven by concerns about retention and achievement, there has been significant development in our approaches to transition and in the provision we make before, on and following from, arrival at the University. Student feedback has helped us grasp something of the scale and quality of transitional experience: the excitement, high expectations and anxiety and the “bizarreness” of university (Currant & Keenan 2009). This emphasis on understanding newness, which has been important for our work on undergraduate transition, has perhaps supported assumptions about postgraduate students' transitional experiences being different in kind.

New policy on New Arrivals and Transition (2011) has grown out of a cross-institutional enhanced induction project and has been directly based on the views of students and staff and their experience of what works well (Alsford & Rose 2013). The Policy focuses on fostering formation of relationships within programmes, active habits of participation and learning, and on allowing time for transition as an extended process. This reflects a shift from earlier patterns of induction as primarily information-giving plus the Students' Union. It was decided, without extensive discussion, that the Policy was for undergraduate but not postgraduate students. It was, perhaps, assumed that, not being new to higher education, postgraduate students do not have the same transition. Planning processes in Schools are separate for undergraduate and postgraduate new arrivals, and those overseeing postgraduate transition have been less represented and engaged in our developmental processes.

We know from our institutional New Arrivals Survey that the early experience of our postgraduate students is broadly similar to that of undergraduate students, and generally very positive⁹. Between 2010 and 2012, survey findings have shown that there was no statistical difference between undergraduate students and postgraduate students in terms of whether their expectations had been met, their sense of belonging to the University, their confidence in understanding what was expected of them (2010, 2011, 2012), the information that they had received (2011, 2012), and their understanding of the purpose of the first week (2011).

There were some differences. Postgraduate students are statistically significantly less likely to participate in planned activities (2010, 2011, 2012), particularly those that are organised by the Students Union (2010, 2012), which they often perceive to not be applicable to them (2012). Postgraduate students are also statistically significantly more likely to arrive on

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⁹ Findings from the university's New Arrivals Survey, administered and reported by the Educational Development Unit
campus after the start of term (2011, 2012). Both of these aspects could potentially have an impact on students' ongoing socialisation into the University.

The context and this previous research gave our study a clear focus:

- what can we learn about the experience of our new postgraduate students and those who support them?
- would exploration of these experiences support the assumption that our policy, and particularly its statement of entitlement, does not or should not apply to postgraduate students?
- what recommendations can be shared with the sector to enhance the postgraduate student transition experience?

2. Approach to the study

This project included focus groups with staff and students and individual student interviews. Thirty members of staff participated; these were primarily academic staff with some professional staff working in information services or central student support. Forty-one students participated in the student focus groups, there was a mix of postgraduate research and postgraduate taught students. In addition, five in-depth individual interviews were carried out with postgraduate students (I 1-5), they comprised: one PGCE, one MA, one MBA and two PhD students. This report focuses only on data from taught students.

The focus groups used a range of activity-based group exercises (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Both staff (S1) and student (S2) focus groups included a post-it note activity asking participants to note useful new arrival activities and sources of information and to make recommendations for improvement. Staff were also asked to map postgraduate transition experience onto a student lifecycle model (Hefce 2001, 15-16), noting issues at particular stages through the student journey (J1). Students were invited to map their journey to date (J2), noting peaks and troughs in their experience (Beard 2010, 183-185).

The longitudinal lifecycle approach was an important element of our university enhanced induction project, reflecting the suggestion that ‘embarking on master’s level studies could be viewed as a key transitional ‘stage’ of a longitudinal learning career in which particular intellectual, social and emotional challenges are likely to arise’ (Scott et al 2011). The focus of this work was thus on on-going transition, in line with institutional policy and the growing sector emphasis, although arrival and the early weeks feature strongly.

The data were analysed inductively, identifying emergent themes. The researchers worked independently and then verified and synthesised their codes into the key themes of: communication; socialisation; support; curriculum design and delivery; training; and staff roles.

3. Findings

3.1 Communications: information and guidance

Unsurprisingly we received feedback on the need for clear communication about practicalities such as applications, visas and finance. However students’ needs in these early stages of the process go beyond the practical; keeping in contact is crucial for “keeping warm” and preparing for postgraduate study.

Students saw preparedness as requiring detailed information about the programme including expectations and requirements; about ‘the basics’ of the discipline (e.g. technical or analytical techniques), and ‘some knowledge of plagiarism’. They saw contact with academic staff and former students as the best information sources (S2). Their concerns about
preparedness also encompass expectations and attitude. A dominant theme was the need for the right attitude for study, including: 'have a clear plan and objective'; being ‘pro-active and organised’; and recognising that postgraduate study was difficult, ‘MSc is not a joke’ (J2).

Although much good provision of information and guidance was identified from application through to the first few weeks, students were clear about the potentially negative impact of gaps and deficiencies, lack of co-ordination and conflicting messages. Such impact may not surface in our New Arrivals survey because the effects may become clear to students only later, perhaps with a first assessment. Master’s students talked of how ‘more course info prior to starting may have made (assessments) less daunting (reading lists, what course entails, dates)’ (J2); another related a sense of missing out because of being so held back by what he’d not known/been told when he began (J2).

Induction and orientation activities which are provided received a lot of positive comments from students and staff and clearly help many with initial settling in, although students noted the lack of consistency in provision for programme-based welcome activities which are ‘different for each school, department, campus’ (J2). Students talked about being overwhelmed by large numbers in lecture theatres, about information overload and the need for more activities. Interactive campus treasure-hunts scored highly and staff suggested that the first week for postgraduates should be separated from teaching, as undergraduates, to allow for such activity: ‘whatever your early experience is really sticks with you’ (J2).

The difficulties late arrival can mean for a transitioning postgraduate student were noted often. Staff were particularly concerned about the lack of provision for late comers, and the need for more extended and repeated induction activities, especially at programme level (including learning resources and student services). This is particularly challenging for staff within the constraints of a one year programme. International students are more like to arrive late, and shared responsibility for them between different offices makes coordination difficult - clearer definition of roles is needed.

### 3.2 Socialisation

Relationships are seen by both students and staff as a crucial element of student experience and support where the University could do more to foster integration. Almost all the students we spoke to were clear about the importance of forming relationships at university and of making friends early in the programme. One student’s high point was: ‘!!!Meeting fellow countrymen and friends!!!’ (J2), while another’s low point was a ‘sense of loneliness’ (J2); and ‘getting along with students – feeling of togetherness as a group’ were all highly valued by students (S2). For one student, a lunch-time break between timetabled classes provided a crucial space for students to socialise, providing some ‘time of feeling like a student’ which was important to her, but not easy in a very packed timetable (I5).

More activities and events are needed, ‘meet[ing] previous students’ (S1); ‘support groups, especially for postgrads’ (S2); ‘extra-curricular activities, fun stuff (S1)’; ‘more opportunities to network’ – with the intention of helping students ‘feel more welcome’ (S1); and ‘more social events of postgraduates’ (S1). Some existing activities are sold more to undergraduate students (S1) and some Masters students complained of ‘no social activities, just work, boring’ and that ‘there’s nowhere to socialise’ (J2).

Staff-student relationships also need to be fostered. Staff spoke of the importance of ‘creating a sense of community’ and the need for staff to ‘get to know the students, set aside specific PG time’, ‘make them feel part of an exclusive club’, ‘always ask them how they’re doing’ (J1). A repeated thread in our research was students’ need for personal interaction with and encouragement from staff as well as from peers, ‘Small group drinks with supervisors and other students’ being a valued experience (J2).
3.3 Support

Communication and forming of relationships is integrally related to support, another core theme in our research which demonstrates the need for appropriate, accessible and helpful personal contact through the whole transition period.

The need for supportive relationships runs from the application process through to the role of tutors or supervisors, administrators, the Students’ Union, support services staff, as one student noted: ‘meeting with student centre – supportive, kind, gentle, always ready to help, calm’ (S2), and even ‘security men at the security post’ (S1). There was a feeling that, whatever their formal role, all university staff had an obligation to help students settle into life at the university where they may face the need for personal, welfare and academic guidance.

Staff advised you have no presumptions when working with postgraduates and this was borne out by students’ comments. These presumptions may relate to their knowledge; maturity; skill level; or their engagement: ‘don’t assume that they are not engaging if they don’t attend initially. Try and find out why. Life in the UK is often very difficult for new international PG students and they need some support at the start’ (S1). This may be because, as one staff member noted, ‘often students, especially international, do not understand material presented and maybe too my attempts to clarify.’ (J1).

The support of academic staff is crucial, staff recognising that they need to get to know their students, be empathetic to their situation and work patiently with them. Students highly value positive relationships with their lecturers, ‘excellent programme leader’ (J2) being a high point in one student’s journey, with another master’s student wanting to be ‘noticed by instructors during lectures’ (J2).

The academics noted that dealings had to be ‘organised, clear. Follow up on everything’ and that support might be called upon ‘at short notice’ (S1). Students spoke particularly of the need for support in placements, which may be difficult to organise within a one year course; ‘did have the link at the uni, but I didn’t know her, so I didn’t want to email her and say, what should I do? I met her only for the first meeting, I met her twice so I didn’t really know her. So I didn’t really have anyone who I could ask, how do you deal with this?’ (I5)

Staff highlighted the importance of the personal tutor’s role in progress monitoring and support so that there is a sense of a joint journey with recognition of and support for students’ development and achievement; ‘students … hit a bit of a trough and need encouragement’ (J1). However a lack of consistency was evident in terms of personal tutor support: some postgraduate students receive individual support, but others do not; one student did not think she had a personal tutor: ‘I suppose we’re meant to have one. But, I’m trying to think. No…. would have helped, to have a tutor you could go through all these things with them’ (I5). This prompted academics to ask for ‘timetabled support with personal tutor’ (J1).

3.4 Curriculum design and delivery

A pedagogy of engagement for postgraduate students was seen as important for both staff and students. This included offering on-going support through the curriculum: ‘mix teaching and induction activities’ (S1), introduce more ‘activity’ into lectures (S1) and ensure that students are aware of the resources that are available to them at the times when they need them through tailored postgraduate provision (J1). The social aspect of learning and its impact on engagement was highlighted once again: ‘We can learn so much from each other’ (I5). Staff noted that ‘Small tutorial groups / small group activities in larger groups work best – but need more time’ (S1).
Time was identified as a major barrier to ensuring a smooth transition for postgraduate students; the intense nature of year-long master’s programmes means the pressure to cover content is very strong. This was highlighted by one lecturer, who, while recognising that orientation was important, noted: ‘some courses / programmes – students arrive in for and are “oriented” for the first two weeks – meaning they lost two weeks teaching. This means they are already at a disadvantage’ (J1). This focus on content teaching was frustrating for one student who recognised the need for the social aspects of learning: ‘there’s always a tension between what needs to be taught, and free time or play. How do you balance that? [...] I think we all would have liked more discussion time, more free time, for general professional development. But there wasn’t enough time for processing what was going on.’ (I4).

Time pressure was also reflected in students’ comments about the spread of assessments across a programme. Students reflected on the pressures that bunched assignments caused. Some students’ experience was ‘first term just had lectures and study time – no assignments, quite easy and nice’, followed by ‘lots of work sprung on us!’ (J2), While another student represented their journey in a finally downward trajectory, marked by bunching of assessments and ending with a carefully-taped down tangle of string annotated: ‘Course structure a complete mess’ (J2). For another student, time issues were exacerbated by an ineffective use of available time. He expressed his disappointment that while he had a great start to his programme, his second term had been a ‘disappointment’ as his programme had all but ‘fizzled out’ from March onwards, that is, halfway through his year-long programme (I1).

Another key area of concern was around the assumptions that students felt were made about their level of prior knowledge and ability, for example, in relation to critical thinking, assessment and subject knowledge. One student commented on a reading that was described as ‘introductory’, but was not introductory enough: ‘because his level is such and the words he used, I think sometimes people at that level just make assumptions, because we are postgraduates, they make assumptions that we will understand and you feel a bit stupid saying I just don’t understand that, could you repeat it.’ (I5). It was clear that assessment caused many problems in terms of expectations and regulations (J1). Students felt they needed clearer information about assessment criteria - to know what is expected: ‘guidance over what “good” is’ (J2) and ‘initial set of assessments (enjoyed subject matter but uncertainty of what was required)’ (J2). Both staff and students highlighted the need for early formative assessment and the provision of results. International students, in particular, often experienced ‘shock’ when they receive their first set of exam results (J1), and students noted ‘Marking system – low marks’ as a low point (J2) and ‘not getting support on some assessment. Less motivation’ (J2).

In terms of curriculum design and delivery, the time constraints of one-year master’s programmes meant that some students did not receive orientation and socialisation activities that can help smooth transition. Assumptions about knowledge, skills and aptitudes also made it hard for some students to easily get to grips with master’s-level learning.

3.5 Training, skills and resources for postgraduate students

In recognition that transition to postgraduate study can be difficult, both staff and students identified the need for training and skills development. Postgraduates might need ‘up-skilling’ to prepare them for postgraduate study (J1), what one student termed an ‘academic “jump up”’ in areas such as critical thinking, analysis and academic writing. One student, who has been out of formal education for some years, noted how concerned he was about academic writing at the start of his programme (I1). Luckily his lecturer devoted time to introducing the notion of scholarship. For him, this was a ‘fundamental building block’ that had repercussions for the rest of the programme. For another, critical analysis and reflection
were essential parts of the course where she felt ‘induction’ and support were lacking; ‘if you don’t get that, if you don’t grasp it, you don’t quite get the thread of the whole course’ (I5). One academic felt that ‘international students need [to be] retrained in what is acceptable for exam responses, coursework and project attendance’ (J1), and short courses on cultural diversity and education in the UK were proposed.

More generic skill development, such as information literacy skills, was also highlighted and focus group participants felt that there was inconsistency in current approaches: ‘these activities (library inductions, skills sessions) are not programmed in a systematic way, it’s down to tutors. Some students won’t find out and miss an opportunity’ (J1). Assumptions were also made about students’ skill levels: ‘an assumption that everyone(s’) … IT skills were up to scratch, but they weren’t. There was no induction for IT. The library – gave us a list and said check into SWETSWISE to get journals. It was trial and error’ (I5).

Particularly important to this cohort was the development of skills that could lead to future employment. Students felt they needed support in ‘knowing where to look for jobs, how to apply, develop CV, apply’ (J1). The University’s Graduate Employability Team was commended (J1); but it was felt that more could be done to develop appropriate initiatives for postgraduate students in acknowledgment of ‘the unique employability of PG students’; ‘Is the programme relevant to my job aspirations?’ (J1). Staff suggested that the University foster: ‘stronger links with business to actually provide internships’ and that it ‘work the alumni connection’ (J1). Students spoke of the need for more ‘practical speakers – i.e. from the field’, whose input they valued highly (S2, I5). ‘Attendance of industrial and academic events’, ‘providing consultancy for large companies’; and ‘beginning working with sponsor on weekly basis’ were identified as high points (J2) and students requested more such opportunities.

The message to not make assumptions was thus repeated in the context of identifying training and development needs of postgraduate students.

3.6 Staff roles

What seemed very pressing to academic staff was having a clear understanding about the scope of their role in terms of postgraduate student support by: ‘discuss[ing] your responsibilities’ and ‘seek[ing] assistance if unsure’ (S1). One area where academic staff felt their role with postgraduate students had changed was international student admissions. Staff felt largely divorced from the admissions process: ‘who decides which students are offered a place? Student intake is largely international, so decisions are made by the International Office. Academics remain largely unaware of composition of student body, as is the programme leader’ (J1). Other staff spoke of feeling ‘disempowered in terms of decisions about students – applications and other decisions. This is ‘not in the best interest of students’ (J1). Their perceived lack of a role in admissions led to future problems; with limited knowledge before the start of term of the make-up of their classes, academic staff found it difficult to design their orientation activities.

Staff felt there was a need for training ‘for all staff involved’ in postgraduate support. The training might be an ‘information induction session’ or more targeted inputs on the ‘needs of international students’, or on ‘the issues students face’ (S1). It was noted that international students had particular needs and that diversity training for staff would be worthwhile: ‘some personal tutors and lecturers need more training on issues to do with diversity. Postgraduate and specifically international students have specific needs, some of these are not being met at the moment’ (J1).

Again lack of consistency was noted, in relation to understanding what postgraduate student support roles involve; staff wanted clarity.
4. Conclusions and recommendations

The growing body of research into master’s students’ experiences and their transition journeys supports our own findings, providing further evidence of the ways in which postgraduates may struggle with assessment (Tobbell, O'Donnell & Zimmit 2010; West 2012); technology (Masterman & Shuyska 2012); independent learning and isolation (Tobbell, O'Donnell & Zimmit 2010); differing expectations of study and a mismatch between espoused and practiced pedagogic philosophies (O'Donnell et al 2009; West 2012). Our research also calls for the development of communities of postgraduate learners (Conrad, Duren & Haworth 1998); structured time for peer interaction (West 2011); and subject-specific and personalised support (West 2011). In summary, postgraduate students want recognition that postgraduate study is different and that their transitional needs are as valid as those of undergraduates.

Whilst provision for any particular cohort (under- or post-graduate) may need tailoring, our research suggests that the transition needs of postgraduates may differ in level and intensity but not in kind from those of undergraduate students. We contend that postgraduate transition deserves the same attention, design and resource as that of undergraduates.

Running through the six themes outlined above were four cross-cutting issues:

- questioning assumptions
- recognising the particular needs of international students
- re-evaluating use of time
- prioritising relationships

Despite assumptions we may make about the familiarity of postgraduate students with higher education, our research suggested that they share very similar excitement, apprehension and challenges. This mixture of anticipation and apprehension was evident in many of the journey mappings, presenting a picture not readily discernible from that of the excited undergraduates who are completely new to higher education. This reinforces messages from both staff and students about postgraduates’ need for transitional support before, as well as from, arrival. A repeated message from both students and staff was that misleading assumptions are made about postgraduate students’ preparedness for study and for life as postgraduates, and that these assumptions mean that students are not always receiving the transitional support they need. There are assumptions that postgraduate students do not participate or are not interested in social events, ice-breakers or fun activities, that they already have the academic and other skills they need for master’s study; these and other assumptions are questioned by our research which shows students’ appreciation for targeted, relevant activity. For international students who have not studied in the UK before, these transitional needs are greatly complicated by cultural and procedural differences.

Within the space of a one-year programme, supplying this transitional support is always going to be difficult. There is a tension between recognition of the need for time for induction and socialisation and the pressure to get quickly into the course. Careful and realistic attention must be given, as part of curriculum design as well as induction planning, to making the best use of the time available, being realistic about students’ capacity, including extra-curricular activities in planning, and understanding that transition is ongoing. The journey mapping, which was the major activity in the student focus groups, showed that quite a few of the mappings ended at a lower point (sometimes considerably lower) than that at which they started and many communicated a sense of disappointment and missed opportunity. Although students identified many positive elements in their initial and early
experiences, there was a sense that difficulties encountered further down the line led them to question whether they could have been better prepared for the experience of postgraduate study. One of the priorities, in the ‘best use of time’, should be establishing and building peer and student-staff relationships which are often given less attention than we devote to undergraduate socialisation.

At an institutional level, our work on transition has grown out of our history as a strongly widening participation institution which has given us a positive ethos of student support. Conversion and retention have been key drivers for work, which has focussed on dissemination and embedding of effective practice, and on establishing greater cross-institutional consistency in terms of the new arrival experience of undergraduate students. There have not been comparable drivers in relation to postgraduate students, although the need for consistency was a repeated message in our research.

Our current New Arrival Policy aims at achieving comparability in what we offer through the Statement of Entitlement for New Students which lies at its core, balanced by local tailoring for particular cohorts. In a large, geographically spread and diverse post-92 university disseminating effective practice, achieving consistency - and indeed having an accurate picture of what current practice is - is difficult. Formal reporting processes specified in the Policy have operated on the same default setting of ‘undergraduate’ and involve reporting against the Statement of Entitlement. This means that the growing picture we have of continuing development and innovation - a picture which facilitates dissemination and collaboration - is primarily an undergraduate one. Whilst there has been some provision for postgraduate students - either targeted or alongside undergraduate activity - the postgraduate transition picture is rather more patchy than the undergraduate one. Our research has identified and prompted a shift from this ‘default’ focus on undergraduate provision. All our students should be provided with comparable support, if we are to enhance their experience and achievement.

For Greenwich, this has led to amendments to our New Arrivals and Transition Policy and the Statement of Entitlement for New Students to explicitly include postgraduate students. It is notable that only minor amendments were needed. This should not be surprising, given that the same kind of provision is clearly needed for both undergraduates and postgraduates (preparation, pre-arrivals, extended transition, forming relationships, pedagogy for transition and engagement). Where the differences will be seen is in what this provision looks like within a postgraduate context. The amendment of the Policy and associated reporting procedures raise awareness institutionally.

Changing practice will be supported by staff development workshops, which take an extended view of transition and base discussion of balanced curriculum design for transition on direct examples from students of challenges they face. Other elements of our institutional context will contribute to changing practice: a newly restructured academic year will now include a First Week, separated from timetabled teaching in January as well as in September; a new Personal Tutor Policy including front-loading of tutorial support for both undergraduate and postgraduate students; and the new role of a ‘International Students Compliance & Advice Manager’ to meet some of the needs expressed in our research.

Recommendations for the sector, arising from our experience and research include:

- Give as much attention to the transition of postgraduate students as to undergraduates.
- Do not make assumptions about postgraduate students’ subject knowledge; skill levels; maturity or general preparedness for postgraduate study.
- Design curricula to support ongoing transition within the compressed timeframe
Provide and tailor support for particular postgraduate cohorts and for staff who support them, including provision of personal tutoring support.

Prioritise building of peer and staff-student relationships.

Adopt a coordinated approach to postgraduate transition including the endorsement of a policy to ensure consistency and identification of key staff roles.

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Transitions as a framework for PGT provision

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Abstract
The framework for PGT provision can be considered within a model, whereby the student is supported while they transition into, and out of, their postgraduate studies. As such, the support provided to the student needs to target the different stages of the transitions timeline in order to successfully engage the student in their learning and enable them to feel involved in the wider community. The Institute for Academic Development (IAD) at The University of Edinburgh has undertaken an initial exploration in order to identify the needs of their PGT student cohort. In addition, the IAD has put into practice a transitions model with the intention of developing and evaluating this model over a number of years. This paper explores whether it is possible to map provision to a transitions framework and whether this provision can meet the expectations of the student cohort.

1 Introduction
Provision for taught postgraduate students (PGT) is a rapidly growing area for the Higher Education (HE) sector. In 2011-12 The University of Edinburgh had 6,280 PGT students with a varied demographic cohort (see figure 1 and 2). The University and College strategic plans at Edinburgh have greatly emphasised maintaining and enhancing the quality of the learning experience of PGT students, and the current strategic plan has the target of increasing overall satisfaction in the Postgraduate Taught Experience survey (PTES) to at least 88%. The Strategic Plan emphasises ‘outstanding student experience’ as one of the six strategic themes which the University will focus on.

![Figure 1: AY 2011-2012: Domicile (at time of matriculation) for PGT students](image1)

![Figure 2: AY 2011-2012: Age Group at start of PGT programme](image2)

Additionally, the University’s 2012-16 Strategic Plan identifies the University’s PGT provision as a vital component of its research, as well as a commitment to enabling PGT students to engage with, and be a part, of, the University’s research excellence. The Strategic Plan sets out ‘research excellence’ as one of three strategic goals.

As is the case in many institutions, the academic development needs associated with PGT study had received little targeted attention under previous structures (Hallett 2010, p226; Tobbell et al., 2010, p.261). Existing studies have focused on areas such as, identity
formation and communities of practice (Tobbell et al., 2010); student experience (Hallett, 2010); and study support (Hallett, 2010; Coates and Dickinson, 2012). In the University sector, most attention seems to focus on undergraduate transitions, and on academic/personal development for research postgraduates. This can be partially explained by different funding mechanisms (the extra funding universities received for supporting research students), and by the specific needs of the students. Moreover, undergraduates are new to Higher Education, and rightly, many institutions focus support on this group in order to ensure students are able to undertake their studies to the best of their abilities. However, there appears to be a perception that PGT students do not need support in the same way, and a belief that because they may have completed an undergraduate qualification, they will be able to study at a PGT level without any problems and are therefore “expert students” (Tobbell et al., 2010, p.261-262)\textsuperscript{10}. This overlooks the fact that many of our PGT cohort have been out of the academic environment for some time, and are coming back to an HE sector that has changed with increasing numbers of students, and a more varied demographic. Based on anecdotal evidence, many PGT students are studying in a different discipline to their undergraduate programme, and may not have experience of the academic culture within that discipline. Finally, the PGT timescale is very compressed, with students expected to quickly be up to speed academically, and working at a very high level (Coats & Dickinson, 2012: 295). Therefore, we would suggest that the complex and diverse PGT student demographic needs a high level of support and that their support needs should take their compressed timeline into account (Nelson et al., 2006, p.2).

In order to provide support to PGT students at Edinburgh, the PGT/Masters team was formed within the IAD in September 2011. This paper covers our activities around the concept of ‘transitions’ as a framework for PGT provision. In academic year (AY) 2011-12 we piloted a variety of different workshops, and support, which facilitated the implementation of our transitions programme in AY 2012-13. We will continue to pilot new ways of providing support until we finalise a cohesive programme that offers the best support to our students, enables them to have timely access to support services and enhances their engagement and involvement during their time at the University (Nelson et al, 2006, p.1).

This paper presents our transitions framework, and asks for discussion around whether this concept is appropriate for working with PGT students. Two questions are posed, firstly, “can we map provision to our framework?” and secondly “can provision match expectations?”. The paper will not cover our activities with online/distance learning students as this will be considered as phase two in the implementation of the transitions model.

1.1 Methodology

As highlighted previously, research in the area of academic development for PGT students is an emerging area (Nelson, 2006; Hallett, 2010), therefore, this paper proposes a model which draws from existing research and is embedded within the University of Edinburgh context. We initially began our exploration of this area by meeting with the PG Deans from each College to discuss the areas where they felt their students could, and should, develop in order to complete their studies, and become part of the academic community. We then held focus groups with School administrators to begin to build a timeline which identified, i) when students needed support within the academic year, ii) where the appropriate intervention points are for encouraging skills development, iii) and where we can support students to engage with the wider University community. This initial work gave us a basic timeline of intervention points, and an understanding of what support might suit students at different points. The timeline was further refined based upon our experience with other student groups, mainly doctoral researchers.

\textsuperscript{10} Tobbell et al. (2010) primarily examines PGR rather than PGT students, the methodology and outcomes are similar to those presented here.
We ran this timeline over two academic years, developing and refining the content over this period. In semester 2 of AY 2012-13 we ran a focus group for students to better understand their experiences of academic development, and what further support would have been beneficial. The participants were identified from a pool of PGT students who had previously attended an IAD study skills workshop. We had eight volunteers, who were from across the three Colleges, and six students were able to participate. During the focus group, students were asked in groups to reflect upon the timeline of a standard PGT programme at Edinburgh, and indicate when they needed support, and how they accessed it. They were then asked to consider three questions: “What supported you most”; “What one thing would you have liked to know before starting?”; and “Any comments about the support you received for academic and personal development”. Focus group participants were given a number, and all comments were assigned to that number to allow us to match up comments without identifying an individual.

In addition, a data analysis was performed on feedback forms from the central calendar of PGT workshops to provide quantitative analysis of our support. The IAD provided 44 workshops in 2011-12 and 57 workshops in 2012-13. In 2011-12, feedback indicates that 90% of participants on PGT workshops rated them as very good or good, and 90% said that their understanding of the subject area was better as a result of attending the workshop. In 2012-13 these figures were similar with 90% rating the workshops as very good or good and 84% stating that their knowledge of the subject was better. Examples of where students have provided specific feedback on how the workshop has helped, include “the best workshop I’ve been to in terms of balance between lecture, group discussion, and personal reflection” (PGT student, Study Skills workshop) and “The workshop has tremendously influenced my writing as a non-native speaker. It has made me realise the pros and cons of writing scientific topics” (PGT student, Scientific Writing workshop). The data analysis has contributed to the development of the transitions framework which is presented below.

1.2 Mapping Provision to a Framework

When considering the provision required for PGT students, there is a need to develop a framework which underpins the support for students both in their transition into as well as out of PGT studies. Accordingly, the following discussion outlines the challenges; the existing provision on offer at the University of Edinburgh; and the proposed framework based on discussions with Schools, students and support services.

1.2.1 Challenges

In relation to the transition in and out of a Masters programme, there are a number of challenges to consider, including the time pressure of a one-year constraint in which the students are to be supported and integrated into the postgraduate programme (Coats & Dickinson, 2012, p.295).

In addition to the time pressures, Coates and Dickinson outline three areas to consider within the learning and teaching support model, and for the purposes of the paper, we will consider the third characteristic, “to design, model and implement appropriate induction and learning support to facilitate international postgraduate students engaging more effectively with their learning and teaching” (2012, p.296). This type of approach is highlighted by Nelson et al. who state that a “coherent, institutionally-managed, program for engagement (curriculum and learning, assisted by professionals and administrative processes and staff, as well as belonging to a learning community) is really what transition students should encounter on arrival at their new institution” (Nelson et al., 2006, p.2).
Providing support and clear signposting at the pre-arrival stage as well as within the first six weeks of a PGT programme is crucial to ensure that the student feels motivated, engaged, and confident in their academic endeavours in order to overcome “transition shock” (Nelson et al., 2006, p.3). It is for this reason that the implementation of a transitions model will target these key stages within the student lifecycle.

Furthermore, the transitions model which is positioned within the wider university context needs to consider that “transition permeates all aspects of their lives”, consequently, support extends beyond the academic environment (Tobbell et al., 2010, p.262). This challenge is identified within the IAD’s transitions framework and while some support is directly provided by the IAD, it is important to signpost other areas within the University in which the student can be supported in relation to academic and personal requirements.

1.2.2 Existing Provision

There are four strands to the provision of PGT support i) purely School based; ii) School based with IAD assistance; iii) IAD provision targeted at a specific College cohort; iv) IAD generic provision, available to all students. Historically, at the University of Edinburgh, provision for PGT students was School based in order to support the student in their degree programme. The School approach provides workshops for specific cohorts to complement the degree programme, for example ‘Project Planning and Ethics in Scientific Research’ workshop for MVM students. School support has been well received by some students, with one stating “my course organiser offers me great academic advice” (focus group participant, March 2013). The IAD does support some of the Schools with delivering this type of support however we have also developed a programme of centrally based provision, which is the main focus presented here. The IAD’s provision targets students within all three colleges (Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and Engineering, and Medicine and Veterinary Medicine), although, it should be noted that there is a significant difference in the number of PGT students across the Colleges (see figure 3). It is for this reason that some workshops and resources will be specifically aimed at students from a specific College, for example the Technical Writing workshop is available to Science and Engineering students, whereas Study Skills is offered to Humanities and Social Science students and Effective Approaches to Tutorials and Lectures is available to students in all Colleges.

![Figure 3: Number of PGT students by College AY 2011-2012](image)

Arguably, the model of generic study support has been perceived by some as having limitations (Hallett, 2010, p.225). However, the generic support provides a number of benefits to the student, including the opportunity to interact with cohorts from other disciplines; engage with topics not necessarily included in degree programmes, for example leadership; and seek advice and support for the future, such as careers advice or funding for further study. The IAD wishes to expand on the resources and delivery of workshops in AY
2013-14, which is outlined in the following section. Moreover enhancement of these benefits is provided by clear signposting of key support services, such as the Careers Service; the English Language Teaching Centre, Counselling, the Advice Place and EUSA which strengthens the sense of belonging to the wider University community during the compressed time of the PGT programme (Nelson, 2006).

In addition to the workshops and online resources, in September 2012 a blog was launched (iad4masters.wordpress.com), which provides a communication channel for Masters students to easily access information. The blog is used to signpost different areas of the University to PGT students, as well as providing a platform for testimonials from previous and current students, and staff, adding a personal dimension to the blog. The inclusion of testimonials on the blog was also to reflect an area that students said they appreciated (PGT event comprising of a panel session Feb 2012 and Dec 2012; focus group 2013). One focus group participant stated that “it would be good to have the opportunity to talk about the programme with someone who’s already completed”, while another stated that talking to staff and students about their experiences is helpful. These comments have directly contributed to the information on the blog and the delivery of events, such as panel discussions with students and staff - both providing an insight and information on the PGT experience. Significantly the themes of blog posts align with milestones and topics outlined in the transitions framework. Although the blog acts as a conduit to information about Edinburgh, it also has generic information about studying at a Masters level, and is openly accessible.

This paper attempts to illustrate that a combination of support, including signposting and direct contact is beneficial to the student and thus improves the quality of the student experience. Accordingly, we propose a framework which outlines existing and future support for postgraduate taught students.

2 Framework

This paper primarily outlines the support provided by the IAD at four stages of the postgraduate cycle, including pre-arrival, semester 1, semester 2 and transitioning out of the University onto further education or employment (see figure 4). Based on discussions from a focus group (March 2013) and feedback from workshops, further insight is gleaned as to the needs of students.

The discussions from the focus group highlighted a number of common areas including: the need for clarity in relation to marking criteria; advice on how to write different styles of assessment (reports and essays); clearly defined expectations in relation to assessments; the usefulness of hearing from students who had previously completed the course; and guidance on literacy skills. In addition it was felt that receiving the course handbook (including reading lists) prior to starting the course is very beneficial, as well as having access to more general resources pre-arrival. Tobbell et al. draws similar conclusions and argues that the PGT student can experience a challenging transition into the PGT environment (2010, p. 269). Reflecting on these areas, this has been built into the framework outlined in this paper.

It is intended that the IAD continue to expand on their provision to meet the needs and expectations of the PGT cohort. Currently, the IAD offers over 30 different workshop topics which focus on study skills; writing skills; presentation skills; effective approaches to exams and tutorials; problem solving; and time management. In addition there are online resources which support the PGT student in relation to writing (e-writing online course); academic skills; and literature searching. Similar courses are run in semester one and two, targeting
the context and stage on the academic journey of the student. In relation to the one-year timeline, the workshops take place at the following times.

Figure 4: Examples of PGT central provision

Figure 4 illustrates the model in which the four main stages (pre-arrival; semester 1; semester 2; and beyond) are further split, where semester 1 and semester 2, target the main areas of development/requirements at key points in the PGT programme. For example, on entering semester 1, the focus is on induction and academic development, whereas the end of semester 1 focuses on exam preparation. A similar approach is taken in semester 2. At the beginning, there is an opportunity for students to have a refresher. This is particularly important for students who may have not done well in exams or coursework at the end of semester 1. Furthermore, the end of semester 2 addresses the dissertation aspect of a taught Masters, as well as looking to the future and engaging students around career or further studies.

The focus group participants were asked what they would have liked to have known pre-arrival and the responses centred around practical advice, encompassing everything from accommodation provision through to academic support, such as identifying the different models of assessment; greater transparency in relation to essay writing and the marking criteria; and a greater awareness of the structure of the specific Masters programme. Based on feedback and drivers within the University these areas have been given significant attention by support services, and Schools and have been highlighted within the framework.

2.1 Expectations

Managing the expectations of both students and staff is important. In order to do this communication needs to be timely and carefully co-ordinated. Based on responses from the focus group participants, expectations of students can be categorised into four areas: i) university culture, ii) programme specific, iii) study skills and iv) support services. Consequently, these areas address some of the expectations outlined in the different stages.

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11 It is recognised that this would differ for the part-time online distance learning Masters programmes.
within framework: pre-arrival (transition in); semester 1; semester 2 and transitioning out. Therefore, matching the expectations of the students with the framework improves the student experience, as well as supports the PGT student through the different stages of the PGT model. Furthermore, this model aligns with Coates and Dickinson’s outline of key elements which are: enhance induction (week 1 and 2), academic skills (semester 1 and 2 and 3), dissertation skills (semester 2 and 3), and enhanced blended learning (year-long) (2012, p. 303). This is done through a number of channels, such as pre-arrival material, induction week and the programme handbook.

One area which arose was the topic of managing academic expectations such as multiple deadlines. This was highlighted by a number of the focus groups participants, who stated “that it would be good to have several deadline options”. Challenges such as this extend our provision to include workshops and resources which focus on time management; problem solving; study skills; and project management, all in an academic context. While each programme has a handbook, which is likely to include the assessment dates, the student may not appreciate the implications of “the multiple hand-in date” (Tobbell et al, 2010, p.271).

3 Future Support

3.1 Support for Students

The IAD would like to develop the framework and expand on the provision currently provided in order to improve the student experience by providing the expected type of support at the key time in the student lifecycle. Referring to Coates and Dickinson (2012: 303), there are areas in which the IAD can support Schools or provide central workshops, including understanding assessments; academic practice; research skills; literature reviews; communication; collaborative working (or group working). In addition, there is a need to support the student in their transition out of the Masters programme and either onto further education or into employment. Figure 5 illustrates the different paths after the PGT student has left the university (for AY 2010/2011) and demonstrates that the vast majority of students go into employment. It is for this reason that a three-pronged approach will be taken which includes aligning the blog posts with the transition framework; collaboratively working with Schools and support services to deliver resources and workshops; and centrally providing resources and workshops. This has been undertaken in semester 2 AY 2012/13, where there has been a focus on aligning blog posts with centrally provided workshops at the right stage of the PGT student’s journey, for example exam preparation and dissertation writing. Further support will be provided over the summer, for students who are writing up their dissertation.

A number of gaps are present within the central provision and this was highlighted by participants from the focus group. Areas which will be developed or signposted more clearly, include: data management; general project management, referencing and bibliographic tools, academic writing and further collaboration with support services, such as the Careers Service.

The effective signposting of services and resources is important, as this will enable the PGT student to address any issues in a timely manner and contribute to supporting them in their academic endeavours. The signposting of different resources, such as careers, library provision and IAD workshops was highlighted by the focus group (March 2013). The IAD continually strives to develop the PGT section of the website (www.ed.ac.uk/iad/postgraduates). Areas which are being developed include resources for exam study; dissertations; and support for international students.
3.2 Support for Staff

The nature of the PGT cohort is that the majority of students are only with us for one year; therefore we do not have several years to build their awareness of academic development, and scholarship as is the case with undergraduate students, and doctoral researchers. We recognise the need to support staff in order to allow them to support their students as independent learners. There are two PGT staff networks (developed by the IAD) to aid this, including the IAD Masters Network and the Online Distance Learning (ODL) Community of Practice. Both networks include events, a mailing list and a platform for staff to ask questions and access resources and information (via a mailing list, wiki and hub).

