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Issues in Masters level courses

The contributions in this paper consider many of the key issues encountered by HEIs in providing Masters level courses, from application, pre-course preparation, induction and progression throughout the course to post-course employment. They were presented at the PedRIO conference which launched the Masters Level Teaching, Learning and Assessment: issues in design and delivery (Kneale, 2015), text where many of the authors made presentations. The papers here complement those in the book itself.

The importance of induction and preparation for advanced study is exemplified in Chappell’s paper, which describes a project to prepare students for study over the summer period before starting their course. In addition to supporting students it clarified a number of issues for academic staff including developing a better understanding of those most likely to attend. Her work is complemented by Davis, Peck and Apekey who describe how their university has adapted their induction week for students in light of the specific needs of Masters level study and especially for overseas students. The benefits of their innovations in creating interactive relationship-building sessions were demonstrated in a ‘vox pop’ evaluation twelve weeks after induction. This valuable research is informing future induction programmes.

Supporting students is crucial for engagement, retention and recruitment. Cross et al.’s paper describes the practice of peer mentoring or ‘buddying’ international students for social support as well as for academic confidence building. In the longer term this should provide alumni who will advocate for the course in their home country, as well as provide feedback on the effectiveness of the programme they experienced. Increasing engagement and participation in group work and creative activities is illustrated by Smith and Khechara who demonstrate the value of introducing technology-based tools involving ‘flipping’ and instantaneous questioning and feedback via mobile devices.

Broadening out the perspective, the subsequent papers demonstrate how their innovations prepare their graduates for life after their Masters studies. Allsop, Radnor and Cole’s paper considers the tension between supply and demand models of curriculum development. It questions where the locus of power can be most successfully located in developing curriculum offers in higher education. Ritchie describes how their Masters course provides graduates with the portfolio of skills required to enable a portfolio career in an increasingly competitive employment situation. Skates then demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary modules in engineering where students complete a design project using standards, techniques and processes commonly used in industry and with the helpful input of professionals in the sector. Finally Kneale’s paper considers some of the challenges which are faced by those seeking to design curricula and to enhance delivery at Masters level.

Pauline Kneale and Wendy Miller, PedRIO, University of Plymouth
Using an online environment to predict student enrolment and aid transition to postgraduate education

Sally Chappell, School of Life Sciences, University of Nottingham

In an increasingly competitive market of higher education, ensuring a high quality student experience and satisfactory transition into the university environment is essential for any education provider. Whilst the application process for undergraduate courses is centrally controlled, applications for postgraduate taught courses (PGT) are much less regulated with students able to apply for, receive and accept offers from several universities. Some issues of this system for postgraduate applications are discussed further in the literature (Tobbell and O’Donnell, 2013), but the process leaves many admissions teams uncertain of which students are genuinely intending to start the course. This has implications for resource allocation and ensuring a balance within the student cohort, for example considering proportions of home/EU versus overseas students.

One of the other challenges for PGT education is the time frame. Most standard UK MSc courses are one year in duration, which reduces the time available for students to acclimatise to being in a PGT environment, especially if the first examinations are held at the end of semester 1. How do we ensure that students are prepared for this transition, especially if they’re coming from an educational background which may be quite different to that in the UK? We also need to take account of the fact that some students won’t be recent graduates and may be returning to study after time in the workplace. Whilst these issues will be addressed to some extent during induction activities at the start of the course, this project also aimed to improve student confidence over the summer period.

There is an assumption that current generations of students will come to their studies with a high level of knowledge regarding technology and online navigation. These so-called ‘digital natives’ have grown up with technology present in many aspects of their lives, so it was assumed that this would lead to high levels of digital ability and a corresponding desire to have educational materials delivered using appropriate technologies (Selwyn, 2009). This has been coupled with an institutional drive to provide course materials via virtual learning environments (VLEs) such as Moodle or WebCT. Whilst many students will soon familiarise themselves with these systems, for some students the transition can be harder. Some authors have also pointed out that there are differences between being familiar with technological advances for social reasons, and being able to use those appropriately to facilitate learning (Masterman and Shuyska, 2012). Postgraduate education also often requires a higher degree of independent working compared to undergraduate programmes. In a one-year postgraduate course, we need to ensure that students acquire these digital literacy skills early so that they are able to progress through the course at an appropriate level. Feelings of
isolation which come from the emphasis on independent learning are discussed in the literature (Tobbell, O’Donnell and Zammit, 2010), and we wanted to investigate whether enabling a feeling of community prior to the start of the course would help students form a community of learning more quickly and therefore help with the transition to this form of teaching and learning.

Studies of international students in particular have revealed that support from peers has a considerable positive impact on student satisfaction and feelings of belonging (Menzies and Baron, 2014). Whilst there are many opportunities for all students to engage with student societies when they arrive at the University, one of the other aims of this project was to provide a mechanism by which applicants would form supportive social networks even before the start of the course, which would facilitate a smooth transition into the University environment at the start of the year.

**Methods**

Preparatory online material was provided for the MSc Molecular Genetics & Diagnostics prior to the start of the course using the ATutor VLE. Rather than being new material created specifically for this task, the resources are mainly annotated and reviewed collections of freely available videos, animations and online books. This addresses the institutional concern of providing new academic material to students who are not yet registered with the University. New material was created in the form of formative quizzes, designed to allow students to self-assess how well they had understood the material provided, but these were a minor part of the overall resource. The topics for the background material were those that the course team felt would have been covered at undergraduate level as part of the candidate’s previous education, so this should be revision rather than new learning for all students.

Applicants were invited by email to self-enrol for access to the system from June onwards. Once applicants had registered for an account they received an email confirming their account had been successful, along with a reminder of how to access the material and a request for them to introduce themselves via the discussion forums which were also provided within the system. Registrations were monitored following the initial invitation, and those applicants who hadn’t applied for an account after three to four weeks were prompted with another email, emphasising the need for applicants to let us know if they were no longer planning on starting the course so that their place could be offered to a student on the waiting list.

We then compared the list of students who registered for this system to those that commenced the course that year, with the hope that this could be used as a predictive measure for course enrolment. Students who started the course were also asked to complete an anonymous survey to provide us with feedback about how useful they felt the system was.
The questions were mainly free-text responses which covered areas such as timing of the emails and release of material, use of forums, and suggestions for topics which should be added or removed.

**Results**

The process for applying for postgraduate study in many institutions is done using online systems, with the same systems being used for making offers to students and for registering the student response to that offer. In an ideal world this should lead to a list of students who have accepted their place on the course which corresponds to those students who actually start the course in September. However, it is clear that in many cases there are students who never formally accept the offer of a place yet still start the course, as well as those students who do accept the offer but then don’t attend.

This study used application and student data from 2014/15 and 2015/16. When we consider all applicants who could potentially start the course over these two academic years (i.e. all those with an offer of a place irrespective of their registered decision), only 48% start the course. There is often little or no contact from the 52% who choose not to start the course, either to the course team directly or via the central admissions department. However, when we consider those students who registered for the preparatory material, 91% of this group started the course, providing the course team with a much better idea of which students were actually going to turn up on day one.

The email dialogue which was put in place regarding registration for the online material also resulted in hearing from a small number of students who were no longer able to start the course, usually for financial reasons. In the past, these students would probably have been in the group who failed to turn up, but with no contact prior to the start of the course.

There were 20 students on the course in each academic year and all students were asked to complete a short survey to provide feedback regarding their use of the online material. Responses were received from 14 students from 2014/15 (70%) and from 17 students from 2015/16 (85%). All students indicated that they logged in either many times (52%) or a few times (48%). The free-text comments indicated that most students found it easy to access, with several comments referring to the benefits of being able to revise topics relevant to the course.

“It is a great idea and should definitely be done for future students, because I think the students who did not use it found the first few weeks more difficult because they had forgotten some rather basic concepts.”

“It was beneficial for me but I feel it would be even more beneficial for those who were out of school for a while.”
“I had a year out before attending the Masters course so found it useful to revise basic knowledge.”

The majority of students (86%) were happy with the amount of time they had to work through the background material, suggesting that the current timings are appropriate for most people.

“Yes, it was great having access to it so early because it gave me plenty of time to go through all the work at an easy pace and was not too stressful.”

“There was plenty of time and a good amount of material. I found this particularly useful as I had taken time out of university, so it was good to have some reading to refresh my knowledge.”

When asked about the use of forums, the majority of students said they thought they were useful. This included students who admitted to not posting anything themselves, although they still acknowledged the usefulness of being able to have conversations with staff and potential classmates prior to the start of the course. All the forum posts were of a social nature rather than academic queries about the material; a few comments indicated that this was because they didn’t have any issues with the material rather than a reluctance to post academic questions.

“Again a really great idea. I did not use the forums myself, but seeing other people with the same concerns etc. as I did was really comforting.”

“I found the forum to be very useful, it made meeting people once the course started a lot easier as most people had already spoken online.”

“I found the forums very useful. I did talk to other students and had the opportunity to meet them before the start of the course. I didn’t use the forum to ask questions about the background material because I didn’t have any problems, however I think this is a very useful way to start studying and be prepared for the course.”

There were some comments which indicated they would have liked more interaction, although it’s not immediately clear how this could be achieved. A staff member responded whenever students posted their introductions so that they got at least one reply, with additional comments posted by staff members to encourage discussion when the forums fell quiet after the initial flurry.

“The forums were a little formal - I felt like even though people introduced themselves it was a bit stop/start and not fluid enough. I didn't need to ask any questions about the material, I just wanted to get to know my peers.”

“Although I used the forum to talk to other students, it wasn’t used by everyone so I’m not sure how helpful it was.”

There were a few suggestions for other material to be included, which mainly referred to information on module content or links to other University resources, rather than requests for more academic content. The majority of comments in this section indicated that students
were generally happy with the resources provided. There were no suggestions for material which should be removed.

The responses overall were overwhelmingly positive, and several comments indicated that students thought a system such as this would be useful for other courses to implement as well.

“The only thing that I want to tell is I strongly recommend the establishment of ATutor in other courses, as I found it very informative and personally I came well prepared for my MSc.”

“I found ATutor fantastic to use as a preparatory system for the course and to get to know staff/students and I am glad that the system was available to me and I would recommend the use of it to other courses.”

**Future developments**

The use of a virtual learning environment for providing preparatory material over the summer prior to the start of the MSc course provides a highly useful method for predicting those students likely to commence the course. In addition, the students find it reassuring to be able to assess their academic knowledge before starting their postgraduate course, as well as being able to interact with their classmates and course staff over the summer period. As well as providing useful information for the admissions team, we hope that the social relationships formed prior to the start of the course will aid student transition into the postgraduate environment and encourage the formation of a learning community that benefits all students throughout the one-year period.

Developments for the 2016/17 intake include moving from the ATutor VLE to an installation of Moodle, in order to present a more consistent view of online delivery throughout the course. In addition, there are plans to expand this to other MSc courses within the School in order to offer this provision to more potential students and assess the impact on prediction of student numbers.

We feel that using the same VLE for this material as used for the rest of course delivery will be beneficial in terms of ensuring that students are already familiar with the VLE by the time they start the course, meaning they can concentrate on the academic material rather than also having to learn another new system. Whilst we will be doing this via an independent installation of Moodle, we feel it would be of more benefit to have this delivered via an institutional version with the same corporate identity as the one for registered students. However, this needs to be addressed at the institutional level, as access to the University VLE is currently restricted to registered students only.
References


The good, bad and ugly of postgraduate participatory induction

Samantha Davis, Katie Peck and Tanefa Apekey, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, Leeds Beckett University

It is common knowledge that people often experience change as challenging and to a certain degree, stressful. Whether we are changing jobs or moving house, exchanging the familiar for the unknown can be charged with both anticipation and worry. Change in an educational setting is no different and in recent years there has been a growing interest to understand how transitions impact upon student well-being and academic performance (Ackesjo, 2014; Garnham, 2013). Smooth transitions, we now know, play a key role in helping students adjust to change, form new relationships, become integrated into new environments, focussed and 'class ready'.

Unsurprisingly, much of the transition literature concerns the compulsory sector, and that which does deal with the higher education context tends to concentrate on the undergraduate rather than postgraduate experience of transition (Laing et al., 2005; Richardson and Tate, 2013). One might deduce from this that having been successful undergraduates, postgraduate students do not require further interventions to help them adjust to change. Postgraduates are by definition 'class ready' - or are they?

