# Editor's Introduction

**A warm welcome to volume 15, issue 1, of Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching!**

This Winter issue of Compass includes a mix of opinion pieces, research articles and case studies. Several papers discuss aspects of online teaching including developing students' online presentation skills to support their employability, using gamification to enhance inter-professional relationships, building a community of practice through the delivery of a HE teaching programme via distancing learning and the challenges and benefits of online teaching in the context of applied disciplines, namely engineering and surveying. Another theme is around dialogue with students and incorporating the student voice, in relation to feedback methods, decolonization of the science curriculum and seminar delivery. Finally, papers on personal tutoring and building student resilience bring attention to the important and current topic of student wellbeing. We hope you enjoy the brief summaries below:

In a powerful opinion piece about the often overlooked but still essential work of personal tutors, Eve Rapley and Michael Talbot of the University of Greenwich argue that such tutoring, advising and mentoring are not sufficiently recognised or properly rewarded. Considering the emphasis in contemporary higher education on the student experience and well-being, supporting students' sense of belonging, progression, retention and achievement, the authors express concern that the personal tutor role still operates "*in the shadows*". The complex range of skills and knowledge needed to carry out the role, they argue, demand the same degree of development as and parity of esteem with teaching and research. The pandemic has served to show even more clearly why the tutor-tutee relationship is so important; it can be transformational and is intrinsically linked to student success. Therefore, there is a need for formal training for the role along with discussion and development of the personal tutor skillset and mindset and, finally, institutional systems which "*encompass the needs and outcomes of personal tutoring*", for it is "*about people and about building and developing relationships*."

In our second opinion piece for this issue, Ramla AlZadjali, University of Exeter, reflects on his experience of using different approaches to providing feedback on students' work, in his role teaching English to HE students on Oman. The author argues that student engagement with feedback is likely to be greater and lead to deeper learning when feedback is focused on specific aspects of their work and contextualized by discussion of and support with those target areas. In contrast when feedback is comprehensive, in other words, it addresses all aspects of the students' work submission, and is not contextualized, students can find this overwhelming, leading to more limited or surface level engagement. The author then raises key questions about the purpose of and best practice for providing feedback when teaching in other subject areas, emphasizing the need for dialogue around the feedback process so that students understand what it is for and how to use it.

An interesting exploration of how distance learning higher education teacher development programmes can build effective communities of practice finds synchronous delivery to be more successful than asynchronous, but, whatever the mode, peer feedback, peer learning and collaboration appear to be crucial to the building of productive communities. Stephanie Fuller, at Queen Mary University of London, conducted a survey of a dispersed group of participants in the institution's PGCert in Academic Practice to gauge to what extent they felt a community

had been established, from which it became clear that some key elements for relationship-building were being commonly expressed, such as break-out rooms in webinars, opportunities for both hearing and ***seeing*** peers (the 'chat' function on its own seemed inadequate), interactive activity with peers and reciprocal feedback; all of these were bound up with finding out and learning from each other's practice, experiences, ideas and approaches. Drawing on the findings, the paper lists ideas for enhancing community development, including suggestions for developing personal relationships and a common identity: use of online social groups, more synchronous spaces for informal chat and discussion and activities geared to helping group members to get to know each other better. There are many helpful recommendations for practice here.

A Kingston University exploration of science students' understanding of 'decolonisation of the curriculum' and their views on how that might be achieved in this subject area found that many were supportive of measures to achieve it; black African/Caribbean students were particularly so, especially in terms of the content of the science taught. Neil Williams and Audrey Benjamin conclude that the results support the call for decolonising the science curriculum to reflect the diversity of the student population. Though the findings indicate a low degree of understanding of the term 'decolonisation of the curriculum', they have already affected how science is being taught in this institution. For example, there is now a more balanced representation of the global south; more active learning is taking place; staff are able to undertake workshops to discuss how best to approach decolonisation. This paper sets out clearly the logic of taking steps to ensure that students from all backgrounds feel that the curriculum does indeed reflect them and their experience: an inclusive curriculum is fundamental to the interest and engagement of all learners.

A comprehensive literature review on the subject of building resilience in higher education students reveals a wide range of institutional and pedagogical practices designed to support students to counter such debilitating challenges to their progress and success as anxiety, depression and stress. Adrian Buttazzoni of the University of Waterloo, Ontario, has synthesized findings from thirty-five articles into five analytical themes – all of which have considerable import for educators in the sector, especially when considering individual and interpersonal approaches – guided by the research question "*What are the methods, strategies and defining (essential) characteristics of teaching approaches, course curricula or other course-based approaches used in HE to support psychological resilience among students?*" An array of strategies to enhance resilience emerges from this meticulous review, central to which is a powerful focus upon "*resilience-awareness and conceptualization, individual skill development and interpersonal strategies*." The review does much to direct educators to possible ways of helping students to develop the skills needed to establish personal mental well-being and, consequently, ensure retention and academic achievement.

