

Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the Summer 2026 edition. We are grateful to all our authors and reviewers and hope you enjoy this new edition. Here we provide brief summaries of the papers

Rebecca Maccabe and Yu-Chun Pan offer a very lucid analysis of a pair of undergraduate inter-disciplinary elective pilot courses at Northeastern University London, as a practical response to the challenge of enabling students to integrate knowledge across subject boundaries, tackle real-world industry challenges and articulate the transferable skills so attained. This study reveals: that experiential learning may not sit comfortably with students' innate desire for structure; how difficult it is to make engagement with industry more profoundly authentic; how important it is to balance practice with academic rigour; that transferable skills must be intrinsic to the very process of such learning. Responses from both students and industry partners demonstrate their mutual respect and also a realisation that this approach may be refined and improved, with constructive suggestions by all. To this end, the authors describe a transferable "four-pillar reconceptualisation of challenge-based learning: meta-learning, ecosystem thinking, deep partnering and mutual value creation", giving a succinct definition of each pillar and confirming that they constitute a guide rather than prescription.

In the context of student-staff co-design of assessment practices (as part of a five-year institutional project to make these more inclusive, compassionate and relevant to the working world), case study authors – Suzanne Albary, Amy Wallington, Anastasia Kontogianni, Chloe Lam, Lucy Millidge, Declan A. Doyle, Claire Hughes, Bobbi Moore, Louise Squire, Simon Walker – of the University of Southampton present findings from a creative reflective workshop involving both 'advancing assessment' student interns and staff. Interestingly, what stands out in this high-definition scrutiny of the roles of the co-designing collaborators is the contrast between the interns' perspectives and those of staff – *viz.*, the former were very much more focused on their unique lived experience of assessment processes (and thus informed expertise) and on their bridging role between their peers and the staff; the latter saw themselves as aiming for an egalitarian working relationship with the interns, both on the same side. In other words, what is important, say the authors, is the *quality* of the collaborative relationship, rather than its equality: institutional recognition of the 'emotional and identity-related dimensions of partnership'; regular reflective opportunities for both staff and students to look again at their roles. Such reflection enables a fluid and responsive – and especially trusting – relationship in a dynamic creative process.

A study – with focus on institutional culture, online learning and student expectations – into student academic and social engagement and sense of belonging at Heriot-Watt University involved three first-year undergraduate cohorts: traditional business and foundation year students and data science graduate apprentices. The authors of this piece, Judith Gorham, Saman Gule and Nicholas Telford work respectively with these groups. Data were gathered by means of an online survey and in-depth interviews with three students, one from each cohort. The findings confirm that successful integration depends a lot on interactive teaching, on whether the institution shows understanding of students' external commitments and on the availability of extra-curricular opportunities to build social networks. Evidence of the difficulties some students face in achieving 'belonging' leads the authors to recommend possible strategies to promote community and make both teaching and support responsive to variable student needs, such as relevant staff training, more active learning, peer mentoring and

targeting of identified disengagement. Student voice plays a powerful part in honing this message.

Scott Steele and John Parkin, of Anglia Ruskin University, present a study of a live-client brief embedded within a first-year contract law module – this brief illustrating authentic learning by means of student partnership in a co-creative context. Academic staff and the business partner first co-designed the brief to achieve disciplinary relevance and mutual benefit. Students, with an external business owner, analysed artificial intelligence-generated contracts used by the business and considered how they could be made legally binding. The study evaluates co-creation by examining how students experienced ownership, agency and accountability in a live assessment; it is formidably reasoned and set against a well-chosen background of literature; it emphasises the benefits and balances those with the understandable challenges and constraints before delineating future needs, such as deliberate scaffolding and institutional adjustment to respond to novel requirements and to sustain partnership models. Students valued the experience but had reservations and concerns about inequitable workload and contribution and variable confidence levels within groups, not to mention uncertainties about fairness in assessment.