One of the challenges for any large institution is effective and timely communication. It is our intention that there will be a clearly defined communication strategy to underpin the transitions framework, so that students and staff are aware of the support and resources available. This will be achieved via the direct communication channels, such as the Masters Staff Network distribution list and wiki; as well as the IAD’s website and social media channels. In addition, each School will be contacted in advance of AY 2013/14 with information about workshops, resources, the Masters blog, IAD contact details, which can be included in student handbooks, as well as raising the profile of what the IAD can offer their PGT students throughout their academic career. Lastly, there will be timely and targeted information throughout the academic year via a newsletter which will highlight resources and advertise workshops. Furthermore, the University of Edinburgh is currently exploring effective methods of communication to students within the Enhancing Students project and recommendations made by this project will be incorporated into the Transitions model.

Due to the limitation of space, this paper has not outlined the existing and future support provided to staff, which is crucial in the delivery of the transitions model of transferrable skills, personal development and curriculum delivery to PGT students (Nelson et al. 2006, p.6). In brief, the IAD provides a programme of support and networks for staff working with PGT students both on-campus and online distance learning students. This includes information sessions, resources (via the website, wiki’s and email) and ongoing discussions with individuals in various schools and support services.

4 Evaluation of Framework

The developed framework will be put in place in AY 2013/2014 and will be monitored throughout with an evaluation at the end of semester 2 (2014). The evaluation will gather both staff and student feedback; consideration will be given to the implications related to
provision and different demographics (on-campus and ODL), as well as the profile/identity of the learner from one type of transition to another (Tobbell et al., 2010). The evaluation will also address the impact of employability on PGT provision and whether more vocational PGT courses are becoming increasingly popular.

The evaluation will include case studies, a formal annual review process, consideration of different funding models and approaches, and the quantitative analysis gathered from workshop feedback. The collective data will determine three aspects, i) what has worked well, ii) areas which need reconsidered, and iii) areas which need developed. Accordingly, the PGT Transitions model will align with the University Strategic Plan, student experience data (PTES), and IAD strategic plans in order to strengthen the framework. In addition, the evaluation will assist with the implementation of phase 2 (ODL Transitions framework).

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the transitions model is multifaceted and complex, which is to be expected, as it aligns itself with the many challenges that staff and PGT students face (Tobbell et al., 2010, p.266). The transitions model address not only the transition in and out of PGT study but also the transitions and changes associated with the identity of the learner, both in a personal and academic capacity.

The primary aim of this research was to propose a framework which would support the PGT student into and out of their academic journey. Accordingly, the framework addresses the key milestones and challenges which face many of the PGT cohort. The IAD proposes that the central provision of support is a combination of signposting to other areas within the university, provision of resources and workshops and continuing work with Schools. This will contribute to independent learning and integration into an environment in which students can engage with additional support and develop academic and personal skills. Ultimately this will go some way in preparation for their future endeavours, whether that be further study or employment.

It is recognised that further evaluation and development is required in order to understand the needs of the PGT cohort and this includes the growing area of online distance Masters programmes. The University is committed to offering a broad range of online Masters programmes which are based upon our research excellence. Students on such programmes generally study part-time whilst working. Consequently, their needs will not easily align with the one-year on-campus cohort and so a transitions framework for ODL will be phase two of this implementation.

In the introduction we posed two questions: “can we map provision to our framework?”; and “can provision match expectations?”. We would welcome discussion on these questions. We believe we are making progress in mapping our current provision to our framework, the approach for the future is to identify what provision is appropriate at different points within the student lifecycle, and how this can be provided.

The existing provision is drawing from the needs of staff and students and it is the intention of the IAD to develop this framework further to meet expectations and support both students and staff. Therefore, in terms of whether provision can match expectations, this may be unanswerable at this point. Continual assessment and refinement of provision will be required in order to meet the demands of this constantly changing environment. Furthermore, as this is an emerging area of research, horizon scanning is crucial for implementing pedagogical approaches to managing PGT transitions.

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ABSTRACT: In an attempt to embrace the challenges presented in higher education along with the opportunities available in ever-changing technology, National University chose to bridge the chasm between traditional storage systems to the use of social media. This action research helped to monitor and administrate the change of systems described as conflicting interests and desirable outcomes. Information from other university systems are reviewed to provide procedural base. The process started with surveys that collected information from faculty, staff and administration on experiences and attitudes using social networking systems. Current configurations of the Community home page are described, using widgets and file sharing to help with development of programs and documents. The National University System provides education to students around the World. Having a social platform, which allows faculty and students from disparate regions share and collaborate in building a collective knowledge-base and establish learning networks empowers the learner and the community.

Keywords
social media, higher education, technology-enhanced learning, effective communication, learning community

1. Background Information

National University is one of the largest private non-profit universities in California, with twenty-five campuses in California and Nevada, and online information centers located across the United States. The School of Education at National recommends the largest number of candidates for special education credentials in the state and has over 5,000 students currently enrolled in either a credential or a master's program in special education. These programs are taught both face-to-face and online providing candidates numerous opportunities to become certified to teach children with disabilities. Maintaining effective communication among the full-time professors, associate professors, and adjunct instructors is an ominous task at best. Information regarding programs materials, syllabi, common core state standards, requirement and regulation changes, and professional development opportunities must be shared with over two hundred full-time faculty and about two thousand adjunct faculty members on a regular basis, a requirement for compliance in preparing future teachers as well as other professionals.
Until recently National University, and more specifically the Department of Special Education, was using a web-based site where faculty members housed files that were shared with other instructors, from across the state and campuses, who were teaching courses. As a part of a regular review and budget planning process, the cost effectiveness of this web-based came into question. Additionally, with advances in online technologies, other options were reviewed and the use of a social learning platform was investigated and determined to be a more effective way of sharing information. However, the process of effectively transitioning faculty to the new platform was another matter.

During the past five years, the change in the use of the Internet has pushed users from posting documents to interacting with other people in real time. In 2000, while teaching online was still in its infancy, National University adopted the eCollege Learning Management System (LMS) to deliver content in online courses. Students were limited in learning information from text-based content formats and interacting through posting messages with each other in threaded discussions. Today, students can have access in course to streaming video, podcasts, collaborative document creation and synchronous chats. In order for instruction in this format to occur in a highly productive and engaging environment, instructors must be trained and have a forum in which effective communication is ongoing, current, and relevant to what they are teaching.

In preparing for this research project, we have investigated other institutions of higher education have initiated in using the internet for communication, the development of resources for teaching, and in research development. The following section synthesizes the historical orientation to the development of use with the internet to share documents, collaborate, and teach on-line in higher education.

2. Review of the Literature

Kulkaska-Hume (2010) reviewed issues as to how educators are able to share expertise and learn informally through social media and online support. She commented that mobile technology has become a catalyst for learners where they choose their own setting according to their own preferences. An international survey was completed across Asia, Europe, and the UK, and she found mobile tools are used extensively, developing the individual's receptiveness to digital competence. She strongly recommends that social / community interaction via social applications on the phone, browsing websites, and sharing pictures is a prominent feature in how people are learning. Recommendations were made for education to embrace the mobile technology as it supports learning. In this way, the new learning culture could become shared projects between learners and teachers. She later suggests that faculty need to adapt to advancements in technology so that they continue to be a professional role model to students as it applies to lifelong learning (Kulkaska-Hulme, 2011).

Dron, et. al. (2011) made a compelling argument for switching learning environment contexts to include online social spaces to help with communication, in relationship to education and collaboration. The argument they presented requires building networked communities for users, who have a variety of opportunities for sharing information and collaboratively creating content. Community of practice allows individuals to network with others around a shared interest. An individual’s level of community engagement is generally contingent on the relevancy of the community’s domain area to the member’s engagement. Authority is dispersed while creativity and possibilities have less limits.

Recently, Bettoni, et. al. (2011) designed an online course utilizing eCollaboration to help orient staff and faculty to the possibilities of developing a sense of social learning as it relates to teaching materials online. They support the concept that learning is primarily a social phenomenon, and networking with others is part of the learning that results within the community. Their conclusions included some of the following ideas: that learning online
best results collaboratively through experiential learning; participants are key to the learning resource; changing from an e-mail to an eCollaboration work-style is not easy; and that management support needs to be visible periodically throughout. These factors were seen as important in changing into a collaborative mode for teaching at the university level.

Further studies using social networks were completed by Forkosh-Baruch and Hershkovitz (2012) in Israel and then by Namahoe (2012) at Indiana University. Both of these studies described initial projects in developing courses to assimilate real-life situations involving new technologies. These studies describe research at the onset of their development.

In essence, the field is at its beginning stages and is perceived as an important avenue for connecting with a wide-variety of opportunities to facilitate learning and collaboration with others. In fact, recent studies show that the use of social networks have risen 44% in public education in the United States over the past two years (Bolkan, 2013). Yet higher education seems to resist its usage.

Recently, National University chose to connect with GoingOn, a web-based company providing an academic networking platform, enabling faculty, administrators and students to connect, collaborate and learn. Within this site a private network of communities were developed where faculty can connect with one another to dialog about instructional strategies, relevant technologies, as well as events and course content. The decision to develop an online social learning network was born out of the faculties’ desire to have an online environment, allowing them to connect with colleagues scattered across disparate regions.

The purpose of this ongoing action research was to determine the use of community learning environments by the University and to examine specifically the Special Education Department’s development of a community of practice. Subsequently it is hoped this research project will showcase effective implementation of strategies for helping community members adapt to the social learning environments through training and shared work narratives, with the goal of improving the abilities and communication needs of all faculty members involved. Ultimately, and in process is the development of a shell used to connect with students and share information within this format.

3. Methods

In 2007 National University implemented a file sharing platform NU-FAST. The site was a state of the art platform for shared document storage and opportunities to create content related threaded discussions. The file storage was based on the hierarchical tree folder file structure. The platform was used heavily by only few programs, but was not widely adopted across National University’s five Schools. After a regular technology and budget review, it was determined NU-FAST’s cost was not supported by its usage and was then slated for termination. After two years of investigation and review of social learning technologies the GoingOn platform was licensed for the creation of networked communities of practice with the National University System.

Step 1. To help with transition to the use social media and updated technological interfaces for communication, data was collected from surveys given to two different resources: 1) new users of the online Faculty Community and 2) the Special Education faculty.

The first survey given to all new community users, regardless of University role as faculty, administration, or staff was designed to collect background information on attitudes and the use of new technologies in the workplace. The use of social media, applications and the extent of social networking was collected. And finally information was collected regarding general impressions regarding the use of social media / and related instructional technologies in the classroom or workplace.
The second survey collected information in May, 2012 from Special Education faculty regarding their use of technology, especially in relationship to specific access to social media, the iPad, and applications that might facilitate teaching both on-campus and online, including usage when traveling out of the country. This survey was designed to help facilitate transition to the new website referred to as the Special Education Community as well as use of new iPads that were distributed to help with using the new technology. Information was collected regarding perceived self-confidence in use of digital technology such as cell phones, e-mail, Skype, video chatting and social networks. An inquiry was also made into the faculties self-perceived ability to integrate technology into their teaching as well as the desire to implement emerging technologies into their classrooms. And finally, they were asked whether or not incorporation of new technology would make them better teachers and more responsive to their students.

The information from these two surveys was collected as a baseline for administration, staff and faculty to help establish where support was needed and what should be to develop the National University Community and affiliate shells to help meet communication needs that would ultimately facilitate teaching and communication with students around the world.

Step 2. The survey results were analyzed and the data is presented in the following charts.

Question: In terms of adopting and incorporating a variety of new technologies in the classroom or workplace, I consider myself an early adopter and I like to be on the leading edge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Response</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: When I am provided with a new technology to work with I need little to no personalized attention, as long as I have access to documentation or other online support materials.

Question: Do you use social media applications (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) in your personal life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question: Online social networking and community interaction is valuable in educational settings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following data was collected from the second survey, from the full-time faculty in the Special Education department:
Thirteen of the twenty (65%) faculty members completed the self-assessments. Seventy-seven percent of those who responded indicated they were somewhat comfortable with digital technologies and used cell phones, email, Skype, video chat, and social networking applications. Most faculty members (69%) are fulltime and 92% have been with the University for more than 3 years. On a scale of one to five, with five being the highest, 31% rated their ability to integrate technology into their teaching as a two, 46% rated themselves a three, and 23% a four or five. In terms of their desire to implement emerging technologies into their classrooms, 46% rated their desire as a four or five, 31% rated it as a three. Seventy percent of the faculty members never used iTunes or only a couple times a month and 54% have never used an iPad or some other tablet. When asked what motivated them to use an iPad or other device in their classrooms, 69% said they wanted to improve student learning, 39% wanted to address varied learning styles and 62% said they wanted the ability to provide anytime, anywhere learning opportunities for their students. Forty-six percent indicated it was an expectation from their school or program leads, which means almost half of those who responded felt using devices in their classroom was being imposed on them. Yet, 85% of the respondents felt the iPad would make them a better teacher and more responsive to their students. In terms of the support needed to use effectively interactive devices, 100% responded small group instruction followed by one-on-one training (62%).

Step 3. A group from the Faculty Community was developed for the Special Education department where programs could be shared and discussed. Since a new credential program had been created to align with revised standards with the State of California – this was the ideal time to make sure that all faculty were able to share new courses, rubrics and trainings required to make sure that all those teaching were familiar with activities, grading and standardization needed across the state. Drop-down menus were created for different parts of programs as needed to facilitate organization of finding the necessary information. Faculty were trained on the new system as well as became acclimated towards a new multi-level search feature. Information was no longer provided in a traditional “tree structure” with files, but could be found with “search” capabilities according to ‘tag words’ provided. Data is continuous being collected according to faculty’s comfort level in navigating and communicating through this new system.

Step 4. A follow-up survey regarding the use of the Community was developed to measure the comfort level of all users in the National University system. Collection of this data is currently in process and will be reported as it becomes available. It is anticipated that in June, 2013, preliminary data will be reported.

Step 5. A web-site is being developed to share programs to students. At this time, the Department of Educational Counseling has developed a part of the Community where students can access courses and design their own programs. Introductory information is provided to help them get started. It is anticipated that the Department of Special Education will soon follow in this venue.

4. Discussions and Conclusions

In review of the data collected, those who responded to the University survey have been involved with social media and see the potential in using these tools educationally. They are open to the NU Community and see networking as valuable to the success of their practice in teaching and connecting with students both nationally and internationally.

The Special Education faculty is somewhat resistant to new technology being imposed upon them yet also feel that use of emerging technologies will make them better teachers, and more responsive to their students.

In summary, the total faculty that answered were receptive and see the use of social media in communication and collaboration as part of success for the university. The Special
Education faculty were receptive to the development of the Community but have concerns with mandatory requirements in using new technology.

To develop a solid network of learning for University faculty will require the delivery and ready availability of application training opportunities, as well as encouraging contributions to the shared work narratives. Ultimately the faculty member’s experiential understanding of online social learning will support a model learning environment, which will serve student’s education goals regardless of their geographic location.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
Thanks to National University for its direction and support in developing new technologies to reach out to all of our students.

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Openness and Practice: Innovations through Openness in Partnership

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The Open University in Scotland

Abstract
At the Open University in Scotland (OUiS) being open is part of our sense of who we are through open licences like Creative Commons we have developed suites of Open Educational Resources (OER) which are “freely” available online to use, to reuse and remix. However, while there is great deal of rhetoric around OER, it is not clear how openness is changing practices. The paper explores this through two case studies. The first case study draws on work the OUiS has done with a national charity that supports community energy projects. The second case study will draw on some work with a regional charity that provides home energy advice. It looks at how we can develop appropriate energy advice by working with tenants and the charity to create a series of home energy OER by tenants for tenants. The paper closes with some question about the sustainability of “free” resources.

Keywords: OER, OEP, Partnership, Practice

1. Introduction
At the Open University (OU) in Scotland being open is part of our sense of who we are, as an open and distance learning provider our message is that we are open to people, places and ideas. The open narrative on which the OU was founded over 40 years ago was about open access, life long learning, first and second chances, and promoting social justice. Over the last two decades open has also become associated with open and accessible content, Open Educational Resources (OER), and the OU has embraced that shift. In this paper we explore what means for the OU in Scotland and look at what we have learnt from our experiences. Using two case studies that focus on the design and development of OER we look at some of pressing issues that have emerged, make an early assessment of how (and whether) OER has the potential to destabilise present HE, then look at models that promote the sustainability of these initiatives.

2. Open Educational Resources and Practices
The OER movement was kick-started by the release of MIT’s OpenCourseWare in 2001. Since MIT’s decision to make some of its content “freely” available on the internet many other HE providers have followed suit.

The OECD define OER as

“... digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research” (p10, OECD 2007)

As well as the materials the report also noted the importance of the tools (software) to facilitate sharing, reuse and adapting those resources. It is difficult to discuss OER without reference to the means by which content might be shared (typically online), or about the licensing that facilitates that openness. As an organisation our main OER focus has been on the medium of exchange (online), and the licence that appears to facilitate that exchange. Not all readings of OER focus on the digitising of materials and some account for other
mediums by which materials can be made publicly available (Atkins et al. 2007), but licensing remains key. The most common licence (only just over a decade old) is Creative Commons (CC). In “The Power of the Open” the people behind the CC licence indicate that “our vision is nothing less than realizing the full potential of the Internet – universal access to culture, education and research – to drive a new era of development, growth and productivity” (p6, Creative Commons 2010).

For HE, this contrasts with the normal HE approach where providers develop and manage knowledge and release it to select people, normally in particular places at particular times. While the question of licensing may only be an issue for the provider, and is not always an issue for the learner. Clearly openness has a huge potential to destabilise the typical pedagogical relationships that have developed within the HE sector.

This presents HE with opportunities and challenges. At a strategic level the opportunities have been presented in two distinct ways. The altruistic and the self-interested (McGill et al. 2011). The altruistic set focuses on the emancipatory nature of OER as a way to break down barriers to HE access for students, but often for HE providers in the majority world. This “Social Justice” perspective highlights the ways that freeing up knowledge can benefit those people who might not otherwise be able to access education (dos Santos 2008). However, the altruistic narrative can be difficult to sustain. These resources are only free to a point, and only accessible to a point. While the medium of exchange (the internet) offers the chance to access content, it is only for those who have access to the relevant infrastructure, and this is an issue for those in the minority and the majority world (Willems and Bossu 2012). Even where it can be accessed, design decisions can effect the accessibility of content. For example, a JISC report on OER (Masterman and Wild 2011) highlights the granularity of resources, with educators and students requiring smaller and more adaptable OER that they can use in “their” own context. The proliferation of content leads to accessibility issues around the storage and the findability of relevant and appropriate content (Olcott 2012), and the provenance (trustworthiness) (Masterman and Wild 2011) of that content.

We can see that accessibility is not free for the user, and it is not free for the provider. Most of the funding for OER has come from charitable foundations. The short term nature of these funds within an uncertain HE economic landscape means that the altruistic ideals of openness need to be tested against the reality - an neo-liberal education sector where “common good” rhetoric behind OER comes into conflict with the “business model”. This is where self-interest comes in. The self-interested set focuses on the way that OER can enhance individuals or an institutions reputation, cost savings in developing materials, and articulation from OER into paid content. Recent reviews of OER policies within HE that looked at the strategies and views of academics and senior managers found that those that produced content were interested in individual reputation and cost (time/money savings) associated with OER, and those who manage education focussed on institutional reputation and articulation from informal to formal learning (Nikoi and Armellini 2012).

That is production, which so far has tended to be the focus of activities, questions around remixing and reuse are harder to answer. Outside of specific projects (e.g. TESSA) it is hard to find evidence of reuse and remixing; partly this might relate to the open licence, where the very openness of the content means that people can be reusing and remixing without you knowing (McAndrew and Cropper 2010). There is also an argument that the reason that there is a lack of research on how effective OER are is that HE institutions are often uncertain about the purpose of OER – e.g. altruism or self interest (Nikoi and Armellini 2012). However, it also appears that institutions have been better at creating OER than they have been at reusing OER, either internally, or across the sector. Some commentators have begun to argue that content is now at saturation point (Conole 2012). Behind this argument
of content saturation is a sense that we need to move beyond the content and start thinking about the practices. Thus we see a move within the literature to talk about Open Educational Practices (OEP) as well as OER. It is how we use OER in practice. It means shifting our thinking about OER from production, to what users need and how to support those needs (Blackhall 2011). It may also mean thinking about whether we risk imposing our ideas of openness on learners, and reflecting on how practices around openness might reconfigure practice for educators and learners. The review has touched on what users need to be able to use the resources in practice. They need it to be relevant to their needs, for example the TESSA programme (Wolfenden 2012). They need to be small “bit size” so that they can be used and remixed in and for different contexts (Masterman and Wild 2011). They need to be stored and structured in a way that means they can be located, and in a format that allows users to reuse and remix them (Olcott 2012). Provenance is an important area are study of learners accessing HE OER found that users have to be able to trust the source of information (Masterman and Wild 2011), though we need to be careful as trustworthiness may not only be an academic attribute, but may come from informal interactions within peer networks or other sources.

The structure and storage of OER is key to its accessibility, and the OU is a global player. For example, in 2011 the OU reported that it had 16 million unique visitors to its open platforms, and nearly ¼ million registered users on OpenLearn and LabSpace (Lane 2011a). Of those registered users only 10% are present OU students. Most of the other registered users appear to be students at other HE institutions or informal learners (Lane 2011b). Clearly figures like this demonstrate that the OU is a major global player in producing and disseminating OER. The OpenLearn platform is reserved for OU content, either from existing modules or bespoke, and this draws on a fairly standard marketing led model of OER that focuses on production. Labspace is different. Here the OU stores content created by other HE institutions and/or material it has created in partnership. It is within these collaborative spaces that we start to see the emergence of new educational practices. For example, the review noted the evolution of the work in the South West, in 2008 (Lane 2008) it was reported as being a interesting series of workshops using OER, now it is fully fledged Widening Participation (WP) that provides routes into formal learning. Key to the success of projects like this is recognising that the academy is not the only source of education materials. Thinking about practice means we move away from OER's as an end in themselves, and think about how they can reconfigure education practice (McAndrew and Cropper 2010). In the next section we look at how we have accessed practice through our engagement with third sector partners.

3. Case Studies

This section introduces two case studies as examples of our work around openness and practice in partnership. The focus on practices outside the academy naturally asks you to consider practices within the academy. Therefore, these are reflective accounts that eschew theorising in favour of a “warts and all” account.

3.1 Supporting Communities to Reduce the Energy Use of Community Building

This case study is based on work we have conducted with a charity that supports communities looking to improve the energy performance of community buildings. Our partners support for communities tended to be reactive, individualised, face-to-face and “just in time”. It has built an organisation round a distributed network of support staff who can react. However, as the sector has grown so it has become over-stretched and less able to provide the tailored one-to-one support it had in the past. It needed a more structured and consistent set of support materials. It had begun to assemble all its individual information sheets into one single (but very large) “toolkit” that was open but not accessible (Olcott
Our early engagement with the partner focussed on our role in providing storage and structure facilitate openness.

Community energy projects have a number of different components, requiring a broad range of knowledge skills and experience. Typically having identified a need to consider energy in their building they will need to; analyse bills, conduct an energy audit, inspect the building and look at feasibility of different options, consult with the local community, raise finance, select and manage contractors, and conduct ongoing monitoring. These are a complex suite of practices. Our partners knowledge of those communities learning journeys meant we could create a structure that reflected how people actually developed and used knowledge and skills. However that knowledge was held at the individual level. Exploring this with our partners we looked how a persona or scenario's (Holtzblatt & Beyer 2013) based approach might help us capture and codify that individual knowledge, allowing us to understand communities learning journey's. The need for a clear narrative within the materials led us to develop a series of “imagined communities”. We asked front line staff to develop a narrative that accounted for their experience of supporting community groups. We then looked at how that learning journey might be supported through OEP, rewriting the narratives to account for a learning journey where communities could developed the skills themselves rather than calling on outside experts. It is based on a team approach with a range of authors working together to create learning materials. We adapted this model in the partnership, shifting power relationship, and creating a joint OU/CES team to develop materials that accounted for knowledge, skills and expertise outside the academy. Here openness shifts the focus of our production model, it also provides as welcome disruption to the normal HE pedagogical model.

These knowledge and skills need to applied to a series of tasks. Learning is through “doing”, engaging with techniques and technologies in the material world (Fenwick et.al 2011). Learning is shaped by those material relations and the material fabric of of the building is in turn shaped by what has been learnt. This is “citizen science” or “enquiry based learning” (Scanlon 2012) with very tangible outcomes. Content needs to structure “enquiries”, guide tasks and provide a way to record and analyse “data”. We used the “imagined communities” to show how data is collected, the data outputs, analysis, and interpretation. These are not individual learning journeys. Each person within the group takes a different role and uses different resources. Learning is shared, in terms of the knowledge and skills required, and also the outcomes. Within our “imagined communities” we allocated different sets of existing skills, and different roles to different people in the community to illustrate the different ways people might use the resources. This means resources whose “granularity” and flexibility accounts for collective learning journeys. you

When working with Third Sector partners capacity is sometimes a problem. For example, for the partners uncertainty over funding can mean that projects are often interrupted. The case study presented here has stalled at the implementation stage, with concerns over funding and staffing meaning the module is not being used consistently within operations. The focus on practice also creates capacity issues for us. For these communities success is measured by improving the energy performance of their building, that can take up to three years. It seems that one thing we ought to recognise is that engaging in partnership to support material actions is likely to require us to take the long view. We need to “take time” to assess the value of our work, these delays may mean that we need space to and time to manage relationships long term. This has resource implications, and suggests that if we are to move beyond content and resources to consider practice then we need to look more clearly at how we resource that engagement.

3.2 Working with Communities to develop Energy Advice Literature
The second case study also focuses on energy management. Our partner provides energy advice and leads on campaigns and actions that tackle fuel poverty. They work with other charities, local authorities, and housing associations to achieve their aims. Our relationship with them is based on consultancy work we have undertaken for a Scottish local authority into the user experience of social housing tenants who live in newly built low energy homes. Our technical monitoring of the buildings found that the low energy bills that were expected did not always materialise. Through our qualitative work we began to explore why that was. Finding that people found it difficult to adapt to what were novel energy management practices. In part that related to design issues that created a complex energy management system of overlapping technologies, in part it was technical problems, and in part it also related to poor and contradictory advice supplied by “officials” who ought to have been trusted sources.

Overall the complexity of the systems and the distance between these new energy management practices and those they were familiar with appeared to be at the root of the problem. We began to conceive of the research as relating to adaptation and learning, not only for residents, but for developers and local authorities. Our approach to the research was to recognise that people are experts in their own lives. This recognition led to a focus on how tenants engaged with the systems in their homes, those socio-material/technical relationships (Sorensen 2009), and from this a realisation that residents had developed a richer understanding of "how thing worked" than existing expert or technical guide.

We wanted to work with these tenants to explore how we might use the knowledge they built through practice to help others, to support the development of knowledge for practice. As a learning provider that often works with uncertain learners we would consider ourselves well placed to support the shift from thinking about those outside the academy as consumers of knowledge to recognising and supporting them as producers. However, our previous experiences of engaging in partnerships to support and develop knowledge for practice has told us that we need to do engage with trusted local organisations to ensure that the materials are used and the long term sustainability of their use. Hence our engagement with a local organisation that already provides support to social housing tenants. This takes time, and we are just beginning the process now (April 2013). The conference paper itself will report on the outcomes of that work.

4. Conclusions

On the surface what these examples have in common is the use (or creation) of open licensed material. However, for us the similarities illustrate a deeper trend, the ability to pursue opportunities that were previously closed to HE. They highlight opportunities to collaborate with organisations outwith the formal education sector. Part of that is leaving behind institutional concerns about IP. The “freedom” that this type of open provides leads us to think about openness more generally. Co-producing content that is relevant to our partners, and opportunities to access new kind of learning spaces, for example within work or in a community context. It also offers the opportunity to explore new models of learning, situated learning, informal learning, and inquiry based learning.

Opening up these possibilities is not without its problems. These case studies focus on the pedagogical design of the materials rather than the outcomes for practice. They focus on that aspect for very practical reasons, it is because our focus on practice and working with people outside the academy to co-produce knowledge takes time. This leads to the question of finance; how do we pay for “free” OEP? At present it relies on charitable foundations, central government and the marketing arm of HE providers. It is not seen as something that ought to come out of central HE funds, it is not seen as teaching. In two of the case studies the delivery and development of materials were funded as a service to a third party. This “service” model may be the way forward, certainly the projects that are emerging in 2013 are
based on this approach. Careful evaluation of these is required, not just the pedagogical models and how it enhances our understanding, but how socially useful it is, and economic analysis of cost benefit. If that takes time, and our work suggests it does, then we must also look at how we can account for that in our development models.

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Perspectives in applied academic practice: development of a cross-institutional open access journal to support early career academics

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Abstract

Engagement in the scholarship of learning and teaching contributes to the enrichment and enhancement of academic practice. One method of engagement is through contributing to the scholarly discourse by publishing in academic journals. The publication process however can be daunting for the uninitiated, with high levels of competition and equally high rates of rejection. Project work produced by academic developers or students on postgraduate education programmes as part fulfilment of their academic programmes of study are often of publishable standard, yet publication rates from such scholarly outputs remain relatively low. The paper outlines a collaborative initiative developed by staff from Edinburgh Napier University, Aston University and the University of Dundee to implement an alternative publishing route designed to support staff new to academic publishing, and students on postgraduate programmes in education, to publish their work in a supportive environment as part of their first steps to becoming a published scholar.

1 Introduction

In recent years there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of the scholarship of learning and teaching, and the benefits this can bring in terms of enhancing and disseminating good academic practice (Hutching, Huber & Ciccone, 2011). This has contributed towards, a greater recognition in the scholarship of teaching and learning practice as an important area for academics within the disciplines to engage in. In short, research and scholarship in learning and teaching is no longer seen as the domain of academics who are specialists in education, and many institutions have developed a number of activities to support scholarly engagement in learning and teaching (Kreber, 2010; Lee and Boud, 2010). Despite these advances significant challenges remain for academics seeking to engage in the scholarship of learning and teaching, particularly where they are aspiring to publish their work in relevant journals. Writing out with the conventions of their own discipline area can potentially be daunting, as can the thought of being in competition with more experienced educational specialists, and subjecting their work to peer scrutiny. Equally, although perhaps less well recognised, there are also challenges for more experienced academics who have successfully published on aspects of their educational research or practice, and who may now be looking to broaden their professional engagement in education as a discipline by becoming involved in the peer review process or in an editorial capacity with relevant periodicals.

This article describes the development of a new open access online journal in academic practice which has a unique developmental focus. It will explore how a truly open and developmental ethos (characterised by practices including structured support for new authors, a non-blind peer review process, open licensing, and editorial internships) can empower academics in becoming engaged contributors to the published discourse on effective learning, teaching and assessment. The idea for the journal stemmed from a
plenary presentation at the Spring Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) Conference in 2012 where Dr Helen Walkington presented the development of the open access journal, Geoverse, which is a journal aimed at promoting the engagement of undergraduate students in research.

2 Open access publishing

The landscape of open access publishing has gained momentum in recent years with the advances in technology enabling authors and publishers to make scholarly works more readily available (Weller, 2011). Within the UK open access publishing has become a serious issue for higher education institutions as a result of the Finch Report (2012) which examined the ways of providing better, faster access to research publications for anyone who wants to read or use them. Previously most journals were published by large publishing houses and only accessible through subscriptions which limited accessibility. As a result of the Finch report the UK government announced that all publicly funded scientific research was to be available for anyone to read by removing subscription only access from April 2013.

Two main routes have been developed for making papers open access: green and gold. The green route is where an author deposits the paper in an open access repository. The most common type is university based research repositories. These routes have been the subject of much debate. The gold route is where the author or their institution pays a fee (access processing charge) to the publisher for their paper to be made immediately publicly accessible (Weller, 2011). The difficulty with the gold route for new authors is that institutional funds may not be available with the demands of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) placing emphasis on institutional support for established researchers. Our journal bridges this important gap by providing an outlet that is both open and subject to peer review, as well as providing support for new authors and opportunities for those wishing to gain experience in reviewing and editing.

3 Establishing the journal

The journal is a collaborative venture, initially between Edinburgh Napier University, University of Dundee and Aston University in Birmingham, with the Editorial Board made up of members from each of the collaborating institutions. An international dimension has recently been added with the introduction of a new collaborative partner with a representative of the University of Auckland in New Zealand joining the Editorial Board.

The editorial team are all academics or academic developers involved in teaching on institutional programmes in academic practice in higher education. As part fulfilment of their academic programmes of study, students on postgraduate education programmes often conduct several pieces of project work which is often commented on to be of publishable standard, yet publication rates from such work remain relatively low. The development of the journal was seen initially as a way of encouraging and supporting these students to become published authors in the field of education however it quickly became apparent that the journal would have wider appeal and the editorial team agreed to develop the journal as an open access vehicle to support all prospective authors in the field.

The journal has an ISSN number and is indexed in relevant scholarly databases including ERIC, MEDLINE and CINAHL.

4 Journal ethos

The Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice (JPAAP) is a biannually published, cross-institutional open access peer-reviewed academic journal which contributes to the enhancement of the educational research infrastructure by providing a publishing outlet for scholarly work and acting as a vehicle for building capacity in academic publishing
experience across the sector. The JPAAP aims to provide a supportive publishing outlet to allow established and particularly new authors to contribute to the scholarly discourse of academic practice (both generally and in their discipline area) through the publication of outputs that are theory-based and supported by evidence, as well as through the publication of Opinion Pieces and ‘On the Horizon’ papers on emerging work. In relation to the general ethos, the journal exists not simply for the publication of papers within our thematic scope but also as a collegiate and developmental platform for new authors, those new to journal reviewing, and for scholars who are seeking to gain experience in journal editing and publishing.

5 Journal themes

The themes of the Journal reflect the breadth of perspectives in academic practice from a wide variety of disciplinary lenses. The journal promotes evidence based academic practice through the publication of papers that are theory-based and supported by evidence. The editors welcome submissions of articles, research notes, opinion pieces and book reviews. The types of articles we publish include:

1. **Original research**: formal research projects with appropriate analysis of data, either with a quantitative or qualitative emphasis or mixed method studies. Action research studies are also particularly relevant to practice development and are welcomed by the journal. All research projects published must have ethical approval.

2. **Reflective analysis papers**: reflective evaluations of academic practice, either practitioner based enquiry or reflections that challenge current practice and encourage experimentation, novel conclusions or offer new perspectives derived from prior work.

3. **Review papers**: Literature reviews illuminating new relationships and understanding, meta-analysis, analytical and integrated reviews, etc.

4. **Case studies**: Case study papers focus on examining academic practice in a particular context, drawing out lessons learned that are usually generalizable to a wide and multidisciplinary audience.

5. **Multimedia articles**: articles which are presented in multimedia formats offers an innovative way to present scholarly work in academic practice and is in keeping with current trends in digital scholarship and open publishing (Weller, 2011). Prospective authors are encouraged to approach the editors with ideas for potential submissions in formats other than the traditional paper.

6 Developing capacity in academic publishing

The developmental ethos of JPAAP manifests itself in a range of activities and opportunities that help create a supportive environment in which a culture academic scholarship and discourse can flourish. The journal provides support at every stage of the publication process. The journal’s unique ethos extends to providing opportunities for staff to gain experience of the wider academic publishing process, engaging early career academics and researchers in both the peer review process and as editorial board members.

6.1 Developing authors

The journal offers direct support for authors who are seeking to publish their first paper in one or more of the thematic areas of the journal, through assigning ‘critical friends’ from within the editorial team who are happy to advise on the development of initial ideas for the formats of paper we publish. Experienced authors are encouraged to publish as second authors, thus giving strong support for developing new authors. This model replicates the approach taken in similar university online academic journals (the “Care” journal at Glasgow Caledonian University, “Geoverse” journal at Oxford Brookes University and the “Scottish
The Journal provides an opportunity for academics with experience in the thematic areas of the journal, but who are new to the journal submission reviewing process, to become involved as reviewers for the journal. An open call for applications resulted in the establishment of an extensive pool of appropriately qualified individuals who will serve alongside a group of established academics who are already experienced as reviewers. It is planned that reviewers will serve for a maximum period of 2 years to allow further individuals the opportunity to engage in the review process and gain this valuable experience. To scaffold the support of these new reviewers the Editorial Board complete the feedback loop by providing comments to reviewers relating to the feedback provided to authors. Through this dialogue Editors seek to highlight aspects of good practice and identify areas for development when the reviewer provides their assessment on future submissions. To facilitate wider discussion around peer review, online webinars led by members of the Editorial Board provide a platform for reviewers to engage in peer-to-peer discussion around the reviewing process.

6.3 Developing editors

Editorial internships are an additional way of offering experience in academic publishing. We will soon be offering editorial internships for academics who are experienced in the thematic areas of the journal, have some publications of their own and experience as a reviewer, and who wish to develop knowledge and experience on the editorial side of journal publishing. This again builds on the developmental ethos of the journal.

6.4 Providing opportunities for the wider academic community

The *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* welcomes the opportunity to work alongside colleagues in the field to develop “Special Issues” of the journal dedicated to particular themes or emerging areas of work. This offers the colleagues from the wider academic community, who have a good idea for a special issue, the opportunity to take on Guest Editor responsibilities for the special issue (with support provided from the regular Editorial Team for the journal). Coinciding with the open call for submissions for the first issue of the journal, expressions of interest were invited for potential future Special Issues. Response to this aspect of the call has been positive with a Special Issue focussing on technology-enhanced learning with contributions and overall editorial leadership from
students and tutors at the Open University planned alongside a further Special Issue focussing on the topic of scholarship within the HE in FE sector.

7 Open access

Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice provides immediate open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge. Whilst the Finch Report (2012) identified two routes to open access publishing, this paper has highlighted that the gold route may pose potential barriers for early career academics or academics working in areas where publishing papers in academic practice are not prioritised due to the completing demands of REF. JPAAP seeks to offer a third route of open access publication which is specifically aimed at supporting early career academics by proving free open access publication.

8 Joint copyright

In continuing the ethos of open access and empowerment of authors the copyright of all articles published in JPAAP is shared between the journal and the author(s). This allows the author(s) to republish their paper or article in full through their own and other online outlets, for example, their own blog or website or institutional websites or research repositories (Rice, 2013). Where papers are re-published elsewhere, it is expected that the original source of publication will be acknowledged by citing the Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice and providing a full reference including authors, title, volume number, issue number, page numbers and direct link.

9 Future Plans

The first issue of the journal will be published online in June 2013, thereafter biannually, with additional occasional special issues. We also plan to evaluate the experiences of the authors and reviewers who have contributed to the journal.

