Caja Spotlight

CAJA

Issue 01 - Higher Education Edition

What's inside

► A word from Caja's Higher Education Director

► Analysis of the current climate for Higher Education Institutes by sector experts.

Contents

"The goal of education is the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination of truth"

– John F. Kennedy

Note from Caja Higher Education Director, Andy Woodcock:

Welcome to the inaugural Caja Spotlight. In conjunction with our normal communications with you all, we wanted to respond to requests for further thought leadership and insight – hence the arrival of Spotlight. We hope to publish these on a regular basis focusing on key subject areas and for this first one, we thought that the higher education sector was a great and important place to start.

Having worked within the education sector for many years, I don't think I have ever come across such a precarious time as it is now amongst Universities. There is a sense that the sector is on a cliff edge – does it continue to operate like it always has done, or will it embrace and evolve new ways of working to develop truly student-centric processes?

In this first Spotlight issue, we will explore how the sector rises to the challenges it faces, ranging from the re-enablement of the campus at Universities through digitisation of assessments, to dealing with change, the levelling of the playfield and collaboration and funding. I'd like to thank all the contributors for articles, and I hope they spark some thoughts, ideas, responses and debate.

At Caja, we are developing a cohort of experts, bringing together a community of like-minded individuals to discuss the key aspects and trends of life today in education so that this thinking can be bought to our clients. Therefore, if you would like to know how this works in practice or you would like to contribute, please contact rachel.campbell@cajagroup.com.

Enjoy!

Re-opening the university: Learning from a Virus

Campus, Community and COVID

Author: Anne Boddington

Once or possibly twice in a generation, university communities experience a 'collective trauma' or shock to their modus operandi, that forces them to return to existential questions about the changing nature of their purpose. UK Universities have experienced a few in the recent decades, with the deregulation of higher education and the emergence of tuition fees, of online learning, digital communication, social media and most recently Artificial Intelligence. They are also in a pivotal position as highly intelligent academic communities that research, design and advance knowledge, policy, science and technologies, but are equally expected to be able to deploy them effectively in the leadership, management and operation of their business models. Paradoxically they are often 'late adopters' of new business models, resistant to change and lack the operational agility to respond to the needs of future generations, much to the collective frustration of students, academic and professional staff, caught between what they see and know of the world and what they are teaching or being taught. Coming face to face with COVID19 has challenged their leadership, resilience and ingenuity to respond creatively and to rethink.

Following the initial 'lockdown' and a plethora of complex emergency crisis measures, procedures and meetings, higher education institutions are now turning their attention to the prospects, challenges and opportunities of living with a viral spectre for the foreseeable future. It is evident that considerable learning has taken place, and unimagined thresholds have been crossed in online working and learning.

As always, there are those that 'yearn to return' to 'normal', those up for cautious pragmatic adaptations to 'manage the crisis' and those willing to embrace both the existential questions and recognise the art and opportunities of what has been and might be possible in the future. Every senior leadership team in higher education is currently reflecting on the financial, physical and operational risks associated with the immediate re-opening, welcoming students and staff, new and current, back to their campuses, whether in person or digitally. Pronouncements about what they will and will not be offering and how they will manage emerge daily. Short cute films have 'gone viral', media outrage about the value of 'online education' and concerns about campus hygiene being just a few. Many of these are taken out of context and critiqued in the mainstream media. But all are declared with the intention of confidently communicating that universities are 'open for business' and that they recognise their duty of care.

