

Flexible Learning Symposium: Co-creating a flexible learning model

14 June 2023, thestudio, Leeds

Session abstracts

Parallel Session 1.1 – Oral Presentations, 11:00 – 12:00, Room: View

Session 1.1a

Nothing short of EPIC: Introducing “Entrepreneurial Programme in Chemistry”

Dr Yun Wah Lam, University of Huddersfield and Dr Victor Lau, Chinese University of Hong Kong

This talk will introduce a pioneering 13-week module that uses an entrepreneurial journey to inspire Chemistry students to synthesise knowledge from other courses in the curriculum and contextualise this knowledge to solve real-world problems. We designed a flexible learning environment where students freely innovated, guided by feedback from a board of chemists, knowledge transfer professionals, entrepreneurs and career coaches. After completing this module, students are encouraged to further develop their ideas utilising knowledge learned from other modules, thus galvanising their entire curriculum into one narrative arc toward the realisation of their ideas.

Session 1.1b

Choice, change and collaboration for a more flexible future

Paula Shaw, University of Derby

This session explores narratives of choice, change and collaboration in flexible curriculum design. Participants in the session will hear how Module Activity Planning with Indicative Time (MAPIT), a flexible curriculum design tool, co-created by academics, students and learning designers has been used to visualise distinct, integrated, sequenced, vertical and horizontal articulations (Beauchamp, 1975), and the lessons learnt along the way. Participants will also have access to the tool for their own planning purposes.

Session 1.1c

Removing boundaries: Capturing the value of flexible pedagogies in HE

Dr Rachel Payne and Jo Skelton, Oxford Brookes University

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) at Oxford Brookes University aims to develop a sustainable and flexible educational environment that draws together a range of physical and virtual learning resources with research-informed teaching. To initiate this, we are conducting research that captures colleagues' flexible pedagogic practices that originate out of the pandemic and students' subsequent organisation of learning.

This is helping us better articulate values located within these pedagogies, focusing on accessibility, engagement, inclusion and employability. This presentation will provide reflections on participants' lived experiences, which help us break down traditional boundaries and reimagine classroom walls.

Parallel Session 1.2 – Oral Presentations, 11:00 – 12:00, Room: Matter

Session 1.2a

What is the end goal: Better learning or higher marks?

Dr Tosha Nembhard, University of Leicester

Most programmes delivered at universities follow a rigid assessment structure, which is often driven by quality assurance regulations and professional bodies' requirements. Often, there is no clear link between the learning outcomes and the assessment types. Students end up preparing specifically for that type of assessment rather than focusing on the learning from that module. This session will discuss how programmes should interrogate their assessment methods to ensure that they support the learning outcome.

Session 1.2b

Remote Masters' level learning: A success story?

Dr Helen Green, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust

The learning and development department (L & D) of one NHS Trust in the South East provides a range of educational opportunities for staff. L & D staff deliver education from non-accredited courses up to Level 7 programmes. Covid-19 meant that most programmes were taught over Microsoft Teams. The relaxation of meeting rules meant that the traditional mode of teaching could have returned but for the level 7 Academic Professional Apprenticeship, the programme remained as a mainly remote learning programme. This presentation will identify the benefits and challenges that the programme team have faced by continuing with this mode of delivery.

Session 1.2c

What are the lessons that we can take from narratives of change? What is the impact of change on specific programme teams and wider departments?

Dr Monica Ward, Dublin City University

Academics had to switch to teaching online in March 2020 and some academics were better prepared than others. However, most academics wanted to abandon all the online 'stuff' as soon as institutions returned to face-to-face teaching. They willingly embraced pandemic amnesia whereby they forgot all the flexible elements afforded by the switch to online learning. It is important to try to hold onto the benefits of flexible learning e.g. (small resources, self-tests and innovative assessment practices) after the return to on-campus learning.

Session 2 – Lightning Talks, 13:00 – 13:30, Room: View

Session 2.1a

Building connections between academia and industry through live streaming and flexible learning

Lindsay Pressdee, University of Manchester

Lessons learned through the pandemic on how live streaming can be used as a flexible teaching tool has allowed the introduction of an industry panel in undergraduate third-year project units. The purpose of this was to engage and inspire students as they enter their degree's final semester through a flexible digital live-streaming event on campus. Six guests were streamed into the session from across the UK and Europe. The students were able to hear from the panel and ask questions about their own projects, the session was recorded so students could revisit it later for maximum engagement and flexibility.

