



## CODE Webinars 2023-24

### Summary Booklet

*This booklet discusses five webinars organised by the [Centre for Online and Distance Education \(CODE\)](#) between December 2023 and July 2024. Four of these formed a series under the strapline of 'Experiences in Digital Learning': the May webinar was an additional event not part of this series. CODE was formed in 2005 as the Centre for Distance Education and changed its name in 2022 in response to the rapid, pandemic-driven 'shift online'.*

*This was the fourth webinar series organised by CODE under the Experiences in Digital Learning strapline. Previous series were co-organised by the University of London in Paris (ULIP) and the first, held during the first pandemic-hit academic year of 2020-21, also by Goldsmith's, University of London. The overall aim of these series is to enable practitioners of open and digital education worldwide to discuss and learn from each other about innovations in digital education during and after the pandemic. All five webinars presented here were well attended, with the 'hot button' topics of climate change and AI proving particularly popular, and each was followed by a lively discussion. Further CODE webinars will be held during 2024-25.*

A blog report of each of these webinars is available separately.

### Executive Summary

The fourth Experiences in Digital Learning webinar series was the first to take place entirely after the WHO had declared the official end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sadly, this has not meant an end to COVID: the disease has merely taken its place in the long list of respiratory diseases afflicting us. The world still looks different to how it did in 2019, and that is as true in higher education as anywhere else. Our students now expect (or should expect) a digital, hybrid or blended experience. And we had no sooner begun to settle into this 'new normal' than the next disruptor came along in the form of generative artificial intelligence (genAI). The launch of the free version of ChatGPT 3.5 in November 2022 was the second truly 'disruptive moment' for education in three years; it is not surprising that it was chosen as the topic for two of the five webinars highlighted in this booklet.

One of these two webinars, held in May, was organised through CODE's Special Interest Group in Learning Design and not as part of the Experiences in Digital Learning series. Incidentally, this webinar had what must be the most intriguing title of any CODE webinar in 'Robot Wrestling'. The subtitle, 'Learning Design in the Age of AI', made its content more explicable. The other topics covered were extremely varied: the student experience, innovations in medical education, and the place of climate change in the higher education curriculum across all disciplines, not only the most 'obvious' ones. When the history of the 2020s comes to be written, this is likely to be seen as the greatest disruptor of them all.

This webinar series was also the first to be organised by CODE alone, without either of its previous partners, the University of London in Paris (ULIP) and Goldsmith's. Its reach was no less extensive than that of previous series, however. It featured four chairs and 20 speakers, the latter including a panel of six students and recent graduates organised by new CODE fellow Margaret Korosec at the



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University of Leeds; five more of the expanded team of 42 fellows took part as either speakers or chairs. All the topics covered proved popular, with well over a hundred people attending several of the webinars. This success was undoubtedly due in part to the able leadership of Linda Amrane-Cooper, the director of CODE.

One topic that ran through all the webinars in this series, as in previous ones, was the ‘digital divide’. It is a truism, but it is none the less important to note, that not every student – and, indeed, not every educator – is as well placed to take advantage of what the world of online and distance education has to offer. Every new technology will overcome some barriers but tend to introduce or reinforce others. While students from affluent backgrounds and at well-resourced institutions will self-evidently have readier access to appropriate generative AI tools, this technology can help decrease barriers for neurodiverse students: Kerith George-Briant told of an autistic student who has found that genAI ‘lessens the cognitive burden’ for him.

Out of all the topics considered in this year’s webinars, however, inequalities loom starkest in the arena of climate change. Speaking in January’s webinar, CODE fellow Pete Cannell reminded those of us who teach at a distance that some of our students may be based in countries that are reeling from far more severe effects of extreme weather than those yet faced in the UK. This raises ethical questions for all distance educators. In responding to them, we can take heed of Laura Brammar’s advice to approach our teaching, and our learning, in a way that is both experimental and critical.

We look forward to a further stimulating series of CODE webinars in 2024-25.



