How e-learning has developed in the UK during 2020, and where it might go in the Future

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Overview of Talk

1. The story so far

2. Planning for 2020-21

3. Lasting impact

(Will include sector context and examples from Abertay)
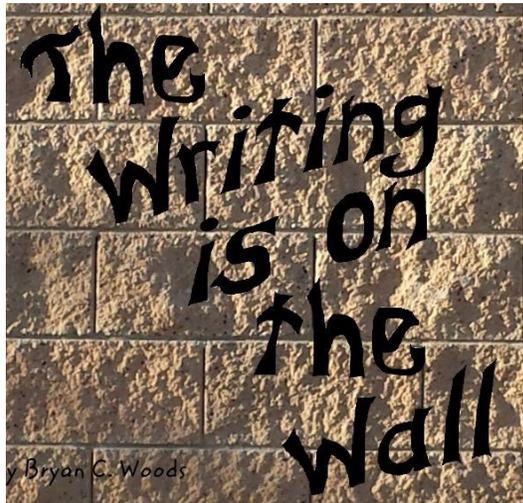
The Story So Far….

The start....

- Friday March 13th – we knew lockdown was coming but most universities hoped to teach for another week

- **Situation seemed to explode over that weekend**

- At Abertay, by Monday 16th some staff were understandably reluctant to come to work and began teaching online
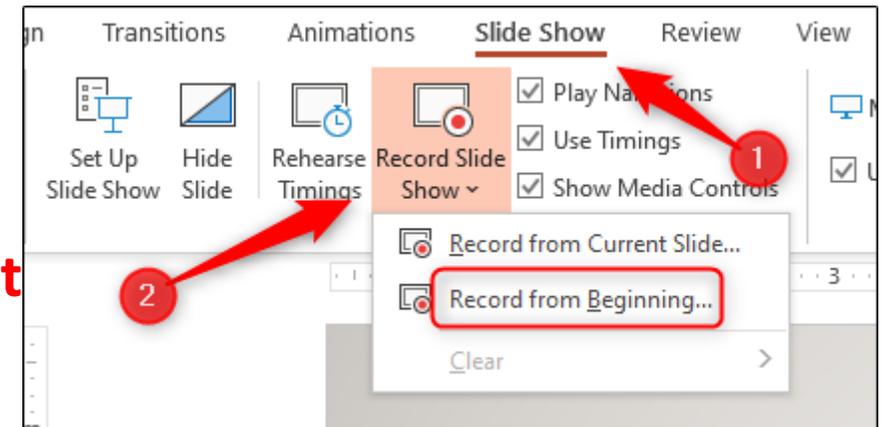
- No choice – everything went online Tuesday 17th March

- **Most universities went online that week at some point**
  - **Saw the writing on the wall**
  - **Immense pressure from staff and students**

- Lockdown 23rd March

Teaching

- Most institutions had a few weeks of teaching left
- **Transition was to "Emergency remote teaching" – classroom pedagogy put online**
- Not the best approach, but for the most part, it worked!

- Every institution had a VLE through which staff and students could continue to communicate yet stories emerged of students not hearing from their lecturers for weeks

- **Overnight we told staff how to record to their PowerPoint presentations and it happened!**

- Some staff even reported increased engagement (captive lockdown audience and no need to travel to campus were two reasons)

