

Editorial

Christopher Drew

Swinburne University, Australia

Andy Hagyard

University of Leeds, UK

John Hilsdon

University of Plymouth, UK

Christina Howell-Richardson

Birkbeck, University of London, UK

Eleanor Loughlin

Durham University, UK

Cathy Malone

Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Craig Morley

Manchester University, UK

Gita Sedghi

University of Liverpool, UK

Alicja Syska

University of Plymouth, UK

This edition of the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education* comes at a significant juncture for us as three of our colleagues, John Hilsdon, Sue Eccles and Chris Drew are stepping down from the editorial board. John was the journal's founding editor, whose role in shaping the journal was pivotal. He leaves behind very large shoes to fill! The contributions of Sue, who served as an editor for four years, and Chris, who gave us an international perspective, were enormously valued as well – both brought distinctive voices to the journal and will be greatly missed.

There are clear signs that *JLDHE* will continue to grow and thrive, however. We are delighted to welcome two new editors to the team: Cathy Malone from Sheffield Hallam University and Eleanor Loughlin from Durham University. Both Cathy and Eleanor bring

with them a wealth of expertise, ample experience in higher education, and much passion for learning development. In addition, Alicja Syska and Gita Sedghi will now co-lead the journal and work tirelessly to ensure its continued success and uphold its hard-earned reputation in the field.

The broad scope of material in this issue is a testament to the creativity and originality of thinking represented by our learning development community. We bring you four articles that built on papers presented at the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE) annual conference in Exeter, in April 2019; seven articles investigating a range of issues, from teaching practices and methodologies to different communities and cultures of practice; as well as two case studies and one book review.

In a paper entitled 'Once there was a learning developer', Steve Rooney of the University of Leicester reflects on a workshop he ran at the 2019 ALDinHE conference exploring the role of parables in stimulating debate and critical reflection in higher education. Parables are not intended to offer explanations, Rooney argues; rather, they contain 'expectation-confounding qualities', which nonetheless make us consider perspectives other than the ones we are most familiar with. It is this provocation to look anew at a situation, not necessarily to find its solution, for which Rooney suggests parables are most useful.

In another paper initially presented at the conference, Helen Jamison and Julie Nolan investigate students' transition into university. They evaluate the impact of a pre-entry module developed to support undergraduate students at Edge Hill University. In addition to the reports of high level of satisfaction with the module, quantitative and qualitative data revealed some links between pre-entry activity and successful transition. The module can be seen as an example of how effective pre-entry courses can be when it comes to reducing student anxiety, setting inspirational role models, creating a sense of belonging, increasing student engagement levels and supporting retention.

Jennie Blake, Nicola Grayson, and Sami Karamalla-Gaiballa report on their investigation into the impact of 'open' support delivered at the University of Manchester via the Library's My Learning Essentials skills programme (MLE). Assessing the impact of sessions open to all students can be more difficult than those embedded in curricula and the authors used a number of approaches, including attendance data, participants' responses (both immediate and deferred), interviews, and degree classifications. The data they collected

suggest that engagement with the MLE programme made a significant positive impact on undergraduate attainment. While the authors see the study as exploratory in nature, its results contribute a positive affirmation to the discussions surrounding the value of learning development support.

The last paper in this conference section, Katharine Stapleford's 'The LDHEN hive mind', offers a major contribution to debates on the role and professional identity of Learning Developers in Higher Education (LDHEN). Setting aside the lack of a substantial literature on the topic and variability in the institutional roles of learning developers, Katharine has developed a creative and insightful methodology. This methodology involved analysing six months of user-generated discourse on LDHEN through the conceptual lens of social identity theory. This approach allowed her to draw out commonalities in professional culture, providing a more richly nuanced insight into the role of the learning developer than accounts based in an institutionally based analysis of qualifications and job descriptions.

Laura Woods, Richard Dockery and Alison Sharman discuss the process and findings of a collaborative project between Huddersfield University's Library and Student Guidance Service. Using UX research techniques, the team explored Computing undergraduates' study habits and perceptions of support services. The holistic scope of the project resulted in wide-ranging insights and recommendations including raising awareness of the Student Guidance Service and the academic sources, and support available through the Library, introducing a formal peer mentoring system and considering commuter and mature students when timetabling. The authors also recognise areas that would benefit from further research.

