Welcome to our twelfth issue of *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching*. This issue of *Compass* reflects key current issues affecting Higher Education: observation of teaching, e-learning (with particular reference to flipped classrooms) and methodology designed to develop broad student skillsets to enhance employability. The issue also focuses upon ways of meeting the needs of 'non-traditional' students, explores a student champion approach to improving staff-to-student feedback and celebrates an occasion devoted to the creation of mobile phone apps.

In the context of the Teaching Excellence Framework, Martin Compton's opinion piece about the use of observation of teaching in Higher Education weighs up both adverse and favourable methods, drawing on the Further Education experience. The linkage between observation as a part of appraisal and government determination to eliminate poor teaching is not, in his opinion, likely to produce pedagogical improvement, marginalising as it does peer and developmental observation practices. Far from adopting a confrontational stance, however, he explores various studies of observation approaches that are not about grading performance but instead focus upon delivery and impact rather than the person, or involve more than just two participants. The potential benefits to both observed and observers are clear; within a non-judgemental and properly-resourced framework, developmental observation has much to offer HE institutions keen to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

A closely-related paper by Zeynep Kacmaz about the peer observation of teaching, specifically in the less-researched area of e-learning, presents some of the challenges faced in monitoring practice and ensuring high standards in the delivery of online teaching and learning, its virtual nature and the fact that many staff are often home-based and 'associate' both militating against effective observation methods. The thorough examination of a cross-section of UK universities and interviews with academics reveals an inconsistent application of peer observation of e-teaching/learning, at a time when online learning is becoming ever more sophisticated (Virtual Learning Environments are now ubiquitous in Higher Education) and teachers are needing to adapt to very different environments and roles in the context of blended, distance and open learning options. Having painted a fascinating picture of the current situation, the paper concludes that much research still needs to be done and suggests a range of potential macro- and micro-level studies to address the reprofessionalisation of teachers in this area, to achieve promotion of best practice and to improve the quality of teaching.

Several contributors to this issue of **Compass** have found themselves much exercised by the realities of institutional Virtual Learning Environments and provide their take on experiences of e-learning and flipped practices:

Adele Atkinson's case study of the application of a flipped classroom to a six-week healthcare professionals' module finds that there are some real benefits to collaborative, enquiry-based/problem-based learning sessions when all participants have, in their own time, adequately explored the available online resources and activities. The case study makes clear the importance both of students' digital skills and of the quality of the materials they are accessing; additionally, the tutors' roles as facilitators and questioners are key to successful face-to-face sessions. Participants' previous passive learning experiences may be a barrier to this much more active approach; in future, she intends to provide students with a preliminary rationale to overcome that and also to develop colleagues' questioning skills to improve the problem-based learning in module sessions.

Another exploration of flipped-classroom methods by Alan Dix involved the reuse of MOOC video materials and the fine-grain analytics provided by a new universal media player. His account of his first steps in flipping the classroom points to the necessity of very diverse ways of using materials to

meet student needs and to the advantages, thanks to the analytics, both of targeted feedback to students and (for the academic, very much accountable) a comforting sense of control over learning. The MOOC materials, intended to be read or watched unsupervised online, proved to be very suitable for student access prior to face-to-face activities, though he does refer to students' own concerns about off-campus internet availability and insufficiently powerful personal computers.

A third piece about flipped learning by Katie Stripe considers the responses garnered from an audience at the University of Greenwich APT2015 Conference to the question 'Is flipped learning a challenge, an opportunity or a necessity?' She suggests that digital and oral expression, as evident in mentimeter and verbal responses to specific questions, reflects a contrast in individuals' preferences for either technological or person-to-person communication in the learning/teaching context; this is emblematic of the institutional gulf between those teachers who resist and those who readily embrace digital technology. Institutions must, she says, have consistency of policy and provide good pedagogical and technological support. The sharing of good practice is fundamental to achieving both general acceptance of, and high standards in, flipped learning.

A fourth paper on this theme by Sue Watling presents some preliminary findings from a three-year action research project into that very matter of staff reluctance to move from face-to-face to e- and blended-learning practices. The project led to the establishment of TELEDA (Teaching and Learning in a Digital Age) course for aspiring e-teachers, itself entirely interactive and collaborative. She argues that e-teaching must be made explicit and that teachers must have the necessary technical and pedagogical knowledge to create effective (i.e. activity-based) online learning environments. Putting TELEDA participants into an experiential course design context resulted in their increased empathy with their own students and increased the likelihood of their consistent adoption of digital practices. Fundamentally, the shift needs to be from a technology-training to a teacher-education model.