- No!
- **Immense amount to sort out**
- Every part of University and home life changed overnight
- **Mechanisms to ensure every member of staff is kept in touch with**
- More of a challenge to track and support students
- **Closing a campus is complex e.g. research experiments half way through which were lost, contents of fridges…**
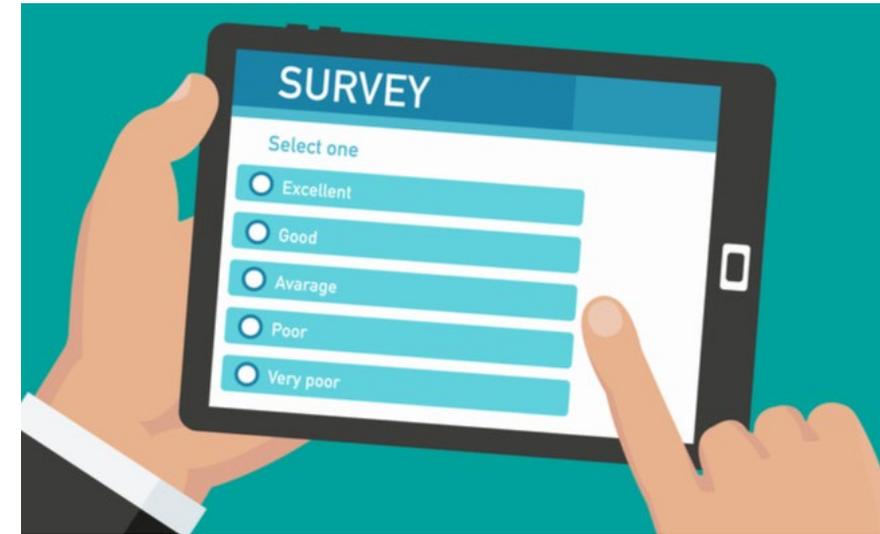
- PhD student experiments, and research staff experiments died overnight, sometimes losing months of work
- **Ensuring staff and students had the right equipment to go online (could not help every student)**
- Some students in dire circumstances – relatives with covid, lost jobs, childcare / home schooling…but most ok!
- **Mental health issues - some students unable to find a private place to talk from home so had to phone during their one exercise per day but some hanging on for F2F**

Quick Sand

- At the start – it felt like a dramatic change daily – new information to respond to, new problems - now slowed a bit but still rapid

- **Everything you knew had gone upside down!**

- The situation led to double the emails and workload – for all!

- **For the most part video conferencing worked – internet glitches continue but in general, ok**

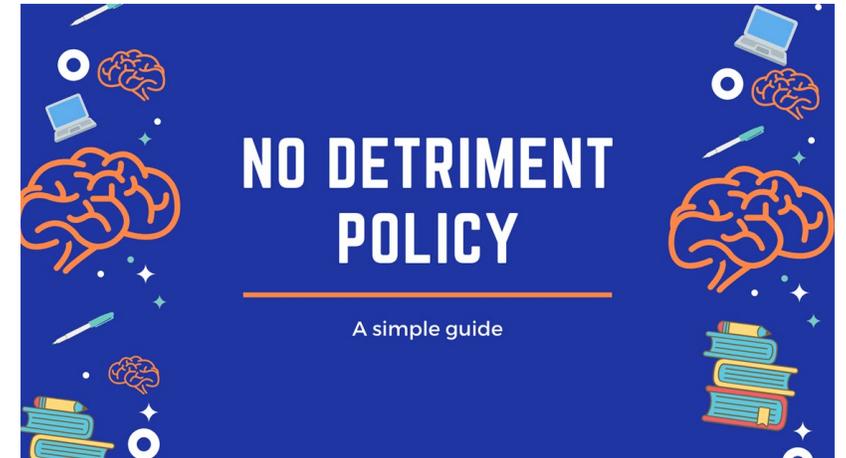- Etiquette developed e.g. mute when not talking.

- Overwhelmed by offers of help and surveys

- **Government, Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland, AdvanceHE, JISC, University groups e.g. UUK, MillionPlus and sub-groups etc. wanted to understand the challenges – some wanted to prove their value…**

- Many meetings, repeated conversations on same issues in different fora

- **Suppliers opened up their teaching platforms and applications for free to try and hook you in….**

- Capacity less than normal to respond – had to be strategic – delete button was hit!

- Concept is that students can't achieve worse than they have done to-date in assessments
- **Sector trends can provide immense pressure – once one University crumbles…**