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The Third Stakeholder: Towards a Pedagogy and Hierarchy of Corporate Learning in Management Programmes

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ABSTRACT: The paper addresses the challenge of curriculum design for learners from corporate clients engaged in programmes in Management subject disciplines. Corporate clients may require learning providers to customise the design and delivery of such programmes and closely couple this with authentic assessment which reflects the needs of the client and learners who are situated ‘out of the university’. The literature on corporate learning identifies that certain dynamics are evident with a direction of travel towards a more action-oriented (including work-based application of learning), proactive and inter-functional engagement with a requirement for a positive and measurable impact on both the individual learner and the client organisation itself. These requirements provide challenges and opportunities for learning providers in curriculum design. The aspirations of the third stakeholder, the corporate client, are pivotal in this regard and thus co-design has become an important feature of corporate client curricula.

1 Introduction

The ‘third mission’ or ‘third stream’ activities which emphasises increased commercial activities in a higher education institution (HEI) portfolio in the context of educational programmes and associated curricula, give rise to the ‘third stakeholder’ as a challenger to the dominant HEI-student dyadic. This ‘specialised higher education’ mission (after Laredo 2007) is the subject of this paper. The paper presents a typology of approaches to corporate learning based upon two elements: firstly a wide-ranging literature review on corporate learning provision; and secondly the experiences of designing and delivering learning engagements for corporate clients. The review draws on literature concerning executive, corporate and situated learning and amalgamates findings across these labels. Corporate clients comprise ‘for profit’ commercial organisations ranging from small firms to multinational enterprises as well as ‘for purpose’ organisations from the public sector. The typology considers aspects of disciplinary knowledge, developmental knowledge and critical approaches to the required body of knowledge within the programme as well as the goals of learners and their employer. Further elements include tests of suitability and resource intensity which necessarily flow from the pedagogy.

The paper addresses the following questions:

- What dynamics are evident with respect to the expectations of corporate clients in commissioning learning engagements in the field of Management?
- What criteria may be used to inform and direct the curricula for corporate clients?
- Are the ‘graduate attributes’ of learners on corporate programmes distinctive?
- What attributes are required from university faculty, administration and support services in order to design and deliver effective corporate learning?

The primary motivation for engaging in learning development within organisations is to achieve a positive contribution to the overall performance of the client (Woods and West 2010). In particular, the test for any such intervention must lie in the overall contribution to the client organisation’s strategy and that this contribution is detectable and measurable. Further important motivations may include the provision of validated credit-bearing programmes resulting in a recognised HEI award. Corporate engagements with HEIs are increasingly built around collaborative educational partnerships (Ryan 2009) and HEI providers are well-positioned to deliver programmes at different university award levels.
learning experience of learners situated ‘out of the university’ has been highlighted by Macfarlane (2000) as a major consideration in the design and delivery of corporate learning engagements.

2 Evidence of dynamics in corporate education

Turbulent and more competitive business environments are widely perceived to create challenges for the management of today’s organisations. Such pressures are often evident in ‘for purpose’ as well as ‘for profit’ organisations and indeed, HEIs, particularly management educators, have also been subject to similar dynamics and competitive environments (Thomas 2007). Management education must accommodate and reflect these changes (Jamali, 2005). In particular, new methods, approaches, priorities and interventions are proposed. Carnall (2003) lists the following priorities and imperatives for organisations in the business and management environment of the early 21st century: value creation; quality; responsiveness; agility; innovation; integration; and teaming. It is interesting to consider that this set of issues for the ‘for profit’ organisations, are also diffusing to ‘for purpose’ organisations as a consequence of imperatives of cost-reduction and public concerns for increased scrutiny and accountability. It follows that if HEI providers are to influence and participate in learning development in organisations with these priorities, HEIs must be able to call-upon a similar set of capabilities in order to deliver authentic curricula to corporate clients. Watling, Prince and Beaver (2003) have summarised trends which indicate growing awareness within organisations of the importance of employees to deliver the aims of the organisation and a commensurate need for appropriate development. These authors also identify the demands from client organisations for context-specific, tailored and flexible interventions. Allied to this may be a requirement for links to organisational competence frameworks and a desire for external accreditation.

2.1 A change in emphasis

Shifts in the emphasis of corporate education have been highlighted with respect to initiatives in: “learning needs, learning content, pedagogy, participant mixes, instruction and organisational integrating mechanisms” (Conger and Xin 2000 page 74). Narayandas et al (2004) set some of these issues out as evident trends which emphasise modern-day imperatives of corporate education. These are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: A summary of dynamics in corporate education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Then</th>
<th>Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique events</td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard off-the-shelf</td>
<td>Customised to specific needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactive – fill gaps for today</td>
<td>Proactive – train for tomorrow’s needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring knowledge</td>
<td>Action orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen and learn</td>
<td>Ask, interact and learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual focus</td>
<td>Team focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional silo approach</td>
<td>Interfunctional emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic focus</td>
<td>Global emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Blend with field delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Reproduce current beliefs and practices</td>
<td>*Transcend current beliefs and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Hierarchical</td>
<td>**Cascading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Yates (2002) has suggested a number of essential ingredients in corporate programmes: expertise (of faculty); innovation and customisation (in delivery and assessment) and clarity
of approach (highlighting that the provider must be clear on a range of diverse issues such as whether the engagement follows a competency approach or management education/knowledge approach). Other “clarity” elements relate to the extent of accreditation of prior learning and targeting the deployments of specialist disciplines, or offering particular types of qualification. Yates also stresses the importance of organisational elements in the design, delivery and ongoing quality improvements in the engagement and the need to balance the client organisation and learner needs in the delivery of successful programmes.

2.2 Impact on providers of corporate education

The role of corporate educators is also reflective of dynamics with a move from a reactive role in sustaining corporate performance (where answers are found in standard, off-the-shelf programmes) to now developing more customised programmes. The increasing sophistication of corporate organisations in their requirements for corporate programmes has been highlighted by Prince and Stewart (2000). These requirements must be of relevance to the organisation, and in particular, reflect the corporate client’s needs, industry environment, anticipate training needs over time and develop programmes that, according to Narayandas et al (2004 page 51), “…proactively fill potential gaps in skills and capabilities”.

2.3 A typology of corporate learning

The dynamics summarised earlier in this section are picked-up by Legge et al (2007) and allocated to modes of engagement which reflect evolving and advanced forms of learning provision. An overview of these is presented in Table 2. The central elements of the typology comprise the extent to which the engagement predominantly reflects a disciplinary approach, a staff development approach or a critical approach. This typology can be used to codify central elements of a suite of potential learning engagements which may reflect distinct forms of provision which meet differing requirement of corporate clients. Harrison et al (2007) point to the capability of universities in particular, as providers able to engage with such a plurality of paradigms, and this provides distinctiveness from alternative suppliers of corporate education. This typology is useful in determining the pedagogical approach to be proposed and agreed with a corporate client in order to ensure alignment between the intentions of the HEI provider and the expectations of the client. It further prompts recognition for the crafting of appropriate level-learning outcomes at the module or course level coupled with the style of engagement required to effectively nurture these outcomes and associated capabilities in the learner. The latter also informs the necessary capabilities of educators as instructors, facilitators and mentors to the corporate client, in order to deliver an appropriate style and level of engagement.

Table 2: A typology of approaches to corporate learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disciplinary approach</th>
<th>Staff Development approach</th>
<th>Critical approach</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student goals</td>
<td>…to acquire knowledge 'about' rather than 'for' management</td>
<td>…balance 'the educational and the practical'</td>
<td>… ‘reflexivity in relation to day-to-day managerial experience’. ‘subject conventional wisdom to critical scrutiny’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on…</td>
<td>…management knowledge as science. …analytical models and techniques.</td>
<td>…student participation. …development of interpersonal skills. …practical relevance</td>
<td>…the ‘students’ work and non-work experiences to problematise management theories and assumptions’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Delivery by…
…disciplinary ‘expert’
academics, therefore
knowledge is ‘functionally
oriented’ and
‘compartmentalised’. High
levels of ‘lecturer control’
…academics, but
also, external
executive lecturers,
initiatives involving
practicing managers,
joint student-
executive workshops
…academics and
students. Lecturer
may teach ‘critical’
content, however
lower levels of
‘lecturer control’ over
process and the
development of
knowledge

Claimed
suitability for…
…any organisation
…specific
organisation
…specific organisation

Justifications
…maintaining academic
standards
…professional body
preference
…some students
familiarity with UG
experience
…blends academic
and practice
elements
…encourages a
community of practice

Characteristics
Resource efficient.
Reflects academics’
priorities for research.
Students may
acquire an
‘unquestioning
managerialist
mindset’. Resource
intensive.
Possibly seen as of
superficial packaging
of a disciplinary-
based course
Challenges
unquestioning
managerialist
mindsets

Conclusions
…fails to address
‘ambiguities of
management practice’
…unsuitable for situated
learning
…moves towards a
more situated
learning experience
…consistent with the
notion of situated
learning

Source: A summary of Legge et al (2007)

3 Learning engagements in corporate education

There are a significant number of published papers which share some specific forms of
learning engagement as evidence of best practice. Aspects of work based learning,
problem-based learning and action learning offer the prospect of integration into learning
systems which are tailored to the needs of corporate clients. These can involve design
issues of learning sequences, with learners going back to their work environments to
implement outcomes from learning and the mentoring of participants in the development of
work-based projects – often with these projects attempting to conceptualise, organise and
synthesize throughout the delivery of a course. Drawing on the work of Revans (1982) in
action learning, Wankel and DeFillipi (2005) emphasise the importance of such real-world
projects and project-based learning pedagogies. The design of the learning engagement
thus integrates analytical and implementation parts. As with many HEIs operating in the field
of corporate education, Aberdeen Business School has experienced the key dynamics set
out earlier in this paper. The main directions of this journey are set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Directions of Corporate Education Growth
The following section briefly explains each of these directions and links each to the typology of approaches set out in Table 2.

At Aberdeen Business School our early corporate learning engagements were largely characterised by ‘Credit Bearing Awards’ for corporate clients. These were primarily contextually versions of existing modules and courses designed to match existing Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma awards. These tended to reflect a disciplinary approach with emphasis on analytical models and techniques. However staff development elements were also brought in, particularly on team projects which had practical relevance for the client and the learner. ‘Life-long learning with Credit Accumulation’ involves the provision of support for individuals engaged on programmes of a more open nature. These are often linked to requirements for consideration of accreditation of prior learning and accreditation of prior experiential learning which may stem from demonstrable competence within the client organisation. These tend to reflect a disciplinary approach with discrete learning episodes accumulated over time. ‘Bite-sized Just-in-time’ approaches are often related to smaller-scale half-day workshop activities. These may be of an introductory nature (and thus prompting the development of the knowledge base within the client) or used for updating the existing knowledge base of the client. These tend to blend the disciplinary approach and the staff development approach.

‘Corporate Academy Support’ concerns clients who have in place an existing Learning and Development function (or wish to develop such a function) with multiple training and learning engagements, often across a variety of subject or specialised disciplines which support and reflect the key activities of the organisation. Here we see the expectation and need for a strong staff development approach which may (if deemed suitable by the client) be extended to a more critical approach. ‘Executive Education’ comprises corporate engagements with a subset of senior managers within the corporate client. These engagements are often of relevance to strategic issues and change initiatives. These are often directed towards a critical approach and often conducted with a problem-solving agenda.

‘Facilitated Learning’ approaches often require significant bespoke developments or interventions which may be highly differentiated from our portfolio of non-corporate programmes. These are often short-duration, co-designed programmes (not credit-bearing) which are often characterised by a strong work-based learning approach coupled with elements of reflection in practice. These tend to produce strong staff development and critical approaches. Challenging accepted ‘ways of doing’ and finding new ways of adding value are often uppermost in the goals for such programmes.

4 Graduate attributes of learners on corporate programmes
Among others, Gunn Bell and Kafmann (2010) have emphasised that ‘employability’ is about the development of attributes and skills that may be transferred beyond the HEI. Much of the emphasis on the ‘Graduates for the 21st Century’ Enhancement Theme and the wider employability agenda for graduates has been predominantly considered with regard to getting graduates in to work. This has often (though by no means exclusively) reflected a largely undergraduate agenda and often implicitly or explicitly transmits the impression of the graduate securing their first post-higher education employment. Given that learners on corporate programmes are already employed by the client, and may have been employed by the firm for a period of time, are the graduate attributes of learners on corporate educational programmes distinctive? How well-positioned are HEIs in identifying and developing the necessary attributes of learners situated ‘out of the university’?

With the learners as primary participants in a corporate education programme situated in the organisation, these individuals start with considerable existing attributes and in-depth knowledge of the organisation and its external environment. For commercial organisations, knowledge of industry context, business models and ‘ways of doing’ may also be evident. HEI faculty are therefore likely to be at something of a comparative disadvantage when it comes to important aspects of context in the programme. Challenges for faculty therefore include aspects of validity and authenticity. This may require significant effort (which may be required across a team of facilitators on the programme) to identify and develop familiarity with the client’s history, organisational configuration, activities, priorities and strategy.

For corporate clients and learners, opportunities for career development within the organisation are probably uppermost in the mind. To this can be added expectations of competence in current or future positions. These desired competences may vary from organisation to organisation depending on a range of factors which are ultimately linked to strategy. The HE parallels to competence can be found within the SCQF Level Descriptors (SCQF 2013). There may be generic and specialised competences within each organisation – these may be multiple (to reflect variation in disciplinary or functional capabilities) or stratified (to reflect differing levels of responsibility, authority and accountability) and so may not neatly match-up to SCQF levels. To what extent can HEIs and their clients coherently and efficiently bring these two approaches together? The competence levels of the corporate client may be ‘a given’ element, and are unlikely to be varied to suit the needs of the HEI provider.

5 Attributes required from Higher Education Institutions as providers

Fundamental to the engagement of an HEI provider with a corporate learning agenda is the capability to add value for the corporate client. Greeno (2006) has highlighted the importance of adding value through mechanisms which transform ‘training’ into a corporate asset and aligning the self-interest of learners to corporate goals. Criteria which consider and demonstrate value adding outcomes must therefore be part of a systematic evaluation of any proposed curriculum. Although emphasising a ‘training’ approach, the Harrison (2009, page 184) ‘six stage value-added training cycle’ emphasises the importance of communicating the value adding elements of such engagements. The elements of the model are: establishing the partnership; integrating planning and evaluation; identifying training and learning needs; agreeing learning principles and strategy; designing and delivering training; monitoring and evaluating outcomes. This approach incorporates the need for what Kessels and Plomp (1996) referred to as ‘internal consistency’ and ‘external consistency’. The former attests to the constructive alignment of the curricula and the latter relates to the shared view of stakeholders in the design of the constructive alignment. The Harrison model tends to concentrate on how the human resources function may support learning and development activities. However, it may be extended to act as a prompt for strategic dialogue in order to keep a number of curricular issues in focus. Indeed, as many corporate engagements are manifested via the human resource department of the client (or
may involve a contribution from that function) the model may act as a suitable bridge between the client and the HEI and may enhance the nature and conduct of the dialogue.

What attributes are required from HEI faculty, administration and support services in order to design and deliver effective corporate learning? Given the growing emphasis on collaboration within corporate learning, both experience and the literature suggests requirements for curricula which are: Co-commissioned; Co-designed; Co-produced; Co-delivered; Co-assessed; and Co-evaluated. These ‘constituents of collaboration’ suggest multiple interactions and knowledge exchanges with the prospect for significant learning between and within the HEI-corporate client dyadic.

Haskins (2012) sets out a number of differences between the traditional ‘classroom’ environment and the ‘executive education’ market. These corporate engagements are characterised by learners having more work and life experience, a requirement for rapid fulfilment, strong connections to their own activities and objectives rather than being focused on the instructor’s objectives. Haskins highlights the shorter lapsed time on such programmes and a tendency for learners to make assessments of the merits and capabilities of the HEI provider and instructors in a relatively short time frame. The dynamics of the engagement are also considered with the instructor having to respond, often immediately, to requests for variations or additional content during delivery.

A range of distinctive staff attributes may be required for specific aspects of this process. These could be considered with respect to both the institutional arrangements of the HEI and faculty delivery capabilities. In addition, the same attributes may be required of the corporate client to specify the overall purpose and aim of the learning engagement. How readily can the client specify what they want? How readily can the HEI accommodate these requirements (and adapt to any changes over time)? This suggests that a major ingredient will be knowledge exchange within the design and delivery of the curriculum – a further dynamic which tests models of pure knowledge transfer as the dominant design of corporate learning engagement.

For enduring and effective collaborations, consideration must be given to the development of the relationship between the HEI and the corporate client. Guidance on this aspect may be found in work from British Standards Institute and could consider application of BSI 11000-1: 2010 ‘Framework specification for collaborative business relationships’ (BSI 2013). In summary, this standard sets out steps ranging from initial readiness for collaboration; identification and selection of partners; managing the relationship; and consideration of suitable exit strategies for partners in the relationship.

There is a need to develop objective and shared ‘tests’ for the appropriateness and relevance of corporate programmes. In order to address wider stakeholder issues, designs may draw on strategic management approaches by considering criteria of suitability, acceptability and feasibility (SAFe Criteria). Kreber and Klampfleitner (2013) have identified both the importance of authenticity yet also propose that authenticity is a contested concept with different ‘dimensions’. These dimensions consider notions of: sincerity; trueness to oneself; constructing and identity; care for subject and learner; and a ‘process of becoming’. With the prospect of variation in learner and educator conceptions of authenticity, we can add the client as the third stakeholder who may (at best) have a single notion of what is authentic, but this can also vary within the client organisation itself. Consideration of Kreber and Klampfleitner dimensions of authenticity may prove to be useful in informing the development and selection of faculty staff for corporate engagements.

The notion of ‘authentic assessment’ is often of considerable interest to all stakeholders in the process, and for this reason, designing the assessment can provide an appropriate path for the curriculum. Practical, targeted and effective assessment may inform what needs to
be learnt and how this should be learnt. Several authors have highlighted various aspects of this including Gullikers, Bastiaens and Kirschner (2004) and their emphasis on the importance of professional practice. Relevance and authenticity can be demonstrated by the vocational nature of many business and management programmes. However, Chia (2007) has said this of itself may be insufficient to optimise the role of HEIs in corporate engagement and has encouraged ‘intellectual entrepreneurship’ in assessment design. Such radical approaches may not be suitable for all clients. The importance of ‘Mode 2’ knowledge (Gibbons et al 1994) has an emphasis on the production and application of practical knowledge which is often transdisciplinary, heterogeneous and heterarchic and these notions can also inform assessment design. Adding to the importance of relevance and practicality in assessment, the HEI provider must also bring suitable academic rigour to the process, particularly with respect to the assessment regime.

Ball and Manwaring (2010) address key aspects of the operation of work-based learning with a strong emphasis on the roles of the HEI, the workplace tutor and the student. These can usefully be extended to consider a variety of corporate engagements. In addition to instructor-level requirements, Prince and Beaver (2007) have cautioned about the ability of the HEI at institutional level to address many of the challenges of corporate delivery, and that aspirations for growth may have to be tempered, or that institutional practice may have to develop in order to fully accommodate corporate engagement.

6 Conclusions and future work

There is a growing literature on corporate education and the role played by HEIs. The literature provides evidence of dynamics in corporate expectation which reflects the increasingly sophisticated needs of corporate clients. Different levels of engagement are possible, with these levels placing different demands on HEI provider capabilities. The literature is worthy of further investigation in order to provide insight into a range of teaching, learning and assessment opportunities which can inform the creation of a learning system or pedagogy for corporate learning. There may be no single pedagogy which can sufficiently address the full variety, extent and dynamism of corporate client aspirations. However, consideration of pedagogies which reflect ‘disciplinary’, ‘staff development’ and ‘critical’ approaches are useful in categorising a range of possible interventions. Importantly, the design of an assessment regime ‘of learning’ and ‘for learning’ is considered to provide both the greatest opportunity and greatest challenge for educational providers and corporate clients. To this end, the imperative for ‘authentic assessment’ and wider consideration of authenticity in all aspects of the engagement are worthy of further investigation. The graduate attributes agenda and employability agenda should be extended to include the development and career pathways of learners who are already in employment, in order to service the long term needs of the learner (the employee) and inform the goals of employer corporate education programmes. There are indications that the outcomes demanded from corporate programmes, the graduate attributes to be demonstrated by corporate learners, and the capabilities of HEI providers in developing the curriculum for corporate clients may be strongly aligned, or may require strong alignment. Without such an alignment, the overall aim and ambition of corporate engagements may not be fully realised. Compatible positive alignment between the HEI and the client may be seen as an important facet of partner selection. Decision-making in curriculum design can be complex. Decision-making in curriculum design which involves active and engaged corporate clients as a ‘third stakeholder’ can add considerably to this complexity. However, several models and approaches are available to inform decision-making in order to derive fit-for-purpose engagements. These can be subject to evaluation by HEIs to determine suitability for current and future activities. In addition, wider considerations of collaborative business relationships should be considered as part of the engagement from the outset. The dynamic of co-designed and co-developed curricula gives rise to series of ‘constituents of collaboration’ which require significant knowledge exchange with the prospect of multiple
iterations. Engaging in ‘third mission’ corporate education provides opportunities for positive spillovers to the HEIs' non-corporate portfolio. For HEIs with Business and Management curricula, this knowledge transfer and knowledge diffusion into such courses should be surfaced and used to inform curricular design and redesign (throughout vocational institutions in particular), in order to demonstrate currency, validity and authenticity of provision. Corporate engagement therefore provides significant potential to enhance the learning of all of the HEI’s learners across their portfolio of courses.

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Supporting Flexible Learning Pathways: Developing a National HE Framework for Recognising Prior informal Learning

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Abstract: The Scottish HEI RPL Network is working, cross-institutionally to develop a National Framework for Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL) for Scotland’s Universities in order to expand and embed RPL to a much greater extent in the Higher Education (HE) sector. A National Framework for RPL is viewed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as being of strategic importance in terms of helping develop more flexible and learner centred programmes and also in widening access and participation in HE. The need for such a framework aligns with the Quality Enhancement Theme (QET) Developing and Supporting the Curriculum and the Flexible Curriculum sub strand (QAA, 2012b). This work will inform, and be informed by, European developments through the European RPL Network and post-Bologna developments in relation to the recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning.

The paper discusses the development of the national framework, its proposed implementation and locates this initiative within the context of broader national and European developments in terms of the changing HE landscape.

1 Context of RPL development in Scottish Higher Education: a changing landscape

Scottish Government policy indicates the role of Higher Education in supporting Scotland’s economic growth (Scottish Government, 2007a, 2007b, 2011). ‘Regional Coherence’ in particular features prominently in the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) agenda with a number of expectations, highlighting universities’ roles in supporting the delivery of this plan (this includes ‘improved articulation and progression routes for students, including those already in work, which use the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF) creatively to respond to the needs of the region’ (Scottish Funding Council, 2011).

There is some excellent practice in RPL and ensuring such practice is adopted as a minimum benchmark across the sector, ensuring that entry to courses happens at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
levels which properly reflect people’s academic and wider experience is a requirement (Scottish Government, 2011, p20).

Whittaker and Brown (2012) furthermore, suggested that RPL is becoming an increasingly significant policy area within the HE sector in Scotland in terms of the drive towards more efficient, flexible learner journeys. They note the association between RPL and a more flexible, accessible curriculum, also advocated by Whittaker (2011). She highlights the fact that ‘the profile of RPL has dramatically increased as a result of the SCQF, which has generated renewed enthusiasm and momentum for RPL since 2005’ (p172). This has progressed to learning and development activities not only in formal education, but in the workplace, the community and careers guidance in which creative approaches to the use of RPL within the context of the SCQF are being explored and developed (Whittaker, 2011). The link between RPL and other agendas within HE is also becoming increasingly prevalent in terms of more flexible curricula to attract greater postgraduate recruitment, income-generating Continued Professional Development (CPD) programs developed in partnership with employers, and the development and articulation of employability skills and graduate attributes through a reflective process (Whittaker and Brown, 2012).

QAA Scotland established the Scottish RPL HEI Network in 2008 to share practice in RPL and support collaborative approaches to development and research to drive this agenda forward in the sector. A key focus of the Network activity is to address some of the continuing barriers to the mainstreaming of RPL within institutional activity. The network includes members from across Scottish HEIs and also from the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Partnership, NHS Education for Scotland and the Scottish Social Services Council (Quality Assurance Agency, 2012a). The work of the Network informs, and is informed by, wider European developments in the recognition of informal and non-formal learning via the European RPL Network. The European RPL Network was established in 2010 to provide a platform for countries in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to share and learn from policies, practices and RPL development and research. It also supports the building of links and partnerships between EHEA countries at various stages in RPL development. RPL development in Europe is linked firmly to National Qualifications Developments and Lifelong Learning strategy centred on widening participation, workforce development and mobility.

The current work of the Scottish HEI RPL Network, discussed in more detail below, includes cross sector working to develop a National Framework for RPL for Scotland’s universities. This aligns to current and future European development in response to the agreement by EU Council of Ministers in November 2012 to adopt the recommendation that all member states should have, by no later than 2018, comprehensive national RPL systems in place. Citizens should have access to the validation of their knowledge, skills and competences, including via the use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and obtain full or part qualifications through this validation. This recommendation reflects a continuation of a top down approach to RPL across Europe and has been driven by the continuing uneven, irregular and slow development of RPL. The Bologna Follow Up Group reports that:

‘Alternative access to higher education (mostly in the form of RPL), currently exists in less than half of the EHEA countries, RPL for progression in higher education studies is possible in a slightly higher number of countries. However, only in 13 higher education systems (out of 47) RPL can be used for access to higher education as well as for progression in higher education studies, in 12 EHEA countries on the contrary no systematic activities related to the RPL in the higher education sector has been commenced yet’ (EURASHE 2013).
Access to RPL remains patchy and uneven across member states in Europe. The EC Recommendation relates to the broader Europe 2020 Strategy and in particular its flagship initiatives ‘Youth on the Move and the ‘Agenda for new skills and jobs’. These ‘emphasize the need for more flexible learning pathways that can improve entry into and progression in the labor market, facilitate transitions between the phases of work and learning and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning’ (European Council, 2012).

2 Background to the National Framework Project

The development of the National Framework builds on earlier work by the network. Since 2010, the Network has established an annual programme of work and a number of activities have already been concluded. This includes developing a greater understanding of current RPL practices within Scotland and further afield, and identifying key areas of development required enabling more streamlined, accessible processes within universities. Whittaker, Brown, Benske and Hawthorne (2011) undertook research as part of a two stage QAA project aiming to ‘streamline RPL support and assessment’ within the HE sector. The first part looked specifically at the mechanisms used by staff (both nationally and internationally) in supporting and assessing learners through the RPL process. Upon completion of the research, a set of ‘institutional enablers for RPL’ and a typology were developed in the form of a report to the QAA, in addition to a separate scoping study resource being made available. This research and outputs have informed recently completed Guidelines on Streamlining and Enhancing RPL Support and Assessment, which formed the second part of the QAA project (Whittaker and Brown, 2012).

The Streamlining RPL research project did not directly explore learners’ perspectives of support and assessment (Whittaker et al., 2011) and as a result identified potential areas for further research. The QAA, in conjunction with Glasgow Caledonian University and in collaboration with other Scottish HEIs, undertook research into the learner experience of RPL within Scottish HEIs. The project entitled ‘Exploring the Learner Experience of the Recognition of Prior informal Learning Process’ ran from May - July 2012. Key findings from the project included the inconsistencies in assessment practices and a lack of coherence between amounts of credit claimed and levels of evidence that are required in RPL. The research also highlights the importance of the role of the advisor in the RPL process, in supporting and guiding learners through the RPL claim process. This is also further emphasized in the suggestion that professional development and training of RPL advisors is an area, suggested by the learners, that requires improvement (Harris, Brown and Proudfoot, 2012). There is correlation between the perceptions of academic staff, explored in the first research project, and those of learners, investigated in the second project, that point to the need to untangle the complexities and variances between and within institutions in terms of RPL assessment practices. The sheer resilience required of many learners, as suggested by this small-scale research study, in persisting in their RPL claim, reinforces the need for more simplified, transparent and consistent practice across the sector (Whittaker and Brown, 2012a). The development of guidelines to support the streamlining and enhancement of RPL processes within Scottish HEIs, research into the effectiveness of RPL from the learner perspective, raises the visibility of the network and collaborative sector-wide activities as part of the new quality enhancement theme in Scotland - Developing and Supporting the Curriculum (Quality Assurance Agency, 2012b).

The inconsistency of policies and practices between HEIs and the continuing variance in awareness and understanding of RPL among students and staff have led to the next stage of development work for QAA Scotland and the Scottish HEI RPL Network: the development of a National RPL Framework for Higher Education. This initiative, funded by QAA Scotland with the endorsement of Universities Scotland and the Scottish Government, endeavours to address the barriers to RPL that make it difficult for the students, professional bodies,
employers and university staff to engage with RPL including the resource-intensive nature of the process, or the perception that is resource intensive. The Framework will be developmental rather than prescriptive and will build on the typology developed through the Streamlining RPL Guidelines project, noted above. The HE sector, building on existing resources and expertise through the Scottish RPL HEI Network, will develop the Framework. While it will be a national framework, it will be flexible enough to reflect different institutional contexts (Whittaker & Gibson, 2012 cited in Whittaker and Brown, 2012a).

3 National Framework Project

The National Framework project is coordinated by Glasgow Caledonian University and comprises of five work streams, four of which are linked to the different aspects of the Framework, noted in Figure One below. These work streams are being led by RPL Network members drawn from different universities following an invitation to Network members to express interest in undertaking this activity. The work stream leads are also drawing upon the wider body of expertise and interest located in the membership of the RPL network. This approach reflects the collaborative nature of RPL development in the HE Sector in Scotland, supported by QAA Scotland and the Network. Each work stream uses a mixed methods approach to the research and development required to achieve the agreed outcomes. Ethical approval was granted by Glasgow Caledonian University for the. Prior to commencement in January 2013, the scope, methodology and outcomes of the project were discussed and agreed by the RPL Network at their meeting on 30th October 2012. The programme of work for each work stream was agreed with the identified leads in March 2013. The draft Framework document will be submitted to QAA Scotland on 31 July 2013.

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<th>Strategic /Sector Level</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Minimum sector benchmark for RPL</td>
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<td>• Strategic/sector level guidance/principles</td>
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<th>Institutional level</th>
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<td>• Support implementation of streamlining guidelines at institutional level</td>
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<td>• Introductory guidance to develop wider awareness and understanding</td>
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<td>• Examples of practice and disciplinary case studies</td>
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<td>• Guidance on RPL for professional, regulatory and statutory bodies</td>
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<td>• Develop resources/case studies</td>
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<th>Student level</th>
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<td>• Guidance &amp; information</td>
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<td>• Resources &amp; toolkits</td>
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Figure One: Framework Overview and Aims

**Work-Stream 1: Project Coordination**, led by Ruth Whittaker and Julie Brown from Glasgow Caledonian University, is responsible for the achievement of the national framework project and focuses on direction, support and monitoring of the four other work
streams. This includes ensuring wider engagement of the RPL Network in the project through Network workshops.

**Work-stream 2: Sector Level dimension of the Framework** is also led by Ruth Whittaker and Julie Brown from Glasgow Caledonian University. This work stream is developing the section of the Framework which will be relevant at a sector level with a view to allowing HEIs and other organisations to share, develop and enhance practice in RPL in a consistent and sustainable manner. In addition it will raise awareness amongst sector level organisations and staff in strategic and policy levels in HEIs of the value of RPL as a method to widen participation and encourage the development of flexible, learner-centred curricula.

The development of this section of the framework is being informed by a scoping exercise of national and international policy documentation and resources that will support the development of benchmark principles and guidance. It will also build upon the outcomes of the earlier QAA RPL Network research and development, principally the *Guidelines for Streamlining and Enhancing RPL*, as well as the outputs from other work streams. Consultation on the sector level benchmark principles and guidance will be undertaken through Universities Scotland Learning and Teaching Committee, membership of which includes university Vice Principals in Learning and Teaching. Feedback will be sought on the extent to which the benchmark principles are achievable for the sector; what changes, if any, may be recommended; what, if any, would be the barriers to implementing these principles and how they could be overcome; and the ways in which we can secure engagement and implementation of the national framework at a strategic level.

**Work Stream 3: Institutional Level dimension of the Framework** is led by Sandra Menzies from University of Stirling. This work stream is exploring and reviewing the institutional elements of RPL within Scottish universities with the aim of collating information that will support and guide the implementation of RPL within central and devolved institutional models, provide examples of generic and discipline-specific RPL and the development of a flow chart to guide and embed RPL at an institutional level. The methodology includes a review of the existing Streamlining and Enhancing RPL guidelines and a web based scoping exercise and consultation exercise which will form the basis for collating generic and discipline based RPL principles, RPL toolkits and working documents. The core principles of RPL will be tested through mock case studies. This section of the framework will include introductory guidance for HEIs to provide an insight into RPL structures, definitions and applications. The aim is develop algorithm type guidance for HEIs to aid transparency, improve consistency of RPL between and within HEIs.

**Work Stream 4: Student dimension of the Framework** is led by Lea McKay, Mary Young and Dorothy Johnson from the University of the West of Scotland. The key aim for this section of the framework is to raise awareness and increase transparency of RPL for students and clearly identify the benefits of RPL in addition to providing user friendly guidance and information. The development of this section is being informed by collation of existing guidance and information targeted at students within the Scottish HE sector, as well as focus groups of 6-10 students at UWS, GCU, University of Stirling, University of Strathclyde and Edinburgh Napier University. These focus groups will enable the exploration of participants’ experiences and knowledge of RPL processes and procedures and to elicit ways in which partners institutions can raise awareness of the benefits of RPL for students and increase opportunities for engagement in the RPL process.

**Work stream 5: Professional Body and Employer dimension of the Framework** is led by Marty Wright from Glasgow Caledonian University. The key aim for this section is to raise awareness and increase transparency of RPL for Professional, Regulatory and Statutory Bodies. (PRSBs) This will be mainly through developing guidance and sharing of best practice. The methodology for this work stream has three phases:
Phase 1: Scoping the parameters and practices for RPL adopted by PRSBs in Scotland, which includes a critical analysis of web based professional body documentation of relevance to RPL to highlight the commonality and variation and issues worthy of further exploration or of relevance to other work streams

Phase 2: Examining the factors which influence PRSB engagement with RPL through two online surveys

Phase 3: Exploring strategies to enhance engagement with RPL amongst PRSBs through telephone interviews.

In addition to guidance of RPL for Professional bodies, case studies will be developed to raise awareness and enhance practice.

4 Emerging Outcomes and Conclusion

Following a network meeting on 29 April 2013, each of the work streams presented some initial findings of the work undertaken so far. Some of the emerging outcomes include:

- Within the sector level work stream, the need to breach the boundaries of the 'RPL field', and facilitate the broader understanding of the interconnectedness of RPL, WBL and the flexible curriculum. The National Framework should make these connections explicit to policy makers at national and institutional levels and ensure that this forms part of wider developments in the sector in response to Scottish Government and European agendas. This will prevent any unnecessary duplication of activities, as well as build on existing expertise within the sector.

- From an institutional level perspective the main outcomes to date include:
  - The on-going difficulties with RPL terminology and confusion surrounding terms such as experiential and informal learning.
  - The professional development of staff is still lacking and an area of priority. This connects to a lack of 'institutional memory' about how and why different RPL systems have developed and hence no explicit rationale for this.
  - There appear to be differences in approaches to RPL that are linked to centralised or devolved models of operation. A devolved system of RPL is one in which university procedures are operated and translated at a faculty/school/department level, with no or little central coordination or support. A centralised model involves a central RPL Coordinator or Unit, or Faculty RPL Coordinator working in partnership with subject experts but acting as a central point of contact, providing support and guidance for staff and students, and monitoring the process and the outcomes (Whittaker and Brown, 2012). A more instrumentalist/credit exchange model of RPL (Butterworth, 1992) appears to be evident in centralised systems than in devolved models which are more developmental in their approach to RPL, exploring the links between prior and future learning.

- The Student work stream has identified that much of the guidance and support available for students appears to be health/social care discipline specific information. One of the emerging outcomes therefore is the need to raise awareness of students in other discipline areas who could benefit from RPL. Equally the need to ensure the needs of international students in terms of recognition of their prior learning are met has been highlighted. 7

- The preliminary scoping of professional body organisations for RPL engagement under the Professional body work stream has revealed the following as tentative issues of relevance to developing the national framework:
  - Delineating PRSB with regard to RPL is challenging given the lack of agreed definitions and diverse functions which characterise such organisations. Adopting
regulatory and statutory views of PB may be limiting in the context of engagement with RPL so it has been necessary to embrace as broad a definition as possible to capture meaningful data and gain an overview of the field. Consequently, the definition extends beyond statutory and regulatory remits to incorporate organisations which represent professions including those with voluntary membership.

- In general, RPL appears not to have a distinct presence on professional body websites making it potentially difficult for enquirers to access information.
- Preliminary scoping suggests that the term RPL is not commonly used and the small number of materials reviewed thus far reflect an ethos through the use of other terms such as exemption and experience. No one document appears to deal with RPL, rather the concept when it appears does so across a number of documents reflective of how the organisation makes use of the process.
- It has become apparent through the work undertaken thus far and in networking with colleagues, particularly SCQFP that QAA Scotland may wish to take cognisance of 'employers' as a distinct strand in the future development of the framework. Engagement with RPL for employers has already been established by SCQFP with a number of useful resources available on their website which has a distinct RPL presence. However, the employer perspective is integral to all levels of the framework in building a knowledgeable and skilled workforce, working in partnership with HE, and taking account of professional body requirements. Furthermore, their utilisation of RPL for learners in the workplace appears to serve a different purpose to that of RPL at institutional levels incorporating both employees and in some cases the wider communities which they serve.

The National RPL Framework aims to raise the awareness of a wider range of policymakers, practitioners and students in terms of the opportunities RPL can provide, and the ways in which it can support other priority agendas, linked to Lifelong Learning, widening participation and workforce development and the development of a more flexible curriculum. In order to achieve this, it needs to be both aspirational and practical, bringing together, in one place, key principles, guidance and resources that can be accessed by a range of users for different purposes. The connection between the development of this Framework and the EC Recommendation on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning (EC,2012) will ensure that practice in Scotland is informed by, and informing, wider European developments in RPL.

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The First Year Advisor’s Network: enhancing the first year experience in response to the Review of Australian Higher Education.

