

# Teaching and Learning Oral Evidence Session

## Part Two: The Future of Teaching and Learning in HE

- Dr Liz Marr – Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students), Open University
- Vicki Stott – Incoming Chief Executive, QAA
- Sam Sanders – Director & Advisory Lead for Higher Education, KPMG
- Professor Tansy Jessop – Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education), University of Bristol
- Professor Danielle George – Associate Vice President Blended and Flexible Learning, University of Manchester

### **Mary Curnock Cook**

Good afternoon everyone. I'm Mary Curnock Cook, and I'm chairing the UPP Foundation's Student Futures Commission. A huge thank you to all of you for giving up your time to help our work, and I am absolutely delighted to welcome our guests this afternoon.

The purpose of our session is to concentrate on teaching and learning, but also to hear your answers, ideas and, and solutions to some of the challenges, as well as flagging up areas where perhaps our inquiry might need to dig deeper. Therefore, please don't be afraid to talk about things where we haven't got the answers yet. We're defining issues as well as solutions.

To start, based on everything you've experienced, and everything you've seen over the last year or so in the sector, and other elements of how higher education has been delivered or managed, what would you really like to see carry on in September and perhaps longer and into the future.

### **Sam Sanders**

So the simple answer is yes, very much. What we're seeing through COVID is probably an acceleration of lots of things that people wanted to do anyway. Increased digitization of learning to support remote learners, and so on, probably leading to flexibility in learning styles as well. The normalization of that self led learning style, which has always been a challenge to incorporate in the typical sort of face to face lecture theatre.

Across all of higher education, there have been things that have been really good. The use of digitization to normalize remote working for professional services staff, supported by cloud technology and standardization of process. That's been a really positive thing. I think the



change in mindset, which I think has happened, probably not at the beginning of COVID, but early into the second wave was around the fact that digital content for teaching and learning is not something you can simply take out of the classroom and put online, it is something you have to design to fit with digital media as well. That's been really interesting. I think a lot of universities have a second wave of learning around that. So across teaching and learning in terms of access for more students, in terms of access to different learning styles, and in terms of efficiency of process, there have been some really big benefits across the base.

### **Professor Danielle George**

I agree that at the heart of it, there has been a change in mindset as Sam said. For us, it wasn't really about dictating a particular way in which everything should be done or about outlawing certain kinds of teaching, it was much more about shifting our assumptions and moving away from that assumption that 10-20 hours of face to face lectures is the default and the best model for teaching. And trying to shift away from assuming that the way that we've lectured, and the way we've delivered them for hundreds of years is going to be the way that we teach forever. I think we've made quite an accelerated movement there. And I'd like to keep that going. I think the slight caveat to that is, if we don't do it now, then we're in danger of shifting back to that. So I think there is a wave that we need to ride on right now. And if we don't, it's going to take us quite a while to get back to where we are now.

### **Mary Curnock Cook**

I do sometimes worry that there will be a difficulty in securing the kind of resource and motivation when there isn't the kind of pandemic to continue driving that momentum.

Liz, slightly different for the Open University, because obviously, you were already delivering distance learning. Would you like to say something about what things the university has learned that you might want to take forward or that you've seen in the sector?

### **Dr Liz Marr**

I agree wholeheartedly with what Sam and Dan have said already. I think that keeping up the momentum around innovation is going to be really important. That discovery that actually there's more than one way of doing things has been absolutely critical in the sector. I think the things that we've learned, particularly around assessment and having to change the ways in which we assess students has been a big learning opportunity for us, and has really started us thinking about different ways that we can assess, and much more radical ways of assessing. And the other big thing for me is around the possibilities that we now have in terms of virtual mobility, so much more collaborative opportunity globally, for both students and for staff, which could bring new insights and new approaches to the things that we do. As some of you will know, I work quite a lot with colleagues in Open Universities in Europe. And there's a huge amount of work being done there around hybrid ways of working, and particularly virtual mobility in virtual exchanges for students. So I think there's lots of opportunities that I wouldn't like to lose.

### **Mary Curnock Cook**

Fantastic, thanks, Liz. I really like the idea of virtual mobility and also about assessment.

Vicki, obviously, you're looking through a quality lens at all of this, but what would you point to what you think could be continued in the future?