As course leaders for postgraduate taught courses in dietetics, health promotion and nutrition, our shared experience suggests students are usually not 'class ready' and what is more, do not fully appreciate the implicit expectations UK higher institutions (HEIs) have of them at postgraduate level. It is generally assumed that students, on entry, are independent, high functioning and already possess the skills necessary to complete a level 7 course successfully. However, our experience shows that an increasing number of students have difficulty performing essential academic activities which range from being able to conduct effective literature searches, apply critical thinking skills, to understanding the importance of academic integrity. This view is echoed by empirical, ethnographic research conducted in five UK universities, arguing that making implicit assumptions about postgraduate competence is unhelpful: students can be left feeling isolated and under-confident which, in turn, has the power to shape transition trajectories in specific ways (Tabbell and O’Donnell, 2013). Whilst earlier studies have started a dialogue on postgraduate expectations (Symons, 2001) and the complexities of transition (Tobbell et al., 2010) the problem here is that there is simply not enough research exploring the context of postgraduate transitions to masterly study or how HEIs are responding to meet the needs of this student group despite them accounting for some 23% of the Higher Education sector in 2014-15 (HESA, n.d.).

Similar to other HEIs in the UK our student body is diverse, although typically, and in line with sector, females outweigh the number of males on health-related postgraduate courses. An overwhelming majority come from overseas, particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa and
Asia, but not exclusively. This diversity has impacted positively upon the curriculum and on teaching practices and has undoubtedly enabled the university to develop its international portfolio and reputation further afield. Such diversity has also brought a growing awareness that many international students have additional needs prior to beginning their course, needs which a week-long intensive induction was clearly failing to meet. Despite furnishing students with relevant course information and the necessary details about university systems and support services, the induction experience was not helping students to transition successfully. For example, differences in cross-cultural interpretations of good academic practice can lead students into immediate difficulties in knowing how to reference to university standards and so demonstrate how ‘their knowledge’ is informed by the work of others. Such students need opportunities to practice, make mistakes and gain feedback in a supportive learning environment. This forced us to re-think the postgraduate induction programme and introduce a more participatory approach.

Traditionally, inductions have run at course level but for two years now we have facilitated a shared postgraduate programme involving students and course teams from three disciplines within the School. On the first day students are invited to meet their course leader, tutors and fellow students, but the second day involves an introduction to a wider inter-professional postgraduate community of students and a broader range of university staff who extend an official welcome to the School. On the same day students receive information to enable them to navigate the university, library and study skills services and understand the wider extra-curricular offer. On the third day students return to their course groups where they may experience taster sessions of what is to come, with overviews of study modules and practice environments, as well as an opportunity for students to address any important outstanding accommodation, enrolment or visa issues. On the final day the postgraduate community comes together once again focusing on information about student support services and academic expectations at postgraduate level covering issues such as academic integrity and critical thinking.

Although ‘content-rich’ this delivery model was ‘process poor,’ overwhelming students with information which, taken in passively, they were unable to retain - as became clear in the following weeks. Students were left with insufficient understanding or ability to demonstrate the ‘wicked competencies’ (Knight, 2007) and masterly skills expected of them. Moreover, this model offered limited time for students to get to know their peers or benefit from the social support this may offer - an established feature for students transitioning to higher education for the first time (Laing, Robinson and Johnson, 2015). This led us to conclude that a more interactive design was called for, particularly on the shared induction days where students received considerable information.

The thinking informing the re-design centred on the purpose and function of a postgraduate induction, encouraging us to appreciate the experience from the student perspective. Some important questions surfaced: how were students being welcomed to our university? Did we
make them feel at ease with tutors and their fellow students? Were we making a positive impression and did this leave them feeling that they had made the right choice to come and study with us? After these, more functional concerns emerged focusing on how we could better equip students with the knowledge and skills they needed to have. In short, how were we providing a ‘successful’ transition to masterly study? These considerations not only prompted a more participatory approach but one that was grounded in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), requiring us to address the affective domain and emotional needs of students joining a new academic community and for many, a new cultural community also.

The resultant programme therefore focussed principally on facilitating good relationships across all three courses, involving tutors and students in fun ice-breakers and team-building activities. One activity tasked students in teams to construct a device that might safely deliver a raw egg when dropped from a height, and which resulted in a predictably unreliable outcome! Such experiential learning fostered partnership working, fun and a critical understanding of how to work in groups at a masterly level. The programme laid solid foundations for the inter-professional learning that would take place on the next shared induction day. On this day we replaced a series of power-point presentations that had been traditionally used to communicate academic expectations with an interactive masters’ skills carousel. Supported by a team recruited across all three disciplines, students were invited to participate in five interactive skill-building sessions of thirty minutes each encompassing: critical evaluation skills; critical reflection skills; time management; plagiarism and Harvard referencing. Tutors structured these sessions as experiential workshops and selected engaging topical content suitable for a diverse student group. In consideration of our students’ needs we also extended induction to an invitation to join course teams for a buffet lunch at a local multi-cultural restaurant with the hope of leaving students on a ‘high’ before commencing their studies proper the following week. Interestingly, we observed that students continued to network informally for several hours long after the lunch had ended.

Although we managed to redesign a large part of the induction programme, traditional elements still remained such as the mandatory health and safety briefing, information about student services, the student union and study skills services. Course leaders felt that these elements could and should be improved, but also acknowledged the need to explore the student perspective of the induction programme through an evaluation process. This took place twelve weeks after induction at the end of semester one, and we invited all 80 students who participated in the programme to take part in a ‘vox pop’ (Collins, 2003). This novel and engaging method of gathering data captured the voice of postgraduate students very effectively, revealing a great many valuable insights about their experience. To encourage participation in the ‘vox pop’ students were invited to attend an informal lunch to talk about their memories of induction with peers. Copies of the induction timetable were exhibited alongside three questions: what is your abiding memory of induction? What helpful/enjoyable elements should we keep for next year? What parts of the programme need improving or removing? Thirty five out of a potential eighty students participated.
voluntarily and gave their individual responses on camera for one minute which was later edited into an informative short film and shown at the PedRIO Masters Conference in January 2016 (Davis et al., 2016).

Initial analysis of the footage reveals clear emergent themes, providing a more precise understanding of what constitutes a successful postgraduate induction. Generally, our data suggests that postgraduate students do indeed have needs prior to study and these differ from those of undergraduate students. More specifically, the data indicates the social aspect to learning is vital as it facilitates communication in a setting that might otherwise be awkward. The use of ice-breakers and team-building games were integral to this, fostering positive relationships amongst students - as well as between students and tutors - which has had a noticeably beneficial effect on subsequent teaching as tutors from different disciplines reunite with the wider student body to deliver discrete sessions. The experiential approach taken to build academic skills using the carousel proved both enjoyable and memorable.

Aspects of induction that were less popular with students affirmed the course leaders’ initial evaluation, indicating the necessity of engaging students in authentic and challenging tasks rather than adopting a model of passive information-giving.

The systematic analysis of data gathered from the ‘vox pop’ informs the first of two phases in a research project that uses a sequential explanatory design (Cresswell and Plano, 2011). Phase two of the research proposes to invite a purposeful sample of students from phase one to take part in focus groups and ‘drill deeper’ into the major themes that emerged from the ‘vox pop’. These findings will be analysed, prioritised hierarchically (Ritchie et al., 2014) and used to shape the shared induction programme for the immediate future. By involving postgraduates in the proposed research in this way we hope to co-produce knowledge on masterly induction and better understand - from a student perspective - what constitutes a ‘successful’ and ‘effective’ masters induction. We aim to make the findings of this research available to PedRIO and the wider postgraduate teaching community via publication.

References


Supporting postgraduate international students: longitudinal induction

Ivy O’Neil, Leeds Beckett University

The project

One impact of globalization in education is the increase of students studying abroad. Our MSc Public Health – Health Promotion course demonstrates that these students bring with them a rich cultural diversity and experience to share with local students. International students can feel anxious leaving their jobs, friends and family, undertaking a course in a new environment with different teaching and learning styles and a different education system. Many masters degrees consist of one-year intensive learning. Students don’t have time to settle in gradually nor to travel during their study. Our participatory style of learning in the UK and the need for critical thinking and self-directed studying can be a shock. Too much information too fast is also difficult for students struggling with a new environment.

Careful planned induction to university life and to studying is important. Jepson et al. (2002) studied the transition of postgraduate international students in Australia and decided there is a need for an incremental orientation programme to facilitate students’ adjustment to the Australian learning environment and English language skills. This paper is about a project providing continuous support to international postgraduate students, from accepting an offer of a university place, through arrival, during the first week and throughout the course until completion.

Induction leading to academic and social integration, promoting retention

Student transition, integration and retention in higher education have been important for many Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Tinto, in Leaving College, was the first to present a model and discuss links between student retention and study environment (Tinto, 1975; 1987). The academic and social system of an institution and the individuals who shaped this environment are important in his model. Central to this has been the concept of integration and interaction between the students and staff, particularly important in the first year of studying. Activities to support these students have often been provided by student affairs professionals, as an add-on to their studying rather than integrated into it with the involvement of academic staff. Many university systems and support mechanisms have been

1 retired January 2016
designed for undergraduate rather than postgraduate students e.g. fresher’s week activities. Although most studies are about undergraduate students, similar issues apply to postgraduate students. Our courses showed post-graduate student experiences are worse. They can be lost and feel out of place.

The learner is the centre of the learning process (Rogers, 1969). The key to enable learning is facilitating the right learning environment; developing ‘ways of being’ with the students, fostering motivation to explore and learn. University induction should be inspirational, aspirational and developmental, not prescriptive information giving nor limited to the first weeks. The induction programme we have developed for our postgraduate learners in our University follows a holistic approach, linking supporting mechanisms together within the institution. Based on the scaffolding concept (Wood et al., 1976), the objectives are to involve existing students in the induction programme and continue this process and pastoral support throughout the year by providing regular seminars, social events, ensuring students receive support throughout the entire course. We seek to promote positive orientation to studying and gradual integration to student life, improving student learning experiences and camaraderie within the School and Faculty, giving the students a School identity within the University structure. The development of programme content through the year is also based on discussions and negotiations with students. Supportive learning environments in the process of knowledge construction are best for learning (Vygotsky, 1978). When scaffolding is taken off gradually, students’ competency increases (Wood et al., 1976), linking to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development theory.

Strategies to support student transition have been widely studied. Hussey and Smith (2010) highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of students’ integration into HEIs. The important issues for induction have been about peer support, a sense of belonging and access to information. Traditional induction has tended to be an information-giving exercise with students facing information overload. The gradual and continuous support we provide for students throughout the year helps improve integration and retention, student engagement and socialisation (Tinto, 2006). It helps build a sense of belonging and identity, celebrate diversity, improve student satisfaction and promote learning in a supportive environment within a Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998). Our approach to teaching and learning has always been student-centred (Rogers, 1969), interactive and dialogical (Dewey, 1916 in Brookfield and Preskill, 1999; Freire, 1972). Students learn both formally and informally (Eraut, 2004). Social interaction is important (Vygotsky, 1978). This initiative also gives students a voice in programme development and in support throughout the year.

Richardson and Tate (2012) discussed an extended induction programme for their Geography undergraduates. Using participatory teaching methods, their extended induction process lasted for 5 weeks of term to avoid information overload in the first week. They involved 2nd and 3rd year students who helped teaching study skills and create a sense of community, improving their CVs and acquisition of transferable skills as mentors. Social
networking sites were used among students and their student mentors. They also ensured student mentors were not used to replace lecturers and lecturers had no additional responsibilities beyond mentor recruitment. Their extended programme ended with a field trip in the fifth week and an assessment of study skills. Student mentors produced an A-Z survival guide, improving students’ employability, scholarship and professional development. The programme has promoted and improved active learning and teaching, recruitment, transition and retention of the course. Briggs et al. (2012) also discussed a phased induction process to enhance student adjustment. They found that the development of learner identity is essential to student achievement. Students want to be treated as individuals and value the provision of information. Personal contacts and formative feedback on progress enable learning and reinforce belonging. Students can identify their own strategies for growth and find their own way to a new identity.

