



Turning University Education into Flexible Innovation: Experiences from the Pandemic

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Higher Education is Changing

- I am going to argue that transformational change is happening in provision of Higher Education, accelerated by the pandemic – and we must harness the change
 - The ways in which we teach and the fundamental architecture of Higher Education provision will change to a flexible and blended model of learning and how skills and qualifications are acquired
 - What we teach will be governed by the changing nature of learners, societal needs and the needs of employers
- “The end of the ‘Golden Age’ for universities in which rising costs are no longer matched by a willingness of government and students to pay for them” Parker, 2021



Higher Education: Change will be Transformational not Incremental

- Most Universities regard themselves as 'forever' institutions
- Most of us are heavily constrained in how we educate, operate and deliver education
- Structures (e.g. 3 or 4 year Bachelor degrees) constrained in time, in space, logistically and physically (on campus, largely in person)
- Our hallmarks of quality, standards, longevity and reputation create a bureaucratic stamp that makes us incremental, not transformational
- Difficult to alter our approach and to innovate – government policy and delivery from new market entrants, new offers and new kinds of learners will force the pace of change



Higher Education: New Offers and New Kinds of Learners

- MOOCs have been old wine in new bottles, but now seeing flexible degree offers
- Traditional routes to degrees changing: Rise of degree apprenticeships, HTQs
- Short courses, micro courses, unbundled credentials, flexible learning
 - Augar: Learning Passports and funding by modules
- Post-pandemic: more are likely to want anytime, anywhere flexible learning and different kinds of relevant skills and experiences
- But tellingly, most students want more than online education, particularly to support learning and their wellbeing – in person, social



What Challenges We Have All Faced

- Threat to physical and mental health, personal and social consequences, lack of connectedness and isolation
- Workload ('always on'), technology requirements, lockdown and restart
- Maintaining student experience across modalities of teaching in safe environments
- Pandemic has accelerated change that was already happening (e.g. digital learning)
- Capturing innovation that we have learnt the hard way



Capturing Lessons, Sustaining Innovation

- Reich (2020) observes:
 - Schools and Colleges are the most durable and conservative of our social institutions. They prepare people for the future by connected them with knowledge and wisdom from the past. Faculty make accommodation for changing times, but for the most part, instructors teach how they were taught ... Even during history's watersheds, they hold fast.
- We are not holding fast
- We are rapidly innovating, and we should sustain the change, but learn its lessons



Innovation: Towards a Greener, Healthier, Fairer Education

- The pandemic has forced us to change quickly towards education that is accessible online, but in **blended** ways for most of us
- We are using modes of learning which are blends of remote, in person, live, recorded experiences
- We are discovering classrooms without borders
- A summary of Exeter thinking is Greener, Healthier, Fairer Education, open and accessible across different modes of learning



Pandemic Has Accelerated Change, And Is Defining It

- Nature of education is changing
- Students are changing
- Wanting a society that is 'greener, healthier, fairer' and education that supports this:

<https://greenfutures.exeter.ac.uk/>



Pandemic Has Accelerated Change, And Is Defining It

- How people want to study (online, blended and social – in person learning)
- Bespoke in Digital and ‘Mindful’ ways that emphasise social learning
- Not necessarily in ‘traditional’ formats (e.g. rise of Degree Apprenticeships)
- Ways of accessing qualifications (micro, built, unbundled, degree apprenticeships, degrees, lifelong, learning passports)
- In context of profound changes to national HE and FE landscape:
 - Skills and Post-16 Education Bill
- A little of what our University has learned during the Pandemic



Academic at Exeter: Project Enhance (Tim Quine, Rob Freathy, Ian Blenkharn)

- Programme Enhancement
 - Institutional Design Principles for Blended/Online Delivery
 - 2920 modules approved under QA fast track, meeting CMA requirements
- Valuing and Supporting Educators
 - Digital Expert Group, Enhancement Hub Portal, Flexible Academic Support (DLDs)
- Student Support
 - Adding VLE resilience (20k learner capacity)
 - Collaborative digital tools, remote access to specialist software



Academic at Exeter: Project Enhance (Tim Quine, Rob Freathy, Ian Blenkarn)

- Exams Online
 - 2019-20: 54,800 individual exams
 - 2020-21: 77,351 individual exams
- No Detriment (2019-20), No Disadvantage (2020-21), regardless of circumstances
- Festival of Discovery (24 May to 7 June) 344 events