### **Vicki Stott**

A lot of what we've been looking at across the sector has supported what people have already said. And in particular, I'd pick up on things that colleagues have already mentioned. Liz was absolutely right - I also like the term virtual mobility. We found that technology can engage, it can enable students to engage in activity that they might not otherwise have been able to participate in, in other ways. So allowing them to look at rare cases and participate in experiments virtually or to experience activity taking place in other countries, the virtual participation has been a great leveller there. I think the strides that have been made in alternative forms and more authentic forms of assessment have been something that I would very much support taking forward. I think that we should be very careful that any kind of alternative forms of assessment are constructed very carefully around the intended learning outcomes. What we've seen is that the most successful adaptations over the course of the last year have been those that have followed very closely from intended learning outcomes and strategic content. We've also found, though, that technologies can support student representation and student engagement in quality processes. Students have reported that their involvement with monitoring and review activity and meetings and student staff liaison committees has been much much better. And again, that inclusive element where we've seen some awarding gaps, particularly in BAME communities and students with disabilities have been closed, because the blended approach is much more accessible to some students.

I think it's important to acknowledge that there's no one size fits all solution in the blended world anymore than there is in the physical world. But those are things we'd like to take away.

### **Professor Tansy Jessop**

For me, the things that I'm keen we take forward are about the step change we've seen to more interactive teaching, which gives students more agency and responsibility and ownership of their learning. David Baume wrote a blog on the Wonkhe site a while ago about how blended learning has shifted for us from teaching to learning. And I think that it really rattles everyone's expectations, but also that it is a really interesting concept that actually moves into a zone where students are learning and prior to a session, they're learning on asynchronous platforms, and they're learning all the time. For me as a person who's led TESTA in the sector for 10 years, I think there's so much more of an opportunity for quite natural formative assessment, where students are writing more, and they're writing not just for summative assessments, they're writing creatively, they're writing on discussion boards, on padlets, on various digital tools.

I think the other thing I'd say is, I think we've seen more marginal voices asking questions. I think it's not just the confident students who are able to engage in discussion in an online environment, and I think it opens up that space.

Finally, I think there's a real challenge to our quite narrow definition of contact hours that this has triggered. There's a wonderful blog by Dave White talking about really, this is about how

we construct our pedagogy, it's about teaching presence: are we actively engaging with our students all the time, rather than saying, you'll be here for this hour, under this roof on this bench in an old lecture theatre. So those are the things I'd love to take.

There's just one other thing, it's about being known. I think education is all about being known. And I think we sort of have forgotten it. But the fact that every time we go into a class we see people's names, means everyone knows each other slightly more, as named human beings. One of my colleagues said, when we go back to in person, he wants everyone to come in with a placard saying their name, so you can remember students, and I think there's that element.

### **Mary Curnock Cook**

That's such a powerful idea. And I really liked you emphasizing marginal voices asking questions as well. Thank you.

### **Mark Leach**

Liz, in light of the pandemic and everything that's changed in the last year or so, how do you think the teaching and learning experience is going to change in 5 to 10 years? What's the tale of all this for the long term, not just for the immediate challenges for this year and the next?

### **Dr Liz Marr**

I think there's two things Mark I would respond on. One is that there's potentially a lot of opportunity for things like augmented reality, to be to be developed in our teaching, which I've seen quite a lot. We've got a Professor who's working on some of that at the moment. And there's some really amazing stuff that's coming out for vocational and skills based developments in medicine, for example, or nursing. So I think that those technologies can help. But I think the other really important application of technology is in learning analytics. So being able to have real time information about a student's progress that can enable you to tweak their experiences they're going through, not just for individual students, but for groups of students. So I think those are two possibilities. Obviously our students have had as many problems as others during the pandemic. But what we have seen is an increase in the numbers of younger students coming through who are thinking, well, if we're not going to get a campus based experience, we might as well go to a university that does online. And we're waiting to see the outcome of that. But I think that desire for a much greater responsiveness and agility on the part of the university is going to be a critical part of what happens in the future.

### **Mark Leach**

As a quick follow up to that, are there any barriers? those things you mentioned can be quite expensive. We're talking about investments, we're talking about long, long term change. What's the pinch point?

