

## Learning in the new world - A Think Piece

Joe Wilson Head of Digital Skills City of Glasgow College, May 2020

In the first eight weeks of global lockdown the face of learning and working changed and we need to accept that many of the changes around remote learning and working are going to stay with us, in fact we can't afford to go back now<sup>1</sup>.

It means more than just taking our current approaches to training, development and assessment and putting these on line. Organisations have learned, from their emergency responses, that simply moving things online does not improve the quality of the learner experience.<sup>2</sup>

We have an opportunity to reflect, rethink and redesign our processes along with the training and development we offer across the College.

This piece sets out some of the areas that we need to consider in negotiating this new landscape. We are not short of potential models to explore.<sup>34567</sup>

Over the years, Colleges have developed an extensive portfolio of qualifications largely due to their focus on practical skills, biased towards face to face learning, in a timetabled slot, with a reliance on traditional paper based systems for competence assessment.

Where practice moved it has been towards blended learning, this being a modest amount of support held in the virtual learning environment to serve as an adjunct to the mainly face to face component of the delivery rather than being a conscious attempt to support learners remotely or as a means to reduce the face to face delivery time, or as a step towards a greater personalisation of the learning experience.

The opportunity now exists to change the culture around the delivery of our learning and assessment products, indeed to change the learning experience.

An opportunity to more effectively utilise technology in the delivery of qualifications, thereby improving the delivery of the overall experience, improving access to learning and to extending the scope of the current learner base. Changes in our systems and practice will move learners to the centre and allow them a richer and more personalised journey through their programmes.

Many organisations were planning to implement changes like this, but thought the cultural and technological barriers were too high. In most cases, the system has surprised itself in its ability to transition swiftly to new ways of working as an emergency response. However, organisations have yet

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tes.com/news/edtech-we-cant-afford-go-back-now>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/0ae1c300-7fee-11ea-82f6-150830b3b99a>

<sup>3</sup> [http://oro.open.ac.uk/67415/2/Lifelong%20Learning\\_ORO.pdf](http://oro.open.ac.uk/67415/2/Lifelong%20Learning_ORO.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2019/4/2019-horizon-report>

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<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/assessment-overhaul-time-to-ditch-pen-and-paper-exams-for-good-17-feb-2020>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Schools\\_of\\_the\\_Future\\_Report\\_2019.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Schools_of_the_Future_Report_2019.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/designing-learning-and-assessment-in-a-digital-age>

to make the changes that would support a new way forward in the longer term. Hanging in the air is still an assumption, in some quarters, that this has just been a temporary interruption of service.

Educators, administrators and policy makers need to embrace the progress that has been made. There are broader implications, organisations who traditionally wanted everyone in the office will be seeing few dips in productivity. Staff who travelled to work and meetings, while missing the more social aspects of the working environment, will have found home working and on-line meetings easier to accept than perhaps the daily commute.

There are other implications of the current crisis, in terms of how it will influence students' subject choices. Who will be applying for courses related to air travel in the coming year and or programmes related to hospitality or travel and tourism? Colleges need to make fair and honest assessments of the employment and progression routes available for learners in the new economic environment. Learners too will be making this assessment. Perhaps some will delay committing to higher education until they see some clearer economic indicators from the sectors they are interested in working in. They may also be attracted by alternative offers from the University community, deprived of international HE students they may suddenly discover a fresh enthusiasm for Access, Cert and Diploma Higher Ed courses for local students.

To attract and retain learners Colleges will need a clear and fresh offer that can be delivered coherently in a world where social distancing will remain the new normal. The challenge will be delivering programmes in new ways while promoting new ways of social learning. How do you create the excitement and rewards of meeting new classmates, building trust and relationships when you will physically be together for shorter periods of time?

In addition Colleges will need to respond to a new demand from post furloughed workers who may discover that their employers faced with the economic downturn need to let them go. This group will be looking for short flexible courses and programmes that can re-equip them for the jobs market.

The implications for working practices<sup>8</sup> go deeper than those discussed in this paper, which will focus on the technical aspects of training and development and new practices that need to be embedded in moving towards a new future.

