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KEY CHALLENGES

# A Silver Lining

## Revitalising impacts of Covid for students, staff, and the institution in Higher Education - a case study

In the past decade, global higher education has undergone significant transformations in learning and teaching (L&T) practices. The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns acted as a disruptive force, prompting rapid changes in L&T methods—dubbed ‘panic-gogy.’ We examine a UK University’s response to the pandemic’s impact on L&T, focusing on institutional, staff, and student dimensions. The university strategically prioritised teaching and student experiences, implemented staff development initiatives, and addressed challenges in student engagement and placements post-pandemic. We identify aspects that led to successful long-term adoption of approaches to revitalise provision and highlight long-term challenges that still need solutions.

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## Introduction

Higher Education (HE) has been experiencing considerable change in educational practices, globally, over the last decade, focusing towards more-effective methods in learning and teaching (L&T). Revitalising L&T approaches is key, especially with regard to effective teaching, student engagement, technology use, and employability. However, adoption of evidence-based educational practices in HE has been relatively sedate. When driving change, often a disruption is necessary to elicit rapid progress. One such disruption, with extreme impact, was the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, and resultant social lockdowns across many countries. This chapter aims to provide examples of how this disruption drove institutional change in HE and evaluates the impacts of those changes.

### *The direction and rate of change in the Higher Education sector*

Across the global HE sector, there has been considerable and ongoing development over the last decade in practices for L&T. HE institutions are increasingly investing in the development and support of L&T practices and innovations, in a sector which has traditionally been more research-focused than teaching-focused (McKinley 2018). As a result, evidence-informed enhancement of educational practices has typically been slow in comparison to innovations in research or professional practice within disciplines (British Academy 2022). Changes in the HE sector as a whole have driven some changes to practice. Substantive shifts include the introduction of tuition fees for home students in parts of the UK; moves towards widening access to university study; or increased numbers of young people entering HE. Other drivers relate to the changing face of knowledge and information, such as the democratisation of information with the internet (Brabazon 2007); the rise of social media and interactive user-led ('Web 2.0' and beyond: Kitsantas & Dabbagh 2011) platforms; and the increased use of blended learning approaches (Müller & Mildemberger 2021). The shifting landscape has begun to effect a greater focus on student-centred learning and student personal development and challenges to the didactic knowledge-focused models of education (Samuelowitz & Bain 2011).

As technologies for blended and online learning developed, there was substantive, though not universal, adoption of these technologies to educational practice in HE. These changes enabled wider access to learning across society. For example, the introduction of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in the second decade of the century opened up university-designed education to millions of subscribers who would not have had the opportunity to attend university in the traditional way (Kaplan & Haenlein 2016). The adoption of screen-recording software for lecture capture and distribution has become increasingly prevalent (and in some cases, ubiquitous), potentially transforming how students engage with didactic teaching activities (Müller & Mildemberger 2021).

In addition, the increasing number of graduates, and financial strictures after the 2008 financial crisis, meant that there was increasing demand (and competition) for graduate level employment. With only 65.2% of graduates in 'Graduate highly-skilled' employment in 2021 in the UK (UK Government 2022), having a degree is no longer of itself an elite marker which leads easily to a graduate-level job. It has therefore become increasingly important for HE institutions to provide embedded employability skills and transferable skills alongside content knowledge and discipline-specific skills. Graduate employability outcomes have become increasingly important to students assessing the value and quality of their programmes of study and to UK Higher Education providers (with HESA Graduate Outcomes survey data being utilised in all the main UK Higher Education League tables). As a result, there is greater focus on universities supporting students to develop a broad framework of skills and attributes necessary to become lifelong learners and succeed in their future careers.

However, the tension between research and teaching, and the potential detrimental impact on the student experience, has long been the subject of academic commentary (for example, McKinley et al. 2018; Hordósy & McLean 2022). In particular, educational provision that supports students' transition into the world of work, with its emphasis on developing transferable employability skills, can often be regarded as having nothing to contribute to the research agenda and is, therefore, relegated down the list of strategic priorities and regarded as being for the careers service to deliver. Therefore, particularly in research-intensive institutions, achieving the change of focus necessary to meet students' expectations is challenging and requires the balancing of competing priorities. Progress in these areas of innovation, however, has been a process of slow adoption limited by the pace of cultural change, and in many sectors this has not kept up with the rate of change of technology, or professional practice outside of university.