Our longitudinal induction project is primarily about supporting international students. However, in the local community, there are many students who are international in origin, but live in UK. There are also those from other parts of the UK, lacking local friends and maybe feeling lonely and unsupported. From the start, the students themselves decide the definition of ‘international’. The project welcomes everyone within the School. We also make use of web 2.0 social media technologies such as Facebook and our progressive Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), MyBeckett, to improve communication. Using admission information from the international and admissions office, prospective students can join the existing international student support group’s Facebook page and share information. Advice and reassurance can be provided through formal admission processes and informal contact on Facebook. Before leaving the home country, queries are answered by existing students. Access to information and advice, encouragement and one-to-one support and guidance concerning university applications are beneficial for potential students (Briggs et al., 2012). In using such pre-induction social networking on student transition, Ribchester et al., (2014) found high levels of activities in their social networking sites. They also found that students and tutors appreciated the opportunities to develop friendships, the chance to become familiar with tutors and access key information. It is important to be aware of the pros and cons in the use of social media for student communications. Our own project has had concerns about personal privacy. Other risks included breach of confidentiality, breach of copyright, cyberbullying and lapses in professionalism (Lafferty, 2013).
**Longitudinal induction programme**

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<tr>
<td>In the first week of arrival</td>
<td>Induction content design to be inspirational and aspirational. It is about welcoming and getting to know people and the environment. Only essential information is given to avoid information overload. Content includes course details, information on the university, classmates and the teaching team. It is hoped that students will get familiar with others and the environment, feeling at ease, knowing how to contact tutors, and how to find out information. It also enthuses them about the course they have come to study. Existing students are involved in this first week, to pass on any survival tips and hints, answer any questions and reassure them about the forthcoming year.</td>
<td>Course leader Module leaders Personal tutors International office Student services Student union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throughout Semester 1 Semester 2</td>
<td>Throughout the year, fortnightly seminars provide ongoing academic and pastoral support. Programmes mirror the progress in the course. For example, at the beginning, there are sessions on the NHS, learning studying skills and the University’s Skills for Learning webpage, content includes critical reflection, being a masters student, critical reading and critical writing. In the second or third month, we discuss assignment writing, academic integrity such as plagiarism and referencing with students. We ask students to write a short formative essay for practice. The essay is marked, so that students can practise essay writing skills including referencing techniques as well as going through the assessment submission and accessing feedback process. Individual tutorials are given through the personal tutor system, to provide additional support. Throughout the year, PhD students are asked to share their research ideas as part of the University community, to showcase their work and inspire MSc students to succeed and continue further studying. The initial seminars are set by the course team, based on past experiences and their understanding of student needs. It then moves to student-led activities, discussed and negotiated with students themselves. Students also discuss, negotiate and organise local activities, e.g. visiting local museums; fun activities e.g. lunch, bowling, parties; day trips to see local attractions.</td>
<td>Use of social media e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Summer**

Discuss support for next year’s potential students, using Facebook to link up students enrolled onto the course, to find out about life in Leeds and the University through exiting students.

Exiting students become alumni but continue to keep in touch with each other and University staff – having the benefit of providing career information sharing, networking with each other.

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**Programme evaluation**

There is continuous evaluation of the induction programme and student progress throughout the year via formal and informal processes including regular contact with student and staff colleagues. Initial induction evaluation is carried out after the first induction week, then course- and module- specific evaluation at the end of semester 1 and semester 2. Course evaluation is about student progress on the course in general, including the induction and support programme. Seminar activities are monitored regarding attendance and types of and satisfaction with the activities. Facebook activities are monitored continuously by the Course Leader in regular contact with student representatives. Module evaluations are about each individual module within the course. Students’ progression and completion rates are also monitored via standard enhancement and development meetings and annual review of the course. Students are also able to contact the Faculty Student Liaison Officer or Student Union if they want to speak to an independent person for support and advice.

To date, evaluation from students has been very positive. They valued support provided by tutors, improving their learning experience and their learning journey, as illustrated by quotes from students:

“The group brought together International Students from different countries, and created an avenue for us to share ideas and plan activities together. It made us feel connected in a foreign country.”

“The group’s existence provided me with confidence and assurance of support in the event of any challenges I might have had. It was an excellent platform to interact with and learn from students and staff alike from diverse background. Everyone was welcome to contribute and make suggestions, improving confidence and a sense of belonging. The meetings (and events) were social and provided a good break from studying and academic work.”
Challenges

As the programme is tutor facilitated and moves to student-led approaches, progress depends on students’ leadership skills and enthusiasm. On evaluation, staff do spent a lot of time in facilitating the process, particularly in the initial period. The programme is intended for all international students across the School. However, different courses within the School have different timetables, thus organising across the whole School is difficult. We co-ordinate our course delivery and teach full-time and part-time students together, so that both international students and local students can share their practice experience. Local part-time students can provide local information, both on social activities as well as on health promotion work in the local areas. It is easier to co-ordinate timetables and teach the course content together but more difficult to share the induction programme beyond the first week, as part-time students only attend University one day a week and they also have family and work commitments.

In our experience, attendance at seminars and enthusiasm for social activities tail off in semester 2 because of the increasing assignments students face in a demanding one-year Masters level course, in addition to their own personal and family commitments. Students also start to form their own self-support mechanisms e.g. their own friendship groups as they go through semester 1 and semester 2. Arguably this is the purpose of the programme. Students become independent as they go into semester 2 and stop needing the scaffolding to support them.

As this is a one-year course, there is no overlap between students from different years. Connection of students between years is difficult to maintain, e.g. managing Facebook activities and needing staff to facilitate year on year. Sometimes staff don’t join in Facebook activities because of concerns over their own privacy in social media from students as well as about the use of social media e.g. cyberbullying as discussed above (Lafferty, 2013).

Continuous development from this initiative

This initiative has been revised, e.g. student buddies system used at our off-site health promotion course in Ghana. This was also modified to develop a non-credit bearing module - an extra space in our VLE, MyBeckett as a continuous communication and information-providing site for our on-campus students and our fully on-line distance learning students.

Studying can be very stressful needing lots of adaptation and adjustments. Supporting students is important for academics. To reduce attrition, and to promote academic and social integration, student engagement is essential. All students need support, local, national or international and undergraduate or postgraduate; not only at the beginning of their study journey, but throughout university life for the development of independence and to promote
knowledge construction. However, as Tinto suggested (2006), strategies to support students, reduce attrition and promote student success need further investigation and development.

References


‘Technologizing’ the postgraduate classroom

Sara Smith and Martin Khechara, School of Biomedical Science and Physiology, University of Wolverhampton

Context to study

Post-graduate education is designed to support the development of greater subject or specialist knowledge as well as developing the capability of the individual (Smith, 2010). Our postgraduate science awards at the University of Wolverhampton attract students from a wide range of undergraduate studies as well as from a wide range of countries. For most students, the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate learner can be challenging. However, for those who have not previously studied in the UK, this transition is potentially more difficult (Sherry, Thomas and Chui, 2010). The challenge for tutors delivering such courses is to ensure that the diverse needs of each cohort of students are addressed, allowing students to graduate with the knowledge and professional skills required at this level of study.

An environment that promotes deep learning and encourages learning via active involvement is more likely to support student transition and success; helping individuals to question the assumptions that inform their capability and practice (Lizzio and Wilson, 2004). The traditional lecture format is still adopted by many science based courses resulting in a range of challenges for both teaching and learning; often promoting passive learning and a superficial grasp of topics rather than active involvement by students (Bransford et al., 2000). More importantly, lectures often fail to stimulate student motivation and enthusiasm for the topic area (Weimer, 2013).

Background to study

In this paper we describe the development and implementation of an instructional design that focuses upon bringing multiple forms of active-learning and student-centred pedagogies into a traditionally lecture-based introductory MSc module, Principles of Biomedical Science (PIBS). Our study was motivated by student and tutor perceptions of the module. Although commended for introducing a range of topics, mid-module evaluations consistently highlighted that students were not satisfied. Poor student attendance at lectures also reflected this negative attitude to the module. In addition there was limited student participation in class as well as suboptimal performance in assessments. As tutors, we found
ourselves demotivated when preparing for delivery of the module; the module provided a particular challenge with regards to promoting engagement and success. It was clear that a paradigm shift in the approach to teaching on the module was required to address the “Oh no! It’s that module again” situation.

We hypothesized that the introduction of technology based tools allowing us to re-design our instructional approach and to incorporate active-learning and student-centred pedagogy would improve student attitudes and also their enjoyment of the material. We also hoped that this would improve our own experience of delivering the module. Freeman et al. (2014, 8413/4) define active learning as an approach that:

“...engages students in the process of learning through activities and/or discussion in class, as opposed to passively listening to an expert. It emphasizes higher-order thinking and often involves group work.”

Our approach focussed upon interactions between peers and instructors through cycles of activity and feedback. By adopting an active learning approach we shifted the focus from teaching to learning, aiming to promote a learning environment more amenable to the metacognitive development necessary for students to become independent and critical thinkers (Bligh, 1998).

**Approach**

We primarily focussed on the use of two different technologies. Firstly, ‘flipping’ or ‘inverting’ the classroom using Panopto, a software package which allows lectures to be captured by tutors easily on their desktop or laptop and watched by students outside of contact time. A range of studies have evaluated ‘flipping’ using different approaches (Bates and Galloway, 2012: Berrett, 2012: Smith et al., 2014) but they all follow a basic format of students accessing ‘virtual lectures’ in the form of video or audio web casts outside of contact hours allowing time for students to engage in activities during class without sacrificing time to cover course content. Secondly, we used Socrative, an on-line application that enables the use of instantaneous questioning and feedback of students’ responses via mobile devices. This activity provides the tutor with an insight into levels of understanding, as well as allowing students to evaluate their own progress. Studies suggest that Socrative affects student collaborative learning and enhances student learning experiences (Awedh et al., 2014).

**Methodology and methods**

An action research approach informed the inquiry, situated within the constructivist paradigm and focusing upon participants as co-creators of understanding within the area being investigated (Reason, 1999).
Module delivery

PIBS is delivered by five tutors, each covering their specialist area of expertise in biomedical science. It is a 20 credit module with taught sessions delivered over a 12 week period. Teaching is organised into 4 hour sessions with each tutor delivering their sessions in 2 hour blocks. For this study three of the tutors delivered the module via the traditional lecture based approach and two used technology based tools to re-design the delivery of our content. ‘Flipping’ and Socrative were, therefore, delivered in 6 of these 2 hour sessions. On one occasion (session 4) these ran concurrently. In addition a 2 hour revision session was delivered by each tutor at the end of the module.

For each of our ‘technologized’ lecture sessions we used:

- ‘Flipped lecture’ to deliver the module content outside of class contact time
- Socrative quiz - to allow both students and tutors to assess understanding
- Group work to encourage active participation through structured activities with tutor support as required.

We decided not to be prescriptive about the ‘running order’ for each session; allowing the topic area, material to be delivered, student feedback via questionnaires and reflection on our own experience from previous sessions to dictate how the tools above supported delivery of the sessions.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires adapted from the Student Course Evaluation Questionnaire (Ramsden, 1991) were completed by students at the end of each session enabling us to monitor delivery of our sessions and ensure students were not disadvantaged by the re-structuring. A Likert scale (1-5) was used for comparison of responses. The questions focused upon the students’ perception of the quality of material provided, their engagement with this material outside of the lecture, and their in-class experiences: motivation, ability to ask questions and perceived understanding of the topic area/achievement of learning outcomes.
Mid-module evaluations
This evaluation was independently administered by the module leader after all of the flipped sessions had been delivered. Students were asked to comment upon what they had ‘liked’ and ‘disliked’ about the module as well as identifying areas for improvement.

Focus groups
Five student volunteers took part in the session allowing us to gain a more in-depth understanding of the students’ experiences on the module. Discussions were directed initially by the questionnaire analysis and mid-module evaluation responses. The use of reflective dialogue during the focus group session enabled shared understandings to emerge. Discussions were recorded and transcribed to allow thematic coding to be undertaken.

Findings
Students’ initial feedback (questionnaire and module evaluation) indicated that there were no negative consequences of changing the module delivery and that there was increased satisfaction.

Did ‘technologizing’ the classroom lead to improved student perceptions of the module? To answer this question, key areas highlighted in the feedback were investigated in the focus group session.

