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Editorial

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How to cite:

Butcher, John (2009). Editorial. Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education, 1(1) pp. 1-3.

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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.14234/elehe.v1i1>

<http://journals.northampton.ac.uk/index.php/elehe/article/view/3/3>

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Editorial

John Butcher, University of Northampton

The launch of any new academic journal is always an exciting moment, and I am delighted to welcome readers to the inaugural edition of *Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education* (ELEHE). ELEHE is a fully-refereed English language journal with an international outlook, addressing the emerging field of enhancement in Higher Education as it impacts on learners.

ELEHE's origins, as the first open access e-journal from the University of Northampton (UK), is an important mark of the new university's aspirations to develop pedagogic research and scholarship, and to share knowledge across the HE community. This context also informs the approach the journal will take: as a 'teaching' university serving the aspirations of its regional community, the institution places learners at the heart of its enhancement activities – ELEHE will provide HE colleagues internationally an opportunity to publish scholarly work investigating the enhancement of the learner experience across all forms of higher education. Open access through the *Open Journals* initiative is crucial to our dissemination strategy.

Readers will rightly ask what will be distinctive about ELEHE. We believe ELEHE is a unique initiative that has a clear guiding purpose - to enthusiastically address the challenge of enhancing the learner experience in HE. It aims to stimulate debate around the educational theories and practices associated with learning in HE (in its broadest interpretation), to explore innovations which impact on learners, and to share effective practice across different HE contexts. It will draw on expertise in researching, describing and enhancing the student experience of learning, and thus providing evidence of the 'student voice.' The journal is interdisciplinary in scope, and diverse as to types of articles and methods. It welcomes critical, comparative and reflective approaches likely to set (as well as respond to) key agendas in HE learning. Focussing on the learner experience, it is intended to reflect a participatory paradigm in which the perspectives, experiences and understandings of learners are elicited in order to examine learning across HE.

This editorial 'welcome' constitutes a statement of purpose for ELEHE, and places the journal in the context of broader events that currently structure and mark the field of the learner experience in Higher Education. The timeliness of this new publication becomes apparent when consideration is given to current debates affecting HE: about the need for innovative learning in mass HE systems; about the impact of sociocultural theories of learning in HE; of the aspiration to enhance learner experiences in HE at a time of higher fees, global economic collapse and growing unemployment; of policy drivers around employability and inclusivity. A key purpose of the journal is to share scholarship between disciplines, and encourage inter-disciplinary research into the learner experience, to offer authors and readers a substantial space in which to disseminate research, and (importantly) in not limiting perspectives to one discipline.

ELEHE will be outward-facing in the breadth of its engagement with all scholars interested in the learner experience, and in offering open access to all potential readers. It is envisaged this will enable it to grow into a key setting for dialogue around effective learning in HE. It seeks to provide a learned forum through which practitioners in all aspects of learning and teaching, academic development and study support can debate emerging issues as HE confronts the challenge of more students, studying more flexibly in a managerialist and performative environment. ELEHE will seek to raise questions about the extent to which deep learning is embedded in HE. Authors will be encouraged to critique unexamined discourses around learning, and to draw on disciplinary cultures beyond their own, debating across settings and across disciplines. The journal aims to support scholarship across the widest range of staff supporting learners in HE. It is envisaged this will include: lecturers; researchers; study support staff; academic developers; librarians; policy makers.

In this inaugural edition, I am delighted to include a range of articles investigating enhancement of the learner experience across undergraduate and postgraduate provision, across campus-based and distance learning students, and across different disciplines. Each article originated in papers presented at the University of Northampton's second Learning and Teaching conference, *Transitions*. Within this diversity, there are clear themes emerging which align with the journal's mission, and which present a baton to be taken up by future authors. Each article is informed by close attention to the learner voice.

One theme is the opportunity to enhance employability, which surfaces in this edition through exploration of Engineering students' enhancement pedagogy around creativity and problem-solving (Adams et al), and the valuing of work placements by all stakeholders (Brown and Ahmed).

A second theme is the enhancement of professional learning, which emerges through exploration of the Education doctorate student's journey to professional self-esteem (Butcher and Sieminski), and through the importance of appropriate support for the transition to qualified Social Work status (Bartoli et al).

A third theme is around better understanding of enhancement according to cultural and international needs, explored within a Virtual Third Space of trans-national contexts (Burnapp and Zhao) and described for African students (Bartoli et al).

A fourth theme is inclusivity as an enhancement activity, which is analysed through the reasonable adjustments made by tutors to support a blind student, which in turn benefited all students (Enjelvin).

As the forgoing articles demonstrate, the enhancement of the learner experience in Higher Education is worthy of close scrutiny. This first edition of ELEHE offers a modest initial contribution to the field, which is intended to develop into a valuable space for practitioners and scholars to reflect critically on the enhancement agenda affecting the learning experience.

I hope you find this first edition of *Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education* useful, stimulating and informative. We intend ELEHE will build into a journal offering student voice-informed perspectives to challenge taken-for-granted orthodoxies. I am grateful to all the authors for submitting their work for peer review, and responding so promptly to suggestions for enhancement. I am particularly grateful to all the anonymous reviewers (drawn from the journal's institutional advisory board and international editorial board) for their hard work in reading and commenting on articles in the context of an inaugural edition.

ELEHE will be a biennial publication (December and June) and I look forward to receiving potential articles from as wide a range of readers as possible. The journal will actively seek three approaches to articles: substantive credible research of 4-6000 words theorising the 'how' and 'why' of effective learning in HE; 4000 word critical case studies of institutional practice out of which original conceptualisations of learning in HE can be considered (the 'what' questions); shorter reports of work in progress inviting dialogue around learner voices. The journal will not publish purely descriptive accounts of data collection, or uncritical accounts of teaching methods. Each edition will feature a minimum of five articles, contextualised through an editorial essay.