

# Engaging Students and Researchers in their Development During a Pandemic:

## A Whole-Institution Response

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### *Abstract*

Engaging students in the development of their academic literacies and researcher skills requires that Learning Developers (LDs) and Researcher Developers (RD) place a strong emphasis on active, dynamic, collaborative, and interactive pedagogies (Boyle et al., 2019; Struan, 2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a radical, immediate shift in LD and RD pedagogical practice; LDs and RDs became increasingly central in the sector's response to student engagement and community building (Syska, 2021).

This paper analyses the response of the LD and RD departments within a Scottish Russell Group university. Utilising reflections and evaluation from fifteen staff members across the two departments, the paper provides a systematic analysis of the implementation of emergency approaches to student and researcher development. The two departments are responsible for the academic and research development of all students – from pre-entry to postgraduate research – across the institution (roughly 37,000 students in total). The paper argues that while a temporary online pivot is not the same as planned change, many of the lessons learnt by LDs and RDs through the pandemic ought to be maintained, expanded, and developed.

### *Keywords:*

COVID-19, student engagement, learning development, researcher development, online

## Introduction

Learner- and Researcher-Development (LD and RD) communities are a united yet diverse subset of Higher Education (HE) staff who have faced a unique set of challenges for student engagement brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic. The often-non-compulsory nature of their teaching provision and the less visible, less direct connection between their teaching and quantifiable degree outcomes has meant that the shift to online, remote education has had a unique impact on the teaching model of these communities of ours and, as such, we have sought to recraft and reform the ways in which we engage, and engage with, students. This recrafting has led to some sustainable improvements in sector practice, as well as some changes that, while feasible during the emergency phase of the pandemic response, are perhaps less suitable as part of a long-term LD and RD adaptation to hybrid and online teaching.

The roles of LDs and RDs overlap, and practices are similar in nature and outcome. The fundamental difference is audience: LDs tend to work with taught students (although can work with research students) while RDs focus entirely on research students and early career researchers. The LD and RD communities in the UK vary in nature and practice, but they all exist to engage students in the development of their learning, writing, and research abilities.

LDs and RDs in most UK institutions tend to work directly with students. LDs and RDs sit outside of the usual subject areas; instead, they are specialists in the processes, mechanics and literacies that underpin students' work in Higher Education. These roles are relatively new in the landscape of the Higher Education sector (Samuels, 2013), but the field/areas of work have grown rapidly and are now often central components of students' university experiences (Boyle et al., 2019). With this expansion in provision, and as the LD and RD communities have sought to standardise practice and underpin their work with pedagogical theory, the community has sought to recast earlier interpretations and find solid theoretical foundations (Hagyard et al., 2013).

In practice, LDs and RDs tend to sit outside of subject areas and occupy a "neutral" (Samuels, 2013, p. 14) position regarding, for example, student assessment. LDs and RDs work with students in a variety of settings to demystify, explain and interpret the requirements of the academy, and work to engage students with their learning and their development. A result of this is, as Wingate (2006) established, the need for all students to benefit from "inclusive models" of LD and RD provision, and to receive opportunities to seek clarification and ask questions. Similarly, Lea and Street (2006) argued strongly for an "academic literacies model" of provision that provides students and researchers with the ability to scaffold their knowledge onto meaningful constructs within academia, to make meaning of concepts, and to engage with academic principles and practices of knowledge (co-) creation. It is with these core principles that the LD and RD communities have approached engaging students through the online pivot.

Through the pandemic, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the globe were working in a model of a temporary, emergency pivot to online teaching, assessment,

and learning. With the reality of ongoing forms of online education in place across the globe, the LD and RD communities must enact and voice clear guidelines in how they have adapted to the crisis. Nordmann *et al.*'s (2020) paper laid out ten simple rules for an online pivot, and is a clear, coherent message of first-level principles.<sup>1</sup> Nordmann *et al.*'s work provides insights into ways in which we can continue to engage students, and it forms the framework for this discussion.

