

Quality - Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education Project

Leadership Intelligence Report

Sustaining a clear focus on quality and good practice,
including revising policy frameworks and guidance
(teaching and assessment)

—

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The Advance HE Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education Project – a welcome from the Chief Executive Officer of Advance HE

Following upon the exigencies of the initial COVID-19 crisis, and the unprecedentedly rapid move to on-line teaching and assessment, the next big question for higher education institutions is '*when we open our campuses, HOW are we going to do that?*'. The forces for doing so are great, yet the uncertainties around how to do so are extraordinary, and the risks involved profound. The whole higher education community is, therefore, now looking ahead to what is really a very complex set of questions, with whatever decisions institutions make being open to further change as the social, economic, policy and health landscape goes on transforming in response to the pandemic.

The Advance HE Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education (SDCE) project offers an opportunity to engage with key facets of this question through collaborative and generative thinking and dialogue, focusing on the priority area of *student education and experience*. Student interests must be at the heart of every part of our conversations, along with their need to be valued and part of a community in which they belong.

At this critical and precarious stage in the COVID-19 response journey, there has never been a greater need for collective learning, sharing and planning. The five SDCE workshops that took place recently, facilitated by Advance HE with nearly three-hundred senior educational leaders from the UK and around the World, were an extraordinary example of this. Our thanks to everyone involved for the tremendous levels of engagement, openness and creative thinking that characterised the workshops and for the high-quality discussions that took place. I hope these publications, direct and rapid outputs from those workshops, will help to provide the support and stimulus you need to work through the important planning and decision making, working collaboratively with others and tailored for your context, that lies ahead over the next few months.

Alison Johns
Chief Executive, Advance HE

Introduction to the Advance HE Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education project

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has led to a seismic shift in higher education. Following the initial outbreak, we are now transitioning from an emergency move to online teaching, learning and assessment (to facilitate campus closures, social lockdowns and in some contexts the conclusion of the academic year/session, including ensuring students graduate without detriment), to planning for the next session or semester which may look very different to the last. Further, the social and educational landscape will not only be different, but is currently unknown as the crisis evolves, and this presents a vast array of challenges for prospective and returning students, academic and professional services staff, institutions and individual disciplines. *The stakes are very high.*

In support of this unique and rapidly evolving educational landscape, Advance HE's Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education (SDCE) project aims to facilitate collective learning for member institutions across the globe. This is a rapid, generative project set up to collaboratively explore the key question '*when we open our campuses, HOW are we going to do that?*'. Driven at pace to match the swiftly unfolding situation that surrounds higher education, and targeted at senior colleagues with responsibility for planning, leading and managing educational programmes, its purpose is threefold:

- + To enable high quality conversations;
- + To share information, inspiration and intelligence; and
- + To co-create solutions to specific aspects of the challenge.

Student interests must be at the heart of every part of our conversations, along with their need to be valued and part of a community to which they belong. Following a series of international workshops, facilitated online for conversation, challenge and co-creation and with **a clear focus on student education and experience**, this publication forms one of a series of six Advance HE Leadership Intelligence Reports. The first five will cover the five key topics that were the focus areas for discussion during the workshops: Induction, Space and Place, Design and Delivery, Quality, and Inclusion. The sixth will be a capstone publication drawing together the project overall and reflecting on the four overarching themes of wellbeing, communication, leadership and partnership.

Importantly, the SDCE project is based on the approach of collaborative enquiry rather than advocacy or advice. To enable this, the following key principles underpin the project:

- + The challenge is about people first, not technology;
 - + Good practice is good practice;
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- + Well intended measures may have unintended consequences;
- + Differentiated approaches will be needed, along with continuous reassessment;
- + Balance is key to decision making – balancing the needs of students with the needs and responsibilities of the institution and the needs of society;
- + Project participants are experts in their own context; and
- + *Learning is above all else a human relationship* (after Rogers, 1983).

Achieving a ‘socially distanced’ inclusive campus will involve the efforts and incredible ingenuity of you all as we move not towards a ‘new’ normal but the ‘next’ normal, reflecting the ongoing fluidity of the world we are currently working in. We hope these publications, along with the accompanying **Advance HE Connect group**, provide an important resource to support you in achieving this.

Finally, three important thoughts for you, the reader:

- + None of the topics covered by the reports stand in isolation as there is overlap between them all, and so for greatest value we recommend that they are read in combination with one another;
- + These are deliberately ‘rapid’ reports rather than ‘polished’ reports. Given the nature of the challenge and the rapid, generative nature of the project we wanted to get the Leadership Intelligence back to you quickly whilst it still has timely relevance and value; and
- + Every action we take has to be differentiated by context, whether at a national level, an institutional level or a subject level, and as one of the principles above sets out, *you are the experts in your own context*.

1. Introduction

At the outset of this Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education Project we identified the next big question for higher education institutions as “*When we open our campuses, HOW are we going to do that?*” This Leadership Intelligence Report extends this question to “*When we open our campuses, how are we going to do that **while sustaining a clear focus on quality and good practice?***”

This is particularly challenging, given the HE sector is currently having to look in two directions at once. Behind us, taking the UK as an example, is the unfinished 2019-20 academic year, which saw a virtually instantaneous cessation of all activities and the need for emergency planning to conclude teaching and implement alternative assessments for finalists and continuing students. In front is the 2020-21 academic year/session, in which everything will be different, from how we move around buildings we may or may not be able to access, to online teaching, learning and assessment for subjects where close physical contact was previously seen as essential (proximal pedagogies). We are having to make unexpected and almost unimaginable changes to how we do things, both in terms of perturbations to procedures and practices we took for granted and the speed at which these have had to be made. Furthermore, planning for these differences is compounded by uncertainty; will there be a second (or third or fourth) wave of the pandemic? what guidance and legislation will be introduced? will prospective home and international students actually come and will returning students return? Thus, not only is there unprecedented uncertainty, but our resources are split between looking backwards and forward, with huge implications for staff time, workloads and wellbeing. Despite these demands, quality and good practice must stay in focus and underlie everything we do. This report focuses on quality issues, sharing information, intelligence and inspiration developed through collaborative enquiry.

Quality is quality, irrespective of the mode of delivery.

Information, guidance and expectations relating to quality and quality assurance is rapidly emerging as the COVID-19 pandemic progresses, building on previous guidance which, despite the pandemic-driven perturbations, remains in place. In the UK the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education’s (QAA) *Advice and Guidance* comprises 12 themes designed as part of the Quality Code to support providers in developing and maintaining effective quality assurance practices (QAA, 2018):

Twelve themes to support providers in developing and maintaining effective quality assurance practices

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| + Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access | + Assessment |
| + Course Design and Development | + Research Degrees |
| + Monitoring and Evaluation | + Concerns, Complaints and Appeals |
| + Learning and Teaching | + External Expertise |
| + Student Engagement | + Partnerships |
| + Enabling Student Achievement | + Work-Based Learning |

These highlight the breadth and depth of quality considerations across the sector, which underpin learning and teaching at all levels and stages of the HE experience. It also brings to the fore the huge challenges faced by universities and colleges, both in ensuring quality of delivery, assessment and the student experience as we respond to the immediate COVID-19 emergency and move to new and more diverse modes of delivery and pedagogic environments next session (for a perspective from outside the UK [Turkey] see Elmas, 2020).

The QAA has recently published (2 June 2020) *'Preserving Quality and Standards Through a Time of Rapid Change: UK Higher Education in 2020-21'* which offers four *'Guiding Principles'*. These provide a very timely "... framework to support planning and to facilitate consistency of decision-making, while also providing a record of the rationale underpinning that decision-making process that places the interests of students at the heart of decision making ... that providers can use to adapt and amend existing processes and ensure that they have the right decision-making systems in place" (QAA, 2020):

Principle 1: That any move to onsite activity is safe and secure for staff and students.