Analysis of the transcript allowed a range of themes to be identified. These were grouped into three thematic areas with associated secondary categories, relating to: physical factors of session design; emotional aspects facilitated by the approach; and finally the ‘worth’ or added value students perceived from the sessions. These are summarised below (Figure 1) demonstrating how each of the themes emerged from the gathered data:
Physical

Discussions acknowledged the importance of the student role or student ‘buy-in’ to facilitate the success of the flipped approach,

“I would encourage somebody to do modules with this approach [use of technology and flipping] but to just be prepared to do your share of the work”

They identified that it is a shared journey and that the student cannot be a passive passenger. These comments support the findings of other studies which identified that success is dependent upon students being prepared to take part (Berrett, 2012; Bishop and Embry-Riddle, 2013). Students readily recognised the opportunities the approach afforded:

“I think for the student who is willing to give the time and to listen it is great. To have the videos and your support is brilliant; it then just depends on the student”

When this was discussed further, students identified group-work consisting of creative learning tasks and structured or directed learning as useful adjuncts to the sessions. One student commented that the creative activity in session four aided in retention of conceptual information:

“I think the practice with the apples was really good because when you see something and when you do something even when it is not related it fixes much better into your mind the information”
Students found that the use of an everyday object to demonstrate a concept fun but that it also allowed them to visualise and understand application to practice. Another student commented on the value of having time to undertake a microscopy activity:

“Even with photos and that in the lecture it is different when you do it yourself”

Creative exercises such as those used in this session provide a powerful tool for learning. Although not directly simulating the process they may affect cognitive process and develop relevant skills, divergent thinking and evaluative ability leading to better understanding and a deep level of learning (Mainemelis and Ronson, 2006). The questionnaire responses and focus group discussions highlighted that students felt more confident with the subject and were facilitated to understand it better by the higher order thinking provided by the creative process.

**Emotional**

Students identified the emotional connections built within the community of the classroom (peer-peer and student-tutor) and the engaging teaching style the approach promoted as important aspects of sessions. These communities provided ‘safe spaces’ in which to learn:

“Another thing that I have noticed is that especially with this class students tend to be quite shy. They won’t speak up and they don’t want to answer questions and they don’t want to ask. When we’re in groups and talking to each other we are a lot more open and a lot more comfortable”

A safe academic space, as described above, is an inclusive and effective learning environment that promotes opportunities for complex cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal development to occur. Such spaces promote learning and affect what and how students learn (Gayle et al., 2013). Group work clearly promoted a feeling of safety and allowed students to interact with staff to check their understanding; time for such activities is not possible during the traditional lecture sessions.

The effectiveness of the ‘flipped’ approach and promoting engagement and student-tutor relationships was highlighted by one student who discussed the problems of studying a range of topic areas on an award. They identified that some topic areas were not of interest to them and so they found it hard to engage. However, they suggested that the ‘flipped’ approach,

“... awakes your interest, even if you are not interested in it you start to get interested in it because of the way you teach it”

The additional support and collaborative nature of the sessions was identified as supporting interest, leading to participation and learning;

“... we don’t know it all yet that’s why we’re students ... so [with this approach] it feels like we are actually gaining something, we are getting guidance ... so when
you actually have somebody who gives you some guidance then it is appreciated by most of us"

**Worth**

Students identified the convenience of having videos to allow review of content and revision outside of the classroom as important. Learning through video was also seen as being culturally appropriate; many students identified that they regularly accessed available lectures/videos on-line in addition to books and other resources to support their studies. Socrative was not mentioned in the questionnaire responses. However, in the focus group, students were very positive about the App. The main benefit they identified was its ability to highlight any weakness in their knowledge. As tutors, we were worried that the use of ‘true/false’ options and simple multiple choice questions may be seen as too simplistic or even patronising by the students. Interestingly students appreciated this technology and viewed it as an important tool, supporting their learning:

“[Socrative] Its great. It put it more easy. At master level you think it is going to be very tough and difficult … and this dynamic we get with Socrative it is an easy way to put the topic … and to check [learning] … .it gives us help at that point of what we should concentrate on or be aware of.”

The use of Panopto and Socrative provide items of ‘functional currency’; important extra value items for students.

“[Panopto]….I also think it is more convenient. If you have a lecture you actually have to sit down and look through the power point slides where as if you have video you can just sit and play while you are multitasking” (LJ)

This suggests that the provision of videos allows students to adopt a style of learning that suits their circumstances and preferences.

The overall value perceived by a student is an evaluation made of the utility of a service provided based on a perception of what is received and what is given (Alves, 2010). Students appear to consider the provision of videos and the use of Socrative as a valuable extra, leading to an increased perceived value. When asked in the mid-module evaluation ‘What are the key things that are positive about the module?’ students identified features of the ‘flipped’ sessions:

“Good interactions between tutor and student”

“… class group tasks encouraged me a lot in understanding some aspects of this module”

“The Panopto video and other materials available”

Previous studies have shown that levels of student satisfaction are positively influenced by the perception of increased added value on their course (Alves, 2010).
Conclusions

The findings from our study illustrate that changing instructional design and delivery using technology, without changes to course content, achieved our aim of improved student attitudes and our own enjoyment of the module. Although the use of technology to support learning was identified as beneficial by students, it was the greater engagement and participation during contact time that had the most impact. Fostering a different teaching dynamic provided time for group work and creative tasks which students identified as increasing their understanding and retention of important concepts: above all it provided a safe space for learning ‘out-of-the-spotlight’ of the traditional classroom dynamic.

Benefits identified by students during the focus group have previously been identified as factors promoting student belonging which in turn promotes success (Thomas, 2012). Further work is required to enable a greater understanding of how each of the identified themes supports engagement and learning and importantly how they may facilitate students to graduate with the knowledge and professional skills required at this level of study.

References


Having it all: customisation and standardisation in curriculum design.

Nick Allsopp, Centre for Academic Practice, Zoe Radnor, School of Business and Economics, and Ben Cole, LUiL, Loughborough University

This paper will consider a specific curriculum development at Loughborough University through a focus on what is often depicted as a tension between customisation and standardisation. It is based on a series of three propositions:

- Most curricula created in higher education (HE) are built up from staff expertise (a supply model). They are therefore built from the module up to the programme and, in the undergraduate model, often centre on the specific optional modules in the final year, as this is where the expertise becomes clear. In the more specialist postgraduate model staff expertise is often front and centre throughout.

- Students and staff as citizens operating in the ‘real world’ – that is the world outside of the University – demand and are offered increasingly personalisable services in the rest of their lives (a demand model).

- There has to be a way of combining these seemingly divergent trajectories – for Loughborough in London this is customisation via a shared offering.

This paper seeks to consider, through one particular example, how these propositions might play out in education, particularly postgraduate taught higher education. In so doing it will, by implication, ask just who should be in charge of the curriculum - its design and delivery?

As is now well known, the notion of the student as consumer is contested. For example in 2007 the now ex-1994 Group produced a report entitled ‘Enhancing the student experience’ which it is claimed sees the marketization of HE and the student taking on the role of consumer as a way of leveraging change: “challenging the established modes of learning, and contributing to making it more exciting and relevant” (p.12). Frank Furedi (2011, p.3) and Roger Brown have both challenged this view, arguing that the marketization of HE does not have the same characteristics as a ‘pure’ market in that the supplier institution is not completely free to “specify the product and to procure and deploy the resources to deliver it” since it is (currently) bound by a national framework for standards – the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and the subject benchmark statements – and the detailed information it must supply to the potential customer via the Key Information Sets (KIS) and the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Until very recently there were also limits on numbers of students it was able to recruit, the price it was able to charge and thus the amount of real competition there was in this ‘market’. Whilst the 2015 Green Paper, Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice, suggests
sweeping much of this away, there is still considerable doubt as to whether this will encourage students to behave as consumers and customers. Nixon et al., (2011, p.199) argue that the higher education experience doesn’t fit with the notion of consumer choice which “privileges instant gratification, allowing us a sense that we can establish our identity without recourse to lengthy and complicated procedures or activities, but rather through purchasing something” and that “this may potentially reduce the role of the tutors to service providers who must meet the instant needs of customers.”

This paper links into this debate and examines a key notion at the heart of much curriculum design, that, unless there is a professional body requirement where there is little or no choice, it is the academic as expert who provides students with a set of module choices based on a well-established research reputation. Students can then choose from the options provided for them but that choice is limited in order to provide curriculum coherence. So in truth there may be little or no choice. And this is seen as best practice.

It is best practice because the control is with the expert. The expert has what Lynch and Ivancheva (2015) describe as ‘regulatory autonomy’ and thus acts, as a gatekeeper to the programme. It is the academic who, at least in theory, decides which students are admitted, provided they are appropriate and the course fits their needs and they are deemed as able to benefit from it. This approach counters what, from a learning and teaching perspective, is seen as poor practice: to simply offer a wide range of modules and let the student choose what they think they want - the dreaded ‘pick’n’mix’ approach to curriculum design.

From the producer’s point of view, too much choice could lead to potentially very small class sizes which are in danger of providing a pedagogically unsatisfactory learning experience for the student and are economically unviable or have to be counter-balanced with very large classes - where the student becomes anonymous - elsewhere. Higher education is a business after all.

So is there a middle way? This paper analyses the curriculum model for Masters programmes designed at Loughborough University for its London campus. Loughborough University chose an innovative approach to curriculum design which combined student choice, academic expertise and an efficient approach to module and programme design. This approach enabled programmes to have their own identity but share a series of common elements and modules, thus making them both efficient and effective.

**Context and description**

In September 2015 Loughborough University opened the doors of a completely new campus based on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London. The campus is structured around a
series of five Research Institutes with direct links back to the Schools on the Loughborough campus and is delivering taught postgraduate provision.

As of September 2015 there were 15 taught postgraduate Masters programmes offered across the five Institutes with 359 students enrolled in total; 80% of the students are international with the vast majority being Chinese. However 66% (n=237) of these students have successfully completed their undergraduate degree in the UK; 30% (n=110) completed an undergraduate degree in Europe or elsewhere overseas; 10 students have Masters degrees on entry to our programmes (3 from Europe and elsewhere overseas, 7 from the UK); and 1 student has significant and appropriate experience but no previous formal degree level qualification.

Recruitment to the programmes can best be described as ‘uneven’ with the vast majority – approximately 180 of the 359 students – enrolled on the two business and enterprise programmes. The remainder (179) are split across the other Institutes with media and creative industries taking 106, Sport Business taking 30 and Diplomacy, Digital Media and Design Innovation taking the remaining 43 students.

The curriculum design created for these taught Masters programmes is innovative for Loughborough and, it is argued, more widely across the sector. One of the key aims of the curriculum model is to eliminate the apparent tension between customisation and standardisation and to enable students to have both – customisation from a standard offering. As such the curriculum design is based around a series of common elements that are required for all programmes. These emphasise the interdisciplinary nature of research and knowledge creation and in so doing they also have a very clear entrepreneurial and vocational theme running through them all. ‘Enterprise through the curriculum’ is a defining characteristic of the programmes delivered on Loughborough University’s London campus and later the paper will consider the ways in which this particular aspect adds to the student experience and how it influences the credit-bearing curriculum.

All modules are 15 credits in size apart from the dissertation, which is 60 credits. This is not a common pattern across the rest of the taught postgraduate provision at Loughborough and so some significant curriculum rethinking and/or redesign had to take place for some colleagues.

Most modules are currently block taught over three week periods, allowing students to gain short-term work placements or continue with one longer one which is punctuated by the blocks of study time. This arrangement also allows for other formal and informal engagements with industry, a key feature of the Loughborough in London experience that is sold to potential students.

All programmes must include a series of common elements: the collaborative project module, a module in a second subject, the dissertation (which has a common module outline with
some in-built flexibility) and a non-credit bearing strand to all programmes called “enterprise through the curriculum”.

The collaborative project is the first module that students encounter once their programme begins. Unusually, it runs across the whole of the first semester with the student groups meeting every week. It has been designed on principles already functioning successfully in Scandinavian higher education institutions. Here, an employer or entrepreneur is invited to propose one or more immediate or longer-term issues or series of problems whilst smaller companies may only have one immediate issue they would like solutions for. Students work in interdisciplinary groups supported by an academic supervisor and a project manager across the semester to research the issue and then present their proposed solutions back to the sponsor in the third week. Employers have ranged from small eight- person firms through to 100,000. Examples of issues that this cohort of students have tackled include: how to monitor spectator enjoyment and activity using wearable technologies; how to make cycling in cities safer through the use of helmets and bike lights; how to assess the regeneration of London post-2012, focusing on the effect on local residents and businesses; and how to develop a business plan for a new start-up coffee shop in East London.

