

KEELE EDUCATION PRINCIPLES

Active Social Learning: Preserving the advances we have made

The pandemic triggered a shift to digital and hybrid education which has been challenging, disruptive and stimulating to us as educators. It forces changes of delivery mode, has brought new tools to the teaching & learning trade, and demands alternative ways of forming the communities and relationships we know are crucial to learning. Throughout this disruption to our profession, identity and community, however, there have been extraordinary successes and inventions. First this happened as pure 'contingency' delivery, then as rapidly installed alternatives of teaching and assessment formats, and now – still in unsettled contexts – as a set of more 'designed' adaptations and enhancements, deployed at session, module and programme scale.

In the Summer of 2020, Keele's Schools drew up a set of powerful 'promises' of educational delivery and shared those with our students to reassure them of the *quality* of education they would receive, even though we all knew the *shape* of that education would look very different. And then, of course, it has been 'different' again and again: we've had to adapt delivery as the sands shifted; as we moved from hybrid to digital and back again. But, by and large, we've *delivered* on our promise of educational quality and care. That should be a source both of great pride, and of reflection on **how we can do things differently, both when we need to, and when we should do.**

In one intensely innovative year, we've opened up new ways of teaching, different ways of supporting students, and new ways of forming communities of knowledge, enquiry and debate. We've done so in a necessarily accelerated and radical way. By doing so, we have challenged conventions, critiqued 'norms' and given students the foundation of a more flexible, inclusive educational infrastructure and experience.

'Keele Education Principles' is a collective message from the four Deans of Education, produced in consultation with members of Education Committee, setting out some of the educational enhancements we need to preserve, the culture changes we must sustain, and innovations we can take to another level as we progress further from contingency to design.

In many sections, we address the digital enhancement of education, but our institutional commitment (apart from in designated, online programmes) **is to hybrid delivery**. In-situ teaching and support sustains as the core of what Keele offers, and this delivery can be made more valuable, engaging and inclusive by the blended and digital methods and resources outlined below.

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[1. Preserve the ‘digital framing’ of our taught sessions]

Across all disciplines, we’ve seen a massive step-change in efforts to create digital activities and communities that allow students to prepare for, and respond to, their ‘live’ teaching sessions. Our response to the pandemic context has been to build online resources and activities that keep students **actively and often collaboratively engaged** either side of the formal ‘contact time’ we offer.

This is best thought of as a form of ‘digital framing’: a pollination of online resources, activities and communities ‘around’ our live teaching sessions, sometimes tutor-prompted, often peer-led. This digital activity (which many staff have experimented with for years) has fed powerfully into the live sessions themselves: students go in ‘warmed up’, already in conversation, already engaged.

This ‘digital framing’ adds massive value to the live teaching we offer, and – perhaps more radically – has heightened the ‘social learning’ that students engage in before and after their formal sessions. It has begun, in fact, to blur the definition of ‘contact time’ in a good way, to stretch it out across the week, and to raise the expectations and self-efficacy of our students in driving their own learning. Structures for this ‘digital framing’ have been supported by the [Flexible Digital Education Framework](#), and bespoke, designed models for it are emerging across our Schools. It’s time to share these, and celebrate and learn from what we have done.

We must sustain the richness of our digital framing and enhancement, even as we return to more familiar timetabled structures of in-situ teaching.

[2. Challenge ‘Broadcast’ teaching formats]

As we shifted to online delivery and then designed hybrid teaching, two things happened that challenged our conventions of delivering ‘broadcast’ presentations in our timetabled sessions. **Firstly**, it was clear that, with a little creativity, we could put up online content for students that ‘delivered’ this knowledge, data and introductory debate in engaging digital ways: short videos, narrated slides, screencasts, Sways, etc.. **Secondly**, when we offered ‘live’ presentations in unfamiliar, sometimes awkward online sessions, it became clear to us that, to keep students engaged and ‘active’, we need to break up our presentations into shorter slots, building time for questions, peer-working and reflection on the material.

