# Editor's Introduction

**Welcome to the Summer 2025 edition. We would like to thank all our authors and reviewers. Here we provide a brief summary of the papers:**

Against a background of literature, Simon Brownhill, of the University of Bristol, argues strongly and coherently that teachers at university should be thoughtful and sensitive about the way they greet and say goodbye to *all* their students, whether they are lecturing, running seminars or tutorials or supervising research. This author offers a range of personal strategies that he has found to be influential in developing rapport, improving relationships and making students feel included and respected. He accepts that some teachers may find it difficult to devote time and effort to such ways of making students welcome and offers alternative, simpler, ways of moving towards a more personal interaction. His tabular presentation of alternative methods and suggested consideration of the importance of choosing particular approaches (that take into account students' backgrounds and cultural preferences) make experimentation with positive human contact very achievable. There is a strong message here about the beneficial effects on both learning and involvement of consistently striking a personal note, whether by verbal, non-verbal, formal or informal means.

An adept review of higher education's application of visual media – comics, graphic novels, manga and cartoons – to enhance both teaching and learning across the disciplines is testament to the author's scholarly exploration of the relevant academic literature from most of the first quarter of the present century. Hendrik van der Sluis, of the University of Flensburg, Germany, systematically covers the educational intentions behind use of these media (found to increase student access to, engagement with and understanding of challenging content) and the effects of so doing on learners' acquisition of knowledge and their ability to think critically and to develop professional skills. Harnessing what this review presents as a versatile higher education tool with global inter-cultural reach has implications, in terms of more research and critical evaluation, especially in the context of AI. For teachers at this level, such visual media with a multimodal format may not only render the complex more accessible, but overcome student disaffection with conventional methods; thus they may deal with delicate topics and ethical concerns while encouraging students to take control of their learning and be creative.

Octavio Murekian, Klairoong Phairor and Surabil Sudarshan of the School of Marketing at the University of Greenwich offer a cogent argument for a seamless integration of the more easily delivered and acquired *technical* skills and expertise with digital tools/software and what may prove harder to achieve: the simultaneous development of more creative and strategic meta skills, such as: 1) being versatile and adaptable in the face of unrelenting change in the marketing industry; 2) having the ability to think critically, communicate well and solve problems collaboratively; 3) being willing and able to interpret imperfect data, make insightful choices and defend a personal position. The authors sum this up emphatically: "*The future belongs to those who can blend technology with insight, data with storytelling and automation with human intuition*." To get this balance of technical and meta skills right, they also provide from their own experience some crucial advice: curricular innovation keeping pace with workplace change, assessment methods testing more than mere recall (projects to demonstrate synthesis, analysis and original thought), collaboration with industry, and learning spaces supporting debate, experimentation and creative risk-taking – ***all*** are vital to lifelong success in employment.

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An investigation into the effects of students' reliance upon generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) to assist them in their academic writing has as its context a South African higher education institution providing comprehensive open distance e-learning; the author, Ntshimane Elphas Mohale, provides an extensive range of relevant literature to support this study. What the author describes will be recognised globally as academia responds to the understandable desire of students (many without a strong educational background) to succeed in their studies by means of GenAI. By both analysing examination scripts and seeking lecturers' responses to the rise in GenAI use, the author explores the conflicting views of this resource and concludes that, if unrestricted, this tool does hamper critical thinking and mastery of content and does limit meaningful engagement with set tasks. Inevitably, plagiarism occurs. The paper offers some particularly helpful strategies for institutional management of the challenges, so that the benefits to students of GenAI may be retained and academic integrity be protected; it also acknowledges the need for further research beyond this specific context.

In a beautifully written opinion piece that exemplifies how powerful an argument may become in the hands of a sensitive and style-conscious writer, Lauren Flannery, of the University of East Anglia, compels the reader to examine an alternative to the neoliberal higher education institution, driven by metrics, efficiency and productivity. This hymn to 'pausing to be human' sings loud in celebration of the co-created and meaningful learning that springs from the sincere, caring and mutually respectful relationships that are the mark of 'relational pedagogy'. Academic culture lies in the hands of educators, some of whom are realising that a depersonalised environment does not transform learners, nor motivates them, nor encourages in them a sense of belonging and well-being, nor, ultimately, helps them to succeed academically. This undeniable logic challenges academia to look critically at itself and to recognise that a learning environment which is no longer hierarchical but depends upon relationality in a partnership between teacher and student is likely to lead to co-creation, open discussion and deeper affective connections, all likely to produce better outcomes. This author acknowledges the institutional constraints (accountability, funding, performance), yet remains convinced of the efficacy of being human. Read, enjoy, believe!

Natalia Gheorghiu, of the University of Greenwich, is well placed as a practising counsellor, educator and lecturer to analyse reasons for the apparent cognitive overload of MSc counselling trainees undertaking experiential learning in the form of case discussion groups. Though the author herself is committed to this practice, she recognises that trainee counsellors may be very competent academically but, at the same time, much slower to come to terms with their developing self-identities in the counselling role. The author sets the learning scene, in which a trainee presents a clinical case to a group of peers, simultaneously processing complex emotional experiences, theoretical frameworks and a personal and very new identity in the role. The pace of such sessions and exposure of self to the scrutiny of others may well cause considerable stress and defensiveness, hampering learning. The author's sensitive critical appraisal of these challenges and her empathetically driven steps to manage their emotional and cognitive overload are a powerful insight into best teacher practice.