Authors Saman Gule, Hebatallah Shoukry, Joy Perkins, Adnan Ilyas and Hanaa Gatta (Heriot-Watt University) provide an assessment and feedback study (carried out in the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences) that relates to work-based projects within the graduate apprentice programme, a Scottish learning pathway enabling acquisition of qualifications to degree level while being employed in the workplace. Such an approach, say the authors, depends on successful alignment of academic expectations and workplace challenges and on the effectiveness of the collaboration between apprentices, academic staff and work-based mentors. Thus they drew on the perspectives of both apprentices and mentors as well as on their own experiences and practices. Their findings emphasise clear assessment instructions, assessment rubrics that are robust, relevance to the workplace and the timing and quality of academic and mentor feedback; there is also acknowledgement of the power of genuine partnership and of the role of mentors in assessment. This paper is of considerable relevance to those engaged in work-integrated assessment and seeking to bridge the gap between education and employment.

Students' anxiety, failure to complete and the sense that their needs are not being met constitute a significant challenge to higher education. Academic literacies lecturers at University of Brighton explored how writing groups, as peer-learning communities of practice, might positively affect the way students felt about their role in learning. The relevant literature to date having focused on doctoral/post-doctoral levels, authors Theresa Clementson decided to apply the method to undergraduate and postgraduate learners, with their focus on process, empowerment and autonomy, especially for diverse learners, such as apprentices and mature students. The qualitative data from this research provides compelling proof of the efficacy of enabling students to help each other by encouraging peer talk about writing projects, suggesting strategies and answering questions. Responses revealed greater confidence and understanding of expectations... and that led to real joy in learning through safe collaborative problem-solving.

To enhance employability, authors Sue Beckingham and Myles Dempsey first established a students-as-partners project with final-year students in the School of Computing and Digital Technologies at Sheffield Hallam University, to co-create an 'employability enhancement

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toolkit', drawing on the latter's own experiences of enrichment activities, both co- and extra-curricular. The authors then held focus groups with second-year students in order to identify activity engagement barriers and enablers. They were therefore able to apply a toolkit carrying the authority of peer lived experiences of preparing for and undertaking a placement to support second-year confidence in action-planning and to improve take-up of enrichment opportunities. This study is a striking example of how powerfully positive it may be to harness in this way the acquired knowledge of peers to convince and encourage learners at an earlier stage; additionally, the authors recommend institutional understanding to reduce the barriers and adopt measures to help students to perceive how they may best make themselves employable.

Education/industry partnerships demand well-planned co-design by both sides. A reflective practice case study by Emma Connor and Jingyang Ai of University of Greenwich concerns an authentic, industry-embedded assessment involving the programme leader of a level 7 digital management marketing module and TikTok Shop's campaign and strategy manager, integrating the industry elements with educational requirements. It was a live brief, for students to analyse, consider and produce recommendations, not merely a simulation. The data were real, from a genuine campaign, the performance of which the students diagnosed to produce evidence-based recommendations. This paper presents a partnership meticulously thought through, with multi-dimensional authenticity, academic scrutiny of professional relevance, equitable access to practitioner support and explicit arrangements for data, roles and confidentiality. It sets a high standard of implementation principles for others to consider.

With a cogent and well-referenced argument, Amal Elamin of University of Greenwich challenges higher education institutions to place a proper value on student-led societies as hugely influential in 1) developing many of the skills and attributes demanded by the world of work and 2) establishing, across a very diverse student spectrum, a genuine sense of belonging, with all the profoundly influential effects on academic achievement, engagement, retention and outcomes this encourages. Such societies are still commonly viewed as optional and extra-curricular; they are usually neither intrinsic to academic programmes nor assessed. Participation in them gives students agency, identity and voice, all significant to their wellbeing and ultimately their success in employment. Yet their lack of formal status leads to inevitable inequalities: not all students are equally placed to join in. So, the author avers, greater consistency is required: more stable funding, more coordinated support, fairer access, more systematic evaluation of positive effects, clearer participation routes and a wider range of opportunities. These societies may continue to be voluntary, but their value must be fully and publicly recognised.