# LJMU Research Online

**Mistry, V**

 Waving not drowning: reflections from an in-house journal

**http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/10333/**

**Article**

# Waving not drowning: Reflections from an in-house journal

**Virendra Mistry,** Liverpool John Moores University

To those that edit or who sit on an editorial board of an in-house or institutional teaching and learning/higher education (IHE) journal, 2018 has caused a bit of a stir. That's because, early in the year, two such journals were released: *IMPact: The University of Lincoln Journal of Higher Education Research* and University of Leicester's *Journal of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*. In this article, I outline the scale of such journals and thereby offer an update to an exploratory study undertaken on open-access IHE journals in the UK (Mistry, 2017). The remainder of the paper reflects and offers insight into the process of writing in the context of the interactions that take place between myself, as editor of Liverpool John Moores University's (LJMU) *Innovations in Practice*, and a prospective author. These interactions underline the distinctive qualities of an IHE journal: the

intimacy associated with this small-scale publishing privileges an informal and relaxed sense of writers' beliefs, attitudes and values, and the trust and bond that ensues raises the likelihood of a calmer writing experience.

## Scale of publishing

A small number of institutions have produced an IHE journal. In contrast to newsletters, a 'journal' has characteristics that have endured since the very first example, The Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* (March 1665), comprising the functions of: 'registration', 'dissemination', 'peer review', and 'archival record' (Mabe, 2009). Applying a simple search on the Internet, references were found to the following IHE journals:

| Institution | Journal |
|---|---|
| Anglia Ruskin University | *Networks* |
| University of Arts London | *Spark: UAL Creative Teaching and Learning Journal* |
| University of Bedfordshire | *Journal of Pedagogic Development* |
| University of Birmingham | *Education in Practice* |
| Arts University Bournemouth | *Creative Pedagogies Journal* |
| City, University of London (The City University) | *Learning at City Journal* |
| University of Cumbria | *Practitioner Research in Higher Education* |
| University of Greenwich | *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching* |
| University of Hertfordshire | *Blended Learning in Practice* |
| Keele University | *JADE: The Journal of Academic Development and Education* |
| King's College, London | *Higher Education Research Network Journal (HERN-J)* |
| University of Leicester (previous journal) | *Journal for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (2010-12)* |
| Liverpool John Moores University | *Innovations in Practice* |
| Manchester Metropolitan University | *Learning and Teaching in Action* |
| Middlesex University | *Middlesex Journal of Educational Technology* |
| University of Northampton | *Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education* |
| Oxford Brookes University | *Brookes eJournal of Learning and Teaching (2004-16), and Higher Education Journal of Learning and Teaching* |
| Sheffield Hallam University | *Student Engagement and Experience Journal* |
| Queen's University, Belfast | *Reflections* |
| Southampton Solent University | *Dialogue* |
| Ulster University | *Perspectives on Practice and Pedagogy* |
| University of Winchester | *Capture* |
| University of Worcester | *Worcester Journal of Learning and Teaching* |
| University of York | *York Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* |

The IHE journals listed either are awaiting publication (e.g. Arts University Bournemouth) or have released at least one issue this decade. Some developed from Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) (e.g. Hertfordshire's Blended Learning Unit CETL). Some are aligned with a particular programme of study (e.g. King's College, London's *HERN-J* is linked to the Enhancing Academic Practice module of a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice), whilst others (such as York) are reflective of emerging institutional cultures of scholarship in teaching and learning (SoTL) (Robinson-Self, 2018). One or two focus on particular themes (e.g. Middlesex on learning technologies). The likes of others, such as Greenwich's *Compass*, have developed to include submissions from colleagues beyond the institution. (This development follows a similar trajectory to that of the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning*, created by the University of Wollongong in Australia.)