What has been less clear or less evident is how such decisions are being made, and what principles or criteria are being used to ensure that the many intelligent and professional 'communities of practice' that make up universities are engaged in resolving and reinventing 'the campus experience'. At the height of the pandemic, the social rhetoric around care in, and for our communities grew and wartime metaphors emerged in abundance, alongside underlying and increasing fears of recession, redundancies and lost generations of students and graduates at all levels. It is unsurprising that higher education communities are cautious, mission
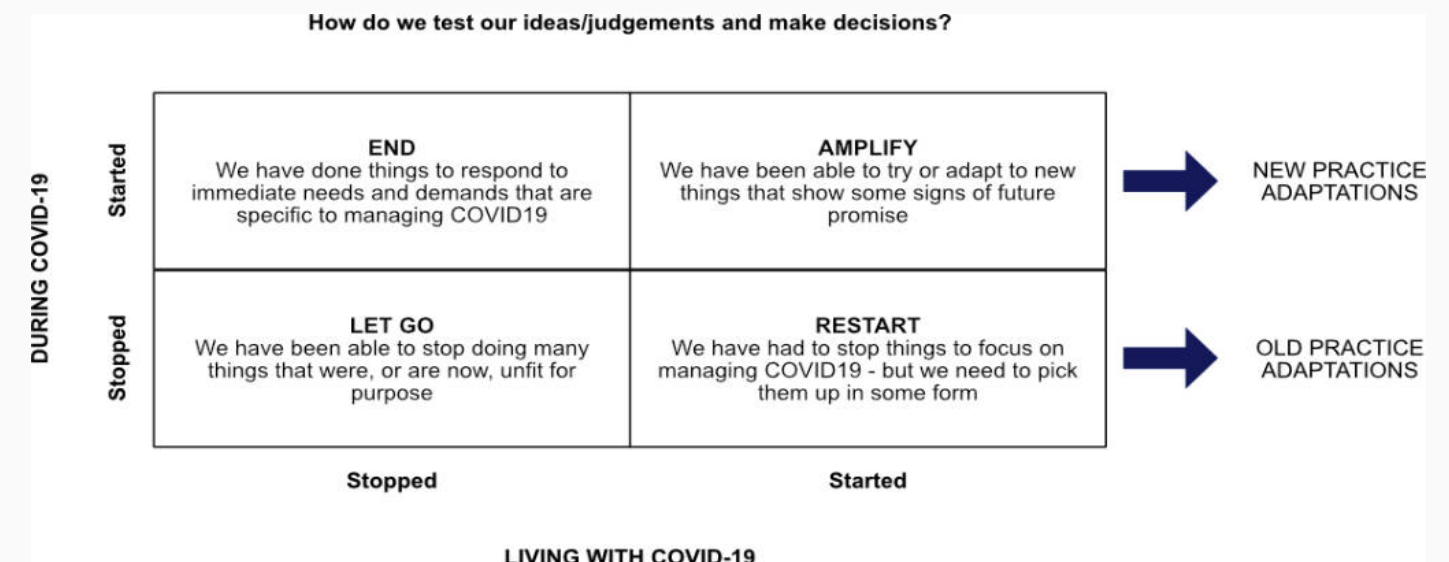

Figure 1.

groups are very active, and few university leaders have raised their heads above the parapet, despite government agencies calling for ideas, (re)invention and innovation.

Clearly there is much to be thought and done, and crisis management has quickly become the new normal of 'business as usual'. However, the 'next' and the next normal is likely to be the rollercoaster of persistent evaluation as the collective impacts of climate emergency, AI and COVID converge. So now is a fascinating time for transition and to adapt the instruments of governance and leadership that universities have in place and identify where and how to facilitate effective and productive dialogue through which they can sustain the vital social constructs of learning, work and public engagement that lie at the core of their contemporary purpose. Below are 7 possible lenses through which these challenges might be explored. They offer provocations that leadership teams may deploy in tackling the challenges these intelligent complex organisations will face in their near futures.

1. Declare the Principles for Decision making[1] and collective sense-making

For information on the process please see figure 1.

2. 'Duty of Care"

What does it mean to place the health, safety, wellbeing and livelihood of all communities of practice at the centre of decision making?

How do academic, professional communities work together effectively in new ways?

How do student, academic and professional communities contribute to co-production of solutions that are mutually beneficial

How do we reshape careers to recognise the diversity and new range of skills knowledge and competencies required?

3. Social Intensity and Lower Density

A campus experience is paramount to the culture and socialisation of learning and work for all for staff and students;

How will this be achieved digitally and physically while maintaining physical distancing?

How can pedagogic innovation and peer-to-peer models of learning enhance socialisation while reducing

campus density?

4. No Borders: Looking up and looking out

If the world is the laboratory, canvas and campus of any university;

How do we redesign or reinvent the end-to end experience between home and campus and back again, whether digital or physical and wherever in world our students and staff are physically located?

How do universities strengthen collaborations and deploy innovation to maximise value and mutual benefit for staff and students?

How to collaborate and strengthen competitive advantage locally, regionally, nationally and internationally?

5. Responsive Product

What is the university 'product' and how can we improve its quality and decouple time and credit to create flexible and bespoke/personalised learning?

What is the capability, capacity and appetite for pedagogic innovation?

Precisely where do students really network and learn?

