

## The COVID pandemic as a change agent in Higher Education: priorities for professional development and research

Alan Tait, Emeritus Professor Distance Education and Development, Open University  
Centre for Online and Distance Education, University of London

Alan Tait

1

## Summary

- Evaluation and published research of online assessment University of London 2020-22
- Experiences at an open university and a research intensive campus university
- COVID pandemic as an accelerator of change in all Higher Education
- New priorities for professional development and research, and the location of expertise to provide it

Alan Tait

2

## Published articles

- Hatzipanagos S, Tait A and Amrane- Cooper L (2020) Towards a Post-COVID19 Digital Authentic Assessment Practice: when radical change enhances the student experience, in Proceedings of the European Distance and E-Learning Network (EDEN) Research Workshop, Lisbon
- Amrane-Cooper L, Hatzipanagos S and Tait A (2022) Developing Student Behaviours that Support Academic Integrity in Distance Learning, in Open Praxis, 13(4), 378-384
- Amrane-Cooper L, Hatzipanagos S and Tait A (2022), in press, Silver Linings, Rethinking assessment pedagogy under the pandemic, in European Journal of Open and Distance Learning (EURODL)

Alan Tait

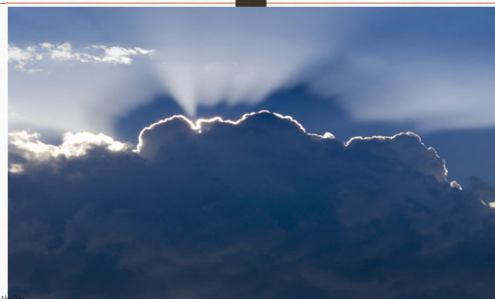
3

## COVID19 brief chronology

- December 2019, first identified
- March 2020, global lockdown
- December 2020, first vaccines
- 4,5 or 6 waves
- 6.5 million dead, plus 'long COVID'
- Economic depression
- Closure of campuses
- Loss of qualified cohorts in poor countries
- Issues of equity
- Management of public health

Alan Tait

4



Alan

5

## Centre for Online and Distance Education University of London

- The Centre for Online and Distance Education (CODE) is a University of London initiative to support the development of expertise and innovation in the field of online and distance education through research, training, capacity building, and strategy and policy development. Formerly known as 'CDE', we added 'Online' to our title in 2022 reflecting the world-wide shift to online learning in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- <https://www.london.ac.uk/centre-online-distance-education>



Alan Tait

6

## University of London research and evaluation of online assessment 2020-2022

- Focus on student experience, with survey of 30000 students
- Programme Director interviews within UoL and other 'London U' family'
- Examiner survey
- Student interviews
- Qualitative and quantitative
- Commercially sensitive data

Alan Tate

7

## The place of the examination in assessment in distance education

- 1868: The University of London
- 1948 UNISA (South Africa)
- 1968 The Open University UK
- 1979: CCRTVU
- 1989: Open Learning Institute (Open University) Hong Kong
- Invigilated assessment event
- Identity check
- Assessment for learning as well as judgement of performance
- Continuous as well as final assessment
- Learning outcomes
- Formative as well as summative assessment
- 'Authentic' assessment

Alan Tate

8

## Main messages 2020-2022

- Students in 180 countries were able to sit online exams: no decline in exams sat
- Large majority of students believed they had been able to achieve fair result
- Increasing majority of students want online exams to continue
- Significant grade inflation and cases of academic misconduct
- Students needed support in managing open book exams
- Programme Directors increasingly intending to reform Programme assessment
- Most likely outcome for 2023 will be return to invigilated exams but with laptops

Alan Tate

9

## Open University UK

- Assessment for learning embedded from 1971
- Continuous assessment from 1971, which protects against personation in assignments and exams (improbable combinations investigated)
- A number of courses dropped final exams in 2020 and 2021
- Overall approach to reform assessment design
- But little disturbance compared with rest of sector

Alan Tate

10

## Research intensive campus based university

- Lockdown meant remote teaching had to be rapid catch up for academics
- Exams cancelled for assessment alternatives in 2020
- Very serious inequities for students
- Serious wellbeing issues for students
- Serious interest in blended learning for future
- Strong development in Learning Analytics

Alan Tate

11

## Assessment reform options?

- Retention of assessment 'as is' with prevention of cheating: plagiarism software; monitoring with proctoring.
- Redesign of assessment strategies: continuous as well as summative; formative; personalised; open book.
- Professional Body constraints

Alan Tate

12

## Education only one sector with accelerated change post COVID

- Blended learning on campus
- Homeworking and limited office presence
- Online shopping
- Hospitality and entertainment sectors
- Social life outside family

Alan Yau

13

## New normal?

- Need to re-envision new normal for Higher Education
- Embed authentic lifelong skills and competencies
- From emergency remote learning to blended learning and learning design
- Support student wellbeing
- Debate in every university campus with range of opinion in every senior leadership team

Alan Yau

14

## Looking backwards? Looking forwards?



Alan Yau

15

## Experience of online learning: the treasure within

Equipping staff and students with the right technology and access to systems is essential for them to participate and engage online.

Fortunately for South West College, they've benefited from the experience of delivering learning online for the past ten years, since a period of severe weather in 2010 temporarily closed the college.

"We were tasked by our governing body to develop college services so they could operate fully online - the first thing we did was to install remote desktops for staff," explains Ciara. By 2011 all operations had moved online.

JISC <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/membership/stories/four-steps-to-better-online-delivery-the-south-west-college-story-17>

Alan Yau

16

## Transitions

- Customer care and student support with Learning Analytics
- Student wellbeing and mental health
- Agile learning
- Divided opinions, especially in senior teams

Alan Yau

17



Alan Yau

18

## Professional expertise

- Well developed in distance and online learning professional community
- Expertise no longer marginal but transitioned to mainstream
- Priorities in professional development and research

Alan Tait

19

## Research and professional development priorities

- Subject based scholarship building to subject groups and interdisciplinary groupings
- Partnerships with other universities
- Promotion of understanding of blended learning, and its development in practice
- Evaluation of student support in blended learning
- Longitudinal studies of student attitude and student progress
- Promotion of reform in assessment methods

Alan Tait

20

## Staff Development

'It's vital that organisations recognise the importance of staff development... Professional development should be an activity that staff are on board with, not something they're forced into. It should be designed so staff are keen to be involved by enabling a behavioural adjustment. With an extremely busy schedule in hand, an approach that requires a lot of external motivation would not be effective and could well just exacerbate stress.'

De Montfort University

JISC <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/membership/stories/cpd-istt-just-good-business-sense-19-oct-2020>

Alan Tait

21

## Thank you!

- Congratulations to HKMU on its first anniversary!



Alan Tait

22

## Published articles

- Hatzipanagos S, Tait A and Amrane- Cooper L (2020) Towards a Post-COVID19 Digital Authentic Assessment Practice: when radical change enhances the student experience, in Proceedings of the European Distance and E-Learning Network (EDEN) Research Workshop, Lisbon
- Amrane-Cooper L, Hatzipanagos S and Tait A (2022) Developing Student Behaviours that Support Academic Integrity in Distance Learning, in Open Praxis, 13(4), 378-384
- Amrane-Cooper L, Hatzipanagos S and Tait A (2022), in press, Silver Linings, Rethinking assessment pedagogy under the pandemic, in European Journal of Open and Distance Learning (EURODL)

Alan Tait

23