### *The Covid-19 pandemic and panic-gogy*

Within any sector or community of practice, for the rate of change to accelerate, and/or paradigm-shifting changes to practice to be made, a substantial disruption to the status quo is often required. For HE, such a disruption came with the impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic in 2020. Amidst the tragic loss of life, there were also widespread social lockdowns in most countries. These lockdowns in turn required a sudden, and generally unprepared-for, change from face-to-face teaching to often fully online delivery of courses and online assessments (Hordósy & McLean 2022). This seismic upheaval required an immediate rethink of educational practices, with new approaches needing to be adopted by staff and students who often had little or no training or expertise in such pedagogies. This rapid attempt to manage the situation, often referred to as 'Panic-gogy' (Baker 2020; Kamenetz 2020; Spinks et al. 2021), required a fundamental rethinking of pedagogies and processes of learning. As a result, several methodologies

were adopted wholesale that had previously been avoided or treated with caution in the sector. Examples of these rapid adoptions included:

- **The use of online platforms for teaching delivery.** There was a sudden need to upskill students, teachers, and support staff in digital tools for learning and communication. Online platforms such as Microsoft Teams™, Zoom™ and BlackBoard Collaborate™, whose use had been patchy across the sector, and often confined to online or distance courses for delivery of content, became the prevalent methodologies for delivery of material.
- **Remote and Open Book Assessments.** Online assessment and the adoption of 'open-book' assessments became more widespread, especially in early-mid 2020, when students were often distributed internationally, in different time zones, and in locations where they could not be monitored. There had been some engagement with 'online proctoring' of remote examinations before the pandemic (Alessio et al. 2018), in most cases requiring an independent company to monitor students during each assessment. The sudden increase in remote assessments made this approach impractical in most cases, and so required a rethink of the design of summative assessment. Remote assessments required a shift from assessing content knowledge and understanding (which could be easily found online in a remote assessment), to assessing the application of knowledge and understanding to solving problems and scenarios (Sam, Reid & Amin 2020; Bansal 2022).
- **Online alternatives to practical training.** Online methodologies to replace formerly face-to-face training activities (such as laboratory work, professional interactions, fieldwork, clinical interactions, and performance) were needed, leading to the development of communities of practice (such as the #DryLabsRealScience community in bioscience education: Francis, Smith & Turner 2022) for sharing online alternatives to face-to-face practical training.

Despite the many student-centred advances in pedagogies, several challenges were also identified for this remote approach to L&T. Such challenges included:

- **Social isolation for students (and staff).** The lockdowns globally had strong impacts on personal relationships and mental wellbeing. This was especially true of students, particularly those new to university, who were unable to form the social relationships that are necessary to support learning in the HE context. The limitation on the formation of Personal Learning Networks (Rutherford 2019) to support learning, and the knock-on effects on socialisation, engagement, and mental wellbeing for isolated young adults, was widespread and well-

documented (for example, Copeland et al. 2021; Chen & Lucock 2022).

- **Digital Poverty.** The sudden move to online learning identified an area which had previously been present, but largely unrecognised—the issue of Digital Poverty. Not all students were able to afford the necessary hardware to engage with remote learning and assessment. Students frequently were required to share equipment, wi-fi/ internet access (if indeed they had these resources at all), and physical spaces with close family, who were also working/studying from home.
- **Opportunities for academic malpractice.** The lack of supervision of summative assessment and end-of-unit examinations assessment led to a widespread concern over the veracity of students' work and its authenticity. Essay mills saw an increase in activity and there was an increased need (real or perceived) to have mechanisms in place to check for plagiarism or collusion.

#### *Returning to a 'new normal'*

In the post-lockdown situation, with the return to mostly face-to-face delivery, many of the advances undertaken in the pandemic have been retained. However, in many instances there has been a wholesale return to the pre-Covid practices. The impact of the lockdowns on both learners and educators will be visible for several years. The impact on students' educations will have aftershocks, with those impacts changing each academic year, depending on the stage at which they experienced the lockdowns in their educational journey. There have been measurable changes to the behaviours of both students and educators (Hordósy & McLean 2022; Day et al. 2023) as well as to the preparedness of students for independent learning.

Another effect of the pandemic was potentially an increased level of value placed on L&T in the university sector. There was a high degree of uncertainty during the summer of 2020, when it was not clear what educational decisions students would make at the start of the academic year. If students decided to stay away from a socially-distanced, or locked-down, university experience and defer for a year, the HE sector was faced with the prospect of substantial, even catastrophic, shortfalls in funding. It is possibly not coincidental that many institutions began to invest more substantially in teaching infrastructure after this potential threat was writ large.

In particular, the engagement of students with face-to-face activities, and their preparedness for engaging with employers in the post-university world, are issues. In tandem with this, the training and engagement of staff is also a challenge. Educators had experienced a sudden change to online learning, followed by a move to an unstable hybrid learning situation (2021-2022), and then back to full-time face-to-face learning (2022-2023). The degree to which students are prepared for

university, and to which educators are prepared to teach these individuals effectively, needs to be questioned.