### **Dealing with the current crisis**

The learning industry responded swiftly in creating offers to cope with the global pandemic. The large vendors Microsoft<sup>9</sup> Google, Amazon and Apple made compelling offers while a range of smaller ambitious providers have reduced tolls or opened up their services for education and training providers. Zoom meetings have become the staple of training sessions as providers moved their face to face sessions towards on-line, remote delivery.

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<sup>8</sup> [Workforce Principles for the COVID-19 Pandemic Stakeholder Capitalism in a Time of Crisis](#)

<sup>9</sup> [The Ultimate Microsoft EDU Wakelet of Wakelets!](#)

There has been a raft of support globally and nationally to support the emergency response.<sup>101112 13141516</sup>

<sup>17</sup>However, the sector cannot become dependent alone on these Covid related services which will become subject to institutional licensing once the peak of the crisis passes. The sector needs to plan its way into the future post the emergency response and the largesse of publishers and suppliers, while using the learning gained from this experience to plot the way ahead.

In the College environment we were able to switch quickly to remote learning as the systems, though not always well used or understood, were in place. The means existed for staff members to send email messages to cohorts of students, for students to be directed to content in courses within the virtual learning environments, for staff to deliver video content synchronously and asynchronously, for learners to work collaboratively in forums and for most forms of assessment to be replicated in a secure, reliable and valid way by digital means.

We did experience the digital divide, neither all staff nor all students had access to a networked device, a quiet place to work, and some lacked initially the skills and confidence to engage across all of these activities, both in the production and the consumption. We've not cured this yet and are looking for sustainable models of providing internet access for learners who do not have this at home. This is a sector wide issue.

Overall, however efficient the response has been<sup>18</sup>, it has to a degree, been make do and mend<sup>19</sup> rather than a planned basis for a sustained change.

## Overcoming resistance

The word pivot has been used in higher education circles to describe this moment of potential change<sup>20</sup><sup>21</sup>. There are many who could slip back comfortably into the old world and who even in this changed world will resist the changes necessary to support learners in the new economic reality we are quickly going to find ourselves in. Many will assume, as we have coped with an emergency situation, that our

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<sup>10</sup> [Webinars](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Virtual Bridge Sessions](#)

<sup>12</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/coronavirus-online-learning-resources\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/coronavirus-online-learning-resources_en)

<sup>13</sup> <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/digilearn/>

<sup>14</sup> [Swiftly Moving Online: Links and Resources](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Community Resources](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Updated: 24th April, 2020 Remote Learning Rapid Evidence Assessment](#)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/blended-learning-getting-started>

<sup>18</sup> [Coronavirus: State of remote FE teaching and learning revealed](#)

<sup>19</sup> [What \(Some\) Faculty Are Saying about the Shift to Remote Teaching and Learning](#)

<sup>20</sup> [10 simple rules for supporting a temporary online pivot in higher edu](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Covid-19 is the pivot point for online learning](#)

systems and approach will just keep coping. Perhaps falsely assuming that by changing some of the delivery tools that the underlying culture has changed or will now change without further intervention.<sup>22</sup>

Witness, staff falling over having delivered six different one hour live zoom lessons in one day , while trying to homeschool their own family or learners complaining of being tied to their desks at home completing assessments while trying to attend on-line classes and coping with unrealistic workloads.

The resistance will be twofold . Those who just wish to go back to traditional forms of delivery and those who assume that the technology is simply there to support the current delivery models that now happen to be mainly on-line. To pivot we have to accept a new reality and plan our way into this , in an informed way that supports everyone. We cannot simply impose our old reality on the new reality. Staff are not working from home , they are coping with a crisis currently and trying to work from home.

## **Towards a New Learning Environment**

It is not all about content<sup>23</sup> , non-stop webinars and simply moving the timetable on-line. If we wish to engage and excite the next generation of learners then we have to rethink our learning design and our delivery processes<sup>24</sup>. The models of creating learning materials from the traditional educational publishing business are expensive and often ineffective<sup>25</sup> . Even the Open University is struggling to remain cost effective, largely due to the inflated costs of its production models and while global massive open on-line courses may act as a shop window for global education , they are too often short on the content that engages learners and short too of learners with the socio economic profile similar to that of a college.

