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Editorial

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Scott Turner

Simon Sneddon

Anna Crouch

We are very pleased to welcome readers to this edition of *‘Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education’* (ELEHE). The edition serves as a mini re-launch for the journal, with a new editorial team taking the helm. Dr John Butcher, the former editor who created the journal and developed it to its current style and format, has since taken on a new role at the Open University and passed on Editorial responsibility for the journal to us. We are very happy and honoured to take over from John, and build on his valuable work in establishing the journal. John’s contribution has been significant, and we are pleased that he will continue to be involved with the journal in an advisory capacity.

In keeping with the success of the journal to date, we have been keen to stay true to its roots and retain the focus, scope, house style and established format. We have sought to grow the editorial board enabling us to draw on expertise in educational practice from national and international arenas, while continuing to maintain the high quality of contributions through the anonymous peer review process. The existing paper formats of research reports; critical case studies; and short reports of work in progress, have been maintained; but we have now also created a book reviews section enabling critical dialogue about recently published works relevant to the core aims and scope of the journal. We hope the journal will continue to grow in popularity and status as a significant contributor in the field.

Our aim is to provide biennial publications of ELEHE, incorporating open calls for papers alongside special issues on specific themes. We also look forward to receiving potential articles from a wide range of authors, including: research reports (3-6000 words), critical case studies (3-4000 words), short research reports of work in progress (up to 2000 words) and book reviews (500-1000 words). Please contact the editors if you or your colleagues have ideas which merit dissemination through *Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education*, or suggestions for themed editions.

Since the last edition in 2011, UK higher education has continued to face major changes and challenges, and discussions about how best to enhance the learner experience are particularly timely. This year has seen the first intake of students in England paying the new higher fees for undergraduate courses, and the pressure on institutions to secure adequate student numbers has been high. Alongside this, there have been budget cuts in higher education spending, and graduate employment is particularly challenging due to the economic climate. In short, universities are in the midst of a turbulent period. Competition in the sector is rife, and institutions are increasingly relying on student feedback from the National Student Survey (NSS) as a marketing strategy to promote student choice. Student satisfaction scores provide a key steer for institutional strategy, feeding down into learning and teaching developments in the classroom and online. With such a focus on students as drivers for change, and frequent discussions at institutional, national and international circles about the ‘student experience’, we feel that the focus and scope of this journal is ideally positioned to support these debates, and promote

challenge, creativity and innovation in pedagogic practice. Its commitment to engagement with the student voice as a core component of published work reflects participatory frameworks whereby the views of learners are sought to develop our understanding of their experience, and identify constructive approaches to enhancing it.

The articles in this issue were submitted in response to our call for papers which focussed on *creative strategies* for enhancing the learning experience. A common theme running through all the papers is the importance placed on interactions as part of the learner experience: interactions between students and fellow students (Petrey); interactions between students and staff (Volkert; Smith & Lee) interactions between students and the wider community (Gant); interactions between students and their learning materials (Tadam; Volkert); and interactions between students and the physical spaces where learning is taking place (Stoncel & Shelton-Mayes). This reinforces the notion that learning is a social activity rather than an isolated venture, and occurs in a social context (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, in order for effective learning to take place, educators need to ensure opportunities for meaningful learning interactions (between learners; with staff; with learning objects; and with learning spaces). Within the shifting landscape of higher education, we will need to be increasingly creative with how such interactions are organised and constructed. For example, the use of technology will undoubtedly provide new and alternative mechanisms for learning interactions. Similarly, the growing emphasis on employability may also further encourage opportunities for learner interactions with employers, community and voluntary organizations embedded within university education. These are interesting times, and we welcome contributions from other colleagues who are exploring related issues.

Thank you to all the authors for their valuable contributions to this edition, and to the reviewers who gave their time providing constructive comments on submitted papers. We hope you enjoy this edition of the journal and find that it stimulates your thinking about learning and teaching practice.

References

Vygotsky, L. (1978) *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.