The students are assessed on their ability to work collaboratively and to produce a realistic solution to the problem. They are assessed by their tutor, by the sponsor and by their peers.

As things stand this module is somewhat problematic. Students have enjoyed working together but some have perhaps struggled to connect the work undertaken in the project with the rest of their programme. They do have the opportunity to do just this in their dissertation.

All programmes also have to offer a second subject, even those designed as ‘single subject’ programmes. At the least this one 15-credit module taken from a prescribed list chosen to complement the main thrust of the curriculum. All subject disciplines are asked to offer a second subject and for many this has involved creating a brand new ‘introductory’ module for non-specialists to take; for others this has simply involved identifying a module which would be suitable for non-specialists and which they were offering anyway.

These modules have proved very popular, allowing students to stretch themselves or giving them the opportunity to begin thinking more laterally about their main interest through engagement with different disciplines and perhaps different ways of thinking and working.

The inclusion in all programmes of a dissertation is not a surprise, but what may be different is the decision taken by the academics running the London campus and the Research Institutes that all of the programmes offered on the London campus will share a common module outline and learning outcomes. The dissertation module offers students three choices: A desk-based research project that could be set by an organisation or could be a subject of the student’s choice, jointly agreed on between student and (intended) dissertation supervisor; a project that involves collection of primary data from within an
organisation or based on lab and/or field experiments – topic and focus to be jointly agreed on between student, organisation and (intended) dissertation supervisor; or a full professional internship within an organisation, during which time they will complete a project as part of their role in joint agreement between the organisation and the (intended) dissertation supervisor (subject to a suitable internship position being obtained).

The final common element for all programmes is a theme not a credit-bearing module. ‘Enterprise through the curriculum’ offers students a series of work-related experiences and opportunities such as an initial employability skills assessment, a series of guest lectures, networking events, skills sessions and site visits in which the students are able to interact with entrepreneurs and business leaders. The aim is to broaden students’ experiences as well as give them a form of recognition which has direct impact on their employment prospects. All of the students are offered three levels of recognition by the end of their programme: Bronze, guaranteed to all students and involving participation in the collaborative projects as well as attending guest lectures and networking and skills sessions; Silver, which is dependent upon the level of employability the students develop throughout their programme through activities such as mentoring others, volunteering and undertaking short-term placements; and Gold, where students do all of the things in the other awards and also obtain paid internships or placements and through these undertake graduate roles.

Whilst we don’t have final details of the current cohort of students, current indications suggest c.90 students are heading for the Bronze award; c.150 are heading for Silver; and c.60 are heading for a Gold award. The benefits to the students are that they will all receive an ‘employability passport’ which will include their current employability and a progress plan to follow to improve. In undertaking the mock assessment centre and following employability activities that are recorded and monitored on an e-portfolio, they develop and build their electronic and face-to-face personal brand. The benefits for employers are that they establish strong links with higher education and through this they also have a better-informed expectation of the employability of Loughborough in London students strong pipeline of potential talent they can access.

**Analysis**

It is possible to conceptualise this development as a tussle between various factors: There can be no doubt that in business terms, so far this has been a highly successful endeavour for the University. Initial targets were exceeded and student satisfaction is high to date. There is however obviously no data on the impact the programmes will have on the lives and livelihoods of the students, nor on the communities they return to following graduation. More widely, the local community around Hackney Wick appears to be benefitting from the ongoing transformation of the Olympic Park and the University is starting to see positive
outcomes from its investment (finance, time and people have been heavily committed to this project).

In pedagogic terms the jury is still out.

The curriculum design is innovative for Loughborough and has enabled a reassessment of what a taught Masters curriculum might look like. Having so many shared elements was initially met with some resistance but those who operate the programmes seem to feel there is still enough space for their specialisms to be fully developed. The common elements have not, in other words, changed the nature of the offering too much (30 credits in total being ceded to non-discipline related modules) and the overall philosophy of the endeavour has tasked the programme directors with refocusing their curriculum on enterprise and employability in a way that they suggest is not artificial and is beneficial.

What of the students? Feedback from a mid-module ‘initial impressions’ survey and from the Staff-Student Liaison committees that have occurred to date suggest that students are enjoying the applied nature of the programmes, realise the potential of their direct contact with employers but still struggle with some aspects of the common features of the curriculum – including working on a collaborative project which might not be directly connected to their area of study.

Do they behave differently from other students though? Has the venture caused them to behave in a more customer-like way, as might have been expected from the scenario painted at the beginning of this paper? If they do behave differently, do they see themselves as powerful players, able to personalise their educational experience in a way that is meaningful and satisfying to them? Importantly for the institution, whilst they are unlikely to be repeat customers, they may well recommend the experience to others and thus exhibit other attributes of the satisfied customer?

Eagle and Brennan (2007, p.45) suggested that viewing higher education and the student-as-customer notion from a Total Quality Management perspective would identify four basic principles: delighting the customer, people-based management, continuous improvement and management by fact. The first involves “being best at what matters most to customers, and this changes over time.” The second means “knowing what to do, how to do it, and getting feedback on performance ...[and thus] encouraging people to take responsibility for the quality of their work.” The third is concerned with “incremental change, not major breakthroughs” and the fourth is about “knowing the current performance levels of the products or services in the customers’ hands and of all employees ... [in order to be] able to improve.” All of these ways of viewing this initiative seem appropriate. Eagle and Brennan argue in their conclusion (p.56) that students in higher education do not behave like a “customer buying a simple consumer good” such as a sandwich, instead they act more like “the professional customer or client”. They are discerning and understand that to benefit they must contribute to the enterprise. They may need educating in order to be more
discerning, presumably about the benefits of the investment they are making, but, if successful, this will result in higher satisfaction and fewer complaints (as seen through the number of appeals etc.). In this way they share both power and responsibility with the academics and managers. They would understand that the limits placed on personalisation through option choices is legitimate and would also understand that the experience they are signed up for is not wholly personal, it is communal. As such they have the responsibility to contribute to the experience of others and benefit from so doing. This is both sobering and liberating.

**Conclusion**

What has this new curriculum model taught us to date? We are in the first year of operation and so any conclusions must be tentative. However the feedback from students so far, through formal mechanisms such as module evaluations and Staff-Student Liaison Committees and through informal feedback to individual academics, suggests that the curriculum model is accepted and working. Students have not, so far, behaved differently within this model from the way they might behave under a ‘more traditional’ model. Indeed early indications through the mid-module feedback suggests that the students have enjoyed working together on the collaborative project and can see its value. They have asked for some changes but these are not directly associated with the new curriculum model (they have asked for things such as more books in the library, more frequent Maths and English language support and things that would make any new campus more comfortable such as coffee and vending machines and phone charging points).

Reflecting on the model from at least a little distance there are still tensions within the model between imposing elements that might not be there if the subject specialist was producing the model on their own (a standard approach), on the one hand, and providing an educational experience which is not only coherent but also improves the employment prospects of the students concerned.

We have no evidence to date to suggest that students did not understand what the offer was when they enrolled. Quite the opposite, there is anecdotal evidence that they wanted a programme that would enhance their future job prospects and the features this model provides does seem to be appropriate for the students.

From an efficiency point of view the model has proved itself successful. Because there are pre-determined features that all programmes must offer, the amount of new curriculum design required to bring a new programme to market is reduced and as a result there have been significant new offers included in the curriculum portfolio for the next two academic years. The task is to continue to make each new offering distinct.
To date this approach to curriculum design has not impacted significantly on the postgraduate taught provision offered on the Loughborough campus, apart from a consolidation of module sizes across many of the Loughborough Schools. This will mean that modules offered in London can also be offered in Loughborough, where appropriate. There is even consideration of delivery to combined groups in dual locations.

The three-week blocks of teaching are also proving popular with students because they are able to take advantage of short-term work experience/placement opportunities in London. On the other hand some of academic staff are finding the intensity of delivery a challenge, especially if they have not delivered in this form before, for example via executive education offerings.

What may eventually develop into something different in this model is the locus of power. The subject specialist may well feel that they have less control over their curriculum; that they are ceding control that they would normally expect to have to a structure and content imposed upon them ‘from above’. In this sense there is strong management control of the curriculum design. The key questions here are whether the student experience suffers as a result and whether academic autonomy and the role of ‘academic as expert’ is compromised. To date the jury is out but student applications are buoyant and this is perhaps a key feature in any compromise that is tacitly accepted.

References


A portfolio of skills for today's performer

Laura Ritchie, University of Chichester

The MA Performance at Chichester has been devised for today’s musician, preparing them with a portfolio of skills and experience for their professional lives. Musicians today need more than technical performance skills and book knowledge. Gaining employment and staying in a discipline today requires a broad spectrum of skills, from instrument-specific proficiencies to organisational, metacognitive, and interpersonal skills (Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac and Lawton, 2012). Over 50% of music graduates gain employment in other disciplines (Slater, 2013), but the aim of pursuing a MA in music is not to equip students for other professions, but to remain successfully employed within music.

The music profession is a rapidly changing and evolving industry, but the ways of learning music have largely remained the same. The master and apprentice model of tuition and the general goal of training musicians to be performers has been a theme of conservatoires and music colleges throughout the decades. However, today’s music graduates have a varied career trajectory in music that seldom comprises a single performance job. At the time of preparing this paper, there were no positions with orchestras open in the UK. There was one advert placed by the London Symphony Orchestra (https://www.musicalchairs.info/double-bass/jobs) requesting a double bass player, but it held the caveat: “Please be aware that auditions are not for a position in the Orchestra, but for the opportunity to be invited to play with the LSO as an Extra player.” The only other positions available were within the army for selected brass or woodwind players.

When preparing for a public performance a musician will practice hundreds of hours, yet will be paid for the one or two hours of performance. Unless they are recovering royalties or other on-going payments for their performance, or have high paying repeated concerts, there is an unbalanced ratio of practice to performance, which makes relying on performance income alone a very uncertain and difficult method for making a good living. Even those who do achieve a post in an orchestra, choir, or other salaried performance job will also pursue several different types of employment within the music industry including performing, teaching, recording, and lecturing, all of which require discrete skills. Creech et al. (2008) found musical versatility to be highly valued and a key to enabling graduates to stay within the profession. Musicians need to develop and establish a palate of skills so they can adapt to the changing musical landscape, and essentially carve their own place in the industry.

The curriculum of the MA Performance at Chichester gives students an opportunity to develop their skills and challenge themselves to explore aspects of the roles they may encounter during their professional lives. Throughout the degree students study different...
aspects of performance and musical listening, learning, and communication across the four taught modules and the recital module. Performance is a cornerstone for musicians at Chichester; it is at the heart of everything they learn and do practically and academically. The aim of the curriculum is to enable students to develop to the best of their capabilities as musicians, providing opportunity and balance that forwards their lives as professional musicians.

The one year MA Performance comprises four 30 credit and one 60 credit taught modules, each with a specific focus that explores and applies practical skills. The course has consistently attracted a small yet diverse intake, and “the mix of ages and experience, previous employment or study, way of life, [and] nationality, all contribute to a lively exchange and on-going learning.” (External examiner report 2014-15). Having students with specialisms across musical genres that are as varied as baroque voice and electric guitar necessitates both an in-build flexibility and inclusivity in the curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester 1</th>
<th>Semester 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAP1 Portfolio Experience</td>
<td>MAP2 Lecture Recital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(30 credits)</td>
<td>(30 credits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP3 Repertoire Exercise</td>
<td>MAP4 Written exercise (Performance Practice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(30 credits)</td>
<td>(30 credits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP5 Recital (60 credits)</td>
<td>Final assessment (one calendar year after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>beginning the programme)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MAP1** In Portfolio Experience students adopt the role of the critic, exploring music from the listener’s perspective, analyse professional performances, and communicate ideas through writing. Students engage in primary research and learn writing through a practical voice.

**MAP2** The Lecture Recital module teaches performance in a different way, students manage musical performance, presentation skills, and develop skills as engaging verbal communicators.

**MAP3** Repertoire Exercise challenges students to develop through music and offers performance as an option. Students either submit an essay or a musical compilation of them performing, as a sonic essay, to demonstrate their argument as an essay in words would. Students defend their work in a viva voce exam.