The very fact that, at the University of Greenwich, Doctor of Education students and their tutor, Mark Betteney, are co-authoring a paper about their attitudes to the use – by higher education generally and by themselves – of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) shows how much

its advent matters to everyone in the sector. This group's difficulty in reaching consensus on ***every*** one of six main discussion points also illustrates how important it is to harness its benefits and manage its threats with continuing research and collaboration. The paper makes clear that institutions generally have guidance in place, though assessment design that is AI-resistant and so protects students from falling foul of accepted standards of academic integrity may take much longer to establish. Interesting here is that the participants agreed that the viva as an assessment tool does overcome the ethical problems. It is clear, too, that students seek to know how best to proceed and the lead author makes the important point that, though the University of Greenwich is proactive in responding to GenAI by extensive surveys of staff and interest groups and by active policy development and analysis, the pace of technological change may be faster; the disparate attitudes to GenAI, and hopes for and concerns about it, will undoubtedly continue to generate debate.

An Excel-based, programme-wide assessment-mapping tool has been co-designed by a student and two staff at the University of Greenwich, replacing a former app and intended as an interim measure. 'Map My Assessment' (MMA) succeeds in enabling staff to plan for an even spread of all assessment types and students with an accessible and easily visualised colour-coded overview to help them manage their time and learning. Nicoleta Catalina, in a process that embodied the best of co-creation practice, was involved from the first, providing a unique perspective and personal expertise with Excel that Jingyang Ai and Silvia Colaiacomo valued as integral to their joint problem-solving approach. Nicoleta's voice is particularly powerful in this study of student/staff collaboration, for she 'felt genuinely proud' of what they had done together and that it had been 'fun, demanding and extremely rewarding'; she recognised the whole as the opportunity to take on an important and real-world challenge with consequent significant value to her future employability, evidencing her skills in teamwork and communication and her ability to drive a project forwards. This account is also testimony to the high level of staff satisfaction, not only with the positive responses from peers, but also with the insights gained by sharing with a student on equal terms a project's planning and delivery.

Students in Management and Marketing at the University of Greenwich responded to research questions designed to discover the extent to which generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools affect assessment learning outcomes, a topic which author Humeyra Dogru-Dastan found to be little researched. The authors wished particularly to gauge to what extent users felt GenAI to be effective in meeting their needs. The survey demonstrated that students wanted support for: academic writing (spelling, grammar, vocabulary and citation, as well as how to write more formally; structuring their essays); searching for topic-related examples; simplifying assignment briefs; getting inspirational ideas to start their pieces; getting feedback on their work; summarising relevant articles; finding appropriate sources. The findings were mixed: though students saw ChatGPT, for example, as helpful, others criticised the quality of provided information or found it to be wrong and so of no value to achievement of intended outcomes. Perhaps the most striking result of this survey relates to the now well-reported student concerns about being accused of plagiarism, but specifically to the fact that students said that they needed adequate training in how to use GenAI competently, both to ensure that they met institutional requirements and learned to apply what it had to offer in an acceptable and discriminatory way. Finally, the authors recommend that institutions continue to involve students in the continuing integration of GenAI.

With an extremely cogent and impeccably supported argument, Nigel Page of the University of Kingston, obliges the reader to pay heed to his view that, though the composition of university student populations now represents non-traditional backgrounds very well, that very mixture may cause complex and unexpected effects, for each group's characteristics – as opposed to individual attributes – may skew aggregated academic outcomes. He illustrates this opinion with carefully selected data that demonstrate how the longer commutes undertaken by many students from disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds may be contributing to the degree awarding gap, for these learners inevitably engage less with campus resources and participate and attend less consistently than non-commuters. The data show that, in his own faculty, black and minority ethnic students constitute seventy per cent of the total and, of these, two thirds commute, while white students number twenty-eight per cent, of whom half commute. In other words, in this example, to assume that ethnicity alone is responsible for the achievement gap is too unsubtle a deduction and this means, if the author is correct, that institutional educational interventions may not be for the right reasons. More nuanced intervention strategies may thus be necessary.

A review of the statistical software KitaaSTAT, that enables data upload and stats tests without knowledge of coding syntax and with immediate results and explanations, will be of great interest to those seeking to overcome students' statistical anxiety. Author Chiamaka Nwosu of Kings College, University of London, says that KitaaSTAT promotes project learning and critical reflection while minimising cognitive load. This helpfully succinct and well-illustrated paper demonstrates how postgraduate students were able, thanks to useful tooltips and prompts that guided their thinking, to gain confidence, problem-solve independently and more readily join in group discussion. The author's objectivity in this review is illustrated by a brief comparative run-through of what alternative statistical software programs have to offer and a summary of what they see as KitaaSTAT's limitations.