The article by Dyanne Escorcía and Mayilin Moreno presents an interesting analysis of the ways university lecturers teach and assess writing. The authors identify three different profiles of teachers' practices for teaching and assessing writing: transmitting, assessing, and non-adherence profiles. The article implicitly prompts readers to reflect upon their own teaching practices and, moreover, on how the teaching and assessment of writing fit within the role of the twenty-first century higher education practitioner.

Alex Forsythe, Emir Demirbag and Jasmine Warren evaluate the impact of PsychLiverpool, an online blog open to psychology students across four universities in central Merseyside. Independent of modular credit or evaluation systems, the student-

edited blog is aimed at supporting student discourse and increasing engagement in the academic community. Free text feedback collected from contributors and readers was evaluated using automated text analysis. This indicates that the blog not only enhances networking and a sense of community but also enables exploration and evaluation leading to insights and increased confidence and motivation.

Pauline Bremner and Audrey Laing's research aims to explore, evaluate and identify any mismatch between degree learning outcomes and employability skills. It also proposes specific strategies to address identifiable skills gaps. Focusing on the views of Fashion Management alumni, the study highlights gaps in digital skills as well as gaps in professional/group skills that some alumni felt were missing from their university education. The research also notes the importance of digital skills in the workplace from the employers' point of view. While the paper focuses on FM alumni and employers, because of the creativity and management that are core to this course, the findings are relevant across many related management and creative industries university courses.

Stephanos Anastasiadis and Justin O'Brien explore students' experiences and expectations of dissertation supervision on a taught master's programme, which is a relatively under-researched area. The context of their project is a multi-cultural, UK based Business school, with a high proportion of international students studying alongside EU and UK students. The authors go into their question in some depth through drawing together a thorough review of the literature and empirical data collected in focus groups and questionnaires. Their inquiry indicates, firstly, that students both expect supervisor engagement and respond well to it; and, secondly, that provision of consistent supervision on theory and method can markedly improve students' overall learning and satisfaction.

In their paper, Maria Kukhareva, Anne Lawrence, Katherine Koulle and Nazlin Bhimani explore the value of using special collections in the classroom to promote higher order thinking processes. In three case studies they describe how special collections were used in different learning development contexts and offer their initial reflections on the process and outcomes of their approach.

Jessica Hancock's article investigates an innovative way of teaching dissertation writing that involves using online videos. Shifting the information-based content of postgraduate workshops to online videos allowed for designing more activity-based sessions that follow

the flipped-classroom approach. Watching these short films before writing sessions not only created space for more personalised approach in the classroom but also facilitated deep learning; in addition, they were beneficial to off-campus students. This teaching method was met with a positive student assessment and Hancock recommends it as an effective way of teaching dissertation writing to postgraduate students, as long as the students are fully briefed regarding its purpose and benefits.

Similarly, the case study by Karin Johnstone, Samantha Thomas, and Nathan Dodzo investigates the use of online videos to provide students with learning development support in a range of academic skills at the University of Northampton. The usage statistics show that these videos are more widely used than other content such as PDF documents. However, videos that were created by staff had poor technical quality and were 'talking heads', which, rather than encourage active learning, may result in passive engagement. The project embedded academic skills into a module in a creative way; students were asked to remake the videos as part of their assessment. This process increased student participation and representation in learning development content.

In her case study, Siriol Lewis presents an analysis of a recent course that attempts to bridge the gap between academia and the workplace. The article focuses on the importance of genre, tone and register shift for students transitioning from academia to workplaces. This study's themes contribute well to an ongoing discussion taking place within the Journal on workforce readiness for students.

Finally, a book review of *Making it at Uni: Navigating your way through the first year of your degree* by Sally Bartholomew and Jodi Withers concludes this issue. Rachel Webster presents this slim volume, aimed at new and prospective students, as a guide to university life. It is divided into two sections: the first providing advice about settling in, making friends, budgeting, cooking and managing time; the second suggesting ways to build the skills needed to succeed academically. According to Webster, the book provides an honest analysis of the value of this recent text for learning developers. She highlights that the text's value is in presenting important foundational knowledge in an accessible way. Learning developers may therefore find it a useful reference when developing their own accessible and engaging learning materials.

We hope that in this impressive collection of articles, our subscribers and all readers will find material that is thought provoking and stimulating, to inspire and to delight.

With very best wishes for the festive season,

The *JLDHE* Editorial Board