#### Chapter aims

This chapter focuses on three elements of a case study featuring Cardiff University: attempts to adapt to the post-lockdown environment in HE, focusing in particular on staff preparedness to educate in such an environment and student engagement with face-to-face activities. We begin with a review of the **institutional** response to L&T in the context of the student experience. We discuss the adoption of a series of strategic initiatives which also revitalised L&T post-pandemic. Initiatives were implemented through institutional KPIs, a revised Education & Students sub-strategy, new programme revalidation processes, and embedding graduate attributes in curricula. **Staff** support was enfolded into a range of approaches aimed at upskilling staff. This case study element discusses the need and embedding of these interventions. We offer a case study of **students** in the Law School. New students intend to enter the legal profession and thus placement/work experience is essential. Yet the Covid lockdown removed our real client portfolio (23 schemes/partnerships) of placements. We discuss how we addressed post-pandemic reduced student engagement and attendance, and other challenges.

We aim to identify the challenges and potential opportunities related to a post-lockdown sector that is finding its feet again after the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### Revitalising the Institutional Approach

Prior to the pandemic, programmes at Cardiff University were generally delivered in a traditional way, with most of our teaching being in-person and the majority of our assessment undertaken through standard formats, such as essays and examinations. The suspension of in-person activities and the pivot to online delivery necessarily increased staff workloads as we grappled with the demands of new pedagogical approaches and technologies. To manage the workload in such a way that we gave our students the best experience possible, whilst protecting the wellbeing of staff, the University made a strategic decision, in Summer 2020, to prioritise learning and teaching in this new environment. Staff were asked to ensure that sufficient time was available for teaching, with a consequent reduction in priority for research that was not supported by a grant or contract. Whilst an understandable concern for many colleagues on a research career pathway, the decision coincided with the fact that the Research Excellence Framework (REF) cycle was ending (in March 2021), so many of the returns were complete and any work immediately REF-related was also prioritised.

To ensure that staff understood what the prioritisation of learning and teaching meant in practice, and to try to ensure that the student experience was comparable across

the University, the institutional 'Education and Students Sub-strategy' was revised (Cardiff University 2022a). Key changes included giving greater priority to high-quality blended approaches to learning and teaching, and creation of a 'successful student futures' area of focus to align the institutional commitment to ensuring that our curriculum provides learning experiences that equip students for whatever path they follow once they graduate, with the support provided by the University's Student Futures team.<sup>1</sup>

A key enabler for the successful student futures workstream was the institutional principles on programme structure, design and delivery.<sup>2</sup> These principles set out the approach that academic schools should take when designing a new academic programme and require that programmes focus on supporting students to acquire the Cardiff University graduate attributes to help them prepare for their future careers. The attributes had been devised with input from employers, to enable students to become socially, economically, and environmentally aware global citizens, with specific focus on ensuring that our graduates are:

- collaborative
- effective communicators
- ethically, socially, and environmentally aware
- independent and critical thinkers
- innovative, enterprising, and commercially aware
- reflective and resilient.

Both undergraduate and postgraduate students should be enabled to develop the attributes, although support for postgraduate students is designed to enable them to develop their skills to a higher level, particularly to provide them with opportunities to prepare for leadership roles.

Although the principles and attributes had been devised prior to the pandemic, the prioritisation of learning and teaching meant that the institutional scrutiny of programme design and delivery was heightened, with the expectation that the graduate attributes should be present as a 'golden thread' running through every student's programme and their wider University experience. To ensure that all programmes, rather than just new provision, complied with the design principles, a revalidation process was introduced. The process requires

<sup>1</sup> *Student Futures is part of the Student Life professional services division, and provides careers and employability advice and guidance, and support for international mobility opportunities. The nomenclature for the 'successful student futures' workstream was deliberately chosen to coincide with the re-branding of our careers and employability support as Student Futures.*

<sup>2</sup> *Subsequently revised and re-issued as 'Institutional expectations for the structure, design, and delivery of programmes' (Cardiff University 2022b).*

schools to review the content of their programmes and reflect on whether they are strategically and academically fit for purpose. Whilst this is inevitably a ‘slow burn’ process, as it is likely to take approximately five years for all schools to go through the initial revalidation cycle, it is a very effective way of re-focusing schools where there has historically been little employability provision.

Key benefits of the requirement to embed the attributes have been an increase in collaborative work between academics and members of the Student Futures team and a recognition that employability support is not something that should be delivered in a silo, separate from the curriculum. This has led to a shift from responsive and transactional activity, driven by requests from schools for bespoke, standalone interventions, to a strategic approach, focused on embedding employability provision in the curriculum. The new approach is supported by a Student Futures framework, which prioritises developing

accessible, impactful, and sustainable opportunities, designed to ensure that all students are enabled to develop the skills and attributes they require on graduation and throughout their early careers. Table 1 summarises the general approach that the Student Futures team takes under the Framework.

