Digital education at Manchester Metropolitan University: responding to the global pandemic

Wednesday 19 May 2021

## Transcript

**Please note: This transcript has been auto-generated - we hope you find this useful, but as it is machine-transcribed it may contain inaccuracies.**

00:00:03.480 --> 00:00:13.349

SK: Well, good morning everyone it's a great pleasure to welcome you all here today, to our building digital capability and digital experience insights community of practice event.

00:00:13.980 -->

SK: we're delighted to see so many of you joining us from across the UK and also some international colleagues that we have with us today, and it gives me great pleasure as well to be introducing this event in collaboration with Manchester Metropolitan University. And we are going to be hearing from our colleagues at Manchester Metropolitan University shortly in terms of the keynote that we have this morning, but a very, very warm welcome.

SK: I’m Sarah Knight I’m head of learning and teaching transformation in the higher education directorate at Jisc and I’m going to be your co-facilitator today, in the main room with Lisa Gray, who is our senior consultant for learning and teaching. So we will be doing a short introduction, just to make sure everyone is familiar with the platform that we're using. I’m sure many of you have used Zoom frequently but just to double check that you are familiar with the tools we’re going to be using today. So just a reminder, we have got the chat window and for those of you that are joining us, please do share your name your role and your organisation in the chat window.

We do ask that everyone mute their microphones apart from those that are speaking just to ensure that we have got no feedback coming through. And we will be using the Q and A for adding in questions during the course of the sessions, if you have got any burning questions for our speakers, please do add them into the Q and A.

which is just the window, box at bottom or top of your screen and if you do want to take the Mic please do use the raise hand function to do so. So we've mentioned about using a Mic if you do want to take the Mic and ask a question, it does help in terms of just making sure the clarity the sound is working well. In the chat just remember, there is a little function there that allows you to send messages to the panellists but equally we'd encourage you, if you do want to send messages and share your reflections to all the delegates just use the dropdown panel and the window box that says all panellists and attendees.

We will be recording the sessions that have taken place and in the main plenary sessions in this room, and we will be making those recordings available after the event.

So, today is a day for sharing practice, we have some fantastic speakers, who again will be sharing their experiences around how their organisations are enhancing students staff and organisational digital capability.

We know with the current context that we are still working within, the challenges that we've all been facing over the past 12 months, and those are still continuing in terms of planning for the next academic year. So today is about gathering approaches sharing practice in relation to how we can really support our staff and students with the development in their digital skills and ensuring that they have a high-quality learning experience. Whether that be hopefully moving back to some face to face in September but also recognising the blend that is still going to be in place.

And it really is an opportunity for sharing your ideas and practice as well, and we do hope the sessions, that we have got in place today are going to enable you to do that.

A quick run through of the agenda today and, importantly, to note that we will be starting with our keynote which I’ll be introducing shortly.

We will be having some breakout sessions, and we will be asking you to make your selection of those breakout sessions shortly in a quick poll. And we will also, of course, be having the opportunity of hearing some Member stories from the Community, this afternoon after lunch break I’m afraid it is bring your own sandwiches today. We have to have our virtual lunches I’m afraid and networking and after our session we have got the second keynote and we're delighted to have the City of Wolverhampton College sharing their experiences with us. And then we have a further breakout session this afternoon, though it is a packed agenda and we do hope you'll enjoy the day with us.

Now at this point we're going to launch our polls, just to get an idea of numbers for the individual breakout sessions that were having this afternoon. And this morning, so Lisa would you kindly share the first poll, if you are able to select the session in the morning that you're going to be attending and that's building digital skills for employability into the curriculum and the second session is on Benchmarking online learning and that's an update on NUS Jisc benchmarking tool, so if you're able to make your choice.

And then we're able to just capture a snapshot of how those sessions are looking in terms of numbers. Lisa did you want to share them back with us. Thank you and we just want to launch the second poll for our afternoon session, where we've got. Lisa, do you want to see if we can get the second one going. Where you’ve got a choice of either digital wellbeing or developing subject specific digital capabilities.

I don’t think we’re able to get that second poll - no the second poll isn’t coming up so right we'll skip that one, but please do think about which session you're going to be selecting for this afternoon.

Just moving on then to our next slide and little bit further information about the sessions that we're going to be running and since the breakout sessions as we've mentioned, if you are looking to join the second session the benchmarking the online learning experience, please do make a note of the Google Doc that we're going to be using in that session and make sure you're able to access it prior to the session starting at 11.10.

And we will be putting the links into the chat window so you've got just to make a note of and then for our afternoon sessions running at 2.20 will again have got some padlets that up there for digital wellbeing session and for our subject specific digital capabilities, we have got a link there to a Trello board and that's if you do have a Trello account, it is worth just checking that you're able to access that Trello board, because that will just give you the functionality to be able to edit and

comment on that activity, if you don't have a Trello account, please don't worry we'll be using padlets to collect the same information from that activity, the links would just be in the chat for you to make notes.