Together, these experiences have further **shaken our assumptions** (which were already unsteady) about the value of long-duration ‘broadcast delivery’ as a teaching mode. If students can engage effectively with well-designed content online, and engage with it around *their* lives, what is the purpose of filling high-value timetabled sessions with that presentation? If live online teaching revealed that we need to splice-up tutor presentations, and mix them up with interactivity and student-led work, why would we want to return to broadcast models of in-situ delivery over one or two hours, where students are largely passive? Tutor-led scene-setting, incisive live introductions, short ‘performances’ of debates and ideas still inspire students. Large group teaching sessions are also useful in many contexts, though we need to define the student interactivity that they contain. We must *radically rethink* the format of the lecture / long presentation (in situ and online) and be honest about how we might fill that precious ‘contact time’ in other, more valuable ways that do justice to our ‘social learning’ vision.

We must continue to challenge ‘broadcast delivery’ in teaching and design more social, collaborative and active learning for students within our taught sessions, whether in small or large groups.

[3. Add value to ‘in-situ’ delivery – enriching the event of campus-based teaching]

As we have added layers of digital engagement, online communities and virtual support, we’ve had to face the difficult question “**where does that leave the value of in-situ delivery?**”. We’ve proved that, on many occasions, online teaching and support can be of high quality and be more than a surrogate: accessible, inventive, often digitally social. Students have explicitly asked us ‘if I can engage and meet learning outcomes online, why should I come to campus for my sessions?’. There are very clear answers to this, and they may differ in each disciplinary context, but we need to make these answers **even clearer to students as they return from a protracted period of online study**, and emphasise the value of active, in-situ learning within the hybrid education we offer.

If we can remove the least engaging, more passive conventions of learning (see section 2) from in-situ teaching then **we have the opportunity to fill those sessions with refreshed activity**. Already, our in-situ disciplinary teaching offers numerous examples of highly collaborative lab, clinical, fieldwork and performance-based learning; examples of discursive, textured explorations of sources and data; vibrant workshops that allow students to express themselves, group-up, re-form and present physical and digital outputs to each other (in ways that are still difficult to replicate online). We must turn to these again, and revitalise and maybe re-prioritise the teaching and learning activity we connect to our timetabled sessions. Expansion of team-based learning, and models of project and problem-based learning (already extremely well developed at Keele) are important ways of achieving this.

There are other, more radical and connected ways of thinking through **the experience of on-campus learning**. Could the value and occasion of in-situ teaching be improved by inventive uses of **teaching and campus space**. It is time to look to particular Schools who *exploit the campus as living lab*, to give us models of innovation. Can we also link teaching more obviously to physical spaces of resource, development and display (Library, Careers, the Science Park, student exhibition spaces). Could we link teaching more tangibly to spaces of civic placement, exchange and collaboration, investing students with a sense of **place-based opportunity and dialogue?** More than ever, students will expect much of, and appreciate, the ‘live event’, the physical ‘occasion’ of teaching, and - whilst we want to link them- we need to be able to **define the specific value of in-situ teaching** in relation to the digital infrastructure that surrounds it.

We must inject in-situ teaching with ‘value adding’ activities and resources that on-campus presence allows, drawing on existing methods but also stretching our own ideas of how teaching can link to space, place, people in campus and civic contexts

[4. Preserve and develop our ‘alternative’ assessments as authentic assessments]

One of the most demanding but innovative activities over the last year has been the contingency design, and later adaptation, of assessment types. From module leaders to programme leaders, through directors of education and quality assurance staff, this has been a complex but incredibly creative and rigorous process. **We developed new, manageable, inclusive ways of assessing students** in relation to learning objectives. And, crucially, we **maintained standards and quality** as we did it.

Along the way, we didn't just come up with 'equivalent' or 'alternative' assessments, but we often created **fairer, more inclusive variants**. The necessary, tectonic shift away from in-situ, high stakes exams and tests has allowed us to experiment with project and portfolio assessment, longer-duration 'take home' assessments, simulated scenarios and online alternatives to clinical, performance, lab and field-based assessment. In some cases, there will have been a sense of loss or compromise. We may be eager to return to some assessments, in particular those that more precisely test the performance of our students in lab, clinical and performance contexts or reflect professional body rubrics.

In many more cases, though, 'alternative' assessments seemed to us **more authentic, not less**. They allowed students better opportunities to show their breadth of learning, their research skills, their holistic understanding and application of subject material. The **convention of the closed, in-situ exam was broken**, and the *inauthenticity* of exams as a measure of a student's learning and research has been further highlighted. They were largely replaced by alternatives that felt much more directly linked to the 'real' research and learning activity within our subjects.