### **Dr Liz Marr**

In terms of learning analytics, there's a huge gain from the investment, and that is around making sure that you keep your students, you keep them on track, they're doing well, so the outcomes for students are good. In terms of the use of technologies in teaching, there are potentially barriers there. And that's one of the questions I've asked, which is, what about students not being able to afford the kit. Some students are studying from their phones, they don't have a laptop available, or they're sharing it with multiple members of the family. So, getting access to the technology could be problematic, and we haven't overcome that yet. And of course, I know this will come up later. But there's issues around broadband, and signal intensity, etc, which could also mitigate against. In terms of younger student experience, I still think that what we're looking for is, interestingly, they don't want to talk to people, they want to self serve quite a lot, the ones that are coming to us. And so I think that kind of anytime, anywhere flexible, and doing it my own way that personalization is going to be important as well. But the pinch points are the affordability and the potential digital exclusion of some students.

### **Mary Curnock Cook**

Thank you so much. I'm going to hand now to Richard Bradner, and it just gives me an opportunity to acknowledge Richard's imagination and foresight in setting up this Commission and indeed, for UPPF for funding it. So thanks for that. Richard, over to you.

### **Richard Bradner**

Thanks, Mary, and my questions to Vicki: from a quality perspective, in terms of online teaching, as you have all on the panel here today said and most people we've spoken to think that blended in hybrid model of teaching is here to stay, but critics might say that this is lower cost and lower quality. So looking forward, how should universities ensure that the quality of online teaching methods is high? And ensure also that there's trust in that quality too?

### **Vicki Stott**

That's a really good question, Richard. I think the idea that online provision is lower cost is not necessarily true, particularly when you take into account the investment in technology adaptations for the campus, training for staff, so on and so forth, that has to be done. Although admittedly, those costs might be shorter term. But I think in terms of making sure that there is real quality underpinning it, the key is making sure that the offer has been deliberately designed for the format that it's going to be delivered in and has been subject to quality assurance and enhancement processes right from the approval stage - and those might look like annual monitoring, there might look like external touch points there might look like periodic review, and that recognize reference points have been applied. So I think things like subject benchmarks, statements, qualifications and credit frameworks, those are going to continue to be important. And indeed, the UK quality code and its core practices and principles will continue to be critical as we move forward. I think there's been a lot of experience about sharing good practice, including highlighting the impact of online and blended pedagogy on student engagement and performance. And that sharing of good practice and learning from each other will continue to be important. And then we will

obviously do our bit in continuing to produce advice around good practice and making sure that those good models and the impact of them are disseminated across the sector. But I go back to what I said in my first answer, the thing that we have found that remains really the most critical is in emphasizing the focus on outcomes and ensuring that by referring everything back to the intended learning outcomes, both in the design of the teaching and in the design of the assessments that follow from it. And that's the thing I think that together with all of those sector reference points and benchmark statements and frameworks that really will underpin the quality going forward.

### **Richard Brabner**

Just a follow up quickly, did you have anything else to say on the trust point of that question, which might be slightly different?

### **Vicki Stott**

Yes, I think, again, those external reference points and the fact that those have been agreed across the sector and are commonly used across the sector will underpin and reinforce people's trust, it means that there's something that everybody can reference and everybody can understand. And that although providers retain their autonomy, they're not working alone and kind of reinventing wheels. There is an overarching framework and reference points that people fit in within and I think that does underpin trust.

### **Mary Curnock Cook**

Really important, and perhaps also time to reflect on quality assurance methodology which was built in an analog age may itself have to go more digital.

### **Professor Mary Stuart**

Thanks very much, Mary.

Tansy, I really want to give you an opportunity to reflect a bit more on some of the things you said in your response earlier. And that is, I'm really interested in what you think student priorities are around teaching and learning, you said the balance is shifting, but from from teaching to learning. So in that case, it really matters because the students are, experts in their own learning. So it really matters what their priorities are. And I wonder if you could just reflect a bit more on that. What you think if you think those have changed, how they've changed, and how they might actually change in the future?

### **Professor Tansy Jessop**

I think that's a really challenging question, Mary. I think I'm not going to homogenize students here, as we've got very variable responses to online learning, partly, because students have experienced their learning differently, but the learning is also being constructed differently.

