

Reflections on transforming assessment and feedback: complexity and collaboration

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National Teaching Fellow Professor Debbie Holley shares her experiences of preparing for, and delivering, an online keynote

Keynote Lecture by Bournemouth University academics Debbie Holley and Anne Quinney to the Medway universities' Creative and inclusive assessment and feedback Festival September 2020.

Medway Learning and Teaching festival is an annual event which has run since 2014. Because of the unique set-up of three universities; Kent, Greenwich and Canterbury Christ Church, on the Medway site, the festival organisation is shared by a small committee of representatives from each of the three universities.

Below, **Louise Frith, Learning Adviser and co-organiser of the three University festival**, offers her insights on running a complex conference in an engaging and interactive format, with a wide range of speakers and participants, some digitally expert and others less so.

“Our staff were initially a little hesitant about having an online Festival ; but these comments show how, with careful design, we were able to make it an engaging, inclusive and informative day.”

Participant feedback:

- *Extraordinary! Full commitment with the cause.*
- *Interesting and innovative.*

Planning for the festival always starts a year in advance, so back in September 2019 we planned our event with the usual considerations of conference theme, key note speaker, venues and refreshments. The theme chosen was ‘Creative and Inclusive Assessment and Feedback’ and we decided to invite Professor Debbie Holley because of her innovative work in these areas. By March 2020 a physical conference was looking unlikely, so we decided to go online. This decision was conveyed to our keynote speaker and potential contributors. Although an online

festival was not what we had planned, all of the contributors embraced the new format and in some ways it presented new opportunities; for example, Debbie suggested that she invite a colleague, Anne Quinney, to co-present with her, making the session more interactive and enabling smoother online management of the keynote. We decided to use MS TEAMS as the presentation platform because it is the most familiar platform for all three institutions and it is free to use.

Debbie and Anne now pick up the narrative, and share their reflections:

Learning to teach and present online has been a steep learning curve for most staff in HE, but by September 2020 it was beginning to feel like the 'new normal'. Some sessions were perfectly suited to online presentation; such as, one from the School of Sports and Exercise Science on the use of a chatbots and another from the University of Greenwich on feedback literacy for prospective students. Other sessions were harder to imagine online; an example of this was the session on mindfulness. This session was presented by a collaborative team from the Kent's Student Support and Wellbeing Service and Student Learning Advisory Service. The aim of the session was to introduce participants to the aims of mindfulness and some of the mindfulness initiatives which exist at Kent and then to deliver a 10-minute guided mindfulness practice. Despite the challenges of delivering this session online, the presenters were able to create a sense of group cohesion and a moment of calm within the busy conference environment enabling participants to experience mindfulness remotely. Feedback on the session was very positive one participant commenting,

"You got me to stop checking all of my screens/phones for 30 minutes and actually breathe and relax a little. My shoulders especially appreciated it!"

Overall, our first experience of running an online conference was successful. We have learnt a lot through the process; such as, the need to provide presenters with support and reassurance regarding the technology, the importance of building in enough breaks for participants to have some time away from their screens and the value of having a clear website with simple joining instructions. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive one participant commented that it was, *"Thoroughly interesting and applicable!"*

Reflections from Debbie Holley and Anne Quinney – keynote speakers

This was a first for us – a joint keynote, separately and online. We have delivered several conference papers and workshops together in person (Quinney et al 2019; Quinney et al 2018) but since Covid-19 restrictions meant that travel to conferences was no longer possible we had gained experience of delivering joint conference papers separately from our own homes online (Holley and Quinney 2020, Goldsmith, Holley and Quinney 2020), and learnt ‘on the spot’ what worked well and what to have contingency plans for.

It was important to consider how to create social presence, particularly important for a Keynote which will set the scene for the day and link to conference themes and the *concerns* of the delegates, without being present and without the energy generated between us when presenting in person. We suggest an icebreaker, setting scenarios for participants to consider, following up afterwards to close the feedback loop by sharing materials and resources.

Link to the BU [Assessment and Feedback Toolkit](#)

Link to blogpost on [designing assessment principles](#)

Link to the presentation here

[Reflections on transforming assessment and feedback: complexity and collaboration](#) from [debbieholley1](#)