A University of Greenwich student-centred approach to learning that involved joint decision-making, to overcome a perceived lack of engagement, is the focus of a case study that explores how involving students in the design and the delivery of their module by means of partnership and constructive dialogue can produce a marked improvement in both participation and outcomes. Giuseppina Madonia reflects carefully upon the limitations of this particular context and is conscious of constraints that might limit transferability, but the qualitative data provided voluntarily by students to support this study speaks clearly: students who had previously been disaffected, express their enthusiasm for 'healthy' group dialogue

and 'power' over the learning and 'fun' during it. Of significance are their references to the productive partnership relationship with the author as their lecturer, but whose role, thanks to a willingness to give students a voice, became that of facilitator. This case study illustrates the value of including students in decisions about design and content.

Inter-professional education (IPE) in the context of the full range of health professions is very likely to make significant improvement to patient care. First-year IPE students at Falmouth University participate in facilitated multi-professional groups, the institution's Medicine, Health Sciences and Natural Sciences faculties' having "*the aim of enhancing their team-working skills, increasing their grasp of roles and interactions in healthcare and developing knowledge of the principles of ethical and compassionate care*." A case study on using gamification as one means of achieving this intention describes two relevant activities: a team challenge in the form of a 'pub quiz' and a scenario-based group board game; both centred on small-group learning as the medium for collaborative exploration and creation of knowledge. Russell Crawford provides reflection upon the feedback gleaned from participants' Likert responses and from IPE facilitators' observations, concluding that there was a broad consensus that this approach helped awareness, knowledge and understanding of the roles of other healthcare professionals and that it increased a sense of inclusion. The authors conclude that a gamified approach encourages discussion, enables students to contribute to the group experience, enhances shared knowledge and imparts "*lived experience of inter-professional practice*."

The important concept of 'employability' underpins a case study from the University of Greenwich, where the business school, by means of module which provided experience of working in virtual teams, set about preparing second-year accounting students for their futures in a digitally driven workplace. Dawn Reilly and Katherine Leopold emphasize that to develop appropriate digital skillsets is becoming vital to ***gaining*** employment. The involvement, in the module activities, of an employability specialist aimed to keep students focused upon contemporary professional expectations and practice. Formal assessment of the technical skills needed to achieve success in virtual collaborative tasks ensured that students saw relevance and value in what they were doing. While many students may be familiar with the online environment, they do not necessarily have the confidence to, for example, work with others in a virtual space to create and deliver presentations, which requires proficiency in a range of technical skills. This case study shows that students enjoyed what they were asked to do, developed confidence and expertise and have now a much clearer sense of how they must prepare themselves for both recruitment and the work they will undertake once appointed.

Another case study that considers employability, this time in the case of surveying students at the Anglia Ruskin University, chooses to explore the perceptions of those students of the learning they experienced because of COVID-imposed lockdown; staff were concerned that the loss of invaluable face-to-face delivery of courses – replaced either entirely by online education or by a mixture of the two modes – might cause students' preparation for the professional workplace to suffer. Certainly, vocational degree courses demand a practice-focused pedagogy to promote relevant deep learning. This study values highly the course participants' views of the pandemic-enforced strategies, especially so that any positive elements that would enhance ***post-lockdown*** learning could be retained. Barbara Vohmann and Andrew Thompson found that considerable positivity emerged in the responses to the survey, with evident appreciation for tutors' responses to the circumstances, such as provision

of learning materials and recordings that could be replayed (e.g., building surveys with voice-over), which allowed class time to be devoted to tutor-student communication, something of significant importance to the students. They very much liked the flipped approach, which, together with the simulations, enabled tutors to go some way to replicating real-world contexts. Other interesting by-products of the survey include the exposure of inequalities of home learning environments, expression of fears and remarkable student awareness of personal responsibility for learning.

Engineering education has always, crucially, depended on practical laboratory experimentation, but the sheer cost (complex equipment and specialist technicians) of achieving it and ensuring student safety have led higher education institutions to balance it with now very sophisticated computer modelling and simulation software. One case study, from the University of Greenwich, demonstrates that this blending of approaches is capable of encouraging the acquisition of basic skills, affording more time and opportunity to explore the subject matter and integrating laboratory experimentation with concepts covered in lectures, with resultant sustained improvement in learning and student satisfaction. The study explores project-based learning in power electronics, with an inquiry-based emphasis, taking students through the module via a combination of modelling, simulation and practical application in the lab. Yehdego Habtay carefully outlines the adopted approach, demonstrating that students benefited from more hands-on experience and more time to learn from relevant software and fit the activities around other responsibilities, with beneficial effect upon personal deeper learning and, consequently, engagement.

We hope these papers will make enjoyable and informative reading.

With best wishes to all Compass readers, contributors and reviewers,

Rachel and the Compass team at the University of Greenwich