This current paper seeks to build on the work of Nordmann *et al.* by recasting their ten simple rules within the context of engagement and LD/RD practice. The paper provides practical discussion of approaches taken within a Scottish research-intensive HEI, and analysis of the ways in which the online pivot has been applied in practice. The paper combines the work of LDs, RDs, student engagement and the online pivot; looking at two key themes, it provides practical evaluation of the ways in which the core principles of LDs and RDs engagement with students have been applied in a variety of contexts (e.g., one-to-ones, small class teaching, large class teaching, FAQs, conferences, and so on).

The aims here are twofold: firstly, we seek to provide readers with discussion of, as well as reflection on, the processes, innovations, and procedures of our emergency pivot to online provision. Secondly, we look to analyse the pedagogies underlying the most successful elements of student engagement from the LD and RD communities through the COVID-19 response. By combining the work of Nordmann *et al.* with the pedagogies and concepts underpinning LD and RD practice, as well as analysis of practicalities, the paper facilitates discussion around the central importance of engaging students in the development of their academic literacies.

To meet this aim, the paper takes a thematic approach with specific examples and reflections. Establishing first the underlying pedagogical principles of LD and RD practice, we then turn to look at two key areas: creating a community of learners who remain engaged (with us and with each other) despite the obvious barriers during lockdown and remote study; and the importance of balancing synchronous and asynchronous materials to maintain active student engagement.

### *LDs and RDs: Practice and Pedagogy*

LDs and RDs occupy a different position from many other academic departments in that our provision is mostly opt-in. We thus experience, and have already responded to, an elevated pressure to create successful relationships and/or a trustworthy, expert image with students to continue to be able to have impact. LDs and RDs, therefore, have learned to compete with a variety of other messages and services for student attention/time. Making resources available and accessible are, resultingly, high priorities. Further, some LD and RD departments also run a variety of credit-bearing or otherwise compulsory courses of their own (Boyle *et al.*, 2019; Haggis, 2006; Maldoni, 2018; Murray & Nallaya, 2016) to further embed academic literacies development.

Moreover, with an opt-in model of provision, the work of LDs and RDs must be made to engage students. This type of active student engagement is crucial in how students

view the impact of, and meaning behind, their degree studies. As LD and RD departments have expanded over the last two decades, this form of student engagement has often become a central pillar of positive student experiences. For example, some LD departments have worked to embed opportunity for active engagement through research-orientated initiatives, conferences, and journals (Bownes et al., 2020), or through the implementation of active and blended pedagogies for learning and assessment on a large scale (Struan, 2021).

### *LDs and RDs: Institutional context to this discussion*

This paper is the result of LD and RD staff reflections at a large Scottish research-intensive university. The University is one of the leading institutions in Scotland, with 37,000 students across all subject areas, but it also has a somewhat unique position in the terms of its large numbers of students from Widening Participation (WP) backgrounds and a very large international student population (especially amongst postgraduate students).

The LD and RD teams sit centrally, but separately, within the institution. The LD team is formed of several broadly subject-aligned Learning Developers and some international Learning Developers, plus Maths and Stats advisers. The team is augmented by several PhD student tutors, termed locally as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), who work alongside the LDs.

The RD team consists of an RD manager, a research integrity adviser, a researcher development adviser, and a research writing adviser. This team works with postgraduate researchers who may also be undertaking teaching or demonstrating roles in their subject areas.

Having central oversight of student developments and trends, expert knowledge about issues of study and assessment, and access to students in all subject areas, both the LD and RD teams were tasked by senior university management with helping students at all levels manage the transition to the emergency pandemic situation. As the pandemic response continued, the LDs and RDs were instrumental in providing students with a source of meaningful engagement with staff, of fundamental academic development, and a sense of continuity of their university community.

### *LDs and RDs: Emergency adaptation*

When the COVID-19 pandemic first resulted in nation-wide lockdowns in the UK, the LDs took to turning our space on our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), Moodle, into a plentiful basis for all resources and communication. All students were enrolled onto relevant Moodle courses for their disciplinary area and alerted to information, resources, and class timetables via announcements.

LDs created entirely online learning resources: reading lists were updated to contain only digital and online materials; all content was available and signposted via the VLE; all classes were signposted and scheduled via the VLE (and hosted on Zoom);

students were provided with timetables of synchronous delivery with Zoom links embedded; and all class content was made available in multiple formats on the VLE. All synchronous classes were recorded and uploaded onto the VLE for future student access, and entirely asynchronous material was quickly developed to further embed the availability of materials.

