



LEARNING AND TEACHING CONFERENCE 2021

The University of Tomorrow

De Montfort University Annual Learning and Teaching Conference
Friday 5 February 2021

Title of Session: Catalysing change for action beyond learning and teaching at DMU
Lead Presenter: Mayen Cunden CEM
Panel of students: Lucy Ford, Aliya Amin-Khan, Victoria Etchells and Sam McPhee

Post Session Write up

The students (Team 1: Lucy Ford & Aliya Amin-Khan and Team 2: Victoria Etchells & Sam McPhee) debated whether the university of tomorrow should equip graduates for the world of work or for the work of the world, respectively. The topic of debate revolved not just around how DMU embeds for example, sustainability education, ethical computing and responsible innovation into an IT programme but also how its teaching programmes catalyse action towards driving change and creating impact beyond IT and its related field of work, through its graduates.

The distinction between the two perspectives lies in the very real challenge for the work of the world where progress may not so easily be achieved in areas such as complex systemic global issues like climate change, biodiversity loss and ocean health, all areas in which the planet is imperilled and where we are running out of time to address these problems and on the other hand, the world of work, characterised by the isolation of distributed ownership of business processes (or silos), geographic inequalities and division within the knowledge economy.

The debate was intended to reflect how we at DMU embrace and embed education in a 21st century teaching and learning programme through which it is envisaged students will engage with how we go about reconfiguring our degree programmes to address not just global sustainability challenges but also, the preparation of our graduates to tackle those challenges.

Audience request: Suggestions on how students may develop resilience, in current learning conditions.

Response: DMU could engage with students more on mental health and coping mechanisms. DMU already offer a comprehensive service when it comes to Mental Health but it may be worth considering implementing group sessions focused on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which will deliver significant benefits in developing resilience, by students being able to self-identify negative or unhelpful thoughts and learning how to deal with them. CBT is a relatively new form of therapy that can help students self-identify and inculcate good behaviours and skills to manage their mental health better and aid their healing. It was suggested that DMU create some kind of

short film or documentary about mental health as a way to indicate support for students and to let them know they're not alone, thereby encouraging the development of their resilience.

There was general consensus that that the university of tomorrow should focus on teaching students healthy coping mechanisms with continued advocacy for ending the stigma attached to mental health. Students appreciated that DMU is reaching out to students, with its 'Are you ok?' campaign, yet there exists room for improvement amidst the current pandemic and lockdown, where loneliness is a major concern for many students. A way to help with this may be to encourage group activities amongst the students so that they can still socialise even if it cannot be done face to face. If students have access to a support network to confide in, discuss issues and just generally support each other, this may help with building their resilience - especially if they knew they could confide in other students without judgement and that it was perfectly acceptable to do so.

Overall, the session went well as everyone spoke with confidence and clarity. The (privately delivered) feedback from some attendees was that the speakers were all clear and made precise points, and that the debate was interesting; in particular the rebuttal between Aliya and Victoria was appreciated and that it would have been nice to have more of the rebuttal. It was felt however that given only one question was asked and that none of the keener points of debate were challenged by the remainder of the audience, was a bit sad. Notwithstanding, all presenters thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to participate and to express their views as members of the debate teams.

Altogether the session was engaging as each of the presenters advocated a different perspective which generated some novel ideas. The topic itself got the team members thinking about their future post-university, and how together with the help of the university, could best prepare themselves for that future.