## Speakers and Chairs

- **Chie Adachi**, Queen Mary, University of London and CODE (March)
- **Laura Brammar**, University of London (July)
- **Elizabeth Burns**, University of London (January)
- **Pete Cannell**, CODE (January)
- **Martin Compton**, King's College London (Chair; July)
- **Efrat Furst**, Mofet Institute, Israel (May)
- **Kerith George-Briant**, Abertay University, Scotland (July)
- **Leonard Houx**, Cambridge Education Group and CODE (Chair, May)
- **Gwyneth Hughes**, UCL Institute of Education and CODE (Chair; January)
- **Margaret Korosec**, University of Leeds and CODE (Chair; December)
- Student / recent graduate panellists (December):
  - **Claire Ashdown**: MSc Disability Studies, Rights, Inclusion, Leeds
  - **Sue Field**: MSc Engineering Management, Leeds
  - **Chantal Jauvin**: MSc Sustainable Business Leadership, Leeds
  - **James Maskill**: MSc Artificial Intelligence, Leeds
  - **Alejandro (Alex) Sampedro Vila**: MSc Engineering Management, Leeds
  - **William (Bill) Thomas**: MSc Sustainable Business Leadership, Leeds
- **Ugnė Litvinaitė**, London School of Economics (May)
- **Shailey Minocha**, The Open University, UK (May)
- **Neil Moseley**, University of London and CODE (May)
- **Kane Murdoch**, Macquarie University, Australia (May)
- **Claire Rogers**, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (March)
- **Clare Sansom**, Birkbeck, University of London and CODE (Chair, March)
- **Shanon Shah**, King's College London (January)
- **Eglė Vinauskaitė**, Nodes, London (May)



## Webinar Highlights

### *7 December 2023: Student Digital Learning Experiences*

- ‘Coursera offers a different model to the University of Leeds’ distance learning portfolio, with less interaction with tutors but even more flexibility for students’ – Alex Sampedro Vila
- ‘I have found peer support using WhatsApp particularly helpful, because I haven’t studied for decades’ – Sue Field
- ‘Group project work can engender a sense of belonging in online students’ – Bill Thomas
- ‘Informal ‘water cooler moments’ [of informal connection with other students] are rarer in distance learning, but when they do occur they can be very rewarding’ – Sarah Gatford, audience member
- ‘Live sessions have to be ‘nice to have’ rather than ‘must have’ because of the challenge of students in different time zones’ – Claire Ashdown
- ‘Student information systems aimed at young campus-based students will be unsuitable for mature professionals studying online – Claire Ashdown

### *25 January 2024: A Climate Change Curriculum: How? What? When? And for whom?*

- ‘This year [2024] is likely to be the one in which the agreed 1.5°C threshold for limiting the worst effects of climate change is breached for the first time’ – Pete Cannell
- ‘Putting climate change on the curriculum is necessary, but it is not at all straightforward... it is interdisciplinary, and poses challenges in epistemology, pedagogy and ethics’ – Gwyneth Hughes
- ‘There is a consensus among university educators that climate change must be taught, but much more uncertainty about how’ – Gwyneth Hughes
- ‘It is such a fast-moving subject that updating and delivering a web-based curriculum will require a team of expert, dedicated support staff’ – Gwyneth Hughes
- ‘Religions can be influential in changing people’s thoughts and actions around climate change [and other ethical issues]’ – Elizabeth Burns
- ‘Students in the UK and similar countries are in a very privileged position compared to those studying in countries facing the ‘sharp end’ of climate change’ – Anonymous focus group participant

### *7 March 2024: Innovations in Digital Medical and Health Care Education*

- ‘We aimed to maintain continuity, to keep [the digital version of the course] interactive with the ‘feeling of being in a lab’ and to keep a sense of continuity’ – Claire Rogers
- ‘Surprisingly engaging’... ‘really helpful for consolidating learning’ – anonymous student responses to a questionnaire about virtual practical classes



- '[The online course is...] a positive step towards decolonising global health' – Claire Rogers
- 'We need innovation in leadership to face the challenges of the digital transformation and of AI in a socially responsible way.' – Chie Adachi
- 'Flexibility, authentic learning, business, pastoral care, and (above all) inclusion and accessibility' – the five key values underpinning the digital education strategy for Queen Mary Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, according to Chie Adachi

