Moving into 2021 and lessons learnt around teaching, learning and the student experience

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Overview

Our fundamental teaching remains unchanged in aiming to support learners to achieve specific unit/course/module/programme learning objectives and outcomes. Any past experiences as educators remain firmly in place alongside the need to facilitate the learning process. However, as the tools to facilitate learning and the opportunities for interaction with our learners may now be different, this brief summary allows us to reflect on potential lessons learnt as we move into semester 2.

As many colleagues have noted:

- We may be delivering teaching and learning in different ways to previous years, but the overall driving force is still the same.
- There is no right or wrong way to deliver material as long as learners are able to engage in this process.
- Continuing to teach in the way that fundamentally suits your own style is key, although this may involve using different tools and approaches to facilitate this.

Clear messaging from **student feedback** to date across the Faculty and University and regardless of the level of study or whether programmes are accredited/professional is that the key needs are around clarity of content and expectations. More specifically for an individual unit/module:

- Where material is located
- How to navigate resources
- When resources will be released during the semester
- What the expectation is of the learner in terms of engaging with material
- Whether synchronous sessions are running and if so when.

Drawing on colleagues and students experiences, this document provides some brief suggestions to help colleagues who are still unsure how they might:

(A) deliver content, and
(B) support learners interactively through live sessions.

(A) Content Delivery 2021

Based on student feedback and the collective experience of colleagues from last semester on course/unit/module teaching and learning material, learners value:

- A clear overview of how content will be organised, delivered and assessed; how they should engage with the material; and the intended learning outcomes.
- Teaching and learning material which incorporates the opportunity for regular live interaction with staff and peers.

Below are tried and tested approaches for producing video lectures alongside easily accessible supporting resources.

Video lectures – Basic format choices for person delivering session

1. **Speaking over PowerPoint, camera on or off**
   - provide the slides as learners appreciate having set of slides as notes
   - avoid too much written text on slides
   - camera on personalises the material, but could become distracting or make you less comfortable with delivery; consider including webcam only for introductory video or first few slides
2. **Speaking without PowerPoint, possibly over images or direct to camera**
   - possibly more engaging than reading aloud PowerPoint slides, but as this approach is less familiar, the learner may be less certain about how to engage
   - consider providing supplementary 'handout' (equivalent to bullet points from PowerPoint)

Note:

i)   Based on student feedback, the software choice to record a learning session (e.g. Zoom, PowerPoint, Adobe Spark) is not particularly important. However,
   - if you are familiar and comfortable with something then pick this
   - If you have no idea and feel overwhelmed a summary of options and support is available from the BMH eLearning webpages or speak directly to the BMH eLearning team

ii)   Just as would happen if you were delivering a live session, you will not necessarily deliver perfection. Aim to minimise the need to edit your videos, if you make a mistake while recording, correct yourself and move on (we're still allowed to be human, students will tolerate this).
   - if you identify a mistake after recording, post a written correction along with the video
   - if you worry about your appearance, turn the webcam off
   - shorter videos of 15-20 mins are ideal to meet attentions spans and it is often quicker to re-record than to edit

iii)   To add some variety to the delivery of learning material, consider including other forms of asynchronous content delivery:
   a. directed reading
   b. video of an interview or conversation
   c. interactive resources (e.g. quiz, flashcards)

d. links to third-party resources (e.g. those included with course text)
e. direction to complete a questionnaire or other self-report/reflective tool
f. direction to student to build a specific study material for themselves (e.g. a table with keyword definitions, a poster showing links between concepts)
g. direction to student to contribute to a collaborative study material (e.g. contribute a discussion board post on a topic, create a slide summarising a concept)

Resources and recommendations for packaging supporting (asynchronous) materials

1. Regular e.g. weekly announcements, sent directly as an email from Blackboard are a good way to explain exactly what learners need to do in the coming week, including assessments, reminders of live sessions and links to discussion board etc. They also help build a sense of community.