Hosting our information, materials, and resources in one easily accessed and easily navigated Moodle course was essential in establishing early student engagement (Aitken et al., 2020; Alkış & Temizel, 2018; Cho, 2012). Student participation was voluntary, but also involved meaningful activity that allowed them to further enhance their academic skills (Delialioglu & Yildirim, 2007; Dymont et al., 2020; Nallaya & Kehrwald, 2013).

The RD team took a different approach when creating content tailored to postgraduate research (PGR) students. An asynchronous course, PGR@Home, was created entirely as a response to the pandemic to ensure ongoing PGRs support. It was hosted on the institutional website, rather than the institution's VLE, as PGRs are more likely to be unused to accessing and logging in to a central VLE. . As with the LDs, the use of a single, dedicated space for all information, resources and content was essential in the delivery of available and accessible materials, and the existing RD VLE was updated and redesigned for this purpose.

Both the LD and RD teams became crucial as the institution responded quickly to the emerging crisis. The materials, resources and classes offered by the LDs and RDs formed central parts of the institution's messaging to students, and the teams were tasked by senior management with further engaging students and providing Learning and Teaching upskilling opportunities for staff.

## **Creating an engaged community for staff and students**

### *Context*

At the onset of the UK-wide lockdowns, LDs and RDs felt the need for an immediate focus on reassuring students that despite the forced isolation presented by lockdown, the university community still existed and that they were still part of that community (Cage et al., 2021).

LDs and RDs were aware that students and researchers engage with the community in different ways and to varying degrees in a "normal" context (Linton et al., 2020). As such, they sought to create a wide variety of ways by which connection and integration could be achieved. Both synchronous and asynchronous activities were key (Nordmann et al., 2020, p. 4), with nuance within that as regards levels of instruction, engagement and reflection. Some content was offered with a strong sense of the presenter/s' identity, other content from a more removed standpoint. Some students were particularly keen to interact and engage with live sessions, while others checking in from different time zones (Liu et al., 2010), sharing technology at home, or perhaps fatigued by Zoom preferred asynchronous contact (Cho, 2012; Dymont et al., 2020; Nallaya & Kehrwald, 2013).

Developing asynchronous content to build community therefore took many different shapes. Each was aimed at different audiences, but all required reflection, which, in turn, encouraged students and researchers to think about how and where they were situated within the wider university community.

### *Examples of community-building approaches*

#### *Video Podcasts*

An informal, conversational approach was achieved through video podcasts. These typically took the form of an unscripted discussion to complement core lecture material, often applying such core information through staff members' reflections on real-world scenarios and examples, and exploring the boundaries of where such core content holds true and where the lines of disciplinary 'truth' become blurry. Recording these podcasts as a video session rather than only audio allowed students to "meet" staff, breaking down reservations that they might have had about contacting them for online engagement. The LDs opted for this approach, discussing topics that were always a popular part of their provision, such as dissertation writing. This information could easily have been delivered in a written format, but the LDs opted to adopt the practice of engaging students through videos, as outlined by Sherer & Shea (2011), to personalise the messages to increase engagement with students.

#### *Social Media Presence - Blogging*

This "humanising" approach was furthered through social media presence, which also offered a similar means by which to foster a sense of community among staff that was also visible to students (Bryson & Callaghan, 2021; Christie & Morris, 2021). Blog content from LDs and RDs included personal reflections on their own working habits, for example, as well as topics such as how they have set up their temporary workspace. Students could therefore see that it was created *for* them by a person, and that engaging with these posts was also a way of connecting with this wider community, thus reinforcing their sense of belonging.

Learning developers also wrote lengthier and more detailed blog posts in which they discussed their approach to online teaching, reflected on and shared their experiences, and talked openly about overcoming challenges. These proved popular with staff, and the delivery model discussed inspired several members of staff from a variety of subject areas to adopt a similar approach. In addition, student volunteers crafted their own blog posts. These blog posts revolved around work undertaken in LD courses or in the process of engaging with academic study through the pandemic. The student authors were mentored through the blog writing process. The student voice was particularly useful in engaging fellow students (Christie & Morris, 2021; Goldstone & Zhang, 2021) with the ways in which online study and research can be beneficial.

