



## **Reflecting to Rebuild and Strengthen Professional Development A Collection of 'Post-Online' Conversations**

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### **Outline**

This monograph is a multi-authored collection consisting of our faculty's post-online reflections. The objective was to gather thoughts and discussion around teaching and research during COVID-19. We aim to build and explore around 'lived experiences' to provide a reference point to help Continuous Professional Learning and Development (CPLD) activities. The section on 'digital diaries' consists of dialogues from staff categorised into varied themes. In the testimonies, staff have reflected around their challenges, targets, strengths, familiarity and how they managed to overcome difficulties and achieve goals. A special section, from the Centre for Urban Research on Austerity (CURA), is devoted to identifying how pandemic has intensified research challenges, highlighting the funding, time and location constraints on academic research.

## Narrative – Identifying the Purpose!

The importance of online working within Higher Education (HE) has become apparent during the COVID-19 outbreak. Starting with a contingency plan, online provision of teaching is now the central strategic objective for institutions. The challenge is to identify the key needs, develop competencies and enhance digital capabilities. It is one thing to change to an online interface instantaneously and another to learn to teach online. The latter requires careful consideration of pedagogy and design as well as technological skills.

For academicians, the pandemic has been a transformative challenge, having no predefined manual to suggest an appropriate working strategy. Within weeks of lockdown and Universities' closures, social media has been sprawling with posts, videos, blogs, trainings to suggest 'brilliant' ideas for teaching, community building, and not to forget the numerous suggestions for working parents around keeping children occupied. It has been remarkable to see that responses from staff have been swift and some context now appears as things run their course. However, not everyone is up to speed with changing circumstances and emerging tools. A skills gap is prevalent, and there is a constant pressure from long-winded training sessions, updates, how-to guides/ instructions. The shift needs to be rewarding and as seamless as possible so that it does not negatively impact staff well-being in the midst of other responsibilities such as child care, mental health etc.

As well as teaching, the pandemic has also put research into the spotlight in numerous ways. Apart from an individual impact specific to personal, temporal and behavioural nature, some common themes such as funding, delay and collaboration have been directly affected. There have been concerns due to diversion of research funds from other areas towards COVID-19 specific work; delays have been anticipated across fieldwork, conferences and data collection. In particular, qualitative research requiring face to face interaction has been suspended, and limited travel has also constrained collaborative research.

Although the current situation is undesirable, it has given an opportunity to change the way we deliver teaching, conduct research and develop staff capabilities. In particular, use of technology and innovative pedagogy has the potential to optimise students' experience and if the challenges are addressed clearly then lessons we learn now can transform the classroom of the future. Gathering the staff reflections together, our objective was to understand and reflect on 'lived experiences'. We hope to provide a reference point to help in building activities around Continuous Professional Learning and Development (CPLD) at both individual and institutional level.

Ours is not a technology driven approach but an emphasis on interpreting, appreciating and considering staff practice within the virtual framework. We want to benefit institutional leaders and experts who are looking at staff learning development to enhance capabilities and designing related programmes and policies. The monograph aims to support education leaders as they research and assess different ways to continue educating students during the forthcoming academic year and beyond. It can be used by those designing or improving upon a plan for education continuity, with a key focus on staff needs, experiences and competencies. We have gathered here stories to help influence, inform and persuade to consider a different perspective and strategic vision based around the workforce.



## Setting the Scene! – CURA Narrative

### Keeping it Critical? Research in the COVID-19 Crisis

By Professor Jonathan Davies

(Director – Centre for Urban Research on Austerity)

The Centre for Urban Research on Austerity (CURA) was established in November 2015 to develop a global urban research community at DMU. The Centre provides thought leadership in urban scholarship and is at the heart of the University's urban living agenda. We have continued to function as a centre, but colleagues have had to adapt to inevitable constraints arising from the suspension of campus life, the prohibition of physical proximity research and the move to a fully digital research environment. Researchers have been affected in many ways, personal and professional – and very unevenly. For some, home research is extremely challenging, while others work better in that environment. In personal terms, some of us found the sudden onset of such a human disaster disorienting, leaving us wondering how our work is going to speak to a radically altered, perhaps dystopian future. Moreover, the virus creates new inequalities within universities, while making existing inequalities more visible and intensifying them.

Colleagues for whom COVID-19 means additional and unexpected duties of care face specific challenges with inequalities arising from workload management. It is important to recognise that these challenges are not new and that precarity in academic life has been increasing for decades. Even in “normal” times it was difficult to balance the expectations and demands of an academic career with caring responsibilities, particularly for mothers. For many, an academic career means having to move away from family and social networks, meaning that care becomes extremely costly. COVID has given this long-existing crisis an acute form and shown, more than ever before, the malign impacts of neoliberalisation and workload intensification. The threat of massive job-losses due to COVID only intensify these stresses. Whether universities finally begin to recognise these crises and act to alleviate them, will only become clear over time.

Beyond the structural challenges, the financial crisis threatening universities means that our research environments and capacity to do research could be under threat in coming years. It is no surprise that universities are exhorting researchers to bid for external funding, and

several colleagues in our faculty have enjoyed great success this academic year. But, winning grants is going to be harder than ever before. External funding has always been very competitive, but in a post-COVID (and Brexit) environment there could be vastly greater competition for fewer resources. Success has always been a rarity, even for prominent academics, and chances of succeeding in a resource desert could be severely curtailed. Much will depend on infrastructure the University is able to provide to support competitive funding applications and the ability of researchers to work collaboratively and inventively together. Equally, it is vital that talented academics who do not wish to apply for grants, or see it as an unnecessary distraction, are supported and not frozen out.

The suspension of physical proximity research has major implications for the qualitative work most of us do in CURA. Travel, particularly overseas travel has been impossible. At the onset of the crisis, a first priority was to bring colleagues home who were working on research council funded projects in Latin America. At the project-level, interviews, observations and ethnographies are much more difficult to execute, while the activities researchers want to study have also, in some cases, ceased or become inaccessible. Conferences were cancelled, visiting research fellowships put on hold and precious funding lost – perhaps for good. Moving research online also introduces potential inequalities and biases in data collection. Many disadvantaged and older respondents cannot or do not wish to live digital lives, and a digital-only research environment would exclude them. Adapting to this new environment has been challenging, but our researchers have done so creatively. See, for example, reflections on the CURA blog<sup>1</sup> by our PhD student, Leon Reichle. Leon is studying tenant displacement in the German city of Leipzig and she has had to cope with significant disruption.