2. Provide an overview to the unit as a whole on the Blackboard homepage
   o a map of the folder structure

3. Provide a calendar/timeline outlining each week - the topic focus, learning activities and any assessments. Organise the unit materials into weekly packages via a single folder accessed easily from the Blackboard homepage.
   o Include a sentence or two describing content: e.g. 'This folder contains three recorded lectures and the corresponding PowerPoint slides'
   o aim for at least a couple of different types of learning materials (could be as basic as a video lecture plus directed reading)

4. Use a consistent folder layout each week for quick and easy navigation
   o ideally, use a consistent template for all Blackboard units across a single degree programme
   o the first link in the weekly folder should be a clear summary of the intended learning outcomes and all the learning activities a student is expected to complete that week
   o distinguish between self-paced and live materials
   o flag any assessments

5. Ideally chunk material into resources that can be reviewed in 20 mins or less (N.B. this relates to directed reading as well as video lectures)

6. Aim to provide checks on learning (ideally in a format relevant to the unit assessment). For example, some low-tech examples include:
   o alongside a video lecture pose a question and instruct student to pause video to make a note of their answer (instructed to write on paper for their own reference, or post their vote/opinion on a discussion board)
   o provide a worksheet with questions at the end of each week, subsequently release model answers

7. Check the total time required by the student needed to engage with the material each week is appropriate (Remember a 10 credit unit represents 100 hours in total and alongside learning material and resources this includes independent study and assessments)

- take into account the range of learners and study approaches from a highly conscientious to an under-confident learner, through to the disengaged learner wanting to achieve the learning outcomes with minimum effort.

8. Give learners advice on how they can best engage with the material
   - student feedback suggests many have been transcribing video lectures because they are unclear as to what they should do with available materials. Provide guidance on whether notes are required and what level of detail is appropriate
   - be explicit about what content is essential/required and what is additional (providing extra resources for engaged students is great, but be aware it creates stress for some students)
   - be explicit about the time you expect students to spend on each learning resource/activity
   - help the learner recognise links between learning resources/activities and assessment
   - direct learners to resources that can help them manage their learning (e.g. My Learning Essentials, textbook resources, study skills workshops or revision resources)

9. Remind the learners how they can access support
   - who they should direct questions or queries to
   - make sure that all members of the unit team have been introduced (a video is nice, but at least a photo and contact details)
   - how they should contact staff (e.g. by email, during live sessions, by discussion board)
   - how quickly they can expect a response.

(B) Synchronous Opportunities for Interactive Workshops

Alongside online provision student experience and learning outcomes also benefit from the opportunity for face-to-face interaction. Below, using tried and tested approaches that are easily accessible, are some suggestions and top tips to incorporate synchronous interaction with students through live workshops on Zoom.

Top Tips for planning:

- Planning content:
  - Consider what you want to achieve: fact checking, exam prep or critical thinking? Student or lecturer led?
  - In general, don't use these sessions to present new material – they work best for embedding learning and consolidating understanding, and student attendance is typically optional.
  - Think informally. Students are more likely to engage if the atmosphere is less formal. Be human!
  - In an informal atmosphere, interactive sessions are an opportunity for housekeeping / going over common issues / announcements. Students will quickly learn they can be a forum for open discussion.
  - Don't feel you have to commit to a single format. Adopt the one(s) you feel most comfortable with which suit your teaching style.
  - Consider using ice breakers to start a session – helps everyone relax (mentimeter, slido)

- Administration and communication:
  - Consider delivering interactive sessions at the same time each week as it provides structure.
  - Set up zoom links as early as possible in the unit / semester. Using the same link for every session adds consistency.
  - Send email reminders for the synchronous sessions each week.
  - Set out the ground rules and expectations: Will the session be recorded? Are students expected to contribute? Will attendance be recorded? Do students need to prepare anything in advance?
  - Be clear with students in advance and at the start about what the outcome of the interactive session will be.

- Consider what the session is trying to achieve and whether recording is really necessary. Not recording can increase attendance and engagement. Interactive sessions are really just remote tutorials - Would you record a tutorial?
- Allow students to stay at the end of the session after you have left so they can chat (nominate a student host at the end of the session). If a student group gets to know each other, they will engage with each other more.
- Don't worry if attendance is low. Even reaching a small subset of engaged students is beneficial.

Synchronous session types:

There is no single optimal way to organise a workshop. Here are some different models which have proved successful and can be tailored to suit your teaching style, and even combined within the same session/unit.