**MAP4** Written Exercise (Performance Practice) hones research and analysis skills and develops scholarly writing. Students explore the specialist practice within their own discipline, relating this to relevant musical literature and drawing upon their own experience and that of other professional performers.
MAP5 The recital double-module focuses on individual performance. Students prepare for a public performance that represents the culmination of their studies, returning to perform their recitals after the summer holiday, one calendar year after beginning the programme. Students perform regularly to one another, across instrumental specialisms, learning to peer assess and self-reflect through the routinely recorded weekly performances.

The learning outcomes, assessments and assessment criteria focus on skills and competencies and allow manoeuvrability for the student to choose a direction, focus, and area of specialism. The skills developed are demonstrated through the modes of assessment, drawing upon Biggs’ (2005) idea of constructed alignment. There is a necessity for a high degree of critical thought and independent research across the assessments: include live performance, studio recorded submissions, critical reviews, presentations illustrated with live performance, and traditional essays. Skills are not necessarily directly or simply aligned to the assignment in a traditional format, but are crafted in a way that requires the student to think outside traditionally established parameters. The concept of a performer is challenged throughout the degree, so that students can analyse the component facets of performing, and begin to formulate their own informed views. As students take on the appropriately framed voice of a music critic they learn to hear from the audience perspective, but with the discerning ear of a performer. The reviews produced are in the language and format appropriate to each musical style. A jazz student not only needs an understanding of the music and the nuances of jazz when reviewing a performance, but also to develop an appropriate voice for addressing a jazz audience, and this will vary considerably from the tone adopted in a review of a classical or a rock audience.

The assessment in MAP4 allows students the choice to submit a performance portfolio instead of a typed essay. The module handbook explains that the portfolio is equivalent to 5,000 words.

“Students are made aware that a performance portfolio is akin to an essay; that is, that they are presenting and developing an "argument", or a "case for consideration", meaning that they will be creating a group of performances which will make a point or work through a perspective in a coherent manner.”

Alongside this submission students explain their work in a viva voce examination. The performance portfolio and the viva voce are classed as equivalent to a 7,000 word essay submission.

In the performance portfolio they are assessed on their ability to:

- Demonstrate confident understanding of the form and style of musical works presented
- Provide evidence of a mature and communicative approach to performance
- Show engagement with a central performance practice theme that unifies the portfolio, drawing upon current performance practice within the discipline
• Produce a high standard of presentation and performance
• Demonstrate appropriate methods of presentation and interaction for the genre presented, including a programme and/or programme notes where appropriate

Exploring aspects of repertoire with the goal of creating a recorded portfolio requires students to develop and draw upon skills as researchers and studio musicians, both of which are directly relevant to their professional practice. The assessment is unique in that it blends practical performance skills with traditional independent research by combining academic research and critical thinking, musical stylistic understanding, and physical performance mastery to convincingly convey a thematic argument through the performance portfolio, and clarity of communication in the spoken defence during the viva voce exam.

After looking outward to critically review other professionals, assessing aspects of repertoire and performance practice, and combining verbal and performance skills to communicate through lecture recital presentation, students prepare and perform their final recital.

“What I particularly loved about doing my MA at Chichester was the diversity afforded to the word ‘performance’. Rather than just focusing totally on playing my instrument, it gave me the opportunity to explore other avenues of performance, some of which have been integral to the progression of my career.” 2010 Graduate

This graduate performs as a recitalist, church organist, private teacher, and holds a post as Head of Music at a school. In developing a range of skills, he and other graduates have remained within the profession as successful performing, teaching, and recording musicians.

References


Preparing Final Year Masters Students for the workplace using an Interdisciplinary Design Project Industrial Case Study based approach.

Geoff Skates, School of Marine Science and Engineering, University of Plymouth, UK

For several years Plymouth University, in partnership with the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAE), has delivered two very successful Interdisciplinary Design Modules to more than 2300 first and final year MEng, MSc, BEng, and BSc Civil, Mechanical, Marine, Robotics, and Electronic engineering students. Although this paper focuses on the final year MEng module taken by Civil, Mechanical, and Marine students there are several similarities between the two modules. The modules have largely been developed, managed, and taught by industrial practitioners, namely the author, and by Mr Steven Cryer, RAE Visiting Teaching Fellow.

The basic objective of both modules is to provide students with an opportunity to acquire the knowledge and personal, inter-personal, technical, and management skills appropriate for the workplace by completing a design project based upon typical industrial applications and using standards, techniques, and processes commonly used in industry.

There are many benefits of this approach, (Skates, 2003; Vickerstaff, 2015). A wide variety of projects and associated assignments gives students experience of:

- Completing a major industrial based project
- Working in groups on an engineering project
- Working with disciplines other than their own
- Developing personal, interpersonal and technical skills
- The importance of time management and meeting deadlines and targets
- Addressing the big picture and the detail
- Solving complex multi-faceted design problems
- Adopting an holistic approach – full life-cycle considerations
- Understanding and meeting the needs of a broad range of stakeholders
- Applying Design, Implementation, and Management processes and standards used in industry
- Addressing environmental and sustainability considerations
- Planning the execution of their projects in detail
- Managing financial performance
- Risk, Change, and Quality Management
• Using industry standard 3D CAD software and Virtual Reality techniques to enhance visualization of designs
• Various methods of communicating project outcomes (videos, reports etc.)
• Critically evaluating personal and group performance for a range of assignments, conducting lessons learned, and suggesting improvements for next time
• The practical application of elements of their academic study.

This paper identifies the process that students follow and, most importantly, includes student feedback results and comments. It is proposed that the module provides a template which could be used in other university courses, not just in engineering.

**MEng Module Overview**

The MEng Interdisciplinary Design Project (IDDP) is a 30 credit module taken by all final year MEng Civil and Mechanical Engineering students – between 70 and 80 students per year. There are a variety of courses represented within each cohort, as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engineering Disciplines</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil</td>
<td>Mechanical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil and Coastal Engineering</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering with Composites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marine Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Courses taking part in IDPP by discipline*

Module Implementation is carried out in a structured format (Figure 1) which is based upon a common industrial based project delivery process that has been adapted to encompass our module aims and objectives.
This process focuses initially on:

- Setting up the group effectively
- Deciding on the project
- Confirming the deliverables of the project
- Detailing how the group proposes to deliver the project
- Producing and documenting the designs (including a business plan)
- Selling the proposed project to potential stakeholders via a marketing video.

The values in red included in Figure 1 indicate the contribution of each assignment to the total mark. Student support is provided by conducting an initial introductory session and thereafter weekly review meetings with each group to address a broad range of issues – planning, forecasting, performance monitoring, design reviews, issue resolution, mentoring etc. Extremely detailed guidance notes and feedback are provided for each assignment.

**Group Formation** is achieved by the students organising themselves into groups (usually six or seven) with the proviso that each group must include students from the Civil and Mechanical disciplines (Table 1) in their make-up.

As groups are formed they are encouraged to address:

- Organisation
- Conducting a skills audit and identifying group and personal development needs
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Rigorous selection of preferred project
- Planning their workload (including other modules)
- Possible Input from potential stakeholders and industrial practitioners
- Corporate Identity (Figure 2)
At this time the students also start their **Personal Reflective Log**. Students document the set-up of their group and the initial personal and group skills audit. For each assignment (and for the overall project upon conclusion) students record

- Their contribution to the assignment
- What they have learnt from it
- What they would do differently next time from a personal and group perspective.

Students are encouraged to investigate and use the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) process appropriate to their Institution to record their skills development.

**Project Selection** is made against a set of top level project titles, each of which provides a flexibility of approach, an opportunity to be creative and innovative, and significant challenge.

For instance one option offered to students is Inner City Redevelopment – students will chose the location and define their proposals (with reference to local development plans) and agree their Project Specification (below) with the module leader.

A good example of this (there are many, see Table 2) is a student project for the redevelopment of Penzance (Figure 3). The students identified several different areas of Penzance that they considered (supported by a visit and a survey they published on social media) should be included in the regeneration of Penzance. They then produced detailed designs for each of these areas and integrated them into an overall solution.
A wide spectrum of design projects have been addressed on the module (Table 2). All projects include a similar breadth and depth of challenges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Redevelopment Projects</th>
<th>General Design Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth Hoe Foreshore (including Tinside Pool)</td>
<td>An integrated emergency response centre (in Wales)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth Hoe Foreshore and the Barbican</td>
<td>Automated Container Port (2 schemes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A new transport hub for Plymouth</td>
<td>London – Glasgow High speed rail link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millbay (affordable housing scheme)</td>
<td>An integrated sports facility in Plymouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Street</td>
<td>Formula E for Plymouth (includes significant redevelopment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth Harbour</td>
<td>Formula 1 development on a disused airfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weymouth Harbour</td>
<td>Vertical Farm (2 schemes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lido Western-super-Mare</td>
<td>Large scale desalination plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penzance</td>
<td>Design of an Eco Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torquay</td>
<td>Mothecombe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth City Airport site</td>
<td>Newquay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drake’s Island</td>
<td>Totnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totnes Ex Dairy Crest site</td>
<td>Plymouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newquay Airport</td>
<td>Ilfracombe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Abbreviated list of IDDP Projects
Initially the groups produce a formal **Presentation** identifying their project selection process and providing some outline details of stakeholder needs and wants and ball-park estimates of cost. Students are encouraged to role play selling their outline ideas to potential stakeholders as a professional company would – formal dress is encouraged.

The natural tendency amongst groups once the project has been chosen is to “get on with designing it”. However, this impatience has to be balanced against the need to:

a) Properly define what “it” is that is going to be designed
b) Fully define how “it” will be designed once agreement is reached as to what “it” is

Actions a) and b) above are satisfied by the production of a Project Specification and a Project Execution Plan respectively.

The **Project Specification** is developed to define what students are going to design. Once it has been completed and agreed there should be no ambiguity or uncertainty amongst group members as to what their project comprises.

The document is also used to manage any changes in scope as the project progresses.

A detailed guidance note identifies the expected content of the document but in summary the following is to be included:

- Purpose of the document
- Project selection
- General overview of project
- Main deliverables of the project
- Integration of deliverables
- Project stakeholders
- First estimates of project costing
- An outline project plan (Gantt chart)
- A project risk assessment
- Conclusion

Once the Project Specification has been agreed between the group and the Module Leader the groups then have to consider and document how they propose to manage and deliver the agreed content.

A **Project Execution Plan** (PEP) serves this purpose (and quite a lot more). The document addresses a strategy for delivering the project content – it confirms what will be delivered and, most importantly, how the project will be managed and delivered. The PEP addresses a wide spectrum of issues that need to be addressed for successful project implementation. The format and content is based upon processes which have been used in industry for many years. A detailed guidance note identifies the expected content of the PEP but in summary the following is to be included:
The PEP includes an estimate by the students of the hours that they predict they will expend to complete the Design Project Report. The forecast estimates hours and costs on a weekly basis for the disciplines of Project Management, Engineering, and Administration. Group performance against this forecast is reviewed with the module leader on a weekly basis in formal project reviews. Students regularly comment on the value that this document and approach brings to their ability to deliver projects (in the workplace and at university).

The project definition phase concludes with a Design Concept Video where the students ‘sell’ their proposals to potential investors to gain funding to complete and document their designs. Although this is a big learning curve it is a very popular activity as it allows the students to be very creative and innovative in how they communicate their key messages.

Production of the Design Project Report is a significant and very challenging activity for the students – it typically comprises 60-80,000 words plus appendices and drawing packages. Students have to research a good deal of their proposed design solutions and the applicable design standards. Several guidance notes are provided e.g. for the document itself, the expected design content of each solution, electrical power, heat demand, building systems design, business plan etc.

Design calculations (structures etc.) are presented in a standard format whereby the students identify the design process in a flow diagram and overview description and then present the calculations with reference to the flow diagram. Full costings are expected and a Business Plan is produced to sell the project to potential investors. A comprehensive drawing package is produced. A drawing register records the status of the complete drawing pack. Extensive
use is made of design tools such as Autodesk Revit® in the production of the drawing package. 3D CAD drawings produced are used as the basis for Virtual Walkthroughs developed for use in presentations and videos.

Students are encouraged to seek out industrial practitioners who have specific knowledge and experience of their design solutions to assist them in their design processes. This has been particularly successful in cases where students have been addressing regeneration projects (Plymouth, Totnes, and Weston-super-Mare councils, Falmouth Harbour Trust, A&P Group Falmouth, Newquay Airport, Devon Contract Waste Limited, ATMOS group Totnes) and also with new build projects (Akkeron Group, Babcock International, Kier Construction) and across all projects from the Institute of Civil Engineers and various members of the School Industrial Advisory committee.