Our research environment and culture are inevitably affected by COVID-19 and remote working. Much of our CURA work is anchored in international partnerships and we regularly invite early career scholars to develop their work and collaborate with us on new projects and funding bids. We have managed these difficulties by moving meetings, mentoring and seminars online and maintaining external networks through digital contacts. However, there is no real substitute for the vibrancy and productivity of a week-long visit to campus and to Leicester, or a face-to-face research encounter with a worker, tenant or campaigner.

Dealing with COVID-19 has also stimulated interesting strategic and philosophical considerations. CURA approaches the crisis from the perspective of “keeping it critical”, when the pressure is to react quickly. Fast policy responses are clearly necessary in times of crisis, but risky. They can be reactive, authoritarian, parochial, full of biases and perverse incentives. They may not stand the test of time and come to be regretted with the wisdom of hindsight. Accordingly, we developed three guiding principles to guide research through COVID-19:

The responsibility to maintain a healthy intellectual distance from dominant COVID discourses. For example, familiar public policy and media terms in the “global north” like isolating, social distancing, shielding and quarantine reflect privilege, with class, racial, spatial and gendered overtones. Billions of people in the world are unable to employ such devices.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cura.our.dmu.ac.uk/2020/05/26/my-phd-fieldwork-was-interrupted-by-a-pandemic-or-researching-relations-through-relations-in-a-period-of-relational-polarization/>

Nor can many families and “key workers’ in the UK for whom physical proximity and exposure to infection goes with the job or cramped living conditions. The virus does not discriminate. Societies, economies and politics do discriminate.

The need to avoid over-privileging the virus and strike a balance between reacting to the moment and maintaining longer-term strategic perspectives. Enormous effort and resources have been diverted into COVID- and COVID-recovery research. Colleagues in CURA have been very proactive in developing projects to address critical issues locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. In partnership with the Institute of Applied Economics and Social Value, for example, we are running a survey looking into public attitudes and experiences of Coronavirus. Another pilot study, in partnership with the Local Governance Research Centre and People Organisation and Work Institute, is looking at whether the COVID-19 crisis unsettles or transforms the pre-existing and overlapping roles of local government, patterns of austerity and experiences of work as they play out in adult social care provision. A third project is beginning to explore whether community support groups, springing up during the pandemic, transform state-civil society relations and ways of governing in Leicester. These and many other projects will come to fruition in the coming months and years.

This refocusing is necessary, but it is important to remember that Coronavirus intersects already unstable, iniquitous and conflictual societies. It is not always the worst or the most important thing happening in a city or a country and if it is now, it might not be in 6 months or a year. Younger people can feel very differently than older people. Other issues can quickly become more pressing. The Manchester City and England Footballer, Raheem Sterling made this point vividly when the Black Lives Matter movement erupted in the UK after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020. In the face of public health warnings about large protests, he commented “the only disease right now is the racism we’re fighting”.<sup>2</sup> Sterling reminds us to be wary of COVID-centric thinking. Our established research priorities on urban class, racial, spatial and gender inequalities remain relevant and could very well become more so.

The need for sensitivity to researcher and respondent wellbeing. Research is essential, we are obliged to do it, and respondents often want to tell their stories. However, it is important to be aware that those immersed in extreme and exhausting situations will find participation taxing in terms of time, cognitive effort and emotional strain. The same can be true of researchers. At the same time, if physical proximity research is not possible for a prolonged period, those of us able to live and work safely and comfortably at home risk becoming distanced and losing critical insights into the lives of people unable to do so and forced into increasingly precarious ways of living.

Many challenges lie ahead for CURA in terms of the time and money available for research, the quality of the work we are able to do and the quality of life to be found in an academic career. The immediate aim is to continue nurturing critical and creative thinking about the future and, at the same time, listen to and support staff and PhD students who continue to encounter difficult personal and professional challenges. The following testimonies provide a flavour of experiences within CURA over the past few months.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/52959292>



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The crisis has been multi-dimensional, affecting us all in numerous ways. Employee experience now has been more important than ever, telling the moments that matter the most and highlighting the need to understand what is working and not working. Functioning remotely, juggling with demands around teaching, research, workplace and household, along with impact on mental health, fatigue and productivity, are some of the ripples of pandemic.

This segment, hence forming the heart of the monograph, is a collection of post-online conversations contributed by Faculty of Business & Law colleagues. These are some incredible stories from colleagues that have gone above and beyond, displayed varied experiences, and identified challenges during the post lockdown period. We wish to display the importance of interactions, capabilities, aptitudes and potentials to highlight diversity in approaches and how essential every aspect of work and day-to-day life is – all leading to success, even during a crisis. This is attempt therefore to see the employee experience through their own lens, something that would help to reflect and holistically appreciate staff differences.

We received 15 stories, including an anonymous excerpt. We categorise the staff testimonies into the following themes. There are no boundaries to these themes, they are not completely distinct, rather grow into each other.

1. The Veteran Expert – here we reflect upon those that are more experienced in their approaches, and have prior understanding of designing, evaluating and planning innovative curriculum and teaching. Through their approaches they have identified how student well-being and learning can be promoted, and have helped colleagues through regular conversations leading professional outcomes.
2. The Firm Resilient – identified here are the stories that reflect resilience, stability and optimism. They have shown cheerfulness and risen to the challenge of innovating with technology, perhaps also due to a greater interest. They have gone beyond the realms of requisite teaching delivery, and have adopted innovative ways to build community and engagement.
3. The Transition Scramble Identifier – this is a set of some very interesting excerpts, providing us with a distinct perspective towards lockdown experience. They have identified for us some of the struggles that may be ignored in the broader spectrum of teaching and learning. They bring to us some essential day to day aspects that often go unnoticed in planning.
4. The Swift Preparer – these testimonies have displayed remarkable achievement through self-made strategies. How staff can complete a task in hand despite the stress and insufficient time is remarkable. The pieces here reflect the voices of many of us who may be novice but are emerging – someone who has the content understanding and is now building the knowledge around tech and pedagogy.
5. The Challenge Spotter – an extremely essential theme revealing the key challenges, helping to contemplate staff and students' needs. These stories show strength as they have managed to sail through successfully whilst also recognising and acknowledging defies through first hand experience.