Principle 2: That degree-awarding bodies maintain quality and standards in the move to flexible provision.

Principle 3: That providers engage with students and staff in planning changes to delivery and assessment of teaching and learning.

Principle 4: That provider planning scenarios are flexible and responsive to students' needs.

Framing these principles around an institution's values will help to clarify what is important in the decision-making process. (QAA, 2020)

Given the complexities inherent in ensuring quality during phases of both reactive and proactive change in a very uncertain world, and the range of staff involved from leaders engaged in high-level institutional quality policies/frameworks to academic practitioners and professional services staff, these guidelines provide a useful introduction to this publication. Quality, like safety and inclusion (the fifth publication in this series) is pervasive across all our COVID-19 considerations, and thus cannot be considered in isolation.

The Quality topic area of the Advance HE SDCE project looked at these issues through a series of five workshops, engaging professional services and academic staff from a wide range of institutions from the UK and internationally. These workshops were structured around four key discussion areas: maintaining quality during rapid change, ensuring equivalence across different modes of learning and teaching, continuing to provide assessment feedback that supports learning, and ensuring students get the higher education they are entitled to expect. These form the main sections in this report, underpinned by the following stimulus models:

Stimulus Models	
Effective learning and teaching (QAA, 2018b) ...	Assessment (QAA, 2018c) ...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is underpinned by an understanding of the provider's learning and teaching strategy; 2. Is underpinned by a focus on student achievement and outcomes; 3. Provides students with an equivalent high-quality learning experience irrespective of where, how or by whom it is delivered; 4. Is informed through reflective practice and providers enable staff to engage in 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Methods and criteria are aligned to learning outcomes and teaching activities; 2. Is reliable, consistent, fair and valid; 3. Design is approached holistically; 4. Is inclusive and equitable; 5. Is explicit and transparent; 6. And feedback is purposeful and supports the learning process;

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relevant, timely and appropriate development;

5. Is underpinned by routine evaluation of provision to enhance L&T activities;
 6. Activities, facilities and resources make the learning environment accessible, relevant and engaging to all students;
 7. Ensures that information about, and support for, L&T is clear and accessible;
 8. Encourages and enables students to take an active role in their studies;
and
 9. Enables students to evaluate and manage their own learning development.
7. Is timely;
 8. Is efficient and manageable;
 9. Encourages academic integrity;
and
 10. Students are supported and prepared for assessment.
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2. Maintaining quality during rapid change

The sector has already made huge changes in response to the COVID-19 emergency, and further change is coming as we design/redesign modules, courses and programmes for a COVID-19-influenced HE environment. In the 'emergency response' phase there was, by sheer necessity, some easing off in terms of rigour and precision in some areas of activity. However, now the initial crisis appears to be passing there is a pressing need to ramp up quality assurance and enhancement considerations once again. This poses considerable challenges in terms of how quality can be made the headline focus in terms of rigour and robustness going forwards. Furthermore, there is a worry that validation/approval mechanisms will clog up the system, causing delays which there simply does not appear to be time for. However, if good quality assurance measures are already in place, these in all likelihood will put the institution in a good position to respond to the speed of events and dramatic perturbations we have experienced recently.

Sustaining a clear focus on quality and good practice, and having policy and approval frameworks which are sufficiently agile and flexible, is challenging.

In terms of observations, challenges and possible solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector, participants in the SDCE Quality workshops engaged with a range of ideas in their discussions:

Observations

- + Learning environments are likely to be very different off-campus. Asking students how they prefer to or want to learn is important, as is having regular communication with them and staff. Transitions, such as face-to-face to online, need to be actively managed;
- + Accepting our humanity - 'accept the chaos';
- + The sector has had to respond very rapidly to the social 'lockdown', but changes to facilitate unlocking are now also moving very fast;
- + Enhancing peer assisted learning is important (e.g. ensuring a comprehensive peer mentoring system is in place). We need to recruit more student mentors to help other students and encourage a sense of community;
- + Scenario planning is key – the situation is fluid for all institutions, and will remain so for the foreseeable future. What, for example, is the management strategy to ensure

quality if another COVID-19 infections spike occurs? We need to be able to manage this (see Box 1 in the SDCE [Space and Place](#) publication);

- + In terms of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA [UK]), institutions need to be very clear what students have been told (see below). What do our module/unit and programme specifications look like now? Are they what we have advertised and therefore what students are entitled to expect?
- + There are concerns that the social element of the HE experience may be overlooked as teaching and learning is prioritised.

Challenges

- + The student voice is complex, and is certainly not a single homogenous group. Feedback from students can be confusing, is often mixed through collective responses (e.g. surveys), and likely to be weighted towards polarised experiences. The challenge is to figure out how to manage quality and what learning and living as an online learner looks and feels like. We need to share good practice and learn from institutions that have established successful online learning programmes;
- + We need to be inclusive, and be able to support a variety of students, with equity in terms of the quality of provision;
- + There will not be a 'new normal', but a succession of 'next normals'. This may exacerbate the rise in applications for extenuating circumstances etc. 'No detriment' policies have been put in place for students in some national contexts as part of the initial COVID-19 response, but what will these look like next academic year/session? A no detriment policy acts as a 'safety net' to ensure students obtain at least their average grade so far in the given year/semester;
- + There is a risk of losing links and ties with students who are not engaging. Alternative ways of how we contact or try to engage with learners are needed – a more personal/personalised approach. Generic 'communications to all' will not be enough. Managing and maintaining attendance will be a big challenge in a more off-campus, blended, online world. Attendance requirements may need to be reviewed;
- + We need to ensure staff are empathetic to the needs of our students;
- + We need to have teaching quality that is as 'good as' traditional face-to-face. There are ongoing IT/ technology challenges for students and staff as well as equipment needs and associated cost challenges (Box 1);

- + How do we provide end of semester feedback in a lockdown situation? Academic staff are not all happy or enthusiastic that subject assessment and end of course feedback has changed in response to the COVID-19 crisis;
- + There was a general feeling that quality review processes seem like an extra burden when staff are already experiencing the weight of the workload in transitioning to online and providing additional support to students. How do we ensure quality standards are met but in such a way as to not overburden staff further? Agility and creativity are key, underpinned by quality considerations;
- + Getting all colleagues on board is a big challenge. Workshop participants felt that while some teams were being very responsive – in particular educational development teams – there are difficulties with others. How do we get everyone on board to deliver a rapid and agile response? Some have set up online Communities of Practice but engagement has been very mixed. One institution has a daily meeting between the Students' Union, PVC Education, students and the Director for the Student Experience – this ensures representation on all working groups to bring in the student voice. Others are using online platforms to ensure student consultation continues;
- + There is a challenge around meeting programme level outcomes as a whole if individual module outcomes can't be met, especially around things like practice and placement activities and group work;
- + There is a need for programmes to create communities of learners. It is easy for some students to engage but less so if they are not comfortable online;
- + Academic integrity issues still need to be addressed. For example, if delivery moves solely online there are concerns regarding identity and fraud, and the need to have monitoring and security measures in place.

