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Post pandemic questions for putting teachers back at the heart of teaching in higher education.

17 March 2025

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UWS UNIVERSITY OF THE
WEST of SCOTLAND



Three-part presentation

- **Overview of our paper:**

- Glover H, Myers F and Collins H (2024) A moment in and out of time: precarity, liminality, and autonomy in crisis teaching. *Teaching in Higher Education* 29(3): 723–740.



- **Second paper:**

Myers F, Collins H and Glover H (2025 in press) 'Lost futures', and undermined pasts of the pandemic; digital lecturers' ghostly reflections of time, self, and the university. *Management Learning* (in press) 10.1177/13505076251325651

- **What questions did the study raise?**

- **Our following project.....**

Where we started...

Pre-pandemic – HE digital expansion was accelerating variance in teaching roles and conditions

Lockdown caused disruption in defined roles and organisational routines

We took the opportunity to undertake a real-time study in Lockdown 1 (March – June 2020)

We asked experienced lecturers to provide a series of images or photos on lockdown teaching life alongside a written reflective account of their work

- All our respondents were familiar with hybrid teaching and learning mix of face to face and online





Creating cocooning space



No manual!



The haunted bus stop



The road to nowhere ...



No need to leave my bedroom shoes....

**Some of the
images we
received ...**



A world off-kilter



Who is on the other side of my Zoom?

Selected quotes

| AXES | Selected quotes illustrating ambiguities and flexibilities |
|------------------------|---|
| Precarity and security | 'Quickly being at breaking point' 'Angst, panic, frustration and consternation from students' 'Precariousness of work...media fuelled this fear' BUT 'throwing yourself into comforting self-organised work' 'comradeship of colleagues' and 'being needed' |
| Time | Chaos 'unpleasant' BUT respondents restored their own order Became 'forgetful of time', 'asking every day what day it is', 'time had no meaning' 'More time to get it all done' MOVES to 'time running away from me...' 'Relaxed attitude' to 'soft and hard time' - expectations soft, news harder and harder to endure |
| Communications | 'The fog' makes things hard for everyone Confused and noisy communications early on - BUT , once routines underway... 'Keeping busy but productive' good for everyone 'New normal' sets in and you are 'calm, happy and able to cope' 'Making you in control of a situation that robs you of control' |



Respondent photo and narrative...

"....This time....was categorised by worry. Worry about my family, worry about going out. Worry about work. Worry about how to manage if we get sick. Worry about friends in a similar position. And worry about all the uncertainties. Worried about the UK government response....sharing worries with my students...we had a good natter about how worried we are.

The lockdown order bought some relief. I got a routine...I stuck to my routine of walks and runs. The roads are empty – no-one wants to take public transport now."

Our analysis...

The empty bus stop: fearing the familiar (R6). This image of a bus stop was taken by the participant close to her home. The bus shelter is located in the countryside, and you can see the shadow of the trees from the other side of the road. The image is taken focusing on the bus shelter and the direction of travel. The shadows from the trees give a sinister feel to the image even though the sun is shining on the bus shelter. There is a contrast between the familiarity of the shelter in sunshine and the road, indicating travel which is in shade.

A rush of pandemic-orientated literature:

Earlier outputs:

- Practicalities of the pivot online and mixed offerings in social reopening (Reitan et al, 2022)
- Struggles in adapting pedagogies (Rapanta et al, 2020)
- Tensions for academic leaders; 'walk the talk' (Gigliotti, 2021), difficult to provide vision when 'in fog' yourself (Pradies et al, 2021)
- Value of crisis in offering opportunities to think and look forward (Gabriel, 2020)

Later Reflective research:

- Digital repurposing of previous online or historical module offerings (Gallagher et al, 2022)
- Tensions in space and place from home/hybrid working (Littlejohn, 2023) and campus repurposing, alongside finances
- Reflections that in the rush to get back to normal, it is important not to lose understandings of difficulties individuals suffered (Godber and Atkins, 2021) and around duty of care in recovery (Smith and Ulus, 2020)

Post-pandemic precarity ... where are we now?