In all of the above cases senior executives have given up their time to review student designs and to offer invaluable advice and encouragement regarding their proposals. Frequently this advice has resulted in site visits, improvements to proposals, and increased student motivation.

The outline content of the Design Project Report is as follows:

**Figure 4. Summary of IDDP Report content and layout**
The final group assignment is production of a **Marketing Video** which is presented to local industrialists who act as assessors. The majority of the marketing video uses strategies and financial forecasts identified in their Business Plans to sell the proposals to potential investors to fund their total projects. Extensive use is made of 3D CAD and Virtual Walkthroughs of the student designs and videos. This is again a very popular assignment. Responses from the invited industrialists are extremely positive.

The final student assignment is the submission of the Personal Reflective Log which includes final group lessons learnt from overall experience of the module. It is clear from student comment that they gain considerable benefit from recording and critically evaluating their performance and skills development.

**Student Experience** of the Module is measured using standard questionnaires, comments in Personal Reflective Logs, weekly review meetings, and in emails. Student satisfaction results are very high indeed (Figure 5). However, we constantly look for ways to improve and enhance the programme based on student feedback. For instance a comprehensive toolkit was developed by a Senior Learning Technologist (Vickerstaff 2015) to support students in their use of 3D CAD and production of virtual reality (VR) walkthroughs and videos.

![Figure 5. IDDP Overall Student Satisfaction results 2013-2015](image-url)
The following is a representative sample of student comments formally documented to us

“You made us consider all aspects of management and planning an engineering project”
“Learnt a lot about leadership during the module”
“This module has been a highlight of the four years I’ve spent studying here”
“A video can be a much more powerful communication medium than a presentation”
“Virtual Reality models and walkthroughs are a great way of visualising designs”
“I produced a quality and content of work on this module that I didn’t think I was capable of”
“When my new employer was developing my programme for achieving Chartered status they reduced it by one year based upon the experience I evidenced from my IDDP project”
“Very useful at interview, got me a job e.g. when I showed them my IDDP project they said ‘this is exactly what we are looking for in our graduates’” (Mech. Eng. Student)

Feedback from the industrialists is also extremely positive. They are impressed by the type and nature of projects being addressed, also by the professional way in which the students present and conduct themselves (we advise the students to consider their meetings as formal business meetings), and with the levels of research carried out by the students, their detailed knowledge of their designs, and their high levels of motivation for their projects. It is also most encouraging that in many cases where practitioners have supported us they’ve gladly given up their valuable time to carry out appraisals of the student marketing videos.

Conclusions

The module has been a considerable success from a number of different perspectives:

- Very high student satisfaction results (>85%)
- High average marks (>70%)
- 100% pass rate
- Very positive response from external examiners (cited for providing several examples of excellence)
- Extremely positive response from
  - Industrialists who have supported students in developing their designs
  - Employers at interview with many students reporting that their description of their MEng IDDP projects contributed significantly to securing them a job
For the future, the fundamental principles of this module could undoubtedly be applied to virtually any workplace where project working is commonplace, not just in engineering.

Those same workplaces are likely to provide employment for graduates and hence a module such as this could provide the same benefits to students across a broad range of faculties, disciplines and courses, all of which have alumni, research partners, and placement providers who could become involved by providing case studies and/or mentoring project groups.

This is a considerable opportunity just waiting to be realised.

References


Peer Support on a Transnational Masters Programme

Ruth Cross, Diane Lowcock, Jerry Fiave, Sarah Akiye and Grace Kafui Annan
Leeds Beckett University

This paper will report on the progress of a peer-to-peer buddying system set up between two cohorts studying on a part-time MSc Public Health Promotion programme delivered in Ghana who started on the programme two years apart. The aims of the project are (1) to build and strengthen community and collegiate identity between two cohorts through a system of peer support and (2) to enhance students’ existing professional networks in public health and health promotion with a view to long-term reciprocal relationships and the establishment of an in-country alumni network. The project has student engagement at its core where students are partners in the process. The rationale is to enhance support mechanisms for new students on the programme as well as to establish a community and social network of learners with a shared identity within Ghana (Wang et al., 2003). Peer support systems can help to counter the isolation some postgraduate students experience (Becker, 2004). This is even more salient for a student group who physically meet together only twice a year and are spread across a large country. The project is designed to help students to adapt more effectively to new ways of learning and their new identity as postgraduate students as well as to engender a ‘sense of belonging’ in a community of learners (Zepke and Lecah, 2005). It is anticipated that the peer support system will alleviate any potential attrition in the mentee group (Race, 2014; Storr et al., 2011) and will promote students’ learning and engagement for both cohorts. In addition, sharing experiences and learning has the potential to promote esteem, mastery and efficacy for the mentors. The project is co-facilitated by two members of the course team and two student representatives. This paper will focus on progress to date including the inception of the project, setting up the project and a critical review of how things are going from the perspectives of the mentors and the mentees.

Background and Context

The MSc Public Health Promotion programme is delivered in Ghana on a part-time basis by Leeds Beckett University supported in partnership by the University of Health and Allied Sciences in Ho, Volta Region. The first cohort of students commenced studies in October 2013 and are now in the dissertation phase of the programme. The second cohort of

2 Project lead and lead author
students started on the programme in late October 2015 and, at the time of writing, have just completed their first module. The programme is delivered using a ‘blended approach’. This involves two 2 week teaching visits in country and on-line learning prior to/after the teaching visits that is supported by the Leeds Beckett virtual learning platform, MyBeckett.

Peer mentoring focuses on a more experienced student helping a less experienced student improve overall academic performance, encourages mentors’ personal growth (Falchikov, 2001; Kram, 1985), and providing advice, support, and knowledge to the mentee (University of South Australia, 2003). Although peer mentoring has been used in a variety of ways (Colvin and Ashman, 2013) typically peer mentor systems have been set up in undergraduate, professional programmes (such as nursing) whereby second or third year students are buddied up with first or second year students respectively (Campbell, 2015).

The aims of this postgraduate peer mentoring project are multi-fold. In the shorter term the aim is to build and strengthen community and collegiate identity between the two student cohorts through a system of peer-support. In the longer term the project aims to enhance students’ existing professional networks in public health and health promotion and to establish an in-country alumni network of Leeds Beckett scholars. Crucially the project is designed with student engagement at the centre of it and students are partners in the whole process. The project team is led by the course leader, another member of the course team, two student representatives from the first cohort and the local in-country co-ordinator.

Rationale

The value of peer mentoring or buddying schemes in higher education is relatively well documented (Campbell, 2015) and mentorship programmes have been found to provide many benefits to those who take part (Gardiner et al., 2013). Notably however, such schemes have tended to focus on undergraduate students and there is a relative lack of literature pertaining specifically to postgraduates. This peer mentoring project was set up to augment and enhance the existing support mechanisms for new students on the programme. The rationale for this was multi-fold. Firstly, to help mentees adapt more effectively to new ways of learning and their new identity as postgraduate learners as well as to engender a ‘sense of belonging’ (Zepke and Lecah, 2005). Secondly, to counter the potential isolation for part-time postgraduate students through peer-support (Becker, 2004). Thirdly, to potentially reduce attrition (Race, 2007; Storr et al., 2011) and finally, to establish a community and social network of learners with a shared identity in Ghana (Wang et al., 2003). It is hoped that the project will promote student learning and engagement for both cohorts of learners (Cheng and Johnston, 2014).

In addition it is anticipated that engaging in peer mentoring will promote esteem, mastery and efficacy for the mentors. Indeed, in a study by Colvin and Ashman (2010) three key themes were identified in terms of benefits to the mentors – being able to support students,
reapplying concepts in their own lives and, finally, developing connections. Peer mentoring and support systems serve a number of purposes including availing students the opportunity to ask questions that they do not feel comfortable addressing to academic staff (Dreary et al., 2003). Frequently peer mentors provide a listening ear, support and advice (Campbell, 2015).

**Project Life Cycle**

This is a short-life project in terms of funding although it is anticipated that the relationships established will have significantly greater longevity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1. Project Life Cycle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• March 2015: bid success (£2500)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• April 2015: first meeting of the project team (what will the peer support project look like?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May – August 2015: project set up (role boundaries – student-led)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sept 2015: allocation of mentor/mentees by project team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Oct/Nov 2015: formal session with mentor/mentees; social event; early data capture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dec 2015 – March 2016: mentor/mentee relationship as negotiated within role boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• April 2016: official project end; evaluation (exact methods to be determined)</td>
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**Role boundaries**

Reid (2008) argued that establishing the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship is crucial to the success of any project. This is particularly important because, as Colvin and Ashman (2010, 2013) have argued, peer mentoring schemes carry an element of risk as well as benefit, particularly if the different parties have different perspectives about what the nature of the relationship is or should be. In the early stages of the project a set of ground-rules or defined role boundaries were established by the student representatives from cohort one in discussion and negotiation with the whole student cohort in order to reduce this risk. The resulting document is considered to be live and organic. The project team and student cohorts agreed that the document would be subject to review during the life cycle of the project (see Box 2).
Box 2. Role Boundaries*

- Provide support
- Demystify some misconceptions
- Buddies are expected to maintain a line of communication through feasible and available means such as telephone calls, social media and face-to-face visitations
- Buddies who live close to each other could schedule their time to meet
- Mentors are expected to act tactfully
- Mentors are expected to act without being overprotective
- The relationship should be mentee-centred.
- Mentors could provide guidance to mentees on critical areas such as time management to minimize stress

The following are sternly discouraged:
- Sharing of previous assignments.
- Discussion of personal dislike of some lecturers and colleagues
- Information overload

(*in the students’ own words)

Progress to Date (as of January 2016)

A teaching visit took place in late October 2015 when the first cohort was in session for their final taught module and the second cohort was beginning the programme (attending for induction and the first module). Prior to the teaching visit, all except one set of mentee/mentors had been in touch with each other prior in some way. Some had already met face to face. During the teaching visit a formal session was built into the programme for mentors and mentees to interact with one another. As a result of a discussion by the project team, this session was structured in three parts: the first part was an introduction to the project led by the student mentors including a discussion about role boundaries and expectations (with reference to the document produced by the student representatives in cohort 1 – see Box 2). This part of the session was supported by the staff members of the project team. The second part was a student-led Q&A session with mentors and mentees without the staff members present and, the final part gave a formal opportunity for the mentor/mentee pairs to meet together and get to know one another further. An informal social event also took place during the teaching visit which provided an opportunity for more networking in a different environment. This was in the form of an evening party with food and local entertainment. Prior to the formal scheduled session both mentors and mentees were asked to anonymously indicate what they would like from the session and to write down any expectations, or questions they had (see Box 3).
**Box 3. Student Expectations**

Mentors’ expectations

- To talk about the course and what is expected of you
- What health promotion entails
- To share my experiences with them in respect to academics and expectations of the tutors
- Provide information and guidance related to academic work
- Discuss with the mentee time management and advance reading
- Discuss general issues that are likely to affect the academic performance
- Assist in overcoming challenges and difficulties on the course
- Listen to them on what they’ve learnt and what challenges they have for discussion
- Discuss the issue of plagiarism with the mentee
- Ensure constant contact via email, social media and telephone involving sharing of ideas, challenges and other issues concerning health promotion and other personal issues
- To share experiences of the course and how it’s affected my professional practice
- Discuss professional experience and the impact of the course
- Share ideas on how to make the most of the VLE
  - Encourage each other on critical reading and reflection
- Demystify the issue of fear on doing the course MSc Public Health Promotion
- Inspire through encouragement
- How to work ahead of time
- How to meet deadlines

Mentees’ expectations

- Share experiences and how the mentors were able to cope with studies and work, in order to meet deadlines
- To share experiences and pre-assess our (the mentees) essays for correction before delivery
- To share experiences, job opportunities after the course, drink together
- The mentors should regularly share their experience on the feedback on assignments and formative essays
- Be ready to support us at all times
- (Check) how we (the mentees) are coping with our assignments
- How to search for relevant source documents
- Share experiences before and after starting the programme – what was it like?
- Any challenges of the programme and how they were overcome?
- How have the mentors managed to cope with the programme, work and family life so far?
- What was the mentor’s worst experience during the course?
Comment on expectations

Understanding expectations was important when clarifying the boundaries of the peer support buddying system for both cohorts and the teaching team. These expectations were used as a basis for discussion in the formal scheduled meeting. Unrealistic and inappropriate expectations such as sharing of academic work between student cohorts and mentors providing correction and comment on mentee assignments prior to submission provided a student-led reinforcement of sound academic practice and integrity. In addition this allayed mentors’ fears about the nature of their input and balancing the potentially competing demands between continuing their study and providing mentorship. Sharing expectations and emotions served to bond the two cohorts and ‘normalised’ some of the fears and anxieties experienced. For the teaching team, expression of expectations illuminated some key issues that were addressed during subsequent teaching and learning sessions. The enhanced space for the student voice was a powerful reminder of the challenges of the academic journey.

