

## Experiences in Digital Learning

### Webinar Series Booklet

*This booklet discusses a series of free webinars between June 2020 and May 2021 organised by the Centre for Distance Education, the University of London Institute in Paris and Goldsmiths, University of London, with the aim of enabling practitioners of open and digital education to discuss and learn from each other about the innovation and development in digital education taking place ‘in a time of Pandemic’. Lively, extensive discussions were a feature of all the webinars; the audiences were large, engaged and well-informed and a follow-up series is being arranged for the 2021-22 academic year.*

*A blog report of each webinar is available separately.*

### Executive Summary

At the University of London, as elsewhere, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic heightened and speeded up trends towards the digitisation of education that were already underway. The last two years, however, have seen a truly unprecedented rate of change. In the words of Sir Richard Dearlove, writing in the forward to the University’s strategy for 2020-25, it has already been exploiting ‘the opportunities inherent in a period of profound change’.

But profound changes are always associated with threats and challenges as much as opportunities. This webinar series, organised by one of the University’s Centres of Excellence, the Centre of Distance Education; its base in Paris; and Goldsmiths, a constituent college, will have enabled members and collaborators to benefit from the most experienced practitioners of digital education and take advantage of the latter while minimising the former. It featured 21 speakers from four countries, with Linda Amrane-Cooper, head of the CDE, in the chair and with the consistent support of the CEO of the University of London in Paris, Tim Gore OBE.

Many speakers highlighted the wide range of tools available to support students and enhance their digital experiences, ranging from simple text-based chat functions to fully immersive virtual reality. More than one commented that this work would have been impossible, and higher education would have essentially ground to a standstill if the pandemic had emerged even twenty years ago. Nevertheless, much has been lost. It was surprising to hear students comment that they ‘missed lectures’ but, digging more deeply, what they have missed most is socialising with their peers around them. Social software is rapidly improving but it cannot catch up completely, and it is this that is driving students’ and lecturers’ hopes to move on, not to the campuses of the 2010s but to a hybrid future: both face-to-face and online.

Our students are a diverse bunch in many ways. Some divides – between the digital ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ – have been exacerbated, but others lessened. Students with certain disabilities, and others with caring responsibilities or who work full time, have benefited most from these changes and are chiefly worried that some of the gains will be lost; future provision must be flexible and responsive as well as hybrid.

Assessment has seen some of the most profound changes. Gone, probably never to return, are large exam halls filled with silent students working on identical papers. Much has been learned from the

emergency online assessments of 2020, not least that online proctoring is expensive, difficult and unsatisfactory for students and invigilators alike. Instead, many institutions are aiming to minimise plagiarism and other academic misconduct through imaginative assessment design.

Simon Walker was referring to assessment when he said that ‘the genie [of digitisation] is out of the bottle’, but this might refer to any aspect of teaching and learning. Even after the pandemic has finally passed, the University of London will be more virtual as well as more global, and this will help achieve the institution’s ‘net operational carbon’ goal. In this ‘more virtual’ environment, however, pedagogy must still drive technology. We will all do well to remember Matt Dane Baker’s comment that ‘our students will not be short-changed’ by the changes we propose. And with that in mind, the Experiences in Digital Learning webinar series for 2021-22 will start in October with a session focused on the student voice.

## Speakers

- **Linda Amrane-Cooper**, Centre for Distance Education and University of London, UK (Chair; all except January)
- **Matt Dane Baker**, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA, USA (June and October)
- **Jon Baldwin**, JISC, UK (May)
- **Maha Bali**, American University in Cairo, Egypt (March)
- **Sam Brenton**, University of London, UK (June)
- **Mark d’Inverno**, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK (November)
- **Marco Gillies**, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK and CDE (January)
- **Stylianios Hatzipanagos**, Centre for Distance Education, London, UK (February)
- **Elisabeth Hill**, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK (May)
- **Simon Katan**, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK (January)
- **Whitney Kilgore**, IDesign, Dallas, TX, USA (June)
- **Thierry Koscielniak**, Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers in Paris (Le Cnam), Paris, France (June and November)
- **Stephanie Marshall**, Queen Mary University of London, UK (May)
- **Sally Parsley**, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK (October)
- **Daksha Patel**, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK and CDE (October)
- **Simon Rofe**, Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy, University of London, UK and CDE (November)
- **Virna Rossi**, London Ravensbourne University, London, UK
- **Ayona Silva-Fletcher**, Royal Veterinary College, London, UK and CDE (June)
- **El Spaeth**, University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK (March)
- **Alan Tait**, Centre for Distance Education, London, UK (February)
- **Simon Walker**, University College London, UK (February)
- **Matthew Yee-King**, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK (November)