I think of my own university, and I think there's some variability in how people have designed the learning, although we have moved in a different direction. And I think that influences student's response to online learning. We're conflating the future with a COVID induced pandemic offer. And I think it's given us a glimpse of the opportunities. But I think there's a

long game to play here. And at the moment, social contact is the scarcity. And therefore the majority of students are saying as you found in the Commissions polling that they really just want to get back to in person. And I think there's something about scarcity that's driving that. But I don't think we can go back in quite the same way. I have a feeling that it's a bit what our colleague from Manchester said, we don't want the slippage just back into where we were, we need to grow this because there's innovation, creativity, and interactivity. Now all my contact with students says they are loving more of the engagement and interactivity, but they're finding it intensely frustrating to have a bed to desk regime where they've got the confines of the learning in one room. And I think that's sort of influencing their perceptions of what blended learning or a new digital offer might shape. And so I think it will be a combo. We can't really predict what student expectations will be like. But I think we need to hold our nerve as a sector. And we need to experiment further with this expanded type of education, which is both digital and in person. And we need to be inventive. I think we've got a bit of a binary at the moment where it's either online or it's in person. And I think it's not that it's a creative fusion, where we bring some of our new digital capability into the in person environment and enliven it. And we use some of the online environment to enliven teaching and so I think we've got to stop and the drift into it's either or, I think it's both and, and I think that acculturation with students plus professional development of staff, so that we get a really good consistent offer of both and will begin to make education much more expansive for everyone. That would be my answer.

### **Professor Mary Stuart**

Thank you that's really helpful. And it plays quite well. I love this idea of hybridity in teaching. I think that's a really good way to go.

### **Mary Curnock Cook**

Thank you, Mary. And thanks Tansy. I think that creative fusion is such an important concept. It's all learning, isn't it? And I think the binary terms are not helpful for anyone.

### **Professor Juliet Foster**

Thanks, Mary. Hello, everybody. My question is actually for Dan, although given what Liz said in her introduction, if we have time, I'd be really interested in any thoughts that she might have on this as well.

My question centers on assessment, because obviously, we've had to see some fairly rapid changes to our assessment over the past 14 months. And many of the decisions we've had to make around that have been pragmatic ones, we haven't had any other options. But I wondered if you could tell us a little bit about how you think assessment practices might change in the future, as we see these changes in teaching and learning more broadly. Dan, first and then if there is time, Liz would be great to hear your thoughts, too.

## **Professor Danielle George**

I think we're moving away from that final end of semester, written exam, memory recall, hopefully moving up sort of Bloom's Taxonomy into thinking about other things, design, analysis, etc. We're seeing more in-semester assessment, and what we were just talking about before, in terms of the, the formative and the summative assessments as well, and the formative, being able to support the summative.

We've tried quite a lot of the open book type examinations, or timed. What I don't feel we've got right, certainly at Manchester yet is how, how big that window should be. I think people should have windows, but is it a two hour very timed window? Is it 24 hours? Is it two weeks? We've tried different things.

I think there's loads of positives on how we're moving with changing assessments. What I think is still a real challenge is if they are online assessments, are we, how confident are we from a malpractice point of view, and it's certainly something we have not solved yet. We've seen a massive increase in academic malpractice over the past year. And the issues with remote proctoring, etc. So, I think, there are lots of real positives to a move to different forms of assessment. If we are going to include online assessment in there, I think we've got a whole bunch of challenges that we need to overcome, to make sure that they are the rigorous academic standard that we'd expect.

## **Dr Liz Marr**

To be honest Dan summarized the situation really well, we do have a problem around identity validation and around proctoring. And I think we and Manchester are not the only universities that have seen an increase in academic misconduct through COVID, which could be a panic reflex, rather than the changes in the form of assessment. But what we have been looking at is how we can break those remote exams or those open book exams down into fixed time periods so that we could have an hour or two hours for this question to be answered, rather than having a five hour period for the whole exam paper. So we've made the decision to stick with those open book remote exams for another year, so that we can assess the extent to which it's effective, because, as I think somebody said earlier, we have seen a big reduction in awarding gaps, particularly for black and minority ethnic students.

## **Mary Curnock Cook**

Thanks, Dan and Liz, interestingly, this whole assessment question, of course is going on in the secondary school sector as well, although it's much more difficult to change things, especially quickly, as we've seen, but what I think is really interesting is, by the way the secondary education sector is watching what's happening in higher education. And I think they'll use that as evidence for potential reform in secondary education. So this is a huge interesting conversation about assessment that needs to happen right across the piece.