## 1. The Veteran Expert

I work as Associate Professor in the Department of Politics, People and Place. Even prior to the abrupt move to online teaching, I have focused on the innovative use of technology enhanced learning and on improving the academic and professional skills of students and staff alike. Post university closure, I conducted effective online sessions for the three modules that still had timetable teaching and assignments; Politics in Action (Level 5), postgraduate Project Management Skills and the postgraduate dissertation. My key strategy was to take things steady for my students, which fits well with reflective learning and teaching. Keeping it simple, I build confidence around Blackboard Collaborate, and helped colleagues and students to utilise the full potential of the tool. I used Collaborate for all of my drop-in sessions and supplemented this with through the use of MS Teams and Slack for some communications.

I have been teaching part-time professional students since I joined DMU in 1997. Over the years I helped to develop our distance learning and later online distance learning pedagogy for housing students. Having attained DMU Teacher Fellowship in 2012, I have been interested and working around varied teaching and learning issues, such as enhancing staff digital capabilities. My understanding enabled me to offer support and mentoring to colleagues, along with taking strategic role during the pandemic situation. Further, having been an online distance learning student previously (PgDip in Digital Education at the University of Edinburgh), I had hands on experience and insights to improve learning experience for my own students in the 'new' teaching setup. Co-leading one of the key workstreams around pedagogy practice, I also advised on the design and dissemination of key strategies at wider faculty level. I felt great to be able to help and that my skills were recognised by the senior members of the faculty.

Despite my active role in digital education and e-learning, challenges had been visible. The key is to ensure that the physical working space is right – having dedicated space, equipment, and tools are an important starting point. It is understandable that not everyone has access to such essentials, and even I have had to make adjustments and obtain additional kit and seek technical support from ITMS. I find that confidence in using the technology can be one of the biggest barriers for colleagues and this is exasperated when there are technical issues. Personally, I also found the situation taxing my health. The volume of emails from students, increased demand from colleagues whom I supported, has at times been exhausting. We 'survived' this bit, but clarity and simplicity will be key to ensuring that we develop and provide a good student experience—something I am more optimistic about for the next academic year.

.....**Ros Lishman**

My name is Roger Saunders and I am Associate Professor Curriculum Innovation in BAL. I am writing this in the first week after Easter during the second week of marking. I work in the department of Economics and Marketing. I have been using flipped lectures for approximately 8 years,

providing lecture slides supported with a recorded audio. The slides come with text descriptions underneath for those who prefer to read rather than listen. The audio is usually done in short sections to make it easier for those students who want to use it on a mobile device (phone or MP3 player). I also provide links to journal articles, trade articles, newspaper articles and video resources. This year I have experimented with a workbook that helped to support students in their self-directed learning, giving clear instructions as to what activities they needed to complete outside the class. The workbook helps students to feel part of a structure and to develop a study routine, even if they are not physically present on campus or meeting face-to-face.

The most important aspect of the work since the beginning of the lockdown has been direct communication. I have always encouraged my students to contact me by email and always responded as quickly as possible, in many cases immediately. Developing a strong communication link with students encourages engagement. To this end I have been happy to supply my mobile number so that students could text me or (as one student did) ring. I have also had two students undertake late presentations using Skype. Previously on some extracurricular work with the CIM I had shared a What's App group with students. The more ways we provide for them to engage with us, especially via their mobile phones the more likely students are to stay in touch and feel supported.

There are lots of other online resources available, many of which are highlighted by Advance HE and I would recommend staff sign up to Connect and the email updates which are available. It is also a good time to explore what other lecturers are doing, for example TJ Moore of HLS has been running a series of webinars, open to all staff, dealing with various different approaches to online and distance learning. Overall, I would say I am quite happy with how things are going, though with more time to prepare we could have offered more individualised communication particularly to those students we know are having problems or struggling with engagement.

.....**Roger Saunders**

## 2. The Firm Resilient

When we received confirmation that the University would be moving to online provision, our initial response was one of relief. Students had already started to report a general feeling of disquiet in attending large group lectures, and we ourselves were not immune to the growing sense of alarm sweeping through society. In the context of our teaching, we were in a relatively stable position. We both work in the law school and serve as joint module leaders for 'Land Law' (an undergraduate module comprised of 390 2nd year students), and 'Introduction to Property Law' (a Graduate Diploma in Law module comprised of 80 full and part time postgraduate students). A fortunate quirk of fate meant that substantive teaching for both modules concluded the week before lockdown with only revision sessions scheduled to take place thereafter. Furthermore, for undergraduate students, assessment had already been set as a piece of written coursework, the question for which was released weeks beforehand. The GDL students were initially down to undertake a traditional exam, but both we and they were quickly and efficiently informed of the change to an online assessment.

We are keen users of Panopto and BlackBoard generally, so the module shells for both were already populated with detailed lecture recordings and seminar materials, as well as extensive guidance on assessment preparation. Consequently, we were able to direct our focus not on the delivery of substantive material, but rather on how best to maintain a more holistic and student focused form of general revision and social engagement. Under normal circumstances, we would attempt to achieve this by encouraging a series of face to face drop-in sessions for students, in addition to traditional lectures and seminars, to engage in enhanced feedback and feed forward exchange. In keeping with this approach, we decided to make use of BlackBoard Collaborate Ultra and schedule virtual drop-in sessions for each cohort to coincide with cancelled lectures. We had never made use of this particular feature of BlackBoard before, and initially considered the use of Zoom or Microsoft Teams, though given the number of students involved felt neither would be suitable.

From the beginning, we found the programme easy to use, and, notwithstanding the occasional microphone glitch, have experienced very few problems. We decided to make the sessions audio only, as not all students had webcam access. This also allows for anyone to log in using their phone should they have difficulty accessing a computer. Students are encouraged to type in questions live or email topics for discussion in advance. Student response has been excellent and many report positively on how the sessions have helped them keep contact with their peer group. Having been branded as RadioDMU (at the students' suggestion), the sessions have taken on a life of their own, and now, several weeks after normal teaching ended, we are still broadcasting up to 3 sessions per week. We have also had guest appearances from other colleagues from the Law School. This experience has formed the basis for ongoing pedagogical research and will now become an ongoing feature of our teaching.