- **But:**
- Universities at different points in their semesters with different amounts of completed assessment to fall back on
- **Many universities declared they had a no detriment policy but most did not, it was half way there – real sector variability, no consistent definition**
- Use of the words "No Detriment" probably helped keep students and the media on board
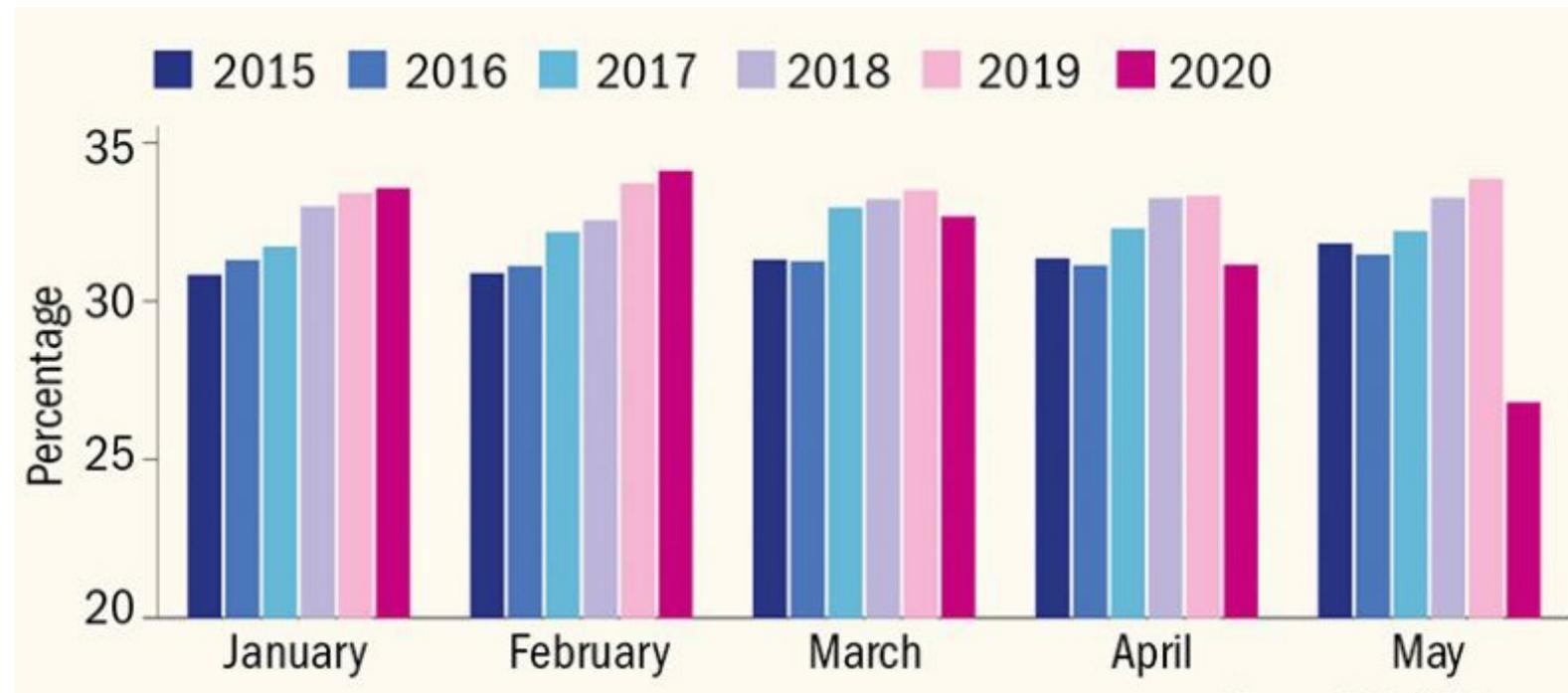
Abertay and No Detriment

- We held our ground – a full ND policy is a license for students, happy with their current grades, to put their feet up and do nothing

- **Whilst the QAA were supportive of ND policies, they were also reaffirming we had to maintain standards and students must achieve the learning outcomes**

- Under pressure from the Students Association and the Media, we introduced some leniency in our regs e.g. students could have a marginal fail

- **Regulation reviews would normally be done over a period of months however:**
  - **Monday – brainstormed new regs with team of Deans**
  - **Tuesday – consulted senior staff and finalised proposal**
  - **Wednesday – Approval through committees – Chair's action**
  - **Thursday – wrote the communications to staff and students**
  - **Friday – sent the comms and waited for the backlash ☺**

- **June – one hiccup realised the day before the first exam board......**

- **Student results look at least as good as normal!**

- **Some academics relishing the saved commute time and churning out many research papers**

- **Others have time but are lacking motivation isolated at home**

- **Disaster for women** ☹

Proportion of research papers accepted where the first author is female, by month of submission over past five years (THE)

Planning for 2020-21

- Scary predictions due to potential loss of international students

- **Home numbers seem to be holding up in the sector but not evenly distributed**

- Loss of accommodation income 2019-20 and 2020-21, plus conference income etc.