So, with the event today one of the things that we're always keen to do is to hear from yourselves in terms of what your aims and objectives are for this event. What is the one thing you are hoping to take away from today's meeting and, if you would like to add that, to the chat window, while I continue sharing some information updates, please do it's always great to see how we can ensure that the event does meet your aims and objectives for the day.

00:07:54.540 -->

SK: So, very briefly, a few slides in relation to news and updates from our digital capability work and our digital experience insights work that we've been doing over the past six months. Just a reminder for our digital capability service we are working with a range of organisations to support them with the development of their digital capabilities of their staff and students.

And today, the community of practice is an opportunity of sharing that work wider and also hearing how you, whether you work in a college or university, are supporting the development of your staff and students digital capabilities, so very much feeds into the work that we're doing around the service.

Within our service we're working with 89 organizations of which we're working with 37 colleges and 42 universities in the UK and for international universities. We are using a discovery tool which is a self-reflective tool to support staff and students with their self-assessment of their digital scale. And we have now worked with over 32,000 users of the discovery tool, who have completed over 31,000 questions that's roughly split between staff and students, so we are able to see how those trends in relation to the digital capabilities of staff and students are developing and evolving over time. And importantly information that those organisations are able to use to support their students and staff development skills.

And we're delighted to have worked with Weston College, who have been sharing their experiences of implementing the discovery tool within Weston College and how they're using and working with us to develop the skills of their staff and students.

We are working on and updating our HE teacher role profile and our learner profile in the context of the online learning context that we've been working within so this will be coming through shortly from our website. We're also, the purpose of today's session is also to gather ideas and feedback into how we can support building digital capability into the curriculum, and we’ll be hearing more from Helen in this afternoon in relation to that area.

So the breakout sessions that we've designed today are really there to actually support and develop the work that we're doing in these areas and how we can really ensure that the requirements that you have feed into our developments going forward. Wellbeing is a topic that we're looking at today and really looking forward to Jane’s session this afternoon and sharing the work they're doing University of Manchester and we have to serve as a reminder some excellent briefing papers that are available from our website and also Jiscmail lists, in addition to our Community list on digital capability, so a few links there just to make you know if you're not already a member of our Community, and would like to have more information in relation to the work we're doing.

Moving on to our digital experience insights, a few quick slides in relation to how we have been working with colleges and universities to gather the views of their staff and students in relation to their digital experience. Never has that been more important as this year and we're delighted to say that we have this year, our largest number of students responses to our students’ surveys. We've been working with we've been able to gather over 63,000 student responses from across further and higher education.

Those numbers aren't included in that stat there, which just shows you the volume of responses that we've been gathering from organisations, since we've been working with them, since 2016. And, of course, a very powerful evidence base to inform the national context in relation to how students and staff are experiencing the online environment. But also importantly to help institutions at the local level to baseline and benchmark their practices, particularly in light of planning for the next academic year and the changes that may need to be in place to support an effective student and staff digital experience.

And just a reminder, if you haven't seen those already we published and briefings in March in relation to the snapshot of the first data that we collected between October and December 2020 for our students. We've just been analysing a subsequent quite catch the data between January and March to see if there were any significant differences in the trends that we were observing.

And of course we are at the moment analysing that very large data set of quantitative and qualitative data. So please do have a look at our briefings both briefing for FE and one for HE that delve down into how we can ensure that we are supporting learners effective online learning experiences.

So we will be publishing the findings from our current analysis for our 2021 students service and September. Our teaching staff professional service and staff research and surveys and still underway, and they will be published and analysed later this year.

And a reminder, if you do want to find out more about how you can run the service and your own college or university, please, to get in touch with us and, of course, the Community mailing list is free for you to join.

Student partnerships has been a theme that we have been working on ingest over the past eight years, and again it's been a very valuable way of ensuring innovation, the curriculum is driven forward and takes into account the views of our students we're delighted to share to be working with Keele University. And they will be hosting the Eighth Annual students staff partnership conference on the first to fourth of June. Registration is open the programme is available and there's four days packed full of presentations. Sharing how students and staff have been collaborating on curriculum innovation, and please do have a look at that if you're interested in joining us.

And also delighted to say that through the CAN network, the journal of educational innovation, partnership and change which again has been evolving since the initiation of the network launched its seventh volume, which is enriching BAME staff-student partnerships in higher education it's a fantastic set of papers. Co-authored by a previous CAN student partner and co-edited by Simon Walker from UCL and really delighted to see that come to fruition so definitely recommend that something to promote with your colleagues and follow up on.

Very briefly, for those in higher education, if you haven't seen our new Jisc strategy on powering HE then please do have a look at that it's a very useful document in setting the agenda that we will be working on within Jisc and supporting higher education going forward around those four key themes. And it has also been a useful document to engage with your leadership teams in thinking about the importance of technology within the context that we're currently working within. And likewise a similar initiative that we've been working on with further education in partnership with AoC in relation to shaping the digital future and, of course, the FE and skills strategy, which was published towards the end of earlier this year as well.