And now I just wanted to pick up with Sam, a comment Tansy made earlier about the Commission polling that was done that said, the big majority, about 60% of students that the thing they most wanted to come back to was face to face. And that actually, I really took Tansy's point that some of that is about scarcity and the fact that they just haven't had that



as an option for such a long time. But Sam, in your strategic overview of the sector, do you have any qualms about digital blended learning as a future for HE? Do you think maybe that's been exaggerated, and that actually some other kind of really important things about human contact in learning, both between students and between students and academics might actually prevail?

### **Sam Sanders**

Thank you, the short answer is no, I don't think it's been exaggerated. I think if we took the question, if you'd have asked students any question whatsoever, and put face to face after it about three or four months ago, they'd have said yes, on a lot of things generally anyway. We were all dealing with the isolation, the mental health that can go with that. So face to face was appealing in any sense. And I think what the pandemic has done in one respect is reinforced, that there is a very valid place, very valuable place for a classic three year undergraduate on campus degree. And that's what a lot of people are clamoring for. It offers you more than the learning, it's the life experience, everything that goes with that, for a certain group of young people. However, alongside that, is it back to the point that keeps coming up is flexibility, flexibility, flexibility, there have been so many gains made in different institutions across the piece, that I think the the genie's out of the bottle now, and all this stuff, I don't think there's any opportunity to reverse and the really interesting thing is, the pandemic for universities was as much a social media event. And it's a terribly glib thing to say that I appreciate but it was as much a social media event, as it was a logistical or operational or, welfare event, because, traditionally, we've always, certainly seen students, or a large body of students as relatively naive buyers of higher education, most of them when they first go haven't been to another university before, it's very hard to compare institutions having never been there. So you're only living your lived experience in one place. We saw very quickly, during lockdown in early days of pandemic, social media take over and students, everyone they've been to school where they knew, within five minutes, every one of their peers, whichever institution they were engaged with the exact quality of service they were getting. And that's not going to go away at all. And it's going to go beyond simply return to face to face teaching, because people will get back to do face to face teaching, realizing, no, it's fantastic, probably not as exciting as they thought when they missed out on it. But they will know exactly the online digital provision that their peers are getting in other institutions. So you've created an ever increasing circle of some expectation, because, people will be communicating far more rapidly in real time about the quality of service, and that will be recognized by students across the base.

### **Mary Curnock Cook**

I don't think I'd quite processed the idea that there was so much more sharing about the different experiences at different students at different universities. We're getting or expecting that maybe that's going to make life even more challenging for universities going forward to thanks for that Sam. But by the way, I agree with you that it's not exaggerated, but I think we've got quite a long route for it to settle into something that we all understand and can be presented to students in a way that's appealing to them as well.

## **Mark Blythe**

We've been discussing blended teaching and learning and this could be one of the big issues I would imagine the Open University have cracked over the years is the training of your staff to deliver that in a way that is consistent and appealing and measurable and so forth with your students. What are the takeaways there in terms of going forward with a more blended approach to ensuring the staff are trained to deliver that to optimize the learning outcomes for students?

## **Dr Liz Marr**

I think we've had many, many years of experience of producing course materials for distance learning and delivery. So they weren't primarily designed for online delivery, they were designed for distance learning. And I think in our early days, we made the mistake that others have made in their, you know, in the urgency of shifting things online to just replicate what you do on paper and face to face in an online environment. And that is not a good experience for students. So we've completely shifted towards a complete universal design focus on our courses. So every course goes through a really rigorous process of design, working with learning designers, technologists, to make sure that they can develop the resources that are needed to sit on the VLE. So there's that huge piece of work and to come back to one of the earlier points about quality. I think that the quality is really important, and that design process is how you ensure quality. In terms of blended provision. We supplement our - all of the learning is in the course materials on the assessment. We supplement that with support from associate lecturers. So we have a team of associate lecturers that support students on a module. And they will do all the marking and feedback for that student. And students can attend face to face tutorials with their tutor or with other tutors. So obviously, during the pandemic, we had to - we obviously couldn't do the face to face tutorials anymore. But we were already doing online tutorials using Adobe Connect. So students had a choice between face to face or online. And what COVID meant was that we had to move all of our tuition online. And that showed that there are some of our some of our staff needed more development in terms of using those online tools. It's not, they're not necessarily completely intuitive, you've got to have some training. So that's really crucial to make sure that people are properly trained in the use of the technologies that you're going to adopt for interaction with students,

## **Professor Danielle George**

Just just to add to that, from our point of view, what we need to do is address the sort of digital literacy first, of all of our staff and our students, and then do what feels like bespoke training for them. Now, of course, it won't be absolutely but the training that a humanities lecturer will need is going to be very different to any training a computer scientist lecturer might need. And so what we're trying to do is assess the digital literacy of all our students as they comeback or as, they enter university, but then do it with our staff as well. I think what I'd really like to see as well is to share things across universities, as well, because so many universities are going to need very, very similar training. And I'd really like it not to include a financial model as well. There are universities that are much more financially viable than others. And I think if we could help each other in the sector, then that would be really good as well.

