

Hybrid Higher: Hybrid working and leadership in higher education

Leadership Intelligence Report

How to achieve a purposeful hybrid balance between
virtual engagement and in-person collaboration

—

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A welcome from the Chief Executive of Advance HE

There is much to celebrate about the speed and success with which higher education institutions (HEIs) pivoted to online learning and teaching. This took place at different times in national and regional HE contexts around the world as the Covid-19 virus spread. The higher education sector achieved not only an unprecedentedly fast change of core delivery methods, embracing at scale online technologies, it also burst several of its underpinning paradigm bubbles.

And now we face the question of what comes next. Do we get back to as we were or do we harness the energy of transformation and seize this opportunity for some more radical reinvention? An emphasis on place may still be important for many institutions but let us make the most of what we have discovered over the last 12 to 18 months, that flexible and virtual ways of working and study open up new potential, greater inclusivity and innovation.

We have learnt through our collective response to the pandemic that high-quality learning and teaching, highly effective research collaboration and great virtual leadership can be achieved through technology and empowering and trusting colleagues. Let's use our learning as we design our new 'hybrid' world. We can become agile participants in an evolving landscape where we really question how we use the world's resources, how we live our lives, and how we participate in both 'real' and virtual work and study communities.

Hybrid working presents a complex leadership and governance challenge. There are many balances to be struck, many voices to be heard, and many options to be explored. Our goal, therefore, with the *Hybrid Higher* project has been to rapidly convene groups of senior colleagues from across the sector to engage in collaborative conversations regarding important aspects of this challenge. In this report we attempt to play back the intelligence and insight that came out of those conversations. You have the full report with the detail, along with some associated thinking and references, and you have the *Hybrid Higher Highlights* pamphlet that pulls out the key points and principles.

Our thanks to everyone involved for the tremendous levels of engagement, openness and creative thinking that characterised the *Hybrid Higher* webinar workshops and for the high-quality discussions that took place. I hope these publications, direct and rapid outputs from those workshops, will help to provide the support and stimulus you need to work through the important planning and decision-making, working collaboratively with others and tailored for your context, involved in building for a hybrid future.

Alison Johns
Chief Executive
Advance HE

1 Introduction

Each twist in the journey through the Covid-19 pandemic has thrown up new challenges. Some of these have been substantial traumas, things to be suffered, lived through or overcome, while others have been disruptors that have significantly changed the way we do things. The thing about disruptors, though, is that they can sometimes point toward innovations that may be a change for the better. This is exemplified in the strong potential suggested by a hybrid operating model, which follows months of enforced working from home and furlough. Employers across all sectors are looking closely at how they can make hybrid work to meet both staff expectations and business needs.

Hybrid working is suddenly a major area of conversation in the media, on phone-in radio shows, in management journals and websites, and on human resources (HR) forums. The ‘what next?’ question has rushed into sharp focus in countries such as the UK and US where large-scale Covid-19 vaccination programmes have been successful in significantly reducing both infection and transmission rates, in combination with extended periods of social lockdown. At long last the prospect of opening up society and rebooting economic activity and employment may be upon us!

For some employers, the hybrid idea is a way of hedging their bets as they wait to see the way the wind is blowing in the economy and the employment market; for others, hybrid working is being embraced for all of its liberating potential, linked to what is probably quite a close natural affinity with the organisation’s core business model. Most employers, however, are looking to remodel their employment practices by extending their existing flexible working provisions to capture the opportunities presented through hybrid working and to safely meet changing employee expectations. Research carried out by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, UK; September 2020) shows that *“before the pandemic, 65% of employers either did not offer regular working from home at all or offered it to 10% or less of their workforce. After the crisis, that 65% is expected to fall dramatically to 37%.”* Other research looking at employee experiences, such as the intriguingly titled ‘Disparity Begins at Home’ report from the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH, February 2021), suggests that while working from home brought with it many difficulties and challenges, only about 6% of people want to go back to full-time office working.

Alongside other sectors, higher education (HE) faces important choices regarding the potential offered by a hybrid operating model. The rapid pivot to online learning and teaching in response to Covid-19, with many staff working from home, was something that no one saw coming, but we did it. Yes, we did it. And now, what next? Well, the pivot keeps on turning as the unpredictable world around us continues to change. There is a sense in which things may pivot back to how they were before, pre-pandemic, with welcome norms returning and the social connections so important for both effective work and study reasserting themselves. There is also a sense in which things may pivot forward to new norms and relationships, harnessing the momentum of innovation, opportunistic discovery, and emerging new work/study paradigms. A hybrid combination of the two seems most likely, welcoming back the familiar while embracing the new, but such a fusion of elements can never be a one-size-fits-all approach, and a high level of thoughtful planning, creative design, flexibility and emotional intelligence will be needed from those leading institutional change.

1.1 The project: Hybrid Higher: hybrid working and leadership in higher education

To support the HE sector to engage with the potential and the uncertainty brought about by the prospect of large-scale hybrid working, in June 2021 Advance HE launched a rapid, generative project to explore the hybrid question. The *Hybrid Higher* initiative brought together senior colleagues from across the sector with responsibility for planning future work and operational models. Through facilitated discussion in two webinar workshops colleagues worked to develop a picture of the challenges and opportunities involved in hybrid working, to share insights and to consider how to achieve a purposeful hybrid balance between virtual engagement and in-person collaboration.

The aims of the project were:

- + to enable high-quality conversations
- + to share information, inspiration and intelligence
- + to explore ideas and co-create possible solutions and approaches.

The workshops began with a carousel of speakers, followed by three parallel sessions of facilitated group discussion. The three focus areas for discussion were:

- + operational effectiveness
- + leadership, team cohesion and motivation
- + fairness and inclusion.

Each discussion had four questions to consider:

Operational effectiveness

Ensuring an operating model that maintains or enhances the institution's core capabilities around research, education, enterprise and key stakeholder engagement.

1. If we move towards hybrid working, how do we preserve and enhance high-quality student education, collaborative research and community engagement?
2. What is needed to achieve a vibrant campus experience and how does hybrid working fit with this? (eg access to academic staff for students, seamless student support/ services, deliberate and accidental research exchange, local community crossover...)
3. How much structure is needed to ensure colleagues are focused and productive in the way that the institution needs them to be? What sort of policies would support this?
4. What safeguards should be put in place around hybrid working to protect the needs of the institution?

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Leadership, team cohesion and motivation The challenge of leading with purpose, focus and engagement when team members have mixed modes of participation, and achieving both individual and collective commitment. 1. What are the main challenges of virtual and hybrid leadership in higher education? 2. What core policies and practices are needed consistently to enable hybrid teams/ departments to perform well and flourish? (And how would we deal with dysfunctional hybrid teams?) 3. What are the values that underpin both hybrid leadership and hybrid teamwork? 4. How should we support and develop HE managers/leaders so that they are equipped with the skills and approaches needed for hybrid leadership (including motivation and engagement)?	Page 29 Page 35 Page 38 Page 41
Fairness and inclusion Designing and facilitating fair and flexible working practices that suit <u>all</u> locations and underpin a culture of inclusion where no groups or individuals are disadvantaged. 1. When considering hybrid working, what are some of the major challenges for inclusion? 2. A question about listening (open consultation): as we plan new hybrid and flexible working practices, who should we listen to and how should we be listening? (As we monitor progress, how should we continue to listen?) 3. How can we achieve a 'one team' feeling when colleagues are both close and remote, and avoid the unfairness that comes with in-groups and out-groups? 4. Taking one relevant example, things like visibility, exposure and networking are known to be important for progression and career development. How, therefore, as we plan hybrid working practices can we guard against unintended consequences that may disproportionately impact certain groups or individuals?	Page 53 Page 58 Page 60 Page 63

In addition to these topic-focused questions, participants were also invited to reflect around **four overarching questions/provocations**:

- a) **Workplace** – how important is the workplace as a destination?
- b) **Welcome** – how important is the workplace as a community?
- c) **Wellbeing** – how important is the work context (setting) for physical and mental health?
- d) **Workforce** – how sustainable is hybrid working for organisational growth?

To guide the project overall and the interactions during the workshops the following **key principles** were used to frame the engagement:

- + the challenge is about people first, not technology
- + good practice is good practice
- + well-intended measures/policies may have unintended consequences
- + where people work may be less important than how people work
- + balance is key to decision-making – for example, balancing the needs of staff, students, and communities
- + listening to the ‘less heard’ voices (inclusion)
- + project participants are experts in their own context.

The carousel session, which began the workshops, was a highlight in itself. Beginning and ending with questions from the workshop participants, the three carousel speakers each adopted a different perspective:

- + Roshan Israni, Deputy Chief Executive, UCEA – operational effectiveness perspective
- + Juliette Alban-Metcalf, Chief Executive, Real World Group – leadership perspective
- + Dr Simon Inger, Learning and Organisational Development Manager, University of Bath, and Co-Chair of the ODHE Network – staff engagement, inclusion and fairness perspective.

The central question to which they were all responding was this:

If universities and colleges adopt large-scale a hybrid working model for staff, what are the implications, challenges, opportunities, advantages and potential pitfalls?

Our sincere thanks to the carousel speakers for their excellent contributions and support. Ideas and insights from the carousel session are included in the body of this report, and a video of the Hybrid Higher workshop is available on the Advance HE website at www.advance-he.ac.uk/membership/advance-he-membership-benefits/hybrid-higher-hybrid-working-and-leadership-higher-education

Following the workshops our commitment was to rapidly produce a leadership intelligence report for Advance HE member institutions drawing upon the information, inspiration and intelligence generated. This is deliberately a ‘rapid’ rather than ‘polished’ report. Given the nature of the hybrid challenge and the rapid, generative nature of the project, we wanted to get the leadership intelligence back to you quickly while it still has timely relevance and value. This full report is accompanied by a shorter *Hybrid Higher Highlights* pamphlet which extracts and presents the key principles and principle-based questions. The pamphlet, as a short digest of ideas, is available to everyone.

Achieving a hybrid operating model in HE, one that meets diverse needs and expectations at the same time as safeguarding the organisation by enhancing both what we do and how we do it, will involve the efforts and incredible ingenuity of colleagues at every level as we move not towards a 'new' normal but the 'next' normal, reflecting the ongoing fluidity of the world we are currently working in. We hope this publication will be an important resource to support you in achieving this. We send our thanks to all of the participants who shared their thinking and ideas so openly and inclusively during the webinar workshops. *The higher education sector thrives on respectful conversations.*

A one-size-fits-all approach will not work for hybrid higher and whatever we do will be differentiated by context, whether at a national level, an institutional level or a service/profession/subject level. As one of the principles above sets out, *you are the experts in your own context.*

2 Operational effectiveness

2.1 Introduction

Operational effectiveness refers to the ability to establish effective processes, based on core capabilities within an organisation (Porter, 1996). This involves improving process performance by leading and controlling the processes within the firm (in this case a higher education institution [HEI]) as well as measuring and improving the processes themselves (Santa et al, 2009). Hill (2005) identifies five performance dimensions to attaining operational effectiveness: cost, quality, flexibility, speed and reliability.

As the HE sector has become more ‘business-like’ over recent decades, and despite a reluctance to use the language of business, institutions have increasingly had to measure their operational effectiveness, and improve their performance, according to these dimensions. The ability of any organisation to remain sustainable and successful, however defined, is intrinsically linked to operational effectiveness, and this is being challenged in an unprecedented way by the possibility of a hybrid working future.

The place where people work has traditionally been the campus (which itself takes a range of forms in the UK and internationally), with institutionally configured and equipped spaces. The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated a great deal of work, including teaching and assessment, to be moved largely to personal and off-campus spaces. HE leaders are now having to consider hybrid working, bounded by operational constraints (within and beyond their control), and the desire of many employees to work remotely to varying degrees. Thus, a ‘hybrid higher’ is placing operational effectiveness at the forefront of the minds of HE leaders and senior management teams.

How much flexibility around where and when people do their jobs is best?

What strategies are most effective?

The impact of hybrid working on operational effectiveness could move both ways. There are opportunities to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of various aspects of HE activity, and many lessons to learn from the virtual forms of engagement brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. It could be said that the enforced experiment with virtual engagement has been an age of digital enlightenment, and not just for HE. There are also potential threats to operational effectiveness, ranging from the quality of the student experience through to the strength of innovation in collaborative research. There is a lot for leaders and colleagues to balance.

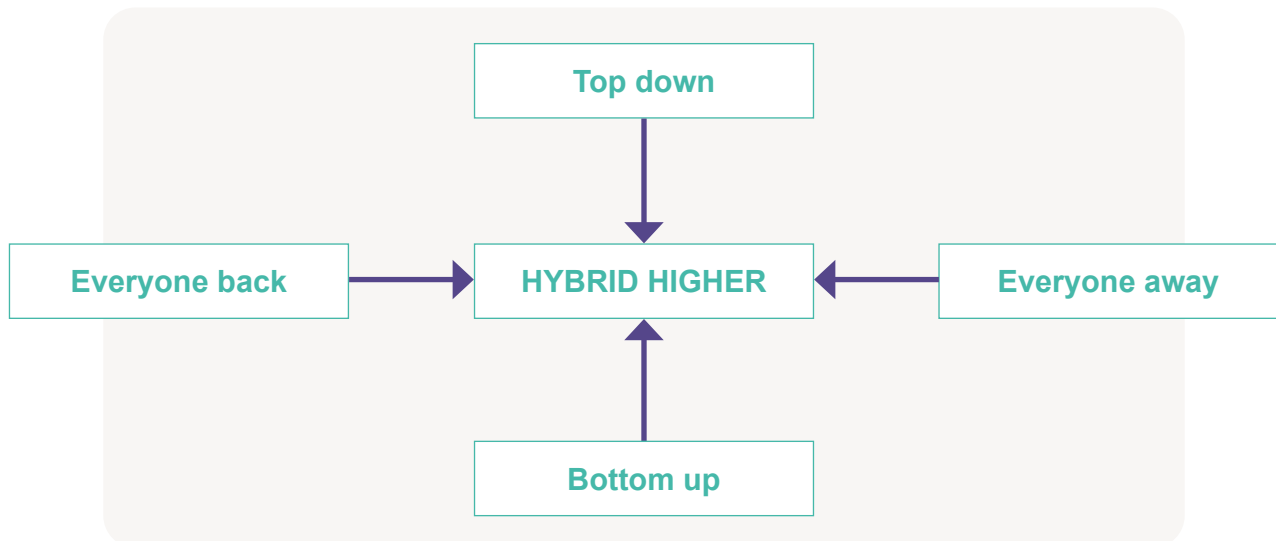
Operational effectiveness is intrinsically tied to leadership, team cohesion, motivation, inclusion, values and culture, and raises a range of concerns and challenges for leaders in HE, including:

- + how to remain a successful ‘business’ across the range of our internal and external activities (for example, how might hybrid working affect interdisciplinary, national and international research collaboration, community engagement, excellence in teaching and learning and the student experience?)
- + how to ensure equality, equity, diversity, fairness and inclusion

- + when decisions are/can be made in relation to who works where and when, how much flexibility is possible, and how much face-to-face interaction is essential. Strategic methods to consider include pilots, trials and incremental decisions (Figure 1)
- + ensuring we do not create a two-tier workforce over access to flexible working
- + frameworks and principles versus rules and policies (and why it has to be one or the other)
- + how we limit our operational palette to avoid confusion and complexity of decision-making, while ensuring there are sufficient tools available to us to deliver operational effectiveness during a period of complex change
- + being mindful that we need to consider not just solutions for today, but also solutions for how things may need to be in two- or three-years' time. The organisation's structural footprint needs to be able to support both changing demands that are hard to forecast as well as future growth.