Possible solutions

- + The student voice can be best engaged through an enhanced student representative system. We should conduct student surveys, in a considered, timely way and at regular intervals using a variety of methods (e.g. one-to-ones, focus groups, pulse/short surveys), but avoiding survey overload, to solicit student views of their experiences in a new and evolving system;
 - + Use student surveys meaningfully to bring about improvements to help students with quality, learning and teaching and using technology in their courses;
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- + At a national level, review regulatory requirements and guidance and support on quality for the sector, and implement these for existing and new students;
- + We need to prepare students and be more acutely aware of their needs – planning and preparation is key;
- + We need to work hard to get consistency of quality and experience across different programmes. Progress on this will need to be managed at an institutional level with central oversight;
- + Do students know what they need? There is a need to adapt and create a different learner journey in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including students and staff;
- + We should evolve student support structures (e.g. buddy systems) and use these to improve quality;
- + Humanity and honesty is really important. We really need to build connections;
- + We need to be able to manage issues around access and technology, and link this to clear communications with students. Set clear expectations for students, staff and institutions to deliver on;
- + Open up discussions about what makes a good HE experience; there is a need for clearer messages from Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) about what their expectations are in order to meet their obligations;
- + We don't want to increase the burden on staff in terms of quality. We already have central regulations in place which may still be fit for purpose in the current environment. However, quality considerations must be in-step with the 'regulators';
- + We need to work closely with academic staff to ensure faculties/institutions know exactly what is being done during this ongoing and dramatic move to online teaching, involving redesigning course content and assessment. Use appropriate technology to help, provide staff with the support they need, and ensure that learning outcomes have been met. Help staff with these transitions;
- + Explore online offerings in terms of remote testing and assessment and look at other sectors to help manage access and integrity;
- + Conduct regular pulse surveys with students, and use these to inform decisions;

- + Facilitate regular student and staff consultations, involving course representatives and co-coordinators and using online platforms;
 - + Some institutions are planning to get the delivery of practice-based programmes (e.g. laboratories) back on campus as soon as is safe to do so with social distancing measures in place;
 - + Identify examples of good online platforms for managing, monitoring and tracking student progress; these can then be used on a recurring basis to see evolving patterns and trends;
 - + Leadership involvement is key. For example, in some cases the head of institution (VC/President/Principal/Provost/Rector) hosts weekly open ‘townhall-style’ sessions with students using a video conferencing platform such as Zoom. This allows students to ask and be asked questions directly – rather than waiting for survey responses – and is an opportunity to gain quick student feedback on many aspects of their experience. This is directly fed back into institutional development and actioned quickly. An additional benefit is that it shows that senior leaders are accessible to students;
 - + There was a general agreement that building knowledge banks within departments and faculties is key to supporting less experienced colleagues and avoiding the feeling of isolation in developing new activities through sharing pedagogic approaches and expertise. It is not just the burden of online teaching that is difficult for people but developing the teaching at the same time as having to deliver it. There was also great interest in sharing expertise and knowledge between institutions too (e.g. Advance HE Connect Groups);
 - + One institution has conducted a crisis quality assessment report looking at validity, equivalence, proportionality and academic integrity across all modules. Others felt this was important from an institution-wide perspective;
 - + Is all activity being synchronous the right approach? Do we need to consider more asynchronous activities, bite-sized learning, chunked up content etc. We need to consider replication vs reinvention and ‘making every second count’. Delivering hour long lectures may not be the best way to convey content and engage learners when online. There are also concerns that online teaching is much more ‘visible’ since it can be shared more readily on, for example, social media;
 - + Some institutions are considering media or performance training to help staff be more engaging in online delivery;
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- + We should develop manuals to help students to use different technologies and train students and staff in using VLEs and video conferencing platforms;
- + Initial examples of live lecture sessions recorded (lecture capture) so that students can watch the recording afterwards have caused some confusion. This, therefore, evolved to use recorded lecturers followed by a seminar/QA session, providing structure and active, rather than passive, engagement and learning.

Box 1 - How do we address the challenges of online learning?

In early June the British Council brought together sector experts to discuss quality teaching online at an event entitled ‘How do universities ensure quality teaching online?’ (British Council, 2020). At the event, Douglas Blackstock (Chief Executive, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK – QAA) presented slides addressing the challenges of online learning which are summarised here:

How do we address the challenges of online learning (after Blackstock, 2020)	
Technology access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Ensure ‘digital education support centre’ actively seeks to find out what the problems are and responds promptly.
Academic staff development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Provide practice-oriented online support as an online course; + Use the university VLE so that staff experience online learning; <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Include social learning to share problems, concerns and solutions.</p>
Mix synchronous and asynchronous learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Focus on a mix of both methods; + Orchestrate how students learn to support one another; + Peer reviews, small groups developing contributions to plenary, + WhatsApp groups to discuss issues to raise with their teacher.

Plan for a digital future	+ Plan not just for the immediate- but also the long-term to enable pay-off from the investment of staff time to be achieved.
Trust the teachers	+ Trust the teaching staff to be innovative, creative and committed by giving them the support they need; + Track the true workload, and plan accordingly.
Invest in online teaching and learning	+ Support teachers to build what will be a massive community knowledge-building project of how to optimise the use of digital technologies to improve the quality and equality of HE.

It is extremely important to remember that quality considerations include not only quality assurance but also quality *enhancement*. A very useful model for considering this has been proposed by Jackson (2002), which states that:

[Quality] enhancement might involve:

1. *abandoning something that is not working;*
2. *doing existing things better/more efficiently;*
3. *making better use of something;*
4. *expanding something that is considered to be desirable;*
5. *adding new things to existing things;*
6. *connecting things to make different (new) things;*
7. *doing entirely new things which replace or complement existing things; or*
8. *it might be an improved capacity to do something different or new in the future.*

This model invites us to be more focused and targeted in our thinking around quality *enhancement* and to take 'deliberate steps' with much clearer transformational objectives driving our programme development activities.

We have seen defined periods within the sector's COVID-19 response. Currently we are in the 'disrupted' phase, adapting what we already had in place. However, consistency of quality at different levels (unit/module, programme, faculty and institution) needs to be assured as a matter of priority going forward, and appropriate quality assurance

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mechanisms put in place which are fit for purpose in a changing world. While this poses significant challenges, integrating Jackson's *enhancement* thinking offers the potential to build more robust, agile systems that are clearly and unmistakably focused on the consistent achievement of learning outcomes. For example, the opportunity that presents itself to move the assessment emphasis to course- rather than unit/module-level to reduce over assessing students and to operate in a more integrated way.

3. Ensuring equivalence across different modes of learning and teaching delivery (e.g. face-to-face and on-line)

Graham Gibbs, in his 2002 '*Dimensions of quality*' paper for the Higher Education Academy in the UK (now Advance HE), poses the questions:

- + *Does it matter that some students receive less class contact than others? Are class contact hours an indicator of quality?*
- + *Does it matter that some students put in less total effort than others? Are total student learning hours an indicator of quality?*

From a quality assurance perspective equivalence across different teaching and learning modes and environments is perhaps the biggest issue the sector is currently facing. This results from a number of factors, including the short timescales available for course design/redesign, unfamiliarity in some cases with the range of pedagogic modes/environments and their pros and cons, a limited pool of skills and resources necessary to develop and implement developments, and 'consumer' rights and perceptions. In addition, transitions to different learning modes, such as online delivery, are easier for some courses than others, which may lead to differential staff workloads between disciplines or between faculties, and perceptions of unfairness and inequality amongst the student body. For example, if practice-based disciplines return to campus first, with the 'privilege' or 'advantage' this may potentially bring with it for both academic and extra-curricular/social activities, how will non-prioritised students feel? Will they expect their fees to be reduced commensurately? Will the COVID-19 anxieties and disruptions, therefore, be perceived as 'lesser' for some disciplines? Some students, rightly or wrongly, may regard that online is clearly a disadvantage relative to sitting in a lecture hall.