Generally, the impact of the prioritisation of learning and teaching will be measured through performance in the relevant student experience metrics of the main higher education league tables. However, the University already had its own employability key performance indicator (KPI) linked to placement learning, with a commitment that at least 50% of its undergraduate students would undertake a work placement during the course of their studies. Performance in the KPI was significantly impacted by the pandemic, as many employers retrenched and withdrew opportunities. However, it is clear that placement learning has a positive impact on future employability (Shury et al. 2007, Table 2).

Audit	Good practice	Guidance and support
<p><b>Mapping against graduate attributes and employability milestones identified by the school for each year of the curriculum.</b></p> <p>Year 1 - to include a curricular element of careers education.</p> <p>Year 2 - to include options to undertake a placement in the curriculum (including an enterprise/start-up option) and have curricular opportunities to undertake international mobility. (Ideally schools should have shorter/taster options available in Y2, with the opportunity to move to a four-year variant with a Y2S/ full-year activity.)</p> <p>Year 3 - to include an assessment task which enables students to analyse and articulate their skills and graduate attributes.</p> <p>OUTCOME - Student Futures provides a mapping template for schools to complete that identifies how current provision meets the graduate attributes and employability milestones, and where gaps exist. Schools may also complete a survey encouraging staff to provide existing examples of good practice related to employability and enterprise in the curriculum.</p>	<p><b>Student Futures will provide examples of what good practice looks like for each of the graduate attributes and the employability milestones proposed.</b></p> <p>This will include case studies of initiatives at Cardiff University and in the sector more widely, such as AdvanceHE Knowledge Hub.</p> <p>OUTCOME - Schools submit proposals about new areas of good practice around employability and enterprise which they would like to develop.</p>	<p><b>Menu of the support which Student Futures can offer and contact details for the team so schools can navigate to the right people.</b></p> <p>Digital curricular resources will be developed for academic staff, including ‘bitesize’ employability and enterprise content, which can be delivered independently or in conjunction with Student Futures staff as required.</p> <p>OUTCOME - Early meetings with Student Futures as part of the programme development or revalidation process, to discuss the areas schools wish to develop and inform proposals, including resourcing.</p>

Table 1. Guidance and practice for employability audit.

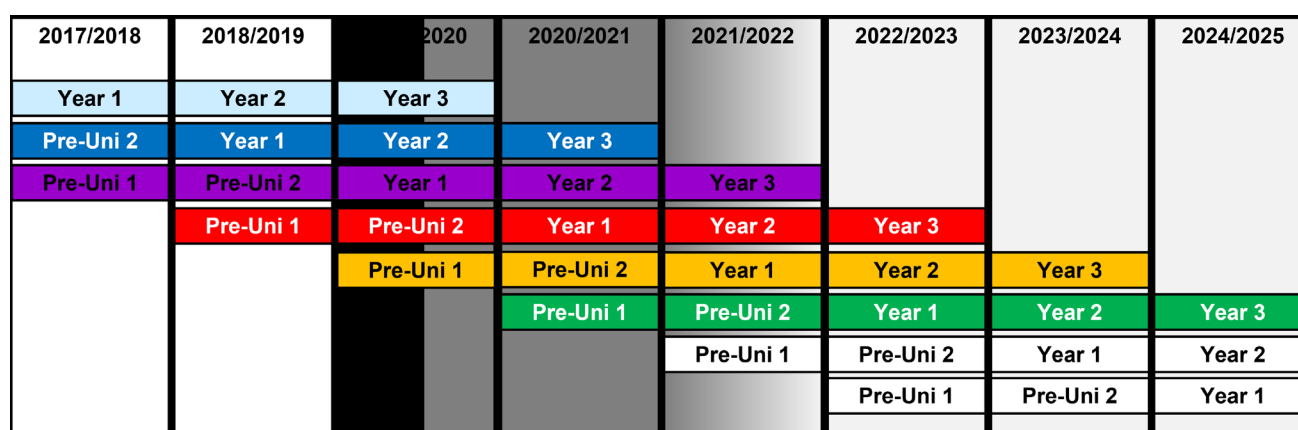
The revised Education and Students Sub-strategy reiterated the University's commitment to supporting students to access a wide range of domestic and international placement opportunities in all sectors, and acknowledged that those opportunities are valuable in traditional, virtual, and blended formats, which reflect the changes to the world of work occasioned by the pandemic. Therefore, a focus on placement learning as a KPI remains appropriate as a proxy for ensuring that the graduate attributes, employability, and wider transferable skills remain a 'front and centre' requirement for all programmes to enable our students to succeed in their future careers.