These considerations need to happen at pace, adding further to the challenges faced by senior leaders.

Figure 1: Pathways to operational effectiveness.



This figure illustrates the pathways to operational effectiveness that came through in the Hybrid Higher conversations. One dimension is about the balance between top-down decision-making and more organic, bottom-up influence. The other dimension is really about the starting point for the institution – either bringing everyone back to campus and then beginning discussions about flexibility, or colleagues remaining where they are (eg working from home), if they are content to be there, and then negotiating the on-campus/in-office needs. Both scales present a spectrum of options rather than four fixed alternatives.

“You will need to manage the expectations of those around you, particularly if you are being tasked with bringing in a hybrid working in your institution.”

Roshan Israni (Deputy Chief Executive, UCEA)

During the Hybrid Higher webinar workshops, those groups engaged in the conversations about **operational effectiveness** explored four discussion areas:

- 1 If we move towards hybrid working, how do we preserve and enhance high-quality student education, collaborative research, and community engagement?
- 2 What is needed to achieve a vibrant campus experience, and how does hybrid working fit with this? (eg access to academic staff for students, seamless student support/services, deliberate and accidental research exchange, local community crossover...)
- 3 How much structure is needed to ensure colleagues are focused and productive in the way that the institution needs them to be? What sort of policies would support this?
- 4 What safeguards should be put in place around hybrid working to protect the needs of the institution?

The responses to these discussion areas are summarised in Sections 2.2 to 2.6 below.

2.2 If we move towards hybrid working, how do we preserve and enhance high-quality student education, collaborative research and community engagement?

Despite the challenges, is it essential to maintain or enhance the quality of what we are fundamentally doing. *If we don't know where we are going, any path will do*, and so the role of institutional vision in decision-making is crucial. Education sits at the heart of establishing an effective hybrid higher model, and learning and teaching must be seen as the most immediate and necessary focus of any hybrid working planning. While we may be reticent about using the language, students are our primary customers, and their experience and educational outcomes should underpin the values of our organisations. Further, what the emergency phase of the Covid-19 pandemic has made clear is that, whether we like it or not, students are becoming highly attuned to the notion of value for money. The sector has made much of the ‘student experience’, and the loss of this ‘experience’ is driving calls for fee refunds (Davies, 2021).

This primary focus throughout the pandemic on learning and teaching and the student experience has meant that other areas of our operations have received less attention to date, with unintended consequences for our institutions and their environs. For example, what might hybrid working decisions in an institution mean for the local economy where that institution is the largest employer?¹ What might it mean for local entrepreneurship? In addition, the operational effectiveness of hybrid working on research has received far less attention to date. Are we confident our research activities have sufficient voice in hybrid working decision-making and, if not, how do we facilitate this? The discussions during the Advance HE Hybrid Higher workshops suggest not.

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions about preserving and enhancing high-quality student education, collaborative research and community engagement.

Observations and concerns

- + Existing measures of quality don't need to change because we don't currently measure quality on the basis of attendance. We measure feedback, quality of assessment, module/unit descriptors, external examiner reports, accreditation, and so on – these remain the same.
- + Quality is less dependent on method of delivery. Key performance indicators (KPIs) don't change just because the environment has changed. The quality of education is less affected because of the changes. Whether virtual or conventional, quality measures remain the same.
- + There is something inherent in quality that isn't dependent on mode of delivery. The challenge is to reinforce strengths and think about what adjustments are needed.
- + The most important thing in maintaining educational quality is to develop the level of understanding of how to use the online tools to meet our quality targets. Support is needed for staff and students to use these tools effectively.
- + It is important to define what we mean by quality. What do we need to do to improve in terms of reliable assessment, delivery and support? How can we enrich and improve the quality of what we have already?
- + We need to understand what we value in our current provision – what is really important – so that we can preserve it.

1 For example, the move to working from home increases the demand for food and beverage services in areas that are primarily residential, but decreases demand in areas that are primarily productive, such as city centres, and pubs, cafes and restaurants directly employ 4% of the UK workforce. They also employ a disproportionate number of workers with low qualifications – over 50% of workers have a GCSE or less – who will have few other job opportunities (Economics Observatory, 2021).

- + We've been trying to stay in touch with staff and students to make sure we're continuing to deliver what people expect. We've been using student engagement activities and surveys at every level so we can continue the things they value. We're bearing that in mind as we design for professional services staff to keep those key services delivering what they need.
- + Compared with professional services staff, academic staff have had a huge amount of freedom to do what they need to do.
- + Who are our customers, what are we delivering to them, and how can we keep this going?
- + Viability – feasibility – desirability drives the model.
- + If colleagues are not working in the same environment, they need to feel accountable for what they produce and provide. Appropriate measures will be needed to assure this accountability.
- + Increased time gives us more flexibility – previously we were restricted with only the time in class, but now we have more online opportunities.
- + Aspects of research have also become better with online; for example, people using online tools to develop networks, enhance publications etc.
- + Constrained time and constrained place = traditional 9am-5pm in an office; there are advantages to consider (alongside trade-offs) of anywhere and anytime.
- + The question covers three things: students; research and community engagement. To have quality in all three dimensions we need a good framework that covers everything, and we need the infrastructure to provide quality. If you don't have a good sustainable system and a smart campus, it might not be as successful as we need it to be.
- + Over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic we were forced to deconstruct what we did, to deliver the same stuff but in a different manner. We had to reconsider everything and go back to the basic principles of what the university is for. But some of the changes were coming anyway, for instance universities are now taking a different approach to knowledge construction and dissemination ('wikification') which doesn't necessarily fit well with current operational models.

Challenges

- + Staff are not convinced that we're coming out of the pandemic; they are concerned that the parameters could still constantly change. They are uncertain about adopting a certain way of working that may then need to be undone. There are also concerns about travel and commuting; they might be happy to be working on site, but not about getting there. So, we need an adaptable and resilient approach because there are uncertainties.
- + Institutional leaders can't give complete assurances to staff about how things will be, because they simply don't know.

- + Buildings and physical infrastructure provide a constraint in some ways. Some buildings have been repurposed over this time, and other buildings might not be entirely fit for purpose eg concerns about ventilation, safety, etc.
- + It will not be possible to find something which pleases most people all of the time. There might need to be a phased approach as we move out of the pandemic (eg make decisions for the first six months, then plan for the next six). Each phase needs to be led by core principles, eg enhancing the student experience.
- + Students have high expectations and a sense of value for money. They look at the experience holistically; it is not just about the teaching, it's the whole *experience*.
- + If we get this right, the disruption caused by the shift is, in a sense, what we're looking for when you do education properly. Education should be disruptive and challenge the status quo. Some staff get the idea of flexibility and opportunity and are thinking very creatively (eg communicating in different ways and using different tools).
- + We can't plot a course from here to 2030 as there is too much uncertainty, too many unknowns. We need information, responsiveness and flexibility. There is a need to say where we want to get to – the goal – and then trust staff to plot the route to get there.
- + Acknowledgement that 'student as customer' is a hard concept in HE, but in a Covid-19 world there is, perhaps, a greater emphasis on providing customer service and satisfaction.
- + We need to change the culture of all the stakeholders in a positive way so as to be receptive to a more hybrid way of working: students, staff, the local community and so on. Within this, though, we also need to be responsive to the diversity of experience that people have had over the last 18 months.

Possible solutions

- + There is an opportunity to review and restate what we believe to be high-quality student education. We were all thrown into the pandemic situation, we had to make do – panic pedagogy. But now students and colleagues can discuss and define: what does high quality look like, what can/can't we do? There is an opportunity to review everything – what are the differences now, what are our ambitions? We need to be having that discussion with both staff and students.
- + To achieve effective hybrid working with colleagues we have created a timeline and guidance for our objectives. We've learnt from our experiences from the first wave – teams now have a timeline, an action plan, and guidance.
- + Trust is very important; we can't work together if we don't trust each other. Personal responsibility is important. Considering our actions in relation to plans and timelines, juggling needs and caring for staff based on their lived experience.

- + We shouldn't rule out the possibility of introducing new KPIs. Think carefully about new KPIs because students are studying more online and staff are not as present.
- + University values are key – embedding those in what we do and how we act for the long term. We can then develop frameworks, principles and expectations to reflect these.
- + Clarity of expectations will be key: what do we expect from staff, and what do staff expect from us (the institution).
- + This is new to most institutions. We've been forced to go on a hybrid learning curve and navigate this need for continuous engagement with staff and students: regular surveying – what works, what doesn't work – and continuous learning and improvement.
- + Trial and error is key – tried one learning platform, didn't get great feedback, crunched the data, and then made the changes.
- + Above all else, we need to be kind to each other.

Given the continuing profound uncertainties, and the potential tensions between the desires, aspirations, preferred choices and preferences of different groups, then pilots and trials, rather than fixed policies, are key to long-term operational effectiveness in a hybrid world of work.

2.3 What is needed to achieve a vibrant campus experience, and how does hybrid working fit with this? (eg access to academic staff for students, seamless student support/services, deliberate and accidental research exchange, local community crossover...)

How do we want our campuses to be?

Who are we listening to?

How have we described ourselves in promotional materials?

What does vibrant actually mean?

Is vibrant actually needed?

What do we aspire to?

These are the questions challenging the HE sector as we move towards operationalising hybrid working, and they are further compounded by tensions between the expectations of students and staff and institutional *values*. Further, decisions affect different people differently, impacting on inclusion, fairness and equity (see below). For example, the 'busy and vibrant' campus doesn't necessarily suit all students, in the same way that the move to online learning and assessment during the pandemic was a mixed experience with some students struggling and others, sometimes unexpectedly, flourishing. Similarly, staff colleagues will have had very different experiences of home working, with those in shared accommodation or with limited facilities, perhaps, more inclined to return to a well-equipped office environment.

A busy campus environment doesn't itself create a sense of belonging and feeling part of a community for all, and managing expectations and ensuring staff and students are connected to the HE *experience* is sometimes overlooked. Feeling isolated while in a busy environment can profoundly intensify feelings of loneliness. This is very important in terms of building connections to institutional values and culture, and within and across the learning community. People are likely to be more connected to a shared experience, and the people around them, than a shiny new building. However, the space and the place can be a big part of what makes the shared experience both possible and special. Alongside all of this are the hopes and expectations of students as the sector approaches the next academic year/semester. Vibrant, lively, exciting, sociable, welcoming and 'high value' may all be words in the collective student mind. If so, how can we facilitate and safeguard this?

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions about what is needed to achieve a vibrant campus experience.

Observations and concerns

- + The social experience of work gives us a sense of belonging. Being on campus isn't just about being creative, it's about the social relationships, too.
- + In HE there is often a reluctance to see students as customers. We need to engage more directly with the students and ask them what they expect to make a vibrant university.
- + University culture has changed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic – what is the new culture? What do we need? Some colleagues are saying we've shown we can be agile and we've shown we can be trusted. But now things are settling, we're putting big projects in place to work out how we can take things forward, but the danger is that that's going to slow things down, and people want answers now.
- + From a human resources perspective, there is a need to ensure the right protections are in place for the organisation – trust isn't enough (this has a governance dimension).
- + We don't need *new* leadership, just *good* leadership.

Challenges

- + Thinking about culture, what does *vibrant* actually mean? What culture does the university need, and how does it enable us to do things differently? What does the student *experience* actually mean and how should this influence what we ask of staff?
- + Some institutions will have less standard/traditional student bodies, and their needs and experience expectations will be different.

- + The pandemic has prompted more people to think about going to university to retrain and reskill as a result of job losses during the pandemic; in the UK there is evidence of the highest number of applications for courses this September from mature students (UCAS reported a 30.8% increase in applications from those aged 35 and over as at the 29 January 2021 deadline). So, a new group of students is coming in, and the student population make-up may change. This will affect operational decisions as this student population will have very different needs. How do we get that balance right in terms of what is offered? There is an impact on what is considered to be a 'good student experience', and this highlights the diversity of our student population.

Possible solutions

- + Achieving energy, focus, coordination and cooperation – four elements of change which require different approaches. Good planning and operational effectiveness can facilitate and guide these.
- + Reflect on the values and the culture of your HEI and its readiness to transform to hybrid. Some are not ready in terms of infrastructure and values. Some may be waiting for the pandemic to be over to go back. From a global perspective, some institutions don't intend to go to hybrid working because the culture isn't there to support it in the longer term. There is a need to understand what the *global* trend is and what the impact of that will be.
- + Some institutions have always operated in a hybrid way – what can we learn from this? How has this been working? One size does not fit all.

The HE sector, both locally and internationally, is diverse. Thus, what 'vibrant' means in one institution may not be what it means in another. Further, that diversity is replicated within different groups (professional staff, academic staff, research staff, undergraduate students, postgraduate students, community contacts), and these groups further subdivide, each of which has different social and operational needs. This presents a challenge in balancing operational effectiveness with the myriad individual and group needs/preferences that may emerge as greater flexibility and choice becomes available for both work and learning.

2.4 How much structure is needed to ensure colleagues are focused and productive in the way that the institution needs them to be? What sort of policies would support this?

How much structure is needed, and how is this captured and expressed as institutional policies in terms of operational effectiveness, to ensure people are doing what is needed? This raises a number of key questions which will underpin operational effectiveness in a hybrid working HE sector.

How many days am I supposed to come in?

Am I allowed to come in?

Who makes those decisions?

Are current policies fit for purpose? And do we need to go back and redesign from scratch?

How do you decide?

What about contracts of employment?

What needs to be done by whom and what environment is needed to get those results?

“Organisations have become more flexible about where and when employees work. Now they need to be more intentional about their choices and trade-offs.”

(Grattan, 2020)

This need for *intention* is urgent. While decisions need to be flexible so they can be reconfigured for evolving circumstances, staff and students need to see action, even if this is in the form of a trial or pilot project. This needs to be achieved while “... *not losing the long-term aim of creating a highly collaborative, dynamic space allowing informal movement*” (Grattan, 2020). With regard to hybrid working, Grattan cautions that early decisions will have long-term effects, and there is a need to leave your options open in order to be able to evaluate the operational effectiveness of hybrid working policies, and then change/reconfigure them if they fail to support the values, culture and core mission(s) of an institution.

“It is important that we go beyond location when considering hybrid working to include time (working hours, hours per week etc.). Other sectors have been developing the concept of the pixelated workforce (Bersin, 2019); a workforce which is managed by outputs, projects etc. ... this is something that HE will have to catch up with ...”.

Roshan Israni (Deputy Chief Executive, UCEA)

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions about how much structure is needed to ensure colleagues are focused and productive in the way that the institution needs them to be.

Observations and concerns

- + There is a strong need to maintain focus and productivity. Defining the key points for a project or task is key. Reasonably continuous virtual meetings and assessing progress can take care of this point to some extent.
- + It is important to acknowledge that there are different services and functions within the university – those that have choice about where to work and those that don't; those that have huge teams, those that don't.
- + People asking the question “*how many days am I allowed / supposed to come in?*” – this links to trust, permissions and relationships within teams and between teams and managers.
- + These hybrid shifts are radical! For all individuals the impact will be different – eg having very young children at home means people may have had to substantially change some work arrangements. How does this contribute to our ‘humanity’ and help us understand each other more and be more empathetic?
- + People need the time to trial, test and reflect. Beware of making key institutional strategic decisions without allowing for reflection and iteration.
- + We're still in a pandemic, how will things change over time?
- + We need to challenge assumptions about the way we work. For example, really considering and questioning the role of meetings – are traditional committee meetings the right way to conduct university business?
- + How can we look at things differently for the new needs, for what we're trying to achieve, while being mindful of the impact of the medium on diverse ‘voices’.
- + Things seem to be done by instinct at the moment and there is a reticence to engage and make decisions.