Not all journals are active. Some, such as Sheffield Hallam's *Student Engagement and Experience Journal*, ceased publication partly owing to the establishment of the RAISE (Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement) Network's *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal*. As illustrated in Figure 1, publication has been patchy and it underscores the fact that, in spite of the best endeavours of the institutions, developing and sustaining an IHE journal is not straightforward as it requires significant commitment from a wide range of people (contributors, reviewers, plus individuals with key skills such as proofreading and layout design).
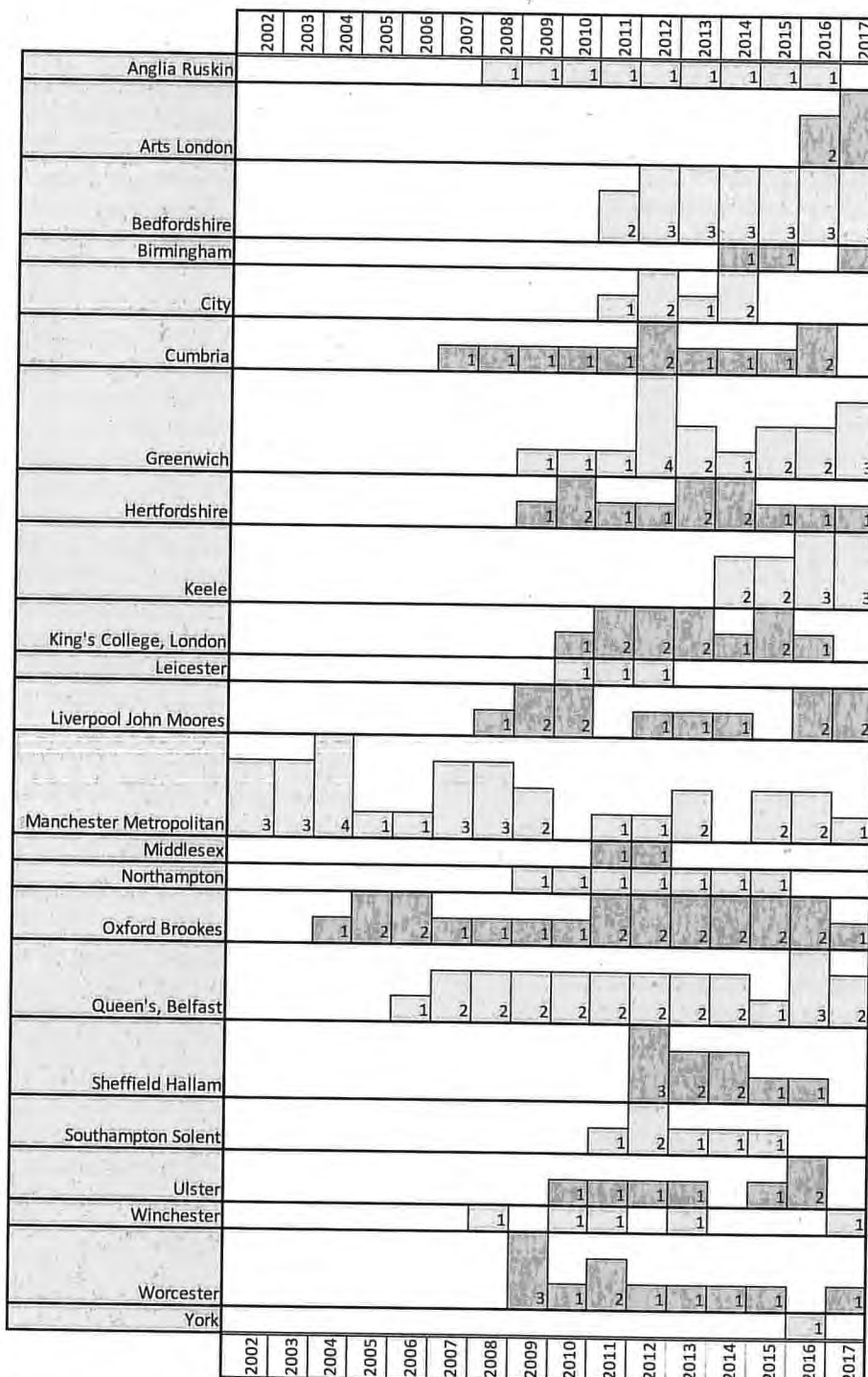
| Institution | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anglia Ruskin | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | |
| Arts London | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 3 |
| Bedfordshire | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Birmingham | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | | 1 |
| City | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | | | |
| Cumbria | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | |
| Greenwich | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Hertfordshire | | | | | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | |
| Keele | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| King's College, London | | | | | | | | | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | |
| Leicester | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| Liverpool John Moores | | | | | | 1 | 2 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 2 | 2 | |
| Manchester Metropolitan | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Middlesex | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| Northampton | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | |
| Oxford Brookes | | | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Queen's, Belfast | | | | | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Sheffield Hallam | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | |
| Southampton Solent | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | |
| Ulster | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | |
| Winchester | | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Worcester | | | | | | | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 |
| York | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | |

*Figure 1    Institutions and number of IHE journal issues released*

## Innovations in Practice

Liverpool John Moore University's (LJMU) *Innovations in Practice* emerged from CETL (Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning) funding, when the University hosted the Centre for Excellence in Leadership and Professional Learning. After the closure of the CETL programme, the journal took the form of an open-access journal, sitting on the Open Journals System platform. Two issues appear each year, and these dovetail when conversations about teaching, learning and student engagement hit particular peaks within the institution. For example, the June issue is released during LJMU's Annual Teaching and Learning Conference and the December issue when the 'call for abstracts' to the Conference is publicised. The journal uses double-blind review for its research papers: the review team includes each of LJMU's Associate Deans for Education plus members of the University's faculty pedagogic research groups.

The journal has attracted submissions from both early career and experienced teaching staff (e.g. LJMU's National Teaching Fellows), professional services staff (e.g. the library, careers team) and some students (PhDs and student interns on internally funded projects). *Innovations* has, over time, adapted to include a variety of paper types: research papers (e.g. case studies and conceptual articles), opinion pieces ('viewpoints'), book and learning technology reviews. These subtle adjustments are part of a vision to reach out to all potential authors. Once writers feel they can make a contribution, and I normally advise new writers to consider doing a book review first, I endeavour to nurture a better appreciation and understanding of practice, as well as an enjoyment of the writing process. The technical aspects of writing are relatively easy to grasp; the emotional aspects less so.