## **Mark Blythe**

It's interesting, isn't it? Because as Sam said in the previous question, ultimately if there is this blended online element that can be shared and that the poor training and competence of a lecturer in delivering it could damage the reputation of the course when actually it's just their ability to communicate with that technology. Dan, Thank you very much.

## **Professor Tansy Jessop**

At Bristol, what we entered into when training with our staff about was, we said it's conceptual, it's pedagogic. It's about learning design. It's not so much about technology. And we ran these digital design courses, we've run five iterations, and they an hour a day for seven days and our staff experience and are modeled what it feels like to be a student on a well designed learning design course so they get the student experience and I think it's been catalytic and picked up by digital champions in the faculty.

## **Mary Curnock Cook**

Thanks. I really hope that learning design and technology is an academic discipline on courses that students can follow. And indeed that, Mark, maybe you're notching it up as an important future professional on your careers website.

We are going to move to how universities could ensure that they're monitoring and supporting students who are struggling with course content. And is that a different challenge for students learning online in new ways. How do we support students? How do we monitor their progress in this completely different online world compared to face to face?

## **Vicki Stott**

It's a really interesting question. So I think ensuring that students are able to participate in the conversations around their learning, and so that they can then help form their learning and they can articulate for themselves any difficulties that they are experiencing in accessing and progressing through their learning. So I talked a little bit earlier about the fact that we've seen that in some of the transition to blended and virtual approaches, students have been able to participate in those formative conversations with staff-student liaison committees, and the people who are designing courses in a much more level playing field sort of way. I think that's really important. Somebody earlier touched on the idea of having- I'm sorry, I was trying to find my notes- , having learning analytics, and we've seen some interesting uses of learning analytics in some of the universities that we've been speaking to. And that had already been adopted pre pandemic to help address the needs of particular groups. And I think particularly black and minority ethnic groups, there are a number of universities that have been studying or doing studies and introducing pilot programs, looking at tracking the progress of those students and building narratives really around creating supportive learning communities, and enabling students to overcome any particular barriers to participation and inclusion that they might be feeling in a way that makes it look as though they- feel as though they are being supported and helped to progress rather than that the institution is addressing an expectation that they will fail or, or not progress. And we've also seen very interesting uses of pulse surveys and ways of gauging views of students in semester and during the course of their learning so that providers have been able to kind of get almost

instant feedback if you like and to tweak the ways that they're presenting learning and teaching so that students can have a better experience and progress more easily through. Does that address the question that you were asking?

### **Mary Curnock Cook**

Thank you very much. And actually, I was having a conversation with some people yesterday about all of this and at some stage I think we're gonna have to realize that we can't survey students back to everything. So many things we want to find out from. from them. I think student engagement is just like another huge challenge for the sector.

### **Dr Omar Khan**

Thanks. My question builds on the previous one around blended learning being used more widely. And it's specific, though, focusing on how we ensure that if blended learning is used more widely, not just in the pandemic, but for the long term, how do we ensure that there's equitable access for all students, so specifically looking at disadvantaged background, people from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have access to the resources for a good home learning environment? And obviously, we know that those inequalities already exist. And yes, we've heard that some of those inequalities may be closing. But how do we make sure not just that they don't grow but is this an opportunity to try to narrow those gaps?

### **Professor Tansy Jessop**

I think we've recognized digital equity as a huge issue. And I think that the JISC digital interest insights show survey showed that 62% of students had connectivity problems. And some of that relates to being in low bandwidth areas, disadvantaged areas as well. So I think, for me, there's an issue here about anticipating some of the digital inequity. And I think we anticipated in the online environment where we design learning with low bandwidth options, downloadable options, and supplement that with lots of teaching presence commentary in a way that actually covers some of the connectivity issues. I think there's also an investment question, investing in devices and having hardship funds, loans of devices this year. But I think there's a long term issue. I think it also speaks to our physical spaces. So if students don't have spaces at home, I think we need to be addressing what our physical spaces on campus look like not only teaching spaces and seminar rooms, but thinking about informal spaces, spaces where students can do some online learning on campus with Wi Fi, and with an appropriate environment around them. I think also, there's something about admissions and applicants, and how we share what will be necessary in a blended environment and think about bursaries and scholarships for students who can't afford them at the point of access. So I think part of this is about anticipating and recognizing the needs of different communities as they join higher education and a part of higher education. So I think there's a big issue around connectivity, though, that can't be solved by universities. I think it's a national issue.