#### *Community Building for a Specific Audience – Postgraduate Researchers*

One of the main impetuses behind RDs' creation of the PGR@Home resource was to reassure PGRs of their place in the wider University community, as much of the initial broader institutional focus was on supporting undergraduate and postgraduate taught students and, equally, support aimed at research staff did not entirely meet their needs

(Goldstone & Zhang, 2021). RDs were keen to devise an asynchronous resource that felt specifically designed for the PGR experience within the University community. This took the shape of a set of Articulate resources created around a weekly theme (the literature review, handling data, etc), and on topics that would be applicable across the PhD. PGRs worked through these at their own pace, reflecting on their research project as they did so. Synchronous community building activities encompassed both implicit and explicit approaches (Nordmann et al., 2021, pp. 6–7), and they were both small and large in scope.

To build upon the asynchronous offering, in terms of community building, PGR@Home offered two opportunities for engagement: “Unexpected Encounters”, a mid-week lunchtime session based around a purely fun social activity, and “Chat Café”, an end-of-week session where PGRs could discuss material shared throughout the week (often with the experts who created them), as well as talking with other PGRs.

Creating a space to enable spontaneous community building is as valuable, and sometimes more successful than, activities explicitly set up with community-building as the sole goal. On a similar small-scale level, even weekly emails to advertise PGR@Home acted as a catalyst to forge community bonds, encouraging students to get in touch with questions specific to the weekly theme, and reminding them that there was a broad support community available to them.

#### *Community Building for a Specific Audience – Staff*

Creation of a student community was one of the most obvious goals, but to help research students also feel part of a wider community of academics who teach, a suite of video guidance was created for teaching staff. These dealt with topics such as: how to set up Zoom and other content delivery tools; how to adapt teaching session plans for a blended and remote environment; how to foster interactions between a teaching team and students; and tips and tricks for common problematic situations relating to the teaching technology. The aim here was not only to disseminate the information necessary to facilitate the smooth running of the University in its new online context, but very deliberately to do so in a way that put knowledgeable, expert human faces to the information, and to showcase the range of contributors from the community.

Recognising that end-users would have different preferences for which format they received such advice, our guidance was published on primarily written webpages that incorporated these video accompaniments prominently. Regardless of whether they then chose to read, listen, or watch, they would receive an implicit reminder that the rest of the community was still there, and actively working on the same issues. This was perhaps particularly important for researchers who may only have been teaching for a relatively short period of time, and who may otherwise have felt more isolated from the academic community.

#### *Community Building for a Specific Audience – Undergraduates and Postgraduate Taught Students*

While LDs could easily have simply created and uploaded recorded sessions, they chose to create question-and-answer sessions linked to each session. This combined synchronous and asynchronous approaches, as outlined by Nordmann et al. (2020), and allowed students to engage with material at a time that suited them, and then to

check into a synchronous session where they could interact with the instructors and/or other students. These question-and-answer sessions were extremely popular, with numbers far exceeding the average on-campus attendance for these sessions.

Writing incubators (online writing sessions) offered by the LDs also helped to create a sense of community, with the same students tending to return each week (Crisfield, 2020; Eardley et al., 2020). Such sessions proved extremely popular; students made connections and engaged with their own development. The mixture of students from different cohorts and at different levels, initially a concern for the LDs, became a feature of the incubators' success: students worked together, guided one another, and set up informal peer mentoring (Bond & Castagnera, 2006; Chen et al., 2021).

### *Conclusion – Community-Building*

The immediate, unexpected shift to online-only provision impacted the ways in which all forms of education functioned. The temporary online pivot (Nordmann et al., 2020) was undertaken during a moment of global crisis and was not planned. That said, the LD and RD teams were able to here to draw on their vast experience in active student engagement – online and offline – to devise innovative solutions to the challenge of community-building in an entirely unfamiliar context. (For our summary of each of the approaches mentioned above, their benefits, and their challenges, see Table 1.)