.....Russell Orr & Paul Omar

I am a Lecturer in Law on both the LLB undergraduate program and also the postgraduate LPC. I am writing this contribution after six weeks of teaching online. The emergence of Covid-19 has put the demand for education-based technology at the centre of everyone's thoughts. My initial concerns were around the competency of the technology itself rather than my own abilities to deliver. I also had concerns around the engagement of students with online resources. I have worked together with colleagues to collaborate and pilot a number of different software programs to see which is most appropriate and efficient. Our team have tried BB Collaborate, MS teams, Zoom and Skype. Each program had both benefits and drawbacks but it became apparent in the infancy stages that some of the technology could not cope with the volume of students and so needed adapting.

I was positive and optimistic about the challenge ahead and I have always had a keen interest in technology. I was born in 1992 and feel that I have been fortunate to have grown up as technology has emerged so the idea of using it does not concern me. One of the main challenges has been the difficult balance between creating effective content in a time sensitive manner. It is important that the students are able to access the materials on time but it is worth noting that lectures and seminars cannot just be replicated. The new technology medium affords a range of tools which can be utilised; new resources, tools and discussion options, but the time to explore these can be limited by virtue of the fact that we switched to online almost overnight. We also need to think carefully about the impact of new technologies. Whilst we want to encourage online discussions through forums, this comes with the added responsibility of monitoring and ensuring appropriate content is posted.

My conclusions over the first six weeks are as follows. Activities that can be swiftly done in a face to face forum take additional time online. The need to be clear is even more important as the ability to be misinterpreted online increases. This adds the need to build in multiple levels of understanding and clarity. Student engagement is a challenge. We can track student participation and inform them they are not participating but how do we get them into the virtual door? Moving forward and with more time to plan, there are positives which can emerge. The key is not to replicate your face to face teaching but adapt it. Different activities are needed to increase engagement and enthusiasm for students. The challenge allows us to change our pedagogy and improve our teaching.

.....**Brett Koenig**

I was still teaching, particularly on the Masters' module, when I framed this testimony. I work as Lecturer in Economics in the Department of Economics & Marketing. Switching to online teaching came as a challenge but not surprise. Just prior to the week the University moved to the new interface I attended the JISC Digifest and had discussions with colleagues from HE around contingency planning. My familiarity with varied tools helped me achieve a decent transition to online format during the COVID-19 outbreak. I aimed for progression, not perfection. I did live sessions using Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, and a couple using Microsoft Teams. My key approach was flipped classroom technique, something

that I had tried before. Keeping in mind factors such as internet access or tech availability causing issues at students' end, I created and uploaded Panopto lecture recordings prior to the scheduled lecture time, hence flipping traditional classroom method. This also enabled more interaction around key questions, discussions and further explanation to clarify doubts during live synchronous sessions. Post live sessions, I wrote down and uploaded minutes from sessions – including the questions asked and my responses, enabling students to refer back – I felt this reduced the number of direct email queries. Also, summarising the minutes gave students an accessible version or offline version, particularly useful for someone struggling with tech access. I tried to keep my students up to date through announcements, stressing also on well-being and optimism through key messages and images.

An interesting task was when I redesigned the gamification technique (I award participation points in my Masters' teaching classes) and adapted it to online tasks. This kept my students occupied and productive, quite essential given the circumstances, particularly also because most of the Masters' students are international and need tasks to keep themselves busy and away from anxiety. Also, they feel engaged and collaborated despite asynchronous learning. The period has been full of challenges, anticipation and of course some stress too. Making sure that information was reaching my students was a key concern. Having had a taste of this new normal, probably the next academic year would be more progressive and informed. If we all aim for a personalised, inclusive, scaffolded and engaging approach, online teaching could in fact be an improved way of teaching in accordance with students' needs.

.....**Swati Virmani**

### 3. The Transition Scramble Identifier

I am at home, sat at my PC, as I have been every day for the last fifty days. Omar (not his real name) is on my screen. He is an International student on my programme, and I am also his personal tutor. He's one of my older students, and no longer in the UK, but it makes no difference: as far as I am concerned, I have a duty of care towards him as a student at DMU. He's on my screen, but not moving; it's a still photo which he sent as evidence for an exceptional extension. He's smiling but wearing a tag and can only show me his face and the ceiling of a quarantine centre. He got an emergency flight home a few days ago, when he realised the UK was less safe than his home country. At the airport, his COVID test was positive, and he was sent directly to quarantine. He won't be out for 28 days.

I rang the Associate Dean Academic to ask about his case. I knew we could give exceptional extensions but was it necessary to collect evidence. It was reassuring to see her face, via video, rather than simply hear her voice. Many DMU procedures were paper based before COVID, and I was expecting to have to complete and return a form via email on behalf of Omar: he had been quarantined directly from the airport and didn't even have a PC with him. The Associate Dean put my mind to rest: we had dropped the requirement for evidence and forms. I emailed Omar straight back to say his request was granted. He replied immediately, asking me to pray for him.

I sat back in my seat and held back tears. The impact of COVID on my students hadn't really hit me like this before. I had been too busy in the fifty days since the University had shutdown, seeing students via video meetings, arranging for them to get research data online, and dealing with their enquiries via emails and forums. I knew there were hard-to-reach students like Omar, but my focus had been on the technology. I was making plans for one-to-one surgeries but had delayed until I knew the guidance on video meetings. My moment of reflection was interrupted by a WhatsApp message from a school friend in Australia, asking me how I was. I poured out my frustration at letting these students down. DMU had suspended attendance monitoring on 16th March, but before that I had been telling International students that I would support them whatever they decided. However, with flights becoming restricted, several had remained in the expectation the UK would be one of the safer countries to stay.

Moving online has had other challenges. There are colleagues I would have seen daily before COVID but haven't seen since the UK lockdown began. We are keeping in contact via Microsoft Teams and email, but it is less spontaneous than 'bumping into someone' in the corridor. The small chat has gone. How was your weekend? How are your family? How has your life changed? How are you coping? I have more control over life online, I can switch off the PC and spend time with family and friends when I want a break. But it can also be overwhelming, when the reality of COVID – a quarantine centre – intrudes.

.....Neil Lancaster (Personal Tutoring under COVID)

My yoga teacher wrote, 'when we go through crises we encounter three psychological stages'. Emergency, with an urgency to solve problems that when transposed to a collective can mean the development of shared goals, which make us feel energised and productive. Regression, when we realise the future is uncertain we lose sense of purpose and become unproductive. Recovery, we begin to reorient, we move beyond the 'getting by'.