How do we transition to iterative sustainable models of lifelong education?

6. Sharing Expertise and Narrating Experience

What and how can we hear, share and communicate experiences regularly with all university constituencies and communities through a range of creative and social media?

Where and how do we interrogate the value and diversity of supply chains, business models and opportunities for reinvention, innovation and new markets?

How do we enhance the leadership, governance and operations to emerge

stronger and more resilient?

7. Vision and Existential Questions:

What are universities for and how can they contribute to living with the viral spectre?

How do we set and manage the risk appetite and what will make universities stronger and more resilient?

What will kill them?

About the author:

Anne Boddington is Professor (Emeritus) of Design Innovation, with extensive senior leadership, management and governance experience in Higher Education extending across teaching, research, business and innovation, public and community engagement. She has worked extensively with Government agencies in the UK and Internationally as well as with Professional and Regulatory Bodies and as a Trustee in the Charity Sector. Educated as an Architect and latterly a geographer she is committed to continuous public service innovation and enhancement, an experienced mentor and a champion of equality, diversity and professional development.

Online - the new reality for Higher Education - but what about assessment?

Author: Frances Tsakonas

As universities scramble to put their courses online, one area that is being overlooked and which needs special attention is assessment. How will assessment, within this new online reality, be undertaken so as to ensure a just and equitable process for all?

Most institutions have adopted the essay as the assessment means for their online courses and programmes. It's a quick and easy way for institutions to tick that assessment box and strangely enough, quality assurance and accreditation agencies seem to have gone along with it as they too, are mainly interested in ticking the boxes. But with 'essay mills' (operating under the guise of 'student support') booming in the last decade and more, should this assessment method be looked at a little more carefully? It has become all too easy to get a custom essay churned out by these 'essay mills' for a minimal price while at the same time, plagiarism detection software has proven to be incapable of fulfilling its mandate.

The bottom line is that if higher education institutions are going to incorporate online learning into their core activities, then assessment methods need to be looked at. It is not enough to simple roll out courses or programmes online and add on an essay at the end as the assessment method. Just as it is not enough to simply run these essays through plagiarism detection software as a paid-for essay will not be detected. More sophisticated use of technology needs to be employed.

The technology exists; however, it is not being employed in a sophisticated manner. For example, assessment methods could employ key stroke biometrics and visuals along with Artificial Intelligence to ensure that the person hitting the keys while sitting in front of the screen writing the essay, is in fact the person registered on the course or programme. This could very easily be incorporated into the online learning environments and could also produce some interesting data about student behaviours that could enrich the whole online learning experience.

About the author:

Dr. Frances Tsakonas is an educationalist with over 40 years of experience across all sectors of the education system. She has consulted internationally with institutions, governments, and international organisations. She holds degrees from Harvard and Oxford Universities in Education and Business.

Keep the faith, coping with change

Author: Peter Block

This year with the profound impact that the Covid-19 pandemic is having on all aspects of the education experience new ways of working have become the norm. Change has been thrust upon the sector.

Designing the learning experience

Even the most reluctant of traditionalist lecturer or tutor has had to embrace the new learning environment. The notion of the 'flipped classroom' that only last year was considered by some as an (un)bearable compromise is looked upon with a degree of nostalgia of times past. Across the sector the learning management system (LMS) has become the backbone of the education experience. Complete courses and associated modules have gone online. No longer as a live recording and repository of the lecture presented in class; or, as an aide memoir for the student who didn't or couldn't attend the lecture but as the prime tool for delivering learning. Zoom has become synonymous with face-to-face learning. Panopto and other video lecture tools have put new demands on academics to deliver a structured learning experience. This is outside of their natural domain where they reigned supreme in the classroom or lecture hall. The performance academic no longer has the captive audience to inspire or challenge their show. The increased preparation time required to craft an engaging online experience has thrown any steady state work allocation model out of the window.

Delivering the learning

The online learning tools make it easier to do a cookie-cutter job on the module delivery process. More than ever before each lecture / learning session has to demonstrate how it delivers elements of the module and course objectives. The blurring of lines that was possible in a class delivered environment where the academic could extemporise or focus on a favoured topic and pick up on the core objectives at a later time are no longer possible. With that goes a sense of the loss of academic freedom and some of the richness of the student – tutor engagement.