## **Vicki Stott**

Thanks Omar I'd like just very quickly to come in- there is some evidence that suggests that pedagogical approaches to delivery like this, an assessment have suited some groups of students much better. So we've seen some evidence that things like recorded lectures have benefits around widening access, and help students who are maybe first in family or from areas where there is low participation, who wouldn't necessarily have experience of accessing HE in the more traditional way?

## **Mary Curnock Cook**

Thank you so much, and some good reminders about the potential for digital learning to democratize access and participation. And I think also that idea that place as an important issue just doesn't go away just because your learning is enabled by technologies. There's some really, really good, good points there.

## **Professor Mary Stuart**

Dan, we've been talking a lot quite rightly about what the particular needs are in terms of things like staff development and, and moving around and doing pulse surveys and then needing to tweak what we're actually doing and things like that. Is it your experience that this hasn't had an impact on staff workloads? And if it has, are you starting to think about whether the way you engage around thinking about staff workloads is changing? And indeed, the point Mary made earlier about whether there are new roles around learning analysis and learning design that we need to be thinking of, in not just in the OU because OU has been doing that for ages, but actually in, in other in other university environments?

## **Professor Danielle George**

In one word, yes, workload is a major issue. Absolutely major, I think our move to blended learning is shifting that workload. And I don't think we've quite got into the groove of it yet, in terms of what that workload is. In the short term, it is an increased workload, because it's change, not necessarily because of blended learning, it's just it's different. And, with change comes, more time to make that change. I think we need to move to blended learning in in a sustainable way from a workload point of view, and allow staff who still, who do research as well, to make sure they have time to do research, which certainly, many of my colleagues have not been able to do over the past year, they've absolutely focused on their teaching, for all the right reasons. We're actually looking at the Open University and all the best practice in the Open University with associate lecturers and that level, that's not something that we have at university, at Manchester. So we're looking at that role in the way that Open University has taken out best practice from from the OU, and seeing if we can develop new roles, we're just discussing that with our unions at the minute. We have a digital learning service that we've developed from the E learning technologists, we come away from the E learning technologist because so much as E learning, why call it that but we've invested very heavily in the learning technology and the learning technologists and, they're an army of people that need to be available for for all staff to help them in their in their workloads. So that's in the class help from an associate lecturer point of view. And then also from a delivery point of view, and then from a creation of content point of view, have to have this army of learning technologists that can help as well.

### **Professor Mary Stuart**

I wondered if anyone else would like to kind of come in on on this, because I think this has thrown up a whole set of things about our community and what they do. And I think the other thing is that sometimes actually this this could free up time, if we think about it properly. So just really interested in different perspectives.

### **Sam Sanders**

Thank you, Mary. Just in relation to the workload points, I think I will be very careful how I frame this. But everyone in universities is always working incredibly hard. So before I say anything else, I'm going to get down on the table.

However, the administrative processes supporting them are not always the most efficient due to historic lack of underinvestment in IT support and the promotion previously of a variation in processes for very standard things as well. So in terms of workload far from is the move to remote digital working, going to improve, the increased workload, if anything, it should decrease workload. So if you're employing effective standardization of business, business processes that affect both professional services, staff, and academics, you should be able to move to greater workflow management, better optimization, or authorizations and things like that using things like RPA, chat, bots, all sorts of other things. Better self service for students should have a really marked impact on the amount of time currently spent doing administrative and at times relatively low value adding activities, so freeing up more time, so I would look at it the other way around. I think there's an enormous opportunity to free up a lot of time to focus on the value adding face to face elements of the student experience, which will still need to be that there won't be any money additional money to pay for

### **Professor Mary Stuart**

It's a whole big thing. And really, I guess my my point would want to be to say that actually we need to reconceptualize the whole community and roles and what people end up doing within that context.