As a CURA member and staff in BAL, March and April felt like the period of emergency, with an urgency to solve our teaching responsibilities and get to grips with Teams and Zoom. Exchanges of emails, phone calls and WhatApps abound over a day period. After the urgency of teaching finished, I began to think about CURA's needs. In retrospect, I think we jumped into the recovery phase. There was no time to lose purpose and feel unproductive. As a group we managed to keep the momentum going especially through a series of online seminars and a couple of meetings that allowed us to feel that a sense of community existed during a period when the faculty activity went quiet. However, at time of writing, I feel that we are now in the regression phase because it is unclear what our future as a centre will be. Although members have not been unproductive (grant bidding, writing, online research, PhD supervision carry on) I wonder, at least at a personal level, whether all this 'productivity' will come to fruition under uncertainty. Some days this uncertainty is accompanied with fatalism and guilt as I hear that the people I research about and work with experience very hard times, while I comfortably sit at home. This feeling makes me uneasy. The recovery phase, in which virtual networks of communication and support play an important part, gives me hope. I wish that CURA as collective keeps developing these networks and makes them work effectively.

.....**Valeria Guarneros-Meza**

I live in a suburban semi, and since lockdown my partner and I have been working at home. We also have twin sons who have returned from university to complete their second year exams. Without a study of my own It has been tricky to find the best place to locate myself, so I have been moving around the house and using different spaces to work in. This has made me reflect on the 'psychogeography' of the house and how different rooms have an effect on how productive I am, and the disruption caused by not having everything to hand, whether I am too cold or too hot, or whether I will disturb someone in the next room with an online meeting.

The front room is too sunny...the back room too cold (and my partner needs to use it today anyway) ... the kitchen is disruptive because of the constant catering and cooking with two young men in the house. There is the added issue of power and invisible borders - not wanting to noisily 'contaminate' the next room as I join yet another MS Teams meeting, or having to negotiate the use of a room after lunch. Lockdown has made me think more about how we work in small spaces when people are forced together rather than given the choice.

The psychogeography of our house has also caused me to reflect on the academic interest in local place and governance. These discussions are usually about cities and regions, or devolution and centralisation, but as I move around the house I have been meditating on how small spaces in buildings can impact on our desire to produce positive outcomes. Perhaps the psychogeography of small spaces can be broadened out to consider other settings where governance is enacted and implemented. The spaces could include open plan offices, shared office spaces and multi-agency hubs which suggest that extra value will emerge from physical collaboration.

.....**Anonymous (The psychogeography of our house)**

#### 4. The Swift Preparer

As I write this (end of week 33) I am completing the final week of teaching for a compulsory block-taught module for which I am the Module Leader, for the Global MBA programme. Block taught modules are taught in their entirety in the space of an intensive 2 weeks of teaching (normally 15 hours of face to face teaching per week for 2 weeks), followed by a 3rd week in which the students complete their assessment. I had zero experience of online teaching at the point when the campus shut down. I was fortunate, at least, in that I had the 3 weeks of the vacation period to prepare my block module for week 31 when the teaching term resumed. Having said that, it was a massively stressful 3 weeks of trying to learn from scratch a completely new way of delivering teaching.

At first, I naively thought that it would be easy enough to simply record lectures either live (synchronously) or asynchronously and shove them onto Blackboard. I quickly realised that this would be both practically impossible and a terrible learning experience – for the following reasons:

1. A survey that I quickly devised and sent out to the cohort of 52 students revealed that they were in time zones spanning a 13-hour difference (from South America to China).
2. I also learned that several had poor and unreliable internet access and limited access to computers in their home countries.
3. On a block-taught teaching schedule, both 1 and 2 meant that live teaching on the usual schedule was out of the question.
4. Everything I was reading conveyed the same essential message: *forget about what you do in face to face teaching; effective teaching and learning online means re-thinking the way you do everything.*

Mostly I self-taught. I found most of DMU's links to existing resources confusing and unhelpful. My colleagues were also floundering and giving contradictory advice, and none of them were facing the challenge of block-teaching. I found the Pearson website very useful, and You-Tube tutorials from academics around the world (in the same Covid-19 boat) became my best friends. Towards the end of the 3 weeks I discovered one colleague in the faculty who had a great deal of experience with online teaching and her input became invaluable.

In the space of 3 weeks I re-designed my whole module, in both its content and delivery. The tool I chose to use was Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. The basic principle I followed was '*less teaching, more active learning engagement*'. To achieve this, I first Marie Kondo-ed all of the lecture content: cutting, slashing and focusing the learning on a series of essential sub-topics. My contributors and I then prepared *pre-recorded lectures in bite-sized units* of no longer than 20 minutes listening time each. Every small topic unit *ended with a learning activity* (often including directed reading) to be carried out using the Discussion Board. They were rolled out in a phased way, with subsets of lectures being released in stages so that students were not overwhelmed. (Side note: students commented that the quality of sound recording on BB Collaborate was excellent compared to DMU Replay).

The *Discussion board* became a busy and active site for engagement with lecturers who monitored it daily, replying, linking to themes in lectures and reinforcing the learning. In addition, to increase engagement, every 2nd day of the teaching weeks I scheduled *regular live meetings* with the cohort. In consultation with the students we agreed on 13.00-14.00 UK time as a compromise hour that could work across the globe. In every session they had access to at least 2 lecturers and could ask questions, receive clarifications, and debate issues in real time. Each of the live sessions was focused on a specific topic content area (one subset of lectures) that they had received a few days earlier. They were well attended and also lively sites of engagement and interaction.

My expectation for myself was to provide the best learning experience possible in the circumstances. The outcome: we achieved higher levels of engagement than we ever had in classroom teaching (a surprising outcome that many students highlighted in their feedback)! My contributing lecturers and I feel we've become better teachers. The students have given fantastic positive feedback. The stress has been intense and has significantly impacted my mental and physical health. However, I can say that I'm proud of the learning experience I provided and happy that after an incredibly steep, rapid learning curve I am in a good position for online delivery in 20/21.