In the new world of an open online environment colleagues across an institution can see what the individual academic has produced. There is a perception by some that the technology is the handmaiden to casualisation and the deskilling of the academic community. Concerns have been raised that the online environment hijacks an individual's intellectual property and their competitive advantage to remain an irreplaceable resource. Plus, what price academic freedom if Zoom meetings are recorded at the time and are used to track teaching time?

Many academics do remain at the cutting-edge of their field. They do deliver a programme each new academic year reflecting current thinking in the academic discourse of their field. However, it is also true, that a few academics only change the date on the first slide before embarking on the current year's work. There are many reasons why this may occur – not the least of which is the workload.

Managing the people

In this time of crisis, the possibility of redundancy schemes may be inevitable in the next academic year. In online delivery model, in an effort to drive down costs it may be tempting for higher education institutions to replace a senior or principal lecturer at the top of the salary scale with a more junior colleague at possibly half the cost. The material is already on the system. The level of trust between senior management and frontline teaching staff is already fragile.
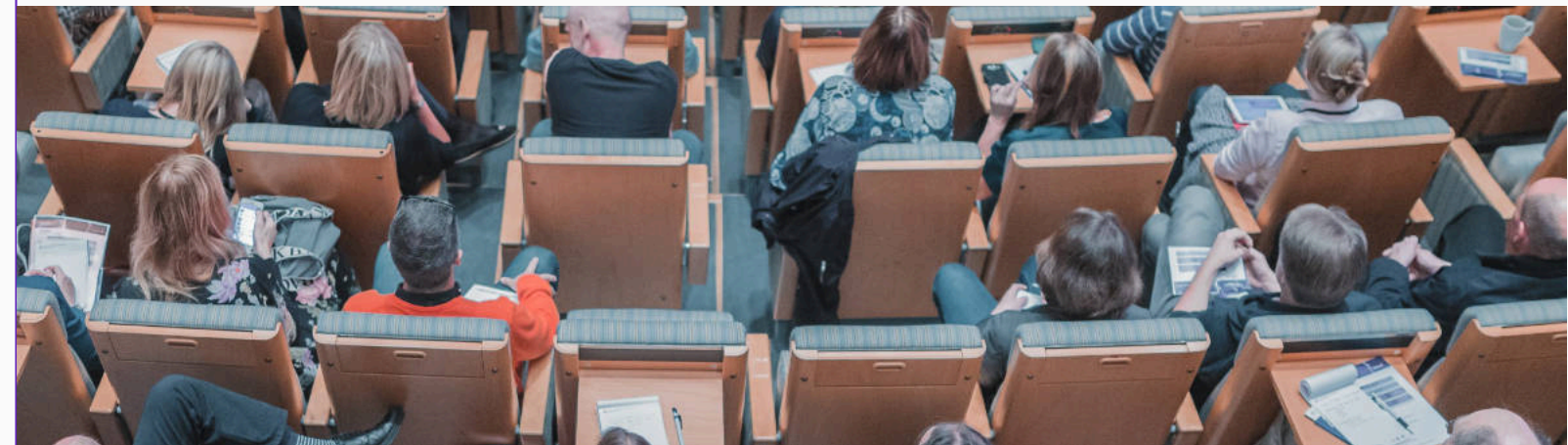
The University and College Union (UCU) has already taken action over what they perceive as the increased casualisation of the workforce and greater workloads. This will continue even as the UK comes out of the lockdown due to the pandemic. Will the virtual campus be the new normal? If the student is online and off campus there may be a temptation by some management in education to question the benefit of having staff on campus and off-line.

How robust are the HRM systems?

With all these pressures on the academic in HE now is the time to revisit the HRM processes and ensure there is a robust model in place to support the teaching community. The first step could be to conduct an audit of the HR function by applying a self-evaluation maturity model that can ensure that the HRM strategy and supporting process are fit for purpose; that they are open, effective and efficient as an assurance to all stakeholders. As a consequence of this audit, the institution should evaluate their strengths and address those areas in need of improvement.

Part of that process will reveal how effective individual performance management has been to date. Within the HE sector, the annual performance appraisal has been seen as a bureaucratic necessity, not a developmental tool. The 'high velocity' change in delivering learning requires an active HRM system, not a compliant largely passive system. Improved performance management systems should inform employees of hygiene factors; such as workload and employer's performance expectations. They should also be part of a career development process that could lead to increased employee motivation and job satisfaction.