The focus on community-creation here was intentional for some elements and accidental in others. The central guiding principle was on maintaining active student engagement with both the institution and with their studies. This active engagement was both in how students themselves engaged with their own academic literacies and subject knowledge development (Delialioğlu, 2012), and in how they engaged with our teams on an individual and group basis. Both LD and RD teams viewed the creation of communities of practice (Whitton et al., 2021) as central to successful student, researcher, and staff engagement. Many of the lessons learnt through the pandemic have become standard LD and RD practice: online writing incubators and broad engagement with students through a variety of communication channels.

## **Providing synchronous and asynchronous content and communication**

### *Context*

The rationale behind offering a range of synchronous and asynchronous has been covered, to an extent, in the discussion of community creation during the pandemic. Just as in face-to-face settings and a “normal” context, individuals prefer to engage with the community to varying degrees and in varying ways; it was universally acknowledged by LDs and RDs that this should be replicated in an online context. This approach was underpinned by a wealth of experience in delivering entirely online or blended courses for several years, and it resulted in a quick shift to fully online provision for all students (Alkış & Temizel, 2018; Auster, 2016; Cho, 2012; del Valle & Duffy, 2009; Struan, 2021).

**Table 1: Summary of Community-Building Approaches**

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Delivery mode</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
<b>Non-specific</b>	Video podcasts (with social media promotion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video recordings</li> <li>• Twitter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humanising of teaching staff; visible in a way that goes beyond standard, more defined lecture and tutorial content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almost none</li> <li>• May benefit from some basic planning of talking points or questions in advance to give the podcast discussion a meaningful direction for the audience</li> </ul>
<b>UGs and PGTs</b>	Q&A sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction with other students</li> <li>• Visible responsiveness from staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time commitment</li> <li>• Requires students to engage at a specific time (significant re: timezones)</li> </ul>
	Writing incubators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of community</li> <li>• Mixture of students from different courses</li> <li>• Provision of structured work time</li> <li>• Students received mutual advice and encouragement; informal peer mentoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students needed to come prepared and willing to engage with the process</li> <li>• Time and effort burden</li> </ul>
<b>PGRs</b>	PGR@Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asynchronous reading via Rise 360</li> <li>• Synchronous 'chat cafes' via Zoom</li> <li>• Periodic email invitations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers joining their Programmes while not on campus (or in country) during the pandemic were able to take part</li> <li>• Participants could work through at own pace</li> <li>• Main staff investment happens once</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large amount of initial work</li> <li>• Required buy-in from specialists in different departments across campus</li> <li>• Participants may not engage with pre-reading</li> <li>• May not attend live sessions</li> </ul>
<b>Staff</b>	Tech upskilling resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video recordings featuring staff faces, written guides, discussion groups on Teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recipients could see the faces of their colleagues while working remotely</li> <li>• Implicit reminder of the existence and persistence of the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires buy-in and time commitment from those featured</li> </ul>

Further to this, the provision of asynchronous content was seen to be crucial from a widening participation perspective. Students, researchers, and staff did not necessarily have access to cameras and/or microphones, or access to devices with the capacity to participate in Zoom or Teams calls. High quality Wi-Fi was not a given, especially in households where multiple occupants required online access. Additionally, not everyone had workspaces where they felt comfortable or able to participate in synchronous activities which might involve a great deal of engagement.

Lastly, it was also important to consider the needs of the LDs and RDs themselves. Individual commitments, contexts and health considerations had to be taken into consideration: acknowledging and managing the wellbeing of those individuals who were creating and delivering material was just as vital as being mindful of the wellbeing of the students, researchers, and staff they supported (Yowler et al., 2021). As such, the opportunity to offer asynchronous content was an essential part of the overall approach.

### *Examples of synchronous and asynchronous approaches*

LDs and RDs developed a variety of innovative means by which content could be delivered and engagement could be achieved via an asynchronous approach. The following sections use specific examples to illustrate four main approaches.