Alternative assessments are likely to have been more inclusive, too. They nearly always gave students greater time, flexibility and resource to complete their task, testing research, understanding and argument better than high-stakes, time-constrained recall and expression. In many cases, these 'alternative' assessed outputs also hold **other student-centred benefits**: the new outputs were often digitally progressive and creative, they had better 'legacy' value and visibility for students; a clearer link with workplace outputs and cultures. There is a very strong possibility that the **striking narrowing of awarding gaps** across BAME, disabled and international student cohorts at Keele is testimony, in part, to this rapid evolution of assessment type and assessment support.

Where we have found alternatives, we must not step back into default settings of in-situ exams, time-limited tests and other conventions. Given the extraordinary effort we spent creating more authentic and inclusive assessments, we need to preserve and finesse these alternatives and design them in at the core of our programmes.

[5. Engage and support our students in diverse, inclusive ways]

As in-situ teaching was disrupted, so were the usual modes of academic and student support that surrounded it. We've been forced to think of surrogate ways of creating student belonging and community, and new ways of extending our support and guidance to students virtually. 'In person' educational care has always been a distinctive feature of a Keele education, and over the last year we've had to reinvent *being there* for students 'in-person' and 'face-to-face', but through a digital frame. It is testimony to our efforts that it has usually felt possible to 'be there' in person and face-to-face for students, even though mediated by technology.

Online induction projects shaped staff-student welcomes and student togetherness. Personal tutorials shifted to online appointments or group Q&As. In-situ revision sessions morphed into online revision *communities* (with a more accessible peer-to-peer dynamic). Many support sessions were prompted by **digital snippets of advice, case-study or encouragement**, and tutors created and recorded inventive, informal content that left a **personal touch of advice and care**, but a 'touch' that could be accessed asynchronously, when the student was able or chose to tune in.

More 'open' than one-off events of support or development (that might be missed, subject to clash, or difficult to attend), these diverse modes of online support, whilst they perhaps lost some of the familiar warmth and contact of in-situ engagement, had one thing in common: **a new kind of accessibility and equity**. Even live online sessions are likely to have been more inclusive and easier to access than campus-based equivalents; for students off-campus, for commuter students, for disabled students, for time-poor students who want to dip in for advice during hectic or disrupted lives. Certainly, asynchronous support materials have been accessed by students when and where it suited them, no doubt reaching a more diverse audience of students.

In effect, the 'surrogate' support offer has often exposed the limitations of the in-situ 'original'. Is the office hour drop-in, the one-off revision workshop, the campus-based feedback seminar, the late-afternoon employability lecture, really the most effective way of guiding a cohort with varying physical and temporal access to campus? Instead, we may be witnessing a profound 'digital levelling up' in the way we offer a *diversity* of online, blended and in-situ support within the pandemic period.

Knowing we could not 'always be there online', we have also been obliged to nurture and trust students to generate and lead their own online communities of academic and pastoral support. We have 'set the scene', we checked in, we become the facilitators of support as much as the deliverers of it, and - along the way - we empowered students to create their own networks of digital guidance, collaboration and self-efficacy.

We must not forget or disband the creativity, accessibility and equity offered by the online variants of support and guidance we turned to.

We can still be *there* 'face to face' 'personally' and authentically for our students, perhaps in more efficient and impactful ways; in forms that are mediated and framed by digital tools, but also made more democratic and inclusive by them.

[6. Think of ourselves as content curators and creators]

As we re-designed and refreshed our modules over the last year, offering content in new digital formats and in more inclusive forms, we all - comfortably or not - evolved quickly as creators of learning resources. Often we searched for and selected new digital content to punctuate the weeks with stimulus and scaffolding for students. We became better *curators* of the existing content we already had access to, using library resources, e-resources and electronic archives more creatively and pragmatically.

We also became better *creators* of original learning resources, often stepping away from merely 'preserving' content (adding slides or handouts to the VLE) or 'capturing' content (recording / editing our lectures) to being more innovative content *producers*. Of course, we've always shaped, designed and annotated resources for our students, but the acceleration of invention was pretty stunning: narrated slides and screencasts added a 'digital human' touch to the passive PowerPoint, and other presentational forms added life and texture to the process of student reading – Sways unfurled, Prezis zoomed, Padlets cascaded resources and links, and we uncovered dormant functions in our VLE and new functions in Teams to present content in fresh ways.