Challenges

- + How do our policies and processes play into this new hybrid world?
- + We're seeing that people are wanting to put planning processes in, instead of making decisions. Are people just looking for stability, just coming up for air after a really difficult year? People want to slow down, take a pause. So that might be why we're setting up lots of working groups.

- + Concerns about how experimental work is accommodated on vocational courses. How can this be managed in the long term? Technicians are increasingly assuming the role of demonstrator and deliverer because they're on site. How do we now view support? Roles are changing.
- + How can we best support students in experimental and developmental work? Over the pandemic the old, restrictive timetable schedule has been set aside – there's been a move to a lot of individual support and guidance. The how and the why and the what might need to shift.

Possible solutions

- + Frequent virtual meetings protect the needs of the organisation – we need more contact than we had in the past. However, we need to ensure intentionality behind everything we do.
- + Working with frameworks and principles rather than policies to allow lateral flexibility.
- + Some universities are talking about sprints (as in agile – *deliver incrementally instead of all at once* [Beck et al, 2001]) as a way to use/manage pilots and accommodate ongoing changes.
- + Ensuring people have the autonomy they need, have a critical friend and keep things on track.
- + Looking closely at the current professional services model and considering feasibility and desirability. Questioning the pace of innovation versus traditional established patterns of working, which are based on assumptions. But some of these traditional ways of working might not now be needed.
- + We need to balance the *pace* of innovation with the *structures* required to allow people to engage with change. Guidelines and policies challenge the pace of innovation – they are based in the previous ways of working.
- + Some institutions are not launching but actually releasing their hybrid working framework imminently. Local departments will then decide how they want to take things forward so that it's appropriate to the local environment. This approach involves thinking about three stages:
 - how it's important for operations at a departmental level (what people value in service provision, within departmental parameters in discussion with academic colleagues)
 - then thinking things through at a team level and then with individuals
 - trial the arrangement.
- + In some departments it will be appropriate to be onsite all of the time. There will need to be a trial and adjust period, and to only then think about the longer term once that settles down.

In terms of operational effectiveness, one of the big questions is how all of this impacts on contracts of employment. Is there a framework or a hard policy or are arrangements left to informal chats with line managers? Providing structure can help with management, stability etc, and also perhaps achieve better perceptions of fairness and equity, but it can also constrain and limit. However, leaving the status quo to run is probably not an option, as some previously taken-for-granted occupational requirements will now be open to challenge as a result of what individuals have achieved working from home during the past 12/18 months. Alongside this there is the need to deliver reasonable parity and consistency across large and complex organisations and to avoid glaring inconsistencies and associated challenges.

There is still lots of uncertainty associated with the pandemic which is beyond the control of institutions – trial-test-reflect!

2.5 What safeguards should be put in place around hybrid working to protect the needs of the institution?

Safeguarding around hybrid working encompasses both the organisation and its governance to protect the needs of the institution. Interestingly, organisational safeguarding dominated the Advance HE Hybrid Higher workshop discussions, while safeguarding with regard to governance didn't come up, and risk registers etc were not mentioned. Clearly these governance aspects have a very necessary place in organisational planning for hybrid working and we would encourage leaders to ensure this aspect of their operational effectiveness is fully considered.

In terms of organisational safeguarding, this covers:

- 1 The **physical elements of risk**: ventilation, health and safety, cybersecurity and access to information, commute versus campus safety etc.
- 2 **Psychological safety**: the freedom to speak out, express ideas and be critical, liberating creativity, how to share emotions and feelings; mental wellbeing support; duty of care etc.
- 3 **Sustainability**: ensuring that the institution remains in good shape for the future financially, reputationally, intellectually, environmentally and as regards its place in the community/society.

It is important to note that these three elements can sometimes be in tension with one another. Further, there are big questions surrounding agility. If, after 12 months' hybrid working, teams are dysfunctional (manifested through, for example, high staff turnover or a large number of student complaints) how do we pull back the situation? This links back to (i) *when* decisions are made, and the role of piloting/testing/reflecting and (ii) what is communicated to staff. While pilots are likely to be unpopular with some staff, agility in the face of uncertainty is essential as once formal hybrid working decisions are made they will be very difficult to reverse.

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions about what safeguards should be put in place around hybrid working to protect the needs of the institution:

Observations and concerns

- + Hybrid exists for students already; millennials and other students are generally very adept at navigating the digital landscape and it is amazing how many social media groups people join and hop around. Operating in this mode isn't disconcerting for them. However, we need to note that not all students are young, digitally well-provided for, or able to use the technology. We need to ensure we don't exclude people, and accommodate those that haven't grown up with the technology.
- + If the sector moves to be much more hybrid, there will need to be a lot more consideration of how this works. Use occupational psychologists to think about how the differences play out.
- + Cyber security is a *big* issue. How do we secure data and information on campus and off? Institutions need policies to carefully govern this. In a hybrid environment, how much information is confidential and how much is not?
- + Mental health, wellbeing support and coaching conversations. Providing managers and colleagues with the support and confidence to have the conversation needed about what the challenges are, how we can learn and possible ways forward. Coaching helps to provide a psychologically safe space to share feelings/emotions as well as problem solve.

Challenges

- + While we are in some ways constrained by our buildings and estate, we at least have control over things such as ventilation, health and safety etc. But what about the commute – how do we make this safe for staff when they are required to be on campus?
- + Working with confidential student data on own laptops – what are the policies here? Should this even be happening?
- + When is the informal digital environment subject to potential data disclosure requests (Freedom of Information [FoI])? What are the mechanisms for promoting informal online discussions if they were to become stifled by such concerns?
- + When we use social media, what attention do we pay to those settings and the policies we apply to digital communication (this has always been a risk, but will be increasingly so)? We're more used to thinking about email but those policies should apply more widely.
- + Leading others through our own self-leadership. How we behave, what we talk about, what we prioritise all sends messages. To safeguard the institution we need to reflect on the behaviours being modelled through leadership, including respecting diversity and inclusion.

Possible solutions

- + To safeguard the institution we need to allow far more flexibility in terms of operations. We need to be prepared to accommodate people who want to work in different ways, whether through a hybrid arrangement or on campus. Flexible thinking will be needed to accommodate flexible needs.
- + Some institutions are already set up to work in a very hybrid way. How can we learn from them to embrace a more hybrid operational model? Many people need convincing of the efficacy of change.
- + Using occupational psychologists to review more systematically how the differences play out.
- + People need confidence in the systems around them, accompanied by a sense of purpose and security.

2.6 Summary

“Organisations have become more flexible about where and when employees work. Now they need to be more intentional about their choices and trade-offs. To find the right way forward, leaders must understand the axes of hybrid work — the upsides and downsides of where and when people work — and align them so that they feed the energy, focus, coordination, and cooperation needed to be productive.”

(Grattan, 2020)

While some employees will want to work from home all the time after the pandemic, most would prefer a balance where they are in the office for some of the week and at home for the remainder (CIPD, 2021). Operationally, what we as a sector, and as leaders in individual institutions, are now having to deal with is establishing what ‘hybrid’ means, how we can balance operational needs with employee and student demands, and what will need to be in place in order for these new ways of working to be effective. For most organisations, the introduction of hybrid working will require a significant culture shift and establishing new ways of working and associated policies and practices (CIPD, 2021).

“We can learn some lessons from working from home during pandemic, however, in some ways hybrid will make greater demands of managers and organisations than the urgent shift to total remote working.”

(CIPD, 2021)

“You and your leadership team will have to provide clarity of vision and then trust people; trust that they know what they are doing, and that at the heart of what they are doing is the student experience ... if you take care of your people, of your employees, they will take care of your customers, your students, and your business will take care of itself.”

Roshan Israni (Deputy Chief Executive, UCEA)

What is clear, however, is that while there is pressure to deliver hybrid working in our institutions and to announce what we will be doing, ongoing uncertainties resulting from external and internal factors mean that we need to pilot, reflect and learn before final decisions are made. And even the final may not be 'final' in a more fluid world of work and study.

2.7 Key principles and principle-based questions

The following key principles relating to operational effectiveness emerged from the discussions and interactions in this Hybrid Higher collaborative enquiry:

- + Make organisational vision and purpose your starting point for decision making. *If we don't know where we're going, any path will do...*
- + Ensure the institution remains effective, in every sense, both for today and tomorrow.
- + Don't turn your back on enlightenment. It could be said that the enforced experiment with virtual engagement has been an age of digital enlightenment, and not just for higher education.
- + The journey from panic pedagogy to sophisticated hybrid education continues to be one of discovery, trial and error, and innovation.
- + Treat hybrid higher as an agile project – deliver incrementally instead of all at once.
- + Beware of making key institutional strategic decisions without allowing for reflection and iteration.
- + The hybrid higher challenge should be seen as an opportunity for organisational enhancement. Better, faster, smarter, while at the same time fostering a more compassionate and inclusive culture.
- + To what extent are you listening to all of your stakeholders in a balanced way?
- + In what ways and to what degree can you regard quality as a constant?
- + What is most valued in your current provision and how can you ensure it is preserved?
- + Constrained time and constrained place = traditional 9am-5pm in an office; there are advantages to consider (alongside trade-offs) of anywhere and anytime.
- + Radical reinvention:
 - over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic we were forced to deconstruct what we did, to deliver the same things but in a different manner. We had to reconsider everything and go back to the basic principles of what the university is for. But some of the changes were coming anyway, for instance universities are now taking a different approach to knowledge construction and dissemination which doesn't necessarily fit well with traditional operating models. Should we seize this opportunity for radical reinvention?

- + The pandemic world continues to be very uncertain and so an agile mindset will help both individual and institution evolve.
- + The 'student as customer' is a hard concept in HE, but in a Covid-19 world there is, perhaps, a greater emphasis on providing customer service and satisfaction (value for money).
- + Do not rule out the possibility of introducing some completely new key performance indicators (KPIs).
- + The composition of the student population is evolving and the institution's operating model may need to shift in line with changing expectations.
- + To safeguard staff engagement, take people with you through consultation and show that you are listening at every turn.
- + What does 'vibrant campus' mean to you? What 'vibrant' means in one institutional context may be very different to what it means in another.
- + The need for intention is urgent! Balancing the need to take deliberate and well-planned steps towards more flexible ways of working that safeguard the institution while "... not losing the long-term aim of creating a highly collaborative, dynamic space allowing informal movement" (Gratton, 2020).
- + Effectiveness will require differentiation – for example, those functions that have choice about where to work and those that don't; those that have huge teams and those that don't.
- + These hybrid shifts are radical! The impact on different teams and individuals needs close consideration, with no assumptions of uniformity.
- + Balance the pace of innovation with the structures required to allow people to engage with change.
- + Never stop asking, what are the opportunities and *what are the risks?*
- + Never stop asking, how inclusive are we being in our thinking and approach?
- + Some previously taken-for-granted 'occupational requirements' will now be open to challenge as a result of what individuals have achieved working from home during the last 12/18 months.
- + Once formal hybrid working decisions become fixed they may be very difficult to reverse.
- + Flexible thinking will be needed to accommodate flexible needs.
- + Be a learning organisation – use trials, pilots and iterative planning to develop the new hybrid model as a community: trial – test – reflect.
- + Develop digital leadership skills at all levels.

- + To safeguard the institution we need to reflect on the behaviours being modelled through leadership, including respecting diversity and inclusion.
- + Alongside all of this are the hopes and expectations of students as the sector approaches the next academic year/semester. *Vibrant, lively, exciting, sociable, welcoming and 'high value'* may all be words in the collective student mind. If so, how can you facilitate and safeguard this in a safe way?
- + Remember, as much as anything else this is a governance challenge.
- + Trial – test – reflect.

2.8 Facilitator and moderator reflections

Cindy Vallance, Assistant Director of Knowledge, Innovation and Delivery, Advance HE and Rachel Witton, Head of Membership at Advance HE

During the workshops Cindy facilitated the breakout discussions focussed on the operational effectiveness topic area.

Over the course of 16 and 17 June 2021 colleagues from a range of functions, institutional types and countries came together to discuss the operational effectiveness implications of our new and changing reality of hybrid working in higher education.

The groups that came together across the two workshops brought a range of different perspectives from their roles and experiences through the pandemic, which allowed for a valuable dialogue and construction of shared understanding. Nonetheless, these are necessarily only the views of a tiny minority within the myriad perspectives across global HE and research. However, the sessions served as a useful reminder to consider how we incorporate multiple perspectives into decision-making (or indeed opinion forming), and how our processes can enable, or block, the generation of multiple perspectives. As we all plan for changes within our organisations, we have the opportunity to consider: who is invited 'to the table'? Whose voices are heard and whose views are represented? Consequently, what might we perpetuate, or indeed what might we change? For decision-makers in this moment there is an opportunity to apply a critical lens to commonly held views or prevailing opinions; where do our views come from and who do they serve?

The focus of the session was to share challenges and opportunities in creating operating models that enhance institutional core capabilities around research, education, enterprise and key stakeholder engagement. It became evident very quickly from the conversation that it is impossible to detach operational effectiveness from the other topics that groups were discussing in parallel on leadership, team cohesion and motivation and inclusion and fairness. Organisations do not exist independently from the systems they operate within, and organisation interoperability requires the ability to simultaneously look at policies, frameworks, work flows, standards, physical and digital space and many other elements of operations. However, it is only through individual and collective will and the ability to work together that a hybrid operating model created by any organisation will be successful.

It was quickly evident that those who participated in the sessions recognised the need to reflect on their own unique contexts and their possible biases, and to understand what lies beneath decision-making, even in the most apparently simple questions that must be answered in this new world of constant and unrelenting change. Decisions must be made and made swiftly but they must also be made with the genuine sense that no one has all the answers, there are no simple solutions, and what may be sensible as a decision today may need to be revisited and iterated differently tomorrow. The journey into, through, and out of the global Covid-19 pandemic has never had a clear roadmap, the terrain has been bumpy, and there have been many twists and turns, making it impossible to guess what might be around the next corner. Power and vulnerability can feel at odds with each other, requiring decision-makers to exercise confident humility and listen to a multiplicity of voices. The pressure on organisational leaders to know the answers is enormous and the ability to tolerate uncertainty is a prerequisite in this environment – and one that does not rest easy on the shoulders of many. Staff and students alike need sufficient certainty for planning that is balanced by enough flexibility to create solutions suited to individual needs and allow for course corrections and adjustments.

We are nowhere near the end of the pandemic and the long-term impact on our people, our organisations, our society and our world is still unknown. While daunting, this challenge also provides a great opportunity for organisational transformation that brings to the forefront more equitable approaches to the multiplicity of decisions that inform organisational effectiveness.