The QAA (UK) guidance sets out three scenarios (QAA, 2020):

- + **Scenario 1:** 100% virtual in some form, with zero attendance,
- + **Scenario 2:** part-virtual, part-physical attendance, known variously as 'mixed-mode' or 'blended',
- + **Scenario 3:** 100% physical attendance.

These scenarios which are explored and discussed here, and also in other reports in this series, in particular *Induction*, *Space and Place* and *Design and Delivery*, are both simple and fundamental. We would encourage readers to refer to those to further inform their quality assurance and enhancement considerations.

The sector has a huge amount of work to do to design and redesign programmes to go on delivering learning outcomes in a sustainable way with quality across a range of teaching modes and environments, many of which are either unfamiliar or require significant upskilling to achieve. In addition, there is a pressing and urgent need for the sector to explain why particular modes of teaching and learning have been selected, their theoretical foundation, and their *real and quantifiable* benefits as part of a diverse, appropriate and quality assured holistic degree programme. Online it not a lesser medium – many lectures are, as we already know, overly didactic. Face-to-face teaching advantages some, while others fulfil their potential through other mediums whilst at the same time managing demanding life responsibilities. There is more complexity to the decision making here than a simple binary choice.

Assessments are also being precipitated into different formats and modes as a result of the pandemic, and innovation, sometimes radical innovation, is required here too. This has accelerated our questioning of what assessment is, its purpose, how it operates, and why it has been done largely in a very limited range of standard ways for a very long time. Are we really sure the traditional examination assesses learning outcomes appropriately and ensures equity of potential achievement? Many institutions stopped all examinations at the end of last session as a result of the COVID-19 emergency and set up valid alternative assessments, despite concerns about collaboration and cheating (which is a widespread concern; see for example, from South Korea, Hankyoreh [2020]). Innovation meant performing and creative arts could be achieved digitally, and this may indeed mesh readily with rapid changes in their allied professions. For example, the fashion industry is now questioning the future of the fashion show itself (Madsen, 2020) and London Fashion Week 2020 has just announced it will be digital only (<https://londonfashionweek.co.uk>). Do we therefore really need to revert back to the familiar in all cases?

In response to this aspect of the discussion, workshop participants identified the following challenges and possible solutions:

Challenges

- + Workload implications when redesigning teaching and learning whilst retaining a focus on quality;
 - + We need to ensure that we manage students' expectations. What will be provided? How and when will this be communicated to students?
 - + Institutions have experts in-house or in allied professional communities on various technologies and platforms. How do we integrate these new platforms and still deliver quality for all stakeholders, despite the pandemic and the speed we need to move?
 - + It is easier for some courses to move online than others (*i.e.* those without proximal- and practice-based-pedagogies?). There is a need to identify these sooner, even if
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we don't know the solutions yet;

- + Should practice-based disciplines get priority for returning to campus? This raises issues of parity and fairness vs. practicality;
- + What are the implications of 'rationing' the campus experience? Should all students get an even slice of this experience, or should practice-based proximal-pedagogies be prioritised? This comes down to what we want the student experience to be about and how we deliver it with quality?
- + How should students be assessed on healthcare and industrial programmes? Where this is not possible, some programmes may need to be replaced, and/or students transferred to a different programme that can be delivered online. There are implications for future employability if work-based learning opportunities and practice-based learning is not happening. The sector needs to re-invent what these will look like;
- + Workplace experience – what is the value of this learning when conducted remotely or at home, and how can learning outcomes and quality be preserved? There is a need to work this out thoroughly;
- + Virtual work placements need to be tried out. How might they work? Early examples have not been satisfactory, so there is a real need to think about their pedagogic design;
- + It will be hard to continue managing staff transitions and student expectations.

Possible solutions

- + Develop and run institutional scenario planning groups. Where is the decision-making happening? If creating new groups, keep these small and specific;
 - + Some differentiation of approach may be required depending on class sizes. Additionally, aim to create relaxed and welcoming learning environments and enhanced social situations and opportunities to help students feel part of their learning, their course and their programme. This can be achieved online too e.g. by leaving your chosen video platform open after a formal class to allow students to talk and socialise with each other;
 - + Look at a baseline quality approach for everyone to achieve, and then provide flexibility for how this is delivered and enhanced;
 - + Deliver similar experiences for students within online environments. Provide revised/new health and safety inductions and monitor student responses to these so as to evaluate and improve;
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- + Try multiple online and face-to-face classrooms with multiple teachers, and continue to establish consistency in academic quality, with heads of departments/directors of learning carrying out teaching observations online, and students also engaged in the observation process and providing feedback. When combined, this provides evidence to improve activities in new methodologies;
 - + Provide students with access to materials, software and equipment (at the institution's cost) to enable them to engage with their learning in practical settings;
 - + There is a need to invest in appropriate staffing/professional development e.g. employing course developers and pedagogic technologists in higher education to support new and redesigned academic programmes;
 - + Do we need to build in media training for our teaching staff? This has helped in institutions to support the 'performance element' of their role (e.g. body language, tone, etc.) and build confidence;
 - + In relation to accredited disciplines and subject requirements, what alternatives might it be possible to negotiate while still ensuring quality? For example, renegotiating the number of hours in practice, alternative modes of practice, changes to assessment, online observations, etc. Health sector examples include randomised control for simulation, mock wards (nursing and mid-wife), 3D and allied physiotherapy. Accrediting bodies can require x number of hours in 'placement', so see if it is possible to revise expectations in terms of staff resources as these can be expensive and intensive;
 - + Keep things simple in teaching and learning – don't make it too complex;
 - + We may need to 'reorder' the 'order' of modules/units, perhaps focusing on theory first and then moving to practice-based activity later, depending on where things are with COVID-19. How will this affect learning progression and quality?
 - + We need to be careful about not showing preferential treatment to specific courses/programmes if they cost more or are more expensive to run;
 - + Many recent e-learning projects could be revisited and their recommendations and suggestions adopted for online teaching. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced institutions to think about e-learning (*'Nothing sharpens the mind like a pandemic'*) and its value e.g. providing pre-recorded lectures combined with online seminars in small groups. However, it might still be necessary to undertake some traditional lecture-based delivery. Reconsider, therefore, how we engage with students online and what we do in the new socially distanced face-to-face environments. Is now the time to 'reject' the traditional mode of lectures?
 - + Take blended learning forward – use 'chunked' lectures, short 'micro-courses' etc. in a single class. This might involve, for example, changing three-hour seminars to asynchronous learning blocks, with materials provided in advance and the 'contact' time used for direct personal and professional development with learners which could be much more valuable. This approach could be much more effective for
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supporting students to develop in a more self-directed way and demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes;

- + We should clarify the expectations of students as regards learning modes. There is some evidence to suggest younger learners have shorter attention spans than previous generations. We may need to address this by having shorter engagements, not lengthy ones (less than seven minutes?). The aim should be to place students at the heart of learning and teaching;
- + Deliver one-hour short webinars, and then provide supported learning outside of webinars. Don't deliver didactic learning and avoid simply replicating face-to-face teaching online; create meaningful learning through good teaching and learning practice;
- + Create multi-modal ways of learning through universal design. How might consistency and quality be maintained in multiple contexts?
- + We need to manage student expectations, communicate the value proposition clearly, and explain the transition;
- + Provide weekly attendance and retention updates for all subjects, supported by course advisors who can contact students directly about support available/needed;
- + Clear communication on the requirements of students, timings and expectations is needed, especially with regard to how they are expected to engage with synchronous, asynchronous and 'remote' activities;
- + Develop a checklist of things all course leaders need to consider when delivering online as a self-assessment tool to pick up the differences with everyone being off campus. This would mean less need for all aspects to be checked on all programmes;
- + The current situation is undoubtedly creating an extra burden on staff, but institutions ahead of those in the UK are now starting to see the positive outcomes of their endeavours.