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ABSTRACT: In response to the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education, Murdoch University redesigned its transition procedures drawing on research into best-practice in transition and the first year experience. It now offers all commencing students an integrated support program, centred on a school-based network of dedicated First Year Advisors who are available to assist all commencing students in their first two semesters of study. This case study outlines the model and illustrates the ways in which it can be altered to suit different contexts. Evaluation of the program through quantitative surveys of students and staff indicate that the First Year Advisors’ Network has been highly effective in enabling students to get timely assistance, and that staff have come to rely on the Advisors to provide pastoral advice.

1. Introduction

A year after publication of the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent Scales, 2008), Murdoch University in Western Australia was facing several challenges: the number of students reporting that they felt disconnected from campus life was increasing, attrition rates were unacceptably high and the number of students seeking assistance with academic study was also growing. Anticipating that the diversity of the student population would increase as changes recommended by the Review were implemented, and that greater diversity would intensify these challenges, Murdoch University undertook a comprehensive review of its transition procedures. It drew on research into best-practice in transition and the first year experience to redesign student support from the ground up (Kift, 2008; Lizzio, 2006; Tinto, 2001; Tinto, 2006-2007; Wilson, 2009; Wilson & Lizzio, 2008).

As a result of this process, Murdoch University now offers all commencing students an integrated program of academic and pastoral support, regardless of their socioeconomic background, matriculation pathway, age, ethnicity or other sociocultural factors. The centerpiece of the program is a school-based network of dedicated First Year Advisors, who assist students throughout their first two semesters of study. This paper provides a case study of an institution-wide response to changes in higher education policy. It further outlines the way in which that response was adapted to meet the needs of students on Murdoch’s three on-shore campuses (one metropolitan and two regional) to illustrate the scope and effectiveness of this role.

2. Higher education in the Australian context

From the mid-1980s, when economic rationalism entered the Australian political domain, there have been major changes in the Australian higher education system that mirror changes in the overall political landscape. Successive governments, drawn from both of the major political parties, have produced policies that have stressed the economic benefits of education to the individual and the nation. This emphasis on utilitarianism led to profound changes in the nature of university education. These changes include:
increased competition between universities and the development of intensely competitive marketing strategies (Marginson, 2006);
growing recruitment of international students, particularly from South Asia and China, and greater diversity among the domestic student population (Marginson & Considine, 2000);
proliferation of courses and subjects driven by student demand (Gallagher, 2000);
pressure on staff to employ innovative approaches to teaching and learning, while maintaining high standards (Nunan, George & McCausland, 2000);
widespread use of information and communication technologies in teaching and learning, both on campus and for distance education, and in other aspects of university activities (Krause & Hartley, 2005).

Over the same period, universities became more responsive to the needs of first year students during their transition to university and their first year on campus (Lizzio, 2006; McInnis, & James, 1995; McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000; Tinto, 2001). Commonwealth initiatives aimed at increasing school completion triggered a surge in the number of young people qualified to apply for university place and prompted a new interest in the process of transition from school to university. Many of these “non-traditional” students were enthusiastic and capable, but not necessarily well-prepared for a traditional university education and attrition rates were high. The inaugural Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference was held in 1995 to address specific issues relating to students’ transition to university and the quality of their experiences on campus. Universities established programs to support commencing students and improve the quality of teaching in first year units; for example the Monash Transition Program conducted research into transition, placed academics in schools to work with teachers and senior student mentors, and brought secondary teachers onto campus to teach first year units, assist academic staff to develop their own teaching skills and conduct research into transition from school to university (Pargetter, McInnis, James, Evans, Peel, & Dobson, 1998; Peel, 1998). In part, this interest in first year students can be attributed to the economic cost of attrition, estimated at $15,300 per student, per year (Marrington, Nelson & Clarke, 2010), but there is also a genuine recognition that the universities have a moral responsibility to provide appropriate support to their students including those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith & McKay, 2012).

3. Creation of the First Year Advisors’ Network

Inaugurated in 1974 as Western Australia’s second university, Murdoch has a long-standing commitment to social inclusion. The student profile has always included significant numbers of students from national equity groups, including regional and rural students, low socioeconomic status, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and mature age students. In 2009, Murdoch was faced with several challenges: (i) attrition rates were increasing; (ii) an increasing number of students were struggling with the academic demands of University study; and (iii) many students were having difficulty making friends on campus which would support their social transition to university (Martin-Lynch, 2009). Anticipating that the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) would increase student diversity further, the Director of Student Life and Learning commissioned a review of student retention, which identified concerns about the lack of cultural capital available to many commencing students, particularly those who were the first in their family to undertake university education and those from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. The report concluded that Murdoch needed to develop a coherent first year policy (Martin-Lynch, 2009) and in 2010 work began on a first year support program based on research undertaken at Griffith University (Lizzio, 2006; Wilson & Lizzio, 2008). The First Year Advisors (FYAs) commenced operation in January 2011.

4. Responding to Student Diversity
Predictions of an increase in student diversity were well founded. As the total number of commencing students has increased, the diversity of their backgrounds and experiences has also increased. By 2012, only one third of commencing students were following the traditional pathway from school to university; while the percentage of mature age students had remained stable, the percentage enrolling through alternate entry programs was increasing. There were also significant differences between Murdoch’s three campuses. The South Street Campus, which is home to law, engineering and veterinary science, continues to attract more “traditional” students – those who are less than 21 years old, have enrolled at university directly from school and have high entry scores (known as the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank or ATAR). In contrast, the Rockingham Campus, which is located in an industrial area that is also home to a large naval base, attracts more students entering through articulation schemes with the technical education sector or through bridging programs. Students on Murdoch’s Peel Campus are a special group as the campus was the exclusive home of the School of Nursing and Midwifery until 2012. In 2013 it was renamed the School of Health Professions and now offers some courses in chiropractic and counselling.

The FYAs are now an integral part of the first year experience at Murdoch (Box, Callan, Geddes, Kemp & Wojcieszek, 2012). The network consists of 16 advisors. Initially there was at least one in each School, but following a consolidation of the Schools from 14 to 8 in 2013, there are now 2-3 in each School on the main campus and one on each of the regional campuses, Rockingham and Peel. The FYAs operate on three main levels by:

(i) maintaining an open door policy, enabling students to get timely assistance without an appointment;
(ii) engaging in regular outreach ‘campaigns’ during which they contact first year students who have shown evidence of needing additional assistance;
(iii) co-ordinating three separate programs that engage students in different aspects of University life: Orientation; UniEdge and Peer Mentoring.

Murdoch University’s First Year Advisors’ Network is distinctive in that it includes all students, rather than focussing solely on students deemed to be disadvantaged or at-risk for on the basis of their ethnicity, family background or geographical location. In contrast to transition programs at other universities, Murdoch’s program is School-based, but centrally co-ordinated and embedded within the university structures.

The FYAs are dedicated, pastoral staff. Unlike academic staff, who often struggle with competing demands, the FYAs have time to talk with students, help them to clarify goals, explain expectations of university life, suggest study strategies and refer them to support services where appropriate – all critical functions of an effective advisor program (Wilson, 2009). Each FYA is semi-autonomous and focuses on the needs of students in their own School. The network provides support to individual FYAs and ensures that responses to student needs are consistent. The FYA network originally met fortnightly to plan activities and campaigns addressing transition issues that affect the whole university (Martin-Lynch, 2009), although the frequency of these meetings has changed to monthly in 2013.

4.1 Outreach campaigns

Over the course of the year the FYAs run eight outreach ‘campaigns’ to support vulnerable students. They contact all international students at least once each semester, while external students are contacted at least twice. Other campaigns are specifically timed within each semester to offer specific groups of students an opportunity for just-in-time academic recovery (Wilson & Lizzio, 2008). Just prior to the start of the semester, the student administration office provides each FYA with a list of students in their School who have accepted a place, but has not enrolled in units by the start of Orientation, and with a second
list of students who have received a warning letter after failing 50% or more of their units in the preceding semester. Within the first two weeks of the semester, they FYAs are notified about students who have enrolled, but not interacted with the online Learning Management System by downloading course materials or engaging in online activities. Prior to Census Date, they are given lists of students who have withdrawn and shortly afterwards, lists of students who have withdrawn, but without a formal intermission.

At Risk

The at risk campaign, continues throughout both semesters of a student’s first 12 months of study. Students are defined as being at-risk if they show evidence of disengaging from their studies. This might include failing a diagnostic test or assessment task; missing classes; not engaging in online tutorials or requiring assistance with academic literacy and numeracy (Nelson, Duncan & Clarke, 2009). Tutors and/or Unit Coordinators observing these behaviours report the student to the FYA in their School using the At-risk Student Alert function on the class management intranet website, MyStudents. On receiving the report, the FYA telephones the student to discuss the situation, ask questions and provide assistance. If there is no response after two phone calls, the FYA will email the student using a standardised message tailored for each campaign theme.

To ensure that the reporting system works effectively, the FYAs liaise with first year unit coordinators and tutors at the start of each semester and explain the nature of their role, and the importance of just-in-time intervention to reduce attrition (Wilson & Lizzio, 2008). They also provide training in the practical aspects of using the At-risk Student Alert. The FYAs continue to meet with the first year unit co-ordinators in their Schools during semester to discuss issues affecting students and to promote events designed to improve the students’ experience. These meetings play an important role in the success of the program by encouraging staff to report at-risk students before problems reach the critical stage. All interactions between the FYAs and students are logged using RightNow a customer service program that has been customised into a case management system. FYAs are able to check to see what advice or support has been given previously, and as all FYAs are able to access case files they can share information about students enrolled in dual degrees, or who change Schools. RightNow also facilitates the FYAN’s capacity to redistribute the caseload when individual members are on leave or if there is a surge in demand in some schools.

4.2 Support Programs

The First Year Advisors also play a leading role in three separate programs that promote student confidence, improve preparedness and encourage engagement; all of which are preconditions for a successful first year (Boin & Lever, 2008; Kantanis, 1995; Quinn, Bennett, Humphreys, Nelson & Clarke, 2011).

Orientation Days

The FYAs work closely with academic staff to design and deliver Orientation activities. They provide study advice, outline career opportunities, discuss expectations of university life and appropriate work/study balance regimes – all of which have been shown to lead to improved student outcomes (Savage & Smith, 2007-2008). One of the most important activities they undertake during Orientation is helping students to set goals for their first year (and beyond) using the purpose-designed Goal Card. This is a business-sized card on which students to outline their goals; the reverse lists the key predictors for success (Lizzio, 2006) and research by Wilson (2006). The FYAs also distribute postcards to each new student. The card welcomes students, outlines the FYA’s role and lists their contact details. Students are told that they can drop in without an appointment as well as phone or email for help. By the end of Orientation, many students have already developed a rapport with their FYA.
**UniEdge**

The second program run by the FYAs is UniEdge, a series of seminars designed to extend the process of Orientation over the first four weeks of semester and address both academic and social transition (Boin & Lever, 2008; Wilson, 2009). The seminars, which are presented jointly by the FYAs and staff from the Centre for University Teaching and Learning, cover key academics skills that students may not have mastered at school and community-building activities to position students for success in their first assessment tasks and foster a sense of community among first year students. In 2013, UniEdge introduced an additional element into the program. The FYAs hold an information expo on Bush Court, the university common, to distribute information about student services to students who have not attended the UniEdge seminars.

**Peer Mentoring Program**

The final part of the transition program is the university-wide Peer Mentoring Program. This program, which replaced the existing, but not always successful School-based programs, complements UniEdge; the emphasis is on enculturation into the academic life of the university through the Schools. The FYAs recruit and train second and third year students within each School as mentors. Pairs of mentors are then matched with up to eight first year students; groups meet weekly throughout the semester in an informal setting. Mentors provide course-specific guidance to students and refer them to the School's FYA where appropriate. In Semester 1 2012, 128 mentors and 380 mentees participated in the program.

**5. Regional variations**

Murdoch University’s two regional campuses at Peel and Rockingham each have distinctive characteristics resulting from their location and the type of they course offer, leading to significant variations in the ways that the FYAs operate. Lower average cohort numbers are exchanged for a wider set of responsibilities, leading to more variety within the role. Owing to the smaller size of the regional campuses, the FYAs have a higher profile than on the South Street campus. They are well-known to all staff and students and are often called upon to undertake activities that are not associated with this role at the South Street Campus. In reality, they act as campus chaplains assisting and advising on a wide range of issues since they are often the first person to detect a problem and look for a resolution. In the last twelve months either or both of the regional FYAs have been asked to help design a student lounge, resolve timetabling issues that made it difficult for some student to attend class, organise a transition program for articulation students entering a course in second year and represent the university at an award ceremony.

**5.1 Peel**

Murdoch’s Peel Campus is some 60 kilometres from the South Street Campus on the outskirts of the satellite town of Mandurah. Until 2012, Nursing and Midwifery was the only university School on the Peel Campus, but post graduate courses in Chiropractic and Counselling are being added this year and the school has been renamed the School of Health Professions. In some respects, having all commencing students enrolled in one degree on a small campus makes the FYA’s job easier, but there are also challenges that arise from the structure of the course and the sociocultural backgrounds of the students that make the FYAs role crucial in the process of transition.

In Australia, nursing and teaching continue to provide a path towards upward mobility for many people who do not regard the elite professions as accessible (Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert...
Nursing is an attractive occupational for many students looking for secure, reasonable well-paid employment, especially in regional areas (Laming & Kelly, 2013), and the entry requirements are moderate. The majority of the students enrolling in the Bachelor of Nursing are mature age students and many have gained access through alternative entry programs. They are likely to be combining study with work and with family responsibilities and a large minority are from CALD backgrounds.

The course structure can also lead to difficulties for some students. It is inflexible, fully prescribed and taught wholly on campus. Students who miss more than 2 tutorials in a unit their unit for any reason fail automatically, and as units are not timetables in both semesters, students may have to wait 12 months to repeat the unit. In some cases, this means being out of contact with the university for six months as there are no other relevant units available. Also, the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia insists that students to complete each year of training before continuing to the next. Time away from study makes recommencing the course more difficult as the students have lost momentum and find it difficult to see themselves in their chosen role. Reorganising their lives, giving up full time work and refocusing on their long-term goal is also difficult.

Owing to the small size of the campus, the Peel FYA is well-known to all students and staff. As well as playing a prominent role in Orientation activities, she is often present at university functions that an FYA would not normally attend. The FYA on the Peel Campus is also responsible for organising activities that would be run by the Student Guild on the South Street Campus – the foodbank, the Multicultural Festival with African drumming and a steel band and “Stamp Out Stress Day, which features yoga classes, meditation with a Buddhist nun and a chocolate fountain. The FYA also played a leading role in establishing the staff-student tunnel ball competition complete with annual trophy. Lizzio (2006) demonstrated that student engagement with extra-curricular activities reduces attrition and increases students’ enjoyment of their studies. The Peel FYA’s involvement in these activities puts her in regular contact with the students and establishes her as an approachable figure. She is able to address most of them by name, something that has long been understood to increase students’ confidence and reduce attrition (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977).

Having a small cohort of commencing students on a small campus also enable the FYA to seek out at risk students and “accidentally” meet them coming out of a tutorial or walking to the car park. In this way she is able to initiate a conversation in a non-threatening manner. Many students lack the confidence to address their lecturers or unit co-ordinators directly about their concerns and the FYA is often asked to sits in on a discussion between a staff member and student to offer support.

5.2 Rockingham

In many ways, the role of the FYA on the Rockingham Campus is more flexible (and more challenging) than any other. More than 90% of students at the Rockingham Campus are enrolled in teacher education, and the FYA is nominally a member of the School of Education, however there is a rapidly growing cohort of students studying tourism and events management, and applied accounting. In addition, each semester 10-12 elective units from courses offered only at other Murdoch campuses including sociology, community development, sustainability, sound, sports science, history, public relations, Asian Studies, Australian Indigenous Studies, English, creative writing and drama. These electives at the Rockingham Campus enable students living in the surrounding area to complete parts of their courses locally instead of travelling 30-40 kilometres to the South Street campus. The FYA at Rockingham provides support to all of these students, and as a consequence, is required to liaise with several different Schools.
Like all FYAs, the Rockingham FYA provides advice and support on a range of issues including study skills and career planning, and refers students to the support services when necessary, but his role is more prominent than that of FYAs on the South Street Campus as staff from Equity and Social Inclusion and Counselling are available one day per week and there is no Student Health Services on campus. Not only does he make appointments with these services, but he carries out triage, providing mental health first aid and fast tracking referrals when necessary. Like his counterpart on the Peel Campus, the Rockingham FYA provides welfare assistance normally organised by the Student Guild including food vouchers and emergency loans and assists second and third year students. The FYA on the Rockingham Campus is unique in that he also helps students enrolled in the bridging program OnTrack, and in HeadStart, a program for secondary students enrolled in preparatory units for the West Australian Certificate of Education. He also offers tutoring in mathematics and science; staff from the Centre for University Teaching and Learning are available three days per week, but none of them is able to provide assistance in these areas. None of these extra responsibilities was included in the original role description; they have been added in response students’ needs and rely on the skills of the current FYA employed at Rockingham. Paradoxically, they also mean that he has less time for one-to-one consultations with first year students.

6. Evaluation: effectiveness and cost

Creation of the First Year Advisors’ Network has had a profound impact on the whole Murdoch University community. As Table 2 indicates there is a steady demand for their services, but evaluating the program is a complex process, which must take into account both human capital and economic capital to develop a true picture of its effectiveness.

Table 1: Interactions between First Year Advisors and students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Number of 1st year students enrolled</th>
<th>Total number of students contacted*</th>
<th>Number of student initiated contacts</th>
<th>Number of campaign contacts</th>
<th>Total number of interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sem 2, 2011</td>
<td>4273</td>
<td>3,486</td>
<td>N/A**</td>
<td>6,085</td>
<td>6,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sem 1, 2012</td>
<td>4360</td>
<td>4,853</td>
<td>3,017</td>
<td>7,529</td>
<td>10,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sem 2, 2012</td>
<td>4407</td>
<td>3,953</td>
<td>2,519</td>
<td>7,111</td>
<td>9,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sem 3, 2013***</td>
<td>4476</td>
<td>3,309</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>3,581</td>
<td>4,652</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* this includes all students contacted, not just first year students

** data was not collected during this period

*** from January 1st 2013 – March 20th 2013 = 2.5 months

6.1 Human capital

Evidence drawn from evaluation of the program, which is undertaken at the end of each semester, indicates that the First Year Advisors’ Network has had a positive impact on retention. In Semester 2, 2011 95.6% of students were “happy to receive the call from their FYA” and 93.5% agreed or strongly agreed that the call was helpful; in Semester 1, 2012 the figure was 100% in response to both questions. The following comment is typical of many from the student evaluations:

[My FYA] was an amazing help, at first I didn't think I could go to her for help, then I received a phone call from [her] and we made an appointment and sat down and talked about all of my issues and how I could resolve them. In the end, [she] helped me to resolve my problem and I am now very comfortable with the position that I am in. (student survey, Semester 1, 2012).

Moreover, 87.2% of respondents to the corresponding staff evaluation indicated that the FYAN has had a positive impact on students’ experiences.
The introduction of the First Year Advisor role has been of huge benefit to students and academics. It's hard to imagine how we managed without them! (First Year Unit Coordinator: Staff survey, Semester 1, 2012)

Both academic and professional staff have come to rely on the FYAs to assist students by providing advice that they may not comfortable giving or have time or skills to provide.

FYAs have taken up a lot of the routine pastoral care work that would otherwise be required of me, and hence would often not get done due to the number of students (usually about 400-450). It is great that I can deal with the special cases and issues that arise, knowing that a lot of other pastoral care work is being done for me by the FYAs. (First Year Unit Coordinator: staff survey, Semester 1 2012)

6.2 Cost-benefit analysis

An initial analysis of the retention data suggests that in addition to providing a valuable service to both students and staff, the First Year Advisor program also provides a positive net financial return. Fifty-six per cent (440/786) of students commencing in Semester 2, 2011 who displayed at-risk behaviours and had active contact with their First Year Advisor were retained for three or more semesters. Retention continued to improve for at-risk students commencing in Semester 1 2012, with 61.3% (1,180/1,924) retained for three or more semesters. Further analysis will be completed in late-2013 for students commencing in Semester 2 2012.

The 2009 review of retention by the Director of Student Life and Learning estimated each student who discontinued their studies represented an average loss to Murdoch of $30,000 over three years, the usual length of an undergraduate degree (Martin-Lynch, 2009). This figure was confirmed by Marrington, Nelson & Clarke (2010). Retaining an additional 100 at-risk students beyond first year, equates an increase in revenue of $3 million. Even after factoring in students who are retained beyond first year but eventually discontinue in their second or third years, a positive financial gain still results after accounting for the $1.5 million yearly operating cost for the FYA program.

7. Concluding comments

Murdoch University's First Year Advisors’ Network is a bold and innovative response to Commonwealth policy intended to complete the process of refashioning Australian higher education from an elite to a mass system. The combination of an open door policy, the outreach campaigns to vulnerable students and tailored programs has created carefully tiered levels of support for all new students and an improvement in the first year experience at Murdoch University. The Murdoch University First Year Advisors’ Network was created to be flexible and dynamic in the way it responds to student needs. Its distinctive features - the distribution of the FYAs across each school under a central co-ordinator and detailed recording of data - give it the capacity to provide invaluable information to the university and to monitor its own effectiveness; a quality lacking from many first year transition programs (McInnis, Hartley, Polesel & Teese, 2000). It is a model that would be widely applicable to other tertiary institutions with an interest in improving student engagement, retention and the overall first year experience.

REFERENCES:


ABSTRACT:

A new Higher Education regulatory regime has given impetus to sector-wide interest in developing valid and robust methods for demonstrating the learning outcomes and standards achieved by graduating students. This paper explores the value and practicality of using an approach based on collaborative inter-university peer-review of comparable final year subjects across a range of discipline areas. The process involved blind peer-reviewing of selected assessment items as well as sharing of subject outlines, assessment guides and program level expectations. Detailed written commentary provided substance to the evaluation and this was further enriched by focus group interviews with participants. Whilst some obstacles to implementation at a sector-wide level very identified, including concerns over reputational risk and workloads, the validity and value of such an approach particularly in informing enhanced quality of subject materials and cross-institutional, intra-discipline discourse was evidenced.

1 Introduction and Context

There is growing global interest in the quality of Higher Education (HE) provision and in the development of valid indicators of this quality. Of particular importance has been the rising discourse concerning valid indicators of the learning outcomes achieved by graduating students. Many stakeholders are driving and informing this discourse: governments with a stake in funding HE providers and a keen interest in the earnings they generate, particularly through maintaining an international reputation for educational quality and value; professional bodies which mandate skills and knowledge achievement levels for accreditation and registration to practice; employers who demand work readiness of graduates and finally students themselves seeking assurance that their personal and financial investment in learning is worthwhile.

Initiatives aimed at assessing learning outcome standards achieved by graduating students, have broadly encompassed common exit and within-program testing; peer review and moderation of subject and course artefacts and combinations thereof. The European Tuning Project, the UK Higher Education Subject Centres initiative and the External Examiners System represent approaches grounded in agreed understandings of desired student learning outcomes, framed in disciplinary context and manifest in reviews of learning material and assessment items. These initiatives recognise diversity of educational and institutional practice; the uniqueness of disciplines and the expertise of academic peers. At the other end of the spectrum is external, benchmarked testing, both of generic skills and discipline knowledge. The US Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) and the Australian Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA), both involve a series of writing and performance tasks aimed at assessing generic skills such as critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving and written communication as well as, with the CLA, discipline specific knowledge. These tests have attracted significant critique as to their validity, particularly in different social, cultural and disciplinary contexts. But in the absence of alternatives they have gained traction and the GSA was recently touted by the Australian federal government as a possible exit test to be used in Australian Universities. The current OECD Assessment of Higher Education Outcomes (AHELO) project is an international feasibility study which uses a mixture of these two approaches. It is being piloted with Engineering and Economics faculties from across the world and involves common tests of generic and discipline skills,
largely based on the CLA as well as more contextualised institution-based assessment of
knowledge and the capacity to interpret and apply such knowledge.

In Australia this conversation has been sharpened by recent changes in the regulatory
environment. First has been the development and ratification of a revised Australian
Qualification Framework (AQF). The AQF provides a national policy for regulating
qualifications and delineates the learning outcomes for qualification types from school,
Vocational (Further) and Higher Education. The second influential change has been the
disbanding of the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) and establishment of a new
Australian Higher Education regulatory body, the Tertiary Quality and Standards Agency
(TEQSA) in January 2012. AUQA, established in 2000, was an independent agency with a
mandate to “undertake audits, report on performance and outcomes and.....to assist in
quality enhancement.. for the benefit of HE”. It recommendations were public and focused
on supporting performance. It had no legislated powers. The need to be reviewed by AUQA
was separate to the requirements of Universities to report on their operations under the
National Protocols. TEQSA is also an independent agency but, in contrast to AUQA, it has
legislated powers and a somewhat more formulaic approach to assurance. TEQSA requires
Higher Education providers to demonstrate they meet particular standards, which include
those previously delineated by the National Protocols. These TEQSA standards encompass
all aspects of HE provider operations. They include a set of four mandated Threshold
Standards and three non-mandated, still evolving, non-Threshold Standards. The Threshold
Standards are three Provider Standards, the first of which delineates operational
requirements for HE provider operations. They include a set of four mandated Threshold
Standards and three non-mandated, still evolving, non-Threshold Standards. The Threshold
Standards are three Provider Standards, the first of which delineates operational
requirements for HE providers such as governance, management, finances and resourcing;
the second requires institutions to meet particular institution category requirements, including
expertise in research aligned with teaching programs. The third of the Provider Standards is
Course Standards which envelopes course design; course resourcing; admissions; quality of
teaching and learning; assessment; monitoring and review. The fourth and final mandated
standard is Qualification Standards which requires that awards delivered by the provider are
aligned with the AQF. The three Non-Threshold Standards are Teaching and Learning
Standards, Information Standards and Research Standards. Of these much effort is now
being placed on developing and clarifying expectations encompassed by the Teaching and
Learning Standard and its relationship with the Course Standards. The Threshold Standards,
having now been used in one round of University re-registrations, are now under review by
the Higher Education Standards Panel, which was established by the government to advise
TEQSA.

It is against this backdrop that a number of initiatives concerned with HE quality and
standards are in progress in Australia. Largely supported by the Office of Learning and
Teaching (OLT) key initiatives include (i) the Discipline Scholars, who have been working to
develop agreed threshold learning outcomes (standards) for graduates in their discipline; (ii)
the Achievement Matters (AM) external peer review of Accounting learning standards; (iii)
Go8 Quality Verification of Standards (QVS), involved validation of grades on marked
assessment tasks and (iv) the learning and teaching standards project (LaTS) A sector-wide
model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-
university moderation, involving peer review and moderation in discipline, which is the focus
of this paper. This paper considers the largely qualitative aspects of this project with an
emphasis on analysis of factors why may impact on the practical feasibility and acceptability
of this approach with key stakeholders.

2 Project Description

The LaTS project is grounded in lessons learnt in international approaches directed at
agreed protocols for academic comparability - external examiners, peer-review and
moderation and in the research which grounds such approaches, particularly the centrality of
assessment and its contextualisation within discipline expertise and expectations (Coates,
2010; Dill and Beerkins, 2013; Knight, 2006; Norcini and Shea, 1997; Yorke, 2008; Sadler, 2009; Smith, 1992).

2.1 Aims and intent

The LaTS project specifically aimed to develop a valid, robust methodology for assessing subject achievement standards and which could potentially be incorporated into TEQSA standards expectations. In doing so the project not only focused on the academic validity of the process but also explored the value or otherwise to participants and their institutions and the practicalities of implementation.

2.2 Methodology

The approach had three major components (i) blind peer review of assessment items from selected final year of program subjects; (ii) analysis by peer reviewers of the positioning and the validity of these assessment items in the context of subject outlines and expectations and (iii) post review focus group interviews with participants to explore issues pivotal to success of the approach with individuals and their institutions.

2.2.1 Participants and discipline areas

Originally eight Australian Universities were partners to this project – The University of Western Sydney, Griffith University, University of Melbourne, La Trobe University, Charles Darwin University, Macquarie University, Queensland University of Technology and the Australian National University. These were subsequently joined by another three – University of Tasmania, University of Wollongong and Deakin University. This represents a spread of quite differently positioned Universities in the Australian HE sector, including the research intensive Go8s; regional institutions and large metropolitan universities with large contingents of disadvantaged students.

Within these Universities eight Field of Education discipline areas were identified to participate. These areas were selected to ensure diversity and included subjects which were part of professionally accredited programs; performance based subjects; languages and representative subjects from the sciences, business and the social sciences. Prior to the commencement of the project a meeting was held at each partner university to explain the intent of the project, its desired outcomes and the process to be followed. Ultimately twelve discrete subjects and a total of sixty two academic staff were involved in the project, which encompassed the subjects of Chinese, Civil Engineering, Economics, Environmental Science, History, Journalism, Law, Marketing, Music, Nursing, Philosophy and Physics.

2.2.2 The subject review process

As indicated above the review process was informed by research which supported consensus moderation in assuring integrity in academic achievement standards. As such the process was based on using primary evidence of academic standards, specifically assessment samples which were reviewed within the whole of subject context.

Once agreement was reached on the subject areas to be involved, effort was focused on identification of final year subjects which were deemed to have sufficient commonality and be representative of core discipline expectations. Subject convenors were provided with an information sheet outlining the process and expectations. This phase of the project was fairly iterative as subject “matches” and willing participant convenors were sought.

Subject material was collected including subject inputs - outlines, assessment items and marking criteria and outputs, four samples of graded student assessments in four grade bands from Fail to High Distinction. These assessment items were then de-identified and all
indications of grading removed. For each chosen subject, subject coordinators were also asked to provide contextual information on how the subject fitted within the degree program. Material from the home University was then sent to one and preferably two partner universities for review.

Reviewers were provided with a feedback template to facilitate comments on the subject inputs (content, learning outcomes and assessment items) and asked to mark the de-identified assessment items using the marking guide provided. Feedback was sought with respect to the following:

(i) the appropriateness and validity of curriculum content for level of study;
(ii) the relationship between the assessment item and the subject learning outcomes;
(iii) the relationship between the assessment tasks and the graduate learning outcomes;
(iv) clarity of explanation of requirements for achieving grade levels;
(v) clarity and appropriateness of grading guidelines;
(vi) suitability of assessment tasks in assessing key learning objectives.

These questions themselves had a quantitative component, with a 5-point Likert scale as well as provision for comment.

2.2.3 Collegial feedback

Subsequent to the review process focus group interviews were conducted with participants from the discipline areas of Environmental Science, Law, Physics, Economics, Marketing, Music, Philosophy and Chinese. These interviews canvassed participants’ opinions on the success or otherwise of the process; any personal development benefits; perceived enablers and impediments; how the process could be improved and whether it was feasible as a whole of sector approach.

3 Findings and Implications

3.1 Responses rates

A total of 62 academic staff were involved in the review process with a response rate of 93.55% and an average turnaround time of 4 weeks. A total of 52 sets of 4 samples of student work (208 in total) were exchanged between the home institution and one partner institution and of these 33 sets were assessed by a second partner (132 in total). A total of 340 instances of assessment were undertaken.

3.2 Observations

3.2.1 Moderation of assessment items

In general there was broad agreement as to the grades awarded by the home and the reviewing institution. Not unexpectedly some variation occurred and these primarily fell at the Pass/Fail boundary. At the moment this data is not available in the public domain.

3.2.2 Evaluation of subject inputs

Table One presents a summary of the data which accompanied the grading of assessments and the reviewing of subject materials. A 5-point Likert Scale with higher scores indicative of agreement/positivity was used.
### Table One: % Reviewer agreement/ Subject material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>at all</th>
<th>somewhat</th>
<th>adequately</th>
<th>very</th>
<th>completely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness and validity of subject curriculum content for level of study</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of relationship between assessment tasks and unit learning outcomes</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of relationship between assessment tasks and graduate learning outcomes</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of explanation of requirements for achieving at grade levels*</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of grading guidelines*</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of grading guidelines*</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suitability of assessment tasks in assessment of key learning objectives*</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some reviewers deemed this not applicable

As can been seen from this data the overall ratings were positive – adequate and above. The textual material that accompanied this data gave the predominate reasons for disagreement as issues of clarity and completeness of information. In particular negative comments referred to lack of rubrics to guide students and assessors; ambiguity of grade requirements; lack of clear explanations as to how assessment linked to expectations and outcomes. In the main reviewers found the curriculum and assessment tasks appropriate for the level of study in the particular discipline.

Transcending the actual details of the evaluation of assessment items and subject materials, this component of the project highlighted the value of discipline-peer engagement. The feedback generated not only could be used for moderation of assessment but to inform improvements in curriculum and assessment design.

3.2.3 Participant feedback

The focus group interviews yielded a wealth of personal perspectives on engagement in the process. A number of themes could be identified in participants’ comments:

**The valuing of seeing what others are doing**

*by doing this particular process ….I saw what other people were doing and brought it up in the context…*  
(Philosophy)

*I thought this process was about as good as I could imagine. Getting hold of other people’s exams was insightful; it was interesting. Having a look at other student’s work was typically painful, but worthwhile. I wouldn’t want to do it very often.*  
(Philosophy)

*….just getting a look at each other’s syllabuses and the assessment is the most efficient way to get at the heart…*  
(Physics)

*Seeing what they’re doing is exactly what we’re going to try and do in the future.*  
(Philosophy)

*much more useful ultimately for everyone involved and encourages the assessor to really engage more with the work rather than just sort of skim it*  
(Music)
really useful to start with the …outlines, and then work across what those outcomes were, because without all of the information you’re really just working on an isolated component. So I found it a really interesting project, because you don’t often or you just never get really to see how other people do what you are doing in your institution, so it was great (Marketing)

there were at least a couple of things I picked up where I thought that’s an approach, it actually made me reflect that I made …our teaching team may be a little bit too strict or a bit too harsh on some of the students (Law)

The valuing of disciplinary and diversity

One of the things that I found was the disparity of the material that constituted an advanced Quantum course in the different universities… I actually enjoyed seeing that disparity.

I’m kind of happy to see that across Australia… we do have heterogeneity … and it should be sort of slightly dynamic because that material should all be sort of out there (Physics)

Workload and sustainability

this kind of process….once every few years and I think there’s a lot of value in that. (Physics)

… the resource implications, it does take a long time and that’s the one thing you have to think about, (Marketing)

I don’t know how you overcome that, and we just keep getting lumped with more and more reporting and more and more, you know, learning outcome stuff that comes in. (Marketing)

it’s almost a work minimisation sales pitch, where you can say look this is being done elsewhere and they’re having good results with that, and that will be a benefit for us …..the pressures on full time staff here if you say to them oh here’s another teaching initiative, oh no, they just collapse under the weight of what they have to do (Law)

if this process happens over a period of time, so just say your courses were viewed a number of times over a number of years, so perhaps not every year but at different points in time (Chinese)

Consensus

I think the assessment task shows that there’s a fairly common standard but the content…it’s going to be a bit hard to define exactly what that is (Philosophy)

So I think that really the most effective way forward is for us to arrive at consensus both internally within departments and programs and universities and between universities as well and I think that the idea of arriving at consensus in comparatively small groups and then overlaying that with a cognate discipline so standards are shared between cognate disciplines is a mechanism by which that common understanding of standards of student achievement can be shared very, very broadly. But it’s not an easy thing, you need to involve people who actually believe that this is a rational thing to do and are prepared to put in the time and energies into developing that sort of a process. (Music)

Anonymity?

I’m not sure that anonymity is actually necessary for a continuing process though but certainly at this stage it was (Music)
I’m not sure that there’s any great benefit in anonymity in any case. I think that probably this kind of thing we need to as colleagues rather than as sort of blind reviewers for example and a dialogue

the notion that you can do it anonymously is good for the aggregate sort of picture. But I think also for feedback purposes a brief discussion with someone who’s been looking at your course would also be useful which means of course that it’s no longer anonymous (Econ)

Improvements

**Discipline panels:**

One suggestion may be that – I mean obviously it wouldn’t necessarily be that cheap but if you could get everyone just in the same room for three or four hours and have the various bits and pieces de-identified and then have sort of a discussion about any differences there and then, more immediate type of feedback might be useful. (Philosophy)

I would like to see ….a group …set up some panel or gather all these people together to sit together, actually to have a face to face discussion and what we have learned, what we can improve for the future. (Chinese)

**Use technology**

the process online would lessen the bureaucracy to some extent (Music)

**Whole of program**

most institutions still have pretty much a unit focus, I don’t think we really look very well at where things fit together in the overall program yet. We’re sort of still in a bit of a silo mentality (Marketing)

there seemed to be some things missing some important skills missing in one case, …..it may well be that those skills were actually covered in another subject. (Environmental Science)

additional information would’ve been useful in a sense that you’re looking at third year, final year Macro Economics units, it would’ve been very useful to know what was done in previous units (Economics).

there are many different ways you can construct courses, configurations of courses to meet those objectives. I’m not too sure that … it’s very difficult to pass judgement on different configurations (Economics).

3.2.4 Implications

Whilst peer-review is willing accepted and even lauded in research, in general, academic staff are less willing to have their teaching and learning exposed to such scrutiny. Academics have not been called upon to systematically evidence their standards setting and assessment practices. The necessity to provide such public evidence is a significant culture change requiring negotiation and demonstration of the value of such engagement. This project found no automatic buy-in by academic staff and there was a high level of anxiety regarding peer critique. Participants were concerned about criticisms of subject materials and of the validity of their assessment tasks and gradings. Reputational risk and concern over potential sub-standard performance required negotiation and assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. These issues are clearly ones which need to be addressed if peer review processes are to become part of normal University business. The comments cited above suggest such concerns can be overcome by negotiated and clear understanding of the process intent. Anonymity, a big issue initially, became less important when
respondents became engaged in the process. Participants clearly experienced the benefit of open engagement with their peers and with access to another individual’s subject material. This frequently generated an affirmation of their own work or gave them insights into how they could improve their own materials. Many saw engagement in the process as positive staff development and an opportunity to develop new discipline networks.

Workload is an issue of ongoing concern in Universities, both for individual staff and university administration. Peer review processes, such as the approach trialled in this project, can increase the workload of participant academic and ancillary staff. The latter often bearing the hidden costs of such initiatives, collecting, collating and exchanging materials, de-identification processes and collation and analysis of results. If such approaches are to be mainstreamed there is a clear need for this to be factored into workloads, for practical guidelines and processes to be developed and adequate resourcing and support to be allocated.