Finally

The impact of reconfiguring the learning experience on the institution may not be felt until the next NSS (National Student Survey) shows a rise in dissatisfaction in learning and teaching. This will be not only because of the move online but because the knowledge of the lecturer delivering the work is questionable. As ever, what gets measured, gets reported and with that a drop in the position on the national league tables.

The question remains whether further casualisation will destroy the internal labour market, a sense of academic coherence and further erode the trust by the frontline staff in management's decision making process. An effective HRM environment is an essential tool for employee and manager alike.

About the author:

Peter Block is a business consultant with a special interest in skills policies, organisational learning & development, and people development issues. From 2014 till 2019 he led the international MA in Global Media Business in the UK and in Beijing for the University of Westminster.

Levelling the playing field

The aftermath of the COVID pandemic

Author: Mark Crabtree

What distinguishes one University from the other? What are the key unique selling points?

As the market for international student recruitment became increasingly competitive, it also became more and more important for higher education institutions to make a strong and distinctive first impression. As the HEI marketplace becomes more crowded, what will make a particular University stand out from the crowd?

We probably all know the answer to this question. It is more than just top-ranked courses or a long-standing reputation for research excellence. It also includes location, atmosphere, community involvement, pedagogical approaches, quality of facilities, and the rather nebulous thing called student experience.

So is it the same now? What impact will the pandemic have? Many institutions are starting to come forward with plans to offer their undergraduate and post-graduate programmes via online methodologies stating that there will be no teaching on campus for at least the first semester. Also, restrictions on travel and the reluctance of students (perhaps driven by the parents of students) to study abroad are likely to have a huge impact on international recruitment.

So we can strip away the location, the atmosphere, quality of facilities and probably most of the community involvement; the thing that may make the difference now could be the quality of the learning experience.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions were putting in place lecture capture and boosting their virtual learning environments, however, the physical aspects of the learning environment and the physical aspects of the student experience still trumped any online attempts. It wasn't vital that students attended lectures, they could catch up via online resources, however, the packaging around these still really mattered. The student experience was becoming more and more important.

So what now? At the moment the physical environment may be partially out of the equation as students studying hunched over their laptop are either accessing online courses or attending Zoom lectures. This is bound to have an impact on the experience.

Whilst we know that the quality of teaching has been a differentiating factor for a little while now and the TEF rankings are starting to have an impact on student choices, we also know that the TEF assessment looked at nationally collected data on:

Student satisfaction - How satisfied students are with their course of study, as measured by responses to the National Student Survey.

Continuation - The proportion of students that continue their studies from year to year, as measured by data collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

Employment outcomes - What students do after they graduate, as measured by responses to the Destination of Leavers Survey

These assessments would have been influenced by the opinions of students on physical teaching and interactions with the academics and not just on the online experience.

So what will be the differentiating factors be now? It is likely to be the online experience, the attractiveness and interactivity of the online learning, the way the content is brought to life on the screen, the way that the topic is enthralling and engaging via the web.

It may be argued that the content of an undergraduate degree from institution to institution may be broadly similar and it was the interaction with the academic faculty, the quality of interaction and the stimulation gained from the learning experience that really helped to forge the reputation of the course. Although we also must not forget the impact that research-led teaching can have.

Nevertheless, the move to put courses online will level the playing field and the quality of the experience will depend on the wizardry of the learning technologists. Those who were already experimenting with online pedagogical approaches, those who were focused on teaching and learning may have a slight advantage. Will those institutions whose USPs have been the stalwarts of research-led teaching and traditional delivery models be able to pivot their approach sufficiently? Will those institutions with a strong teaching and learning emphasis be in a better position? Will the playing field be levelled. Will the gleaming spires and the student traditions and the flashy facilities, labs and swanky student accommodation have as much sway for the next year or so?

It may be a couple of years before we know the answer; however, it is likely that international student numbers will be suppressed for a while and it will be difficult for all students to access the full student experience. So in the short term, it may be the quality of online delivery that will be the driving USP.

About the author:

After studying at Newcastle University, Mark moved into the field of training and organisation development. A qualified coach, mediator and facilitator; Mark has over 30 years' experience of leading the development, implementation and delivery/facilitation of engaging learning and organisation development strategies and initiatives. Drawing upon experience in the Higher Education Sector, Local Government and the Public Sector, he enables organisations to develop people and structures in line with their strategic ambitions.