3 Leadership, team cohesion and motivation

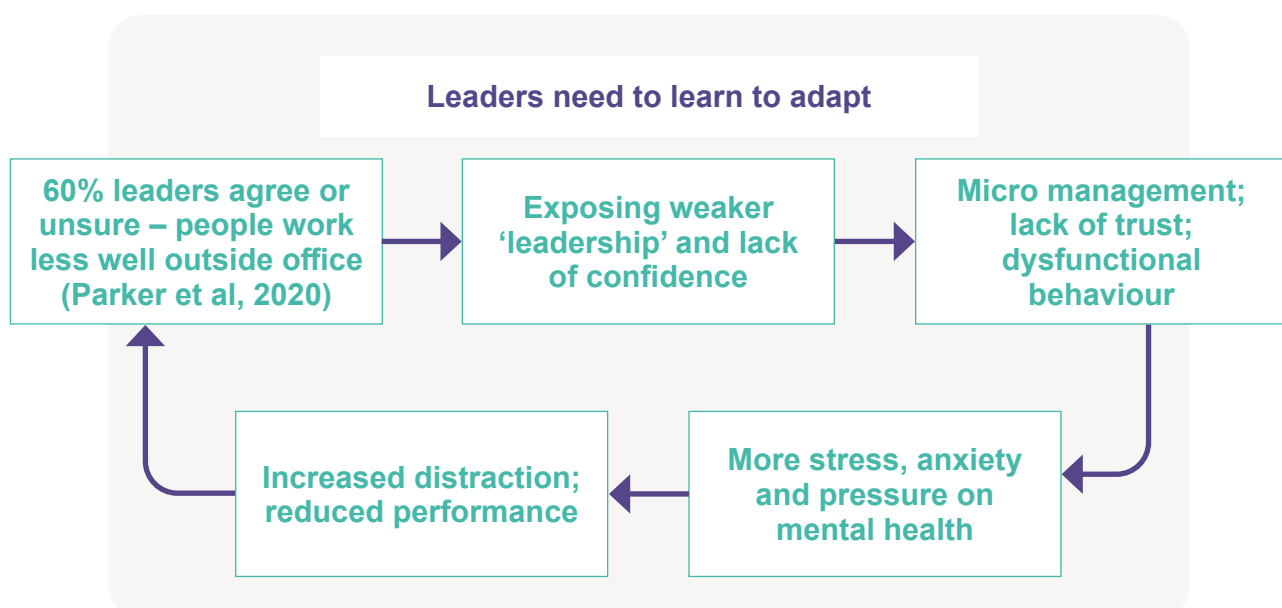
Good leadership is good leadership, and the core principles as we emerge from the many restrictions and hardships brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic remain the same as they were pre-pandemic. The good practices that matter in leadership – the nourishers – are fairly constant in most situations: creating meaning, establishing trust, allowing appropriate autonomy, enabling people to develop mastery, showing appreciation, ensuring safety, providing social support and achieving progress (Amabile and Kramer, 2011). These nourishers can and should remain the key focus of leaders, whether working with colleagues virtually, in person or a combination of the two. What has changed is the landscape, both in terms of its topography and also the speed at which it is transforming. In order to navigate the new terrain successfully it is crucial that leaders identify the implications, challenges, opportunities, advantages and pitfalls of the ‘next normal’ and respond with sufficient agility to deal with an evolving world of work, and the inevitable unintended consequences of our decision-making. The challenge now is leading with purpose, focus and engagement when team members have mixed modes of participation, and achieving both individual and collective commitment in a hybrid world of work and education.

“Covid-19 is accelerating a shift to hybrid work models, which requires a fundamental change in the skills team leaders need to succeed.”

(Hooijberg and Watkins, 2021)

In order to achieve this, leadership needs to be emergent, flexible and based on principles not processes (Figure 2). The sector is diverse and one size will not fit all. Policies need to be flexible with hybrid working practices piloted before they are established. Threats and opportunities in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion must be recognised from the outset. This requires leadership development: while good leadership remains good leadership the hard and soft *skills* required to perform well in a hybrid higher education (HE) setting may, at the very least, need to be fine tuned.

Figure 2. Leaders need to learn to adapt (Juliette Alban-Metcalf, Real World Group).



If you develop yourself as a skilful leader in this new hybrid world you will be in demand as a valuable commodity above and beyond what you are doing.

During the Hybrid Higher webinar workshops, those groups engaged in the conversations about leadership, team cohesion and motivation explored four discussion areas:

- 1 What are the main challenges of virtual and hybrid leadership in HE?
- 2 What core policies and practices are needed consistently to enable hybrid teams/departments to perform well and flourish? (And how would we deal with dysfunctional hybrid teams?)
- 3 What are the values that underpin both hybrid leadership and hybrid teamwork?
- 4 How should we support and develop HE managers/leaders so that they are equipped with the skills and approaches needed for hybrid leadership (including motivation and engagement)?

The responses to these discussion areas are summarised in Sections 3.1 to 3.4 below.

3.1 What are the main challenges of virtual and hybrid leadership in HE?

What is clear is that in some country and regional contexts, including the UK, we have moved to a new phase in terms of planning as large-scale Covid restrictions begin to lift. During the crisis phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, our activities and responses, and associated leadership behaviours, were largely transactional. There was a need to make rapid decisions and enact plans, even if these plans were in some cases sub-optimal. As we emerge from this phase there is now a need to move from leadership styles which may have been perceived as somewhat directive during the crisis response (Deloitte, 2020) to a more transformational style of leadership (Box 1). This requires a different skill set, mindset and approach, with an emphasis on building trust by returning to more inclusive, consultative styles and values. Given the once-in-a-lifetime radical nature of the Covid-19 pandemic we also need to be question whether the *transactional* phase has been a good basis for the *transformational* change that is now required.

Box 1: Leadership styles of the future: How Covid-19 is shaping leadership beyond the crisis.

Crises tend to follow a clear pattern of three phases:

RESPOND

Address the acute situation and **manage continuity**

The 'Respond' phase is chaos

Leaders need to balance tough decisions with empathy.

During the 'Respond' phase, uncertainty is everywhere

Still, leaders have to react quickly to both the economic demands and the emotional emergency.

RECOVER

Learn and emerge stronger

The 'Recover' phase reintroduces order into the chaos

Leaders have to take a step back to ensure buy-in for the "next normal".

During the 'Recover' phase, the 'next normal' is the top priority

Leaders need to decide how to reshape the 'old normal', existing crisis-driven methodologies and future- oriented goals into the 'next normal'.

THRIVE

Prepare for and shape the 'next normal'

The 'Thrive' phase brings the organization back up to speed

Leaders move back to their 'normal' role and will need to return to a more flexible posture.

During the 'Thrive' phase, it is time to ramp back up business as usual

Leaders must be flexible enough to adapt their behaviour to the situation as it evolves.

The common thread in all three is working towards the 'next normal', and if you put the 'next normal' at the centre of every decision, any crisis can become an opportunity to affect progress.

To successfully lead through a crisis, leaders must first understand its unique characteristics

All crises have three things in common:

- + *they demand a response;*
- + *they have an unprecedented impact; and*
- + *they tend to unfold in an unordered fashion.*

Responding to the uncertainties of a crisis poses major challenges

The most urgent objective of any leader is to safeguard the future of the organization.

A crisis brings organizational ambidexterity to a new level

Though you need quick decisions today, it is also crucial to be considered and clear about the 'next normal' of tomorrow.

Managing a crisis requires leaders to adapt their behaviour with intention
The key challenges are ambidexterity, time pressure and emotional stress.

Deloitte (2020). Leadership styles of the future: How COVID-19 is shaping leadership beyond the crisis. Available at: www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/de/Documents/human-capital-consulting/COVID19_Leadership_Styles.pdf [accessed 26 June 2021].

In the UK and elsewhere, higher education institutions (HEIs) are very diverse, and approaches to delivering a hybrid higher environment sit on a continuum from prescriptive/paternalistic to loose/autonomous. Clearly, one size will not fit all. A wide range of responses to the issue are also already evident; some institutions are moving rapidly to everyone working from home, and have already repurposed space for shared-working when on campus, while others are planning for everyone being back at the start of the next academic year/semester, with some hybrid flexibility, to deliver on a promised 'vibrant campus culture'. Others are waiting and watching to see how other institutions respond. However, a hybrid working world is definitely coming, in some shape or form, and how well institutions craft their future operating model may have a strong influence on future success and stability.

Returning to pre-pandemic working practices is simply not an option.

The current transformational phase requires leaders to genuinely engage with staff and there are huge benefits to an organisation in doing so. However, these leadership decisions cannot be made in a vacuum, and consideration needs to be given to a wide range of factors, including:

- + The role/standing of emerging guidance and legislation, and employees' rights to work at home. External factors are also at play here and these issues are currently being debated at government level (as is weight of policy versus legal right).
- + Managing concepts/preconceptions of what 'doing work' and 'being productive' actually means.
- + People want a lot more choice and an inclusive organisational culture will reflect this. The demand for more choice being driven from the bottom up, and a more transformational style of leadership, working *with* people, is needed. However, this presents its own challenges. How do we include people when they are not *physically* there, and build an institution-wide sense of community and inclusion?
- + Revised metrics – not timesheets but outputs and outcomes.
- + The limitations of an institution's estate, and the monies required to repurpose it if, for example, staff occupancy moves to say 50%.
- + Not all leaders are in the same place in terms of having the skills required for hybrid working and management, and senior management teams need to evolve and converge on a reasonably common approach, and also be cognisant of how they present themselves as leaders.

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussion of the main challenges of virtual and hybrid leadership.

Observations and concerns

- + Culture change – if it comes from the top we can't assume senior leaders are all on the same page. There is a danger that following the pandemic command and control is still the go-to mode for many.
- + Shifting the mindset is crucial.
- + Professional services staff have been more productive at home but will be pulled back because it may be perceived that the technology and support is not there.

Challenges

Culture change and shifting mindsets

- + Deciding what you want; if we don't provide a shape, the move to hybrid will be process led or driven by individual preferences. How can we make these decisions quickly?
- + Timing is crucial – if we don't define things quickly, individuals will adopt their own preferences (and that could be hard to unpick later).
- + What to take forward? What to leave behind?
- + Develop a set of assumptions from the senior leadership team, then build out from there.
- + Taking an emergent view based on some principles but without prescribing, even if people may want to be told '*what can I and can't I do*'.
- + Expectations of staff – everyone wants an answer.
- + Establish the high-level principles first – place (campus at the heart), wellbeing, organisation, teams and people.
- + Hybrid working framework – reviewed every three months. Treat it as a change project.
- + Recognising these changes, and the associated uncertainties, are traumatic for staff.
- + One size can't fit all in the hybrid space, and distinct operational needs have to be considered in relation to individual preferences.
- + There is a danger that managers will revert to their previous leadership style and focus on those who are present over those who are '*out of sight, out of mind*'.
- + Consider what your leadership development programmes look like moving forward and reconfigure this for hybrid higher.
- + Many change initiatives have previously been about moving from one space to a clearly defined other space. This change is different, it is emergent.

- + Big differences in opinion – some say they can do their whole job remotely; other views may differ. We don't want to go down the outsourcing route.
- + Time to collaborate properly and consult in time for September/the next semester.

Work spaces and technology

- + How to bring shared spaces into this – and dealing with the push back from staff about this as a way of working.
- + Using the architecture and facilities to drive behaviour, but only come in if you are adding value by being there.

Productivity and how it is measured

- + Is the increase in productivity we have seen during the pandemic sustainable? Are people effectively trading in commuting time for extra work?
- + Recruitment – people are asking for the hybrid working policy. If we don't have one how competitive are we when others in the non-HE world have one?
- + A pick up in the general pace of the organisation has been felt by many. Should we hope that this abates a bit?
- + We have lost candidates who are asking for a commitment to x days remote working as part of their job offer.
- + Are people disadvantaged by being only online in terms of promotion?

General

- + If we're not singing from the same hymn sheet, that's not helpful or consistent, and that impacts on equity.
- + What will catch a lot of people is where the technology isn't there to allow for a blended approach. Specifications for new spaces were made pre-pandemic, but money has been spent and equipment bought – can we afford to retrofit?
- + Once we fall back into old ways it will be very hard to break out of that; now is the chance to change.
- + There are other organisations we can learn from which have already overcome these challenges. But we must hold on to what we love so changing the mindset is the big challenge.

Possible solutions

- + *All here or all virtual – why? The technology works. Why not have some people in the office and some people online. Why all or nothing? Hybrid makes sense.*

3.2 What core policies and practices are needed to enable hybrid teams/departments to perform well and flourish? (And how would we deal with dysfunctional hybrid teams?)

The challenge for the HE sector is achieving change with hybrid teams with variable contact, some groups who potentially have more engagement than others, and a reliance on technology that is fast changing, sometimes providing an inconsistent experience, whether we are managing campus-focused or more distributed estates. So, what do you need for your team/department/organisation to perform well and flourish? The key here is to decide strategically what we want as an institution, linked to our clear purpose and distinctiveness, and how this relates to our operational/business needs. Understanding who we are and what we are here to achieve should have a strong influence on what we do and how we do it.

Simple structural decisions can help; for example, meeting face to face a given number of times a month. This will answer the *'how many days do you want me in?'* question currently echoing around in both HE and, indeed, most other business sectors. What is clear is that there is the potential for vast inconsistencies and associated perceptions of (un)fairness at all levels. This means everyone with staff management responsibilities will need to be clear about expectations (when staff need to be in and at what frequency) and purpose (*why* being in is necessary) and expand their skill set to manage staff onsite (which they should be used to) and remotely (which for most is a new experience). Acknowledging that some of the skills required to undertake the latter effectively are very different to those that were commonplace before the pandemic is paramount, and training is essential both to ensure staff feel they are fairly and effectively supported, and, importantly, that leaders feel confident in delivering on their line management responsibilities in a hybrid world.

There is a pressing need for HEI leaders to make decisions regarding hybrid working. Many staff have been remote for over a year and are anxious to know if their new preferences for hybrid working can be accommodated; conversely, student surveys suggest that blended and remote learning has contributed to an increased perception that their experience of higher education has not been good value for money (Neves and Hewitt, 2021, as reported in Hall, 2021). The challenge of resolving this complexity is considerable. Further, the pandemic is not over, with the ongoing uncertainties this brings, and the 'next normal' is yet to be established, making leadership in higher education uniquely challenging. In light of this, many institutions are implementing temporary hybrid working policies, with no permanent decisions for at least another year and no fixed patterns of working until 2022. Others are running a pilot for 12 months with no changes to contracts during that period.

These sometimes apparently opposing demands and expectations of ‘presence’ highlight the need to be clear about what values an institution holds, and how leaders ensure these values are known and shared by staff. In order to facilitate progressive thinking we need clarity of purpose, and for that purpose to be shared to a reasonable degree by everyone in the institution. These institutional identities provide the foundation for decision-making as we evolve our hybrid working strategies. For example, if an institution’s strength is its campus, with the allied benefits this brings (safety, everything being together on a single site, easy access to facilities, less need to use public transport etc), then that should drive the operational model. Conversely, an HEI delivering a portfolio of programmes to business professionals may only require occasional high-quality face-to-face contact, which could lead to very different choices in terms of what is possible in terms of hybrid working. These values also extend to student expectations in terms of what a degree is, and what it means to have an educational experience, from a particular institution.

Other important values leaders need to consider include:

- inclusion
- trust (both building and maintaining). This is a core fundamental agency, ensuring those we lead are trusted to do things, problem solve and make decisions, and that we build trust within teams to ensure no one feels excluded
- resilience and wellbeing
- how authentic/self-reflective we are (and appear) as leaders combined with the need to challenge individual values/behaviours and creating spaces where people can ask questions, explore and express ideas/views/differences.