### Empowering Staff to Rethink Folk Pedagogies

Ongoing CPD for staff regarding L&T is a challenging issue; with competing elements of time pressures, requirement for research outputs, or administrative/managerial tasks, the importance of teaching development is frequently minimised (British Academy 2022). One of the most challenging concepts to address in staff L&T is Jerome Bruner's (1996) concept of 'Folk Pedagogies': educators' reflexive behaviour to base their teaching activities on the way they themselves were taught. The adoption of folk pedagogies typically leads to a heavy reliance on didactic teaching methods and summative assessment. The adoption of new media for L&T was typically limited primarily to the more engaged and innovative staff. The pandemic forced this rapid adoption of different teaching approaches and some of those approaches have persisted. However, there is a continual need to ensure that educators are reflective over their teaching activities, to ensure that they are addressing the needs of the students.

**Table 2.** Impact of placement activity on employability (Shury et al. 2007).

Placement Activity	Professional/Managerial Employment	
	6 months	30 months
An industrial or sandwich year placement	64%	73%
Shorter structured work placement as part of course	62%	73%
Shorter structured non-compulsory work placement	49%	68%
No work placement	37%	58%



**Figure 1.** Student cohorts relative to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Year cohorts of students showing Years 1-3 of Undergraduate BSc, and two years of pre-University study (small rectangles). Different year groups are coloured to aid identification. Vertical rectangles represent academic years, with shading showing the existence of Covid-19-related lockdowns and/or social distancing measures, which began suddenly in early 2020, and then gradually reduced during 2021 and 2022.

Student needs have changed quite considerably over recent years. A key starting point for staff development around L&T post-pandemic is to understand the experiences of the pandemic for students and its impacts on them. The student experience was impacted substantially (some might argue catastrophically) by the pandemic lockdowns and social distancing requirements. Impacts on the student experience included both the academic (content knowledge, engagement, and academic skills) and the pastoral (mental wellbeing, opportunities for social interactions and peer-support, developing learning networks). However, there are nuances to the student experience that often get overlooked. Students of different academic years are often considered as a homogenous group, but their experiences were quite different, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 represents a time-course of academic years (vertical boxes), with the impact of the lockdowns/social distancing highlighted (grey shading). Overlaid on this are the university cohorts, showing their years of study (assuming a 3-year degree), and two years of pre-university study. The 2017/18 Year 1 intake (row 1, pale blue boxes) experienced a sudden shift online just before their final examinations, and therefore a change in the examination format for which they had not prepared (open book, online/distance, in most cases). The 2018/19 intake (dark blue boxes) faced a sudden disruption to Year 2, followed by uncertainty and extended social distancing in Year 3. The 2019/20 intake (purple boxes) have undertaken most of their degree in a lockdown form, except for the initial transition period. Arguably, the most impact has been felt by the 2020/21 intake (red boxes), who completed their high school experience after the sudden move to distance/isolated/home-schooled learning, and then began their university experience during continued lockdowns, which impacted the crucial initial semester of Year 1 (fundamental for the transition to university: Rutherford 2019). The 2021/22 intake (orange boxes) undertook the majority of their pre-university stage under lockdown; in the UK there was widespread grade inflation due to grades being allocated by teachers, rather than through examinations. This meant unusual distributions of students in courses, with some courses in top-tier universities being massively over-subscribed. The 2022/23 intake (green boxes) have not experienced university during lockdown, but the entirety of their two pre-university years was affected by lockdowns, as well as their age-16 examinations. These students typically have less experience of formal final examinations than any other cohort. Each of these cohorts is unique and would require different teaching and assessment methods, according to their experiences. However, in the majority of cases, universities did not adapt their courses to the varied needs of these students; they merely returned to a semblance of the pre-pandemic modes of L&T.

Key adaptations that were seen among staff during and after the pandemic were successful in some cases, and less so in others. Across the sector there has been varied retention (or

active abandonment) of these adaptations; sometimes for sound pedagogical reasons, sometimes for logistical reasons, inertia, or the desire to return to a pre-pandemic idealised 'normality'. The key to retaining the effective pedagogies, and refining or removing the detrimental ones, has its fundamental base in staff reflexivity and an open mindset that welcomes change (Bruner 1996). A series of initiatives were prompted, or at least accelerated, by the pandemic that aimed to enhance staff engagement with, and understanding of the potential of, teaching innovations.

**The Digital Education Project.** During the summer of 2020, at the initial height of the lockdown, the University brought in a series of working groups to facilitate the upskilling of both staff and students for a digital-based course delivery in the 2020/21 semester ahead. This project encompassed support for students, staff, and university policies and procedures, as well as introducing Five Key principles for Blended Learning (Cardiff University 2020)

- Keep it simple.
- Concentrate on what works in a blended context.
- Provide clarity and structure.
- Focus on quality.
- Accessibility.