4. Conclusions

This project affirmed the validity and acceptability of discipline-based peer review of assessment. The provision of contextual material increased the valuing and utility for participants. It was clear that the evaluative process needs to encompass whole of program expectations and that academics need to be able to articulate how their subject learning outcomes align with program level outcomes.

Discipline staff are well positioned to monitor and assure learning standards and Universities need to have policy frameworks that require regular moderation of assessment and regular, but not onerous review.

The process of peer moderation, as described in this project, would be well suited for inclusion in the regulatory Threshold Standards.

5. References and Relevant Sites

5.1 Reference sites

Assessment of Higher Education Outcomes
http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/testingstudentanduniversityperformancegloballyoeedsahelo.htm

Australian Qualifications Framework

Collegiate Learning Assessment

Graduate Skills Assessment
http://www.acer.edu.au/tests/gsa

TEQSA
http://www.teqsa.gov.au/about

5.2 References


Acknowledgements

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Natives, immigrants, residents or visitors? Developing a student-led understanding of the role of digital literacies in the curriculum

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ABSTRACT: The well established digital natives construct posits that those born into the digital age have an immersive command of technology. However, the fervour with which the debate was initially received has in recent years been replaced by increasing criticism. Indeed, the colonial native versus immigrant metaphorical bifurcation has been modified to reflect the potential existence of more transient, mutable roles of digital resident and visitor. For students, affiliation with the digital native ‘tribe’ may be less than straightforward. This paper aims to contribute to discussion on what, if anything, students studying in creative disciplines understand by the term digital native and how they might interpret the concept of digital literacies within their curriculum. Facilitating a student-led conceptualisation of the attributes and competencies associated with developing digital literacies and confidence in using technology for educational purposes provides scope for participative, empowering and collaborative institutional debate to directly inform forward-looking, responsive and sustainable cultural change.

1 Introduction

For Gillen and Barton (2011), digital literacies refer to ‘constantly changing practices through which people make traceable meanings using digital technologies’ (p. 9). Such meaning-making is key within creative education in encouraging expression, reflection, autonomy and lateral sense making. As such, embracing digital technologies as part of the holistic learning experience enables students to research, develop and articulate ideas in a variety of innovative multimedia formats.

Students in creative disciplines, such as those studying Art, Design or Architecture at the Glasgow School of Art (GSA), are required within their programmes to balance a combination of academic, information and digital literacies. The unique demands of composite modes of study - studio based learning as well as online and more traditional tutor-led scenarios – requires students to develop confidence in the underpinning principles common to all three literacy areas: adaptability, critical application, collaboration and solution-focused, creative use of educational technologies (see e.g. Lea 2004; SCONUL Working Group on Information Literacy 2011; Bawden 2001 for extensive discussion on attributes key to each area).

However, students’ use of technology in learning and teaching may not necessarily match existing confidence and competencies of everyday, personal use. As increasing criticism of reductionist concepts such as Generation Y (Manuel 2002) and digital natives (Prensky 2001a, 2001b) attest, assumptions are often made on the part of institutions as to students’ use of technology and the perceived ease of transferring principles from the personal domain to the academic (Beetham 2009; Cranmer 2006). Reaction to the digital natives debate now posits it as over-simplistic (Luckin et al 2009), and as harbouring potential for the interpretation of students’ digital literacies to be stronger than they actually are (JISC
As with both academic and information literacies, expectations of applying digital literacies within academic programmes must be made clear to students, both on joining their programme and as requirements change throughout each academic transition. The student perspectives presented in this paper point toward a need for continued opportunities to enable students to develop confidence in using technology for educational purposes according to potentially differing context and learning preferences.

2 Natives, immigrants, residents or visitors?

The digital natives (Prensky 2001a) construct posits that those born into the digital age have an immersive command of technology, in contrast to those digital immigrants (born before 1980, according to Prensky), who are required to actively develop technological confidence and competence through adaptation. Digital natives allegedly share a number of defining characteristics, including an expectation of rapid information delivery, a pre-disposition to multi-tasking and accessing information in non-linear ways (Prensky 2001a, 2001b; Oblinger 2003). Bennet et al (2008) argue that the two-fold significance integral to the digital natives debate is that firstly, this discrete population with specific attributes exists, and that secondly, there is a significant mismatch between the expectations of the role of technology in learning between students and academic practitioners.

However, the fervour with which the debate has been received has in recent years been replaced by increasing criticism; a counter to the ‘moral panic’ with which Bennet et al (2008) argue has characterised attention to date. In suggesting a more disinterested, pragmatic approach, Bennet et al echo increasingly widespread criticism of the construct (Kennedy et al 2008). Indeed, the colonial native versus immigrant metaphor has been modified to reflect the existence of more transient and flexible residents and visitors (White and Le Cornu 2011).

This move to incorporate the complex and varied ways in which people interact with technology into a more flexible typology offers much more scope to consider the richness of students’ experiences; past, present and future. However, the residents/visitors typology still creates an either/or perspective, when perhaps there is more argument for a view that incorporates movement between technologies as well as in and out of them. A holistic view of navigation, considering existing knowledge, its application, and its evolution into new or adapted knowledge, may be one such premise on which a more inclusive typology might be based.

3 About the institution

Learning technologies have been an integral part of learning and teaching practices at the Glasgow School of Art for a number of years. In addition to a centrally administered Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) through which students access academic course information, tutors make use of a variety of media and technologies which extend opportunities for learning beyond the studio. Increasingly, in line with an expansion in the use of non-mainstream knowledge and discourses as part of internationalisation and massification of education in recent years (Eijkman 2009), collaborative web 2.0 and mobile technologies are used to facilitate creative learning networks. The use of blogs and wikis as collaborative learning spaces, as well as connective social media such as Twitter, Facebook and media repositories such as Flickr and Vimeo have also increased in use. There are a number of virtual interdisciplinary communities (some curated by students) affiliated with the institution where information about events, exhibitions or creative works are shared.

A number of initiatives already exist to facilitate the scaffolding of students’ use of technology in learning at GSA. For example, IT Twilight Classes offer a programme of opt-in, after-hours software workshops where students can develop or enhance their confidence in a particular
area. Workshop materials are made available through the VLE so that if students are unable to attend they can access resources at a time that is convenient to them, and on a repeat basis. Also, the Webtastic! VLE course contains a diversity of resources (podcasts, walk through guides, videos, links) to help students develop and manage their own web presence. In addition, the InfosmART information literacy resource, which has recently been made available for re-use by other arts-based institutions under a Creative Commons licence, offers support on using evidence in academic work.

4 Student perspectives on digital literacies in the arts

Two focus groups were conducted with students in the first term of the academic year 2012/13. Issues raised in the discussion groups reinforced complexities associated with perceptions of students’ use of technology in learning. Students shared contrasting and diverse perspectives on the role that digital tools played in their learning and creative practices and highlighted the importance of the institution in providing a robust technological infrastructure and in helping to clarify the purpose of differing technologies in learning. Students noted the usefulness of the immediacy of responsive support to software and hardware queries with direct access to staff in the library, as well as to the scheduled IT Twilight classes.

Students who took part in discussions noted huge variations in access and ownership of mobile technologies, from non-existent to immersive engagement. In induction sessions during the beginning of the academic year 2012/13, of 478 students, 320 owned smartphones (as a proxy for mobile engagement in this context) (67%). Whilst there may be a presupposition that most if not all students may have access to the use of a smartphone and thus portable access to immediate information, for a third of incoming students this was not the case. Whilst mobile pedagogies are an area that the institution is keen to explore, encompassing the use of tablet and other handheld devices as well as smartphones, this will be done as an enhancement or alternative to principal blended routes. In this way, the flexibility offered by mobile technologies provides scope for learner choice and autonomy.

Students were asked about their awareness and interpretation of the term ‘digital native’ as part of discussions. Despite none of the students having heard the term, two students said that they would consider themselves to be digital natives, and that it was a description that resonated with them. Other students described it as ‘a strange term’ or ‘a weird concept’, and one student commented on its limiting potential:

“I think to assume anyone born would automatically know how to use one form of technology or maybe prefer it to an analogue process is slightly jarring…”

In discussing the time-bound definition of being born post 1980, as per Prensky’s description, another student raised concerns about the efficacy of making sweeping generalisations based purely on age:

“Yeah, I mean my idea of those terms is that it’s kind of dangerous to assume that anyone born past 1980 will automatically be able to use technology…and also, you can’t put everything digitally…”

In this context, students discussed conscious ways in which they used technology in their creative practice, balancing analogue and digital techniques. As per Oblinger and Oblinger’s (2005) research, many of the students spoke in terms of process and outcome, of the creative journey and what the technology allowed them to achieve as opposed to focussing on the technology itself. For one Fine Art Photography student this process was about protection, and having more scope to preserve the stages of her work as opposed to risking ‘ruin’:

“I’m more of a digital person, because I tend to ruin things. Cos in analogue photography you just have much more stages and you can actually ruin what you’ve
done...you can go wrong at more stages...but it really depends on the quality and feeling you want to achieve.”

This purposeful use of technology in the creative process and learning environment was also referred to as a way of providing peer cohesion, company and support. One student privileged the importance of the co-created learning experience as opposed to the potentially isolating experience of independent self-study, and again cited her use of technology as instrumental in this:

“Just being with someone else in the room, people working...in this work environment, so you're more productive. I stay, like, one hour...two hours after teaching finishes because we have a full curriculum...and I choose to stay there several hours sometimes just because there are people there...”

By using technology to maximise face to face contact, this student was able to develop her skills and peer network. Other students discussed the role of technology in community building online, in both fostering and restricting distributed networks. In referring to social networking communities that traversed several aspects of students’ lives, one student noted that although Facebook was useful in offering an online community for her class, the blurred boundaries of sharing her academic content with a wider network made her uncomfortable:

“We're using Facebook, we share with the class, like...a separate website and our group. But I don't want to share my work with other people...with different friends. For example, I don't really want to show something that is, I don't know... deeper.”

As with the transference of digital confidence from using technology for personal purposes to academic, students too have to navigate interaction protocols within different communities. Based on relationships, context, purpose and preferences, these critical decisions give students autonomy over sharing their creative works (or not) with differing groups.

In discussing the concept of digital literacies with students in recognising existing personal technological confidence and transposing this to education, one student recognised some of the problematic aspects of the digital native construct in conceptualising digital literacies. Students were less able to define what this might actually mean for them, and were quick to point out the context dependency of a definition.

“It’s a strange one. I’ve heard of the term’ digital literacy’ but it completely depends on what you’re using or what...what it is. Just because its digital doesn’t mean it’s user-friendly. But I mean ...I know you need to title things, you need to give things a snappy heading and I would call myself digitally literate...but again, it depends. Stick me in front of a certain programme and I’m lost. But then again I’ve probably got the understanding to work out how to solve the problem, you know maybe around file menus. So I mean, within half an hour I could get my head around something...but again to assume that that’s the case for the majority...you can’t really do that.”

This student highlighted the importance of the underpinning attributes as opposed to software-specific knowledge, and whilst confident that he could employ these skills was unsure that this was a universal truth for his peers. Another student also highlighted that they could likewise understand the concept of digital literacy, but also found it problematic. However, as a graduate attribute, the student acknowledged the importance of developing digital confidence in this context over the course of study:

“I do think it’s a skill in college, you know, something you should leave with...or at university. Whatever it means – you should have it...”

This reference to the vagueness of ‘whatever it means’ encapsulates well the ambivalence that Eshet-Alkalai (2004, p. 94) refers to in the suggestion that ‘indistinct use of the term causes ambiguity, and leads to misunderstanding, misconceptions, and poor communication’. The vagueness was countered by students’ request for clarity and
consistency, in, for example, guidance on using the library catalogue and in course organisation in the VLE. In discussing the latter, one student highlighted importance of staff awareness under the auspices, too, of ‘literacy’:

“And it’s something that should expand to the tutors to make sure that they’re VLE literate...so there’s a kind of set way of doing things, cos it is sporadic in terms of folders in different departments. But I mean obviously a lot of the tutors will be, uh...immigrants to technology...so that’s another reason to make sure that everyone’s on the same page...it’s just a massive page.”

5 Discussion

Students discussed the need for a more fluid, contextually dependent understanding of interactions with technology, based on personal choice, selected interactions, access to community (online and face to face) and enactment of autonomy as opposed to definable and compartmentalising demographics such as age. Students discussed the usefulness that technology afforded them in terms of creative preservation and process, choice of media and mode, connectivity and peer support. Some also recognised their ability to transfer principles of use from one software package to another, under the auspices of grappling with the tenets of digital literacies, ‘whatever it means’. The co-existence of analogue and digital techniques was endorsed by students in examining their practice and considering their preferences.

A flexible, mutably typology of use and engagement with learning technologies based on context-dependent interactions allows for less division and compartmentalisation, and posits that potentially everyone can and does interact with technology in some form. Such an inclusive perspective offers technology users the scope to change roles and control interactions and process as opposed to being ascribed a bounded and potentially passive identity. All those who engage in such digital navigation may enact autonomy in digital interactions, information retrieval and critical application or transference of technological knowledge and experience. As notions of digital literacy pervade throughout the lifecourse, so too does an ability to navigate digital resources as one migrating from learning episode to functional task to reflection.

Navigation between, rather than into, technologies is part of a flexible, customisable and vibrant continuum, contingent upon diversity, difference and autonomy as opposed to isolated, contradictory and compartmentalised roles. Variances in process, subject specificity, context and access to technology inform learner choices and preferences in medium and thus have an undeniable effect on the creative process.

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The Fourth key – digital competence for teachers

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ABSTRACT:
The fourth key competence is a project of collaboration between Uppsala University and the municipality of Uppsala. The aim of the project is to improve the skills in ICT among school teachers and teacher students and to inspire them to use computers as pedagogical tools in the classroom.

The program coordinators worked with teachers and students of the teacher training program with the aim to improve examinations and assignments through the use of computers. In 2012 approximately 300 students of the teacher training program have been involved in courses using ICT skills for presenting examinations and assignments.

Methods for integrating ICT skills include improvement of assignments, use of digital display surfaces etc., and development of a web resource. From the project follows that many teacher students are inspired to use the digital display in different ways and also to take optional courses to improve their ICT skills. Teachers report the digital tools strengthened their course outlines, assignments and examination.

1. Introduction

In accordance with the EU’s key competences for lifelong learning and the new National curricula, the demands on teachers’ digital literacy increase. The fourth key competence is a project of collaboration between Uppsala University and the municipality of Uppsala. One aim of the project is to improve the skills in ICT among the schoolteachers and to inspire them to use computers as pedagogical tools in the classroom. The second aim is to improve ICT skills among university students at the teacher training program with respect to computers as pedagogical tools. Previous efforts in school and in teacher training suggest that knowledge of digital tools cannot be implemented by individual events, but need to be integrated in other educational activities.

In this article we will present how we together with teachers in teacher education programs worked out strategies for ICT. This work has involved reviewing and developing coursework and development of technical solutions including visibility of student’s progression and enabling experiences. We will also discuss how we choose to integrate ICT skills in the courses of the teacher education program by letting the students present their progression through their education using digital presentation views. We will talk about how students use technology through their education and what effect it has had on student – teacher-interaction, examinations and assignments.

2. Background

As ICT more and more becomes an obvious aid in all parts of societal activities the competence requirements increase for all those operating in various parts of society. Education in general, and School and Teacher training in particular, are no exceptions. Already in 2006 the European Parliament decided on recommendations on competences for lifelong learning, including digital literacy as the 4th key competence (European Commission 2007). A new National curriculum (Lgr11), municipals investing in training of school staff and increased government inspection of higher education, force the Faculty of
Education and the Department of Education at Uppsala university to take action to ensure their mission regarding digital competence.

National Agency for Educations’ recent review of the use of IT and IT skills in the Swedish school system shows that Sweden is one of the countries with the greatest access to technology, but where it is not used in any great extent. In the survey many teachers testify about the need for more expertise in this area. This is consistent with previous evaluations of IT investment in school such as the One-to-one project (Hallerström et.al. 2010).

One of the lessons learned when evaluating these projects is that it requires many different skills to use digital tools in educational purposes. It is not just about learning techniques and programs, but also about being able to understand the educational opportunities and to tie these to a teaching content, see Fig. 1.

![Fig. 1. M Koehler model (Source: http://tpack.org)](image)

2.1 Swedish teacher education

In Sweden teacher education is part of higher education since 1977, and have been lively discussed and also subject to substantial changes in the last years. The decisions about teacher education are related to changes in the education sector in society. When reforming the teacher education in 2001 one clear ambition is to strengthen the academic character of teacher education programmes. Further the importance of ICT-competences was pointed out including basic ICT-competency for personal use and competency in using ICT with pupils in educational settings (see Ds 1996:16). In relation to this focus on ICT-competence in Teacher education, Kallos states:

“It is noteworthy that these demands were introduced as general requirements for degrees in teacher education programmes. Teacher education programmes thus had to be adjusted to these new demands and the universities and university colleges responsible for teacher
education had to introduce strategies to increase the ICT-competencies within teacher education itself. Teacher education accordingly may at least partly be regarded as a forerunner in matters pertaining to ICT in Swedish higher education” (Kallos, 1999, p. 167).

In 2011 the latest reform of teacher education took place. In the outlines for the reform it was stated that four perspectives should be an integral part of all teacher education: a scientific and critical approach, a historical and an international perspective and ICT as an educational resource (SOU 2008:109 p. 191). In the ordinances, identifying the qualifications that must be completed and what requirements students must fulfill for each exam, it is stated that the students should:

“… demonstrate the ability to safely and critically use digital tool in the educational activities and to consider importance of different media and digital environments role thereof” (Högskoleförordningen, bilaga 2).

2.2 Teacher education programs at Uppsala University

At Uppsala University teacher programmes are among the largest programmes, counting number of attending student. Especially the Preschool teacher program is popular among the students and it is number ten in the list of programmes attracting largest number of student applications. Three teacher degrees are available at Uppsala university: degree in preschool education, in primary school education directed towards preschool class to grade 3 and primary school education directed to grade 4 to 6, and finally, in subject education, directed at work in years 7–9 of compulsory school (lower secondary school) and in subject education directed at work in upper secondary school. Teacher education requires between three and five years of studies depending on the educational field. The studies are divided into University located studies and School Located Studies. During school located studies, in total 60 Credits, the students spend a period of time in his/her future professional environment i.e. in preschool or school. The university located studies include a core of educational science, in total 60 Credits, and subject knowledge depending on degree. At Uppsala University teacher education is regarded a responsibility for the whole university and subject teacher students study subject knowledge at different departments. Courses in educational science are studied at Department of Education.

Over many years elective courses in ICT and learning have been available within teacher education at Uppsala University, where a small number of teacher students have acquired the relevant competencies to integrate ICT in their teaching. Most students, however, have only participated in occasional and optional lessons in ICT, resulting in that they do not acquire the necessary skills. The few initiatives to reach out to all teacher students in the past have often ended up with individual and isolated elements, which have failed in relating to the courses the students study.

3. The project

The fourth key competence is a project of collaboration between Uppsala University and the municipality of Uppsala. One aim of the project is to improve the skills in ICT among school teachers and to inspire them to use computers as pedagogical tools in the classroom. The second aim is to improve ICT skills among teacher students in different teacher education programs with respect to computers as pedagogical tools.

It is important to regard ICT skills not as a separate part of a course, but integrated in the courses. The project aimed at making teacher students comfortable in using digital media, web resources and modes of communication usually used by children and youth, and to familiarise the students about technical devises used in schools, such as interactive boards and software.
The project coordinators worked with teachers and teacher students with the aim to improve examinations and assignments through the use of computers. The project coordinators also developed and implemented technical solutions to illuminate the progression of students and to improve the sharing of experiences. In addition to this the coordinators developed a web resource to support the work of students and teachers. The idea of this web resource is that students and teachers will be inspired by good examples of how other educators have chosen to integrate ICT in their teaching, but it will also serve as support to cope with the digital forms of examination, which the student will face during their education. There is also a page with training manuals and resource films for in-depth learning program.

In 2012 approximately 300 teacher students have been involved in courses using ICT skills for presenting examinations and assignments. All these students and their teachers is part of the evaluation process starting in November 2012.

Below (Fig. 3) is an overview of the first three semesters, of 8 in total, of primary teacher training where the symbol indicates ICT element. Further down is a description of one of these courses.
Fig. 3.

An example of a course in which ICT is now included in the curriculum is "Swedish 2 for Teacher Training Programme, Preschool and Grade 1-3". The purpose of this course is to give theoretical and practical knowledge of the students’ speech, reading and writing development and their encounter with fiction and non-fiction.

The ICT element in the course concerns meaning making and language learning in different practices, focusing on aesthetic expression, multimodal texts and ICT. The teacher students are expected to use ICT to support learning within different teaching methods. They develop, plan and implement teaching with digital learning environments and digital tools for teaching the school subject Swedish. Students plan, build and publish their lesson structure on the digital display surface and then use the material in practice during the school located studies. The idea is that also performance and productions by the pupils in school can be made visible on the student’s digital display surface. Using the digital display surface means that teachers as well as other teacher students have the opportunity to observe and provide feedback during the on-going process. The feedback can be formalised by including acting as opponent as part of the examination task.

The project has also included collaboration with other departments at Uppsala University to ensure students progression throughout the program. Further, Department of Education also provide in service education for different target groups such as principals, teachers etc. in the municipalities, we have cooperation with, to strengthen the digital skills of teachers in schools. At the same time the municipality of Uppsala have arranged four courses for teachers since August 2010, each course lasted one year and was equivalent to 15 days of full time work. Five days was scheduled with lectures, seminars and workshops. The courses dealt with issues as: password management, basic and advanced ICT skills, school equipment, laws and regulations, source criticism and network knowledge. There has also been a course regarding Digital Competence for principals.

4. Baseline report

The fourth key project is in progression and in the current situation we do not have complete data on the project, as teacher students involved in the project still study and have not completed the ICT elements planned. It is not until 2015 that we will be able to complete the entire project-evaluation, as the first cohort of students have graduated. Interim results are
based on evaluations of parts of the project, and the trends we see in number of applicants and completed examination tasks so far.

The process of evaluating the project includes interviews with teachers and students as well as the department’s course evaluation tool used in all courses. The evaluation focuses on two areas. The first is the extent to which students’ academic performance is equivalent to the expected outcomes of the policy documents and curriculum. The second is to evaluate the changes in working practices brought by each student creating their own digital display surfaces.

All teacher students entering in the primary or pre-school teacher-training program creates their own digital display surface where the student's progression is made visible. Many students take the opportunity not only to present the required information, but also continuously reflect on their future professional role in encounter with other student experience.

We have also seen an increase in students who have chosen to report data using digital tools, such as web pages, digital presentations or movies. This has partly been made possible by the teachers opening up for alternative ways to submit assignments, but also because of the digital resource that we have developed within the project to support students different productions.

We also noticed that the number of applications to the optional courses in ICT and learning increased, as many teacher students choose to supplement their training with these optional courses in order to deepen their digital skills. Many of those who apply for these courses are teacher students who have had elements of ICT in their teacher training. This can perhaps be explained by the awareness has increased around ICT – issues, but also to the students awareness of the importance of making themselves attractive for employment.

The courses in which ICT-elements have had the most positive impact are where the teacher educators had a clear pedagogical idea and purpose of integrating digital tools. Several teacher educators also report that the digital tools strengthened their course outlines, assignments and examination. Many testify that the commitment of students has increased.

Some criticism has concerned the visibility of teacher students' progression and the risk of plagiarism. Teacher educators report that they sometimes found it difficult to understand how the digital tools work and therefore had a hard time answering the students' questions or tutor them. They call for more support and professional development for themselves.

5. Looking ahead

We have already been able to see several positive results when it comes to increasing students' digital skills. It has to start with getting students comfortable using digital tools and to enable students take control over their own learning process.

The digital presentation surfaces used in several courses have contributed to an increased interaction between students or between students and teachers. Teachers at the University have been able to monitor students while they are on their school located studies. It has also given students the opportunity to practice on creating activities that exposes learning and giving feedback to fellow teacher students.

Teacher students’ process-writing through out their education has brought the teacher programs' activities to light and this, in turn, have aroused interest from several other departments to teach with similar methods.
Some of the teachers who participated in the project report that they need more support in their process of change. Here, we need to increase our understanding of how to work with ICT. We need to create a forum in which university teachers can share their experiences, get support and guidance as well as develop their own expertise in and understanding of digital tools.

Efforts to develop methods and design assignments that enable teacher students' ICT knowledge and skills are made visible and the development of the process in which students become the owner of their own learning process will take time. It's not so much about technology, but more about an attitude and approach to knowledge.

The process of change initiated with the project The fourth key, is a necessity to ensure the assignments of teacher education programs, but will take time. When in due time ICT will be included in more programs it will concern more teachers and teacher students, and demand expanded collaboration with other departments, this is something that needs to taken into consideration.

References


Do students study and learn differently using e-Readers? A cross-discipline research investigation into the pedagogical implications of using e-Readers to study university level texts.

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ABSTRACT: We present preliminary results from a pilot study which is investigating the use of e-Readers for learning by two groups of Level 1 undergraduate part-time distance students and their tutors in the UK Open University. The Kindle e-Reader was used in the study as the most accessible and common e-Reader in use in the UK. A mixed methods approach to the research includes diary studies, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and surveys. Grounded theory is used for data analysis. Key themes emerging include a distinction between 'concentrated reading' and 'active learning', and changing study habits in students, aided by the portability of the device.

Introduction

In the past few years there has been a huge growth in the use of e-Readers in the UK population. The market leader, Amazon's Kindle, has vastly increased its sales worldwide (Lunden 2012b; Ramaiah, 2012) with growth of Kindle sales in the UK mirroring growth of Kindle sales elsewhere in the world (Lunden, 2012a; Anscome, 2012). Simultaneously there has been a growing interest in mobile learning in the Higher Education (HE) sector, as evidenced by many conferences and special issues of journals on this topic (eg Open Learning: Journal of Open, Distance an e-Learning 2010, Vol 25 Issue 3; the annual IADIS Mobile Learning conference), and there is evidence that most students use technology of some sort or another for studying and preparation (Massis, 2010). Understanding how students learn using e-Readers is a relatively neglected part of this surge of interest in mobile learning, although it is likely that increasing numbers of students from HE institutions will make use of e-Readers in the future as e-learning programmes increase (PR Newswire, 2012). Although there is evidence in the literature that HE students in campus universities have been slow in the past to start using e-Readers, being discouraged by previous relatively high costs (Foasberg, 2011), a recent survey within our own institution, the UK Open University (OU), found that 50% of postgraduates own or have access to an e-Reader or tablet, and 60% of those students use the device at least once a week for studying (Sharples & Cross, 2012). Patterns of use are likely to be similar in our undergraduate population and in other distance institutions. In this context it is important to know whether e-Readers can be used successfully for studying in higher education.

e-Reader useability research

e-Readers make use of e-ink technology which allows the reading experience in many respects to be similar to reading a printed book. The text can be read in reflected light from virtually any angle; the display is stable and in high contrast (Godwin-Jones, 2007). It has also been found that the eye behaves similarly when reading e-ink and paper print (Siegenthaler et al, 2011; Kretzschmar, 2013). In fact, in some respects an e-Reader can be more legible than a book, as the reader has the ability to increase font size to suit (Siegenthaler et al, 2011).

In the existing studies of how students in the HE sector use hand-held e-Readers, several studies concentrate on the advantages and disadvantages of the functionality (Broadhurst & Watson, 2012; Richardson & Mahmood, 2012; Angeletaki, 2011); other research focuses on
producing information on how to improve the devices from a design point of view (Gibson & Gibb, 2011; Lai and Chang, 2011); and a number of studies look at the use of e-Readers from a library services point of view (eg Mallett, 2010; Aaltonen, 2011; Kemp et al, 2012). Very few studies concentrate on how student learning is affected by the use of an e-Reader.

Reading practices

There is presently some controversy about the effect of modern technology on the brain’s capacity for absorbing practices, such as deep concentration on a text, sometimes called deep reading (Carr, 2010; Bilton, 2010). Recent research by Kretzschmar (2013), using comprehension probes and eye-tracking technology, concluded that there is no objective evidence of decreased comprehension when using an e-Reader compared to a traditional text (for a variety of different types of text including scientific and non-scientific texts), despite participant perceptions that electronic text was less easy to read. These authors suggest that the common perception that e-Readers are less easy to use is a cultural rather than a cognitive phenomenon. Indeed Keller et al (2012) suggested that this perception may be caused by a deep emotional connection with the printed book, particularly for those who have been avid readers in childhood.

Supporting the conclusion that comprehension is not diminished when using an e-Reader, Behler (2009) found that students felt more immersed in the text of an e-Reader compared to reading paper – although the author surmises that this may have been caused by navigation issues, which meant that students needed to concentrate and read the text more thoroughly on a first reading. In contrast to these studies, Thayer et al’s (2011) research focussed on university level study using the now defunct Kindle DX e-Reader. This longitudinal study of student study habits uncovered issues such as an inability to create cognitive maps (Li et al 2013; Rose, 2011) of e-Reader texts because of a lack of spatial and kinaesthetic clues (eg page numbers, headers, physical weight of the text and other features). Thayer et al suggested that this caused students to take longer to locate material, and reduced their mental energy for other tasks, so that students were less productive when using their e-Readers compared to using printed texts.

As educators, we are particularly interested in encouraging deep reading, where students are concentrating hard, learning, and developing new knowledge by engaging with a text. In the literature this is usually thought to be the same as ‘active’ or ‘responsive’ reading (Qayyum, 2007; Thayer et al, 2011), although it could be that deep concentration on a text to follow a long a difficult argument may not actually need the markers of active reading, and should be considered as a separate practice.

Research questions

This paper presents early results from a pilot research project in the UK Open University which looks at the experience of 20 students and their four tutors who are using e-Readers for studying. Our basic research questions are fourfold: How do students read and learn using an e-Reader? Is it possible to use e-Readers for deep reading and active learning? Do e-Readers affect students' study patterns? Are e-Readers useful devices for tutors supporting learning? The basic Kindle e-Reader was chosen for this study as it is presently the most prolific e-Reader in the UK population, and because of its cost, reputation and ease of use, the one that OU students may be most likely to buy. This research is new in several respects: at the moment little is known about how students study and learn using e-Readers; our study is cross-disciplinary, looking at how both Science and Social Science students study; we look in particular at how e-Readers can be used to support deep reading and active learning; we consider how e-Readers could help or hinder HE distance students with a wide range of ages, rather than school-leaver campus students, who have been the focus of most studies; we also look at how tutors might use e-Readers to support students.
Educational setting

The OU provides distance education for over 250,000 students worldwide, most of them from the UK and studying on a part-time basis. Student ages range from school leavers to retired, with a median age of new undergraduate students of 32. These students have busy active lives outside of their studying with most having jobs or other occupations. Scottish OU students come from all geographic areas in Scotland, with around 60% based in urban conglomerations, 25% in rural and remote areas, and the rest living in small towns. Around 7% of OU in Scotland students are disabled, and around 45% of undergraduates receive assistance with fees.

The OU operates a model of ‘supported open learning’. Students receive module materials, traditionally textbooks, other multimedia content like DVDs, and online material, and are given a study timetable to work through this material. Active learning is strongly encouraged, with in-text and end-of-chapter questions, multimedia and online activities. Each student is allocated a tutor who works from home and may be geographically local to the student, although increasingly may not be, as more and more modules move to online presentation only. A single tutor has a group of 15 to 25 students and supports students through group tuition (online and/or face to face), individual tuition by phone and/or email, and correspondence tuition on student assignments, which are usually completed and marked electronically.

Within the OU there is presently an institutional drive to providing material electronically, in e-text book format, for use on mobile devices, and there may come a point in the future where traditional textbooks are no longer used in some faculties. In this context, it is important to examine the implications for student studying, to evaluate if there are significant differences in learning using e-Reader texts and traditional printed texts.

The two modules which are the focus of this research project are the Science module ‘Introducing Health Sciences: A Case Study Approach’, and the Social Science module ‘You and Your Money: Personal Finance in Context’. Each is a first year undergraduate module worth 30 points in the UK’s Credit and Accumulation Transfer Scheme (CATS). The modules run for nine months and require around eight to nine hours of study per week. These two very different academic subject disciplines were chosen in order that any discipline differences in the way that students engaged with academic texts on an e-Reader might become apparent.

Before it commenced, the research was approved by the OU’s Student Research and Project Panel. This panel reviews research methodology and makes sure that ethical guidelines are followed.

Methodology

We use a mixed methods approach to address the research questions. This involves several different data collection methods, most of them qualitative. A diary study for students and tutors over a period of about 3-4 months (late February to early June 2013) allows an ethnographic approach: students and tutors use these to describe their daily and weekly use of the Kindle in their own settings. In addition we plan to employ semi-structured interviews for students and a focus group for tutors at the end of the diary study period, which will allow deeper exploration of the research questions in the context of the completed diaries. A group interview part way through the research was undertaken with the two Science tutors, and we conducted two early student surveys to determine (1) why the students wished to be involved in this research and (2) student prior use of e-Readers as well as student perceptions of their competence in use of computer technology. Data collection for this research is still ongoing, but we present preliminary analysis and discussion below.
Student participants

22 out of the 52 students from the two modules who were invited agreed to take part in the project. Two of these subsequently withdrew for reasons unconnected with the research study. Of the 20 students presently participating, 15 are Science students and five are Social Science students. 70% are female. Ages range from 17 to 72, with a median age of 37. Only seven of the students live in urban areas, with the other 13 living in rural areas and small towns, including seven that are remote. 13 out of the 20 students are receiving financial support for their studies, and three of the students count themselves as disabled. Most of the students consider themselves to be competent users of computer technology and regularly read for both work and leisure using screens and printed text, although most had not used an e-Reader prior to this study.

Findings

Module texts were obtained in Kindle format (mobi) from the Learning and Teaching Solutions unit within the OU, as part of a wider project (OU Anywhere) to produce module texts in mobile formats. The project team preloaded these texts onto student Kindles before distribution by post. Some documentation on using the Kindle for study was produced and sent to students via their tutors.

Usage

16 students and all four tutors returned study diaries covering the period late February to late March 2013. Each diary is split into a series of practical and reflective logs. The practical log includes details such as date used, length of usage, location, type of reading and whether and how notes or highlights are made. Reflective logs focus on how the Kindle affects study patterns and includes reflections on the use of a Kindle for concentrating, learning and remembering.

116 student and 26 tutor practical logs were collected. These showed that for students, concentrated reading over a period of about one hour was the most common type of usage. The students used the Kindle both at home (67 logs) and away from home (53 logs). Table 1 indicates the type of reading and the markers of active learning use indicated in the student logs. The tutors used a mixture of skim reading, when answering student queries, and concentrated reading, when preparing to mark an assignment. Tutors mainly used the Kindle at home, in their normal working environment, but one tutor also used it whilst travelling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Reading</th>
<th>Took notes (in any format)</th>
<th>Took notes (using Kindle)</th>
<th>Highlighted (using Kindle)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concentrated (77 logs)</td>
<td>50 (64.93%)</td>
<td>5 (6.49%)</td>
<td>12 (15.58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skim (27 logs)</td>
<td>6 (22.22%)</td>
<td>2 (7.40%)</td>
<td>6 (22.22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both (10 logs)</td>
<td>8 (80%)</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>4 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t indicate (2 logs)</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Type of reading and markers of active learning in the student logs.

Student and tutor perceptions

Student and tutor reflective logs, and the tutor group interview transcript, were analysed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In effect this method allows themes, issues and important topics to emerge from the data through iterative reading of the
texts; these topics then form the basis for subsequent analysis. Several interesting themes emerged and we discuss these in detail below.

**Deep/active reading and learning**

An apparent contradiction arose in the student logs, where some students reported that they found it simple to concentrate using the e-Reader. However the same students (and others) reported that when it came to studying for an assignment, a process we came to describe as active learning, they tended not to use the e-Reader. In fact when answering a question about the learning tools used while writing an assignment, the students were eloquent on the problems associated with using an e-Reader.

Comments relating to ability to concentrate whilst reading with the Kindle included:

- I have found it quite easy to concentrate and learn from the Kindle just as much as from the printed text. (S3)

- I tend to lose concentration and start reading random pages of a text book, with the kindle I am much more disciplined and know to stop when my concentration is waning. (S14)

- I am finding it easier to concentrate and take in the information using the kindle... (D4)

While students seemed to be able to concentrate whilst reading with a Kindle, they had more difficulty using the device for concentrated, or active, learning. Typical comments include:

- The kindle is easy enough to learn from. However, I prefer using printed text for concentrated learning. (S7)

- I'm enjoying reading from it, - it gives you the impression you are covering material quite quickly. I'm still not sure about the learning and remembering, - again it's all too 'samey'. (S1)

- It is more difficult to concentrate on the text on a Kindle, I am more accustomed to using printed text and therefore I associate it with studying whereas a Kindle feels more like a leisure activity. (D3)

- It is not hard to concentrate on the Kindle. Indeed, one gets the impression of reading faster, - perhaps because the pages are smaller. I think… it is harder to learn and remember than from printed text, because each page is less distinctive, - they all look similar. (S1)

These extracts offer one possible explanation for the apparent contradiction around 'concentration': it might be the case that in terms of simply reading, the Kindle is similar to printed text, allowing text to be read in a concentrated fashion. However, the more active reading associated with the learning process, which Thayer et al (2011) described as 'responsive' reading, is more difficult on an e-Reader.

Thinking through how students study for an assignment offers a useful way into considering active learning, as typically students will be engaging with certain elements of the learning materials in a concentrated fashion:

The difficulty of navigating between sections on the e-Reader was highlighted by a number of students, who valued the capability of skimming associated with printed textbooks, particularly when preparing a Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA). Typical comments include:

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12 Note that 'S' refers to individual Science students and 'D' refers to individual Social Science students.
When I read the student notes relating to part A of the TMA, I considered whether to use the Kindle or Text Books to refer back – well I considered it for about one second. The Kindle seems much too cumbersome/clunky to use to refer back to specific parts of the chapters – it seems to me that it would never be a substitute for flicking back through a text book. (D1)

I have not used the kindle this week as I have been attempting to do my TMA and find it better to sit with the course book and handwritten notes whilst working on it. The small screen was a disadvantage this week as I could not skim read over the page to find the information I was looking for. (D2)

I suppose the ultimate test would be to use nothing else but the Kindle up to the point of an exam, and I’m not sure I would feel confident enough that its sole use would not jeopardise my results! (D6)

It would appear that the active reading associated with studying for an assignment requires an overview of the subject matter and the capacity to quickly skim between sections, a process related to the 'cognitive mapping' discussed in the Introduction (Rose, 2011).