And new and just a note, as we have a session around employability that RH and MS are going to be leading us through shortly. An updated employability toolkit is now available from Jisc website, we know that employability, especially is a core agenda at the moment for our students and that is a very useful guide in relation to current practice and highlighting some of the issues and challenges and solutions that we're working on in that space, as well as around table events that is being hosted by just on the ninth of June.

And at that point, it gives me great pleasure to now hand over to Professor Mark Stubbs and Professor Helen Laville. We have very fond memories of working with Manchester Metropolitan University since the early days of what was then the Jisc e-learning Programme.

Professor Mark Stubbs, director learning and research technologies unit at Manchester Metropolitan University and Professor Helen Laville was formerly Pro Vice Chancellor for education since May of 2016 and has recently taken up a very exciting post as provost at Kingston University.

So we are really delighted to welcome Mark and Helen here today to share their journey around digital education at Manchester Met. And I know it's a fascinating journey that we have been following your journey as it's unfolded so I’m really looking forward to handing over to you for the session, thank you.

00:17:10.860 -->

MS: Thanks so much for that warm introduction I’ll just put this on presentation mode and we should be away. Hopefully, you can see that we are cooking on gas as they say?

SK: Perfect Mark, thank you. We have got some I’m not sure if you want to just share your window because I’m seeing it as a presenter view.

MS: Sure, the actual window then.

SK: might be easier okay screen size for the size to come through, perfect.

MS: working. Right.

00:17:57.720 -->

MS: Well, thanks so much for the opportunity to present this morning, I mean you know there were some awful stories from the pandemic and I think what we wanted to do today was just share some practice with this, you know this incredible community about what we've been through and to draw some lessons from that. And these are only a couple of perspectives, mine from the IT side and Helen’s from the education side of it. Helen would you like to set the scene?

HL: I will, and thank you for inviting me it's a delight to be here and to see you again my former colleagues Mark and Rod and Emily. And Rachel I think on the call as well, and also see some my new colleagues from Kingston who've joined us so it's really lovely to be able to be part of this and take this opportunity to reflect it's actually quite hard to reflect at the moment because we don't feel this is in the rear view mirror yet, I mean I know all of us out there are thinking we're still obviously in this and we're still looking forward.

But I do think it's a good time and there's always a benefit and then historian by trading there's always a benefit to looking back and learning some lessons from that So if I can take us all back from to the January to May period of the emerging pandemic before that pandemic hit Manchester met was a university that taught mainly on campus.

We did have a few online provision some courses that were online quite successfully but it's quite a nice offering the vast majority of our courses were campus based, of course, we supplemented face to face teaching with digital materials we have Moodle sites that were very, very strong we use digital technologies in the classroom and we didn't work out some stuff but the majority things that we did was on campus including face to face meetings with tutors, including our professional service offering around students wellbeing and careers, you know it was vast majority that was face to face place based and, in fact, one of the principles of our strategic framework is that we were we are Manchester

We were very rooted in the Manchester campus we have a lovely, fantastic campus and we were very proud of it and we kind of like really did focus a lot on being in that space so every day, staff and students came to university to work, fantastic work spaces there, again the Business School wonderfully art school terrific workspaces. And it didn't really cross our minds, perhaps to think about them not coming in.

And the social space was there we've done a lot of work around sticky campus we had a lot of commuting students, we wanted to encourage them to come in and to work in those spaces. And the digital systems were there for extra support and for some assessments and obviously we've made some moves towards digital, increasing digital technologies, particularly the science and engineering faculty are really innovated around digital video recordings about assessment briefs, for example, and we've done a lot of work to think about how that made that sort of extra information more accessible to students and how students found it much easier to click on a five minute video of a tutor talking about the assessment than to go through the bullet point descriptions that was a bit hard to understand, so we started to do some small work in that in that area but, but you know, we were not. As digital as we were to quickly become and then, of course, that the global pandemic across the country to locked down extremely rapidly.

And again, the extent to which we should have known that was coming perhaps or something we might want to mull over, but you know I remember in early March still thinking, quite a lot of us still thought it was an overreaaction to be talking about the whole campus closing down and when it did close down, you know the conversation was happening when we might have to do exams online, the idea that this would go on for as long as it has wasn't something that was really many of us were really thinking about, but we did happen, we had to close our campus very, very quickly. We knew quite you know, we could see it coming from a little bit so we accelerated some of the on-campus stuff we needed to do assessments that had to be face to face we did move some things around kind of racing to the finish line for when it would have to happen, but then it was closed, and we have to move everything online.

At the end of the story was that we did by then we got through this we got through the period of the end of the year, very early on our commitment is to getting students through with robust academic outcomes and not expecting anybody to pause because it wasn't clear when they'd be able to resume. And so we had to get our digital systems up and running so that staff and students could deliver those things, and that we needed to build those supportive communities that will enable people to react, a situation that nobody had ever been in before.

