

## **CLaS light touch project: scaling up educational co-design process**

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**Keywords:** educational development; co-design; learning design at scale; business education; Covid-19.

### ***The challenge***

Connected Learning at Scale (CLaS) is a significant longitudinal project initiated in 2019 by the University of Sydney Business School aiming to enhance the learning experience for students in large undergraduate and postgraduate classes. Three of us work at Business Co-Design, a team of educational developers, learning designers and media producers, who are among the key drivers of the CLaS project. Before the pandemic, we were working through a co-design process, with eight core subject coordinators for a duration of three semesters, to embed active-learning strategies and connected student participation in relevant and authentic tasks and assessments. Covid-19 and the pivot to online teaching challenged us to scale up our CLaS support system and to develop new co-design strategies that could provide rapid and agile support across more units of study. We no longer had the luxury of working with a small number of core subjects. Instead, we were asked to support 36 subjects across five business disciplines within one semester. We termed this the 'CLaS light touch' project as it offered lighter levels of support, resources, and timeline. Most subject coordinators we worked with were new to online teaching and faced a steep learning curve, in addition to the anxieties and uncertainties associated with the pandemic and teaching and learning environments. Our challenge was

thus not only scaling up the technological and pedagogical support, but dealing with the people at the centre of the transition (Aitchison et al., 2020).

## ***The response***

Throughout the light touch co-design process, we provided two-step support: bespoke workshops and one-on-one consultations. We tailored six workshops for each business discipline to introduce various learning tools (Padlet, Jamboard), techniques (chunking online content), and approaches (interactive tools, active learning). We followed the workshops with individual consultations with the subject coordinators to prioritise strategies that would most benefit students studying remotely. A 'light touch' design checklist was developed where the coordinators could select areas to concentrate on, with a space to add their own focus areas for improvement if the checklist did not cover their needs. The design checklist was informed by Stone (2017), who determined three common areas for attention in online education: (1) teacher presence, (2) consistency and quality online curriculum materials and information, and (3) supporting synchronous and asynchronous interactivity.

To increase teacher presence in the online environment, with assistance from Business Co-Design media producers, a welcome video was created for each subject. The video helped students to get to know their coordinator and get a clear understanding of subject expectations and requirements. Our second area of focus addressed the lack of consistency in online content and information provided to students. At the time of the pandemic most subjects were taught in face-to-face mode and the online Learning Management System (LMS) was used as a resource depository (Huber et al. 2020). Since LMSs were the key drivers of content design, development, and delivery for online learning (Rekhari and Curran, 2018), an in-house Canvas LMS template was designed to enhance information engagement and active learning for students. The template was flexible and easy to use in order to lessen the workload and stress for coordinators. The template also delivered a consistent 'look and feel' and incorporated prompts for the teaching team to provide important information in a consistent format. For example, the template included a 'how to study this unit' page which offered clear details on weekly synchronous sessions, expectations for asynchronous engagement, and how assessments linked to weekly

content. Our third focus area incorporated online interactivity to foster student engagement and collaboration. This step introduced digital tools and incorporated pedagogical techniques such as tips to orchestrate breakout rooms or design a Padlet activity.

We evaluated the light touch project through student surveys and teaching staff focus groups. The subject coordinators indicated that they profoundly benefited from the co-design approach and discipline-based workshops, while the individual consultations received overwhelmingly positive feedback. For example, academics stated that workshops introduced various online tools; however, during individual consultations they were able to get tailored advice on which tools would best solve their issues, support their teaching, and be implemented in their classes. The participants stated that only parts of the provided workshops were relevant to them, whereas the consultations were tailored to their specific needs.

Around 74% (n=308) of students who responded to the survey indicated the LMS template was 'extremely' or 'moderately easy' to navigate. The template, which consisted of a home page and four associated pages, helped students to better engage with content. A further 89% (n=144) of students strongly or somewhat agreed that the welcome video helped them to get to know their lecturers better, while 87% (n=141) believed that the welcome video helped them to understand what to expect from the subjects. Although the video may appear as a minor intervention, the evidence shows that it helped students to build stronger connections with their subject coordinators during the online learning.

## ***Recommendations***

Approaching innovation at scale requires a streamlined process. Despite being termed 'light touch', the project offered extensive and tailored support to address the unique educational and digital needs of the selected subjects. In a time of uncertainty when academics are under increasing pressure, we learned that professional and emotional support through a tailored consultation process was beneficial and invaluable.

The 'light touch' checklist functioned as a driver for professional discussions and co-design ideas. The checklist was effective for two reasons: (1) the coordinators could choose or

'cherry pick' what they wanted to implement in their units; (2) the checklist provided the teaching team with new ideas to implement in their units. The coordinators also appreciated that the ideas from the checklist were recommended, not forced on them.

Co-design was a successful approach to scale up educational quality, however not all selected subjects engaged with the process as it was optional. In the future, the subject coordinators should be asked to complete an expression of interest for the 'light touch' project to ensure that they are committed to work on improvements and that their needs can be satisfied within the provided support framework.

## **References**

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