Although tutors were not using the texts for concentrated learning, two of them also expressed difficulties with cognitive mapping using the Kindle, and reverted to using their printed texts:

I did revert to my trusted course text book on a few occasions, because I had bookmarked certain sections with coloured sticky tabs, which made them easy to locate quickly! (Social Science tutor)

If I need to know something now, if I've got a student email or a student on the end of the phone and I want to find out, I reach for the textbook, I don’t reach for the Kindle. Because I know I can find it in the textbook, and then I’ll be able to flick through and find page whatever, diagram whatever, and talk it through with the student. (Science tutor)

One tutor however had little difficulty with this, suggesting that familiarity with using the Kindle can compensate for some of the problems associated with cognitive mapping, if the text is also familiar:

You know I’ve got quite an awareness of where certain subject material is, I’ve got a good idea of where they are and it’s just using it to double-check really…. I’m used to using it... I don’t find it time-consuming to scroll through. (Science tutor)

However, our findings so far, especially with regards to student learning, echo Thayer et al’s (2011) conclusions, that e-Readers can "strip away" the kinaesthetic and spatial clues which support easy location of content. On these particular criteria the Kindle has performed poorly so far in this study, and most students did not use the e-Reader for their early assignments.

Diagrams and tables

Working with tables, diagrams and photos was a particular challenge using the Kindle, for both students and tutors, with problems caused mainly by the small (6 inch) screen and the lack of colour:

…whereas normally if you had a table columns of numbers and you could easily come up and down and across and whatever, if you’re only limited to looking at a part of a table at a time, that restricts how much you could sort of analyse the data and work out what the data’s telling you so… I think that’s the limitation. (Science tutor)

This week whilst reading chapter 2, a table was actual split over two screens which made it difficult to read and as I have bad vision anyway, I did not feel that I could make the writing any smaller so that it would come on to one page. (D2)
...in the pages I was studying this week there were lots of pictures and diagrams, and I was frustrated that even with enlarging them I still could not see them adequately... I took out the text book to study these particular pages. (S3) Text is clear but, diagrams and photos don't come up on the black and white screen clearly enough. Scientific data is often in colour and using this type of kindle has not met my needs. (S7)

Interacting with the text
A theme that emerged from students was difficulty with the more practical elements of using the text as a tool for learning, for example, highlighting and note-taking. Students found it particularly difficult to take notes:

So far I have found [it] too time consuming to add notes and highlight text on the kindle. (D6)

Writing text notes is cumbersome and I have given up, preferring to make notes on paper before I forget what I am putting. (S3)

I don't like using the kindle for highlighting parts of text as I feel it is not as effective as the traditional coloured highlighter on paper. (S7)

I still studied the same way as I would with the printed book – by taking notes with pen and paper, although I didn't highlight any text on the Kindle. (S4)

In practice, students did not use the Kindle's note-taking facilities; instead they preferred to take handwritten notes, which they used to refer back to, particularly when studying for an assignment. This was contrasted to their use of the textbook as a practical learning tool:

I do miss the wide margins provided in OU printed text books for scribbling personal thoughts/comments about the text. These have an immediacy of impact through recall of writing them and hence aid revision/re-reading. Flicking back to a note on the Kindle doesn't seem to make such an impression. (S1)

I did notice that when I read the course text book, I tend to make notes as I go but when I use the kindle, I just read. (D2)

The implication is that students find the direct interaction with learning materials (which is so crucial to study) difficult with an e-Reader. Indeed, the implication of the second quote above is that using the Kindle is more passive: “I just read.” This contrasts with active note-taking on printed material, which one student described as ‘a means of taking ownership of the knowledge/learning’. The difficulties with annotating text do seem to suggest that this is a major weakness with using an e-Reader for educational purposes. In this respect our study agrees with findings from several previous studies (eg Angelataki, 2011; Thayer et al, 2011; Behler, 2009), although it should be noted that these previous studies focused on the use of PDF texts rather than the dedicated Kindle format used here.

Changing study habits

Size matters
The most significant advantage, reported by nearly all students and tutors, and in common with previous findings (eg Richardson and Mahmood, 2012; Angelataki, 2011), is the small size, weight and portability of the e-Reader. The Kindles were used to study where students may not have been able to study before: at the top of mountains, in doctors' waiting rooms, at sick children's bedsides, on ferries, on buses, at bus stops and in bed. Responses on this topic include:

[The e-Reader is] Obviously much more convenient – wouldn't have lugged the great tome up the hill in my rucksack. Sometimes my learning has a sense of place about it – so I will recall facts/principles from where I physically was in the landscape as in 'oh yes,
on that glorious day up Blencathra I learned about the Financial Planning Model then thought about the activities as I walked up.’ (D1)

It seems very light and portable, does not need an internet connection, and is as easily held as a book would be. (D5)

My most challenging week yet – I was supposed to have Friday & Saturday to myself to catch up with my study. Both my children decided to get the flu within days of each other, so I had to fit in the studying with looking after sick children. I don’t think this would have mattered whether I was studying from paper or kindle. The up side was that I could sit beside my ill boys while reading, instead of being at a desk. Note taking was slightly more difficult. (S6)

I have found it absolutely invaluable because through my work I travel a lot and it means that I don’t have to be worried about taking all the textbooks with me. (Science tutor)

So rather than having a big book, you know, I’ve got a very small computer desk, I’ve just got a small Kindle. And I’ve got it on the book that we’re looking at. (Science tutor, talking about using the Kindle when running an online tutorial)

Students also described themselves as 'snatching' study time, where they studied for a few minutes with the Kindle whilst out, something not possible with a large textbook:

It is perfect for taking in your handbag and snatching a few minutes here and there. (S6)

I can study more because of the kindle. You are able to snatch extra time i.e. when commuting, out for a walk at lunch and because it fits in your handbag, you can always carry it about just in case. (D2)

Of course an interesting point for learning is whether this study is additional to or a substitute for other academic work. At least one student commented that because they felt they had 'done' their study on the Kindle, they tended to do less concentrated learning elsewhere in the week. For example one student reported that because they had read their textbook on the Kindle on the morning commute they didn't 'tend to study at home because I think that I can do it on the Kindle’. (D3)

'Surreptitious' study
Another interesting feature of the Kindle’s size is the capacity to do what we describe as surreptitious study. This is study which takes place when others are present, but do not know what the student is reading. Most commonly this was reported as taking place at work, but also in the home environment:

It is small enough to be discreetly used (I can read it in waiting rooms/in a quiet part of office). (D2)

I would have been uncomfortable reading a text book at the hairdressers however the kindle is inconspicuous and nobody questions it. They simply assume you are enjoying a good book – which I am! … In fact this week it has been easier for me than a textbook, which would have made me feel conspicuous in a public place. (S3)

One tutor also appreciated this feature of the Kindle:

…nobody in public has any idea of the subject matter you are reading (unlike a book which has a cover and a title)...therefore you can concentrate safely in the knowledge that no-one beside or close to you is aware of the content. (Social science tutor)

Discussion
Emerging results from our study suggest that it is possible to use the Kindle to support deep reading, but not active learning. Our preliminary findings point to a distinction between concentrated or deep reading and concentrated or active learning, with the new knowledge created by concentrated reading needing consolidation by active learning techniques. One example of such activity is the process of creating cognitive maps, whereby a student engages with, comprehends and builds their learning through skimming and flicking between pages of a traditional textbook, using spatial and kinaesthetic clues to locate content. Another example of active learning is highlighting relevant parts of the text and inserting marginal notes. We found that these activities were not well supported by the Kindle e-Reader. Both of these processes are particularly used during assignments; and it is during preparation of such assignments students tended not to use the e-Reader. Balanced against this is the important advantage of portability and anonymity of reading associated with the e-Reader, which meant study materials were accessed and read more frequently and in more numerous locations than traditional module material. This could be particularly important for part-time distance students who often find it difficult to fit study time into busy, active and mobile lives. We must be careful to encourage students to use these new ways of studying as additional to the active learning that takes place in a more fixed setting.

Interestingly, so far we have not seen any difference in the ways that students from the two different subject disciplines, Science and Social Science, approach their learning using the e-Reader. Both sets of students could read deeply but had problems with active learning; both sets of students found the portability and anonymity to be the key strengths; and both sets of students found similar weaknesses in reading with the Kindle, including problems learning from tables and diagrams.

For tutors the main advantages so far seem to be in the portability of the device, which allows them to support students whilst travelling or at their places of work.

With data still being collected in this study, and analysis on-going, we should have further findings to communicate later. We plan to report further at a later date.

Acknowledgements

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Let Me Demonstrate: Towards a web-based application to encourage critical reflection amongst computing students

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ABSTRACT: The Higher Education Academy-funded Let Me Demonstrate (LMD) project involves the design and development of a student-driven, video-based, proof of concept application to encourage students to share the results of their learning with their peers in a safe and secure environment. The overall goal of the project is to investigate, from the perspective of students, the potential benefits and drawbacks of using video as a means of assisting students to communicate and critically reflect on their learning achievements, and to build an awareness of the importance of transferable skills as well as subject specific skills. The aim of this paper is to present some studies which led on to the design and development of the LMD prototype application. Longer term, given the knowledge sharing potential of the application, we intend to investigate the extent to which the application supports peer mentoring between students.

1 Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, Personal Development Planning (PDP), a process in which students are encouraged to monitor, record, build and reflect upon their personal development (QAA, 2009), has continued to establish itself within UK Higher Education. Indeed, evidence suggests that PDP should be embedded into the curriculum from an early stage so that its benefits can be recognized by students almost from day one (Miller et al, 2008). Consequently, many formal approaches to embedding PDP within the curriculum and within a wide range of disciplines, as well as the received benefits and drawbacks of these approaches, have been proposed within the literature, including web-based portfolios (e.g. Gush, 2006), the m-portfolio (Cotterill et al, 2006), as well as modules specifically geared towards PDP practice (e.g. Graham and Westwood, 2005).

Yet, in a recent study of PDP across three disciplines at Scottish HE institutions, Riley et al (2010) noted that critical reflection was more clearly evident within education and law courses, in which students were often required to provide evidence of their reflective process, than in computing courses, in which there were comparatively fewer requirements to incorporate critical reflection into modules. Instead, coursework assignments in computing have traditionally involved the submission of working code, and perhaps a brief explanatory report. As a result, it is entirely possible that some students will submit code which, while functioning, they may at best find difficult to explain to others (while also getting few opportunities to formally do so) or, at worst, simply do not understand, as the content may be the result of hacking together different code fragments until their program works, or through assistance from their peers. We find this particularly concerning, as many of our computing graduates enter the creative industries, in which a proliferating skill set that goes beyond mere technical competence is increasingly viewed as an essential requirement (Simpson et al, 2009), while others (e.g. Thomas, 2013) argue that continual technical innovations and structural changes within computing require constant (re)learning, and therefore promoting this mindset is vital.

As a result, we are continuing to identify and evaluate different approaches that can help students to evidence, document, and communicate the results of their learning over time. One approach we are beginning to take is the use of reflective videos, which we believe
represent an ideal medium for this purpose. Video offers the potential for encouraging students to demonstrate their knowledge and to help them to gain presentational skills, both of which are obviously extremely valuable graduate attributes, in a novel and engaging way. Of course, the use of video in academia is not new, as evidenced by educational channels on YouTube, iTunes U and so on, not to mention sites such as the Periodic Table of Videos (www.periodicvideos.com) which intend to introduce sciences to the masses. Yet, while anecdotal evidence gathered through informal feedback suggests that our students enjoy the process, the potential benefits of video in terms of critical reflection appear less clear cut.

The specific research questions that this project seeks to tackle are therefore as follows:

- To what extent does the medium of video help to develop an awareness amongst our students, from an early stage of their degrees, of the significance of transferable skills relating to employability (such as critical reflection and the ability to communicate complex concepts) in addition to technical skills (such as the ability to use a particular programming language)?
- To what extent do students themselves accept the medium of video as an approach to critical reflection?
- Longer term, to what extent can the critical reflection of one student benefit other students – does the application act as a bridge between PDP and peer mentoring?

We begin with a summary of the results from a short questionnaire, followed by a discussion of two projects involving the use of video within two separate first year modules, before documenting the student-centered design and development of the Let Me Demonstrate (LMD) application.

3 Studies

3.1 Study 1 – Questionnaire

Given continual advances in digital technologies, there are already many possibilities for students to engage with online tools such as blogs, video sharing websites such as YouTube and Vimeo, and even social networking sites such as Twitter to evidence, reflect and communicate their learning to others. However, while these resources may be public, such activities are generally undertaken informally outside of the teaching environment and in the student’s own time, and therefore may go unnoticed by teaching staff. Hence, during the early stages of this project, we produced an online survey to investigate the extent to which computing students across Scotland undertook such activities outside organized classes.

As space restrictions prevent us from presenting the full results of the survey, we concentrate on the results related to the research presented in this paper.

Data Collection and Methodology

The survey was developed using Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) (www.survey.bris.ac.uk), and contained 17 questions (most of which were based on a Likert scale, with some free textboxes provided to allow respondents to clarify their responses). The following themes relevant to the research described in this paper were covered by the questionnaire:

1) Respondents’ background information, including degree programme, age, and if they were registered as an international student.
2) The extent to which respondents contribute to external resources (both online and offline), and the reasons why they do so;
3) The extent to which respondents would be comfortable undertaking certain
extracurricular activities related to their learning, including: responding to a computing-related query on a public/private forum (i.e. open versus only used within their own department), writing a public/private blog article, producing a video for a public/private video-sharing application, producing a public/private podcast, contributing computing-related content to Wikipedia, lab tutoring, and contributing to an academic journal/conference paper.

To comply with our University’s ethical procedures, all questions were optional. A link to the survey was distributed through an internal mailing list to computing students, to contacts in computing departments across Scotland, through the Scottish Informatics and Computer Science Alliance (SICSA) Education mailing list, and finally through the HEA Computing Update newsletter in May 2012.

Results and Discussion

A total of 284 responses to the questionnaire were received. Of those who provided their gender, 78.2% of respondents were male and 21.8% were female. 77.8% of respondents were between 18-25 years of age. Almost all respondents (81.3%) were registered as undergraduate students, although there was a mix between years (24.1% in Year 1, 26.7% in Year 2, 23% in Year 3 and 25.7% in Year 4).

Many of the respondents reported contributing to several resources, both online and offline. 110 respondents reported that they contributed an answer to a query on a Q&A site, such as Stack Overflow or Yahoo! Answers, while 44 respondents ran their own computing-related blog. 40 respondents contributed content to Wikipedia, while 28 uploaded content to video-sharing websites such as YouTube and Vimeo. The top three reasons for undertaking such tasks were: 1) to improve future employability prospects (33.7% high, 26.8% very high), 2) to develop self-confidence in particular subjects (44.4% high, 14.6% very high), and 3) to be able to reflect on acquired knowledge (44.6% high and 13.5% very high). On the other hand, financial rewards (23.1% high and 11.2% very high) and undertaking a specific activity because a classmate or another contact does so (27.5% high and 4.3% very high) were the lowest rated reasons.

In terms of the extent to which students would be willing to undertake certain extracurricular learning activities, responding to queries on forums (43.2% comfortable and 35.3% very comfortable for public; 41% comfortable and 37.1% very comfortable for private), followed by producing a blog article (42.8% comfortable and 24.8% very comfortable for public; 41.5% comfortable and 25.6% very comfortable for private) were the most popular responses, while producing a computing-related podcast was the least popular, with just 24.9% comfortable / 9.4% very comfortable for private podcasts and 27% comfortable / 7.2% very comfortable for public podcasts. Many of the reasons given in the free text section for this question were quite telling, particularly in terms of the perceived fragility of knowledge – for example, “I’m not skilled enough to contribute”, “I am not confident enough in my own knowledge” and “I would not be comfortable in presenting myself as some sort of ‘expert’...however, I would be happy to share what I have learnt with others as an equal, not as a form of authority”. A much smaller number of participants noted the effort required to carry out such activities may prevent them from doing so, for example: “Many of the tasks would be quite time consuming, and that would be the constraining factor rather than the nature of production itself”. Interestingly, whether or not the resource being contributed to is private or public appears to have little effect, generating conflicting responses. For example, in terms of benefits of private resources, one respondent noted: “[I am] much more willing to contribute to closed group mediums because constructive criticism is good [but] anything more is not cool”. However, other respondents were more in favour of public resources, for example: “I respect people who make learning available for everyone. I don’t like keeping learning private”. A second respondent noted, “I don’t like to post on forums where access is closed to the
public. It tends to mean that it’s not one I’m using regularly and thus don’t understand the netiquette for the site. Eternal September is a real thing”.

While this was a small scale study, and therefore providing strong conclusions would be premature, a few tentative observations can be made at this stage. Firstly, those students who carry out some of the activities described above recognized that the transferable skills they gain from doing so may benefit them in terms of future employment prospects, rather than for any financial rewards. On the other hand, respondents felt that the public nature of resources which support such activities may expose a (perceived) lack of, or fragile, knowledge, which may prevent those students particularly from the early stage of their degree in engaging with such resources. In order to further investigate these issues in the wild, we carried out two studies into the use of student-produced videos as reflective practice.

3.2 Study 2 – Student Workshop

Following on from the survey, we decided to run a workshop session involving a cohort of undergraduate computing and product design students to investigate the extent to which students accepted the video medium as a form of critical reflection, and to consider whether any of the issues students reported as part of the survey could be lessened through video. The results are discussed in more detail elsewhere (Martin et al., 2013) so a summary will be presented in this section.

Data Collection and Methodology

40 students took part of the workshop, made up of students from level one Applied Computing, students from an HNC computing course, and level two Product Design students. The workshop was undertaken as part of a core Data Visualization module, approximately halfway through a fourteen-week semester.

The workshop was designed as a three-hour practical session. Students organized themselves into groups (there were 12 groups in total), and were asked to choose a group assignment they had recently worked on. They were then asked to spend approximately one hour producing a reflective video explaining the code, and how they approached its development, using either the CamStudio screen-capturing software (www.camstudio.org) available in the School labs, or the video capturing technologies available on their personal laptops or mobile devices. No specific time limits or production constraints were set; rather, students were encouraged to describe their work in whichever way they felt was the most appropriate within the available timescale. In the second half of the workshop, students were brought together to watch the resultant videos, and were encouraged to feed back what they felt were the benefits and drawbacks of the approach in terms of contributing to their learning.

Results and Discussion

All groups produced a video, the shortest of which was one minute 26 seconds, and the longest of which was eight minutes and 23 seconds. Presentational approaches varied – some groups filmed the action on their monitor using a smart phone, while others used screen capturing and video editing software. In terms of explaining the code, some groups undertook a “think-aloud” protocol to walk through their code, while others used text annotations to highlight specific aspects.

Feedback from the session was mixed. Many students suggested that revisiting and explaining their code through video, sometimes two to three weeks after it was originally
written, an extremely useful exercise in terms of positively impacting on their understanding. Students recognized the benefits of producing a video to improve communication skills, while also suggesting that undertaking the activity within their group added to the experience and contributed to team bonding. Finally, and particularly pertinent to our overall research, some proposed that their videos could be shared, thus recognizing that their learning achievements may help others. On the other hand, embarrassment associated with the video medium – for example, being “in front of the camera” and hearing one’s own voice – was seen as a significant drawback, as was a perception that the process supposedly exposes a (perceived) lack of, or fragile, knowledge. While we expected the videos to be rough and ready, many students expressed concern over the quality, either because they felt they were not given enough time, or due to particular technical issues such as the lack of appropriate microphones and difficulties extracting videos from mobile devices. Indeed, while it is possible to produce video content of acceptable quality using phone cameras and screen capturing software, the audio quality of such devices can be extremely variable. Additionally, despite the technical nature of the degree, several students had limited experience using video editing or screen capturing software, and therefore found the process quite difficult.

While the study was conducted within a short timeframe, the workshop enabled us to consider the potential role of student-produced videos as a means of critical reflection and in crystallizing knowledge for communicating to others. Such transferable skills are vital as graduate attributes, but it is important that students are provided with the opportunity to constantly improve those skills during the course of their degree. We believe that encouraging students to produce short reflective videos of their work at regular intervals is one such example. In the next section, we describe a semester long study, in which students were required to do just that as part of a specific module.

### 3.3 Study 3 – Embedding Video in a Module

A second evaluation was conducted as part of a Physical Computing module, a first year second semester module undertaken by students of Applied Computing, Computer Science, Product Design and Software Engineering students from a local college. In this module, students design and develop “off-desktop” interactive digital artifacts which do not fall into the traditional mouse, keyboard and monitor paradigm of computing. This makes it more difficult for students to share the product of their learning, unlike, for example, a web site or an application which can more easily be shared over the internet. As a result, we were keen to devise a method that allowed students to share the results of their projects through short video demonstrations and blog posts.

#### Data Collection and Methodology

Drawing on the overall philosophy of our research, we were keen to encourage students to share not just the results of their work, but also to critically reflect on their experiences producing their artifacts. We encouraged students to share content through “off the shelf” tools such as Wordpress and Vimeo. We held preliminary lab sessions on video creation, and highlighted the benefits of self-reflection and the potential cementation of knowledge through explication and externalization within those sessions.

Student groups were allocated in the first week of the semester. The first activity involved the production of “getting to know each other” videos, in which groups were asked to produce a 90-second introductory video. Following on from this, students were encouraged to generate video and blog posts throughout the semester to share the results of what they had produced with others, and to reflect on what they had learnt. None of the activities were assessed, so there was no direct impact upon grades.
Results and Discussion

There were six opportunities for groups to produce a video throughout the semester. In total, 57 videos were produced out of a possible 96 (refer to lmd.computing.dundee.ac.uk/?page_id=171 for examples), which we believe is a reasonable response rate for a voluntary set of activities. However, there was an inevitable tailing off of video creation over the course of the semester. In the first few weeks, all groups produced videos, but this declined to around 20% of groups towards the end of the semester. However, there was an interesting “spike” during week 6 as part of the “pressure project” in which students were required to rapidly design and build a simple, playful, system using a randomly assigned sensor. At this stage, 75% of the groups produced a video, which may suggest that students are more motivated to put in this extra work when they have produced something they want to “show off” and have put a significant amount of effort into, rather than midway through a project.

In terms of feedback, many of the benefits highlighted in the previous workshop were further confirmed. Students commented that they shared their videos not only with their classmates, but with those outside the course such as family and friends. Students also identified the potential peer mentoring benefits by commenting on the ability to learn from what other groups were producing and what they could learn from them. Additionally, several students mentioned that the process had brought them closer together as a group, as the process of preparing and recording videos involved all group members. Finally, several students commented on the potential for using the videos as a reference and revision tool.

On the downside, technical constraints were once again highlighted. For example, several participants commented that uploading videos to Vimeo was extremely time consuming. Again, embarrassment associated with the video medium – for example, being in front of a camera or hearing one’s own voice – made for an uncomfortable process amongst some students; however, some groups compensated for this in imaginative ways by, for example, placing their project at the centre of the video (so that their faces were never on screen) or, in one case, through the use of sock puppets! Finally, some students struggled to see the point of the exercise, commenting that this is not an activity they would expect programmers to do. However, we would counter this by suggesting that, while they may not be tasked with producing videos in their future post-education careers, the experiences gained from critically reflecting and communicating the results of their work will lead them in good stead.

4 Towards the LMD Application

The main outcome of this project is the development of an internal student-driven video-based application, Let Me Demonstrate (LMD), which is hosted on a server within the School of Computing and subsequently enable students to share video demonstrations of their coursework, “how-to” guides, and advice for other students either currently studying within the School or who are thinking about doing so. We will also be making the source code available to other institutions to use within their own departments. In this section, we briefly describe the design and development of the application, and our future plans for implementing the system within the School and across the institution.

4.1 Design Methodology

We took a participatory design approach to the development of the LMD application.
Participatory design involves all stakeholders from the early stages of the design process (in this case, students) in order to make sure that the final product will meet their needs (Muller and Kuhn, 2003). We engaged a student advisory group made up of five students (two MSc students and three undergraduate students from years 1-4) who brought their experiences and suggestions to early requirements gathering and prototyping sessions, three of which took place in March 2012. In the sessions, students were asked to note down requirements for the system on sticky notes, which were then discussed as a group and pulled together into formal functional and non-functional requirements. Subsequently, a set of “mock-ups” for the system were produced. Example outcomes from the sessions are shown in Figure 2:

![Figure 2 - The left image shows some of the requirements generated by the student advisory group, while the right shows a "mockup" screenshot subsequently discussed](image)

4.2 Technical Design

A prototype of the system has been built using the open source Ruby on Rails web application framework ([www.rubyonrails.org](http://www.rubyonrails.org)) running a PostgreSQL database. This framework was chosen as it provides the ability to manage large amounts of data safely and securely out of the box with minimal extra configuration, and is both customizable and extremely well supported through packages known as [rubygems](http://rubygems.org) (third party add-ons developed by individuals which allow extra features to be added, such as user authentication, tagging facilities and so on). As a result, the framework offers many advantages over writing a bespoke framework from scratch, a process which would be significantly less cost and time effective. The system uses the ImageMagick ([www.imagemagick.org](http://www.imagemagick.org)) library for image compression, and the ffmpeg ([www.ffmpeg.org](http://www.ffmpeg.org)) library to deal with the uploading of and conversion of videos to the dedicated server. Additionally, given the School's background in accessible web design, the system has been designed with accessibility in mind – for example, Nomensa’s Accessible Media Player ([www.nomensa.com/services/accessibility-and-inclusive-design/accessible-media-player](http://www.nomensa.com/services/accessibility-and-inclusive-design/accessible-media-player)) was chosen to act as the video player, as the controls are keyboard accessible and therefore do not solely rely on the user being able to use a mouse, while the states and properties of videos (e.g. current position of the video) are conveyed to assistive technologies such as a screen reader for blind users. The application is also designed using a responsive layout, which means that the interface changes based on whether the user is interacting with the application through a laptop, a desktop or their smartphone (see Figure 3 for an example).
Currently, the prototype is installed on a dedicated server (Ubuntu 10.04 LTS) at the School of Computing, and can only be accessed from inside the School to reduce potential concerns over data protection and to ensure the student-produced content is safe and secure.

4.3 Functionality

The system allows a student to upload, tag, and comment on videos, similarly to public video-based sites such as YouTube and Vimeo. However, unlike the latter sites, students cannot add themselves to the system – only an administrator (e.g. a departmental IT manager or academic member of staff) is able to add a new user. This is to prevent non-students from adding content (whether videos or comments) to the system. Figure 4 shows an example video page:

4.4 Development Challenges

In developing the LMD application, the predominant challenges we encountered can be put down to time and technical constraints. In terms of time constraints, and while functionality which is often time consuming to achieve is already built into the Ruby on Rails framework, developing a project of this size requires a significant amount of effort and capacity, which was not always available. Therefore, some of the features students proposed, such as allowing students to tag each other’s videos, could not be implemented within the project’s
Technical challenges were predominately encountered when dealing with the uploading of video files. In keeping with the non-public nature of this project, content is hosted on a university server which, while a sensible concern in terms of data protection and security, added significant complexity (often already built in to existing video hosting services such as YouTube and Vimeo) to the website architecture. Although the application works reasonably well as a bespoke solution, the video functionality that we have implemented cannot compete with the usability and functionality of the more mature video hosting services. For example, the server often struggles to deal with unusual video formats, multiple uploads, and different aspect ratios, leading to “unfriendly” system error messages being presented back to the user. Additionally, we noted that, due to the third party tools we used, videos cannot be played in the Safari browser predominately used on Mac computers and the i-range of Apple products (iPhone, iPod and iPad), which is of course not ideal. Future versions will therefore concentrate primarily on the development of the unique pedagogical and commercial aspects of the site, while allowing established services to handle video uploading, conversion, and hosting. This would also reduce the load on the server hosting the LMD application, since the video would be embedded rather than hosted locally. As noted in the semester long study, many of our students were happy to post their work publically, so it can be argued that the privacy concerns we had for this project are potentially unnecessary. This is an area we plan to investigate further in the coming months.

5 Future Work

As yet, due to the technical difficulties described above, we have not yet carried out a complete evaluation of the LMD prototype with our students. However, we are keen to solve these issues, embed the system within a cohort of modules in the next academic year, and explore what happens when student-produced reflective videos are released “into the wild” through the application and how our student population engages with the tool. In particular, and given related feedback from our students, we are keen to investigate whether reflective videos offer peer mentoring effects, in which students in earlier years (who are almost immediately exposed to a plethora of new programming concepts, several of which can often be extremely difficult to grasp) could benefit from being exposed to the experiences of their peers who once shared the same difficulties and fears that they are currently experiencing. This may also benefit the video producers; knowing that others are benefiting from one’s own reflective practice may encourage the student to continue providing content and, ideally, add to their transferable skills as they do so. We are also keen to compare and contrast video against other methods of critical reflection, such as blogs, portfolios, or social networking tools, to gain an insight into which methods students feel are most beneficial as part of their learning. Finally, other Schools within our institution are keen to implement the LMD application on their servers, despite the technical constraints, due to data protection and ethical issues associated with videos hosted on public sites (for example, videos showing medical procedures).

6 References


Parallel Session 5.6: Internationalisation of the curriculum

What does it mean for us? Academics’ perceptions of internationalising the curriculum: The Global Perspectives Project at Glasgow Caledonian University

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ABSTRACT: Internationalisation has become another buzzword in higher education. Ambitious aims and strategies spring up everywhere but the question of how to design and deliver an internationalised curriculum remains largely unanswered. Glasgow Caledonian University launched a new three-year strategic change project called Global Perspectives which aims to explore what the term ‘internationalisation of the curriculum’ means to academic staff and students in different subject areas, how they perceive the benefits and challenges involved in embedding it and what support academics require to design and deliver it. The paper reports on the findings of the first research phase which focuses on the views of academic staff. They indicate that academics see no difficulty with embedding international aspects in their teaching but that their students can be reluctant to take up opportunities for study and work abroad. Other challenges include an over-reliance on few enthusiasts and insufficient guidance on the curriculum development process.

Introduction

Internationalisation has become one of the buzzwords in the debate about the aims of higher education over the past 20 years (Turner and Robson, 2007). New international strategies with very worthy ambitions and impressive recruitment targets spring up everywhere, a wide variety of extra-curricular activities and induction programmes for international students is on offer in all institutions and academics are being asked to embed ‘internationalisation’ in their teaching. The question of how that can be done remains largely unanswered though (Leask and Bridge, 2013). There is considerable evidence that the “gap between the announcement of loudly trumpeted schemes and actual change in education practice” (Reid et al, 2010, page 4) has not been closed yet. While academics understand the need for universities to increase their income through recruiting premium-fee paying students from countries outside the EU/EEA area, they struggle with the call for an ‘internationalised curriculum’. How can this “new frontier” (Ryan, 2012, page 3) be addressed in their own subject discipline, in the context of their own university and in their daily practice? There seems to be “no one correct” way of internationalising the curriculum (Ryan, 2012, page 6). The responses to the challenge ahead seem to vary from university to university and subject to subject.

This paper provides a first insight into Glasgow Caledonian University’s (GCU) approach. It aims to explore how senior academic staff in different subject areas experience the impact of the university’s new internationalisation strategy on learning and teaching, what an internationalised curriculum means to them and how they perceive the benefits and challenges of embedding it.

1 The debate about an internationalised curriculum

There is no shortage of definitions of ‘internationalisation’ or an ‘internationalised curriculum’. Neither the plethora of academic literature on the theme (Caruana and Spurling, 2007) nor
the abundance of university strategies has made the concepts any clearer though. It remains a “contested notion” which can be perceived as “elusive and unsatisfactory” by academic staff (Turner and Robson, 2007, page 4). Knight’s widely cited definition of internationalisation as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004, page 11) puts the focus on university systems and processes in the widest sense. It is less helpful in assisting academics in reviewing their curricula and, if required, make the necessary changes. Leask provides more clarity when she points out that an internationalised curriculum “will engage students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity. It will purposefully develop their international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals and citizens” (Leask, 2009, page 209).

Van der Wende (1996, page 187) suggests a variety of approaches in her widely cited ‘typology of international curricula’. They include curricula in which the traditional/ original subject area is broadened by an internationally comparative approach, programmes which prepare students for international professions and curricula that lead to joint degrees from different countries. While this typology reassures academic staff that there are many ways of internationalising a curriculum, it does not provide any guidance on how it can be achieved. Nevertheless they are charged with putting it into practice. Their role in the internationalisation process is “vital” (Dunne, 2011, page 615). Sanderson refers to them as “a catalyst in assisting their institutions and their students to realise their internationalisation goals” (Sanderson, 2011, page 662). As Dunne and others (Bell, 2004; Turner and Robson, 2007; Friesen, 2012) point out, their genuine commitment to curricular change is essential if the university’s strategic internationalisation ambitions are to be achieved. Friesen (2012, page 2) sees their role as “primary agents in the internationalization process” who can not only actively further the process but also inhibit it.

Do universities know where their own staff are on the “spectrum of acceptance of internationalising the curriculum”? (Bell, 2004, page 1) Do they view it with a degree of scepticism, embrace it wholeheartedly as a positive step in the right direction or reject it as a negative development? Leask and Bridge (2013, page 81) point out that studies of the internationalisation of the higher education curriculum are very rare. Institutions often rely on anecdotal evidence rather than actual data. This paper makes a contribution to filling that gap. It presents the results of a study at Glasgow Caledonian University which asked senior academics from different subject disciplines how they define their own place on their university’s journey towards internationalising the curriculum, where they see opportunities for change and how they perceive any barriers that might lie ahead in the process.

2 Background to the study: The GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES Project

The GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES Project at Glasgow Caledonian is a university-wide strategic change initiative which supports academic staff in embedding an internationalised curriculum as required by the university’s new Internationalisation Strategy. Led and managed by GCU LEAD (Centre for Learning Enhancement and Academic Practice) it works in partnership with the academic schools, the Students’ Association and relevant support departments. The term GLOBAL is used as shorthand for the process of developing an internationalised curriculum at GCU: Growing awareness of international issues; Learning from other cultures; Observing and reflecting on cultural differences; Being prepared to challenge oneself; Avoiding cultural stereotypes; Listening to culturally different points of view.

The three year project (2012-2015) consists of four phases. Phase 1 is a research phase which aims to establish how academic staff and their students assess the opportunities for and barriers to embedding an internationalised curriculum in their programmes. This paper presents some of the results of the research with the academics. The findings from the
research with students will be presented at a later stage. Phases 2 and 3 of the project will pilot innovative interventions, evaluate their effectiveness and develop support materials for staff. In phase 4 recommendations will be made for a programme of CPD activities to ensure that an internationalised curriculum can be rolled out in all of GCU’s core programmes by 2015.

The research reported on here adopted a mixed-method approach. An on-line survey was sent to all programme leaders (n=85) in the university’s three schools (Glasgow School for Business and Society, School of Health and Life Sciences, School of Engineering and Built Environment) which was followed by individual, semi-structured interviews with eight of the university’s nine Heads of Department and nine senior staff with special responsibility for internationalisation. Tables 1–3 present an overview of the responses to the survey and the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Table 1: Responses to on-line survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme leaders invited to participate</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses received</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow School of Business and Society</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Health and Life Sciences</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Engineering and the Built Environment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Numbers of interviewees by school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glasgow School of Business and Society</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School of Health and Life Sciences</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Engineering and the Built Environment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central International Office</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Roles of interviewees

| Assistant Dean International          | 1    |
| Head of Department                    | 8    |
| Senior Lecturer / International Lead  | 6    |
| Professor                             | 1    |
| Manager in International Office       | 1    |
| **Total:**                           | **17** |

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed inductively by clustering the responses around key themes from the question framework. The questions were designed to explore participants’ perceptions of the university’s new internationalisation strategy and their interpretation of the term ‘internationalisation of the curriculum’ (IoC). The on-line questionnaire asked programme leaders similar questions on the value of an internationalised curriculum in their subject. It also included questions on their perceptions of their students’ international awareness and on the need for CPD opportunities for themselves. The dataset from the survey was too small for statistical analysis.

3 Findings

The responses to the two research phases generated a large amount of data. Only a small percentage of it can be presented here. This paper focuses on some representative results from the individual interviews. Selected results from the survey will be added to provide a wider perspective.
3.1 Lost in translation? The difficulties of operationalising an institutional internationalisation strategy

Staff were asked to assess the value of GCU’s new Internationalisation Strategy which was published in the autumn of 2012. How does it impact upon their own work and how is it perceived by colleagues charged with its implementation? All interviewees felt that the new strategy was a positive development because it moved away from the previous strategy’s almost exclusive focus on international student recruitment. Its new emphasis on the importance of addressing internationalisation in the curriculum for all students from home and abroad was welcome. One respondent emphasised that she felt encouraged by the university’s refreshed strategic commitment to the importance of international student exchanges. In her view it would endorse the International Office’s efforts to increase GCU’s very low participation rate in international exchange activities like ERASMUS and strengthen her argument in discussions with colleagues who might be reluctant to promote it to their students.

“I think they have made a really serious commitment ...and for the first time I am getting a real feeling that they are able to understand that internationalisation isn’t just a one-way traffic, it can’t only be about international student recruitment.”

How successful the university’s efforts are in persuading academics that internationalisation is not just driven by recruitment, remains to be seen though. In the survey for programme leaders 89% felt that the university considers recruitment to be very important whereas only 33% thought that raising UK students’ international awareness was a top priority in GCU’s Internationalisation Strategy.

When it came to discussing the best way of implementing the strategy at operational level in the schools, there were more critical voices. Staff commented on the “missing link” between the university’s lofty ambitions and the daily learning and teaching activities on their programmes. They felt that the process of reaching colleagues at module level was not made sufficiently clear. More guidance on how an internationalised curriculum could be contextualised in their subject area would be welcome. In their view the process of translating a strategic vision into daily practice could lose momentum if there is insufficient additional funding to support its implementation or if other university strategies contradict it. One interviewee explained that he regularly “gets rapped over the knuckles” if he overspends his budget to pay for international study trips. Another one pointed out that the pressure on departments to produce high progression rates can lead to a situation where staff are reluctant to teach large numbers of international students who might find it harder to pass assessments and therefore ‘spoil’ the department’s progression statistics.

“All...there’s a large number of people who just see it (teaching international students) as more work ...you have people whose English is not great ... and then they fail. So why would you take people from a different culture when they’ve got a higher chance of failing? ...you know, turkeys don’t vote for Christmas.”

