

Editorial

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We are publishing this issue at a time of what must be the most puzzling, challenging and, simply busiest beginning of semester higher education institutions have experienced in a while. We are aware of how hard everyone is working at the moment, how many new trails are being blazed and how much effort it takes to ensure the success of the new way of teaching and learning, foisted on us by the pandemic. We hope that this issue will provide a welcome distraction from the current relentlessness of work.

Issue 18 brings you four papers, two case studies and one opinion piece, and we are also delighted to announce that all these articles now have DOIs assigned to them. We are currently indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals and Google Scholar, as well as linked to Crossref so our authors' publications can be more easily identified, accessed and cited by other authors.

In the first article in this issue, Edward John Bradley, Steven Anderson and Laurence Eagle investigate the effectiveness of a marking rubric in improving Level 5 Sports student

performance and staff marking efficiency. Student engagement with the rubric led to a 7% mark improvement compared with the previous year and staff marking time was also found to be reduced by average of 25 minutes when guided by the rubric. Based upon these findings the authors argue that rubrics should be considered when implementing a laboratory-based practical assessment and report.

Russell Delderfield, Kirsten Riches-Suman, Mathias Ndoma-Egba and James Boyne turn our attention to postgraduate students' mental health. As a team comprising a learning developer, academics and a doctoral student, their collaborative investigation is wide reaching, revealing, for example, a number of university-based sources of stress including the very expectation of poor mental health, while suggesting areas for improvement. One aspect of their research exposes the unexpected fact that students tend to look for sources of support outside of the university, although the reasons for this are unclear. The authors' findings in this 'first study of its kind at a diverse, plate-glass UK university' have already influenced university processes, including induction and staff training, while identifying potential for future initiatives and interventions, particularly when it comes to the role of learning developers.

The authors Rick Hayman, Andy Coyles, Karl Wharton and Antony Mellor report on an investigation into the impact of academic tutorials delivered at the University of Northumbria. Informed by Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1984) which posits a relationship between academic and social involvement and overall student experience, the research was particularly interested in the experience of widening participation students. They set out to investigate the role played by personal tutors in supporting effective transition through focus groups carried out early in the academic year with a diverse cohort of sports students. Results revealed that main contributory factors to successful student involvement were a focus on social integration and investment of time and energy in personalised tutoring early in the academic year. These findings note the influence of coaching and mentoring among this subject group and indicate the need to establish clear understanding of the role, given prior student experiences of academic tutoring. The findings have relevance beyond the discipline and add to the growing area of scholarship around academic advising.

The challenge of ensuring that graduates of higher education are employable has become a pedagogical issue for teaching colleagues at universities worldwide. The last paper in

this Issue, by Tom Lowe, highlights that students already possess the skills sought after by employers and that students are only missing the opportunity to translate their discipline-specific skills into more flexible graduate attributes. The research was conducted through a trial intervention with students from multiple disciplines, to assess whether a translation exercise would raise awareness of skills and then to evaluate the student experience of this exercise. This study offers an alternative to longer interventions and explores how translating discipline-specific skills through short conversations may have both relevance and impact in a pressurised higher education world.

Nathalie Sheridan's case study provides examples of how creative and active pedagogies can be used in learning development. Working with both first year undergraduates and master's students, she takes a creative approach in developing non-subject specific learning opportunities. Through a two-step process of de-contextualising and re-contextualising learning, the students gain a fuller understanding of the relationship between their expectations and those of the institution into which they are transitioning. The author further discusses the positive impact the learning had on the students' academic work.

In the second case study, Oliver Thiel, Rolv Lundheim, Signe Marie Hanssen, Jørgen Moe and Piedade Vaz Rebelo discuss an approach for engaging often reluctant trainee early childhood education and care (ECEC) teachers with teaching STEM subjects. Taking an object-based learning approach, they introduced the students to using automata in their teaching. Through providing the teachers with an opportunity to build their own automata, as part of a process that enabled both 'in-action' and 'on-action' reflection, they found not only that the teachers' attitudes to the integration of STEM into teaching became more positive, but also that they had gained the tools and knowledge to be able to integrate the model into play and learning environments.

Finally, in her opinion piece, Christine Davies discusses the current value of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) from the perspective of both lecturers and students. She argues that universities need to think more flexibly in how they make use of technologies for teaching and learning.

We hope that in this collection of articles, our subscribers and readers will find thought provoking and stimulating material.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank our wonderful reviewers whose critical reading of submissions and thoughtful feedback and recommendations have made invaluable contributions to the quality of articles we publish.

Our heartfelt appreciation for the time, expertise and work it took to review papers in this issue goes to the following reviewers:

Karen Angus-Cole, UK

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With very best wishes,

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