## Webinar Highlights

### *June 2020: The Future of Digital Learning*

- 'Higher education is not yet 'web-shaped'' – Sam Brenton
- 'Suddenly, instructional designers became the 'essential workers' of higher education: [in lockdown] they are highly respected and sought-after but, if anything, even more burnt out' – Whitney Kilgore
- 'Face to face, teachers know how their students are responding through visual clues that are simply not there on video' – Ayona Silva-Fletcher
- 'We will need to take into account the minority of students who don't want to, or can't, return to face to face teaching' – Whitney Kilgore

### *October 2020: Learning Design*

- 'About 60% of clinical education can be replaced by a mixture of videos and simulations' – Matt Dane Baker
- 'The bandwidth divide is real... some of our students have only been able to access [the full range of course material] through setting up their phones as hotspots' – Matt Dane Baker
- '[Using Miro for course design has many advantages]: it requires team members to work together, the pedagogy is explicit and the completed Miro boards become a useful resource' – Sally Parsley
- 'Our students should not be short-changed' – Matt Dane Baker

### *November 2020: Synchronous Online Teaching*

- 'To have a good digital presence, you need... first class sound, a second camera to provide different visual images, and an environment with no distractions' – Mark d'Inverno
- 'Sometimes we engage in learning, but sometimes it happens to us' – Simon Rofe
- 'If a museum is closed [by the pandemic], the next best thing may be to walk round its exhibition space in virtual reality' – Thierry Koskielniak
- 'Second Life is still a flat-screen virtual world... the immersive virtual scenarios that are now possible are much more memorable and engaging for learners' – Linda Amrane-Cooper

### *January 2021: Sustaining Teaching Online*

- [Some positive and negative outcomes of 2020] 'Teaching became more responsive, and feedback from online exams was encouraging... but students missed social aspects of learning, despite being difficult to engage in interactive sessions online' – Simon Katan
- 'Typical distance-learning students are older, with work and family commitments, and may be based in different cities, countries or even continents... during lockdown, universities have been forced to favour this type of student' – Marco Gillies
- 'Even low-level interactions between students using, for example, Microsoft Teams' persistent chat can help to build relationships between them' – Marco Gillies

### *February 2021: Digital Assessment*

- [Moving every piece of assessment online...] 'In London's case, this meant over 110,000 exams for 35,000 students in 600 centres and 180 countries worldwide' – Alan Tait
- 'Personation can be addressed by designing assessments with [academic] integrity in mind, but how this works will vary between disciplines' – Alan Tait
- 'One programme leader described the enforced move to online assessment as 'a silver lining of this terrible pandemic'' – Stylianos Hatzipanagos
- 'Ideally, the same software platform should be used throughout the exam process, from paper authoring through proctoring, marking and grading' – Simon Walker
- "The genie is out of the bottle' for assessment: it will look very different after the COVID crisis than it did before – Simon Walker

### *March 2021: Inclusive Online Practices*

- 'The three Universal Design for Learning principles – representation, action and expression, and engagement – act as lenses through which we view teaching and learning, and can be thought of as like 'rear-view mirrors' – Virna Rossi
- 'Equity means that all participants will have access to the space where dialogue takes place, and if that space is online, it means connectivity, comfort and the power to participate – Maha Bali
- 'I am not interested in picking up crumbs of compassion thrown from the table of someone who considers himself my master. I want the full menu of rights' – Desmond Tutu, quoted by Maha Bali
- 'We all design courses with an 'imagined student' in mind, and that student will be neurotypical... non-imagined students are likely to be disadvantaged' – El Spaeth
- 'Working with neurodivergent students reminds us that there is no 'best' way to learn – El Spaeth

### *May 2021: The Institutional Response*

- [Three challenges for the HE sector in 2030:] 'ensuring that joy and serenity remain possible, relating to different experiences across the sector, and developing a HE model that is compelling but still affordable' – Jon Baldwin
- 'Almost universally, students confessed to missing lectures' – Jon Baldwin
- 'The challenge of digital poverty is hard to address, particularly when students are unable to access facilities on campus' – Stephanie Marshall
- 'Goldsmiths staff who were already experienced in using Panopto for lecture capture became 'champions' who were willing and able to help their peers' – Elisabeth Hill

### Some Useful Links

- **HyFlex** (hybrid flexible teaching modality): <https://medium.com/the-faculty/hyflex-teaching-d1347143ef3d>
- **JISC report, *Learning and Teaching Reimagined***: <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/learning-and-teaching-reimagined-change-and-challenge>
- **Ketso** (mind mapping): <https://ketso.com/>
- **MindMeister** (more mind mapping): <https://www.mindmeister.com/>
- **Miro** (brainstorming; collaboration; course design): <https://miro.com/>
- **Padlet** (online notice board): <https://en-gb.padlet.com/>
- **Panopto** (video recording and sharing): <https://www.panopto.com/>
- **Teaching & Learning Innovation Centre (TALIC), Goldsmiths**: <https://www.gold.ac.uk/talic/>
- **Wooclap** (interactive learning tool): <https://www.wooclap.com/>

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