All interviewees commented on the conflicting messages staff receive from the university executive. Achieving ambitious international student recruitment targets and key performance indicators for progression can leave little time for redesigning the curriculum. “People need time to reflect and be creative (in embedding an internationalised curriculum). When you are being bombarded with 101 things, I mean where is the time?”

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13 In the 2011-12 academic session 81 GCU students participated in ERASMUS exchanges. 24 took part in non-EU exchanges which constitutes less than 1% of the total student population.
Some respondents were concerned that internationalisation of the curriculum might be yet another "fashion" which will fade and be replaced by a new initiative from the university executive very soon. All of them were committed to addressing internationalisation in learning and teaching and invest time in it but they also worried that they were under too much pressure to produce quick results for a ‘project’ that might not be at the top of the university’s agenda for very long.

“ There is a big spotlight on it for a period of time and then it sort of diminishes really. It moves on to something else and I think it’s about sustaining that kind of level of focus...”

3.2 Making connections: Is education without internationalisation possible?

When asked how they would internationalise the curriculum in their department and their subject areas all participants emphasized that their discipline cannot be taught or researched in isolation from developments and practices in the rest of the world. They felt that there is no longer a place for a local or national approach to solving the problems universities have been tasked to address. This applies to vocational and non-vocational disciplines. A comment like “How can you teach sociology without having an international outlook?” is representative of the views expressed in all interviews. Staff are aware that they need to prepare their students for the demands of a globalised world through integrating international perspectives in their teaching and research. It was perceived as intrinsic to their professional practice and inseparable from good quality education. There was a feeling though that they do not need to be instructed by university management. One respondent pointed to academics’ dislike of a diktat from above. “It becomes an instruction, it becomes an order.” He felt that an internationalisation strategy could be perceived as patronising by staff who “are pretty supportive of the internationalisation agenda” anyway.

While there was agreement that international perspectives need to be embedded in the subject specific teaching, views on the best way of doing it varied widely. All respondents chose a particular focus and rationale for addressing internationalisation in the curriculum. The most common one was student employability which is at heart of GCU’s mission. Participants from the technical and the science subjects put most emphasis on it. They were very aware of the need to prepare students for success in the competitive global employment market which requires international team-working skills and cross-cultural understanding. They were concerned though that GCU students were too often unaware of the competition from peers in other countries who speak more than one language and have experience of studying and working abroad. One of the Heads of Department in the School of Engineering and the Built Environment spoke about his students meeting their European counterparts on a study trip to France. For the first time they realised that their peers were more mobile and enterprising than them and that they might lose out on attractive job opportunities. He explained: “Now sooner or later you are going to be in competition with someone who says ‘Well, where can you work? I can work anywhere in the UK and in Europe’.”

All interviewees considered it irresponsible not to make their students aware of international variations in professional practice and provided many examples of how that can be done. They ranged from presenting European construction standards in civil engineering, “global tools and methodologies” in computer science and electronics to assessing different design specifications for power generators in different climates and understanding global health issues such as HIV or TB. One of the interviewees from the School of Health and Life Sciences recalled a class which required students to present the reasons for suicide among young people in different countries. An analysis of the official statistics from Scotland and Singapore revealed national differences which surprised and shocked the Scottish students.
“What was interesting was the reasons why people commit suicide...in Scotland and in Singapore. In Scotland it’s to do with ill health, drugs, alcohol abuse, those kinds of things. In Singapore it’s academic stress....there was a silence in the class.”

She explained that this was a special learning experience for her home students who, as a result of this class, were motivated to find out more about Singapore’s society, its values and education system.

Participants from the business and management subjects made a connection with other issues and agendas in their field such as the requirements for PRME (Principles of Responsible Management Education) accreditation which stipulates that university curricula include “critical issues related to global responsibility and sustainability”14. Examples of how that can be done included modules in Fashion Marketing which address problems with ethical supply chains and in Tourism Development where students are asked to compare different national marketing strategies to understand how Scotland can compete with the “other 130 odd countries in the world who want to be tourism meccas.”

Top performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) was cited as another driver for an internationalised curriculum. It was emphasized that good quality research is carried out on a global stage in a competitive global environment. Academics who collaborate with colleagues at international level, apply for research funding from international bodies and then present the results of their research to their students were considered the most qualified to deliver an internationalised curriculum. Research excellence would also enhance the university’s profile abroad and attract more international students as a result.

“The challenge is the REF, I think the challenge is where we end up in the REF. If we don’t have a reasonable profile it would be very difficult for us to crack these (international recruitment) markets in the way that we should.”

The results from the survey support the views expressed in the interviews. The majority of respondents (61%) agreed that their subject area is broadened by an internationally comparative approach.

3.3 The challenges of embedding an internationalised curriculum: breaking the mould

When asked to identify the barriers involved in internationalising the curriculum all but two of the interviewees referred to their students’ attitudes which they characterized as “parochial”. As experienced academics who have spent an average of almost 20 years teaching at GCU they had seen a large number of students whose career ambitions are centred exclusively on Glasgow and the surrounding areas. Finding a job in Glasgow was their first plan after graduation. Only if that was not possible would they consider options elsewhere. Participants from the School of Engineering and the Built Environment were particularly concerned that their students restrict their own choices and do not always give themselves the chance to fulfil their full potential because that might involve leaving Scotland. One Head of Department felt that he had to break what he considered to be the “Scottish mould”. “I feel that students are happy to take a lesser job, but it’s one that allows them to remain within this area.” One of his colleagues summed up the attitude he had come across in very many of his students “If I could live and die in the West of Scotland that’ll be fine.”

14 See the six principles of PRME http://www.unprme.org/the-6-principles/index.php
Results from the survey reveal that only 37% of staff felt that the majority of their home students are aware of international issues; 42% thought that only a minority of them are and 20% felt that they are not aware.

Another interviewee suggested that studying in England would have been a first step for students to widen their horizons in the past but the high tuition fees at English universities have made that almost impossible. He added that a certain reluctance to leave Scotland was particularly pervasive among undergraduate students who “have a long way to go” in embracing the international agenda. “For them “global citizenship would be an aspiration, I would say, because, to be frank, we have an agenda in Scotland that encourages students to stay at home.”

He was concerned that a side effect of the different funding models in Scotland and the rest of the UK is an ever increasing reluctance among Scottish students to seek opportunities elsewhere in Britain. While he welcomed the ambitions of an international education he also called for realism in assessing GCU students’ readiness.

“To talk about our students as global citizens is good ...but the reality is that we need to drive them into a recognition that it’s a big world and that coming from Glasgow, getting educated in Glasgow and working in Glasgow is unlikely to be your future scenario. That if you look ...wider than your Glasgow university, your opportunities will increase.”

The colleague from the university’s International Office was equally worried that students who live at home with their parents are too protected by them and therefore less prepared to fend for themselves when studying abroad. She felt that the double challenge of living in a foreign country and looking after yourself for the first time can frighten young undergraduates and stop them taking part in exchanges.

“They are not moving out of their comfort zone at all (because they live at home) and so it’s a big shock if you suddenly go to Finland and we get things like 'they don’t have curtains at the windows; what am I supposed to do now?”

She also recalled an incident when a father phoned her to complain that his daughter did not have a table in the kitchen of the student residence in Finland.

While there was consensus that the students need to widen their horizons, the interviewees did not put the ‘blame’ entirely on them. They were equally aware that academics themselves do not always practise what they preach and included themselves in their criticism. Most of them had spent almost their entire academic careers in Glasgow and at GCU in particular. They came across as enthusiastic and committed to internationalising the curriculum but also recognised that they themselves were not always the best role models for their students. When asked whether she had ever taken part in international staff exchanges or knew of colleagues who had, one respondent said that she knew of only one person in her department. She felt that it was more common in other universities. Another respondent explained that he had never left his home town just outside of Glasgow. One of his colleagues agreed. “I think it’s a Scottish thing... we need to break that mould and I think in some respects that’s beyond our ability.”

It is important to note though that such an attitude is not necessarily representative of all GCU staff. Of the 48 respondents to the on-line survey 54% reported that they had lived and/ or worked abroad. Of those 44% had spent less than a year abroad, 28% had been away for one to five years.
The attitudes of students and staff were cited most often as barriers to IoC but they were not the only ones. Some respondents from the Health School felt that their professional bodies would not be flexible enough to accredit modules that strayed too far away from the prescriptive core programme. Others from the same school did not agree though. They claimed that some colleagues might hide behind their professional bodies to avoid a debate about curricular change. The argument that the programme was "full" and did not allow room for international aspects was made on several occasions by staff in the health/ science subjects. It came up most often in the discussion about GCU students’ poor foreign language skills. When asked whether their students take up the opportunity to learn a language as part of their studies, interviewees explained that there was no provision for it in their curriculum. "I think the language thing is a big, big plus...it would be nice to have a gap in the taught programme where students could do some language skills...(but) there is no room."

Like most of his fellow interviewees he also referred to his own poor language skills. Responses to the on-line survey confirm that a substantial number of senior staff (42% of the sample) do not speak a language other than English.

3.4 The way forward: sharing responsibility

There was considerable agreement among the interviewees that GCU was at the beginning of its ‘internationalisation journey’. All of them reported to be encouraged by the new strategy but they also felt that the university relies almost exclusively on the efforts and the commitment of the enthusiasts and ‘champions’ who do not need to be persuaded of its importance. They often add many hours to their workload without any special recognition or reward while the majority of staff keep a sceptical distance or just pay lip service. One of the international leads pointed out that his role “still hasn’t had a tariff attached to it as to what remission you receive.” His teaching load had not been reduced to take account of his international responsibilities which include international recruitment and exchanges.

The interviewee from the International Office who is not an academic member of staff but deals with them on a regular basis was concerned about the uneven uptake of the internationalisation challenge. When asked whether academics play a central role she said “I think they do but I think it’s not really happening. It’s not happening in any consistent way across the university. So that’s a big problem.” She had even experienced a distinctly negative attitude from some academics who considered student exchanges “a big hassle”. Another respondent who is the international lead in his department reported that colleagues pass all international students on to him because “they think it’s too much trouble”. He felt though that most resistance came from those “who are close to retirement age, who are very, very set in their ways”.

There was a strong feeling that the responsibility for internationalising the curriculum needs to be shared more evenly among all academics. One respondent suggested a “carrot and stick approach”. The enthusiasts need to be rewarded but at the same time “there has to be some kind of structural mandate that makes them (engage) even if they don’t in their hearts of hearts believe in it...they have to do it ...because it is expected of them.” She suggested that such an expectation should be communicated to new lecturers as part of their induction to the university and the Postgraduate Certificate Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. There was also a view that the process of internationalisation needs to start with “internationalising the staff” who might not have the expertise or experience to shape a new international curriculum. One interviewee from the Health School reported that students in his department had complained about a “lack of knowledge of staff about employment opportunities abroad”. In their defence his colleagues “would argue that we’re training for
Scotland. We don’t train for export...why do we need to know about what the job situation is in Denmark?”

When asked what can be done in the short term to internationalise the curriculum there was consensus that the university cannot wait for everybody to be converted. Even small interventions and adjustments that do not require large amounts of funding can make a difference. Many suggestions were put forward. They ranged from using departmental funds to support short study trips abroad for students who are not yet ready to take part in a full ERASMUS exchange to adopting a more flexible approach to student assessment. One of the Heads of Department from the School of Engineering and Built Environment pointed out that their students can work on an accredited project in English during their semester in Europe instead of sitting the exams at the host university. Such flexibility alleviates students’ anxiety about the academic impact of their studies abroad and gives them the opportunity to experience life in a foreign country. It was felt that even a short time abroad can make a difference to students’ international awareness. “It can really open their minds ...and almost invariably they come back and they want to embark on a full exchange because they understand it”. A flexible approach to curriculum design was considered most important to improve student uptake of international opportunities. GCU’s new learning and teaching strategy (Strategy for Learning) and the current university-wide programme review promote such flexibility. They suggest a liberal arts approach to programme design which would allow students to choose generic international modules from outside their core programme.

Other suggestions included using donations from international alumni to fund placements and study trips abroad as well as harnessing the experience of returning exchange students who can act as student mentors and role models for their peers. Interviewees agreed that the university needs to take a long-term view to achieving its internationalisation targets. In their view showing flexibility and investing effort to overcome short-term problems will lead to long-term gains. One respondent cited the example of French undergraduate exchange students who returned to GCU as paying PhD students a few years later.

4. Conclusion
This study suggests that GCU academics can be placed in the middle of Bell’s “spectrum of acceptance of IoC” (Bell, 2004) where internationalisation is viewed as possible but not yet integral. All of the interviewees supported the idea of internationalising the curriculum but they also identified substantial challenges in the process of making it a reality. The results of the on-line survey show an almost even split between programme leaders who considered IoC “possible but not essential” (40%) and those who felt it is “essential and should be integrated” (51%). Only 9% thought “it is not required” because the curriculum is the same in any context. It is also interesting to note that openness to IoC did not vary across the subject disciplines. Clifford’s findings that academics in the sciences were more reluctant to make adjustments to their curriculum could not be confirmed here (Clifford, 2009). This might be explained by the fact that at GCU the ‘pure’ sciences are all integrated in applied, often vocational programmes. Nevertheless, the discipline played an important role in this study. All respondents placed it at the heart of the internationalisation process when they emphasised that their subject cannot be taught or researched in isolation from global developments. Leask and Bridge refer to the “enormous power” the paradigms of the discipline exert in the curriculum design process (Leask and Bridge, 2013, page 85). She points out that discipline teams need to find their own distinctive approach to and rationale for IoC in a process of review and reflection. Academics at GCU seem to have started that process. A set of resources designed by the Global Perspectives Project will support them in this. It is, however, only the first stage of the five stage process of IoC that Leask and Bridge suggest. The other four stages (imagine new ways of thinking; revise and plan; act; evaluate) will take a considerable amount of time and resources which need to be made available by the university if it is serious about its internationalisation aims. Leask and Bridge ask for “careful nurturing” required for the IoC process (Leask and Bridge, 2013, page 98).
Only if such a nurturing environment is in place can real progress towards achieving an internalised curriculum be made.

It must not be forgotten that the real proof of success lies with the students' experience of the curriculum. Whether their teachers' ambitions translate into real change on the ground needs to be seen. Gauging the students' views will be the next phase of the Global Perspectives Project.

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ABSTRACT: Given the large increase in international student numbers (UKCISA, 2012) it will prove beneficial to the international educator to identify any differences in cultural perceptions and expectations of newly registered international students and UK teaching and learning expectations. Knowledge of such differences could be used to inform teaching practice which promotes a smooth cultural transition. This project aimed to measure the 'typical' academic culture of a new cohort of international students compared to that of their UK teacher. Several cultural differences were identified according to Hofstede's cultural typologies (Hofstede, 1986). Students identified themselves as collectivists in a position of low power, whereas their teacher expressed individualist traits and valued a more equal distribution of power in the classroom. These findings can be used to understand how different cultural expectations between students and staff may become apparent in an international classroom.

1 Introduction

Culture can be defined as the collection of mutually agreed rules of behaviour or norms, and values which members of a culture hold in high esteem (for example, power). Hofstede (1986) and Hofstede and Bond (1988) describe culture as having five categories: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualismollectivism, masculinity/femininity and long term orientations. Power distance refers to the extent to which power is perceived to be distributed equally amongst social hierarchies. Uncertainty avoidance represents a group's acceptance of uncertainty or tolerance to change. The third category of individualism versus collectivism represents the degree to which individual society members are integrated into groups or whether more personal achievements are valued. The gender category is a measure of competitive values (masculinity) over quality of life (femininity). The long term orientation category describes the extent to which a society craves deferred or immediate gratification. These notions of culture can be applied to describe many social setting including the learning and teaching cultures and the collective 'academic culture' of a classroom or discipline (Manikutty, Anuradha and Hansen, 2007). Accordingly, socio and academic cultures can play an important role in teaching and learning, as well as day to day classroom interactions between teaching staff and students (Ryan, 2005).

Socio and academic cultural differences exist not only across international boundaries (Hofstede, 1986), but also across academic disciplines (Becher & Trowler, 2001). For example, Jin (1992: p393) suggests that the academic culture in the UK is characterised by 'critical evaluation, originality, academic freedom and independent thinking' which maps to low power distance and individualism in Hofstede's cultural dimensions. This is in stark contrast to Chinese academic culture which places great respect on academic authority which translates to a high power distance between students and teachers and a collectivist identity using the definitions of cultural dimensions discussed in Hofstede (1986). Furthermore, it could be argued that hard scientific academic cultures value different cognitive domains identified through Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) compared with other subject groups at specific stages in education (Draper, 2005). For example, the pure, hard sciences often focus on problem solving and application at very early stage in education. Accordingly, such potential differences in socio and academic cultures can offer additional challenges to the difficult transition period of any student to UK Higher Education, but
particularly for international students for whom the cultural changes may be particularly stark.

The point of transition from one culture to another is a time when cultural differences can play a significant part in the success of an international transition. This transition can lead to a 'culture shock' in any student who is moving between cultures which can impact on students' learning in many ways. For example, Ryan (2005) discusses 'academic shock' where international students have to quickly adapt their approach to learning as their previous approach may not entirely suit the expectations of teachers in the UK. Moreover, the approaches to teaching in the UK may be an entirely new and confusing experience for international students. Ryan (2005) also examines the differing levels of independence of learning between different academic cultures. Similarly, Wu and Hammond (2011) discuss the varying stages of cultural transition for East Asian students studying in the UK where initial language difficulties progress to academic and social 'cultural bumps' before a period of adjustment takes place. It is this period of adjustment (albeit by the students, the academic institution or their teachers) which is vital.

Given that the initial stages of education in a new cultural setting can play a significant role in the success of international student transition, and that any potential cultural differences between students, staff and the discipline at HE level can impact significantly on student outcomes, then it will prove beneficial for any educator of international students to become more aware of the differences in cultural perceptions and the expectation of their international students. Moreover, this paper argues that bridging the gap between students' and staffs' socio and academic cultural expectations should be done collaboratively by sharing academic cultural information, being explicit about expectations, encouraging mindfulness of such differences and raising awareness that certain 'cultural compromises' are necessary by all stakeholders. Ryan (2011) makes comment to a 'transcultural approach' where the cultural baggage and experiences of a diverse international group is utilised as an asset in an international classroom and it is this transcultural approach, combined with a desire to learn and promote mindfulness of cultural differences within any classroom, which may actually benefit all stakeholders in teaching and learning in HE.

2 The Study

This paper reports on a small scale evaluation which measured the expectations of a diverse group of international students on arrival to UK HE regarding their experiences and perceptions of approaches to learning and teaching, awareness of cultural differences with the new UK HE setting and their expectations regarding the relationship with their teacher (myself). This student data was then compared to my own expectations and perceptions of culture in the same regard and a comparison between my own and student data allowed a measurement of the extent to which my practice facilitates a smooth transition between cultures rather than a ‘culture shock’ for students. Furthermore, the study aims to reveal the extent to which an environment of collaborative bridging of academic cultural differences is required in an international classroom, rather than a one-way approach to bridging any perceived cultural gap between students attributes and staff expectations. It is hoped that this study will inform other Higher Education practitioners of potential cultural differences in an academic setting, highlight potential cultural compromises which can be made (and by whom) and promote a continual, culturally reflective approach to teaching and learning which is arguably the essence of a transcultural approach discussed at length in Ryan (2011).

All the students who participated in this study attend Glasgow International College, which is an international pathway college embedded within the University of Glasgow in partnership between the university and Kaplan International Colleges. The purpose of such an institution is to aid student transition into the ‘foreign’ UK higher educational environment by enhancing both academic and cultural preparation (in the sense of academic culture) and allowing for a
period of cultural adjustment. I am a teacher of physics, maths and statistics at Glasgow International College with a background embedded wholly within UK Higher Education (UK HE).

3 Methodology

A questionnaire was developed which aimed to collect cultural information regarding approaches to learning, approaches to and expectations of teaching, student-teacher relationships and awareness of cultural differences. A version of the questionnaire, adapted for publication, is available in the Appendix to this paper. The first five questions were adapted from the revised approaches to studying inventory (Entwistle and Tait, 1994) and aimed to gain a snapshot of student learning approaches using a five point Likert scale. The next six questions were adapted from the approaches to teaching inventory (Trigwell and Prosser, 2004) but were edited to offer student facing questions relating to their expectations of a teacher and approaches to teaching. These six questions also measured responses using a five point Likert scale. The remaining twenty four questions were designed to obtain the cultural expectations of the respondents within a UK HE classroom according to the five areas of culture discussed in Hofstede (1986), Hofstede and Bond (1988) and further explained in Hofstede (2008) as well as containing elements of the student-supervisor perception rating (Moses, 1985). These twenty four questions therefore measured aspects of socio and academic culture within the classroom using a continuum scale which ranged from one extreme end of a cultural dimension to the other (e.g. individualist to collectivist).

Eighteen foundation and twenty eight pre-masters students participated in this study. I taught the foundation students for four hours per week in a mathematics module, and I taught statistics for four hours per week with the pre-masters groups. These groups included a wide range of students from different nationalities, cultures and academic cultures. It should be noted that the pre-masters group was predominantly of Chinese origin whereas the foundation group was internationally diverse.

In order to obtain an accurate snapshot of students’ initial culture, the questionnaire was issued to students in classroom sessions at an early point in their programme (the end of their second week). However, given that some students may have already had some experience of a UK education (either at school or in second language learning) the results of this initial study should be taken with appropriate caution as compromises may have already taken place. In order to have a benchmark and to inform my practice, I also completed the survey.

The student data was collected and processed according to the student groups. This allowed for a separate analysis of the younger foundation students who have most recently transitioned from their native high school system (by contrast the majority of pre-masters students have recently transitioned from their native higher education system). The student responses to each question were recorded on a discrete scale between 1 and 5 and mean responses were calculated alongside the spread in responses. These responses were then categorised (according to the related question) into Hofstede’s cultural typology. This approach allowed an overview of the typical student academic culture in a GIC classroom at the point of entry.

Any significant differences between student responses and my own were identified and used as a basis to inform the need to encourage collaborative bridging of cultural differences and facilitate a dialogue surrounding academic and cultural expectations. Furthermore, any significant differences between foundation and pre-masters groups were also identified. It is important to note that a full statistical treatment is not appropriate in this instance due to the personally evaluative nature of this study. The processed results for the foundation and pre-masters groups are recorded in Figures 1 and 2, respectively.
Due to the potential wider application of this study (beyond a personal evaluation), ethical approval was granted by the College Academic Director and Programme Leader for Science and Engineering. All students were informed of the study by a formal email and were asked to participate. A discussion was carried out in class sessions where the purpose of the study was communicated to students and at this point, all students indicated that they were happy to participate. At this point, students were asked to sign a document agreeing to participate in the study and further agreeing that the findings of the evaluation could be used for publication either internally within Glasgow International College, or externally where appropriate.

4 Results

Foundation and pre-master students’ mean responses were recorded alongside the personal evaluation. The standard deviation of responses was recorded to give insight into the spread of the data. A notable difference between student and teacher responses was recorded if responses differed by more than one standard deviation or if responses spanned different extremes of the spectrum. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate only the notable differences between students and teacher for foundation and pre-masters students, respectively. The text at the base of each bar in Figures 1 and 2 indicate the academic or cultural information which a response of ‘1’ indicates. For example, the first bar on Figure 1 shows a teacher response of ‘1’ indicating individualism in comparison to an average student response of around ‘3’ indicating a comparatively collectivist culture.

Figure 1: Highlighting the notable differences between teacher (red) and foundation student (blue) responses to the questionnaire given in the appendix.

4.1 Commentary on Foundation Data (Figure 1)

The foundation student responses to the questions related to learning show significant notable differences compared to my own in questions 1, 2 and 5. The main trend suggests that my students show collectivist traits compared to my individualist values. When focussing
on the approaches to learning identified using these responses (based on a similar, but more in depth analysis presented in Mattick, Dennis and Bligh (2004)), the student responses tend towards the middle of the spectrum between surface and deep approaches, whereas my own responses indicate an expectation of a deep approach to learning. This is in agreement with the second hypothesis presented in Manikutty, Anuradha and Hansen (2007) which attempts to correlate collectivism and surface approaches to learning, and suggests that my foundation students have a tendency towards surface and strategic approaches to learning. This may have an impact when I utilise problem solving and application as a tool for teaching and learning as these require deeper learning to be most successful.

Turning to the questions related to teaching, questions 7, 9, 10 and 11 have elicited notably different responses between students and myself. Interestingly, the difference in responses is identifiable in only the questions relating to power distance (PD) and collectivism/individualism. My collectivist students have placed themselves in a position of low power, but my own responses indicate individualism and a more equal distribution of power. This is a significant discovery as collectivist students are more likely to focus on the class performance or average grade, comparing their grades to their friend’s, valuing the information their friend gave them and so on. On the contrary, my individualist approach values, encourages and requires independence. Furthermore, the student responses suggest a slight teacher focussed approach in previous classroom experiences since the PD which students expect suggests that they feel the teacher is in control of their learning. However, the low PD which I perceive implies that teaching and learning have more equal importance and that there is greater onus on the student to control their learning (student focussed). This could easily be perceived as a lack of independence and a lack of motivation to learn deeply to a teacher who is not culturally reflective, which could easily impact on the teaching and learning for that cohort. Moreover, Manikutty, Anuradha and Hansen (2007) also suggests that students who display high PD may tend towards surface learning, and combining that with the collectivist traits, students may tend away from a deep approach towards learning.

Finally, the culture based questions demonstrate several notable differences (namely questions 12, 18, 19, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32 and 35). Responses suggest that students have tended towards a small amount of PD (in contrast to the learning and teaching questions above), as have I. Consequently, it seems that the large PD only really manifests when students consider the questions relating to teaching focus on classroom aspects of academic culture such as providing notes, answering questions and so on.

Overall, a number of responses may indicate potential ‘cultural clashes’ or misunderstandings. The most notable trend is that students tended towards collectivism and higher PD compared to my individualism. Additionally, my responses showed lower uncertainty avoidance (e.g. learning through mistakes), and a masculine dimension (e.g. competitiveness and an intense assessment regime). This highlights some important cultural differences in my international classroom.

4.2 Commentary on Pre-Masters Data (Figure 2)

Firstly, the reader is reminded of the hypothesised cultural homogeneity of the pre-masters group (the majority of students were of Chinese origin). This allows some degree of comparison with Hofstede’s cultural typology of China (http://geert-hofstede.com/china.html). Interestingly, the responses of the pre-masters and the foundation students show a similar trend for the questions related to learning; questions 1 and 5 showing notable differences between the student voice and my own. As a result, similar conclusions can be drawn here: the student body is a collectivist culture. This matches very well with Hofstede’s own findings for China. Furthermore, the approach to learning which I expect is deeper on the spectrum
than students indicate and this again could have an impact when I utilise problem solving and application as a learning tool.

When considering the questions related to teaching, the pre-masters student responses are all closer to my own response than the foundation responses, and only questions 7, 10 and 11 are identified as having notable differences. Overall, the responses indicate that these students are collectivist in a position of low power, compared to my individualism and more equal distribution of power. The differences between students and teacher are smaller for the pre-masters students when compared to the foundation students; however this may still be interpreted as a lack of independence in learning, and a tendency away from a deep approach to learning. This is a vital finding as it is one of the key learning outcomes which programmes at GIC are designed to develop.

![Figure 2: Notable Differences: PM and Teacher - a comparison between teacher (red) and pre-masters student (blue) responses to the questionnaire.](http://geert-hofstede.com/china.html)

It is worthy to note that the pre-masters data also highlights several areas of notable cultural differences (namely, questions 12, 13, 18, 19, 24, 26, 29, 30, 32 and 35). Again, students have tended to respond with collectivist traits. In comparison, my own responses are individualist and more masculine. More subtly, student PD appears higher. This shows some agreement with Hofstede’s cultural typology for China which suggests a greater PD in China compared to the UK and a more collectivist culture.

### 4.3 Comparing Between Groups

Whilst the majority of conclusions drawn for the foundation group apply also to the pre-masters group, the responses to cultural questions 1, 13 and 28 have highlighted significant differences between the two groups (with around 95% confidence). In each case, the foundation students have lower UA, more collectivism and a greater degree of surface learning. Again, this is a significant result as it suggests a more directed approach should be made when dealing with the younger foundation students. Additionally, the foundation students showed more significant differences with their teacher in terms of academic culture.
(or teaching and learning) compared to the pre-masters group. This could further reinforce the need to promote cultural awareness and mindfulness of academic cultural difference more so when dealing with younger undergraduate and foundation level students compared to older postgraduate students.

5 Conclusions and Reflections

This evaluation has revealed cultural differences between myself and my students and has helped me determine the potential impact this may have on student learning, and my own teaching. The key findings are:

- My students are collectivists and place themselves in a position of low power. As a result, my students show lower independence in their learning than I expect, they place me (their teacher) in a position of high authority and they are teacher centred placing the responsibility on me for their learning.
- My students tend slightly towards surface or strategic approaches to learning (foundation students more so), whereas I value a deeper approach. This could have an impact when I utilise higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy in my teaching; particularly application and problem solving.

This study promotes transcultural awareness on my part; however my task is to foster a similar awareness throughout my classroom and institution (i.e. a two way process). As a result, I should encourage this awareness and facilitate collaborative bridging so that the transition from native to new academic cultures is as smooth as possible. This transcultural approach combined with a desire to promote learning of cultural differences within my classroom will aid all stakeholders in teaching and learning.

In order to develop collaborative bridging, I should design classroom activities which nurture interactivity between students and teachers, promote critical application and allow students to experiment with problem solving. This will allow students to become more aware of my discipline’s academic culture and my more neutral position on the power distance scale. Moreover, I should encourage debate within groups, encourage individuals to challenge theories and promote an understanding of the individualist nature of UK academic culture. By understanding that there are different cultural dimensions within an international classroom and by having a greater understanding of exactly what those differences are, I will understand the reactions and responses of my students to a greater degree. This will allow me to have more appropriate and explicit dialogue with students when required. As a result of this evaluation I can help students become more aware of my expectations, the expectations of their future teachers in UK HE and the academic culture of their chosen discipline. This awareness is not only applicable to my discipline of teaching international students in a pathway college, but could be equally applicable to any student in transition to UK HE.

More generally, these findings highlight that students are not a homogeneous group of ‘oven-ready’ learners. Socio and academic cultural differences, and more general differences in expectations of teaching and learning between students and staff exist and can impact on several key indicators of successful student learning. By highlighting the sharing of cultural information, mindfulness of cultural differences and promoting certain ‘cultural compromises’ (as opposed to cultural clashes) this report highlight that in spite of such differences, a transcultural approach can foster more engaging, culturally reflective international classrooms which can benefit student outcomes and the teaching experience therein.
References


### Appendix: Student Survey for Evaluation

Note: the questionnaire presented here has been condensed somewhat for the purposes of publication. The full survey can be requested from the author.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  I tend to take anything I have been taught at face value without</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>questioning it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  When I am taught new things I have to relate them to real life contexts to understand them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  I generally put in around 8 to 10 hours of study per week per module</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4  It is important for me to see why something is true, rather than just accepting that it is true</td>
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<tr>
<td>5  If I have not understood something when studying, I will try a different method of study</td>
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<tr>
<td>6  My teacher encourages me to think more independently than I had to in my own country</td>
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<tr>
<td>7  If I only learn the information given in lectures then I can get a high grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  I expect the teacher to know the answers to any questions I have about the subject</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  It is the teachers responsibility to provide me with good notes/resources for this subject</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 It is the teacher’s responsibility to set homework and ensure it has been completed satisfactorily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 It is the teachers responsibility to teach me everything necessary to pass the assessments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Relationships with teachers and LSTs are purely professional and personal matters should not intrude</td>
<td>Close personal relationships are essential for successful study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 The teacher/LST should insist on seeing drafts of students work in order to review them</td>
<td>It is up to the student to ask for constructive criticism from the teacher/LST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 It is the teacher’s responsibility to teach me everything necessary to pass the assessments</td>
<td>It is the students responsibility to learn from what the teacher says, but to add to that knowledge with private study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 It is the teacher’s responsibility to choose the topic of any project or essay</td>
<td>It is the students responsibility to learn from what the teacher says, but to add to that knowledge with private study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 It is the teacher’s responsibility to meet my needs, even if the class is very diverse and the students all have different needs</td>
<td>It is the student’s responsibility to let the teacher know if my needs are not being met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 The teacher should be available after class to answer any questions</td>
<td>Students should not expect teachers to be available after class and may have to wait for an appointment (if at all)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher should take into consideration any personal circumstances of students which may affect performance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>If a teacher asks a really hard question in class, and no one knows the answer then the question is too hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>It is the teacher's responsibility to set homework and ensure it has been completed satisfactorily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>It is rude to question the teacher during class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>I think students should be dependent on teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Teachers should initiate all communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>I am happy to guess if I don't know the answer to a question which the teacher asks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Teachers should make sure students know the right answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Teachers are supposed to know all the answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>If I misunderstand something during the class I should ask the teacher to explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>The purpose of learning is to learn how to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Qualifications increase your self-respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Good teachers get good results by any method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>I tend to over-rate my own performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Failing is a disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>It is OK for me to communicate with others during class as long as I don’t interrupt the teacher (e.g. answering a phone call, emails or notes to other students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>It is better not to go to class if I think I cannot participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>If I fall asleep during a lecture then the teacher can wake me up and punish me (which will disturb the class)</td>
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INTERNATIONALISING THE CURRICULUM - PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION: SCOTLAND AND SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT: This paper considers the absence of an agreed definition of work based learning. It explores this in relation to employer/HEI partnerships acknowledging that there is a perceived difficulty with Higher Education developing partnerships with industry. This is explored in the context of a programme involving the Scottish Centre for Work Based Learning at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) with Transnet Freight Rail and the University of Johannesburg in the Republic of South Africa.

The paper considers the institutional drivers for this project in relation to GCU’s strategic aim of internationalizing the curriculum and increase the number of international students undertaking GCU programmes and the more general goal of increasing industry partnerships as part of a programme of establishing what GCU terms ‘Academies’.

DEFINING ‘WORK BASED LEARNING’

‘Work based learning’ (WBL) has been a subject of intense discussion since the 1990s. Debates cover a range of issues including the appropriateness of subject based content and ‘how to’ literature on putting WBL into practice. What is often unacknowledged, however, is that different authors are often using the term to refer to quite different experiences. Therefore, although it may appear that there is a sizeable body of knowledge on the subject of WBL, the diverse range of understandings of the concept mean that the same thing is not under discussion, which is a barrier to a shared understanding of pedagogy, policy and practice. The terms ‘work based learning’, ‘workplace learning’ and ‘work related learning’ can also refer to similar or distinct concepts, depending upon the author’s definition.

Some authors do, however, at least highlight that WBL is a contested concept. For example, Lee et al. (2004: 4) acknowledge “There is no singular definition or one unified approach to what ‘workplace learning’ is, what it should be, or who it is/should be for…” and Brennan et al. (2006: 23) “Much of the confusion and contradiction in discussions about workplace learning and higher education may lie in the fact that people are often talking about quite different things.”. It is then, somewhat surprising that there has not been a stronger ‘push’ for clarity for these terms. Rather than seeking an agreed definition which is descriptive, covering WBL in its many varieties, authors are instead prescriptive, defining how the term will be used for the purposes of a particular discourse.

Lee et al. (2004) (drawing on Boud and Garrick, 1999) argue that the reasons for the multiple definitions of WBL are that first, there is an issue of competing interests and values; and secondly, as workplace learning has been approached, investigated and theorised from different disciplinary backgrounds, it has generated a multitude of different ‘lenses’ through which workplace learning and the various concepts embodied within it, are viewed and understood. Lee et al. (2004) argue if taken together, (citing Candy and Matthews) “they have generated a bewildering array of models. (p. 15)”

It is important therefore important to clarify what is meant by WBL for Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU). As intimated above, there are a range of competing definitions, often overlapping with each other. For example, WBL can be used as a broad term to encompass a wide range of learning episodes which take place in the workplace or it can be used to refer to a specific sub-set of programmes. Unsurprisingly WBL as used in GCU refers to a
specific sub-set of programmes which relate to Higher Education (HE), but further definition is necessary.

Although WBL can be a wide ranging concept as noted some insights can, however, assist in narrowing a particular meaning. Boud and Solomon (2001) are viewed by many as offering a seminal definition of WBL as applied to HE. They define WBL as university programmes that bring together universities and work organisations to create new learning opportunities in workplaces. These programmes, they claim, should meet the needs of the learners, contribute to the longer-term development of the organisation and be formal courses accredited by the university.

These programmes Boud and Solomon (2001: 4-7) contend have six key features. For the purposes of this paper the following key features are pertinent. A partnership is established between an external organisation and a higher education institution (HEI), which fosters learning and provides infrastructure to support learning. The learners are the employees of the external organisation. Rather than being framed by the disciplinary or professional curriculum of HE, the programme of learning derives from the needs of the workplace - that is the employer and the learner.

While much of this is uncontroversial the relationship between disciplinary knowledge and knowledge gained in the workplace is complex. For example, the extent to which assessment should or could be based on an actual work place artefact, or a more ‘academic’ report based on practice invites consideration of the role of academic knowledge framing the learning.

Other authors in an effort to encompass the breadth of practice and the associated terminology without being too precise about the tensions suggested above have attempted more comprehensive definitions that try to highlight the salient features of WBL as practiced in HE. For example, Gallacher and Reeve (2002) provide a fairly comprehensive definition which identifies four facets that they believe are common to WBL as undertaken by HE institutions: Partnership, Flexibility, Relevance and Accreditation.

**Partnership**
The first of these, ‘Partnership’ is perhaps the aspect of WBL that uniquely sets it aside from other forms of flexible learning in HE. It is certainly viewed as a defining feature by Smith and Betts (2000). They argue that with the development of partnership, employers, students and educational providers need to move beyond a model where learning is located in the workplace to ‘learning through the experience of work’, creating space for an understanding of the role of HE knowledge in transforming that workplace learning.

Partnership implies that another important aspect of WBL is negotiation (Brennan and Little, 1996). They note that a distinguishing feature of WBL is the part that negotiation between stakeholders plays in identifying achievable learning outcomes, which are meaningful and challenging to the individual, relevant to the employer and have academic credibility. Negotiation, however, also brings into sharp focus the role of power relations within the stakeholder relationship. Could competing agendas become a barrier to working relationships in WBL partnership programmes?