Graham Gibbs' (2002) *'Dimensions of Quality'* report aims: "... to contribute to the current debates about educational quality in undergraduate education in the UK and about the need to justify increases in resources on the basis of indicators of educational quality". However, it is also helpful here in terms of framing our thinking about equivalence across different modes of teaching and learning delivery. The report identifies dimensions of educational quality that can be used to compare learning and teaching settings, adapting Biggs's '3P' model of 'presage', 'process' and 'product' (Biggs, 1993). Of most direct relevance here is the 'process' stage, which identifies the following dimensions of quality:

- + *class size;*
- + *class contact hours, independent study hours and total hours (including the amount of time on a task);*
- + *quality of teaching (including who does it);*
- + *research environment;*
- + *level of intellectual challenge;*
- + *formative assessment and feedback; and*
- + *other factors (such as reputation, peer ratings, student support and quality enhancement processes).*

Gibbs concludes that “*The most important conclusion of this report is that what best predicts educational gain is measures of educational process: what institutions do with their resources to make the most of whatever students they have. The process variables that best predict gains are not to do with the facilities themselves, or to do with student satisfaction with these facilities, but concern a small range of fairly well-understood pedagogical practices that engender student engagement*” (Gibbs, 2002).

While these concepts are very helpful, these are exceptional times, and while equivalence can be measured using models such as this one, *perceptions* of equity, fairness and inclusion also need to be considered, both *within* and *between* institutions. Students have been destabilised by the upheaval to their academic progression, exemplified in the SDCE **Induction** report. However, their expectations, along with those of their parents and supporters, appear not to have altered commensurately. The sector is therefore facing a major reputational challenge, founded on misconceptions of, for example, the educational value of online learning, and having to deal with phased returns to campus which may be perceived to offer some disciplines an advantage over others. Communication is key to redressing these perceptions, which, coupled with robust quality assurance processes, will help ensure equivalence, equity and educational enhancement.

4. Continuing to provide assessment feedback that supports learning (feedback for learning – dialogic)

The role and importance of feedback, for both formative and summative assessments, is key in allowing all students to demonstrate their potential (Edgington, 2020).

“Academic feedback is more strongly and consistently related to achievement than any other teaching behaviour... This relationship is consistent regardless of grade, socioeconomic status, race, or school setting.” (Bellon et al., 1991).

“[Feedback is] ... the most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement.”
(Hattie, 1999)

The HE sector is currently having to deal with assessment feedback at a number of levels. For example, in the UK and other similar HE contexts:

- + **Finalists** – degree assessments need to be concluded in order for students to graduate this summer, ‘without detriment’ arising from the changes brought about in response to COVID-19;
- + **Continuing students** – coursework marks for activities and assignments which were disrupted when the social lockdown was imposed in March (UK), along with recast end-of-year assessments, need to be generated to provide (a) students with feedback on progress and (b) departments/faculties with information to support and agree progression to the next year of study; and
- + **Incoming and continuing students** – assessments need to be integrated into the design of new and reconfigured courses/units for the start of the next academic year/session.

Furthermore, these issues are having to be dealt with at speed and in parallel, and in an environment of uncertainty. How we deliver teaching and assessment safely to meet both learning outcomes and student expectations, differentiated across courses and disciplines and in an inclusive and equitable way, is a major challenge.

It is therefore crucial to ensure quality that sound principles of assessment feedback (dialogic feedback that is *for learning*) underpin programme design and delivery. **Design and Delivery** is covered in more detail in the separate SDCE Leadership Intelligence Report

in this series, and so we will focus here on the quality aspects of assessment. Workshop participants identified a range of observations, challenges and possible solutions here, including:

Observations

- + There was considerable interest expressed about conducting more assessments at a course/programme level, rather than in an atomised way at unit/modular level. In addition to the potential this offers in identifying overassessment, it has the added advantage of focusing on what it is that students need to know by the end of the course overall and how they can demonstrate course learning outcomes in a deep and integrated way;
- + Can more of the assessment process be automated to reduce the staff burden when it comes to marking?
- + We need to ensure we are meeting quality assurance benchmarks efficiently and effectively. University and college leaders, professional services and academic staff, and students simply don't have the time to engage in repeated overassessment, particularly in a socially-distanced campus situation but also in the longer-term when the sector is recovering and adjusting to the 'next normal';
- + There was often a consensus amongst workshop participants that we should not be looking to make big changes to policies where this isn't needed. To ensure quality it should be more about the application and operationalisation of existing policies and the move to a more educative approach;
- + COVID-19-related reviews of assessment methods has great potential to ensure we are more inclusive;
- + More formative assessments need to be included/integrated into quality-focused curricula. However, the value of the formative needs to be clearly and effectively communicated to both students and staff. It also requires other unnecessary things to be removed from the portfolio of assessment to balance workloads.
A summative mark isn't a learning outcome in itself.

Challenges

- + We need to support students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in talking to prospective employers to boost their employability. Should we acknowledge the impact of COVID-19 on course completion certificates?
 - + Students still need to take and pass some or all of the remaining assessments/ alternative assessments carried forward from the last session. How will this happen?
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- + What is the new future for assessment and feedback? How do we add value and measure success?
 - + What is fair and equitable for students in relation to assessment and feedback? Is it appropriate to completely change an assessment?
 - + There has been a huge increase in demand for assessment extensions from students during the COVID-19 'emergency response' phase. We urgently need to understand the reasons for this in order to plan for the reopening of our campuses, and to use this knowledge in course and assessment design going forward to mitigate against this happening to the same extent in the future;
 - + Courses that have placements (e.g. teacher training, healthcare professions) require confirmation of student engagement with the training element. How will this be signed off? If some quality criteria are relaxed, how will this be viewed by employers? This needs to be addressed at a national level;
 - + Some courses (e.g. counselling) are primarily about face-to-face engagement and alternative assessments using, for example, video have proved problematic as some students struggle to engage with video and don't see themselves as 'performers'. There are also inclusion and equity considerations here. Furthermore, there may not currently be enough practise clients for subjects of this nature to develop and establish practitioner proficiency;
 - + There is a need to continue to meet regulatory body requirements, for example medical professional bodies. How quickly are they responding? How will their requirements be met? It is imperative we continue negotiating with PSRBs;
 - + Laboratory-based practical work and assessments is problematic, since not all can be undertaken in 'dry-labs'. How can we solve this?
 - + Will reintroducing quality assurance approvals and mechanisms post the COVID-19 emergency create tensions? We have had to be more flexible in recent months, leading staff to, perhaps, question the necessity of greater rigour;
 - + The actual mechanics of assessments is a cause for concern. For example, questions have been raised about the use of essay mills in unproctored examinations, and the constraints on viva voce examinations. There are concerns too about meeting the standards of accrediting bodies for groupwork, group presentations etc. This needs to be reviewed for the next academic year/session, and must take into account equality, diversity and inclusion considerations;
 - + There are tensions between making quick supposedly pragmatic changes and ensuring we are able to support the diversity of student needs, especially those of students from widening participation backgrounds. It takes time to reflect upon these needs and ensure appropriate adjustments are in place;
 - + In the UK, the devolved nations/governments have different accreditation requirements. For example, the requirements in accountancy are different for
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different accreditors, which is causing problems. As another example, there are also concerns with aircraft engineering courses and associated PSRBs.