#### *Approach 1 - asynchronous content & synchronous discussion*

A popular approach taken across both the LD and RD teams was offering recorded sessions which were then followed by live question and answer sessions (Pownall et al., 2021). This offered maximum flexibility for LDs, RDs and participants. It was also especially useful when covering potentially sensitive topics which might require individual reflection, or simply topics where participants required time to think about how principles and ideas raised might relate to their own work.

Efforts were made to ensure that students felt comfortable engaging in live Q&A sessions by enabling a variety of ways to communicate. In sessions led by the LDs, students could choose to ask questions via video and/or mic, and students were reminded that they could use the chat function in Zoom to privately ask the LD questions. If appropriate, these questions were then read out (anonymously), discussed, and addressed. This strategy has been successful in ensuring inclusivity and encouraging participation from all students. Importantly, it also consolidated the course content via peer and tutor mediated discussions, as students would also willingly contribute their experiences, observations, and advice (Aitken et al., 2020; Durrington et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2010).

For the PGR community, it was intended that the relationship between weekly themed materials in the PGR@Home resource and the end-of-week chat café would be clear to students: the chat cafes were built around informal questions designed to prompt conversation on the topic covered throughout the week. Further, those involved in contributing to and building the weekly materials attended the chat session whenever possible, leading discussion and answering questions. In practice, however, it was

usually discovered in discussion that the PGRs who chose to attend the café had not read the weekly materials beforehand, and they usually engaged with the materials after the café instead.

Variations were adopted. Some LDs created a weekly Q&A forum where they recorded questions and answers raised during synchronous Q&A sessions. Students unable to attend the synchronous session were not only able to view content covered, but they could also ask their own questions in the forum, which would in turn be picked up by a LD. This meant it functioned both as a resource and means of engagement. Some of the LDs took a slightly modified approach, using questions and answers from live sessions in the creation of later pre-recorded sessions and resources.

#### *Approach 2 – entirely asynchronous content and discussion*

RDs made the decision to make research integrity training (which is mandatory) entirely asynchronous. Much of the material covered in this training can be sensitive and involve personal reflection, and the nature of an online session on Zoom did not immediately lend itself to this type of work. This decision was partly made as the RDs consciously chose not to add to the volume of Zoom calls, or to add to deadlines and stresses for researchers who were already dealing with an exceptionally difficult situation.

#### *Approach 3 – synchronous sessions*

For postgraduate researchers, the issue of synchronous versus asynchronous delivery raised some unique considerations in the context of their traditional training route as teaching staff. CPD sessions are primarily intended to enhance a participant's understanding or skill in a given area, but they typically also offer a space for candid discussions of uncertainty and questions. Attendees at staff level are perhaps more adept at in-depth reflection than the typical student attending a taught class as part of a degree, and perhaps more invested in the subject since it relates to their career development. This often naturally manifests as more frank in-session discussions of past difficulties, failed prior attempts at various teaching approaches, and perhaps also discussions around interactions with real current and past students: discussions which are naturally sensitive. Our LD CPD Zoom sessions for staff were therefore not recorded. This provided a synchronous-only space for candid discussions, affording participants the opportunity to share some more private concerns and doubts, connecting with others in their community.

Online writing workshops for postgraduate researchers were never considered for an asynchronous approach, as the opportunity for PGRs to situate themselves in the PGR community is a key aim of these sessions. Workshops made extensive use of the chat function in Zoom. Sessions begin by having participants introduce themselves via the Chat function in Zoom and finish with ten minutes for discussion. This allowed, in one workshop, for three students to exchange email addresses via Chat to set up an informal peer review group

### *Conclusion – Synchronous and asynchronous approaches*

The creation of a wealth of new teaching materials in a short period of time was a gargantuan task; courses that would normally take a year to realise were built and delivered within the space of a few weeks. Moreover, suites of new asynchronous resources to augment and accompany those courses were developed in tandem. The volume of work for the LDs and RDs in creating these synchronous and asynchronous materials should not be understated.

That said, the experience of creating and delivering these new methods has significantly boosted LD/RD confidence in online delivery and student engagement. Where classes were entirely in-person, synchronous events before the pandemic, the LD and RD departments now have fully online access-any-time materials that encourage students to engage with their academic development in a “progressive and holistic manner” (Wingate, 2006, p. 467).