In 2002, Gallacher and Reeve see partnership as largely benign, seeking to minimise the competing needs of the employing organisation and HE by smoothing out differences in power, for example, addressing HE’s potential loss of control over the curriculum in order to enhance the relevance of the programme to workplace performance. Gallacher and Reeve note, however, that the “continuation of different agendas may lead … to the emergence of a ‘politics of curriculum’” (2007: 4). This suggests that whilst the concept of partnership has support, there may be some concerns regarding implementing the notion in practice.
Smith and Betts (2000) argue much in the same vein as Gallacher and Reeve (2002) that partnership is an important dimension in the development of ‘learning organisations’ and of ‘lifelong learning’ in higher education and that partnerships will become less hierarchical and more democratic in future.

Indeed for Smith and Betts (2000), and Maclaren and Marshall (1998), the concept of ‘active partnership’ is at the heart of WBL as both the driver and the definer. Maclaren and Marshall argue that to be truly effective WBL requires the active participation of facilitators from both spheres of academia and the workplace and that the nature and the quality of the partnership depends on the level of involvement of each of these partners and the interaction between them.

Garnett (2001) and Walsh (2007) add their voices in support of partnership seeing it as a vehicle for a level of redistribution of power over the content of the curriculum from the traditional relationships between business and HEIs: universities may lose some control of the curriculum, but they can gain valuable knowledge of the changing circumstances within business, therefore updating their knowledge.

However, not all academics in this field are so sanguine. Reeve and Gallacher (2005) raise a number of issues. Firstly, they argue that WBL partnerships are limited and marginal and although there is some evidence of strong and fully integrated partnerships, they are unlikely to become widespread arguing, among other things, that it is not clear how HEIs should work with employers and that building effective partnerships is difficult and time consuming. They cite the resource intensive nature of partnership negotiations, for example.

At a more profound level they argue that differences in culture and priorities exist between employers and universities, a position supported by the CBI (2008). This refers to the employer’s need to hit targets and a lack of interest in reflection and analysis and as a consequence a focus on knowledge which is seen as immediately relevant.

Therefore, although there are authors who espouse the need for active partnerships for WBL, Reeve and Gallacher’s research would suggest a number of practical issues exist, which may make them unworkable. The difficulty with this position is the paucity of research undertaken regarding the effectiveness of HE programmes specifically run in partnership with employers. For example Reeve and Gallacher rely on one study in a manufacturing company as the basis for their conclusions on culture.

By contrast Nixon et al. (2006) suggest that strategies can be developed which cross the cultural bridge between learning and work. That is not to suggest that one model would suit all; different employers may want different levels of engagement in design and delivery. However, a number of models could be developed to reflect levels of engagement, which could be modified to suit the needs of a partnership. Further, the practical problems and differences in culture and priorities identified may be due to a lack of understanding and experience, which could be overcome in time. For example, whilst Brennan et al. (2006) also note that partnership programmes have yet to achieve widespread take-up, they have a more positive outlook for their future, suggesting they have the potential to be a prime vehicle for workforce development. They suggest that brokerage may create permeability in the boundaries between HE and work, to enable WBL to develop more easily and reduce potential for confusion, duplication of effort and take account of diversity of current practice. This may in part address some of the concerns raised by Reeve and Gallacher (2005).

Finally in relation to partnerships it is necessary to discuss financial arrangements. Boud and Solomon, among others (for example, Smith and Betts, 2000), mention WBL partnerships as ‘sources of income’ for the university. This could, however, turn a ‘partnership’ into a
‘contractor-client’ relationship, rather than meaning a pursuit of common goals. This is something that such partnerships have been attempting to overcome:

“Ball writing about the need for an expanded and more diverse system of higher education in the UK, referred to a successful system resting on a true partnership between providers and employers, rather than a contractor-supplier relationship’ (Ball, 1990, para 1.21)” (Brennan and Little 1996: 2).

Although it is unavoidable that WBL will be viewed as an income generating activity for universities, if partnerships were reduced to this aspect it could limit the added value of knowledge exchange. As intimated earlier, there is an element of power in the partnership relationship. The employing organisation requires the content of learning programmes to fit their needs, will usually be paying the fees and will decide whether or not to continue the relationship with the university. The university, as the accrediting body, will have to ensure that the knowledge and skills acquired through undertaking a WBL programme meets the requirements for the exiting award. For as Boud and Solomon (2001) argue, while the learning should be of benefit to the organisation, it must be accepted by the educational institution, if a formal qualification is to be awarded.

Harvey (2007) argues that whilst students and employers have the power of customers in the ‘new higher education’ environment, and so are able to make decisions about which HEI can provide the most appropriate learning opportunities, the recognition that knowledge can be gained through workplace practices has not yet significantly increased employers’ power within universities. This is an issue that needs to be resolved as universities are increasingly encouraged to find alternative sources of income as government funding is reduced.

It would appear, as Edmond et al. (2007:179) argue the notions of “employer engagement” and “work-based learning” remain problematic and under-theorised. It is too early to make generalised statements regarding employer engagement and the level of involvement in partnership programmes. It would seem unlikely that there can be a single model devised that meets everyone’s requirements. This does not negate the possibility, however, of some flexible guiding principles being developed to form the bases of negotiation. Looking at some partnerships in more depth may shed some light on employers’ views and academics understanding. The following consideration of the partnership between the Scottish Centre for Work Based Learning at GCU and two South African partners will, hopefully contribute to that elucidation.

Drivers for the programme
For GCU there were two key drivers. The first which has been explored in the first section of this paper is work based learning and in particular work based learning partnerships. We have noted the difficulty in arriving at a shared understanding of both the meaning of ‘work based learning’ and an agreement on whether partnership between Higher Education and the Academy is possible, given the critique of partnership as offered by authors like Reeve and Gallacher.

However, GCU developed a workable definition ironically enough based on that offered by Gallacher and Reeve (2002). In GCU, Work Based Learning programmes are based on partnership, flexibility, relevance and accreditation. As work based learning has developed in GCU it has continued to be based on academic disciplinary knowledge used to frame, analyse and solve work based problems within a flexible curriculum supported by appropriately applied pedagogies, principally reflective practice and communities of practice.

The Centre had developed a range of partnerships across the public, private and to a limited extent third sector, but with the exception of the private sector where a global company engaged in a Masters programme with some minimal changes to content that would
otherwise have been offered to UK organisations, there was little experience or indeed aspiration to develop international work based partnerships.

The University did, however, have a very clear strategy for internationalising. ‘Internationalising’ however is a concept at least, and probably more, contested than work based learning. It is described positively in an OECD report by Henard et al (2012) as comprising two key elements. The first is internationalisation at home, which means integrating intercultural and international elements into the curriculum with a view to helping students imbibing without having to leave their home country.

The other form of internationalisation referred to in the report is what is described as emerging transnational education which is manifest through campuses based in other countries, joint programmes and distance learning. The report as you might imagine focuses on the benefits of internationalisation, and argues that “Today, internationalisation functions as a two way street” (p8)

Critics would argue that given the target of many of the HE institutions, developing countries, the central objective of the advanced economies should in fact be one way. It should primarily function as a conduit for knowledge transfer with a view to supporting development even if that is to the financial detriment of the donor institutions. In fact according to Langthaler (2010) educational globalisation has led to growing disparities between rich and poor nations.

There are those who would see, as Kreber (2007:4) argues:

“Although until the 1990s internationalization in higher education was largely understood to be a cooperative effort with its rationale based primarily on political, cultural, and academic arguments, many observers today feel that internationalization has become increasingly economically motivated.”

Others would challenge the view that until 1990s approaches to internationalisation could be viewed so altruistically and while economic interest may have been less obvious, cultural imperialism was not. According to Timothy Richard, a British missionary, who complained in 1911 that the newly established modern colleges in China were so Western that they made students seem like foreigners in their own land, because patterns of thought were not in touch with those prevalent in China (Davin, 1987). This is an observation that must have a curious resonance for some Chinese students in British universities seeking precisely opposite of an authentic British experience.

“... participants were very critical when they found that they studied in classes with nearly all Chinese students, lived in accommodation with other Chinese and ended up socializing with the same groups. One female graduate commented that her English had got worse since she had lived in Britain...” (Philo 2007:19)

One of the newer aspects of contemporary forms of internationalisation has been the phenomenon of Western Universities not merely receiving students, but in a fashion similar to modern colleges in early 20th Century China actually physically establishing a presence in other countries. A particular target has been the new BRIC group of economies as being particularly attractive since there is an obvious need for knowledge transfer coupled with a ‘market’ of a new middle class wealthy enough to pay the fees that the kudos of a British degree can extract. There are now 200 overseas campuses around the world according to Lawton and Katsomitros (2012).

Glasgow Caledonian has followed the pattern of Universities both in seeking to attract foreign students to programmes in the UK and to open campuses in overseas locations.
The first three strategic outcomes of the GCU 2010 -2015 internationalisation strategy are:

- “to maintain a top 10 position in the ISB survey for international students and a top 3 position for Scotland
- to more than double the number of international students studying at GCU
- to more than double income from international student recruitment, research and knowledge transfer activity” (p2)

and their strategic approaches do indeed include a:

“focus on the geographical regions of India, China, Europe, Middle East, North & South America for strategic partnerships” (p1)

The University’s strategy is principally about bringing University students to its two British campuses, in Glasgow and London although it is perhaps not obvious how the London campus can contribute to the “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education” (p1) since by definition integration with the main student and staff community is limited, leaving it open to the kind of criticism levelled by Philo. However, the Glasgow Campus does increase the possibility of internationalisation affecting both the visiting students and the predominantly locally based student population as well as the staff.

To a considerable extent the partnership with TFR did not fit existing patterns of internationalisation as outlined in the GCU strategy. Firstly, South Africa is not within the target list of countries identified in the strategy document, despite the similarities in the need for development post apartheid.

Secondly, the nature of the programme meant that individuals were not paying for the programme; it was a corporate railway company that funded the programme and consequently although provision would still be more expensive than local provision because of the costs of staff travel, costs were minimal compared to that of hundreds of South African students travelling to Scotland, even for limited periods of time.

Thirdly, the mode of delivery was new, at least in terms of international programmes. It was principally an on-line programme with some initial face to face delivery by GCU staff who travelled to RSA to provide induction and some initial face to face teaching.

The strategy here was less deliberate than emerging with an existing partner of GCU, the Institution of Railway Operators (IRO) introducing the main South African Partner Transnet Freight Rail (TFR) to the programme that IRO and GCU delivered in partnership to a wide range of Train and Freight Operating Companies in the UK and the Republic of Ireland; the BSc in Railway Operations Management. In 2008 after initial meetings in Scotland where key TFR personnel visited, there was a long period of negotiation before agreement was reached.

TFR already had a University partner in South Africa, the University of Johannesburg. It is a comparatively new university which emerged from a merger of four institutions. After the 1994 democratic election South Africa sought to rid the education system of the apartheid legacy. The University of Johannesburg is a product of that commitment. It was formed through the incorporation of the Soweto and East Rand Campuses of Vista University into Rand Afrikaans University (RAU); and the merger of RAU with the Technikon of Witwatersrand (TWR) in 2005. While the University of Johannesburg is an important partner, their participation was conditional on the desire of TFR to source a programme that
could deliver the skills and content the TFR leadership believed necessary to advance in an increasingly competitive and politically demanding environment.

TFR is the largest division of Transnet, an integrated freight transport company fully owned by the South African government, that operates as a corporate entity aimed at supporting the country’s freight logistics network. TFR is a heavy haul freight rail company that specialises in the transportation of freight. It has approximately 25,000 employees, who are spread throughout the country. It maintains an extensive rail network across South Africa that connects with other rail networks in the sub-Saharan region, with its rail infrastructure representing about 80% of Africa’s total.

What were the drivers in TFR’s decision? Firstly, South Africa is looking to economic stimulus to help growth in the face of the current global economic crisis. Transnet is at the heart of a major expansion of infrastructure in South Africa which has intensified with the announcement of President Jacob Zuma, in February 2012, which put Transnet at the centre of government’s drive to increase economic growth through infrastructure development. According to Transnet’s eponymous magazine (2012) over the next seven years the company plans to invest R300 billion in expanding South Africa’s railways, ports and pipelines. Of course, skills development is an intrinsic part of this strategy.

Nevertheless the choice of a Scottish University may have seemed a strange one and it is all the more unusual given that the period when discussions began, the number of foreign programmes offered in South Africa decreased because of strict new government regulations and accreditation processes introduced at that time.

According to Altbach and Knight (2007)

"Only a few foreign institutions have branch campuses, including Bond and Monash from Australia, De Montfort (United Kingdom), and the Netherlands Business School. Three foreign institutions are leaving because of accreditation issues related to a recent review of all MBA programs. Monash will remain (it does not offer an MBA program), as will the British-based Henley Management College, primarily a distance provider." (p290)

The reason is that like the Henley Management College distance provision was less prone to difficulties emanating from country based regulation although GCU provision had all to be accredited against the standards of the South African Qualifications Agency. The principal reason, however, was that the programme GCU offered fitted the areas of skill and knowledge that TFR believed were necessary to improve the Freight Rail infrastructure in South Africa and as intimated above a senior manager of TFR had been introduced in 2008, very early in the process, to the nature of delivery and content of the programme.

In addition it allowed TFR to offer its staff a valued, portable qualification, that would have been outside the reach of the vast majority of TFR employees. These are not the emerging middle classes of the BRIC countries.

**Conclusion**

There has always been different meanings and different purposes ascribed to work based learning, but in GCU there has always been a strong current of seeing work based learning as a very effective way of widening access to Higher Education. This is because those in work very often find it difficult or impossible to undertake study that is either very expensive or very time consuming or both. By working in partnership with employing organisations and we believe that we have shown that partnerships are possible with progressive employers, then relevant, flexible, accredited programmes can be delivered.
The partnership with TFR and the University of Johannesburg did not develop as part of a deliberate internationalising strategy. However, it did emerge as part of the Scottish Centre for Work Based Learning’s desire to make Higher Education available to people at work, whether that be in Selkirk, or Soweto and in this we hope we have helped share the liberation that Higher Education can bring.

References


Demystifying the Prejudice about International Students: A Matter of Module Design?

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ABSTRACT: Increased numbers of students from China have led academics to study their learning styles and performance. Based on a literature review, this paper investigates an approach to learning suitable for students from varied backgrounds. Using descriptive statistics from three deliveries and qualitative data collected during one of these deliveries of an undergraduate module at a UK Business School, the pedagogy and design may explain why Chinese students achieved high marks in some assessments, contrary to perceptions of them as passive learners. The findings reveal that the staged, collaborative and cumulative learning involved benefited them and they achieved marks similar to home students and sometimes higher than home and European students. However, unexpectedly, some home students objected to the design and preferred discrete blocks of learning and assessment rather than cumulative learning and assessment. Implications for module design to promote graduate attributes in students from diverse educational backgrounds are discussed.

1 Introduction

This paper describes the possible implications for innovative teaching, module design and assessment which derive from a case study of the module ‘Strategic Management’ delivered to a group consisting of home (UK) students, EU students, and international students from China in a UK Business School. While there are considerable numbers of international students in UK universities, attention has been drawn to Chinese students, who form the largest group of international non-EU students in UK higher education: there were 67,325 students from China in 2010/11, up by 18.1% from 2009/10 (HESA 2012). An inability to achieve deep learning, critically analyse information, and demonstrate the application of knowledge to problems and tasks have been highlighted by some in the literature as prominent deficits of Chinese students (for example, Edwards and Ran 2006; Jones 2005; Turner 2006). However, for both home students and overseas students, expectations in higher education include concepts and skills like independent learning, reflective learning, lifelong learning, metacognitive awareness of deep and surface learning, constructivist conceptions of teaching and learning, creativity, synthesising information from a variety of sources, and group-working among others (Robson and Turner 2007; Barrie 2006). Such expected graduate attributes only underline the need to actively address the gap in individual learning styles or design modules to accommodate these differing learning styles while attaining learning outcomes. This gap has to be placed in the perspective that more and more international students attend UK universities (HESA 2012), contributing to vital income generation and the benefits of internationalisation (Tarry 2011, 71–72).

This paper shows how the need to cater for students with a variety of backgrounds led to the redesign of a module, while at the same time incorporating features that stimulated the development of transferable academic skills. The design of the module was inspired by a search for an alternative to existing views on how to deal with different culture-based learning styles. Questions like why Chinese students performed better than home and EU students in the coursework in the redesigned module, and why Chinese students performed less well than home and EU students in the final (more traditional) examination could perhaps be answered. If this was the case in this study, could the results show that Chinese students can perform better when engaged in staged and collaborative learning embedded in the redesign of the module? Did the ‘Strategic Management’ module results challenge some value-laden western conceptions about how students should learn? What were the perceptions of the Chinese, EU and home students of the teaching and assessments on the
2 Background and Literature Review

Early literature on learning styles provided a view of Chinese approaches to learning as being inadequate for study in western universities, and may have focused on the international student as the ‘other’. Some researchers suggest that Chinese learners’ approaches to learning are simply inadequate for academic success, a deficit that must be corrected (Ballard and Clanchy 1991a, b). Therefore, international students were expected to assimilate. However, academic success of Chinese students in western universities then gave rise to literature on this paradox (e.g. Kember and Gow 1991; Kember 2000).

A second way to explain the gap in learning styles is by viewing it as inherent to culture. Cortazzi and Jin (1997) argue that despite these different cultures of learning, teachers and students should attempt a process of ‘cultural synergy’ in which they can learn from each other about their cultures. A ‘cultural pedagogy’ that accommodates students from different cultures was recommended. The advantages and disadvantages of this pedagogy are also discussed in the literature (for example, Nguyen, Terlouw and Pilot 2006).

A third approach to the gap in learning styles is found in the teaching method as module design. Such an approach follows Zhou et al. (2008, 72) who recommend ‘reciprocal adaptations’ in pedagogy on the part of the learners and teachers; that call is similar to the one by Campbell and Li (2008, 394). In the perspective of this approach, academic staff who teach and are module designers are best-placed to deal with these aspects of learning. Rather than just telling students how to study, a teaching method that leads students through a more fruitful process of studying may lead to self-development and continued academic success (Watkins 2000; Wang and Byram 2011). This stance is mostly followed by Wong (2004, 165) who sees the Asian international students adapting to the learning styles at an Australian university. In addition, Kingston and Forland (2008, 219) also point out that the teaching practice should benefit home and international students at the same time. This idea of the international university and curriculum is now prominent, and this means planning teaching and learning that is accessible to all students. This is based to an extent on the literature looking at the idea of global social justice and developing an inclusive curriculum for all students (Otten 2003). Some of this literature is aspirational and general, and some is both visionary and pragmatic, with examples of good practice in teaching (for instance, Enslin and Hedge 2008; Haigh 2002). There is also a host of literature providing advice, hints and toolkits for teaching international and home students together (e.g. Carroll and Ryan 2005; Higher Education Academy resources 2013; Burnapp 2007).

However, while advice abounds, concrete examples of the practice of teaching and learning in the internationalised classroom are lacking in the literature. At the classroom and course level, Back et al. (1996, in Haigh 2002, 56-57) briefly outline courses where groupwork in teams using the Internet was involved and where students were assessed by their contributions to a teleconference. Another course required students to work in discussion teams to critically analyse media reports of African events (Aspaas 1998 in Haigh 2002, 58). A similar type of pedagogical design is described by Johnston and Olekans (2002) who outline the internet based delivery and assessment of ‘Critical and Analytical Learning in Macroeconomics’ to almost 1200 students in an Australian university, one third of whom were non-native speakers. For the same project, Jones (2005, 339) concluded that

the study confirmed that, although cultural and linguistic differences are important, the way in which a subject and assessment task is presented to students has a profound impact on learning.

Spronken-Smith and Walker (2010) describe three case studies of modules in which an inquiry-based and student-centred approach is used to develop students’ research skills.
However, we are given an overview of the case-studies only. Given the lack of evidence, this article aims to explore how a module can be designed and delivered to allow all students the opportunity to become independent learners, to develop an inquisitive mind, and to perform well academically. However, with respect to the analysis our initial focus is on the comparative performance between home and Chinese students.

3   **Methodology for Case Study**

To that purpose, an unexpected opportunity for a case study using a qualitative research approach emerged. A module for a third-year undergraduate programme contained a wide variety of learning activities for students from a wide variety of backgrounds in an integrated mode; a non-traditional method of delivery was used, but there was a final conventional examination.

3.1 **Module ‘Strategic Management’**

One of the three learning objectives in this module was: ‘to acquire knowledge and understanding of the debates surrounding functional, competitive and corporate strategy’. Traditionally, the delivery of the module would elaborate on these debates during traditional lectures, using de Wit and Meyer (2004), in which 10 strategic business paradoxes are discussed. The examination as assessment instrument was complemented by coursework about a generic question handed out by the teaching staff; the coursework also called for a case study (a traditional way of teaching and assessing strategic management in business schools). Since this traditional module design was viewed as only requiring passive engagement, particularly for the paradoxes, the delivery from the academic year 2006/2007 on was changed. Because of the extent of supporting materials, including the use of a Virtual Learning Environment, it was not until the fourth delivery that the full suite of support, including tutorials, and programming could be realised. These changes are captured in Table 1; this overview also shows that the students’ experience might vary between these editions of the module. After the academic year 2009/2010 changes were implemented in programmes, resulting in the withdrawal of this module. Hence, the provision of the second to the fourth edition of the module Strategic Management (2007/2008 to 2009/2010) has served as a case study for this paper.

Apart from the delivery of contents and the preparations for the exam, the coursework and the related activities in the module are the units of analysis for the case study. Following one of the learning objectives, three streams of activities for coursework could be viewed as activating students to become independent learners and encouraging the research-teaching link. The first stream is writing of the coursework, which follows the steps of (1) topic selection, (2) generation of academic literature for the topic (basically, at least 5 academic journal publications), (3) appraisal of references (one of them submitted as an example for formative feedback), (4) draft report and (5) final report; note that for the steps 1-3 formative assessment was given by the module coordinator. For this first stream of coursework the students were divided into six groups, each group dealing with a paradox of strategic management found in the main textbook for the module (for example, the paradox resources vs. markets [de Wit and Meyer 2004, 245–247]). Each student chose a topic that was positioned or related to the paradox of her/his group; there were supporting mechanisms to avoid replication of topics chosen by students for their coursework. The second stream in the learning activities is the delivery of a commentary (review) on the draft report of a student in one of the other five groups. It was required that each commentary was based on the original paradox and two more academic references (that way indirectly increasing the sources used); students were expected to include the commentary and a response to it in their final report. The third stream was a structured debate by each group about their paradox. The purpose of this debate was three-fold: (a) to activate a group to study their own paradox in-depth in order to form their own final report and (b) to learn more about
organising arguments for and against and (c) to inform the students about the other paradoxes to assist them in writing an informed commentary. For the coursework components three marks were awarded: (i) debate as group activity, (ii) commentary as individual effort, and (iii) final report as individual work; the relatively high weight of the commentary also shows its importance as formative assessment. The remaining 45-50% of the total mark for the module went to the examination (this percentage varied over the academic years considered). Note that all these streams in the three deliveries are part of regular academic processes.

3.2 Data Collection

From the three deliveries descriptive data on performance were collected from each of the first diets (Table 2a-c). For example, during 2009/2010, while 63 students participated in the module, only 49 composite marks were eventually complete and useful; 3 students had received part of the marks in the previous academic year and 11 others had not completed all components for the composite grade at the end of the first diet. From these 49 usable results, 28 were from home, 18 from EU and 3 from Chinese students (see Table 2c). During the provision in 2007/2008, the delivery at a remote campus was done by a local lecturer. From 2008/2009 on, the lectures, tutorials, debates and group activities were transmitted by videoconferencing to the remote campus (two-way communication). Hence, for the purpose of analysis the home group has been split into two subgroups: main campus and remote campus. All EU and Chinese students followed the module at the main campus. The three Chinese students were direct entry students into third year as they had already completed 3 years of study at their university in China. Given the relatively low number of international Chinese students, the outcomes of this study can only be viewed as explorative.

In addition, qualitative information to complement the quantitative data was gathered through unstructured interviews with students during the delivery in 2009/2010. Firstly, the meeting with the teams to prepare for the debates was taken as an opportunity to collect information. Invariably during these meetings, each group of students (consisting of 4-6 individuals) was asked what they liked and disliked; each meeting was recorded in a logbook. Next, a session was organised with four student representatives, chaired by a teaching assistant. The teaching assistant and the four representatives agreed the minutes of the meeting. A plenary discussion with about 30 students served as a third source of information; notes were taken directly afterwards. All these three sessions could be seen as focus groups and the results are displayed in Table 3. Finally, the individual meetings with students from week 10 were taken as an opportunity to deliberate on the module (see Table 4); again students were asked what they liked and disliked and outcomes recorded in a logbook (26 out of 49 students). These four types of interviews – three types of focus groups and individual interviews – comply with the requirement for case studies to include a wide variety of sources and evidence.

4 Results

Returning to the available data, the marks were collected unabridged from the module results. Three groups were distinguished: home, EU and Chinese; the data from the home students’ group one is presented as two separate results, one for students at the remote campus and one on the main campus (Table 2). The mark for the debate has been omitted since that was not an individual mark but a mark for a group effort and only came into play during the 2009/2010 delivery; each of the groups consisted of a random composition of home, EU and Chinese students making it difficult to differentiate between these groups in terms of attainment. Furthermore, since the coursework is the focus of this paper, the average score has been set at 100 for each academic year. Chinese students performed far better in 2009/2010, while the exam results are consistent
over the two years. Table 1 (all tables presented at the end of this paper) gives a clue to why that might be: only during the final year of delivery were the full support mechanisms and group interaction available. For example, that was the only year during which students as a subgroup sat together and discussed the individual topics to ensure nobody in that subgroup had a similar topic; these tutorials were facilitated by doctoral students with the remit that the module students themselves should engage and make the decisions. This would support the conclusion that staged learning is only successful for Chinese students when appropriate supporting mechanisms are in place.

The examination results show a reverse trend in the same tables. To compensate for possible differences in proficiency in English, the descriptive text, consisting of about 300-500 words, was published 48 hours in advance, while the factual questions were presented during the examination. This allowed all students to understand the full text and give every participating student as far as possible an equal opportunity. Note that this ‘preview’ of examination questions was the only concession to different levels of proficiency in English. Despite that, the traditional examination yielded a very different trend and across the three years does not show any difference in performance.

The results of the unstructured interviews in the three types of focus groups are displayed in Table 3. Each statement shown in the table was derived through recursive abstraction from notes. Comments and results not related to the teaching method were removed. In both Tables 2 and 3 it should also be noted that the further the module progressed, the more confident students grew in how to prepare the coursework. These summarised statements obtained in a systematic way form the basis for the later discussion of results.

During the meetings with the debating teams, the first focus group in Table 3, students frequently raised the issue that this was the first time they had been required to study academic publications (particularly journals; the guidelines for the module stated text books were not considered as counting towards the required academic publications, although they could be used). Most students were insufficiently aware of journals or how to use them. Students also stated that they very little experience of any of the learning activities before and wondered why in earlier years these had not been part of other modules.

The interview with the representatives (or focus group for that matter) added the length of the time allocation (second row in Table 3). But proof of the time spent by students pointed out that an initial distribution of time allocated to the learning activities by the module coordinator was about right (students provided proof that they needed to spend about 160-200 hours on this module, which corresponds with the nominal 200 effort hours). Most interestingly, students requested that all steps, even those with formative assessments for defining the topic of the coursework, were marked. Furthermore, during the focus group students stated a preference for assignments set by the tutor(s) above developing their own topic; some viewed this part of the process as a waste of time. In addition, the representatives raised concerns about the videoconferencing and group meetings across campuses; although listed in the table, these are not seen as essential to the core of this study.

A plenary discussion with all students raised similar points as the meeting with the representatives on the set-up of the module, albeit that the discussion was led mostly by HND Direct Entry students (spontaneous voting was used to find this out), see Table 3. But in addition, students made remarks about the need to review somebody else’s work; they did not view it as formative assessment towards reviewing their own work. No EU and Chinese students joined in this part of the discussion at all, except for some comments about it being their first time to do an assignment like this. Quite far into the module (week 8), there was still great resistance from home students to the unusual approach of this module. Finally, meetings with individual students, see Table 4, generated student perspectives on the module consistent with the other three ‘focus groups’. Again the statements in the table were obtained through recursive abstraction. Notably, at that stage, 10 weeks into the module, the Chinese students did not ask for support anymore; also these students did not miss any lectures or tutorials. All those individual meetings, most of them related to compensatory work for absence, were an opportunity to discuss the progression of the
5 Discussion of Findings

The results show that Chinese students possibly perform better when engaged with staged writing of coursework (see Table 2), although it might be necessary to have appropriate support mechanisms in place (based on the performance in 2009/2010). This confirms the positions of Watkins (2000) and Wang and Byram (2011). The EU students performed better in the final exam than the home students at the main campus, while doing worse in the commentary. That difference is hard to explain, also when taking into account that the Chinese students performed at the same level as the home students for the commentary. It could well be that the confidence level of commenting on others' work was easier for home students (also taking into account the relatively short turnaround time of 2 weeks for a commentary); at that stage of the commentary, the Chinese students were not asking for support and feedback any more (except to know how well they were doing, mostly asked informally during lectures). This is commensurate with Wong's finding (2004, 165) that Asian students are able to adapt to the new style of teaching and learning within two to three months; this corresponds more or less with the submission of the draft report in this particular module. The design of the module also made students have direct contact with materials, a preference of international students found by Ladd and Ruby (1999, 365). Hence, a first finding of the research is that there are indications that the construction of step-by-step coursework complemented by a low number of support mechanisms (like guided group meetings) suits the Chinese students very well.

While Chinese and EU students generally appreciated the staged learning, the approach caused a larger divide between the home students. In Table 3 it can be seen that some students have great difficulty interacting with other students about their work and prefer to generate coursework in one go based on a generic assignment set by the module coordinator. As one student put it during the plenary discussion:

*Who are you to tell me how to do my coursework? I know it because I have done it many times successfully already and I want to work on it and complete it in just one weekend.*

The point of reference for the home students seemed to be an essay on a generic topic, to be submitted halfway or two-thirds during the teaching period. That group viewed the phased development of the coursework as a nuisance in their predetermined plan; that articulation was stronger from students with an HND background. This attitude may be due to their previous experience of study at a further education college; Barron and d’Annunzio-Green (2009, 9) summarise these differences as perceived by direct entry students:

*less approachable staff, stricter time scales, lesser expectations about standards of work and less familiarity with the pedagogical approaches adopted.*

Submissions of coursework early during a semester would also allow more time for preparing for examinations. Furthermore Regan (2003) points to the necessity for the link between teacher-led activities and the development of independent learners; but that seems not to have been taken on by the Direct Entry HND students in this module. Comments like this about the appropriateness of the module design were not raised by the EU and Chinese students; these students had only initial difficulties grasping the set-up of the model but the more the module progressed, the more the debates took place, the more the benefits of this approach became apparent, the more they seemed at ease. Hence, a second finding suggests that home students have become accustomed to the generation of coursework in
blocks, particularly essays, and do not see the need to develop academic skills as essential to their learning process. However, there was also an equally-sized cohort of home students who rather enjoyed the experience and saw the benefits well beyond this module. Those results reverberate in the time students needed to allocate to this module. Initially home students expressed concern about the time needed for completion of each learning activity. However, through the unstructured collection of data about hours spent, it became apparent that those corresponded with an initial estimation for the module (a typical student spending about 160–200 hours for a 200-hour module). When asked, the students said that this module did cause them to spend more time on learning activities than other modules. Some indicated that they had problems combining work to financially support themselves. The limiting of time devoted to studies in relation to academic performance is also mentioned by Moreau and Leathwood (2006, 35). Again, the point of reference for students seemed to be the writing of essays in a fairly short time, which creates more time for personal, non-study related activities, and this supports the second finding of this study.

Some students reported practical problems. For example, students experienced difficulties meeting deadlines for other modules running in parallel. Particularly, a student with learning disabilities did not manage to work simultaneously on different subjects in conjunction with the many activities in the module. Other students brought the meeting of deadlines to the attention of the module coordinator, too, but that seemed related to jobs they were holding to support themselves. On the contrary, a number of mature students, studying full-time with full-time jobs, lauded the approach of the module since they took it as an opportunity to enhance their skills. Hence, a third finding of our study indicates that continuous learning activities and formative assessment might be experienced as detrimental to other obligations by students; a fourth finding was the difficulty experienced by those students with particular learning abilities who perform better when concentrating on one assignment.

This brings us to the impact of the module design on learning activities and styles. The case demonstrates that the set-up of a module in the form of step-by-step building of coursework might benefit international students. In particular, the written (formative) feedback might be preferred by Chinese students and be key to their progression (Kingston and Forland 2008, 217). But it is not merely the staged writing of coursework, but also the many activities, like debating and group interaction, which contribute to these results. However, it seems to come at the expense of the performance of home students, although that could be partly attributed to their educational background. But it is also the divide among home students that such a module causes that must be considered. Therefore, a fifth finding of our study is that innovative module design like this case might benefit international students.

6 Conclusions

The principal claim resulting from the case study is that this method of teaching can lead to successful completion of a module by all students, not just students familiar with the western tradition of learning. Some exposure to students of this kind of module design might prepare students for what is expected of them in higher order skills in HE: to learn how to learn, rather than just acquire knowledge; to become collaborative student researchers rather than passive receivers of knowledge; to critically assess knowledge rather than simply accept what they are told; to be autonomous learners rather than reliant on lecturers.

In the context of principal approaches for dealing with international students, this explorative study has broadened the scope by adding module design as a determinant. While the paper stresses its advantages, the module design for engaging with students acknowledges the paradox of the Chinese learner and steps beyond the cultural differences by building on generic academic skills (both part of the other two principal approaches embedded in the literature review). It also empowers module co-ordinators to address all students, no matter their background, and not see ‘international students’ as a challenge. However, it comes at the expense of more effort in formative feedback by the module co-ordinator and managing peer-review and groupwork. Also, it has a backlash in terms of learning problems for Direct
Entry HND students, particularly for third-year undergraduate studies. But the benefits seem to outweigh the efforts, if the learning experience of students and the acquisition of academic skills take a central position. More studies into the specific pedagogies of module design would contribute to the enhancement of current practice in UK higher education.

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### Tables

#### Table 1: Overview of changes in module design. The guest lecture was delivered by a CEO or top manager. The development of the module design over the successive years was driven by the stage introduction of its elements, the development of supporting materials (Virtual Learning Environment) and systematic evaluation of feedback from students.

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<tr>
<td>Collaboration in groups</td>
<td>Initiative of students (only for part determined by deadlines in schedule).</td>
<td>Initiative of students (only for part determined by deadlines in schedule).</td>
<td>1 tutorial about setting topics within groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students at remote campus as different subgroup.</td>
<td>1 tutorial about writing report (outwith regular schedule).</td>
<td>1 tutorial about writing report (outwith regular schedule).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subgroups mixture from both campuses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration in group necessary but supported by two short meetings with module coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam preparation</td>
<td>Revision lecture.</td>
<td>Revision lecture.</td>
<td>Revision lecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posting of sample questions.</td>
<td>Posting of sample questions.</td>
<td>Posting of sample questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion threads.</td>
<td>Quizzes for self-study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subgroup pages and communication tools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 2a: Performance of students for individual components during 2007/2008. The label “Home (P)” refers to the students on the main campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight (%)</th>
<th>Home (All)</th>
<th>Home (P)</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Table 2a: Performance of students for individual components during 2008/2009. The label “Home (P)” refers to the students on the main campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weight (%)</th>
<th>Home (All)</th>
<th>Home (P)</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Report</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>128%</td>
<td>130%</td>
<td>125%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>127%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>102%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>107%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>103%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2c: Performance of students for individual components during 2009/2010. The label “Home (P)” refers to the students on the main campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weight (%)</th>
<th>Home (All)</th>
<th>Home (P)</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Report</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>118%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>125%</td>
<td>123%</td>
<td>103%</td>
<td>123%</td>
<td>117%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Overview of unstructured group meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Participants with debating teams</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4–10</td>
<td>Separate meetings</td>
<td>• Very new approach. Have never experienced anything like this before (all students).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• HND (Direct Entry) students report a large gap between previous teaching practices and requirements for this module.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 11 students reported that for the first time they to read an academic journal and read the summary in another module running in parallel. Very different from the in-depth evaluation required for this module.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Relatively new to prepare for a module in steps rather than one (broad) assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Seeking clarification why the structure for this module is needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lectures are very good. Good use of demonstrating theory through examples and cases. Guest lecture by Operations Director of medium-sized company on strategy formation and personal experience much appreciated.

Some students did not see the need for reading academic journal publications.

Why not exposed to learning some steps in years before (like critically analysing texts and writing coursework in steps)?

Involvement of other lecturers to deliver on specific topics new but beneficial to learning experience.

Request to allocate marks to every step of the coursework (for example, the selected topic).

For too many marks allocated to commentary (25%), which is only max. 500 words. Is disproportional to the marks for final report (20%), which is max. 3000 words.

This type of learning should be introduced in earlier years (particularly on style of referencing and writing a report [ed.: as opposed to submitting essays]).

Hours for module exceeding hours scheduled by students.

Call for generic topics set by tutor. Coursework not contributing to gaining broader knowledge about strategic management.

Video-conferencing with other campus limits learning experience for those students (remark: caused by some unexpected technical difficulties); limits peer-to-peer contact.

Limited possibilities for group meetings due to less facilities for students video-conferencing.

Self-assessments for preparations exam hardly used due to time needed for steps of coursework.

Home students, particularly HND Direct Entry, expressed concerns about learning style needed for assignment. Clearly expressed wish to have on broad assignment.

Same group expressed concerns about commentary and doubted why they should read work from others.

Home students about 50-50 divided about set-up of module.

EU and Chinese students hardly participating in discussion.

Table 4: Overview of individual interviews at aggregated level. Please note that curiously enough none of the Chinese students asked for such an individual meeting, but there was contact during the lectures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10–14</td>
<td>Meetings with individual students (26 in total)</td>
<td>French students: used to writing about controversies. Less used to requirements for citing and referencing and not familiar with using a case study in report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>German students: level of assignment complies with German experience but less used to step-by-step writing of report. Debating of controversies new. One student reported that topics were already dealt with during first year of undergraduate programme in Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home students: divided about module. With progression of module better understanding of what is required. Some asking that other modules should be organised like this. One student: when sitting down and looking at requirements for module, this is to be understood and do-able.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 home students reported problems with the planning and scheduling in conjunction with the coursework for other modules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 other home students mentioned that the module was hard to combine with their job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 students with learning disabilities found that this stage-wise progress of coursework suited them well while 1 recorded that he preferred to submit every 14 days one coursework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Benefits well beyond this module. Other lectures should adopt the same approaches or build on this module.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>