

Learning from Disruption: Exploring what Counts in Higher Education

Key messages from the 4th International Enhancement Conference,
June 2020



What are we learning from disruption?



- We are living with disruption: it is a defining feature of the 21st Century.
- The sector can be nimble and accelerate planned changes when necessary.
- We can respond more quickly to the needs of the student body than we had previously thought.
- We are able to remove barriers, offering students increasingly flexible means of learning and accessing support services.
- Greater flexibility can empower independent learning.
- It is difficult to predict the impact of disruption on student demand.
- Digital learning environments can enable greater student engagement.
- It is important to create more cohesive communities and kinder working environments.



What opportunities have been created?



- Reimagining the purpose of higher education.
- Deciding what the 'new normal' looks like: what we want to retain from the pre-COVID world, and what we want to reshape.
- Developing a vision for a connected lifelong learning ecosystem.
- Building on the renewed interest in digital learning and overturning the misconception that it is inferior to in-person learning.
- Making better use of learning analytics for greater benefits.
- Encouraging more authentic links between research, teaching, and practice.
- Learning how to build relationships in digital spaces and recognising the importance of social interaction and peer support to the student experience.

**“ We shouldn’t only learn from disruption,
we must learn to live with it. ”**

Professor Mary Stuart, CBE, Vice Chancellor, University of Lincoln





How do we stay calm and positive?



- Remind ourselves that delivery during the pandemic wasn't necessarily 'online learning', but 'emergency remote learning' (or 'panic-gogy').
- Technology is less important than pedagogy; simple approaches and tools are often best.
- Remember that we (as individuals, institutions, and sectors) can't do everything.
- Remain practical and pragmatic in our approach to what is possible.
- Establish what is a baseline for 'good enough' and forgive ourselves, and others, for mistakes. We cannot always be perfect.
- Remember to share our experiences and resources.
- Role model wellbeing and remember staff keeping calm will have a significant positive impact on student wellbeing.
- Pay attention to our basic physical, psychological, emotional and social needs.
- Value having fun! It enhances learning and improves wellbeing.

“ **Let's normalise accessible learning.** ”

Andrew Bowie, Vice President
Higher Education, Highlands
and Islands Students' Association



What do we need to do next?



- Commit to meaningful, long-term engagement with our communities.
- Change our curricula: decolonising is only the beginning.
- Reimagine delivery and assessment methods and think about when attendance (whether in-person or online) is necessary.
- Consider what in-person learning looks like in a socially distanced context. How can we ensure all students receive the support they need?
- Recognise the changing nature of employment and ensure that our programmes remain current.
- Reassure students (and prospective students) that the value of their education is resilient to this and other disruption.
- Adjust our expectations about student engagement and ensure that student representatives are supported to do their work in the online environment.
- Continue to address barriers to participation: students and staff do not necessarily have equal workspace, technology, or skills development opportunities.
- Value and support staff, who may be anxious about job security, workload, and their preparedness to teach online. This includes those who support learning and teaching, and those who work in student services and students' associations.