So, how did we collectively build a community to deliver such a huge task and had a little have the confidence to let people know we thought we could do this, we have this so shall we move on to the next slide.

MS: Thanks Helen so perhaps if I give a little bit of what was going on behind the scenes, with all of that. I mean reflecting on it, I think we were very fortunate to be building on some pretty strong foundations we've got the university wide VLE with kind of personalised assessment and timetables kind of things that. Sarah pointed out that we've been working together with Jisc colleagues, for a long time on we've got a responsive set of it partners on hand as well, which proved very useful.

We had sort of mature single sign on we've got a you know, a helpline capability that was able to cope with volume and triage calls. We had, and you know I’m very grateful to colleagues are on the call right now, you know, a very mature and well embedded TEL function with strong intelligence about the student on staff experience and you know.

Sorry Helen, but we have very effective education leadership as well you know a good system of heads of education in the faculties, providing that kind of link to translate key messages and although you know, it was a shock we had the partnership with Wuhan, so we had colleagues on the ground, which gave us a bit of a heads up. And we were able to sort of start to put the gold incident team together early.

And do some scenario planning, I took out some been through the old emails to put these slides together, and it was really interesting to see what exactly when we started this scenario, planning and what we pulled out as a priority you know we know we've been doing some stuff about assessment. But we needed to increase resilience quickly and we needed to be better able to

support remote working so that when it actually came, we activated that plan, we did have some panic when the equivalent of the toilet roll panic buying with licenses for synchronous tools and various other things.

I think most of the part for the most part we're able to accelerate plans, but I think the tough thing was staying ahead of the messaging there was so many rumours about what we should do, or shouldn't do, and I think that might have been one of the sort of takeaway messages about how we stay ahead of an evolving situation, I think.

The other thing that we did was we scaled we moved to Moodle very, very quickly to the cloud and dial it up to 11 so that it could really cope with a sort of peaks that that we found some then, as you say you know we did get through, we were able to preserve the sort of academic standards, by the way

that you know we handled the assessment, which I thought was a particular strength, but that was just about surviving like the first base, I think you know when we took a breather after the exam boards, you know, I don't know how you felt it at your level what it felt like there.

00:25:45.360 --> 00:25:52.170

HL: yeah, I mean it was quite an early we did a lot of immediate response and I remember quite early our VC saying to me have you started planning for next year and I was honestly indignant that he would ask me that, in the middle of all this. I was like I’m too busy I’m too busy to do that, but you know I went away and walked around the garden swearing for a little bit and then came back in. And realised, he was quite right, we didn't need to start thinking ahead, and again I think one of the reasons that that was quite a quick transformation I didn't sulk for more than an hour on that question was exactly what Mark said we did have very, very solid foundations, and I was enormously cheered and had a huge boost of confidence from the fact that our systems and our networks work we've done a lot of work before this happened to make sure that we had a very, very good set of relationships.

We did education and reviews that I brought in meant that I felt I knew all my heads of education or my department heads. And that they all need the professional services teams who are there to help them, so I think that network of extremely welcome strong connections got us through things so I felt we had a lot of had a lot of confidence in our foundations, and then they got us through the emergency so that they would still say robust. So that gave us the confidence, I think, to start that energy that we needed to start thinking about what was going to happen.

And of course we were all very tired, because the effort to do all this have been tremendous, I mean if you think about all of the things we have to do we have a very, very fantastic art school and fashion show and moving that assessment and those shows online, it was a huge piece of work and people were tired people were uncertain.

There were massive gulfs between people who, when you think about April may time people who thought that everything would be back to normal between September by September and people, we thought it would not. That that's a big goal, those are basic assumptions that were not shared and that people you know genuinely had very strong opinions about what we should be doing and what might be wasted efforts and what was overly pessimistic about was overly optimistic, so there wasn't much to build on that sort of uncertainty.

And you know we didn't know that as well, these new students would be joining us. And they would have had a rough ride their A Levels have been disrupted, so their entry into university was going to be very challenging.

And we need to think about that they wouldn't have the confidence piece that they might have from getting a level results so induction would be different, the whole challenge and he'll scenario was different than, of course nobody knew what was going to happen around student number, where we'd have to manage, and it all started to look quite difficult and challenging so we knew that we need to work on learning communities and how we do that students were able to come onto campus early. We knew that that needs to be a mix, but we also need that mix might change, again, I think we started off by saying, well, it might be tricky in September, but it will gradually ease up over the year.

And then we realised that that wasn't the case that it might start off well and then have to go to lock down and then it might pick up, and it would be uneven. So we need to be able to have a very, very rapid flip between online and on campus we'd have to be able to that very quickly, because we might not have much notice that would need to happen. And we need to think through the Community that sat behind those changes that's stacatto way of studying how to keep the threads going. Not all students whatever situation, it became quickly apparent will be able to come on campus international students, particularly would struggle, students who might be shielding or have health reasons they might have to come, even if we were able to offer campus teaching they might not be able to manage that.