1. Discussion / workshop

- **Pros:** treats students as active participants in their learning; students do most of talking; allows detailed answers and discussions of nuance; facilitates peer learning and discussion; improves student online skills; improves student socialisation with use of smaller groups in breakout rooms; camera shy students may engage more in smaller groups; works well for all year groups (UG/PGT); little preparation needed by the lecturer (4/5 questions usually enough for a 50 minute session); no additional software needed.

- **Cons:** This kind of session requires management/facilitation to encourage student discussion and minimise awkward silences; consider inviting colleagues or GTAs to keep discussion going particularly at the start of a unit when material is less familiar; it is possible for host (only) to move around breakout rooms, but this takes time; it is possible to allocate staff/GTA to each breakout room to facilitate more complex tasks.

- **Top tips:**
  - Start with easy questions to get the discussion started.
  - Consider going along to colleagues' sessions to support each other, fill in the gaps and start the discussion.
  - Encourage students to use the chat function. If group size is large (>50) consider using a demonstrator or team teaching with a colleague to monitor chat entries.
  - [Breakout (BO) rooms](#) are very useful for stimulating discussion. They are easy to manage but consider inviting a colleague as co-host to help until you are familiar with the technology. BO rooms can be pre-allocated, but automatic (random) allocation (in real time by zoom) can work well and is a lot less stressful for the facilitator. Ideally, allocate no more than 4-5 students per breakout room. Frequent use of random allocation in one session also means that if the dynamic isn't good in a room, students don't disengage. 30-50 BO rooms allowed depending on meeting capacity.
  - Give the students ownership of their discussions / rooms. Verbally allocate one student in each room to chair and feedback or make the nomination of a chair each group's first task.
  - Keep it simple! If you are using BO rooms, add contingency time in your planning for movement in and out. Keep activities/BO discussions short (3-5 mins). Multiple short activities help students focus rather than leaving them without facilitation for long periods.
  - Try putting music on when students come out of their BO rooms. Avoids awkward silences!

2. Quiz

- **Pros**: Students enjoy quizzes – it is an engaging approach and allows students to identify gaps in their understanding and how they compare to their peers; anonymous; helps gauge cohort learning; good for large class sizes; works for fact checking with Y1; MCQ format useful for exam preparation; some platforms can be incorporated into PowerPoint for synchronous delivery; zoom polls can be set up easily for use in a discussion/workshop session so no additional software needed; can use quiz questions to kick start discussion; group quizzes provide a social aspect.

- **Cons**: requires preparation of questions and testing of technology; some platforms have limits on participant numbers.

- **Top tips:**
  - Make sure you have tried out the software! Most need students to have a second device with web connection so that they can access hosting site and input a pin, but simple quizzes

can easily be viewed on a phone. Think about piloting new software with small groups e.g. tutorials or with colleagues.
- o These platforms work well for icebreakers (e.g. word cloud: favourite film/food/season) and feedback.
- o Zoom polls: simple option; limit of 25 polls per session, but all participants can take part; host must be using desktop zoom client rather than app to manage polling; no additional software needed.
- o Mentimeter: Free and easy to use PowerPoint style setup; students access via online pin; large capacity for participants (2000 +); maximum 2 questions and 5 quiz questions per presentation; question types include MCQ, word cloud, open ended, ranking, and more; use with zoom video.
- o Slido has a limit of 100 participants at any one time on the free plan, but includes options for word cloud, ratings, MCQ, and quiz; students access via online pin; can be added to PowerPoint slides.
- o Kahoot has limit of 50 participants on the basic plan; students access via online pin; can add to PowerPoint slides.
- o Nearpod is an interactive platform supported by UoM and requires account registration.

3. Simple Q&A – synchronous after live/recorded lecture delivery

- **Pros**: supports student comprehension of the lecture material; mimics an important aspect of face-to-face teaching (asking questions after lecture); zero preparation required from lecturer.

- **Cons:** students without specific questions may not engage/attend; need to set expectations for students; unstructured; if after synchronous lecture, students may not have time to formulate queries.

- **Top Tips:**
  - o If lecture delivered synchronously invite questions in the chat box throughout.
  - o If after asynchronous delivery, invite questions by email before Q&A sessions.
  - o Have a small number of questions to share verbally to check understanding.
  - o Consider a 'panel event' where a number of lecturers are available for questions to maximise interaction. Communicate panel members clearly to students in advance.
  - o Can be incorporated into a discussion group format and/or quiz style workshop format