Another constructive technology review comes from Nigel Page of the University of Kingston, It concerns SimVenture Validate, applied in a bioscience module to improve innovation literacy – *viz*., in the workplace, the capacity to think and act strategically, identify opportunities and lead the development of relevant commercially viable products and services. The Validate platform simulates real-world innovation and the author deployed it via interactive workshops and computing sessions, incorporating its 'Business Model Canvas'. Level 6 students followed a guided process, involving their research, reflection and validation. The author evaluates the evident success of the software as providing clarity, a guided structure and encouragement of deeper investigation of enterprise elements. Its iterative learning structure and interdisciplinary nature assists breadth of understanding. An educator dashboard helps monitor student progress in the moment and files, slides and web pages are exportable for presentations/assessments. Role-based team assignments offer a range of workplace experiences. Overall, both students and the author found much to like about what Validate offers, though the author comments on its lack of specific support for scientific and technical dimensions fundamental to bioscience innovation.

Fatemeh Mohamadi, of the University of Greenwich, achieves in her opinion piece what is in fact quite rare in journal articles: beautifully crafted writing that is eminently readable and compelling in its argument; a sustained and natural incorporation of citation, chosen in every case for its particular relevance to the context; sufficient self-revelation to support the thrust of the piece with the authority of real personal experience; a sense of audience. This refreshing

and convincingly sincere exhortation to university teachers to foster genuine human relationships may be summed up by 'Know thyself.' It is hard not to be persuaded in reading this that all students, whether hard to reach or openly responsive, are likely to flourish and succeed if the institution, its staff and its structures are all geared to making learning liberatory. If staff consider that students may find ***them*** hard to reach and deliberately set out to achieve the well-being of all learners *and* themselves by opening dialogue, including everyone, making time for and being interested in each other, and ensuring that what is taught is representative of a wide range of perspectives, the misapplied expression 'hard to reach' will be redundant. This author fully understands that if the culture is genuine and empathetic, ***all*** will trust and thrive.

An interesting case study describes the triple-layered approach adopted by Oliver Gingrich, Julie Watkins and Ryan Flynn of the University of Greenwich to help students on the BA (Hons) Animation course (as well as those on other programmes designed as training for the creative industries) to become confident independent learners, able to integrate theory and practice. The aim was to sharpen students' sense both of 'belonging' and of 'mattering' by means of scaffolded and inclusive learning and teaching. Of significance are: 1) the regularity of personalised tutorials that not only provide feedback but monitor how well students are acting upon it, so supporting all, but especially those with individual needs; 2) the deliberate celebration of students' achievements and passion for animation; 3) support for developing analytical writing skills as well as technical and visualisation capabilities; 4) the streamlined whole-course structure, with academic writing, research and analysis fully embedded. Thus, students have greater clarity, sense of direction, immediate guidance and opportunities to receive industry support and showcase their work. The authors report on outcome evidence collected over five years that demonstrates their successful creation of an academic community of learning.

Xue Zhou (University of Leicester), Lei Fang and Lilian Schofield (both of Queen Mary, University of London) provide a meticulous study across several disciplines of academic staff's artificial intelligence (AI) literacy, so raising significant matters of relevance to higher education's management of AI. The authors explore the perceptions staff of barriers to and benefits of adopting AI and evaluate how familiar they are with its capabilities and applications and how confident they feel about using its tools. The findings demonstrate a low rate of adoption and that users tend to apply it superficially for lower-order tasks. Their comments also clearly identify their need for guidance and training on how best to apply it to enhance their teaching, a deficiency borne out by the literature. The authors concluded from the survey that current training is largely ineffective. Participants in the survey commented on an institutional lack of policies and guidance and an excess of regulation and the authors conclude that if the benefits of AI are to be gained, then these aspects must be made fit for purpose. This study is impressive for its relevant citation, its mapping of the identified concerns to the 'technological pedagogical content knowledge' (TPACK) framework, its depth and range and its subtle interpretation.

In the context of an MA Marketing programme at the University of Greenwich, author Klairoong Hawa Phairor, considers how, over four years, she/he came to realise that the assessment of student engagement in marketing simulation games needed improvement. After four years of careful scrutiny, it was clear that, while the assessments did encourage reflective analysis, they failed to account for the degree of constructive learning in the simulation's opportunities

for strategic risk-taking and resulting adaptation of choices taken. The author concluded that supportive scaffolding and more targeted assessment might change participants' mere enthusiasm for competition and their lack of genuine interest in anything that did not count for personal grades. So that the game mechanics, the assessment structure and the reflection opportunities would cohere better, a fifth of the assessment total was allocated to performance in the simulation and four-fifths to a reflective report, while shrewd adjustments focused on team self-improvement rather than simple competitive ranking. Deliberate inclusion of support between rounds pointed to thoughtful analysis of choices for subsequent self-development in the gaming. This stimulating paper certainly shows how objective intervention may both sharpen assessment precision and boost learning.

**With best wishes from the Compass team**