Possible solutions

- + Continue to put in place alternative assessments to replace face-to-face activities to ensure learning outcomes can be met;
- + Continue to benchmark against prior attainment;
- + For study abroad students, allow partner institutions to use their own policy in relation to COVID-19, e.g. in approving extensions;
- + Recruit a network of employers to observe/engage with students during online teaching to promote skills development;
- + Be imaginative in exploiting mechanisms for providing feedback. The following examples are being used/trialled at the moment: using screen sharing, one-to-one and group support online, short recorded podcasts, in-text annotations, providing assignment feedback by email/online submission;
- + Offer regular three-weekly surveys to students to seek feedback so that institutions can act on feedback quickly, respond in a timely way, and make relevant changes as a unit/programme is running. This requires the ability to adapt flexibly to change and show resilience;
- + Make quick changes to assessment and have a sound basis for doing so underpinned by quality considerations. Which elements can/should be kept? What needs to change? COVID-19 has been a catalyst for course/programme teams to engage in conversations around the 'redesign' of assessment and feedback processes which otherwise might not have taken place;
- + There are good examples of alternative assessments out there across a range of disciplines; online/digital exhibitions, open-book assessments, online assignments, quizzes, online viva voce examinations, observations over video conferencing, sports coaching sessions delivered online etc. Alternative online methods can and do work, we just need to be creative and innovative in our methods;
- + Make sure assessments enable students to meet the learning outcomes;
- + Academic integrity is a concern, and we need to be mindful of cheating, plagiarism and protecting/sustaining academic quality. How do we deal with this? See, for example QAA (UK) guidance in support of academic integrity (available at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-do/academic-integrity>). Review policies around academic assessment and integrity and appropriately operationalise these;

- + Plan to integrate assessments through coursework, project assessments and final assessments such as portfolios;
- + Look to develop online work-based learning opportunities; create scenarios for this, trial and test them, then evaluate and improve;
- + Continue to provide mentoring/coaching for staff and students;
- + Develop automated assessment tasks with feedback within the system, tailored to support student needs, and taking into account practical considerations such as access to technology;
- + We need to ensure course content is chunked to allow students time to reflect and check their learning, and also allow feedback from staff to ensure understanding and progress;
- + An increased use of coursework instead of examinations is likely, but we need to be mindful of increasing the burden on staff in terms of marking;
- + There is the potential to photograph calculations and upload them with work in engineering and maths.

As with other areas of quality and quality assurance, assessment is ripe for scrutiny and enhancement. Blended, asynchronous delivery will mean teaching and learning will be less 'blocky', with greater use of free-flowing learning and teaching models becoming possible unfettered by traditional teaching timetables, such as –

micro-lectures + collaborative-breakout + immediate-feedback

Moving to this kind of approach also offers the opportunity to reflect on what assessment is for, how it meshes with our stated learning outcomes and satisfies accreditation obligations, the skills and attribute development it offers, and how it prepares students for the world of employment and wider society/citizenship. Are proctored examinations really the best way to embed knowledge and prepare students for the world of collaborative work? Are there better ways to provide feedback on progress and consolidate learning? In addition, informal feedback goes beyond the formal classroom setting. As a final question, then, how might we replicate informal opportunities for feedback on a socially-distanced campus or in online environments?

5. Ensuring students get the higher education they are entitled to expect

The UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education foregrounds its remit as: *"We safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered around the world. We check that students working towards a UK qualification get the higher education they are entitled to expect"*. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, these student expectations have in some respects changed, and now encompass issues, areas and concerns we would never have envisaged before this year. However, the distinctive quality offering which students are entitled to expect from higher education institutions remains, namely:

- + being exceptional;
- + being consistent;
- + being fit for purpose;
- + offering value for money; and
- + being transformational.

"Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skilful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives"

(William A. Foster)

In addition to oversight and guidance from agencies such as the QAA, higher education leaders also need to be mindful that consumer protection law (as it appears in different countries and regions), which applies to the relationship between providers and prospective and current students, continues to apply during this period of COVID-19 disruption (UK Government, 2020). In light of this, the UK's Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of higher education in England, published *'Guidance for providers about student and consumer protection during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic'* on 10 June 2020 (OfS, 2020a). This document "... provides guidance for registered providers about how the Office for Students (OfS) will approach the regulation of student protection during the period of disruption resulting from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic", and contains the following statements:

"Notwithstanding the significant uncertainty regarding the impact of coronavirus, providers will need to ensure that prospective students have information that is clear and timely (including any information about changes to the courses for which they have applied). Prospective students will need to understand what a provider is

committing to deliver in the current circumstances and in different scenarios, how this will be achieved, and the changes that might need to be made in response to changing public health advice, so that they are able to make informed choices. Existing students also need clear information about any adjustments to their courses and assessment that may take place in the next academic year."

and

"As set out in our guidance on quality and standards during the pandemic, providers should make all reasonable efforts to provide alternative teaching and support for students that is broadly equivalent to the provider's usual arrangements. We also expect providers to ensure that they follow the principles set out in their student protection plans in relation to ensuring continuation of study for students, even where their plans do not specifically refer to pandemic-related risks."

What these highlight, amongst other things, is the urgency with which institutions need to establish what they will deliver at the start of the next session, how they will deliver it, and for returning students how the educational proposition and setting differs from the one they signed up to at the outset of their programme of study. Furthermore, this needs to be set in the context of sustaining a clear focus on quality and good practice.

To continue this example, the OfS will be using four primary mechanisms to enable them to identify regulatory concerns about student and consumer protection (OfS, 2020a):

1. They require a provider to report to them when it intends or expects to cease teaching some or all of its courses to one or more groups of students;
2. They will continue to encourage students and other third parties to notify them of any concerns about the arrangements put in place by an individual provider as a means of identifying any providers that may not have made reasonable efforts to protect the interests of their students;
3. They will use their engagement to understand a provider's approaches to teaching and assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensure they understand OfS guidance and expectations, and will follow up any notifications that cause concern;
and
4. As part of their normal regulatory approach will consider the number and pattern of complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and will continue to use this information to inform their assessments after the pandemic, and so will be able to take into account issues raised by a provider's students and the OIA's response to these.

This highlights the important fact that ensuring we provide students with 'the higher education they are entitled to expect' will not be simply down to higher education institutions, and students will have clear grounds for complaint if these OfS and Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidelines and regulations are not implemented (and similar systems of regulation and recourse are likely to be operating in other country settings). It should also be noted that an earlier OfS Guidance document (3 April 2020) entitled '*Guidance for providers about quality and standards during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic*' still has force and is also very relevant to quality considerations (OfS, 2020b).

In terms of the discussion around student expectations, workshop participants highlighted:

Observations

- + Different institutions have many similar issues in responding to COVID-19. There is therefore much commonality across a diverse HE sector;
- + Student expectations remain as high as they were before the outbreak of COVID-19. It is difficult to say if this will change, given the rapidly evolving landscape, and different institutional responses to public health and government advice;
- + There is a significant problem for the HE sector resulting from the media and in some cases government's framing of online delivery as second rate. What can we do about this?
- + There is a feeling that the HE sector is not doing a very good public relations job at the moment. Students are representing their views very well, whereas much of the publicity directed at HE institutions has been about getting a government bailout, reducing face-to-face teaching, the loss of the campus experience, and 'demanding' full fees in the face of a perceived reduction in the quality of the offering. We need to be proactive and say more as a sector about the high quality and value-for-money proposition that continues to be on offer, and explain more clearly the value of higher education and the overall student experience;
- + The problem with student expectations is that students expect the campus experience!
- + We have to overcome the challenge of 'contact hours' and better articulate how and when learning occurs ('engagement hours').