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Advance HE Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions, including a consideration of how we develop and implement core policies and practices.

Observations and concerns

- + We must engage with staff to gain their perspectives.
- + Senior leaders need to set expectations and then give flexibility where possible.
- + We need to be more thoughtful about the purpose of meetings – can it still be purposeful online? It can, actually, sometimes be more inclusive to hold meetings online. However, we need to be aware of the challenges people might be facing; for example, childcare may not be easy to come by in the future.

Challenges

- + What about culture? Gathering feedback on working away from campus has informed the development of a hybrid working framework and we have linked this to the estates masterplan.
- + Creating space for formal and unplanned interactions, especially for early-career staff.

Possible solutions

- + Working from home as standard, nobody has offices anymore, instead open plan, bookable spaces. This has flipped the policy on its head. Changes in architecture and ways of working have prompted the drive to change behaviours. This has given clarity – only come in if your visit is adding value. Saves money, time, the environment...go radical!
- + Co-working spaces are being piloted.
- + Hybrid working frameworks – being clear about what we expect, but giving people the opportunity to flex wherever the job allows. We need to continuously review to be clear on the take up and the results, what works well and what doesn't.
- + Some things we can't be reproduced online (object-based study, for example). So, we need to set academic expectations about what needs to be done on site. We need to strike the right balance in our policies.
- + The important core leadership elements such as values, culture, direction and strategy are all location/work pattern agnostic. It tends to be the work time frameworks, staff contracts etc that mention things like location and working times. So, we need to refocus on the former, and ditch many of the latter.

Core policies

Varied approaches/expectations to drive behaviours (eg on campus versus working from home):

- + Not rewriting the flexible working policy now. This is not the time to do that.
- + Need to adapt as policies may be too rigid for current circumstances.
- + Too early to fix hybrid working policies now.
- + Recognise clearly the EDI threats and opportunities.
- + Can staff be forced to work at home? A difficult issue unless people agree. On the other side can they be compelled to return to campus?
- + How much do we need a policy? Flexible working is guided by legislation, hybrid working currently is not.

- + Legal advice suggests a policy on hybrid working ensures fairness.
- + Not policies but a lot of focus on developing guidance and support for leaders to build their confidence in having individual one to one discussions with staff.
- + Leaders set expectations with flexibility and strike a balance.

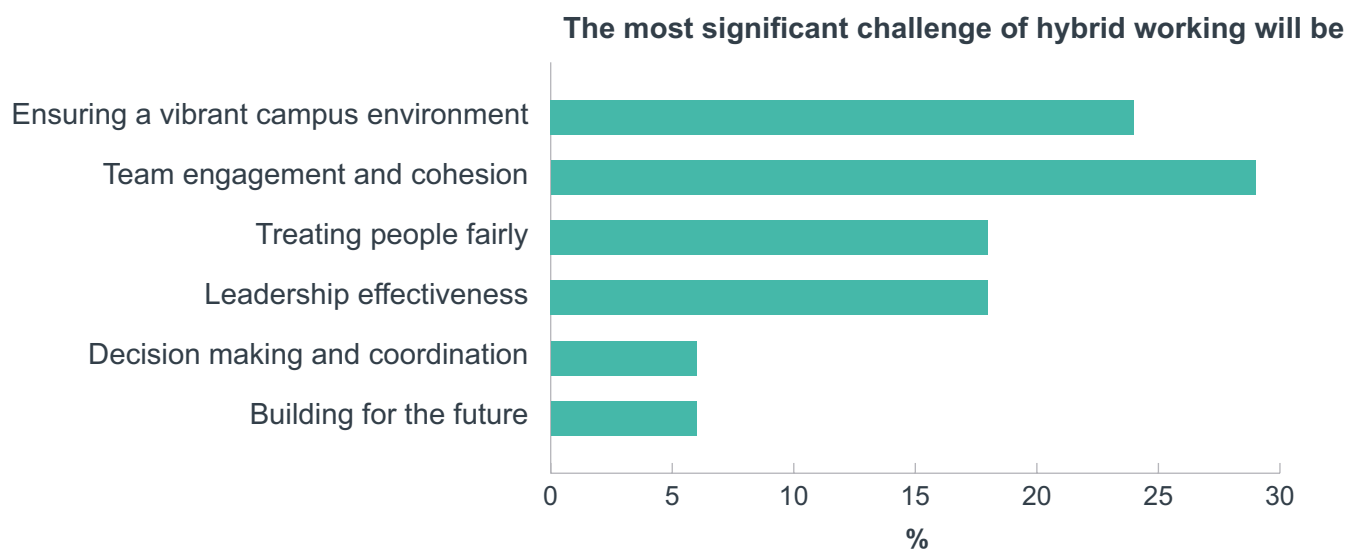
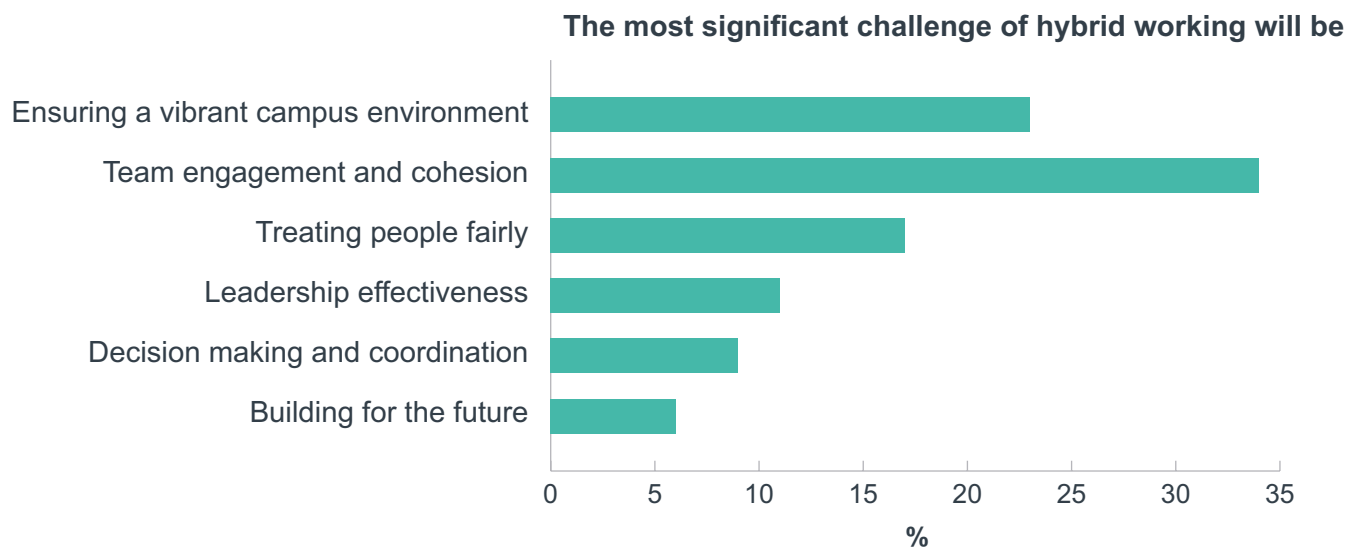
3.3 What are the values that underpin both hybrid leadership and hybrid teamwork?

Values underpin both who we are and what we do. In terms of leadership they exist as a series of conscious and less conscious principles that guide our behaviours, decisions and action. Values, when authentically and consistently expressed through action and experience, are the basis of trust and engagement, particularly when there is a strong intersection between leadership values and those personally held by team members. They are concepts and beliefs, deeply held, that are not always accessible to the conscious mind, and that may be hard to read in others. One way of thinking about values is as desired end states, or the way we would like the world to be. They are the things we personally strive for and which guide our choices. Within teams and organisations, they can be the things that transcend our differences.

As we think about a hybrid future, leaders also need to be mindful of inadvertent ‘value drift’. For example, an institution whose values are based on its campus and the associated (and advertised) campus experience for its student population, needs to question whether a move towards online and blended learning with many staff based at home would start to shift the essential identity of the organisation. Leadership development needs to explore carefully what simply can’t be done, or can’t be done for good reasons (such as an institution’s identity), or that only appears not to be possible or desirable simply because at that moment in time the leader cannot see an alternative.

The social, relational and informal elements of the workplace also need to be identified, valued and factored in to leadership decision-making. This applies to existing staff negotiating their place in a more hybrid working environment, but also to the recruitment and the induction of new staff into their roles. For example, how does a new member of staff become part of an organisation going forward? Hybrid Higher workshop participants on both days identified team engagement and cohesion as the most significant challenge to hybrid working (Figures 3 and 4). How can we ensure that, in a few years, our hybrid working policies do not result in a disenfranchised organisation where no one knows anyone, trust has severely diminished and worthwhile conversations can’t happen?

Figures 3 and 4. Live poll results from workshop participants identifying the most significant challenges they perceive to hybrid working (16 and 17 June 2021).



In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions, including a consideration of leadership and team values.

Observations and concerns

- + There must be trust throughout the organisation.
- + What's the balance of, say, being able to focus at home rather than in the office; what's the relative impact on wellbeing?

Challenges

- + Teaching twice? Responding to different learning styles – in the room or virtual? It's about inclusivity and the same challenge applies to leadership.
- + How do we wish to present ourselves as leaders going forward?
- + How to manage different perspectives of how productive people are?

Possible solutions

- + Trust and agency is key. There can be a lack of trust; eg if you are not there in person, you are not working.

Values

- + Being an inclusive leader (or incorporating and embracing inclusive practice).
- + Leadership attributes – starting with trust, then compassionate leadership, emotional intelligence, innovation, wellbeing.
- + An inherent lack of trust has mitigated against hybrid working. Now a multimodal approach to leadership is needed. We have started to unpack different styles of leadership. The pandemic has brought to the fore other types of leadership style.
- + How leaders present themselves, and how they understand their biases.
- + Different leaders at different places on a performance and style continuum.
- + Psychological safety is as important as physical safety.
- + Developing leaders: multimodal leadership roles; using the technology; short courses and workshops; support on how to create virtual team-spirit; managing virtual meeting skills development; scenarios and role-plays; what's working best practice; finding creative ways of supporting staff.
- + Building trust and challenging own bias while revisiting values and decisions.

3.4 How should we support and develop HE managers/leaders so that they are equipped with the skills and approaches needed for hybrid leadership (including motivation and engagement)?

In order to support and develop HE leaders and managers for the challenges of hybrid leadership it is important what we are clear about what makes good leadership. Facets of good leadership generally include:

- emotional intelligence
- empathy and a compassionate approach
- motivation through engagement
- being authentic
- building and maintaining trust
- incorporating inclusive practice
- decisiveness within context
- being clear about institutional values, culture, direction and strategy
- ensuring work-time frameworks, contracts etc are the focus of leadership/HR.

In terms of leadership development, in order to develop current/future leaders, possible solutions include:

- communities of practice (CoP) to create more thinking space and interaction to share good practice
- leadership cafés
- training to help with challenging bias and unconscious bias
- training to help with confronting negative attitudes and fears
- acknowledging that small decisions can have disproportionate impacts
- the ability to effectively manage meetings across a range of media, from face-to-face to online
- role play and real play, using professional actors to bring scenarios to life
- adopting multimodal approaches
- being flexible
- sharing good practice and 'what works' within and, importantly, across institutions
- being compassionate and integrating wellbeing into decision-making, as well as fostering resilience
- ensuring leaders are supported to support others.

All this is an enormous ask for leaders, and institutions need to create space for leaders to develop these skills. Approaches such as role playing and enacting scenarios to cover situations such as someone not performing, managing a hybrid meeting, managing difficult behaviours etc will reap rewards in the longer term. We need to acknowledge that the old skills may not deliver fully in the new workplace! Further, leaders need to be aware of the impact and potential consequences of not investing in developing themselves and others, and building systems and structures accordingly. Failing to fully consider the implications of management decisions for hybrid working will make leadership roles much more difficult. For example, how can you avoid the accusation of holding

insufficient meetings with an underperforming member of staff who is working remotely? Are your expectations for remote working clear, and can they be evidenced? Have your online communications skills been effective?

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas regarding leadership development in their discussions.

Observations and concerns

- + What are the values of managers? Do we understand them? Are they shared? What are your preferences as managers and how is that impacting your decisions? It's the small decisions that can often have a big disruptive impact.
- + Must have vision from the top, consistently applied.
- + EDI – make sure everyone understands the EDI implications. Carry out all-staff surveys so that leaders and managers can understand how staff are feeling about hybrid working.
- + Talk about what's good, not what's perfect.

Challenges

- + Inclusivity – bringing people into the room in person is very powerful, but that's not so easy now. Having faces on the screen – it's just not quite the same.
- + Leadership behaviours – setting targets etc is one thing but more collaboration is the other side of that. How do we ensure that we have both?
- + We must confront what we bring to the table in terms of our conceptions – '*You're not working if I can't see you...*'. What does inclusivity *really* mean to us? We must challenge and reduce/remove our own biases.
- + Maintaining team spirit, how to keep that going at a distance – it's a different way of managing people.
- + Managers' personal bias where there may be extreme views on hybrid working (for or against), and concern about the experience of staff at either end of these managers' views.

Possible solutions

- + Perhaps a short course/workshop to focus on the issues as a development opportunity.
- + Open conversations and challenge.

- + Support particularly for managing meetings: timing, structure, techniques, taking breaks, offline chats, creative ways of supporting people, and so on. In the online space there can sometimes be ways to get people more involved, included and contributing.
- + Get people to reflect on their values and decisions as part of preparing them to manage a virtual team.
- + Use scenarios and role plays eg how do you have a conversation where you might need to challenge a home working decision; practice having a hybrid meeting.
- + Fuller use of MS Teams and similar. Among many other things they can be very useful for informal chats etc and reducing email traffic.
- + Multimodal roles for leaders – we may need to adapt different types of behaviour, and learn different skills – coach, champion, facilitator.
- + Short, succinct, focused webinars and café sessions.
- + Learning from others – connect leaders with people they wouldn't normally meet to explore and understand the many different circumstances that hybrid working can create. Consider how they can learn from each other through action learning or communities of practice, especially as things are in flux and emerging all the time.
- + Capturing and sharing stories/case studies of what is happening at a local level and being careful to describe approaches as 'good practice' not 'best practice'.

Ferrazzi (2014) suggests successful virtual team players all have a few things in common: good communication skills, high emotional intelligence, an ability to work independently, and the resilience to recover when things inevitably don't go as planned and/or things go wrong. Further, he also highlights the importance of selecting people who are suited to virtual teamwork, that virtual teams are the right size, and dividing the work appropriately (Figure 5). These points reinforce the importance of not assuming pre-pandemic modes of working will be fully fit for a post-pandemic hybrid HE world, and that leaders and staff have the skill sets to work across mixed modes of engagement effectively. For example, will that long-standing and very large staff meeting still work virtually (or with some people in a room and others online), and, if not, how can it be reconstituted to deliver on its purpose, while still ensuring appropriate inclusivity and perceptions of fairness? Finally, Ferrazzi also highlights the need for the right technology: “... *even top-notch virtual teams – those with the most-talented workers, the finest leadership, and frequent touchpoints – can be felled by poor technology.*”

Figure 5. Getting virtual teams right (Ferrazzi, 2014)

Using virtual teams can improve employee productivity; some organisations have seen gains of up to 43% (Aon Consulting, 2009)

The right team

- People (with right skills)
- Size (small, <10)
- Roles (dynamics and diversity)

The right leadership

- Fostering trust
- Encouraging open dialogue
- Clarifying goals and guidelines (expectations)

The right skills

- Communication
- Emotional intelligence
- Cultural sensitivity
- Ability to work independently
- Resilience

The right touchpoints

- Kickoff (face-to-face)
- Onboarding (new people)
- Milestones (celebrate)
- The right technology (synchronous and asynchronous)

Getting virtual teams right, Keith Ferrazzi, HBR, 2014.