Experience at Exeter: Project Experience (in tandem with Students' Unions)

- Enable students to feel they belong, connected, know what they are doing and feel engaged:
 - A One-University approach, no-one left behind no matter where they are located
 - Feeling wanted and valued
 - Satisfies all relevant student profiles with shareable experiences
 - Baseline of knowledge, complemented by tailored approaches
 - Co-ordinated and easy to navigate: A one-stop shop
 - Relateable, engaging and manageable: chunking information, not overwhelming
 - Easy to track and visible, showing complete journey



Experience at Exeter: Project Experience (in tandem with Students' Unions)

- Student Personas – to stress test
- New Students' Guide with longer 'welcome': Online microsites, activity for late arrivals
- Welcome Packs
- Apps to augment Wellbeing provision
- Inclusion training
- Measuring engagement through attendance
- Student Reach Out/Here to Talk
- Digital Hampers (1353 hampers to SARS-CoV-19 and isolating cases)
- Student behaviours: Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce



Mental Health, Wellbeing and Inclusion: Healthier, Fairer

- Provost Commission on Innovation in EDI (Anti-Racism, Black Awarding Gap, Gender Safety, Inclusive Education)
- Redesign of Wellbeing web presence to ensure the ability to seek immediate help is flagged as top priority
- Development of CBT self-help prevention approaches, such as Managing Your Worries During Covid-19 and Getting Back to A New Life Routine after lockdown.
- Mental fitness app and a service providing online 24/7 peer-peer and professional support for all students
- Commissioned the support of 'Nilaari,' a culturally appropriate online counselling service for our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students
- Increased support and training for personal tutors focussed on mental health matters
- Pulse Surveys assessing wellbeing levels at key times throughout the year, using WHO-5 questions
- Redesign and reviews of complete pathway across University and SU to assure Freedom of Speech



Sustainable Education: Greener

- Focus on Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions, important to 'walk the talk'
- An Environment and Climate Emergency Policy in Education aligned with QA mechanisms
- Promoting SDGs in curriculum, with gap analysis (alignment with current curricula) and annual SDG 'teach in'
- SDG Vodcasts: short videos of academic and professional staff discussing their work
- MOOCs and Certified Climate Literacy Training for business and community (requires an action pledge)
- Student Societies Sustainability Alliance (SSSA) – A monthly forum of 26 student societies collaborating with E&CE Team to deliver joint projects (footprint reviews of sustainability claims of suppliers)
- 'Low Carbon Commitment' funding approved for 2021/2022 to deliver further 4.5% reduction from baseline.
- Green Rewards: over 824 staff and students signed up, with approx. 40,000 positive and sustainable actions recorded resulting in reductions of 45 tonnes CO₂



Capturing Innovation We Have Learnt the Hard Way

- Developing the model of Flexible Blended Learning
- Builds on how we teach Degree Apprenticeships (5% of portfolio)
- And will guide our future Education delivery
- Courses with modes of learning that are blends of remote, in person, live, recorded experiences
- An offer that applies equally to any student: home, international, undergraduate or graduate and changes flexibly to accommodate changes in circumstances
- Changing lens of our Curricula and Student Experience



Capturing the Blended Model of Learning: 10 Principles

- Pedagogy is Primary
- Flexible
- Digital First But Not Only
- Innovative
- Sustainable
- Educator Rich
- Students as Agents of Learning Innovation and Change
- Learning as Social
- Employer Interaction
- Students of the Future



Towards a Greener, Healthier, Fairer Higher Education

- Courses will be offered in different and flexible mixes of in-person, online, remote, live, recorded, in micro, built, unbundled qualifications, learning passports
- But this is not enough
- Curricula and 'Course content' must change to support 'mental health' and 'mental wealth' of students in much more integrated ways
- Sustainability will fundamentally define how and what we teach and assess
- Approaches to Inclusive Education will permeate what we teach and how we provide experiences for students that are perceived to be socially just



Higher Education is Changing: Let's Get Ready

- Transformational change is happening in Higher Education, accelerated by the pandemic
- We need to assure
 - Strong Vision, Strategic Direction, Market analysis
 - Flexible Curricula and Delivery, Beyond Tradition
 - Bespoke Social and Wellbeing Experience
 - Workforce Readiness
 - Digitalisation of core processes





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