The project produced suggestions for numerous online/distance/blended pedagogies, use of digital media, open-book and remote assessment design, as well as strategy development and peer-support. As a result, the blended learning landscape of the University has changed radically from the pre-pandemic situation, with substantive investment in digital education support and platforms.

**Learning Communities.** As mentioned above, the establishment of mutually supportive online communities of practice has had a substantive impact on some areas of educational activity. Another approach that was undertaken at Cardiff University was the establishment of a strategic project in partnership between the Students' Union and the university's Learning and Teaching Academy. This project aimed to understand student and staff perceptions of learning communities and their potential impact on the learning environment. The aim of this project was to develop a university environment where all students and staff saw themselves as part of a single learning community, to encourage student-staff partnership. This partnership approach, and an environment where students feel part of a learning community rather than consumers of a product, aimed to support enhanced teaching practices. Table 3 illustrates some of the proposals for Schools that emerged from the project.

**Guidance and Professional Recognition.** In order to support formal L&T CPD and to support colleagues in applying for accreditation of their teaching via AdvanceHE, the UK's

Observation/Theme	Approach
Development of a joint 'Community of Practice' in learning, inclusive of students and staff, within each School.  Breaking down the 'Us and Them' feel.	Encouraging the perception (and reality) of students and staff being part of the same 'community of learners' within a School and address the 'them and us' mentality.  Use of inclusive terminology in emails (e.g. do not use 'Dear Students' as an address).
Interactions and activity with the SU: - at the student level - at the School level - at the College level	More interaction with the SU for encouraging students to see links with the SU. More links between academics and Schools with the SU. Make students aware of their College.
Student peer mentorship.	Establishing systems for students mentoring or partnering with each other across years.
Importance of staff who demonstrably care about the students' education and welfare	Celebrating and raising the profile of excellent teachers.
Increased active student partnership in the development and design of courses, curricula, assessments etc.	Adoption of a programme of active student partnership at the School, College and University level, to engage students as active partners in change projects and development. Sharing and celebration of the outputs of student partnership projects with students. Enhanced opportunities for student internships. Visible partnership activities between the CSU and CU.
Dedicated focus to responding to student voice and student feedback.	Active and rapid responses to student voice comments. Early opportunities for students to offer feedback on courses and modules.
The importance of personal interaction between students and teaching staff.	Post-pandemic increased use of Blended Learning, mixing face-to-face teaching and digital approaches to enhance the interactions between students and staff. Thinking about ways in which we communicate with students. Meet-and-greet activities for each module, to enhance staff-student interactions. Opportunities for students to contact staff and/or ask questions.
Enhanced social interactions between students and/or students & staff at the School level.	Embed activities within curricula that encourage student social interaction (e.g. groupwork activities, collaborative projects). Increased interaction between Discipline-based student Societies and Schools. Create personal feel/belonging within large cohort sizes. Sharing student work within the School/College. Encourage students to feel part of their School spaces. Encourage Schools to set up physical or online communities for students associated with the module/course.

**Table 3.** Learning Community Activities suggested from the 'Learning Communities' Project. Summary of suggestions made to academic Schools for enhancing student-staff 'learning community' perceptions (SU = Students' Union).



professional body for HE educators, we developed a suite of 'Education Fellowship' programmes. AdvanceHE offers four levels of fellowship: Associate (AFHEA, aimed at those supporting educational activities designed by others), Fellow (FHEA, aimed at those who design and deliver educational activities), Senior Fellow (SFHEA, aimed at those who support the educational delivery activities of others), and Principal (PFHEA, aimed at those who impact L&T policy at the institutional level, or higher). We designed programmes to support AFHEA, FHEA and SFHEA accreditation. The design of these programmes was a collaborative activity (Roberts & Rutherford 2022) involving various stakeholders (students, junior and senior academic staff, directors of L&T, National Teaching Fellows, Directors of Research, Learning Technologists, Information specialists, learning specialists, technical staff, and Heads of Schools). The collaborative activity identified a series of key principles which should underpin the proposed programmes. The schemes were accredited in early 2021 and the first pilot cohorts began in the summer of 2021, at the tail-end of the lockdowns. To date there have been over 700 colleagues through these programmes, with 254 successfully gaining accredited status, as of June 2023 (see Table 4 below).

This investment in staff CPD, related to L&T, is a fundamental cornerstone of the institution but was accelerated dramatically, and its importance emphasised, by the challenges and revelations induced by the pandemic. As a result, the profile of L&T within the University has been raised and pockets of innovation, always present prior to the pandemic, were broadened and given greater impact. The importance of staff training and support in L&T matters was emphasised and while one cannot claim that we have reached a state of perfection, there is certainly a more upwards trajectory in evidence.