Sometimes students were invited into these digital 'texts' and resources to add their contributions, links and research findings. When student attendance of live teaching became harder to nurture and measure in formal ways, we opened up learning resources to greater asynchronous interaction. Whilst this was, admittedly, patchy, student digital presence *within and through our learning resources* became a way of registering engagement and participation. Tutor innovation, in the most successful cases, **became student co-production**. Students' own choices of digital curation and expression fed back into module communities and resources, giving us new ideas.

Content creation extended to video, too, and whilst the techniques were by definition DIY, we created new mini lectures, introductions, training, guidance and assessment advice, capturing ourselves on screen as an alternative to in-situ presence. And this was often much *better* than 'lecture capture' because it wasn't a 'capture' of a live event somewhere else, but a digital-born engagement with our students, and designed better for it.

In some ways, we've managed to develop content that does some of the work for us. When digital content is more engaging, open and accessible, we should expect students to find their way around it, contribute to it, and learn from us as educators who teach *through* well designed resources. This evolution from preserving to curating to creating takes considerable effort, and needs layers of support. But it is effort that will be repaid in the future because it allows our students to be more independent learners, not waiting to be 'shown' knowledge in our live sessions, but prompted and supported throughout modules by the rich digital content we have developed.

In-situ teaching has incontestable value, but we must explore ways of using digital resource to *save on some the effort* we habitually put into preparing and delivering forms of in-situ broadcast, presentation, guidance and support. Only in this way can we balance the significant investment we put into developing new forms of content.

We must celebrate the developments we have made as digital content producers, and continue to define ourselves not just by the resources we list or capture, but by the digital learning resources we *curate and create*.

We must be clear in our expectations about the ways students should engage, interact with, and co-produce digital content, and the ways in which they contribute to online communities. In this way, they take ownership of learning resources and learning itself.

[7. Sharing, listening, disseminating: staying open and networked]

During the pandemic context, we've seen a remarkable culture of innovation, sharing and humility as we learnt from each other in 'crisis' scenarios of contingency and design. As well as taking advantage of established groups of internal experts and consultants, attending training and drop-ins organised by KIITE and IDS, staff routinely formed more organic groups within and across Schools, sharing tips on live online teaching, creating alternative assessments and so much more.

Externally, too, the HE sector learning & teaching community (already a very open culture) reached a new height of co-operation and sharing – frameworks for hybrid learning pinged from Institution to Institution, and most HEIs made their covid education resources 'open' and truly educational. Keele staff grew to greater visibility through networks like AdvanceHE, JISC, ALT, SEDA and the QAA.

Whilst necessarily fluid and sometimes very informal, this revitalised culture must be captured and sustained. We can confidently say that we've got educators at Keele who are now more open to sharing and consulting case-studies from other Schools, more external facing in relation to sector innovations, and more keen to link up with our own specialists in curriculum design, digital education and student support. During the last year, **scholarship clusters** in Schools and Faculties have sharpened their purpose and impact, and the **Education & Scholarship** academic job family at Keele (now over 150 members) seemed especially visible and valued.

As we look to the future, we should give urgent thought to joining up established and emergent scholarship groups across the University; giving the right kind of visibility and reward to the educators who have refreshed our co-curriculum; reaching out via KIITE to sector networks and conversations, and evaluating what we have done in more defined ways (the research work on the narrowing of awarding gaps in the covid context is one example of this). We should also explore more efficient and open ways of sharing the created and captured content we have developed, between disciplines and Schools, and exemplifying the solutions we have found through the Curriculum Design Framework's resources and case-studies.

We must capture and sustain the agile, open and high quality collaboration that we have seen in education 'contingency' and make this concrete through networks of scholarship, expertise and dissemination.

[8. Not less work, but different work: managing workload and wellbeing as we develop]

We must acknowledge and reward the extraordinary (and often supplementary) work we have invested in our educational adaptations and advances. It has taken great time and effort to explore new modes of delivery, create digital resources, and find new ways of engaging and supporting our students.

Re-inventing our roles, and reforming our teaching landscape takes time, and it has tested resilience. We need to preserve our wellbeing and capacity whilst sustaining our advances. Therefore, we must seek ways we can sustain innovation whilst *reducing* some areas of work, and by *moving on entirely* from some cycles and habits of educational activity.