And we knew that the quality of their experience was paramount, so we drew up a set of principles really about how we might take things forward what was the best interest for students and which is five bullet points really about what we were trying to do, and it was things like the teaching experience is really important at quality, but we can only ask what's reasonable of staff as well, but we have to be cognisant of the work stuff have already done and we can't ask them to give more than capable of given situation we're in.

With the next slide.

HL: So this is a metaphor, I used with Mark, and I said, this is what planning was like is that you couldn't think far ahead, you could like think of your day ahead.

And we were just like solving the next little bit of the puzzle before, but the train was speeding along, and we were trying to keep ourselves going. So one of the things we did at Man Met that which was which I’m extremely proud of, because I think it speaks to kind of institution we were in terms of being quite radical, flexible and all in on something and getting the buy in was that we decided to move to an intensive block teaching approach for the coming up academic year, and I say I’m very proud of this, because I did a lot of work around a bit, but it wasn't my idea. Full confession it came from Mark and Rachel who's on this call, and also Clare our very talented head of education in health psychology and social care and they came up with this idea that well actually what we do for some postgraduate courses is we teach in blocks. So instead of doing lots of lots of courses at the same time, three or four courses they do one thing intensively and then they move on to the next. And there were lots of advantages to that and logistically and then that students will not mixing basically it gave us a lot more control over how many students were mixing in different groups.

It gave us a lot of clarity we were only trying to timetable access for that group of students. And so the idea was we could do this for everybody that all our students whatever year they were in a sale very nearly all would be doing one university time. And that we could then work out what on campus opportunities we can offer them and that simplified all of our processes and we quite quickly worked out with again our brilliant timetable and colleagues who worked out that we could offer we hoped, a three-hour block for every programme for every year on campus and then the rest will be online so because we simplified like that, we were able to be quite clear quite early and we think that was a good method and again because of the strength of relationships people bought into that.

I could see why we were doing that and so whilst it did up the asking away because we're not just saying oh it's online, we were also saying to academic colleagues it's online and that thing you taught over 12 weeks now must be taught over six. So it was a big ask, but people could see the logic behind it and they responded to. Shall we move on?

MS: Thanks Helen, so the amount of work, you put into sort of just getting that message across to academic colleagues, providing the opportunity for them to give feedback on how this might be best operationalised.

Now, I think that was a really important part of the response I took that you know that sort of message that you've been sharing the academic community and sort of trying to translate that back from you know my sort of IT and TEL colleagues. You know, stressing that we were going to be moving at a pace we needed to boost that kind of communication collaboration or remote practice the things that have come out from this scenario planning exercise.

You know, we knew we had some gaps around our technical capabilities in those areas so that would be important work to do, for some time, but we made the decision with Sue, as you mentioned that we don't know quite what the future holds, but we do know, we need to be very, very clear about it from a time saving perspective because that will really shape and drive the feel of the place so structuring the academic delivery decisions around time tabling so that we can flex based on timetabling data was a sort of core principle that we adopted.

I think the other thing we were acutely aware of as well, was just that big ask of academic colleagues and trying to do everything we could to reduce the burden for them, so you know not expecting people to be setting up all their meetings in teams or zoom or whatever it was you know, can we take that kind of burden away so that academic colleagues can focus on the you know the business of learning and supporting our students.

So, building on those tools that academics are already familiar with like Moodle we wanted to top up the sort of digital workplace element to create that flatter more collaborative dimension, hence bringing in teams which we didn't have at the time when we were kicking this all off.

And one of the other things I emphasised really was that the block approach was about innovating through the year. You know, we have second block where we get better and the third block where we get better still, in the fourth where we get better again. And trying to emphasise that this was a journey taken in partnership with the academic and professional services community was so important to making this a success. So looking actually behind the scenes you know yes, we were all on Teams now, but we were starting to work you know, by the end of May, everyone was on Skype and we just said, well, we need some kind of digital education project to get this all delivered so things move very, very quickly after those block teaching briefings and we, we decided that we would integrate Teams with our timetabling system so that if things changed

we would automatically create all the meetings online and be able to work data stack and student timetables, based on that. That wasn't something that existed, you know there wasn't a capability, we could buy off the shelf, we had to sit down write a spec for that, find you know, a partner who could step up and help us and work with our internal capability and we had some very, very intense project management to make that all a success.

At the same time, we knew we also needed to give our students remote access to a number of pieces of software, whether it was with virtual labs or some of the software that they would normally come onto campus to use, we knew we need the remote solutions for that. So you now this slide just sets out just some of the work that colleagues were doing month by month to put this in in place, I think it's just quite useful to see just how many different strands of work we're moving forward simultaneously to try and establish those principles that we don't we put in place to try and reduce the burden for academic colleagues but create a supportive collaborative Community for our students.

So by September now we had managed to have timetables integrated with Teams, we've got the virtual labs in place, we had a software download centre where students would download software that they normally would have come onto campus for with remote access.