3.5 Summary

“Effective leadership in this new hybrid world requires different skills that go beyond traditional team leadership.”

(Hooijberg and Watkins, 2021)

Figure 6. Great team leadership is great team leadership (Juliette Alban-Metcalfe, Real World Group).



Leadership that can productively engage and motivate a more distributed hybrid workforce while maintaining team cohesion, equity and fairness is challenging. It is easy to talk about ‘new and different’ leadership, but the truth is likely to be closer to ‘better normal leadership’. As mentioned at the start of this section, the good practices that matter in leadership are fairly constant in most situations (Amabile and Kramer, 2011):

- + creating meaning
- + establishing trust
- + allowing appropriate autonomy

- + enabling people to develop mastery
- + showing appreciation
- + ensuring safety
- + providing social support
- + achieving progress.

These should remain the key focus of leaders whether working with colleagues virtually, in person, or a combination of the two. Further, we need to acknowledge and develop leadership skills at all levels, those with authority and position, and those carrying important agendas with courage, commitment and influence. A hybrid workforce will be managed by leaders and managers who are not only working in a hybrid manner themselves, but are also distributed across all levels within an organisation. Good leadership is not the preserve of an exceptional few; good leadership is often wonderfully ordinary. For a hybrid workforce to flourish, good leadership practices need to be pervasive within an organisation, and supported and developed accordingly.

The key challenge for leadership development may well be to cultivate two modes of engagement and consider how they can operate in a complementary way. As one suggestion of how this might work, Hooijberg and Watkins (2021) contrast a virtual coordination leadership mode with what they term a face-to-face collaboration mode:

- + Virtual coordination mode – *“This means establishing goals, monitoring progress, driving information sharing, and sustaining connections among colleagues working remotely.”*
- + Face-to-face collaboration mode – *“When... teams periodically come together to engage in true collaboration... fostering deep learning, innovation, acculturation, and dedication.”*

However, the pressures are numerous and often appear to pull in different directions. On one hand *“... the expectations of our students and their supporters seem at present to be remarkably traditional...”* (Brown and Parkin, 2020d), namely the desire for on-campus face-to-face teaching and learning. On the other, staff have become accustomed to working away from institutions and the majority of workers, in our sector and all others, do not wish to return to the workplace full time. According to the British Council for Offices, employees at all levels intend/hope to divide their time between their homes and their workplaces, with 62% of senior executives and 58% of entry-level workers wishing to alternate (Partridge, 2020). Ultimately, institutional missions and values must drive hybrid working decisions, and HE leaders must be clear about this and communicate a strong narrative linked to identity.

3.6 Key principles and principle-based questions

The following key principles relating to leadership, team cohesion and motivation emerged from the discussions and interactions in this Hybrid Higher collaborative enquiry.

- + Good leadership is good leadership. The pandemic experience and the challenges of virtual engagement have made the need for effective, engaging leadership clearer than ever, and exposed leadership development needs at all levels.
- + An evolving world of work calls for agile leaders with a balanced approach.
- + The journey from transactional responses (the crisis) to a transformational future is a journey of trust.
- + Hybrid teams will thrive if there is a healthy combination of group interdependence and self-leadership.
- + Processes provide structure, principles provide a guiding light.
- + The secret to engagement is connecting people with purpose (and purpose with people).
- + Your vision as an institution, the experience you want to create and offer, should be your fundamental basis for decision-making.
- + Treat the move to hybrid working as a change initiative and use your very best change leadership skills.
- + This is an emergent change challenge, it will be a journey of many steps (so, at this stage maybe treat everything as a pilot).
- + Each step in the journey is an opportunity for engagement, so keep the conversations going with all staff and stakeholders.
- + Set out your core assumptions and guiding principles, and empower others to have discussions and explore options on this basis.
- + Aim to combine top-down direction with bottom-up inspiration.
- + Like an ecosystem, structure, strategy and culture will all shift together. So, what will the move to hybrid working mean for your organisational culture?
- + Hybrid leadership involves a mindset shift:
 - from hours to outputs
 - from informing to involving
 - from linear to lateral management (working across the team rather than through the team)
 - from a narrow to a broad range of styles
 - from 'out of sight, out of mind' to 'the less I see, the more I care'

- from unconscious bias to deeper awareness
- from transactional to relational trust
- from diversity on the surface to inclusion at the heart.
- + The hybrid leadership relationship calls for deliberate and intentional inclusion.
- + Always question whether the changes that are emerging or being considered are sustainable (for individuals and the institution).
- + Be careful of equating consistency with fairness – for hybrid working and leadership a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to work (rigid policies could hamper progress).
- + Virtual leadership with those you already know is one thing, inducting and developing a relationship with new team members is a different level of challenge.
- + The virtual leader's role is to create space for both formal and unplanned team interactions – such spaces need to be physically and psychologically safe.
- + Leadership development is more important than ever for team and organisational success, including fairness, inclusion and wellbeing.
- + Ensure leadership development activities are a strong combination of emotional intelligence, exploring values and well-tailored, context specific practical skills.
- + Enable experience sharing for leaders through short support sessions and action learning.
- + Never argue for your leadership limitations on the basis of technology.

3.7 Facilitator's reflections

Jean Chandler, Chandler Coaching Facilitation and Training

During the workshops Jean facilitated the breakout discussions focussed on the leadership, team cohesion and motivation topic area.

In facilitating the Leadership, Teams and Motivation discussion sessions of the Advance HE Hybrid Higher workshops I was struck by how significant a challenge the pandemic has been in HE. However, it also affords an opportunity for fundamental and positive change as to how HEIs operate. This merits careful and thoughtful consideration and the Hybrid Higher project is very timely. The clock is ticking, with the majority of participants acknowledging that hybrid working poses significant challenges as well as opportunities.

Within the sessions, the variety and range of institutional responses to a post-pandemic hybrid working and leadership culture was diverse; at one end of the continuum, paternalistic/prescriptive, at the other end loose/autonomous, both of which I found fascinating and reflective of the responses to such an unprecedented degree of organisational change.

There is an emergent perspective for many institutions, with evidence of some keeping their options open and not taking steps to make permanent change, or to fix policies or practices, at this stage. At the other end is a more prescriptive approach, based around the perspective of ensuring ‘vibrant campuses’ and a high-quality, on-campus student experience, with emergent guidance or key principles to help steer the dialogue and expectations between HE leaders and staff.

One size does not fit all, but trying to balance the needs of many stakeholders was acknowledged by the majority of participants as no easy job, while at the same time maintaining productivity, generating resources to retrofit spaces with necessary technology, and reconsidering organisational and individual leadership values to underpin the vision. However, it has become more and more evident that hybrid working can be done without affecting productivity. Indeed, productivity may be enhancing beyond what was ever perceived or believed to be possible before. However, it appears that, for many HEIs and their leadership teams, this will require a seismic shift in culture and mindsets, and this would seem to be one of, if not *the*, biggest challenge.

The need for the sector to make the best of the change that has occurred since the pandemic was acknowledged. The time is now ripe for a progressive, transformational leadership approach with the opportunity for real engagement with staff, students and other stakeholders, about how the world of HE might look. However, there is a real risk for those institutions which fail to engage with staff around the hybrid working agenda; it is imperative that HEIs are open and consultative with staff about their individual preferences, balanced with the operational and business needs. A significant proportion of the HEIs represented have already taken positive steps to engage with their staff to seek their views. In this approach there is a holy grail of staff engagement, including building trust and incorporating psychological wellbeing, to be unearthed.

As Professor Pauleen, professor in technology management at the School of Management, Massey University, New Zealand puts it:

“... there is a good chance that those who have been working from home have come to appreciate the autonomy they have gained. Some employees might bristle if this management trust in employee capabilities to work more autonomously suddenly ceased.”

(Pauleen as cited in Samuel, 2021)

There was good evidence from the discussions of the need to support and develop leaders to become ‘multimodal’ in their abilities and approaches to lead and manage virtual and face-to-face teams, coupled with acknowledgement of the importance of inclusivity and other aspects of equality and diversity. The latter are writ large in the shift to hybrid working, with its inherent threats and opportunities.

Building trust with staff and within teams, and setting out mutual expectations and creating dialogue, will be paramount to creating successful hybrid teams. New leadership horizons beckon for those who are brave enough to explore it in a new world of hybrid working and leading.

4 Fairness and inclusion

The challenges associated with ensuring inclusive practices for both staff and students in HE have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The focus to date has largely been on students as the sector moved rapidly to blended and online learning in response to the initial emergency. Over the past 12 to 18 months, how we reopen our campuses for our students and provide safe, well supported education has, quite correctly, consumed a vast amount of resource, focusing on issues such as health and safety, recruitment and induction, the campus environment and its association with its environs, the design and delivery of learning and teaching, quality and quality assurance, and finance. This was the focus of the Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education project undertaken by Advance HE with the sector internationally between May and July 2020 (Brown and Parkin, 2020a-e; Parkin and Brown, 2020; Box 2). The prominence of these fundamental issues often means issues of inclusion and equity are overlooked, particularly given the magnitude and unprecedented nature of the pandemic (Brown and Parkin, 2020e).

While the Covid-19 pandemic has brought on history's largest ever remote working experiment (Jacobs, 2020), the impact on staff of working off-campus has received relatively little attention. It is only with the dramatic shift in the workplace zeitgeist of balancing virtual engagement and in-person collaboration as we emerge from the pandemic that the HE sector has shifted its attention firmly towards its staff, and the challenge of balancing *blended learning and hybrid working*. Needless to say, this challenge brings with it multiple layers of complexity. In considering hybrid working the sector is, therefore, having to engage with another potential paradigm shift in its operating model, and is again having to make rapid decisions for an uncertain future, driven by staff demands and expectations and the imminent start of the next academic year/semester (Figure 7). Despite these pressures, designing and facilitating fair and flexible working practices that suit all locations and underpin a culture of inclusion where no groups or individuals are disadvantaged is essential and must underpin planning and decision-making.

Figure 7. Three key hybrid working inclusion questions (Simon Inger, Learning and OD Manager, University of Bath, and Co-Chair of the ODHE Network)



This is a challenging precept. Inclusion, fairness and equity issues are cross-cutting, running through every chapter in this Leadership Intelligence Report. Further, inclusion is sometimes overlooked because our structures and systems are developed by and for the majority, and there are persistent and systemic inequalities in HE (Brown and Parkin, 2020d). However, if we have a clear mindset that looks to “...*embrace[s] a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others*” (Hockings, 2010) then that should be a strong foundation for discussing and planning approaches to hybrid working.

Box 2 – Key equality legislation and issues (after Brown and Parkin, 2020e)

A helpful briefing summarising the key issues contained in the Equality Act (2010) has been produced by the UK's Equality Challenge Unit (ECU, 2012; now part of Advance HE). This document covers the 'protected characteristics' (referred to as 'equality groups' in Northern Ireland) under the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief [including lack of belief], sex and sexual orientation) as they are defined in the UK context. It should be read alongside the Equality Act 2010 and specific duties regulations as they separately apply in England, Scotland and Wales, links to which are available on ECU's website (www.ecu.ac.uk/subjects/equality-act-2010 [accessed 29 June 2021]). (In other national and regional contexts, it will be very important for higher education leaders and practitioners to have a close awareness of the equality and human rights legislation and regulations that apply). Institutions would do well to think beyond these characteristics in their responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, including intersectionality² (Advance HE, 2020b), and also other groups; for example, widening participation/access, commuter students, those with caring responsibilities, and care leavers. Advance HE Equality in higher education student statistical reports (eg Advance HE, 2019e; there are equivalent reports for staff in higher education) are also helpful in assisting the sector better understand the main equality challenges for students and directing future efforts to overcome them.

“As senior leaders are required to take agile and responsive decisions of unprecedented scope to meet the challenges of Covid-19, a proactive approach to understanding and addressing the equality impacts of these actions is vital”.

(Bass, 2020)

In order to achieve this, we need to ask some fundamental questions. One way is through a strategic equality impact assessment (SEIA), and Bass (2020) suggests starting with the following questions:

- + Do you know what your core Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) priorities are?
- + Do you have a proportionate, evidence-based approach to understanding the impact your plans for hybrid working will have on different groups?
- + For your highest priorities or groups likely to experience the greatest negative impact, do you have mechanisms to efficiently and quickly consult with stakeholders?
- + Can you see opportunities in these changes to improve equality of access, address attainment gaps etc.

An effective SEIA provides structure and establishes an institutional framework for quality and inclusion. In particular, it allows institutions to articulate their values, hold equality priorities through rapid strategic change, evidence, align and mainstream commitment and action, manage risk, support approaches and responses to complex/competing priorities and opportunities, and identify, integrate and mainstream good practices (Bass, 2020; Advance HE, 2019a).

² Intersectionality means “... recognising that people’s identities and social positions are shaped by several factors, which create unique experiences and perspectives. These factors include, among others: sexuality, gender, race, disability, age, and religion (Advance HE, 2020b).

While our workshop participants recognised the importance of inclusion and equality, the focus on these topics was often softened with wider hybrid working concerns coming to the fore. This highlights the challenges faced by the sector in ensuring fair treatment and opportunity for all, and the need to embed inclusion, fairness and equity considerations as we configure our systems and structures for the new hybrid higher world.

During the Hybrid Higher webinar workshops, those groups engaged in the conversations about fairness and inclusion explored four discussion areas:

- 1 When considering hybrid working, what are some of the major challenges for inclusion?
- 2 A question about listening (open consultation): as we plan new hybrid and flexible working practices, who should we listen to and how should we be listening? (As we monitor progress, how should we continue to listen?)
- 3 How can we achieve a 'one team' feeling when colleagues are both close and remote, and avoid the unfairness that comes with in-groups and out-groups?
- 4 Taking one relevant example, things like visibility, exposure and networking are known to be important for progression and career development. How, therefore, as we plan hybrid working practices, can we guard against unintended consequences that may disproportionately impact certain groups or individuals?

The responses to these discussion areas are summarised in Sections 4.1 to 4.4 below.

4.1 When considering hybrid working, what are some of the major challenges for inclusion?

Many of the inclusion, fairness and equity challenges linked to the Covid-19 pandemic facing students also apply to staff, and we would encourage you to use the 2020 Advance HE *Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education Project Leadership Intelligence Report* on Inclusion (Brown and Parkin, 2020d) to guide current decision-making on hybrid working. Areas to be considered for both staff and student groups include:

- digital poverty or disadvantage when working at home (access to laptops, internet connection/broadband speed, software and/or the necessary digital skills, and time and space off-campus to engage effectively online)
- equity of experience between online and face-to-face engagement
- communicating with all staff including those that are 'hard to reach', or those who may have been particularly adversely impacted by Covid-19
- ensuring staff and student wellbeing to meet the needs of different groups and in a socially distanced (if appropriate) or online environment.

