# Distanced not distant what we learned from supporting staff to develop flexible learning and teaching during COVID 19

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## APT0605221315139

## Slide 1:

Hello and welcome to our presentation. I’m Rachel Challen and I’m jointly presenting today with Rose and Rachel. Hi im Rosemary Pearce, hi I’m Rachel Bancroft.

We all work in the School of Arts and Humanities at NTU and our presentation focuses on technology, pedagogy and assessment and what we learned from supporting staff to develop flexible learning and teaching during COVID 19, our lessons learned and how we are building on this for a post-pandemic future.

## Slide 2:

The Learning and Teaching Support Unit (LTSU is a team supporting learning technology in the School, and because of that, this team played a central role in our pandemic learning and teaching response.

The support offer shown in this slide had allowed connections to be built, and with initiatives such as digital partners (academic colleagues and LTSU working in partnership) and identifying effective practice to share cross departmentally, there was a strong trust and respect between teams already in place.

## Slide 3:

As with most universities at that time, our institution response was to go fully online. In order to do that we developed a 3-stage process transfer to transform, building on the LTSU work, that took colleagues from an emergency response (OSLAH) to a consolidation of practice (Aah Connect) and now focusing on transforming our curriculum with digital pedagogy (AAH Connect plus).

The stages were clearly defined so colleagues could identify with the expectations and requirements of each step

This presentation focuses on three key areas of staff development, community of practice and digital confidence that underpinned achieving our goals.

## Slide 4:

So first of all we’re going to talk about the staff development side of things, which is my area within the Learning and Teaching Support Unit.

At the start, we knew we had to give tightly-focused staff development sessions on the basics of using Microsoft Teams for teaching – this was very much about button-clicking, but running these sessions multiple times a day over several days reassured staff at least that presenting and discussion in a Teams meeting was possible.

It was clear from the high levels of attendance at training sessions in those first weeks, and in our online drop-in sessions, that staff needed intensive support at that time. Asynchronous resources (FAQs and support materials) that we made available through our Microsoft Teams site saw very high sustained usage - we were initially reacting to the needs of colleagues as we collectively learned about them.

## Slide 5:

It’s difficult to imagine now, but the very start when we ran the sessions introducing colleagues to using Microsoft Teams we displayed a Welcome slide that aimed to give people a handle on the basic features available in an online meeting. And I think comparing this Welcome slide to the one we used the following year in our training exemplifies something that changed about our approach as we, the colleagues we supported, and the situation changed.

## Slide 6:

As the training became less reactive and more proactive, as colleagues got more confident with their use of tools for online teaching and learning, and as the training became less about button-clicking and more about thinking through and discussing pedagogical approaches together, we found that rather than helping staff orient themselves to the online learning environment, we could instead spend that time trying to build rapport and promote discussion, and we chose to do this through what we called a “corridor question,” which was always non-work related, much like the chat you might have in a corridor before an on-campus session began.

It was designed to get people feeling comfortable talking to us and one another. Sessions moved toward a collaborative workshop format as confidence built, giving space for sharing effective practice and working together to solve problems. Attendance was much higher than sessions we ran pre-pandemic, and we were pleased to note that those who attended often came back to other sessions.

## Slide 7:

To support colleagues throughout the pandemic period, we established a community of practice using a Microsoft Teams site and coupled that with ASK (advice, support knowledge) drop-in sessions which were an important source of both team and peer support for colleagues. It offered a space to connect whilst many of us were grappling with feelings of disconnection and isolation – heightened during the pandemic as we were physically distanced from others in new ways.

## Slide 8:

In our Teams space we carefully nurtured community, offering encouragement and enthusiasm which helped to mitigate hesitancy when asking questions and sharing thoughts. Colleagues also shared a sense of reassurance from having questions answered quickly and from being able to see the queries and discussions of their peers.

We moved our campus-based, ASK drop-in sessions online, and right from the start, colleagues often joined the call to hear the questions of others, feeling like there was more they needed to know, but unsure what questions to ask.

Because the team was always very present in the community of practice it meant we could make connections between colleagues who were working on similar approaches - putting people in touch.

We welcomed all messages and questions from colleagues, sometimes a peer would answer before one of the support team could respond and we were careful to thank and acknowledge each contribution.

Some of the impact and influence of this approach on developing a community of practice was observable. We received direct feedback from colleagues explaining successes using approaches with students which began or developed from discussions in the Community of Practice. Colleagues began to readily answer each other’s questions in the Teams space, arranging meetings to try things out with one another, and eventually building on each other’s approaches. Repeat visits to drop-in sessions, and Teams space allowed colleagues to share their successes and challenges when trying out new learning approaches, bringing back news of student feedback and making changes based on new advice from the community which they could return with to their students.

## Slide 9:

I’m now just going to take you through the ways that we embedded opportunities to develop digital confidence in colleagues.

## Slide 10:

The University was giving a lot of focus to developing digital skills. We decided that we would focus on digital confidence and digital resilience because these were going to form the basis of the mentoring, support and development framework that was necessary for colleagues to succeed – given the lack of time available in adjusting, some colleagues were firmly in a liminal space, unsure of how they were going to get to the next step but no longer grounded in their pre-pandemic curriculum design or thought processes.

As a team, we began to realise the key roles we could play in building digital confidence, that of springboard, safety net, and spotlight.

## Slide 11:

As a springboard, we noticed that many colleagues who wouldn’t consider themselves “tech-savvy” were now innovating by necessity, so as a team we made clear that we would be available to give advice, provide relevant information, and even try things out with them to support the changes they were making.

## Slide 12:

Our team’s role as a safety net to help resolve issues with learning technology when things went wrong was more pronounced than ever.

## Slide 13:

And we also realised our role as a spotlight on innovative and effective practice in our School, talking through ideas with colleagues and writing up their experiences for our team blog. We found that the experience of talking it through with us prompted reflection and sometimes new iterations of their planned learning activities.

Evidence of the development of growth in staff digital confidence could be seen in:

* Increased sharing of digital practice over time as colleagues grew more confident with new approaches beyond the community of practice, and into the university’s annual conference.
* Direct feedback from colleagues noting their increased digital confidence – often coupled with comments on reduced anxiety.

## Slide 14:

1. We need to capitalize on the gains that happened, the practice that impacted positively on student experience and continue to build on these

2. In OSLAH we had to focus on the technology to move quickly, but now the focus is definitely back to the why – we ned to be more flexible to achieve our goals

3. Our community of practice grew rapidly, almost as soon as we had created the space, colleagues were asking questions and looking for resources. Sharing occurred more rapidly than we had expected. Our community of practice has grown beyond the Teams space – which we still use for drop-in sessions and for partnered projects where we try new approaches for digital learning. Our community has expanded into new areas, connecting with colleagues in learning and teaching spaces across the institution, the sector, and beyond.

4. The asynchronous part of our community of practice allowed colleagues to connect at times most suitable for them. We have implemented a time to think series to support this

5. Whilst we have always discussed digital confidence as part as digital skills, we have come to focus on it as an area all of its own and quite separate from digital competencies. Our experience suggests that this is not enough if staff do not have the confidence to feel in control and supported if, for example, the technology for a learning activity should fail them. Having the digital confidence to deal with rapid change and unexpected circumstances remains important to us all.

## Slide 15:

Is there anything in this presentation that you would like to explore further when we meet as a group?

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