*“Contemporary research into online learning almost univocally agrees that structured online discussions with clear guidelines and expectations, well-designed courses with interactive content and flexible deadlines, and continuous instructor involvement ... are the most promising approaches to fostering learning in online environments.”*<sup>26</sup>

It is not the technology but the human factor that makes learning engaging. Teachers know this already but have often rejected the notion that technology could enhance the learning experience in spite of a growing evidence base from both education and industry.<sup>27</sup> We need models that can embed teachers' skills and enthusiasm and make these visible in the production and delivery.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://philonedtech.com/planning-for-resilience-not-resistance/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://publications.cetis.org.uk/2012/601>

<sup>24</sup> [Online learning: Are we asking the right questions? - HEPI](#)

<sup>25</sup> [How Long Does it Take to Create Learning?](#)

<sup>26</sup> Joksimović et al. 2015, p. 95 The history and State of Online Learning

<sup>27</sup> [The new work of L&D in the modern workplace](#)

There are models around the production process of on-line learning , notably the ADDIE model<sup>28</sup> but there are many more currently in circulation<sup>29</sup> and even models that promise a universal design for learning<sup>30</sup>

In City of Glasgow College we are about to roll out a tailored version of the ABC Learning Design Model. Tailored as we are not approaching this as a vehicle to design blended learning but as a deliberate attempt to get staff to design for blended learning in the first instance. It is easier to design learning in this way, to later accommodate some socially distanced classroom activities than to simply develop a blended model that would rely on a classroom based component. Tailored too in that we have modified some of the language to reflect the landscape we operate in.

The ABC Model ( and simple as ABC = Active , Blended and Connected in our definition, to make it logical in our context)<sup>31</sup> will help staff plan their programmes and then decide which technical tools they will use for delivery and assessment. The new programmes will have content , activities , collaboration tools , co-creation, assessment formative and summative and still have elements of both synchronous and asynchronous direct instruction along with links to open educational resources . We are piloting this approach and will roll out this programme as the students finish their courses and staff look to prepare their programmes for the new academic year. As we work towards this we are harnessing assets from Jisc<sup>32</sup>,ALT<sup>33</sup> The UFI Vocational Trust<sup>34</sup>, the Education and Training Foundation<sup>35</sup> CDN and other relevant partnerships across the UK and beyond.

Through [the Learning and Teaching Academy](#) we will share our journey with the sector.

I've hardly mentioned technology at all .

#### **Further References used in compiling think piece :**

Future Learn Courses <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/making-blended-education-work/>

The Learning Fractal Newsletter <https://weareopen.coop/newsletter/>

Heriot Watt Learning and Teaching Academy [Digital education - Learning and Teaching academy](#)

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<sup>28</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ADDIE\\_Model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ADDIE_Model)

<sup>29</sup> [Instructional Design Models: Comparing ADDIE, Bloom, Gagne, & Merrill](#)

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html>

<sup>31</sup> <https://cityofglasgowcollege.libguides.com/ltmodels>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.alt.ac.uk/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.ufi.co.uk/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/>

With Thanks to Roger Emery Solent University

**The Five Elements for Successful Online Learning:**

#Presence - eg: Regular tutor presence in discussions, video calls, response to emails. Regular updating or release of materials and activities, regular formative feedback

#Connectedness – eg: Regular interactive sessions with tutors and other students. Facilitation of class discussions and group work.

#Eventedness – eg: Guest Lectures, Expert demonstrations, one-off must see/must engage learning moments

#Facilitation – eg: Comprehensive support, Accessible, engagement & achievement monitoring, easy to engage with, barrier free/device agnostic, additional resources (library, linkedin, BoB etc)

#Content\_and\_Activities – eg: Rich variety in various media, digital emulations & simulations, self-test quizzes, interactive multimedia (eg H5P), aligned assessment of Learning Outcomes