### **Mary Curnock Cook**

And I'm going to let Richard Brabner do a wrap up question

### **Richard Brabner**

Thanks, Mary. And, again, thank you to everybody. And thank you to our panelists for coming and giving up your time to give us your expertise and thoughts today.

I've just got the final wrap up question here, which I know is almost an impossible task, which we're going to ask to everybody starting off with Sam, but taking on board the experience of the last year, what would be the number one change you'd like to see in the higher education sector, over the next decade or so

## **Sam Sanders**

Very quickly, then I would like people to think more broadly about what the notion of a student or the notion of a teacher actually is. So I think universities need to move away from the concept of student being an 18 year old, in the next building over from you, especially with sort of additional funding for lifelong learning, we're gonna see lots of people going to university for very different reasons than me, they want a very different experience, some of them from a very transactional, personal commercial advantage perspective, how am I going to get more money and better employability, some from an experiential perspective, some from a pure interest perspective, and we've got to be careful not to confuse them. I also think from a teaching perspective, we're gonna see more and different people in the classroom, on the virtual classroom besides traditional academics as well. So we're gonna see that, the blurring of the boundaries between pure academia and professionals in the wider business community working more collaboratively. So for me, it's thinking slightly differently about some of these traditional terms

## **Professor Danielle George**

Just following on from Sam in terms of pathways in lifelong learning, I think, seeing more of this sort of stackable model, so you can trade in your last certificate, so you might start with some CPD, because that's all you can afford, or that's all you know, in terms of time or money. And then you trade that in for a certificate, and then a diploma, and then maybe your degree in the future, and I think we're gonna see a lot more of that.

## **Vicki Stott**

I think that we will be looking at much more personalized models of learning, I wouldn't be at all surprised if Dan's absolutely right, that we see a lot of sort of scaffolded stackable learning types. And I think we've got a real opportunity now to build flexible, inclusive academic communities with, as Sam was saying, very different types of people taking the lead in different types of learning, and a much more co-collaborative participative way of learning

## **Dr Liz Marr**

In a way, I think it would be lovely if we could go back to what we did prior to 2012 funding changes where people stacked up credit according to their interests and enthusiasms. But I have to agree with what Sam and Dan was saying. And Vicki, I see the future as, as much more flexible opportunities for people to move in and out of both FE and HE and accumulate credit for awards if they want to do that. But having that lifelong learning entitlement where funding follows credits, and I think people because people are going to be moving in and out of different types of employment. And we don't know now what that employment is going to be in the future, what it's going to be like, so we have to have the opportunity to be able to reskill, upskill, change direction. And HE has got to be part of that.

## **Richard Brabner**

We've been talking about that for a long time though haven't we Liz the pandemic, then has given it the sort of not the motivation but the impetus to make that change.

**Dr Liz Marr**

I think it has, but I think it's also the skills agenda that's pushing that forward in the, you know, economic requirements. But interestingly, the European Commissioner is now consulting on individual learning accounts, which you may recall we had in the UK some time ago, so similar to the lifelong learning entitlement, I think there's a general move, particularly with the growth of things like micro credentials and short courses. The world is shifting. Definitely.

**Richard Brabner**

Thank you. And Tansy, last words?

**Professor Tansy Jessop**

Sorry to be contrarian, but I suppose I'm going to say instead of stackable credits and micro credentials, I've seen the opportunity of collaboration sharing and beginning to chart- because we can because we're working so much more together, I think across university students and staff, beginning to see the connections across the whole curriculum from first year to final year, PGT, whatever it is, and I'd like to see more of that joined up-ness as a result of a more transparent, shared collaborative endeavor in higher education.

**Mary Curnock Cook**

Thank you so much. And that hour has flown by and I do apologize that we've gone a couple of minutes over just such interesting points there. And people talk about the unbundling of the degree, but I think that how you re bundle it is, is also really important. And also Tansy, the points you made about collaboration across is that actually, there was a piece in that I think it was in The Times this morning, somebody wrote, saying, you that students wanted to design their curriculum now. Well, I think they've probably got a point but lots to chew on. Thank you so so much, Vicki, Sam, Liz, Dan, and Tansy. I've just so enjoyed the session, and I'm really glad that somebody is going to transcribe it all so that I've got time to go back over it. I really appreciate the generosity of your contributions and so many ideas for us to take forward. So thank you all very much indeed.