Two papers consider the power of particular approaches to learning, both of them at the University of Greenwich:

In the Faculty of Education and Health, Jim Gritton, Jill Stewart, Charlotte Jeavons, Nevin Mehmet, and Vincent La Placa explore how using film to stimulate discussion amongst public health, wellbeing and leadership students has proved efficacious in developing their sensitivity, understanding and powers of empathy, to enhance their future work as professional practitioners. Outlining the approach provides a substantial amount of academic evidence to support the educational and stimulation value of viewing film from health and leadership perspectives and describes the authors' workshop to offer best practice methodology to teaching colleagues. Close focus on the possibilities of one specific film, *Erin Brockovich*, demonstrates how teachers might apply the approach to their own disciplines and offers some clear insights into the issues involved.

Angela Byrne's case study focuses on the introduction of podcasting on an undergraduate History course as a means of learning and assessment. It intended to foster a range of student skills as well as diversifying assessment methods, with both formative peer and summative lecturer feedback. The podcast not only presented students' original research; it enhanced their digital and communication expertise, highly relevant to employability. Student feedback was largely positive. She describes refinements to be incorporated to enhance it for the future.

Helping students (especially those from non-traditional backgrounds and those who are the first in their families to undertake higher education) to access education and find their way into employment presents considerable challenge.

One case study by Noel-Ann Bradshaw describes how the Greenwich Graduate Work Experience Scheme (GWES) enabled a graduate intern with film experience to help combat student apprehensions about the graduate job application process; she selected students, trained them in film-making and got them to use their own ideas in several videos which they created on CVs, extra-curricular activities, mentoring and placements. The case study includes student comments about the skills and confidence acquired during the project and demonstrates how film and film-making represent a decidedly effective way of allowing real insight into the stages of preparing for, seeking and acquiring a relevant graduate post.

Another paper by Melanie Thorley and Clifton Kandler reviews and explores the effectiveness of lecture capturing at the University of Greenwich, specifically its own cross-faculty application of the Panopto system as a means of supporting disabled and non-traditional students who may not be able to access education equally with their peers. The trial threw up significant benefits, as the system operates on personal electronic equipment, allowing for live-streaming, replaying and searching of recorded lectures/presentations and adjustment of fonts and colours. Thus the approach can meet the needs of students with diverse abilities, but there are implications for institutions, which may need to address such matters as staff skills/awareness and legal and policy issues. The paper considers also the system's potential at a time of cuts to student disability allowances for a reduction in the need for in-class notetakers. All in all, the advantages win the day.

Cornelia Boldyreff, Yasmine Arafa, Asif Malik, Andrew Wicks, and Gillian Windall cover the BCS Appathon events at the University of Greenwich, one of several UK locations collectively aiming to engage in one hour as many people as possible in producing a mobile phone app. The authors describe the method, the software and the outcomes. Very much the brainchild of BCSWomen and with creation rather than consumption at its heart, the day not only drew a wide age range of people, but also triggered the idea of exposing first-year students of Computer and Information Sciences to the Appathon experience; as ambassadors, these students might then go out to schools to generate programming interest there.

Twenty-seven student 'champions' at the University of Southampton acted as change agents in a project designed to improve the quality, practice and culture of feedback from staff to students. A thorough portrayal of the multi-faceted, cross-discipline project is provided in a case study by Laurence Georgin, Kristina Stewart, Rebecca Wainwright, Rameesha Anwar and Abisola Tina Hammed shows how a much better understanding of why feedback didn't work well for students was achieved. The paper contains references to some useful transferable resources, such as a video and interactive tool, and clearly describes the various means by which the project's findings were disseminated. Though the case study suggests that embedding good practice will be challenging and will need institutional resolve, there are encouraging signs that, at Southampton, things are moving in the right direction.

We hope that you enjoy reading these thought provoking accounts, discussing the ideas raised with colleagues, and help continue to extend the conversations concerning teaching and learning by submitting to our future issues.

Danielle Tran

Editor

Educational Development Unit, University of Greenwich