Session 2.1b

Converting comparative questions from passive to active learning: Teaching AC motors as a case study

Dr Mahmoud Masoud, University of Sheffield

This session depends on when things go wrong. As a case study, when I teach students the single-phase induction motor and ask them to compare it with the three-phase one, they memorise the comparison only for the sake of the exam. Based on a revised Bloom's Taxonomy, this represents passive learning. I decided to change the delivery method. It took me two years to reach the optimum method to convert this topic from memorising level (passive learning) to analysing (active learning). This talk will highlight the methodology I used for this case study which can be a genuine method used for most topics.

Session 2.1c

Addressing the on-campus “snap back”: Co-creating a flexible learning model, insights and approaches from the University of South Wales

Karl Luke, University of South Wales

This lightning talk aims to explore the benefits and challenges of co-creating a flexible learning model at the University of South Wales (USW). The talk will define the concept of flexible learning at USW and offer insights into the approaches taken to engage with stakeholders, professional services, academics and learners in the co-development of a flexible learning model and strategy. Through interactive discussions, participants will explore USW's approach to flexible learning and hear about USW's plans for piloting flexible delivery approaches during the 23/24 academic year and beyond!

Parallel Session 3 – Workshops, 13:35 – 14:15, Room: View

Session 3.1

Assessment in Flexible Learning: Can it resolve contemporary assessment concerns in higher education?

Dr Miriam Firth, University of Manchester

Teaching and learning and assessment design go hand in hand to effectively manage the student journey in higher education. However, contemporary assessment concerns, such as AI use for assessment, inclusive assessment, and assessment that mitigates poor academic practice, are still relatively unexplored in the flexible learning space. This workshop will offer delegates time to discuss these contemporary issues and analyse them from an assessment in flexible learning context. Through discussion and activity, we will explore whether principles, process, and practice for flexible learning can mitigate against these contemporary assessment concerns.

Session 3.2

Flexible active learning: Balancing learning with life's complexities

Dr Rod Cullen, Manchester Metropolitan University

Based on student feedback, our university is launching a Digitally Enhanced Learning Teaching and Assessment (DELTA) Strategy. This aspires to providing “Flexible active learning”, based upon six principles of digital flexibility, delivered with a framework of formal and informal, physical, and online learning spaces. This workshop will explore participant experiences of active learning, online learning, teaching and assessment during the pandemic and the role of digital technologies in enabling flexibility post pandemic. Participant

experiences will be contrasted with those of our institution and discussed in relation to the key aspirations and principles at the core of our new strategy.

Session 4 – Oral Presentations, 14:30 – 15:30, Room: View

Session 4.1a

Collaborative components of solution-focused flexible learning: A case study

Dr Anita Goldschmied, Sheffield Hallam University and Dr Dean-David Holyoake, University of Wolverhampton

This paper suggests that solution-focused flexible learning has a number of collaborative components, including fluidity, adaptability and a future-focused perspective which dispute the traditional ideals of universal standards and easily transferrable matrixes. The session explores these components and how co-authoring with students looks in practice using a case study of a Level 6 undergraduate module. The lessons learnt suggest that flexible learning requires constant negotiations between students, academics and systems in which solution-focused skills achieve more satisfying flexible learning environments.

Session 4.1b

Learning the lessons of curriculum redesign using storyboards

Dr Fiona Wadie and Dr Mary Watkins, University of Portsmouth

Curriculum design is an ever-evolving process, with continual refinement and reflection on what does, and does not work. This session focuses on the lessons learnt following a curriculum redesign of distance-learning undergraduate teaching materials. Drawing upon previous experiences of curriculum redesign it was found that what worked within a small team was no longer appropriate with a larger, more complex, team. With the development of learning materials delayed, a reconsideration of the starting point was needed. This led to the development of a storyboard template for curriculum design, aimed specifically at developing a suitable appropriate and flexible learning model.

Session 4.1c

The challenges of flexible complexity

Susan Martin, University College London

In 2021/22, University College London established a ‘task and finish group’ to investigate the experience of flexible learners across the institution. Over the preceding few years, and particularly during the pandemic, colleagues had noted that the student (and staff) experience on a wide range of flexible courses heavily relied on manual intervention in systems, a pragmatic interpretation of policy and staff relying on localised practices. This session will consider the findings of the investigation, the lessons learned from organising a wide-ranging review and invite session attendees to consider the applicability of the findings and recommendations at their own institutions.

Poster presentations

Flex for academic success: Co-creating flexible learning with Sociology students

Alison Leslie, University of Leeds

It is generally recognised that “learning in higher education involves adapting to new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge” (Lea and Street, 1998: 158). To meet this challenge, flexibility is important as a learning approach and outcome (Ryan and Tilbury, 2013). This poster will illustrate examples of how I co-create

flexible learning with Sociology and Social Policy postgraduate students through a variety of academic language and literacy interventions, which are responsive to their immediate needs, enable them to understand how knowledge is constructed in their discipline and encourage them to be autonomous learners.