

Learning development 2030

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Presentation abstract

Whilst the widening participation agenda and the impact of Covid-19 has arguably increased the importance of learning development (LD) within the UK higher education sector, it is widely acknowledged that the role, and indeed title, of the learning developer varies greatly between institutions. Some staff are employed on academic contracts with research requirements, others not. Similarly, some staff are faculty based whilst others are employed within a central team. This means that, as Bickle et al. (2021) explain, LD operates in a 'third space' (Whitchurch 2008). The disparity within the profession has meant that the role of the learning developer is multi-faceted, as reflected in Hilsdon's (2011, p.14) definition of LD:

Learning development is a complex set of multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary academic roles and functions, involving teaching, tutoring, research, and the design and production of learning materials.

This workshop provided participants with an opportunity to untangle the complex LD web and map out ideas for the future of the LD profession. Acting as newspaper editors, participants got out their crystal balls and produced a front page of a newspaper in 2030 where the main headline has been dedicated to the field of LD. Perhaps a LD staff member has won a prestigious award, maybe LD has received some form of international recognition. After presenting their front pages, participants engaged in a discussion around how as a profession we can achieve some of these aspirations. Participants took ideas with them that they could apply to their own practice.

Community response

This was a fantastic session; it was engaging, provoking, and stimulating. I loved the creative aspect to this session, and I will try to incorporate this into staff and student focus group scenarios. The free format of the session was really great for idea development and allowed an element of creativity – definitely something I will try with students. I am new to LD having worked in an academic discipline for a number of years, so I was interested in finding out about the field and how people think it will develop over the coming years. I would recommend that this session or a similar one is included in the ‘mini-keynotes’ section of ALDCon23 to engage more of our community in this future planning process. This was a great session to kick these conversations off with. Very thought provoking!

Being able to discuss how different aspects of the current ‘*status quo*’ could be transformed over the next 10 years led to a debate about the priorities different HE institutions and educational systems in the UK have for the 2030 horizon. There was a tremendous amount of positivity in the room but a realistic realisation that there are huge institutional, political and personal barriers to overcome which will likely remain in the next decade or so. For instance, the exploration of the links between university education and the UN S(ustainable)D(evelopment)G(oal)s as well as a reflection on the ‘true value’ of a university education from various angles gave me insights into other LD practitioners’ (more) localised educational goals and priorities for the near future. From a more pragmatic point of view, the looking to the future ‘wish list’ ideas and conversations were reflected in later sessions about the professionalisation of LD roles within universities, and the disparity between institutions in terms of contracts, workloads and models were also highlighted at various points. Hopefully ALDHE and the LD community can work together to create parity of pay and workload and provide professional recognition for our profession.

This was an interesting dichotomy of those within the field and those on the outside – very different perceptions and beliefs. I found this a really interesting element and something I would like to think more about. Many of the groups commented on this element. I also did not get a chance to consider in the session, but I think links with secondary education and FE institutions will need to become more central as we try to navigate the changing student demographics. Understanding where the students have been and the skills they

have (or do not have) can only improve our work, and this is something I think we need to think more carefully about.

Authors' reflection

Given the impact of Covid-19, this was an opportune moment for LD practitioners to reflect on our practice and to think about what we want LD to look like in the future. Our aim was to leave the interpretation of what was required as flexible and as open as possible in order for participants to be as creative as they wished. I think this was reflected in the 'posters'. Whilst all 'posters' focused on the need for change, the ideas generated were very different – technological change, inclusivity, changing modes of assessment, and increased recognition of LD and LD practitioners. It was suggested that the ideas generated from the workshop could be used to write a #take5 blog piece. This was a great idea and is something we are very supportive of (we have already started the ball rolling!). This is an opportune and critical moment for LD practitioners to have their say on how the profession could look in the coming years.

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References

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