.....**Karen Malan**

I work in the Law Department, and I have been responsible for the DL Sports Law Programme (LLM and BASL). Therefore, the online mode hasn't been completely novel for us as we have always looked at ways to integrate more with our students through the blended learning processes. The platforms we have used included Youtube Channel and Blackboard. During the period post lockdown, my task was to provide content for the LLM Sports Law in general and the Study Day content and look at focussing sports law online as a provision. Even though we have worked via a DL delivery service it has been very challenging with limited resources working from home but largely because the timeframe in which it happened and the uncertainty for students (obviously something not in DMU's control). This meant a lot more interaction with students to help them process the different way of learning, a lot more work trying to keep up with the many 'suggestions' to maximise the opportunity and of course to move the face to face days to online delivery.

In my opinion to get online right we have to take the time to do it properly. It is somewhat stressful learning the complete ability of Blackboard as a platform, putting the content into an online format that can be delivered in a creative way and challenging students in a different way. There was very little guidance in DL along with being restricted to the university's delivery platforms, for instance panopto (which is clunky and complex to use and access). We still tried to deliver the expectations and even conducted some online interviews which have enhanced the learning perspective. In my opinion students on my programme will benefit from this way of learning and it will enhance my programme.

.....**Genevieve Gordon**

I work as Senior Lecturer in the Department of Economics & Marketing. Because Covid-19 outbreak and lockdown, first time I had 2 lectures online. I used the Panopto live system in conjunction with Blackboard. The reason that I used Panopto was that Blackboard collaboration failed for some colleagues, for instance due to sound distortion. However, I have used Blackboard tool for training, and it seemed good – an option that I will explore for the next academic year. In addition, I think Microsoft teams seems good, it has embedded whiteboard and student can raise the hand. I would be in a position to try out different possibilities given more time.

Even though teaching was delivered, my expectations weren't really met as it was impossible to communicate with the student using technology. Communicating with students seemed one-way stream and a bit hard to comprehend if a student gets what you want to teach. Of course, this is perhaps the case of an early and instant stage situation. Nonetheless, challenge also crops from managing home and work responsibilities, especially with little kids at home and no proper office space in addition to tech failures.

.....**Ali Orazgani**

## 5. The Challenge Spotter

This testimony covers the teaching period from 19 March 2020 through 15 May 2020 at De Montfort University. I am a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Economics & Marketing. I have previous experience of organizing and delivering teaching online, but it was rather sporadic. I also use various online communication platforms (skype, viber, Face Book messenger) on a regular base for many years to support my research and policy advising activities (e.g. for meetings, presentations). I also took some courses online when I was a PhD student in 2002-2004.

During the period reported in this testimony, I relied primarily on the BB Collaborate, which allows to share screen, video and audio and has several other useful collaboration tools. It also records and shares the sessions and keeps attendance records. Student attendance was a bit lower than previous face-to-face sessions. The largest session had 16 participants and the smallest only 3. I had clear expectations, based on my previous experience. In general, teaching went as expected. I am also a module leader for a module, which is delivered at a partner university. I collaborated with my colleagues in the Niels Brock, have shared with them my experience and provided support in organizing teaching online. We were able to review and share the best online resources for our module, adjust the assignments, discuss what worked and what did not work with our students. The main challenge was related to re-design of the assessments and adjustments of the schedule to accommodate the new COVID environment.

In terms of key challenges, I could identify two sets:

1. Technical: Internet quality – streaming the online sessions with video and screen sharing requires stable and high-speed connection on the teaching side. Several colleagues have suggested to switch to LAN connection and it really made a big difference in my case. Student access to the internet came as a repeated problem. It is not only about a stable and fast connection to benefit from the real time communication and video materials (some students reported to live in the area with no internet and unstable connection), but also in terms of equipment – for instance, not having access to computers off campus. Often accessing to the learning materials from the cell phones has not produced good results. Internet browsers – some of the technical capacity is often not supported by some browsers. For example, I could not share the audio for the short videos using FireFox, but it worked in Chrome. Finally, it requires time and attention to develop technical skills, and given this students' need to have some alternative channels for communication in case they cannot access learning materials or teaching session online.
2. Pedagogical issues: low student engagement compared to a face-to-face class, requiring restructuring the teaching approach and methods to achieve the desired outcomes. Formats for original assignments had to be re-designed as they did not fit the online environment.

In addition, combining work with home schooling for children added pressure on the time use and schedule. Particularly, the pandemic had a significant negative effect on my research activities, as I had to reallocate time from research to teaching. Several conferences were cancelled and the time on their preparation was just wasted. The field activities and meetings on several projects was delayed. Funders have changed priorities and reallocated resources to COVID related activities. As a result, some activities I have invested my time have to be postponed. Nonetheless, I planned and started looking at new research ideas, such as how tenure security may affect coping strategies or be a source of additional insecurity (e.g. linked to rent or mortgage payments).

.....**Denys Nizalov**

My name is Brian Harman and work with the Dept of Economics and Marketing. I am the Module Leader for the Consumer Behaviour module (MARK2303). There are 240 DMU students on the module and the cohort is very diverse. As of Wed 18th March, I began delivering classes online; my final 3 lectures and final 2 seminars were pre-recorded on Panopto. This was my first time pre-recording my classes. The final lecture was primarily used to talk through the new assessment that would replace the summer MCQ exam. I set up a Slido poll after the lecture so that students could ask questions about the assignment. I left this poll open until the following week and then answered the questions in a follow up video. The Slido poll worked well - leaving it open rather than trying to reply in real time ensured that students questions were more thoughtful and my responses were more considered.

In my module, students traditionally score low marks in their written assignment and then get higher grades in the summer MCQ exam. This trend is especially evident among non-native students who often have poor writing skills. The addition of a new piece of written coursework will potentially disadvantage these students (although I am trying to minimise this effect by asking them to design an infographic).

From a teaching perspective, I feel that online teaching is very restrictive. The online workshops on BB collaborate leave me with the impression that it quite limited in its functionality - even sharing a streaming youtube video with your audience seems to be problematic. I think online teaching will disproportionately affect classes that have been designed to be highly interactive and engaging. I suspect that online teaching, will, to misuse the phrase, “flatten the peak” of student engagement. Lectures may homogenise stylistically over time and student experience may regress to a lower common denominator. Certainly, innovative and creative approaches to teaching will be needed but it remains to be seen if technology can fully address the new challenges we face.