Other challenges more focused on staff include:

- Ensuring staff have the skill set to work from home (eg motivation, time management, digital capabilities etc) and managers have the skill set to manage a dispersed team. Such teams may have little or nothing in the form of mutual support networks when management is lacking. This highlights the role of managers in promoting connections.
- Two-way communication. Staff will need a lot more feedback and immediate responsiveness, so feedback loops need to be established to see how things are going.
- How can staff work more as individuals and then negotiate their own terms of engagement, and how equitable and fair can things be?
- Solutions for today might not be the best solutions in 12/24 months' time as people leave and join the organisation and the reliance on existing relationships ebbs away. Onboarding new staff colleagues into a hybrid working model is likely to become increasingly challenging, particularly if team identity and cohesion prove difficult to preserve. This could lead to marginalisation.
- Are there more BAME staff in service roles with, therefore, a greater level of requirement to be present and on campus? Are they able to enjoy the same level of trust and flexibility as colleague in other roles? What might be the longer-term implication of this? Are they, for example, incurring larger travel expenses relative to staff who have greater levels of flexibility to work from home? If so, should they be compensated?
- Once working from home is formally supported by an institution, who is legally responsible for health and safety in the remote workplace? Who is responsible for occupational health, both in terms of assessments and paying for equipment to undertake roles remotely? If home working is contractual, who will pay for increases in things like home insurance and utilities? If home working becomes more of a norm than an exception the prominence of these kinds of questions will increase.
- If your institution currently provides on-site subsidised childcare, are you responsible for providing a stipend for childcare when staff are working remotely?

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions about the major challenges for inclusion. These are presented under four headings: workplace, welcome, wellbeing and workforce. This echoes the four overarching questions that were part of the workshop design:

- + **Workplace** – how important is the workplace as a destination?
- + **Welcome** – how important is the workplace as a community?
- + **Wellbeing** – how important is the work context (setting) for physical and mental health?
- + **Workforce** – how sustainable is hybrid working for organisational growth?

Workplace

- + There are financial implications for hybrid working – equipment, access, time etc.
- + How do we develop agile working related to hybrid higher? There has been some work with regard to agile teams but we need to concentrate on the agile workplace.
- + Academic staff are more used to working in a hybrid format. It has been a very different experience for professional colleagues as, for many, the pandemic was their first time working from home for an extended period. Transferring equipment to the home was challenging.
- + Staff can have flexibility, but not necessarily about working at home.
- + We still have to run our services so staff will need to be on campus.
- + We need to maintain a vibrant campus and ensure students don't feel they are getting a second-class experience.
- + Managing attitudes to working remotely is essential to combat things like presenteeism, the notion that being seen is being productive etc.
- + There is a lot of talk about equity, but change must be driven by the role. Some roles simply can't be done remotely. Equity can cause problems because some staff will have to be in the office and this might (will?) cause resentment.
- + Having a vibrant campus with heavy footfall creates a real tension within the student-academic relationship. If academics are off campus and students are on campus there may be issues with gaining tutor access. People need to be available on campus. Different service areas need to work out for themselves what is required and how their flexible working policy can be laid out to meet local needs. How do we spread the workload fairly with hybrid working?
- + Staff and students are both facing online challenges to digital inclusion – having digital capability to engage, having digital equipment, digital space to work and confidence in working online.
- + Socioeconomic factors may result in further disparities in staff experience.
- + How to manage meetings fairly and effectively when you have hybrid working with some staff on campus and others remote.
- + For hybrid, should the default be campus based and then allowing flexibility about remote working? This approach needs to be kept under review.
 - But if campus is the default do we then run the risk of returning to pre-Covid-19 on campus working?

- + There is an academic and professional services divide with academics (especially in research) working much more flexibly and professional services traditionally being campus based – a potential ‘them and us’ situation. We need to bring these two together to work out how flexible we can be. There is a risk of relying on the same staff being on campus, so how do we balance and share out responsibilities?
- + There are issues around on-boarding new staff such as missing out on the social and relational aspects of induction.
- + We have spent a lot of time thinking about blended learning for students during the pandemic. Now we are emerging from the pandemic we need to think about hybrid working for staff and give this equal emphasis.

Welcome

- + We need opportunities to value difference more. How do we keep valuing these differences? Some differences are harder to acknowledge and manage and perhaps need more careful consideration. We need to empower the voice of more marginalised groups. How do we socialise these changes so that considering flexible options becomes normal practice? There is the potential to see these changes as further dividing people if not managed properly.
- + Can we actually achieve equity across the staff body with hybrid working?
- + We need clarity of expectations for students and staff, coupled with clear communications and agreement that clearly sets out how and when people are available.

Wellbeing

- + Declared disabilities: remote working has worked well for some disadvantaged groups during lockdown, so how do we take good practice forward? We need to capitalise on the best parts of hybrid working.
- + There are issues around connectivity and what equipment people have in their homes, including reasonable adjustments and support for those with disabilities or special needs.
- + Understanding and devising protocols for staff in term of things like how they present themselves online. People do not always have the right devices, the right environment or the right skills around connectivity.
- + IT is a major issue. We need to ensure staff are supported and have the technology and equipment to undertake their roles.
- + Moving forward, not all roles are suitable for hybrid so it is not open to everyone based on their roles. Hybrid working requires the organisation to rethink desk space on campus. For example do we provide staff with their own desk if they aren’t using it 100% of the time?
- + Is the staff wellbeing service commensurate with the student wellbeing service?

Workforce

- + Do staff have the skill set to work remotely? This will vary across the institution. Some staff simply cannot work from home. Is there the potential to develop a two-tier system for staff, and would this be desirable? We need to recognise that one size does not fit all.
- + The challenge lies in identifying those that require hybrid working. What support do we give managers to support and identify those staff who would benefit from hybrid working; how do we consciously make hybrid working available and encourage staff to speak up?
- + Ensuring managers have the right level of conversations with team members, some of whom will not be able to undertake hybrid working. We need to carefully define roles and what needs to physically take place on campus and what can be done remotely.

While hybrid working will undoubtedly present challenges to both institutions and individuals, there are also positive aspects in terms of inclusion. For example, many disabled staff have seen practical and equity benefits over the past 15 months. Ruby Jones, a disability activist who works for the University of Exeter's students' union, has been in the press (BBC, 2021) highlighting the elements of lockdown that have benefited her lifestyle and helped her to manage her condition. These include:

- working a full-time job without exhausting herself to the point of hospitalisation
- attending meetings from her home with members of university senior management where she would not have been in the room were it not for digital access
- being able to work from home means she has been able to keep her first full-time job.

Students have reported similar benefits:

“Online classes meant I was able to attend all my university classes and actually take things in and learn instead of my disabilities getting in the way. And if I needed to, I could re-watch them and my grades have never been better tbh.”

(*Ghost Toast* [*@Gh0st_Toast*], 2021)

“Events being on Zoom mean that I can actually attend despite my agoraphobia and social anxiety. Social distancing on buses means I can use them without fear of strangers sitting next to me. Outdoor seating at cafes means I can eat at them without having a panic attack.”

(Hazel [*@AnLasair*], 2021)

In addition, there are also the intangible benefits of remote working. An insight into peoples' lives, such as the Zoom cat interruption or evidence of lives outside work, humanises staff and students. At the same time, though, we need to be alert to privacy issues, conscious and unconscious bias and associated prejudice (some institutions are adopting standard video screen backgrounds to help mitigate this).

4.2 A question about listening (open consultation): as we plan new hybrid and flexible working practices, who should we listen to and how should we be listening? (As we monitor progress, how should we continue to listen?)

Equality, diversity and inclusion considerations have highlighted the importance of bottom-up, organic approaches for consultation, and are clearly a very important part of the listening process as institutions develop their hybrid working policies. This raises issues of:

- + transparency (who listens to whom)
- + the practicalities of communicating with staff and students:
 - how to make communications tailored and fit for the new world of work (where message come from as well as who gives the message)
 - the medium used to communicate with a more disbursed workforce (including other/new forms such as podcasts/brief bursts of information)
 - who communicates with whom, the issue of filtering and perceptions of fairness when engaging a diverse mix of people.
- + how existing support networks will work in a hybrid workplace (eg BAME and women's groups)
- + union involvement: partnership, early engagement and consultation is favoured when designing new or revised policies to ensure staff engagement and that top down versus bottom up does not become an issue
- + it is crucial to embed inclusion in the culture and ethos of an institution during periods of uncertainty, since this should be a constant.

Hybrid working offers the opportunity to redress inequalities at the same time as redesigning/ restructuring ways of working. However, in order to achieve this leaders need to be transparent (who is doing what, why we are unable to support certain things etc) and complete the communications loop (not just what was sent, but what was received/understood, and what resulted). This highlights the importance of two-way communication. Senior leaders have many opportunities and avenues to communicate with staff and students, whereas other staff are more constrained.

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions about who we should listen to and how we should be listening. These are presented under four headings: workplace, welcome, wellbeing and workforce.

Workplace

- + Some students want to be on campus for the experience but still access support online.
- + Student engagement has gone up in important ways through being online but when surveyed they predominantly want in-person support, so we need to plan for both eventualities moving forward.
- + Digital access is actually easier when student and staff are on campus: equipment works, IT labs are available for working in, library facilities are very high quality etc.
- + Car parking and staff permits has always been an issue. We are moving away from yearly permits to a pay per use system.

Welcome

- + Communication, communication, communication (but make sure staff are not overwhelmed).
- + Weekly newsletters.
- + Hold all-staff hybrid working/townhall-style meetings to say what it's all about and to understand people's feelings.
- + Senior leaders will always have an opinion but for inclusion we need to ensure all staff have a voice.
- + Implementation of policies will only work if staff have been able to communicate their opinions.
- + We need to have effective staff consultation.
- + How do we communicate with those staff who don't have a voice or are afraid to speak out?
- + Use our staff networks to gauge views (women, BAME groups etc).
- + Create open, trustful and safe environments to speak with staff.
- + Students should be who we listen to first. Do we, therefore, have the right people available if students want on-site support and do we offer the right level of remote support? Are we, furthermore, addressing the students' needs and addressing the student experience?
- + There is a rich diversity of students on different programmes all with their own needs. We need to ensure whatever model we have supports students first.
- + Students want flexibility.

Wellbeing

- + We have concentrated hard on supporting students but we do need to remember the same issues are there for our staff.
- + From an inclusion perspective it is normally the lowest graded staff who need to be on campus, so there are cost issues of travel impacting on lower socioeconomic groups. We now need to consider things like providing free bus passes to use the university buses/public transport.

Workforce

- + Use staff surveys and presentations.
- + We need to take different voices into account.
- + We need to push communications down the institutional structures so people are comfortable to talk and then have the systems in place to push those conversations back up.
- + Data has a vital role to play in capturing all voices. This may help to reveal what staff are actually doing alongside what they are saying: what people say they want and what they do are sometimes two different things.
- + We need to start by identifying what the business need is first.
- + It is important to consider how we engage leaders at all levels in this conversation in order to explore what has happened over the last 12 months, identifying what has worked and not worked.

4.3 How can we achieve a 'one team' feeling when colleagues are both close and remote, and avoid the unfairness that comes with in-groups and out-groups?

A major challenge for leaders, managers and staff in HE institutions as we move to new, more dispersed and varied working practices is proximity bias; the idea that employees with close physical proximity to their team and leaders will be perceived as better workers and ultimately find more success in the workplace than their remote counterparts (Dickey, 2021).

“... if the office reopens and executives are first in the office, and even if they say you have a choice whether or not to come in, it sends a very powerful signal that the choice you have now is between your family or your career. You can go to your office and be seen or you can choose your family and go remote.”

(Darren Murph, Head of Remote at GitLab; cited in Dickey, 2021)

“If you have two playing fields to administer, they are inequitable by design”

(Darren Murph, Head of Remote at GitLab; cited in Dickey, 2021)

While Murph advocates either an all co-located or all remote model to combat proximity bias, which is not a viable option for HEIs, the concerns emergent from proximity bias still apply. In addition, if not well set up and managed, remote working can be harmful as a result of, for example, increased anxiety, longer working hours, perceptions of a surveillance culture, and increased monitoring by line managers resulting from a lack of trust. This can be exacerbated by a lack of informal social support for staff which comes from being able to share, off-load, and support colleagues. There is, therefore, a need to find ways to do deliberately some of the things that used to happen by chance, such as facilitating informal chat between co-workers, while ensuring these channels are inclusive and not alienating or marginalising. It is important to recognise, too, that managers can sometimes be excluded by team members when it comes to things like social networking and informal connections.

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions about how we can achieve a 'one team' feeling when colleagues are both close and remote. These are presented under four headings: *workplace*, *welcome*, *wellbeing* and *workforce*.

Workplace

- + Many institutions already have experience of remote working over the years such as overseas teams, multi-campus teams, so take the best bits and develop for all;
- + Build into policies and ways of working the requirement to bring teams together on a regular and structured basis. This may be better done at a local level rather than institution-wide. Some teams are being organised so that the whole team is in one day each week;
- + Make engagement purposeful. The answer to the question, '*why am I here?*' should be clear, but that answer may have social, relational and team dimensions;
- + There is no point commuting to your office if you are just staying in your office and working on a computer, so flexible working needs to acknowledge this and ensure *purpose*;
- + In terms of the campus presence, we need to ensure we maintain a spread of staff across the working week, including Mondays and Fridays.

Welcome

- + Technology is essential to ensure that teams feel as one. Technology has to be simple and easy to use so that you can feel comfortable just having an online chat, for example.
- + Regular team gatherings and social events have been done online during the pandemic, so take what works well and build upon it. Also build in some face-to-face time.
- + Staff working online has increased staff engagement from colleagues that may not have usually contributed so fully.

- + Informal chat functions have really enabled staff contributions, but they are not always inclusive (and indeed can sometimes be very exclusive).
- + Informal chat provides for immediacy and emotional contributions. Can we provide these informal chat spaces for staff in other ways? (And should managers have access to them?)
- + We need to appreciate the issues around community and team cohesion in helping to decide whether a person needs to come in or not.
- + Why do I need to come in, where will I add value and what are my motivations? What will I achieve by being onsite or being remote? The answers to these questions are not just about productivity and outputs but also the social and interpersonal dimensions of effective teams.

Workforce

- + Building into the culture that it's OK to just chat virtually.
- + Changing behaviours for a new working culture.
- + How do we work with our HR departments to support managers in face-to-face and virtual working? Managers have often been left to identify for themselves good ways of working during the pandemic. We assume managers have the skillset for virtual working.
- + Training for managers in managing face-to-face and virtual teams is essential.
- + Moving from emergency response over last 15 months to 'next normal'; in many ways we have been working in an artificial environment during the pandemic to-date.
- + Providing staff and student training for hybrid working. Currently there is very little training on skill set development for hybrid working. Some institutions have provided training but it is critical that training supports hybrid working, coupled with facilitating the development and evolution of a new inclusive working culture.
- + Hybrid operationalising is being left to managers and also being left to local teams to decide.
- + Fairness is about the principles upon which we make decisions, so we need a clear set of principles to ensure fair access and, of course, this is also dependent upon roles.
- + It is not always going to be 100% fair regarding whether people get the flexibility they want or expect, but as long as we have transparent decision-making based on clear principles that's the fairest we can be.

“Hybrid workplaces are breeding grounds for inequity.”

(Dickey, 2021)

“The virtual world does not treat roles and tasks equally.”