- **Some universities facing a cliff edge**

  - Loans available

  - **Impact of international students – can they start teaching online if they need to? Will quarantine still be in place? Free quarantine accommodation?**

  - Bailouts will come with conditions e.g. mergers

  - **Some university accounts may not be signed off by auditors**

Financial Impact - staff

- Temporary pay freezes
- **Promotion freezes (or can have status but no money)**
- Pay cuts by senior staff
- **Pay cuts for all staff bar the lowest paid**
- Almost immediate loss of hourly paid, zero hours contracts etc.

- **Potential loss of a generation of researchers but new research loan money might help temporarily**
- REF delay and damage to impact case studies
- **Ability to cope is variable**

The Teaching Challenge

- Classroom pedagogy put online was acceptable in an emergency but not for long!

- **Need to do better but recognise can't do top quality by end of the summer**

- And staff still need to take annual leave during the summer!

- **Staff need more time to develop materials for online – inevitably impact research and knowledge exchange activities**

- Everyone issuing guidance how to teach online and training sessions

"What if we don't change at all … and something magical just happens?"
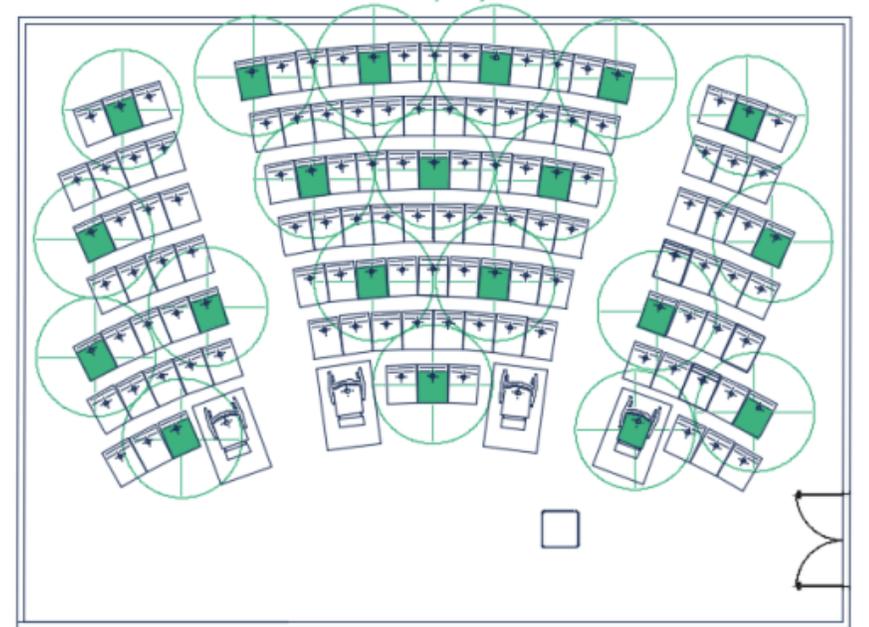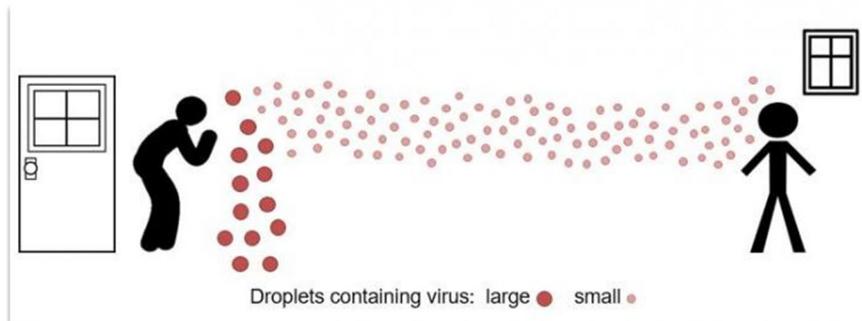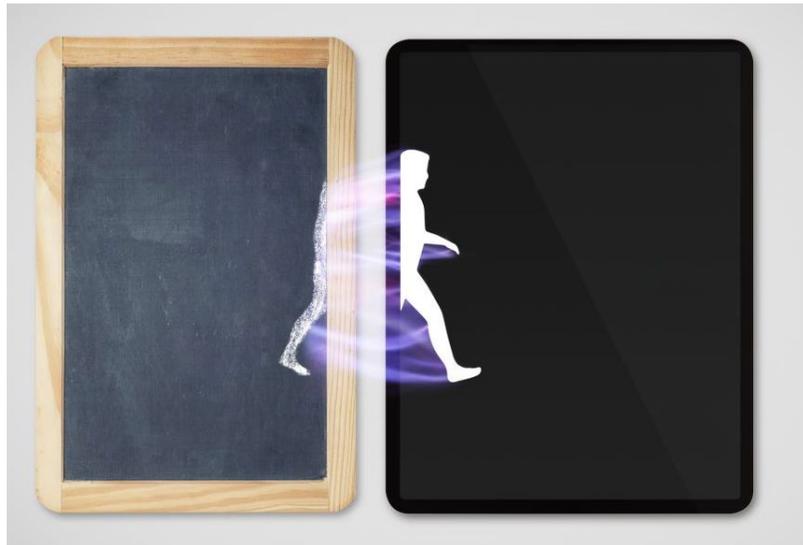
Employees **Management**