The focus through all the above was to provide students with a continuation of every opportunity to engage with the development of their academic literacies. From the outset of the pandemic, the LD and RD teams decided to use the opportunity to revamp, enhance and overhaul the work that had hitherto become standard practice.

In so doing, both the LD and RD teams have undergone radical changes: new courses, new staff, new methods of engagement, and vastly increased student engagement (in terms of numbers and in terms of student feedback) are the results of the efforts here deployed.

### **Conclusion: A temporary online pivot is not the same as planned change**

The above discussion must be foregrounded with this key message: there is an important pedagogical distinction between the “immediate reaction to the COVID-19 disruption” that led to the development of “emergency remote teaching” and plans for “temporary” online teaching in the coming academic year (Nordmann et al., 2020, p. 5) and a fully planned and timetabled move to online learning and teaching.

The variety of approaches taken vividly demonstrates that a temporary online pivot is not akin to planned change. The temporary online pivot is *not* emergency remote teaching: a great deal of careful thought and planning has gone into ensuring that approaches are adapted for the new context, on a solid foundation of pedagogical consideration, and that new approaches are responsive to student uptake and feedback. Equally, however, the provision delivered over this period does *not* constitute a specialised online course: materials and approaches have been devised at great speed and under an unusual amount of pressure, often adapting existing ideas and materials with a constant background awareness of “matching” an in-campus experience (Loizzo & Ertmer, 2016; Wiebe et al., 2015).

Nordmann’s ten principles provide the LD and RD communities with a clear framework. However, the experience of teaching and student engagement through the pandemic taught us of the need to focus on three of Nordmann’s key principles. Our

areas of focus, therefore, were to: 'provide synchronous and asynchronous contact and communication'; 'ensure resources are available, accessible and signposted'; and 'create a community for staff and students'.

- Provide synchronous and asynchronous contact and communication

Consider the options available for synchronous versus asynchronous contact and communication. In-person teaching vs text-based resources need not be the only options. As we learned, a podcast offers a different experience and confers different benefits than a lecture recording, and a blog post from an LD or RD offers a community-building dimension in a way that a text resource on, for example, dissertation writing might not. As we emerge from our second year of pandemic teaching, evidence reaffirming the advice to create bite-sized chunks of content is emerging in the literature (e.g. Humphries & Clark, 2021) and further solidifies our adopted approaches.

- Ensure resources are available, accessible and signposted

Both the LD team and RD team made a conscious decision that all resources should be easily accessible. Wherever possible, social media was used as a bridge to core resources and other activities. The RD team opted against using their central VLE, preferring instead to house their main asynchronous resource on the University website where login was not required for access, broadening the audience to incoming students. As with the provision of synchronous and asynchronous resources, a wide variety of formats is advantageous, here offering students various means by which they could access and engage with content.

- Create a community for staff and students

This was uppermost in the minds of both LDs and RDs. Our experience of community building during a pandemic confirmed the long-standing assertion that community creation is most successful when an implicit part of activities that students find meaningful and contextualised. Explicit community-building attempts were less well-received and quickly abandoned in light of low numbers. Community building should be a consistent goal that underpins the planning and design of all activities.

In conclusion, the unique requirements of the roles of LDs and RDs require us to prioritise student engagement and community creation. These requirements became increasingly urgent through the pandemic: at a time when engaging with our students became more challenging, they required and demanded more community creation and alternative forms of engagement. The lessons learnt through the pandemic will be of significant value to the LD and RD communities, and to the broader academic audience as we all look to continue to engage with our students in a post-pandemic world.

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<sup>i</sup> 01/09/2023 17:18:00 ten rules are:

1. A temporary pivot is not the same as emergency remote teaching or online distance learning
2. Provide asynchronous content
3. Provide synchronous and asynchronous contact and communication
4. Set and communicate clear expectations about engagement
5. Design appropriate assessments with clear expectations
6. Monitor and support engagement
7. Review the use and format of recorded content
8. Focus on achievable learning outcomes for field, laboratory, and performance
9. Ensure resources are available, accessible, and signposted
10. Create a community for staff and students (Nordmann et al., 2020).