(Heikkinen et al, 2021)

The next normal must not simply be a huge set of rules which make working too prescriptive. We have to trust people, support them with effective and appropriate training, communicate well, and accept fragility and uncertainty for a while. As a leader, it is ok not to know.

4.4 Taking one relevant example, things like visibility, exposure and networking are known to be important for progression and career development. How, therefore, as we plan hybrid working practices can we guard against unintended consequences that may disproportionately impact certain groups or individuals?

Expectations are high and the HE sector is having to react, and react at speed, in order to develop hybrid working practices. This urgency, and the lack of established procedure and practice for what has been described by some commentators as the largest workplace change since the Industrial Revolution, means HE leaders and managers are developing policies which will inevitably result in unintended consequences. The question is, therefore, how can we best guard against these and, importantly, ensure they do not impact disproportionately on certain individuals and groups, and work against the progress the sector has made in terms of inclusion and equity. Further, good practice requires policymakers to ensure feedback loops are open and effective, and post-pandemic policies sufficiently agile and responsive, so as to be able to notice, consider and correct unintended consequences when they arise.

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the Hybrid Higher workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions about guarding against unintended consequences that may disproportionately impact certain groups or individuals. These are presented under four headings: *workplace, welcome, wellbeing and workforce*.

Workplace

- + While we were online, virtual meetings worked so much better, with good attendance and engagement. But there are nerves around returning to face-to-face on campus and the associated bad habits of ad-hoc attendance and engagement.
- + With virtual meetings there is the risk of having back-to-back meetings without breaks. This is not healthy and may reduce inclusive participation over time.

Welcome

- + Encouraging staff to return to campus requires work and support. We need to provide new Covid-19 guidelines and help staff get used to campus working again to reduce anxiety.
- + We assume engagement is happening in virtual meetings but can't always tell – presenteeism is a concern.

Wellbeing

- + Discussions and text generated during online/digital working, such as online chats, is classified as 'content' and can be requested under disclosure and discovery legislation, such the UK's Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000. Institutions and individuals need to be aware of, and transparent about, how information can be used in the virtual environment and how people should communicate and share ideas and opinions across different digital/online platforms. However, people need an outlet to express themselves, exchange ideas, off load, share problems and support one another. What happens when you let off steam virtually and the chat is requested under a disclosure order? Will this stop criticism, critique, healthy conflict, creativity and legitimate argument?
- + Perceptions as well as realities need to be recognised and addressed.
- + Managing resistance: many people are very nervous about returning to work, and we need to ensure they are supported. In addition, leaders and managers at all levels need to be supported to have the confidence and ability to manage resistance from staff who are anxious about coming back onto campus. There is a need to identify what level of support will mitigate this resistance to avoid more heavy-handed approaches.
- + Some institutions are encouraging managers to offer phased returns where possible.
- + While institutions can make their buildings Covid-secure, staff have concerns about using public transport to get to campus.
- + Running virtual tours and small team meetings onsite to enable staff to acclimatise.
- + Building staff up gradually over a period of phased return.
- + We need to take into account people's energy and stamina when they return to the workplace – this will take a while to develop.

Workforce

- + Will we need to duplicate learning and working activities/processes in multiple formats? This has the potential to create a lot more work. Can we create once and deliver in multiple ways?
- + We need to ensure diversity and representation in any policies we compile and ensure we have truly listened to and gained buy-in from staff.
- + How will we engage with diverse staff communities? What success looks like will be different across different parts of the organisation.

- + Developing clear guidance and protocols will be essential to remove ambiguity.
- + Whose definition of fairness are we using? Fairness is about perception – what people think and feel – and managers need to be conscious of this.
- + Who will champion staff voices at different levels throughout the organisation?
- + We need to call in the unions early and fully consult in order to explore these issues.
- + We have staff networks that we need to consult who represent groups such as BAME staff and students, women's and LGBTQ+ groups, who will help build equity and inclusive practices into the new hybrid workplace.
- + Use staff surveys which provide useful feedback to inform policy decisions.
- + There's going to be a lot of trial and error to find what works and what doesn't.
- + We see the default as being on campus and flexibility will then be added to that.

Hybrid working offers the potential for greater choice of where and how we work, making our lives easier, happier and more productive (Thackray, 2021). However, the same author identifies three main challenges we should be mindful of as we move rapidly towards hybrid working at an unprecedented scale (Table 1).

Table 1. The unintended consequences of hybrid working (after Thackray, 2021).

Challenge	Consequences	Possible solutions
Reduced business benefits	Fewer unplanned interactions, no pre- and post-meeting discussions, reduced chances of interactions with distant teams or people in other 'silos' and opportunities to observe and learn from others.	Nurturing emotionally intelligent leadership. Simulating scenarios and role playing to see how hybrid working might play out and anticipate and head off problems before they arise.
Amplified divisions along gender, personality, socio-economic and generational lines	Through undertaking the lion's share of childcare and work related to the household women have very different experiences of working from home to men ³ ; personality traits reinforcing in-groups and out-groups and extroverts demanding face-to-face meetings; within-team (rather than seniority driven) remote and office-based working driven by good home working conditions resulting from socioeconomic factors.	
Psycho-social factors	A permanent reduction in the physical separation between work and home (see above); loss of reflection time during the commute; stress compounded by choice (what would have happened had I attended that meeting? What am I missing?)	

The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH, 2021) in the UK is calling for all employees to be offered the support and resources to be able to work from home in a way that looks after their mental and physical wellbeing. It is also calling on employers to offer staff (i) some form of mental health support to help them to cope with anxiety and stress; (ii) equipment and an assessment to support them with their physical health; and (iii) to develop a culture that encourages employees to separate their home and work life. As one clear example, consider the impact of email described by Hunt (2021) and the role of leaders to “... *take the lead – not only by materially supporting employees to switch off and take breaks, but doing the same themselves.*”

³ The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) in the UK and the UCL Institute of Education (University College London) found that mothers were more likely than fathers to spend their working hours simultaneously caring for children (Andrew et al, 2020). The campaign group Pregnant Then Screwed found 57% of employed mothers believe increased childcare responsibilities during the pandemic has already impacted their career prospects or will harm them in the future (Baska, 2020). The natural conclusion from these findings would be that women are less likely to return to the workplace, mainly due to increased likelihood of having caring responsibilities (Jacobs, 2021).

4.5 Summary

As a result of their experience of home working during the Covid-19 pandemic, only around 6% of people want to go back to working in an office full time. However, 26% of people were working from home from a sofa or a bedroom, and only 34% of people were offered any mental health support from their employer (RSPH, 2021).

What emerged strongly from the Hybrid Higher workshop discussions was that:

- + Leaders need to be aware that certain ‘voices’ can be drowned out.
- + Hybrid working arrangements need to be flexible and negotiable to accommodate all groups, and that real solutions will be found through a careful combination bottom-up *and* top-down management.
- + People have different perceptions of fairness. Who defines what is fair within an institution?
- + In a hybrid world an institution’s health and safety protocols will need to apply beyond the estate and campus to the home, with associated costs for assessments and adjustments in all the places employees undertake formal institutional work.
- + The principles for working need to be transparent, and the fact that the goalposts for success are changing needs to be acknowledged, career milestones and terminology revised, and what is realistic to do clearly defined. This involves a mindset shift for leaders and organisations *from hours to outputs*, and making outputs ‘seen’ by capturing them through multiple platforms etc.
- + Practical *and* more intangible concerns need to be addressed, such as how does someone build a career in the hybrid world, how can influence be developed, how can staff connect with other groups and across boundaries within an institution?
- + Staff need to be supported to return to work (perhaps in a phased way?), and mental health and anxiety management support will be needed. Leaders and line managers need to be equipped to ensure this.

4.6 Key principles and principle-based questions

The following key principles relating to fairness and inclusion emerged from the discussions and interactions in this Hybrid Higher collaborative enquiry.

- + Most importantly, ensure that the prominence of the hybrid working challenge does not cause issues of fairness, inclusion and equity to be overlooked.
- + Balancing virtual engagement and in-person collaboration in a fair way will often mean balancing the needs of the team with the needs of individuals.
- + What does a vibrant, attractive and fit-for-purpose campus mean in your context?

- + Historically, structures and systems have been developed by and for the majority, or from the standpoint of privileged groups. Hybrid working models may be an opportunity to address deep-rooted inequalities.
- + Fairness is about the principles upon which we make decisions.
- + Beware of a heavy-handed approach to fairness. Treating everybody the same no matter what is not a strategy for inclusion.
- + Whose definition of fairness are you using?
- + Perceptions as well as realities need to be recognised and addressed to achieve inclusion. Perception is reality!
- + Aim to empower the voice of marginalised groups, and then listen to what they have to say (even if the stories and the messages are hard to listen to).
- + When it comes to listening, should students be the people we listen to first?
- + Create open, trustful and safe environments for staff to share their desires and concerns.
- + All systems can be gamed, so don't lose sight of simple issues like fairly spreading workloads.
- + Capitalise on the best parts of the pandemic experience, including where changes and adjustments have supported individual needs.
- + One size will not fit all, so allow for differentiated outcomes.
- + Don't leave flexibility to chance – new job descriptions need to be carefully defined.
- + Consider who communicates with whom, the issue of filtering and perceptions of fairness when engaging a diverse community of colleagues.
- + Communication, communication, communication (but make sure staff are not overwhelmed).
- + Partner with unions and staff representative groups.
- + Think principles, think systems, think practice and *think culture*.
- + Could hybrid working cause the academic and professional staff divide to increase?
- + What does it mean for a manager to be 'available' to their team; what does it mean for a tutor to be 'available' to their students?
- + Beware *proximity bias*: the idea that employees with close physical proximity to their team and leaders are better workers and more reliable.
- + The essence of an agile mindset is to notice, consider and correct unintended consequences as they arise.

- + Onboarding new staff colleagues into a hybrid working model is likely to become increasingly challenging and could lead to disengagement and marginalisation.
- + People do not always have the right devices, the right environment or the right skills around online connectivity.
- + Maintain informal interactions by finding ways to *do deliberately some of the things that used to happen by chance*.
- + Make engagement purposeful. The answer to the question ‘*why am I here?*’ should be clear, but that answer may have social, relational and team dimensions.
- + Provide new Covid-19 guidelines and help staff get used to campus working again to reduce anxiety.
- + It may be dangerous to interpret anxiety about returning to work as resistance.
- + Offer phased returns to campus based on people’s individual needs and circumstances.
- + Treat everything you do initially as a pilot.
- + Keep any policies you develop iterative and open to review.
- + Always ask the question, which voices informed this policy?
- + Use staff surveys for feedback, but don’t make them the only form of feedback.
- + Listen to the informal, shadow side of the organisation, not just the set forums.
- + ***Develop your managers and leaders like never before!***

4.7 Facilitator’s reflections

Melissa Jogie, Director, Diversifying Leadership Programme, Advance HE

During the workshops Melissa facilitated the breakout discussions focussed on the fairness and inclusion topic area.

The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged our academic and professional staff to reimagine how we function and reconceptualise our roles in HE. The Hybrid Higher project puts ‘people-first’ to help us think through a new workspace model that combines home and remote strategies which are mindful of some of the core principles that we hold as necessary for operation within UK tertiary systems. The area of ‘fairness and inclusion’ has been tricky to balance because intentions behind the design of systems do not always harmonise with the lived experiences of the people who work within them. Given the current uncertainties, this two-day workshop has surely whetted the appetite for imagining a fairer and more inclusive future, though at times we seemed to be nestled in our pre-pandemic mindsets, which were perhaps more resistant to radical change. Many of the points raised in our discussions did indeed convey urgent and tangible actions to aid agendas for fairness and inclusion,

though at times they fell somewhat short when scoping habit-changing and sustainable practices. As the fairness and inclusion facilitator, my summary below is derived from additional reflection and critique of the issues raised.

The sudden physical shift from campus/office to virtual/home was deemed the most obvious change perpetuating unfairness and threatening exclusive practices for staff and students. Though many efforts have been made to scaffold the transition, more attention and investment is needed to consider how latent and emerging challenges (eg technology, social isolation, health and safety) might need to be uniquely addressed. As a personal observation, participants were able to relate to their common disadvantages in the aforementioned areas but were hesitant to return to pre-pandemic business as usual, as there were many surprising positives to emerge from remote work environments. Some of these positive experiences include reduced carbon footprint, less travel anxiety and healthier diets, but there were no comments on how these positives might bolster operations from virtual platforms to strengthen inclusive agendas. For instance, the home environment embeds one's unique spatial milieu (eg customised backgrounds, family interruptions, keyboard cats etc) but there were hardly any comments about how presenting these through a remote work environment can impact the balance of existing HE 'inclusive' practices (whether neutrally/adversely/affirmatively).

In HEIs, the decision-making process is often top-down, so participants proposed that a fairer and more inclusive hybrid system would involve listening to 'unheard' voices more frequently through better use of middle level management and adjunct networking groups. It was interesting (from a facilitator's viewpoint) that participants in these workshops comprised mostly senior leaders from across a range of HEIs, and while there was certainly an expectation to listen to the needs of the wider community, no one proposed structural changes which might include overhauling the old hierarchy or re-ordering the chain of command for a new revised management model, for example, by creating mezzanine jobs to assist with remote and on-site transitions. Instead, conversations leaned to current management doing *more of already familiar practices*, in the hope this might temper emerging unfairness and exclusion in the virtual workspace. It was acknowledged that HEIs were already engaging with a range of existing networks and working groups assigned to championing under-represented voices, and that this did not necessarily waver during the pandemic. Nevertheless, it would have been useful to gain impressions of how a hybrid model might better integrate the feedback of unheard voices into new systems and practices, even looking past the pandemic. Participants desired more time to deliberate over: (i) why 'better listening' did not actively close off existing gaps of unfairness and exclusion in the pre-pandemic systems of leadership, and (ii) how this approach of 'better listening to unheard voices' will make for a fairer system in a hybrid model.

It might be some time, before (or if ever), we aspire to pre-pandemic modes of operation in the wider world, let alone HEIs. Given the tectonic displacement of responsibilities within the HE sector, new benchmarks for determining success are expected to arise. Great emphasis was placed (over both days) on staff revisiting our sense of 'purpose' against both our broader goals of career progression, and day-to-day routines. We must continually question *how* and *why* should the presence and participation of staff/students be commuted in the new world, so that we are more efficient and productive in the workspace? It was proposed that while it is challenging to redesign HE systems that are fairer and inclusive at *all times to all persons*, a hybrid approach might help us think through our work preferences, which might be more aligned with our personalities and professional strengths. There was hope that a hybrid system can prioritise transparency and offer more work choices to potentially bring about a greater sense of fairness and inclusion; if individuals were seen to be shouldering some elements of democratic compromise to accommodate for a greater sense of equity for *all* rather than only to *an evident majority* of staff and students.

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Carousel speakers

- + Roshan Israni, Deputy Chief Executive, UCEA – Operational effectiveness perspective;
- + Juliette Alban-Metcalf, Chief Executive, Real World Group – Leadership perspective;
- + Dr Simon Inger, Learning and Organisational Development Manager, University of Bath, and Co-Chair of the ODHE Network – Staff engagement, inclusion and fairness perspective.

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- + Facilitator – Cindy Vallance
- + Moderator – Rachel Witton

Leadership, Team Cohesion and Motivation discussion area

- + Facilitator – Jean Chandler
- + Moderator – Mel Smith

Fairness and Inclusion discussion area

- + Facilitator – Melissa Jogie
- + Moderator – Lucy Madahar

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