- Some resistance – want to keep what they know and deliver one hour online synchronous lectures – bad idea!

- **Many staff apprehensive, scared of getting it wrong – encouraging team approach**

- Lots of time spent online with groups of staff – reassuring, explaining, debating….

- **IP policy, use of unapproved cloud technology, performance rights etc. all come to the fore**

- Traffic flow around campus and in classrooms
- Masks, cleaning classrooms between use, sanitisers, air flow in rooms etc.
- Breaks between classes to allow SD in lifts, toilets etc.
- **2 metres social distancing = ~15-25% capacity**
- **1 metre social distancing = ~40-50+% capacity**
- Need an online version of everything for vulnerable students, carers etc.
- Keeping students in the same room and in "Student Bubbles" – can only be done for core subjects

Droplets containing virus: large ●   small ●

- At 2m SD, Abertay can get 10% of its students on campus at any one time plus specialist computer labs and wet labs

- **So every student can have half a day per week on campus (lots of duplication due to room sizes, staff and students shielding etc.) rest has to be online – challenge to make this a good experience with SD!**

- Schedule by (cognate) programme group and stage – given a morning or afternoon in a room

- What do you teach? Large classes will need multiple deliveries and this requires duplicate staff expertise or a challenging timetable for one person – risk!

- **Modules taught to more than one group e.g. electives have to be online**

- Identified the "essential" on campus teaching i.e. the stuff that can't be done online – will need to prioritise if go into lockdown during the year

Lasting Impact

Abertay University®

- Staff have more confidence and more skills for online – maybe would have taken 10 years to achieve the same under normal circumstances

- **More online programmes in general – some universities already announced it**

- Hope the flipped lecture / flipped classroom remains to maximise campus use for interactive sessions

FLIPPED CLASSROOM

ONE-SIZE FITS ALL STORE

SALE

- You can teach online in ways you can't in the classroom and vice versa e.g. simulations, personalisation, learning at your own pace…..

- **Hope for a more blended approach to on campus teaching – enhanced by online – best of online and best of F2F**

- But one size never fits all and you have to take the people with you!

- More flexible modes of study but can universities compete with existing quality online providers?

- **How will the market change for learners now they have had this experience? Clearly relished by some, unpopular with others.**

- What does it mean for partnerships, franchises, use of technology, including AI, going forward?

- **How will people study in future? More JIT, upskilling / reskilling direct to workplace, stackable qualifications, will funding for credit accumulation happen? how support economic recovery / needs of businesses, increased competition**

- Challenges of Brexit e.g. reduced EU students, increasing home competition, unlikely to participate in Horizon Europe impact of research on teaching….

Questions and Comments?

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