Inheritance of flux and uncertainty from marketisation

- Long standing insecurities, targets and metrics (McCann et al, 2021)

Jumbled present of pandemic-legacy hybrid and recognition of precarities

- Pandemic practices establish how we arrived *here* (Gallagher et al, 2023)
- Creeping return of audit cultures
- Emotional journeys from online pivot and isolation, sparking longer term reflections
- Effects of policy designs on sector
- Working through the longer-term implications of what we do, and how we do it (Carrigan et al, 2023) of digital and hybrid pedagogies

Future fears

- Financial crises of sector and mass redundancies
- Worries over data-driven 'opportunism' from corporate ed-tech (Bayne and Gallagher, 2021) and seized on in race to save money
- Questions around where digital education is heading (Bayne, 2024) - moving on from being a 'lockdown saviour'
- Impact of AI on teaching and assessment - e.g. back to pen and paper exams or embracing vivas?

Recent interviews and photos from a 'bricks' university study:

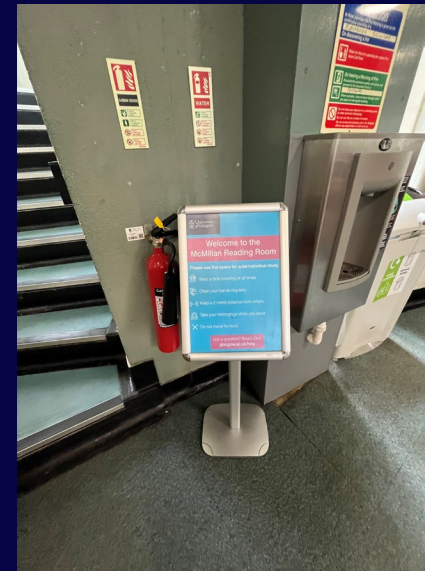
Early findings from new fieldwork

- Moved from chaos and learning new tech to now it's fine as a mix, but no clear sector agenda for going forward
- Some lecturers engaging online, some not, others desperate to be in the classroom / meeting rooms
- Policy environment noisy
 - Hybrid mix has become normalised, and pedagogy driven by other factors – including campus usage, international student regulations, job losses due to sector finances
- Patchwork of teaching offerings between universities, faculties, and individuals – varied responses
 - from 'empty room recordings', to hybrid and face to face
 - LOTS of choice, but not sure how this is affecting pedagogies
- Multilayered nuanced complexities leave many teachers feeling lost in current teaching in higher education



Mismatching sector and staff

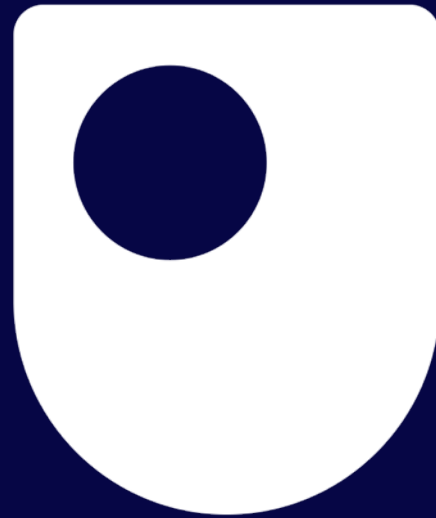
- We are aiming to work in the spirit of the Covid enquiry using real life narratives where 'every story matters' to focus in on HE teaching specifically
- What has become clear based on what people have gone through, is that the sector response to COVID-19 is a lost opportunity....
- We recognise just how important the 'human' element is, such as compassion, honesty and support....however....
- Sector leadership is looking ahead to a longer-term landscape around new models of 'service delivery'
- The workforce is searching for connectedness, a fresh clarity and confidence



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