**The Cardiff Law School Model of Clinical Legal Education and Real Client Work**

The Law School's portfolio is an obvious choice for this revitalisation case study because of the additional driver of law being a vocational subject and the particular student needs that brings. 79.1% of Law Degree programme entrants aspire

to become practising lawyers (Hardee 2012), although the number eventually qualifying into legal practice is inevitably lower. Graduate outcomes data tend to be imperfect and do not give a percentage of students graduating into legal work, so our estimate of c.53% is composed using law-related job titles within the data.

The number of law students in England and Wales in 2020/21 was 138,080 (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2022). Entry into the legal profession is competitive; US law firms in London can offer trainee solicitors £75,000+ salaries plus benefits, while the top tier offer £165,000-plus p.a. to newly-qualified solicitors (Chambers 2022). It is little wonder, then, that it is an attractive profession to students, and law schools arguably have to service early student aspirations.

As outlined earlier, the university has revised its Education and Students Sub-Strategy to enhance its commitment to student employability. But in law we have had to observe that ethos for decades anyway, albeit largely through extra-curricular activities, recognising that students need to show prospective employers relevant activities 'over and above' their degree studies, including through giving something back to society/communities. Law clinics (modelled on medical training problem/enquiry-based learning: law students see clients to establish the problem and its potential solution) are essential to the survival of law faculties; the latest survey conducted by LawWorks and the Clinical Legal Education Organisation shows that 77 of 78 responding UK law schools had clinical provision (Sandbach & Grimes 2020).

The Cardiff model of clinic is unique—by design—reflecting its position in the capital city of Wales, with devolved laws as well as those emanating from Westminster. But alongside strategic planning, organic reactive evolution has played its part. From a starting point of zero in 2005, we introduced our first clinic—the Cardiff Innocence Project. Cardiff Law School peaked at 23 separate projects and won an award for best pro bono clinic (Cardiff University 2019), but the pandemic years effectively reduced our programme to two major schemes: Innocence, and our new Climate Change initiative, with only remnants of the rest surviving.

**Table 4.** Numbers of cohorts, participants, and awards from the Cardiff University Education Fellowships Framework since 2021.

Fellowship Level	Number of cohorts to date	Participants enrolled since inception	Participants awarded fellowship to date
Associate Fellow	12	286	119
Fellow	14	310	115
Senior Fellow	4	113	20
<b>Total</b>		<b>709</b>	<b>254</b>

As the pandemic proceeded, some of our partner charities retained a skeleton service, largely online. Not treated as key workers, students were not allowed in-office experience. As shares in Zoom soared and online became the new norm, public demand for our services reduced by 80%. One scheme, a partnership between Wales Arts International, the law school, and international law firm Latham & Watkins, was a direct victim. The plan for students to assist with legal advice for artists wanting to come to the UK post-Brexit was seen off by Covid preventing any artist mobility!

Online became our only clinical activities option. We developed our secure case management system, so students could work on Innocence files remotely. We launched our Grand Challenge: Climate Change, which could take large numbers remotely. It was attractive to students as it coincided with the COP27 conference being held in Glasgow. Our climate change expert colleague (Dr Jen Allen) facilitated outputs, with students writing for the Wales Climate Week Bulletin on the government website (Welsh Government 2022).

So, over the two Covid/hybrid years, we managed to give all students the chance of something extra on their CVs. Simultaneously, coming out of those two particularly difficult years, we started to rebuild some of our smaller schemes. For example, our new Enterprise Clinic gave legal advice to students/recent alumni of Cardiff University on business start-ups, the number of which had seemingly increased during lockdown. We also gave greater prominence to marketing our legal skills programmes, which are linked to long-established international competitions (Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution 2023; International Bar Association 2023).

### What Next?

Our current position is one of consolidation: further enhancing our legal skills programmes and our public legal education focus, and strategically expanding our policy clinic activities. We will never again hit our peak of 23 separate activities in the pro bono portfolio, partly because of the lasting impact of the Covid-19 period. But it is more complex than that. Legal education and training has just been massively overhauled: the Solicitors Qualifying Examination and Qualifying Work Experience now includes the right for students to claim law clinic work towards the two-year on-the-job experience which allows them to qualify as solicitors (Solicitors Regulation Authority 2022).