At present, online teaching promises to be quite demotivating - a rigid and sanitised version of what has gone before. My initial impression of pre-recording lectures is not great - it seems to take the fun out of teaching. If lectures are delivered live via webcast then there will at least be the possibility of student interaction. Nevertheless, I expect that it will be much more difficult to use humour and build rapport when we can't

gauge “the temperature of the room”. If stony silence from unblinking screens is all that awaits us, then teaching online will feel far less rewarding. I also imagine that large online lectures will require us to flip the classroom more often - students will need to take up the slack by taking more responsibility for their own learning. Online classes will require more planning and the time for questions and spontaneity will have to be managed carefully - this will not suit all teaching styles.

.....**Brian Harman**

The teaching component of my senior lecturer role within the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship at De Montfort University, as with most of daily life, has been dramatically altered by the Covid-19 pandemic. I am writing this testimony of my experience during academic week 33, which is after the formal end of both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching weeks, and during the assessment period.

While I have now taught for three years in a formal academic position, and several additional years during my Ph.D., this had all been in-person teaching in lectures and seminars and I had never encountered online teaching. When teaching was suspended in mid-March, about a week prior to the U.K. lockdown, my teaching was moving towards its conclusion, with only three scheduled undergraduate lectures remaining and seminars concluded. Thus, my direct exposure to online teaching delivery has been rather limited. In these classes I have utilised online recordings of lectures to deliver the teaching, which while efficient, prohibits any interaction during the lessons. While discussion boards may offset this to an extent, I have found them to be more useful for answering generic inquires (e.g., how many references should I include), for which we already have email. This leaves a gap for the staff-student connections that often facilitate the deepest learning.

Where I have learnt most is through discussions with colleagues with experience of online teaching. In particular, many colleagues have advocated for more interactive forms of online teaching, which enable students to interact and ask questions throughout lectures, and the values of this for learning. At the same time, while others accept the benefits of this form of online teaching, they have highlighted significant challenges, in particular, the significant difficulty in solely delivering a lecture, while simultaneously monitoring and engaging with the continuous questions and interactions in the chat comments. Some noted this is impossible alone, and that additional administrative support would be required to successfully perform. Thus, my expectations are of significant challenges and changes to the structure and design of teaching teams going forward.

The most significant challenge I have encountered thus far has been adapting already designed assessments for an online world. My final assessments on both the undergraduate and postgraduate innovation models I lead are exams, which due to the pandemic cannot take place, and have been replaced by online assessments. The adjustment posed significant challenges in adapting the questions for an appropriate level

of challenge for students in moving from unseen to seen questions and designing new marking schemes. While marking is yet to commence, I anticipate this, and the collation of grades and moderation will reveal further challenges.

Where I have found fewer challenges is research. I was fortunate enough to finish data collection I was undertaking in early March prior to the lockdown. Equally, as an academic, I would be working at home extensively at this time of year normally until the Autumn semester and have a home office set up at home to facilitate this. I am expecting more challenges to emerge with research going forward, however.

.....**Gary Chapman**



workloads and not lack of initiative or willingness. If academics have a million demands on their time, which they do, then who can blame them for just putting up the same PowerPoint presentation they have used for the last 10 years. It is the understandable path of least resistance.

So, is coronavirus going to make a difference? The pandemic is 'forcing' many academics to change their methods. Flipped learning, short videos, forums, message boards etc. are all going to become far more widely used. If this is a 'shock to the system' that exposes academics to new ways of doing things and provokes innovation then that would be a good thing. But I'm sceptical. I know there are a number of academics who want to try new things but then simply become 'too busy'. That is not going to change now – indeed the demands on people's time are clearly only going to increase. In short, if the lack of innovation in higher education is due to workload rather than individual initiative then a global pandemic with elevated workloads and stress is not going to be the time for a major breakthrough!

With this in mind let me turn to the staff reflections and some common themes running through those reflections. Let me begin with the positive message of hope.

*Our 'old ways of doing things' will not work on-line and that can provoke innovation.* There are some positive examples, from Roger, Brett and others, of how the crisis has led to innovation. Here are two powerful examples,

Karen: In the space of 3 weeks I re-designed my whole module, both content and delivery... The basic principle I followed was 'less teaching, more active learning engagement'.....The outcome: we achieved higher levels of engagement than we ever had in classroom teaching. We all feel we've become better teachers. The students have given fantastic feedback.

Russell and Paul: 'Student response has been excellent and many report positively on how the sessions have helped them keep contact with their peer group. Having been branded as RadioDMU (at the students' suggestion), the sessions have taken on a life of their own, and now, several weeks after normal teaching ended, we are still broadcasting up to 3 sessions per week. We have also had guest appearances from other colleagues from the Law School. This experience has formed the basis for ongoing pedagogical research and will now become an ongoing feature of our teaching.'

Great though these stories are, they are not the whole story. *An online environment raises a host of new challenges and puts a severe strain on colleagues.* Most of us are now familiar with some of the main challenges online teaching brings, such as, poor internet access, students' lack of access to digital technology, the difficulties of online assessment and time-zone problems. I was particularly struck by Brett's comment that: 'Activities that can be swiftly done in a face to face forum take additional time online. The need to be clear is even more important as the ability to be misinterpreted online increases. This adds the need to build in multiple levels of understanding and clarity.' One thing I take from this is how 'little things can easily add up'. While many of the new challenges we face are solvable, but to have so many new challenges all at once, in the midst of a global pandemic and severe economic downturn with home schooling and everything else, can easily be overwhelming. Many of the reflections speak to such difficulties,

Karen: The stress has been intense and has significantly impacted my mental and physical health.

Neil: There are colleagues I would have seen daily before COVID but haven't seen since the UK lockdown began. We are keeping in contact via Microsoft Teams and email, but it is less spontaneous than 'bumping into someone' in the corridor. The small chat has gone. How was your weekend? How are your family? How has your life changed? How are you coping? I have more control over life online, I can switch off the PC and spend time with family and friends when I want a break. But it can also be overwhelming.

Valeria: Although members have not been unproductive (grant bidding, writing, online research, PhD supervision carry on) I wonder, at least at a personal level, whether all this 'productivity' will come to fruition under uncertainty. Some days this uncertainty is accompanied with fatalism and guilt as I hear that the people I research about and work with experience very hard times, while I comfortably sit at home. This feeling makes me uneasy.