Early data capture – key themes

At the end of the teaching visit, students in cohort 2 (the mentees) were asked to give anonymous written feedback about the impact that the peer mentor had had on them at that point. Several key themes emerged from this early data capture that are reflected in the wider literature on peer mentoring. These included friendship and social support, course orientation (academic orientation and practical advice), reassurance and support, encouragement, anxiety reduction, increased confidence and motivation and information sharing. These are illustrated by the following selected quotes from the mentees:

“It has given me confidence that I can excel with hard work, lots of reading and good time management”

“My mentor has been so helpful especially in making me understand what the course involves”

“(The project) has been helpful and I learnt a lot from their experiences and their encouragement. It is a nice project because it has a lot of impact on my life. Facebook, Whatsapp and phone calls are in place and it will be helpful.”

Kram’s (1985) model of mentoring theorised two key roles, (1) psycho-social support and (2) career-related function. The early data capture shows that psycho-social support is a key factor within this project from a mentee perspective. It is too soon to make a judgement about career-related benefits however, some of the qualitative data points to a recognition of the potential future value of the mentor project as follows:

“A form of social network that exposes you to lots of opportunities in life”

“Forging of strong bonds and hope for the future”
In addition to Kram’s (1985) two roles, there is some indication that this project is serving a third purpose, a *practical* function, in that the mentees have identified orientation, practical advice and information as being an important part of the relationship in its early stages as illustrated by the following quote:

“It has been very helpful. It helped me settle into Ho and the program comfortably. It has helped to allay my fears about the programme workload. It has been a great source of encouragement. My mentor is very friendly. We contact each other via phone calls, text, Facebook and Whatsapp.”

**Next steps**

Campbell (2015, p.990) highlighted that there is a lack of formal evaluations of peer mentoring programmes noting “a paucity in the available literature of evaluations on different universities’ buddy systems”. Formal outcome evaluation (Green *et al*., 2015) was built into the life cycle of the project. This will be student-led and will be carried out during the teaching visit that is due to take place in April 2016. Given the peer-led nature of this project and the potential benefits of this approach (Stoecker, 1999) a participatory evaluation strategy was thought to be the most appropriate and most likely to capture the essential features of the student perspective. The exact nature of the evaluation methods are yet to be decided in collaboration with the student groups. The findings will be reported on in due course.

**References**


The challenge for enhancement in Masters learning

Pauline E. Kneale, University of Plymouth

*Masters students should be drivers, not passengers*
(The Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, 2013, p.5.)

The PEDRIO Conference provided an opportunity to launch *Masters Level Teaching, Learning and Assessment: issues in design and delivery* (Kneale, 2015), with many of the authors presenting on aspects of their research and professional experience. The introductory session of the conference, and this report, aims to capture some of the major challenges in the delivery of Masters teaching and issues for the broader student experience.

Postgraduate teaching is increasingly complex, work styles and processes are evolving. Employers ask for staff who can tackle multidimensional problems in interdisciplinary teams, while being aware of and sensitive to the wider social, ethical sustainability and political dimensions. In 2016, 75% of UK postgraduate students are self-funded, and financially need to study locally (Soilemetzidis, Bennett and Leman, 2014). Universities need to provide graduates who are flexible in their thinking and enthusiastic to take up the challenge of working on issues which are currently unknown with technologies that will be created in the next five years.

The Masters classroom is populated by a diverse student body encompassing new graduates, those with extensive work experience, full and part-time, face-to-face and distance learners. The market for taught Masters programmes is extensive, and the costs to students can vary widely. Both for UK and international students, learning at Masters level is seen as:

“a worthwhile investment. There is still a clear postgraduate wage premium relative to those possessing only undergraduate degrees. Postgraduate education also facilitates access to competitive parts of the labour market. There are a number of areas where it appears a postgraduate degree is becoming a de facto requirement for entry.” (HEC, 2012, p.12). This report signals the U.K.'s national capacity to teach at this level as being at “the heart of our national plans for long-term competiveness and growth. Failure to do so puts at risk our future prosperity. (HEC, 2012, p.18).

A Masters degree is potentially the perfect space for developing research, professional and workplace expertise, through developing in independence, skills and confidence as a learner and creator of knowledge. There is a deeply interesting question as to how the pedagogy of
teaching at level 7 could evolve to make this a distinctive learning experience. The conference, the book and this short summary explores some of these opportunities.

**Understanding the student voice**

One area of limited understanding is what Masters students think of their experience. In the UK courses are generally one year in length, discouraging students from engaging with co-design of curricular because improvements will *not benefit me*. Where a program has relatively small numbers, students may feel unable to give honest feedback to those who will assess their work in the immediate future. The effectiveness of the programme can probably only be fully evaluated through research with alumni 3 to 5 years after graduation. Such studies are rare to the point of nonexistence. Personal tutors, as distinct from programme leaders and module tutors are not ubiquitous features of Masters courses. Nonetheless there is a need for students to feel fully engaged with their programme and regular one-to-one discussions that can deepen students understanding course material is hugely important when the programme is completed very rapidly. Involving alumni in a programme, as role models in relevant employment, and to provide feedback on what was valuable and crucially what was absent from their experience on the programme, is one route through curriculum development and provides the student voice, albeit retrospectively.

**Transition**

When students move to Masters learning direct from the undergraduate programs there is tendency to assume they need little induction. They know what university involves. What is not generally clear to a Masters student is the step up in standards and quality of work expected over and above that which was successfully getting high marks in the undergraduate space. For those who have been out of higher education for some years induction is hugely important, and really needs to follow through the academic year, as new skill needs emerge. Developing mastery is about being independent as a learner, but that does not mean that scaffolding of learning by the teaching staff suddenly becomes unimportant.

Where classes have students from very different backgrounds it may be extremely important to run parallel, or twin track transition and induction sessions to capture the different needs of the subgroups of students. Where there is a real diversity of entrants, consideration should be given to pre-course activity for some/all students, and parallel modules for those who have different pre-entry backgrounds. That would enable some modules to revisit and reinforce core undergraduate information in the Masters context, while other students build on their prior learning without the frustration of repeating previous learning.
Interestingly Masters students tend to hide from tutors and programme leaders their use of central university learning development staff, study skills workshops, library skills events, counselling and writing support opportunities. Course design needs to embed induction and transition practice, so that staff and students value and reinforce support, and at least signpost students to central university support opportunities. Embedding support for career development and career guidance is also vital to provide a rounded education experience to these students.

**Standards**

Masters work needs to be distinguished from undergraduate work. Asking students to approach problems in these different ways, with the genuine excitement of reporting on their findings, begins to distinguish a curriculum that sits between the experience of the undergraduate and of the doctoral student.

Arguably Masters learning champions the process of skills and knowledge discovery with plenty of opportunities for first-hand primary research, minimising traditional ‘listen, learn and revise’ didactic sessions. Curriculum design needs to ensure that the students have the opportunity to develop approaches and seek solutions in a way that the research process is evaluated, rather than the end product answer which may or may not be successful. Masters students, people with real interest, experience and the skills to explore and co-create with professional and academic staff, allow researchers to take issues where the answers are unknown and see how these individuals, ideally working in groups, approach, develop and report on their findings. In essence this requires teaching staff to be research oriented and flexible in their approaches to curriculum design and create new learning opportunities.

Defining the curriculum can be challenging. Masters courses may be seen as the safe spaces for academics to talk about their own research. It’s challenging to consider whether this is actually what graduates from a Masters course needs to know. Critical questions to ask are:

- will these learning experiences ensure students will be effective in their workplace over the next five years?
- Are students being treated as adult learners, with appropriate autonomy, enhancing their independence of learning?
- Is the work in each module a real step up from final year undergraduate work in both style and content?

Arguably the most useful discussions addressing these questions are with recent alumni, both those working in jobs which are relevant to the Masters programme and those in generic workplaces. It’s important to remember that many students following vocational courses move into broader workplace settings.
**Curriculum design**

Masters programmes are frequently dominated by modules taught by individuals rather than teams, which may contribute to a slower evolution of curriculum content and style. Arguably the next generation of employees needs to be comfortable with approaching wicked and interdisciplinary problems and they will benefit hugely from hearing the perspectives from those inside and outside of academic life.

Creating appropriate student choice can be a challenge particularly if student numbers are relatively small. In practice most students will follow the main menu of modules on offer. Should students be able to tailor a part of their programme to their own personal agenda, either through taking modules from other parts of the university, or substituting alternative projects or work placements? These questions are at the core of what flexible learning or co-designed learning could mean. Is it always essential to take the standard balance of taught elements and research elements? Might flexibility be built-in for a student who finds an ideal placement to substitute 60 taught credits with an appropriate work placement project that meets appropriate learning outcomes?

It is proper to check that students ‘feel’ something of the real-life experience of a researcher or practitioner in their discipline. That almost certainly means spending time with enthused practitioners getting a deeper understanding of generic and professional competences. Ensuring that problem-based learning opportunities within modules and assessments are designed to mirror real research and workplace practice processes is very helpful. Part of the focus on developing students’ understanding of future workplace opportunities and practices through links with alumni for example, is that it gives students the motivation to continue to work in the discipline area, and to be encouraging of others to attend the course or programme in future.

**Assessment**

Assessment is one of the better researched areas of practice at Masters level, (Brown, 2014, 2015a, 2015b), or evidencing huge diversity in the styles of reports and presentation. A crucial question in programme design is does the assessment enable students to develop their autonomy and research skills? Creating authentic assignments matched with authentic workplace-relevant reporting provides invaluable workplace experience at this level. The experience of writing group reports is one area which alumni frequently cite as missing from their university experience, while being core to their activities in their first years at work.

As with undergraduates, feedback needs to be timely, effective and valued, which provides another role for the personal tutor.
**Visibility of Masters programmes**

Despite their financial importance to universities, the postgraduate taught Masters programmes are often less visible than might be imagined. Creating opportunities for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students to meet together is important in making Masters programmes an aspiration for students, not necessarily immediately on graduation, but on their radar for their longer term personal development.

This also begs the question about whether universities are offering degrees appropriate to students who are wanting to change direction. Motivation for Masters study may include:

- increasing recognised skills and experience as a prelude to promotion applications,
- wanting to make a substantial change of career direction
- developing leisure interests in for example art, geology or creative writing.

**Summary**

Amongst the design thinking for Masters level teaching is whether the programme design is providing the right scaffolding for participants to progress to Rosenberg’s (2012) mastery or expert stage, which means letting students take control of their learning. Active learning and problem-based learning provide effective pedagogies when married with exploration of the workplace and globally relevant research and practice issues. Assignments need to be designed in a sophisticated way such that the process of research, evolution of thinking and methodologies employed are assessed because solutions will not necessarily emerge from assignments which are being tackled in parallel by the world’s best researchers. The challenge of being asked to consider and delve into the currently unsolved provides a huge motivation to the class.

Perhaps slightly less challenging questions to start with include:

- Induction is crucial, where does it fit in the programme? Who needs to be involved? How do we know it is successful? What do our alumni suggest we provide?
- Is the ‘tutor role’ active, enabling regular student-staff interactions, building students’ confidence to learn and see the broader benefits of their programme? Does it provide independent support for learners?
- Is there enough research practice, with students co-creating with academics and practitioners to genuinely benefit their discipline as well as their own understandings?
- How are the benchmarks of autonomy, independence, responsibility and judgement explicitly delivered?
• Do the assessment styles replicate real-world, authentic, reporting, building students' confidence to be independent researchers in every module?
• How does the programme effectively support students from diverse backgrounds? Is the global reach of the academic material appropriate to the international backgrounds of students from other countries? Do we need some parallel modules to challenge students with different background experiences?

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Edited by Pauline Kneale and Wendy Miller

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