Challenges

- + There is currently considerable tension between perceptions of what institutions say they will provide and what students are expecting;
 - + We need to address student expectations and establish what a 'successful' and 'valued' HE experience looks like. What are the attributes that we can maximise to
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enable this to be realised?

- + Different students expect different things. We have been flexible and accommodating during the crisis-response phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is now a need to manage ongoing expectations. What will HE be fundamentally for in the future?
- + Can we say how much time staff would be on campus? Which staff? How do we make this fair and equitable?
- + Do we provide everything to everyone (e.g. access to all library services)? What happens when face-to-face activities are reinstated? Do we then restrict or take away what we previously offered? How do we manage these kinds of changes on an on-going basis?
- + Students are currently overwhelmed. We can't force them to come to campus (though Professor May Tan-Mullins' [one of the SDCE guest speakers] experience in China is that once the Ningbo Campus reopened the return rate was in excess of 85%, with a further 7% of students willing but unable to return due to flight restrictions). Some may prefer online teaching and learning during the pandemic, and some students and staff will continue to need shielding;
- + The challenge is we need to re-imagine and re-invent HE!;
- + Workloads are potentially greater for online teaching, and contact hours do not reflect preparation hours;
- + How do we manage student expectations, and perceptions of fairness and equity, when individual students might be getting very different experiences, even on the same campus as a result of staggered returns, 'priority' disciplines dependent on proximal pedagogies and blended approaches?

Possible solutions

- + Give extensions to final year students so that they can complete their studies;
 - + Provide enhanced pastoral support and guidance, hire more people to deliver this, and support them in their work. This will enable us to deliver the high-quality experience we promise, and that our students expect and deserve;
 - + We need to support the health and wellbeing of our learners;
 - + Ensure continued dialogue with students through Students' Unions/other representative student bodies, student representatives and indeed all students. Institutions need to be transparent about what they are doing and why. We need to rise to the challenge and proactively manage student expectations;
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- + Clearly articulate what we expect from all our students – **it is a two-way learning contract**. Provide relevant and timely guidance, scene setting, direct engagement at course/programme level as well as at an individual level;
- + Clarify what the new on-campus, off-campus, blended and online learning environments will look and feel like;
- + We need to engage with the pedagogic literature. As a single example, The Society for the Improvement of Psychological Science have published a paper entitled, 'A systematic review of the effects of video on learning in higher education' (Noetel *et al.*, 2020);
- + We can better manage expectations by co-creating online environments with students as much as possible;
- + A clear articulation of what each module involves in terms of requirements from staff and students, pre-learning, online, face-to-face etc. in each module handbook is essential;
- + We need to capture the student voice continually, checking their response to the learning experience and taking the temperature of feelings and engagement.

A sector-wide response regarding expectations is clearly needed, reframing these in the context of *learning outcomes* and *quality*. Furthermore, we also need to evaluate and where appropriate challenge the metrics used to drive expectations. For example, despite their widespread use contact hours do not necessarily deliver a quality learning experience overall. It is the *quality* of contact time, not its *quantity*, and everything that surrounds it that matters and we need to better articulate how and when real learning occurs.

“Customers and suppliers do not always see things the same way” (Corver, 2020)

Every aspect of higher education our students experience will be touched and transformed by COVID-19. However, the expectations of our students and their supporters seem at present to be remarkably traditional and this must not lead us to be complacent. A complete return to the 'old normal' is highly unlikely. Indeed, the transitional period we find ourselves in at the moment may be an indicator of the future – a series of 'next normals' rather than a 'new normal'. It is imperative that we play an active role in managing expectations going forward through innovative, quality-driven, diverse teaching and learning design and delivery. That way, and through effective communications strategies, rather than managing expectations down in response to the crisis we can actually *raise* expectations through vision and enhancement.

"While some college leaders are making serious efforts to improve the quality of teaching, many others seem content with their existing programs. Although they recognize the existence of problems affecting higher education as a whole, such as grade inflation or a decline in the rigor of academic standards, few seem to believe that these difficulties exist on their own campus, or they tend to attribute most of the difficulty to the poor preparation of students before they enrol." (Bok, 2017)

The consequences for not proactively addressing the issues surrounding quality may be stark, as clearly exemplified by LeFevre (2020): *"Last month a subtle warning shot was shot across the bows of universities still struggling to manage the disruption caused by Covid-19. When the Minister responsible for higher education announced that UK students would be charged full tuition fees for online study, she added a caveat – the assumption of quality. If students 'feel that the quality isn't there' she said, 'there are processes that they can follow to seek redress'."*

6. Key principles

The following key principles relating to quality emerged from the discussions and interaction in this collaborative enquiry:

- + Our overriding consideration and priority is the health, safety and wellbeing of students, staff, visitors, and the wider community;
- + *Stick to your knitting!* Know what you are good at and what makes you distinctive as an institution and use this as the clear basis for your quality proposition;
- + In the heat of unanticipated events of an apparently seismic scale, the drive to maintain demand and income can cause organisations to overpromise on their services or diversify inappropriately (well beyond their core activity). Neither of these approaches work well for quality assurance;
- + Good practice is good practice. Keep first principles of quality assurance in sight and aim to do well the things ‘that you do well’;
- + Focus on processes rather than just the product. For example, the operation of intended learning outcomes as an aligning thread that runs through from course/programme design to assessment is core to ensuring the validity and reliability of teaching delivery;
- + Think hard about the *dimensions of quality* and how they apply in your environment and with the changes you propose;
- + Fluidity versus rigidity. Look closely at the policies and quality frameworks already in place, as they may be more flexible than they first appear and they are already tailored to your educational context. It may just be a case of applying them differently and with greater agility;
- + Reinvent versus replicate. Be pragmatic with regard to time and resources by considering which elements of curricula can simply be replicated, with quality assurance already largely in place, and which elements have the potential for reinvention through enhancement;
- + Begin with the end in mind. Consider what a good, high quality student experience would be, build a rich picture, and work backwards from there in terms of how this can be designed and delivered;

- + Induction is a process not an event and this forms a critical basis for a high-quality student experience;
- + Focus your energy around understanding student expectations, have open conversations about both changes and quality, and co-create by regularly seeking student views and feedback;
- + Keep thinking about unintended consequences and the equity of your decisions and choices;
- + Stay alert to the evolving guidance, frameworks and regulatory requirements as they apply to your context and be responsive to them;
- + No institution is an island – the sharing and dissemination of good practice will be crucial for developing new paradigms of quality for the next generation of higher education programmes. Be part of the conversation;
- + Communicate, communicate, communicate!

7. Conclusions

The following quote covering regulations, processes and policies for assuring quality and standards from the QAA, UK (2020) helpfully contextualises and positions quality in an HE sector radically changed by COVID-19:

"Institutional policies and procedures that assure quality and standards will need to be reviewed to ensure that they are sufficiently flexible to accommodate changes in circumstances that will occur over the next year, and possibly beyond. For some providers, temporary arrangements for alternative assessments (for example, to replace exams) will remain in 2020-21, and regulations will need to reflect those arrangements. Providers have moved quickly to deliver teaching and learning virtually, ensuring that lecture/seminar/tutorial materials were available through a VLE and that students could virtually attend sessions. They have also had to assure the quality of the move to virtual delivery, often implementing 'emergency' or 'exceptional' academic regulations to do so. The challenge providers are now facing is how to ensure that those regulations are not a barrier to making reasonable changes while ensuring that quality is not adversely affected."