Genevieve: It is somewhat stressful learning the complete ability of Blackboard as a platform, putting the content into an online format that can be delivered in a creative way and challenging students in a different way. There was very little guidance in DL along with being restricted to the university's delivery platforms, for instance panopto (which is clunky and complex to use and access).

Ali: Challenge also crops from managing home and work responsibilities, especially with little kids at home and no proper office space in addition to tech failures.

Anonymous: The front room is too sunny...the back room too cold (and my partner needs to use it today anyway) ... the kitchen is disruptive because of the constant catering and cooking with two young men in the house. There is the added issue of power and invisible borders - not wanting to noisily 'contaminate' the next room as I join yet another MS Teams meeting, or having to negotiate the use of a room after lunch.

Denys: In addition, combining work with home schooling for children added pressure on the time use and schedule. Particularly, the pandemic had a significant negative effect on my research activities, as I had to reallocate time from research to teaching. Several conferences were cancelled and the time on their preparation was just wasted. The field activities and meetings on several projects was delayed.

In looking through the reflections it was definitely easier to pick out negative than positive views. And we should keep in mind that this is a non-random sample of reflections. The overwhelming impression I get is that the pandemic and shift to online teaching has created far more problems than opportunities. With eyes on the next academic year and beyond we, therefore, need to be realistic. At the one extreme we can simply move our teaching online in the simplest possible way and acknowledge 'a terrible learning experience'. At the other extreme we can go above and beyond to adapt but only by pushing boundaries of mental and physical health. Neither of these extremes seem desirable. Yet, it is difficult to see how to

strike a reasonable middle ground without severe strain on colleagues. It is vitally important, therefore, we work together as a community to support each other.

We will, at some point, move beyond the current crisis and Universities will return to some form of normality. Will we then reach a point where innovative techniques come to the fore? Clearly we have all learnt a lot during the crisis about how to learn new technology. Teaching methods will evolve and improve. We will no doubt have more online meetings and interaction going forward. I think we have also learnt that online technology cannot replace face-to-face contact. There have been, for instance, suggestions that MOOCs would challenge conventional university degrees. That idea can now probably be put to bed. Most of us, including students, surely long for the time we can sit in a classroom and have a meaningful discussion without the inadequacies of Zoom, Teams and the like. Here are some reflections that pick up this theme.

Ali: Even though teaching was delivered, my expectations weren't really met as it was impossible to communicate with the student using technology. Communicating with students seemed one-way stream and a bit hard to comprehend if a student gets what you want to teach. Of course, this is perhaps the case of an early and instant stage situation.

Brian: From a teaching perspective, I feel that online teaching is very restrictive. The online workshops on BB collaborate leave me with the impression that it quite limited in its functionality - even sharing a streaming youtube video with your audience seems to be problematic. I think online teaching will disproportionately affect classes that have been designed to be highly interactive and engaging. I suspect that online teaching, will, to misuse the phrase, "flatten the peak" of student engagement. Lectures may homogenise stylistically over time and student experience may regress to a lower common denominator. Certainly, innovative and creative approaches to teaching will be needed but it remains to be seen if technology can fully address the new challenges we face.

Gary: many colleagues have advocated for more interactive forms of online teaching, which enable students to interact and ask questions throughout lectures, and the values of this for learning. At the same time, while others accept the benefits of this form of online teaching, they have highlighted significant challenges, in particular, the significant difficulty in solely delivering a lecture, while simultaneously monitoring and engaging with the continuous questions and interactions in the chat comments. Some noted this is impossible alone, and that additional administrative support would be required to successfully perform. At present, online teaching promises to be quite demotivating - a rigid and sanitised version of what has gone before.

Let me finish with the hope that we can all return to 'normal' teaching as soon as possible. I, for one, would be quite happy to not use Microsoft Teams for a long while!



The question that now arises is how can we strengthen staff effectiveness for the forthcoming academic year, along with rebuilding opportunities for long-run improvement. It is no surprise that online education will be the strategic priority at every HE institution, and existing and potential research partnerships will be rethought, there is a need to facilitate a model to help institutions in managing, improving and accelerating support for its staff. A World Bank note<sup>6</sup>, for instance, has identified three key principles to support teacher effectiveness during and in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic. Apart from the more commonly thought of support around instructional and technological know-how, a key principle suggested is to build staff resilience by enhancing motivation and well-being. There is a need to not only protect jobs and salaries, but to also enhance intrinsic motivation. In this monograph, with the help of staff reflections, we have hence tried to highlight a blend of staff experiences to emphasise on the many aspects that are essential while designing future professional development.

Similar to the 'new normal' teaching, even staff development need to be blended and hybrid. It needs to be conceived as an integrated, systemic and ongoing process. In addition to support around teaching plans, there is a need to cater, more closely, to specific needs. On top of that, fiscal constraints must be taken into account, as they can have long term consequences on teachers' motivation and effectiveness ('build back better', World Bank note). Robinson (1998)<sup>7</sup> suggested that staff development often fails because of ignoring hard-core resistance, inadequate resources, training being too theoretical compared to the realities of the workplace, time lag between training and implementation, and lack of follow-up. These factors are very much relevant in the current context and need to be considered.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/331951589903056125/Three-Principles-to-Support-Teacher-Effectiveness-During-COVID-19>

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, B. (1998) 'A strategic perspective on staff development for open and distance learning' in C. Latchem & F. Lockwood (Eds.) *Staff Development in Open and Flexible Learning*, Routledge, London & New York, pp.33-44.

The key to successful staff development is that it needs to be understood as critical, empowering and continuous. Some levels or phases of development ought to be identified. For instance, either a timeline approach - short, medium, long term planning, or grouping by needs – academic, non-academic. Strategies to bring about change should involve an individual and group problem- and case-based learning and action research. Professional development should be an activity undertaken with staff and not something merely ‘done to them’ (Robinson, 1998). Finally, staff development should be designed in such a way that it enables a behavioural adjustment needing only some degree of external motivation. It requires a focus on change, providing context specific training, and building positive expectations. A key question also is ‘can staff development be designed to identify and overcome problems of time and workload?’ – a reason often presented by staff for not attending trainings (Latchem, 2004)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Latchem, C (2004) ‘Staff Development for Open and Flexible Learning’, *Learning & Teaching in Action*, Vol 3 Issue 1: Professional Development.