One crucial step is to move away from just seeing innovation as an 'additive' layer. **We can only preserve staff capacity by embracing the ways in which new modes of teaching and support can replace or supplant the old, and free us from certain cycles and conventions of educational work.** Some of the latter are scrutinised and illustrated in the sections above. We also need to make sure that 'innovation' in technology-enhanced learning doesn't cause an unnecessary proliferation of digital tools and methods that might be overwhelming for staff and students. **A set of supported tools - and frameworks for their application - should be defined** (in line with KIITE's Flexible Digital Education Framework), and work on technology and service innovation with the Innovation Team within IDS will ensure students benefit from new modes of learning and collaboration, but within a planned and structured offer.

One of the mistakes of 'returning to normal' in a post-pandemic context is that we re-instate previous conventions and modes of provision whilst feeling obliged to retain the extra layers of innovation and additional support, as well. **This is not a sustainable model for education delivery, or for our own wellbeing. We need to stop doing things, too.** The dynamics of sharing, networking and collaboration mentioned above 'take time', certainly, but they can also shift burden from the individual to the collective, and thereby save effort, too. Exhaustively burrowing away within our own modules and trying to sort out challenges has never really worked, it definitely didn't work last year, and it shouldn't need to work in the future. There's been a progressive shift to collaborative effort and support, and a refreshed willingness to take on expertise and advice. These ways of working should help spread the load.

We have also discovered more ways of offering digital academic advice and support to **the whole group or cohort, and allowing online content to be accessed by students at any time:** these methods reduce some of the high workload associated with one-to-one queries and meetings. Improved digital workflows around assessment, student support and academic advice also save time, and we've become more conscious of the need to design assessment that is manageable for staff and students, and to avoid over-assessment (see refreshed 'Keele Assessment Principles').

On top of that, it is perhaps time to hand over more of the ownership and direction of study to our students. Well supported and stimulated by the digital and hybrid frameworks of learning explored and celebrated in this document, **it should be expected that students become more autonomous, collaborative, and self-directed** as they navigate through the resources and communities we design.

Our future educational work in encouraging this student autonomy and engagement is not less, it is not less challenging. But it is very different, and – preserving the advances we have made in encouraging active, social learning - it has the potential to be more rewarding.

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- 1. We must sustain the richness of our ‘digital framing’ and online enhancement, even as we return to more familiar timetabled structures of teaching**
- 2. We must continue to challenge ‘broadcast delivery’ in teaching and design more social, collaborative and active learning for students within our taught sessions**
- 3. We must inject in-situ teaching with ‘added value’ activities and resources that on-campus presence allows, drawing on existing methods and stretching our own ideas of how teaching can link to space, place and people in campus and civic contexts**
- 4. Where we have found alternatives, we must not step back into default settings of in-situ exams, time-limited tests and other conventions. Given the extraordinary effort we spent creating more authentic and inclusive assessments, we need to preserve and finesse these alternatives and design them in at the core of our programmes.**
- 5. We must not forget or disband the creativity, accessibility and equity offered by the online variants of support and guidance we turned to.**

- 6. We must continue to be there ‘face to face’ ‘personally’ and authentically for our students when we are online. In forms that are mediated and framed by digital tools, but also made more democratic and inclusive by them. This will complement our in-situ presence and engagement.**
- 7. We must celebrate the developments we have made as digital content producers, and continue to define ourselves not just by the resources we list or capture, but by the digital learning resources we *curate and create*.**
- 8. We must be clear in our expectations about the ways students should engage, interact with, and co-produce digital content, and the ways in which they contribute to online communities. In this way, students take ownership of learning resources and the process of learning itself**
- 9. We must explore ways of using our digital resources to *save on the effort* we habitually put into preparing & delivering certain forms of in-situ broadcast, presentation and guidance: only in this way can we balance the significant investment we put into developing new forms of content.**
- 10. We must capture and sustain the agile, open and high quality collaboration that we have seen in times of crisis and contingency, and make this concrete through established networks of sharing and scholarship.**
- 11. We must acknowledge and reward the extraordinary (and often supplementary) work we have invested in our educational adaptations and advances. We must seek ways of saving on effort, too, and move away from seeing innovation as ‘additive’, embracing ways that new modes of teaching and support can replace or move on from the old, freeing us from certain cycles and conventions of educational work.**