This highlights the need to move rapidly beyond our COVID-19 'emergency' responses and develop flexible, agile and fit-for-purpose quality and quality assurance procedures and practices, particularly in relation to new online and blended teaching and learning environments. Following a period of necessary flexibility, we must now establish new and rigorous regulations for quality in all that we do. Given there is still huge uncertainty as to how we will be doing things at the start of next session this is a challenging proposition. However, by embedding quality considerations into our planning we can achieve our goals of maintaining quality during rapid and ongoing change, ensure equity and inclusivity, frame and manage student and staff expectations, and develop assessment and feedback procedures which allow our students to achieve their potential.

Given higher education has had to become more 'business-like' in recent years in a number of respects, it may also be helpful to look beyond the sector for help in developing our practices. A major 'dimensions of quality' model used more generically outside of higher education is David Garvin's eight dimensions of quality model, and this may be of some value here (after Garvin, 1987; IfM, 2016):

1. Performance	A product's primary operating characteristics, based on measurable attributes, which usually allows brands to be ranked objectively on individual aspects of performance
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	(overall performance rankings may however be more difficult to develop due to different customer needs).
2. Features	Usually the secondary aspects of performance, encompassing those characteristics that augment basic functioning. These features involve objective and measurable attributes; objective individual needs, not prejudices, affect their translation into quality differences.
3. Reliability	The probability of a product malfunctioning or failing within a specified time period.
4. Conformance	The degree to which a product's design and operating characteristics meet established standards.
5. Durability	A measure of product life which has both economic and technical dimensions. It can be defined as the amount of use one gets from a product before it deteriorates or the amount of use one gets from a product before it breaks down and replacement is preferable to continued repair.
6. Serviceability	Serviceability is the speed, courtesy, competence, and ease of repair. Consumers are concerned not only about a product breaking down but also about the time before service is restored, the timeliness with which service appointments are kept, the nature of dealings with service personnel, and the frequency with which service calls or repairs fail to correct outstanding problems. In those cases where problems are not immediately resolved and complaints are filed, a company's complaints handling procedures are also likely to affect customers' ultimate evaluation of product and service quality.
7. Aesthetics	A subjective dimension of quality relating to how a product looks, feels, sounds, tastes, or smells. It is a matter of personal judgement and a reflection of individual preference. On this dimension of quality it may be difficult to please everyone.
8. Perceived Quality	Consumers do not always have complete information about a product's or service's attributes; indirect measures may be their only basis for comparing brands. A product's durability for example can seldom be observed directly; it must usually be inferred from various tangible and intangible aspects of the product. In such circumstances, images, advertising, and branding –

Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education Project: Quality

Giles Brown and Doug Parkin

	inferences about quality rather than the reality itself – can be critical
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While the language is clearly from outside our own sector, it is relatively easy to reframe the dimensions to stimulate and expand our thinking regarding quality and good practice. They also highlight the importance of perception as well as quantifiable attributes, and hence the huge importance of communication as we navigate the COVID-19 world and the progression of 'next normals'.

Ultimately and ideally, quality needs to be 'apodictic', which is where it is demonstrably and self-evidently the case: the very 'look and feel' of something speaks quality with certainty and assurance. When quality is beyond dispute we are there!

"We probably won't please every student but we might transform the way online pedagogy is used and viewed forever"

(Vicki Stott, Executive Director of Operations and Deputy CEO, QAA, UK, and a guest speaker on the SDCE project).

8. Facilitator's reflections

Becky Smith, Assistant Director, International Business Development and Delivery, Advance HE

(During the workshops Becky facilitated the breakout discussions focused on the Quality topic area.)

Across the five workshops, I was privileged to facilitate the group discussions on Quality. Such a broad topic cuts across so many aspects of higher education provision and is central to the core of its *raison d'être*. The Quality-focused keynote presentation, delivered by Vicki Stott of the UK's Quality Assurance Agency, which was repeated twice across the week, emphasised this and, to some extent, helped to frame discussions at those particular workshops.

The umbrella-nature of Quality as a topic was reflected by the diversity of those participating. We had national policy-makers, institutional leaders, those with quality responsibilities at institutional and faculty-level, Registrars, Deans, Heads of Learning and Teaching, educational developers, student services staff and academics all represented. Participants were from a variety of countries including the UK, China, Bahrain, Ireland, Oman, UAE, Kenya, Thailand and Australia. With my 'international' hat on, it was a real pleasure to engage with colleagues last seen face-to-face in their respective countries, before our own interactions went entirely online. Institution-types included both large and small, public and private sector, further education colleges and other institutions with HE provision as well as universities, including one that had offered entirely online provision prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

With the exception of the final discussion group, each group numbered below ten in size enabling deep and rich discussion. I felt participants really appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences and hear from others who were facing similar challenges irrespective of their own situational context. Many questions were posed, and not all could be answered, but the sharing of tried and tested ideas, intended approaches and practical tools was seemingly appreciated by all.

Key themes that emerged were the balance between fluidity and rigidity in relation to quality and standards. There was a recognition that greater flexibility in terms of policies, frameworks, processes and accommodations had been required in dealing with the immediate crisis associated with campus closures. However, it was generally felt that the level of rigour in terms of applying quality standards needs to be increased and reoriented to adapt to new ways of doing things in either an online or 'bi-modal model' going forward. There was general acknowledgement of the need for enhanced communication whether that be with students, staff, internal committees, regulatory bodies, sector agencies, employers, the media or the wider public to ensure accuracy, clarity and understanding of

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standards and expectations. There was also considerable discussion regarding assessment alternatives and approvals. In particular, the challenges of dealing with assessment relating to practice-based learning and teaching was a consistent topic theme that emerged. Another thread that came through quite strongly was that many saw the 'forced change' as an opportunity to consider the long-term re-design of delivery and assessment models used as opposed to the short-term replication of those previously used. There was also a recognition of the investment required to support staff, faculty and students during transition periods and that the heavy burden of workload created, and potential disparities that have and could emerge need to be mitigated.

As one participant noted, "*Nothing focuses the mind like a pandemic,*" and what was acutely apparent from all the discussion sessions was the concern for safety, integrity, flexibility, creativity and consistency relating to quality standards, the student experience and the wider community as the nature of higher education navigates a new path.

9. Resources

There is an Advance HE Connect group for members who participated in the SDCE workshops. This can be accessed via <https://connect.advance-he.ac.uk>.

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Guest speakers

Vicki Stott, Executive Director of Operations and Deputy CEO, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), UK.

Eve Alcock, Students' Union President, University of Bath, UK.

Dr Helen Galbraith, Academic Registrar and Director of Student and Academic Services, Keele University, UK.

Professor May Tan-Mullins, Vice Provost (Teaching and Learning) EDI and Sustainability, University of Nottingham Ningbo China – UNNC Ningbo, China.

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(All Advance HE staff)

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- Moderator – Lucy Madahar

Quality topic area

- Facilitator – Becky Smith
- Moderators – Raj Dhimar and Celia Brigg

Inclusion topic area

- Facilitators – Gary Loke and Clare Pavitt
- Moderator – Jenny Tester

Design and delivery topic area

- Facilitator – Cindy Vallance
- Moderators – Steve Lloyd and Tim Whittlesea

Space and place topic area

- Facilitator – Barbara Bassa
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- Moderator – Dan Tinkler

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Report formatting and production – Faye Thomson

List of participating institutions

- | | |
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| + Aberystwyth University | + Curtin University |
| + AECC University College | + Defence Academy of the United Kingdom |
| + Anglia Ruskin University | + Derby College |
| + Arden University, RDI | + Dublin City University |
| + Aston University | + Durham University |
| + Australian Institute of Business | + European College of Chiropractic |
| + Bangor University | + Futureworks Training Ltd |
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| + BPP University | + Gower College Swansea |
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