Ours is not so much a perfect storm, but rather a perfect watershed. We are still being shortlisted for national awards (Cardiff University 2023) but we face many considerable challenges, including the new Covid generation of non-engaged, non-attending students, which may become the new norm. For example:

- The pandemic forced law firms and other organisations to change their business model. Home/hybrid working has remained, with fewer in-office staff to support our students, resulting in fewer physical placements. Law work placements are still commonly a virtual experience, and this is likely to remain as it is more efficient and cost-effective.
- Large numbers: our student numbers rose hugely during Covid, largely because of teacher-assessed grading of entry qualifications leading to grade inflation and lower retention rates.
- Funding: some of our resourcing comes indirectly from the Welsh Government. Funding for advice work is competitive; we do not want to disadvantage struggling third sector organisations by competing for a shrinking central money pot: they cannot access HE funding as we can (in theory).
- Practitioner support: one foundation of our clinical work has been the willingness of practising lawyers, often our alumni, to support us. But there remains a tension between timesheet-driven paid work and targets, and pro bono missions of law firms. Timely pro bono work delivered to the same standard sometimes is given lesser priority.
- Workload allocation models for clinical work that falls outside the curriculum remain a challenge. To be sustainable and scalable, our clinical work ideally needs to be linked to colleagues' research/scholarship interests. But a fair workload allocation allowance still evades us and will remain thus unless/until non-assessed clinical work is held institutionally in the same regard as excellent assessed teaching and research.

We have a multitude of questions that we regularly debate, and after a two-year dearth of opportunities, we have to refocus. Should we rebuild on breadth or depth of opportunity? How can we provide meaningful experiences to such large numbers, e.g. 700-plus in some year groups? Should we proactively move towards a balance of law and policy clinics? The latter is easier to manage, being self-contained projects rather than ongoing real client casework. Transferable skills linked to international competitions are easier to deliver without the added pressure of real clients, but how do we make those programmes have equal attraction to students?

How should we deal with the mismatch between what students want and what they are capable of? We cannot expect them to deliver work of the quality of qualified lawyers, but they may think they can. Students training for the Bar want advocacy to enhance their CVs but few meaningful

opportunities exist, so we have to be inventive with our definition of advocacy. Should we build skills incrementally (embedding activities in the first year, then shadowing in second, and seeing clients in third year)? To keep all cohorts of students happy in a huge law school that currently offers none of these opportunities to our first years is a challenge.

There is a disparity of student offerings within our mixed discipline School: our Politics and International Relations students have virtually no such opportunities. Is that fair?

Should we revisit operating a walk-in clinic open to the public? Ongoing cases outside university semesters are problematic. Typical public-facing law clinics give welfare benefits and housing advice. Those are often time-sensitive, so not ideal for a short academic year. Could/should we repackage our skills programmes as simulation clinics? Those are artificial, obviously, but can be loaded for optimum learning experience.

How do we deal with the need for a balance of social justice and commercial schemes? How do we persuade a research-intensive university to fairly allocate workload hours to clinical activity, which is not direct research activity?

How do we make our Innocence Project less attractive to our students? They have to select our optional second year 'Miscarriages of Justice' module to be entitled to apply for casework. Numbers in that module are capped at 250, but it is regularly over-subscribed because of the attraction of the project, perhaps fuelled by mania for *Making a Murderer* and the *CSI*-effect.

### Conclusion and Reflections

These elements of this case study highlight some key factors for consideration.

The prioritisation of L&T over research activity was always intended to be a short-term, emergency response to the pandemic, which has now been re-balanced by the reinstatement of research activity into workload allocation. However, as we have noted, the impact of the pandemic on the student cohort extends beyond L&T activities delivered under lockdown restrictions. Therefore, emergence from the pandemic should not be seen as 'job done', and institutional leaders need to ensure that approaches to L&T continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of current and future cohorts.

**Institutional challenges** are several, but a key factor for success is the embedding of training and support for students in priorities for the modern workplace and society.

A similar situation is required regarding **staff CPD and upskilling**. There is the need to provide 'relentless support', including financial investment, in order to achieve sustainable changes in practice. Also, a culture of recognising effective teaching methodologies and being open to the idea of change are fundamental.

From the **student perspective**, as regards the law clinic, the main challenge has remained constant: resourcing. We are one of the largest UK law schools, yet historically have experienced Cinderella funding supplemented by an Oliver Twist begging bowl!

However, a new challenge on the block has emerged: the substantial non-engagement of the Pandemic Student Generation. If this is the new norm then how do we deal with it—carrot or stick? We cannot ignore current cost of living pressures. Ours are full-time courses, but the reality is increasingly that students have to work to live: if we record all lectures what incentive is there for them to attend live?

There is a similar scale of challenge of having to become a campaign/policy unit too, particularly as regards our innocence and environment projects. This opens up a whole new ballgame, but perhaps it may drive a move towards clinical collaboration with our School colleagues in Politics and International Relations.

All of these challenges together highlight the extent to which the lessons of the pandemic were both valuable and paradigm-shifting. However, the major challenge is keeping what was effective practice, removing what was less effective/ineffective practice, and having the means to be able to identify the former from the latter.

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