*8 May 2024: Robot Wrestling: Learning Design in the Age of AI<sup>1</sup>*

- 'AI can allow us to create learning designs that are more personalised and contextual and, therefore, more relevant for each learner' – Ugné Litvinaitė
- 'An AI assistant is not a tutor, colleague or friend but a non-human entity, and it cannot provide the connection that we need for our wellbeing' – Shailey Minocha
- 'Inequity in access to AI tools can increase existing inequities in access to education more generally' – Leonard Houx
- 'Our brains, and how they learn are unchanged [by the advent of AI] and, therefore, the basic principles of good pedagogy are unchanged' – Efrat Furst
- 'We need to learn how generative AI works as well as how to use it before we can use it effectively in our teaching' – Ugné Litvinaitė
- 'A case can be made for a return to traditional exams, although they are hard for some students' – Kane Murdoch

*4 July 2024: AI as a Learning Support*

- 'Generative AI [or genAI] can support students to build their confidence, decrease language disadvantages, and fill in the gaps in the 'hidden curriculum'' – Kerith George-Briant
- 'Policymakers should realise that genAI can help all students and develop guidance accordingly, particularly as the technology is moving so fast' – Kerith George-Briant
- 'Employability is as much about building successful careers as about obtaining jobs' – Laura Brammar
- 'Students need to learn those skills that are least easily replicated by AI: critical thinking, creativity, social and emotional skills, and teaching' – Laura Brammar
- 'AI-assisted training will help students prepare for a working future that is transdisciplinary rather than just multi-disciplinary' – Laura Brammar
- '[In conclusion] we should be encouraged to experiment with AI, and to encourage our students to experiment with it, but always to stay critical' – Laura Brammar

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<sup>1</sup> This webinar was put forward by the CODE Learning Design Special Interest Group and was not part of the original Experiences in Digital Learning 2023-24 series.



### Some Useful Links

- **Coursera:** <https://www.coursera.org/>
- **Prof. Eric Atwell (Leeds University, Artificial Intelligence):**  
<https://eps.leeds.ac.uk/computing/staff/33/professor-eric-atwell>
- **Climate Change in the Curriculum (briefing note):**  
<https://www.london.ac.uk/sites/default/files/code-resources/Resources-to-support-the-integration-of-climate-issues-in-the-curriculum-final.pdf>
- **The Heythrop Association:** <https://www.heythropassociation.org/>
- **Faith for the Climate:** <https://faithfortheclimate.org.uk/>
- **Sustainable Development Goals:** <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- **Supporting Climate Action through Digital Education (Open University, UK):**  
<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/supporting-climate-action-through-digital-education>
- **LSHTM Professional Diploma in Tropical Nursing (online):**  
<https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/study/courses/short-courses/diploma-tropical-nursing>
- **Padlet (digital boards):** <https://padlet.com/>
- **Queen Mary's Digital Education Studio:** <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/digital-education-studio/>
- **Nvivo (data analysis):** <https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/>
- **Cadmus (online assessment platform):** <https://www.cadmus.io/>
- **Free MOOC on digital health (Queen Mary and Ain Shams University, Egypt):**  
<https://asuvh.thinkific.com/courses/digital-health-course>
- **CANVA (visual design platform incorporating AI):** [https://www.canva.com/en\\_gb/](https://www.canva.com/en_gb/)
- **ChatGPT:** <https://openai.com/index/chatgpt/>
- **Microsoft Copilot:** <https://copilot.microsoft.com/>
- **Quality Assurance Agency (UK HE):** <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/>
- **Advance HE Embedding Employability Framework:** <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/employability-enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-higher-education>
- **'There's an AI for that':** <https://theresanaiforthat.com/>
- **CareerSet (AI-based careers app):** <https://careerset.com/>
- **Gemini (updated version of Google Bard AI tool):**  
[https://gemini.google.com/?gad\\_source=1](https://gemini.google.com/?gad_source=1)

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