We would set up for a blend of covid secure on campus sessions, as many as we could manage safely for students, but you know organised online and arranged around that block teaching model and teaching began, and we had that incredible sort of never seen before digital usage. Moodle got, I think the technical term is battered you know 1.8 million hits in the first week we created 20,000 Teams meetings, students were able to access packages and there were some teething problems, you know the move to blocked teaching was incredibly fast.

And we had some challenges getting students onto the right blocks and which built up a bit of a backlog and our helpline us which took a bit of time to clear. We knew that despite our sort of spider man guidance on there with great power comes great responsibility, the fact we haven't been able to separate the presenter attendee rights from our timetabled meetings might make for a little bit of fun for students and sure enough, it did.

But we you know we we've spotted that one and we've been liaison with Microsoft about putting it in, and we were making some you know running repairs, but it was also going well we've got students on campus and then you know the headlines hit, and I think you had the call from Public Health England Helen, it was interesting times I think Helen do you want to say anything about.

HL: Yes, we did I mean I think you've set that up nicely Mark that in the narrative of things we thought Okay, this is okay, we can do this, it was like that bit of the end of the movie where you think it's all going to resolve but everyone’s wait a minute there's still 20 minutes to go there's going to be a twist and there was a shock twist which I suppose wasn't really a shock now on kind of like yeah that was going to happen.

We have worked very hard to make campus secure, like many of you, and really it wasn't the campus that was an issue it was it was residences that caused a problem. Because we had started our terms so early, it was very early, I think, several of my colleagues at other universities really thanked me for us taking the brunt of this in the national press because we became a little bit of the poster boy for this, because we were one of the first to go through it and a lot of other universities. This happened a week down the line for them, but this you know there were a surge in covid cases amongst our students and

we were the first go through this, it was quite challenging no one quite knew what to do with this.

Public Health England weren't quite sure what to do with this. We work very closely with Greater Manchester as well, but you know it was something that we were all struggling to come to terms with. But in order to try and get on top of this, this growth in cases. Well, first of all, many of our students started self-isolating yes, it was very much associated with first years in halls. A lot of them and started to self-isolate and had a very slick way of reporting to us that they were doing that, but it is

having an impact on teaching that so many students were self-isolating the first year and then we were essentially we discussed this and we were agreed that we would move our first year teaching all online, and this was about I think three weeks into the first block mark I’m thinking yeah so they had about three weeks on campus and then we moved all the first year online go to the next slide is probably what I want here. Yeah. I wasn't so I just wanted to sorry speak to that a little bit I think speaks back to the point I made earlier about agility though yeah the speed with which we did that was astonishing.

And so I think it's something I mean it's in the thousands 6000 modules is making some ridiculously high announce that we're timetabled to happen on campus. And within an hour, they were all showing up in students timetables personal expenses, as on can online sessions with something for them to click. So there was no need for staff to intervene to email, it was no need for any of that to be set up, it was all done absolutely astonishing me quickly so that rapidity was really was really impressive I think so.

That was really impressive and the second thing that we needed to do that, I think we had to build that digital capabilities around was how do we support students if they’re not coming on to campus.

So a lot of self-isolating students understandably were worried, they were first years they'd left home, and then they were being asked to isolate in their rooms and it's quite frightening and isolating for them, and so digital again came to the fore in terms of supporting our students.

We have a really fantastic programme called RISE and the leader did loads of work to sort of get students involved, we sent them ukuleles we sent them food packages. We did online classes, we did, and that was impressive, I would say, also share the limitations of things. And the students IT and tried really hard with this to get online quizzes and things going. You know, but some of the feedback I got the students were like what we appreciate it, you know you're making us feel that you're caring about as you're thinking about us. But we just don't want to look at screen anymore we're doing our classes we're doing you know and that kind of burnout of trying to provide both learning and social activities remotely was really difficult, so I think why some of those deliveries, we did around craft projects to allow students to do something physical was actually really important and book clubs, because that was a message that it's okay to switch a computer off and do something that involves something slightly less boring instead, that my why don't you reference there, so shows my age, so they, we needed to do that, and that was, I think, really important.

MS: I think that's really important to pick that out, and I think also you know the peer assisted learning support that we're able to bring him in was well for the students was really valuable, I think. You know, we rehearsed for this, but actually getting that call on the Friday night and knowing that we needed to flip 10,000 timetables. You know, and the fact it succeeded under an hour was an amazing sort of thing, but it was a bit to sort of scary watching it and hoping it was all going to work.

I think what it showed us there was we did have that kind of capability and we had to use it several times, then through the year, where we had some move all the undergrad and postgrad teaching online eventually. I think what it also meant was this the block teaching approach enabled us to be trying to make things better for each block, so we were learning as we went you know this, the fact that a lot more was going to be online, we need to boost our tracking capabilities for online, so that we could identify those students who are struggling and get the support in place.

Now you know there wasn't a capability at the time for tracking teams attendance, so we had to build one and we had to get that data out to colleagues. I think we saw that students and you know we're struggling to submit, so our procedures for that needed to be tweaked and it was that kind of learning and responding all through that. And we know we did survey the students about their experience and you know Rod and Kate and colleagues have spent a lot of time looking at that and learning what we can from that which will find an opportunity to share.