Creating Value in Higher Education through collaboration, consolidation, co-funding and community commitment

Author: Hilary Murphy

Higher Education (HE) establishments are ripe for disruption. While the higher educational system prioritises research over teaching and the learning and the mismatch persists between the jobs people want and those that are actually available, the traditional HE models are vulnerable to rapidly changing market forces.

The business of HE has been in a growth for several decades but they face immediate challenges:

- Old Business Models and Sources of Funding

- Attracting customers / students

- Prioritising and personalising learning

- Managing highly (over?) educated people and facing high levels of competition for key personnel

Business Models and Funding

Old business models prevail in HE. This is somewhat perpetuated by the need to conform to quality standards set at local, national and international levels. They also tend to have standardised structures and business models i.e. degree programmes, faculties, departments and supporting services along with national pay scales. They rarely look to other businesses in terms of revolutionising their business practices as they have benefitted from policies that have given their student customers little alternative to a degree education and have been in growth mode for decades now. The funding of HE is reliant on two main providers in the UK, i.e. Student fees and research grants. At present, during the Coved 19 crisis, there

is a lobbying for more governmental support. There is unlikely to be much support for this intervention with the financial focus currently on essential work and workers.

Attracting customers

The marketing of universities as places of learning will be become more complex as they broaden their appeal to a wider market. As universities turn to more non-traditional methods to recruit and compete for potential students and with most universities embedded in traditional promotional channels and educational messaging, this is particularly challenging in the era of digital and social media marketing. Additionally, the market is already inflated with numerous academic institutions offering similar courses, content and messaging in the same geographical areas at identical price points. This will make it difficult to cut through the clutter and create a clear competitive advantage in a very busy media landscape.

Prioritising and personalising learning

With personalised learning the pricing strategy of most universities would need to change to reflect diversified delivery and content of programmes. All HE products and services are not equal and students / parents would be more attracted to a range of pricing policies that had a better product/ service mix e.g. online, face to face, self-learning and credit for prior learning.

The problems with the sudden conversion to online learning, exacerbated by Covid-19, have been well documented. Already there are predictions of declining student numbers

as there is little "perceived value" in online courses and programmes and already resistance to paying full fees. In the long-term, distanced learning is likely to have a significant impact on peer networking and the overall student/ customer experience. Both highly valued aspects of the student experience. Furthermore, poorly designed online courses may alienate traditional learners and already trigger refund requests from a generation that are used are more Immersive experiences (e.g. tik tok, filtered images and engaging, interactive content) and poorly designed online courses suffer by comparison.

Managing (Over educated) people

HE organisations must be more agile and flexible to reflect rapidly changing employment opportunities. This infers optimising systems, processes and people that reflect that ethos. Most HE structures are excessively hierarchical and take a top down management approach and foster a culture where people/ employees are unable to pivot and be flexible in the design, delivery and development of their role in the organisation.

What are the possible solutions for HE?

- Seek other sources of funding from employers and local communities that have a vested interest in an educated population aligned with their requirements.

- Adopt a more "asset light" approach where less is invested in capital expenditure, risk is shared and where the ability to change structure, location and focus is easier.

- The HE product must reflect employment and community needs and engage students in work as part of the learning process.

- Redesigning programmes (programmes, assessments, attendance etc) for multimedia learning on various devices, accepting MOOC or similar style courses and awarding credit for a variety of prior learning activities.

- Collaborate with a range of HE institutions and non-traditional educational providers to provide diversity in learning opportunities

- Think in terms of customer lifetime value and focus on retaining customers for a longer period in an era of lifelong learning and multiple career paths

- Get radical about pricing and create premium offers, priced accordingly, such as personal tutors who guides the experience in a kind of master-apprentice model

- Personalised learning should match student learning styles to learning resources.

- Health, safety, wellbeing and environmental values are increasingly crucial to all stakeholders e.g. parents, employees and students. Including these benefits would attract students and employees alike.

- Human resource performance musts be measured and rewarded, standardised pay scales breed complacent performance

- Ensure that academics who are teaching knowledge and skill are current and progressive in content and teaching styles that help students get ready for future work environments, whatever they may be!

There is a great potential if we exploit the talent that already exists in HE. Most academics are experts on the "body of knowledge" and are expert knowledge brokers who can, at least provide context.

About the author:

Dr Hilary Murphy is a higher education consultant and most recently the Associate Dean and Professor of Digital Marketing at the University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland. She has extensive academic and international expertise in consultancy, research, teaching, course management, quality control and faculty management.

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