And just picking up the final bits towards the end and through the next sort of after the mid-season break around Christmas, it was all about what can we bring forward that we wanted to do see more of what can we consolidate, how can we improve on what can we can sort of prepare to be ready for future scenarios, which I think finally brought us to kind of towards the end of the story Arc where we are right now, you know with our university and setting out its road to 2030 and you know we are a strong place based institution. And it's what can we learn from this, how does it feed in. You know we've made the decision early doors, that we will continue with that block the teaching approach.

So that there's continuity there's consistency colleagues know where they stand, but it also creates the space to listen and reflects you know, is it was that right what can we learn how could it be better. So there's a sort of consultation being planned around that I think the points, we put in at the end, around the six seasons and a movie question mark a really, really interesting point to finish on, you know this.

Yes, and I think just yesterday, the Guardian pick this up didn't they have a story that some universities are planning to do the lectures online and there's so much that you can dislike. You know the press has a particular they think that all university teaching is lectures. And they always have and they don't understand that, so you know it's a kind of facile way of thinking about it, but the responses to it and the feedback to it, and I was listening to a couple of students talking on the radio

just yesterday yeah it does for me this question of what blended look like and how we think about it in terms of the value of it, because I think there is no question in my mind, but students, even when they enjoy online believe it should be cheaper. It's very hard to get them to see that as being contact and if you can remember a few years ago comedy contact as we've delivered became the proxy for the value of what we do and how much University fees should be charged and if you just start to look at that discussion. And that idea of what you move online and how you do that value is, I think, going to be a really pressing one for the sector in the next year and one that's already starting to arise, so I think there's going to be a really challenging and interesting year for us ahead for the for the health sector.

MS: Well, hopefully, that gives us a point to give an opportunity for question Sarah does it matter objective in terms of timing.

SK: that's perfect Mark and thank you Mark and Helen for sharing such insightful if you around the journey that you've been on, and you know.

Those slides hide the wealth of work, and you know planning and organization and infrastructure, obviously there's been that support that and can we JH can we check I know we've got some questions in the Q and A which we can perhaps start with.

But also, if anyone would like to raise their hand and take the MIC please do if you raise your hand JH will be able to do.

If you right to take the MIC so if anyone is keen to do that, please do, but in the meantime, and the first question we've got there.

Perhaps one for you Mark is did you encourage staff and students to use the Moodle APP or did you try and make Moodle as a web responsive as possible for web browser viewing. Did you find many people would with were digitally left behind because of the lack of devices?

MS: that's a really good point now we tried to make a Moodle as responsive as possible, rather than relying on the APP we do have a mobile APP that we you know, provide for free to all our students to try and make access as simple as possible, but I think one of the things that's come through really, really strongly in the analysis of the student comments is really students experience of their teaching was very much shaped by their own personal circumstances, the tools they had available, the time they had available, the other things that were going on in their lives, while they were trying to trying to learn. You know the experience of someone who had a dedicated decent bandwidth connection with a you know reasonable powered laptop, in in a quiet study bedroom was very, very different from one of our material learners who was trying to you know home-school at the same time as.

Sharing that one device with others and we know, whilst we put in place a whole range of support mechanisms in terms of getting wi-fi boosters out to people, you know sort of wi-fi adapter things. You know I think there's there is some real lessons about how the pandemic expose some of the inequalities and those would manifest in the digital estate, so I think there were some lessons around that.

Thank you, Mark and just can't keep up with all the questions are coming in now and we've got another question there and does anyone think the pandemic force to teaching learning online will help higher education to move towards a more blended model.

HL: I mean, yes I think I think it comes back to my question, but for what, l and we can't just say blended is a good model. You know I think we have to start to think about what we're trying to do when blended and it is really complex and it hits across you know that we have different groups of students and a lot of students have talked about you know commuting students have talked about the availability and how that makes them feel. At, so I think it will make it will make us more blended, why do you think we need to be really kind of careful about and that's why I’m kind of like.

caveat saying that that newspaper article and thinking about that sense of what is it students get from online learning what they get from place to place, I mean there's a lot of death of the lecture stuff happening in the moment, and again I think that that's quite narrow, I think we think of lectures sometimes we using the term to mean person going on at all and just being boring and droning stage on the stage approach when actually what we mean is mass teaching events which can be engaging which can be exciting, which brings people together that gives them a reason to come into campus rather than stay home, so I think the whole seeing all of this teaching is part of the whole student

ethos, the ecosystem of education is what we need to do, and so I think you know we can't shouldn't assume blended for its own just because we need to think why we're doing it that way what's the best delivery method sorry about the noise.

MS: And perhaps a shout out today white's recent post thinking about what some of this means, particularly for the practice based. You know subjects, you know the arts and you know the real issues there about what presence means in terms of joining a Community modelling practice, etc, which I think are really important and a nuance to capture in there.

SK: I think there's two important points, to stress there and I think you know it goes back to that old statement we used to make around don't use technology just for technology's sake, you know it's looking and understanding and learners looking at the subject disciplinary and looking at that sense of Community mark that I think you're referencing to there and that connectedness to the university So yes, absolutely really critical points they're.

SK: Following I’m.

SK: Sorry HL

HL: I think it's interesting to reflect on the fact that, when we bring in lecture capture you don't see the catastrophic fall in the lecture attendance that you predict, and I know what my experience either whispering once we have so many students in one room, so we live cast of it to the second lecture room and students tend to get up early to be in the live event, even though that was being live streamed, as I said, there is something about them coming onto campus for lectures. And they use lecture capture to refresh and to go over it, but, that being in that room. And when it's a good, well delivered lecture means a lot to people so again I’m not saying that it's never great that flip lectures pedagogy is more of that it's good but it's and I think one concept said it means a lot of things.

And I think we have to be a bit more clear about what that is.

And also it's very, very easy to talk about well this will shift as to active learning instead of passive learning but active learning is really hard work, and students often resist it and academics often give it up, not because it's bad, but because it's exhausting. And students can be quite difficult sometimes they see passive learning and they often feel that they're learning, even when they're not so I think it's a really complex issue as well, I think it's really important to get those nuances up sorry and.

SK: You haven't and following on from that is this two very similar questions that have come through in relation to supporting staff and students with the development of a digital scale and how you have ensured that staff are having those opportunities to develop their skills and any learning that you have from that.

MS: I think that's really is so important that we call that out Sarah I mean you know when you when you reflect on that timeline and you see just how late those sorts of developments arrived and the fact they arrived it's all over that place is amazing, but they did arrive late for academic perspective, so it was tough for academic colleagues and I’m sure the digital insights survey will reflect that but, so there are real lessons here about how we can support our colleagues and just again, reflecting, just as it was for our students, that the pandemic was felt differently, based on individual circumstances, so it was for our academic colleagues and the amount of space they had or the level of familiarity with teaching did in a digital way that they were bringing to this sudden change was really important to sort of factor into the mix so there's a there's a lot of lessons and that will be a really important for adding what goes forward for our road to 2030.

SK: Thank you, mark and probably time for one final question or there's more in the question arts and then, I know, perhaps we could ask you perhaps during the breaks just pop in and answer some of the ones we didn't pick up on and there's interesting one there around what was the feedback from students regarding block teaching. And we were saying we have mixed feedback from both staff and students when they say university.

HL: It is mixed someone referred to as a bit like marmite. Some students absolutely love it, it depends on you know first is have never known anything different. For us so and some of them are horrified at the idea, they might have to study more blocks, at the same time. There is benefits to the intensity I’ve had feedback from staff and students saying it's great to be able to just focus on one topic. I feel that means I’ve got more in depth learning and then others will say the fact that we've already got six weeks we feel like we're kind of getting to grips with it and then it's over. And that's, not to say anything really, really radically depends, and it is a problematic thing, because when we've asked for student these on block learning what we're often getting back as their views on online learning.

Because we're asking them about their experience of block, but their experience with block has been blocked online stressful, all of the things that go around with it, so the reason we kind of decided at my neck to keep going with it next year was really to start to get to grips with some of those things and get those views to think about where it works and where it doesn't. To build it again, we were asking as MS said I think it's absolutely right, the fact is four blocks, we were doing different things in each one so gathering experience at the first block.

You know, maybe not the fairest way to go, but I think it will always be the case that it's not it's not straightforward different disciplines will have different views and different learning styles different personalities have different views on it, and so I think it's a fascinating. Massive institutional experiments and I’m absolutely can't wait to hear how the consultation goes. I can't wait to hear that consultation goes, because people have and, again, the important thing is very legitimate views, no one is just going I don't want to do this because I’m stuck in my ways, people are legitimate differences of opinions about it. And some of those things will be mitigated by us not being in a pandemic and being able to do things differently, but some of them wouldn't sometimes when somebody says philosophy, you need at least 12 weeks to really understand. That may be true, it may be that it lends itself more to skills based and kind of getting to grips with the genre rather than developing that longer term reflections, so I think that piece going forward will be really interesting.

SK: I think, as you say, having that that whole consultation evaluation of what's worked what you're taking forward in terms of those enhancements will be very, very interesting to be able to reflect on and, MS you know, we hope that we can have that you back at a future event so to share how this journey continues to evolve and the learning that you have been so willing to share with us today.

And if I can just ask advice, those that are panellists perhaps they're just to unmute yourself well as speakers, but just to give her a virtual round of applause, because that was a fabulous session, and you know as you've seen from the questions or comments in the chat people have found it so valuable to have that learning so we'll do a show round of applause. Thank you very much.

SK: we're breaking for the coffee break, we will be returning at 11.10 in the main room, so please go and get a virtual cup of coffee and we'll see you back shortly, thank you.