A majority of the contributors to *Innovations in Practice* are sole authors. Many are new to writing about their teaching practice, and some are from disciplines imbued with conventions of writing that seem inimical to research in education and academic practice. What stands some staff in good stead is that they have used other formats to disseminate their ideas and thinking (this is often the stimulus to their expression of interest). Some have presented at the Teaching and Learning Conference, or been part of 'peer learning groups' when undertaking LJMU's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education or, in a few cases, produced updates from various internally funded projects. Thus, generating discussions, debate, exchange of ideas and experiences provide a useful opportunity upon which to establish a rough outline for a paper. As editor, I see this as a chance to cultivate a relationship in a spirit that extends the conversations many staff are already having. This is, I think, the defining feature of the IHE journal compared with a larger publication. Whilst there are email exchanges, the meetings are face-to-face and informal. Thus, the drafts that are presented serve as an opportunity to develop intimate insights into peoples' values and beliefs in their practice.

## Personal to consensual symbols

Cognitive psychologist Ronald T. Kellogg (1994), in musing on the biological and cultural uniqueness of *Homo symbolificus*, describes writing as a form of symbol creation and manipulation revealing the very human process of giving meaning to the experience of life. Communicating through written text demands translation from personal and private symbols to the cultural and public, or personal to consensual symbols. Whether one is a seasoned writer or novice, the act of writing is itself a demanding cognitive feat and, as Kellogg concludes, representing one's inner experiences, feelings, beliefs and attitudes, such that they can be shared and understood in a public forum, is difficult and may never be completely successful. Coupled with this are the natural author anxieties that abound upon the realisation that '[written] texts become examinable objects in the physical world in a way that spoken utterances (without technological support) cannot' (Chandler, 1995, p. 47). It is, as Vygotsky once observed, the exactness, precision and detail in writing that can leave many novices in something of a shock.

On translating thought/speech to writing, linguist Walter Nash (1971) observed that, 'the different media of writing and speaking bring different devices and perceptions into play...the media are essentially distinct, and each has its own possibilities which cannot be developed or reflected in the other' (pp. 15-16). In short, conversations are socially situated. By engaging with an author, I have the ability to probe and to question so, what unfolds is a 'learningful conversation' (Senge *et al.*, 1994). These conversations are rich and focused and take the form of a dialogue which, as Haigh (2005) reminds us, involves exploration and critique of the reasons and assumptions associated with a position (of inquiry). Haigh asserts, 'in a dialogue, positions represent a starting point for conversation rather than an end point to be defended; positions may be abandoned, modified or added to' (Haigh, 2005, p. 9). The dialogue forms part of the recursive process, particularly as the writer moves from drafting to revising a paper. There are dangers inherent here and, as editor, I acknowledge that there is a fine line to tread in ensuring that it is the author's voice that is amplified, and not my own inner thoughts. Limiting the number of meetings is important (two or three seem to be sufficient); my support is focused on keeping people engaged and motivated and to approach rewriting positively – people often see that writing is inevitably messy but an iterative process.

The process of writing for *Innovations in Practice* has opened many interesting questions raised by Haigh (2005) on the value of conversations, discussion or dialogue in professional learning. Clark (2001) notes that when the interactions are authentic they stimulate the participant to articulate 'experiences, implicit theories, hopes, and fears, in the intellectual and emotional company of others whom we trust' (p. 177). He proceeds, 'Good conversation feeds the spirit; it feels good; it reminds us of our ideals and hopes for education; it confirms that we are not alone in our frustrations and doubts or in our small victories' (p. 181). I hope, through the interactions, the crippling self-doubt that some new writers experience can be alleviated in some way, and that any difficult emotions felt, as the paper is sent out for review, are diminished.

## Conclusion

*'Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man.' (Francis Bacon, On Studies)*

Writing and being published, as Gina Wisker counsels, is a form of academic rite of passage, and recognition in the published community 'signifies and enables wider acceptance into the communities of those who create, articulate and share knowledge: a powerful position' (Wisker, 2013, p. 345). For many staff who have contributed to *Innovations in Practice* it represents a journey of self-identity, discovery and personal belief and, as such, a finished article for *Innovations in Practice* almost entirely masks its evolution. Contributing to an IHE journal is a calm, but important, nudge for many into new terrain and into the domain of research into academic practice. I hope that by illuminating the 'backstage' of the process, our writers continue to evolve and to develop, and to set their aspirations beyond the IHE journal.

## References

Chandler, D. (1995) *The Act of Writing: A Media Theory Approach*, Aberystwyth: University of Wales, Aberystwyth

Clark, C.M. (2001) 'Good conversation' in Clark, C.M. (Ed.) *Talking Shop: Authentic Conversation and Teacher Learning*, New York, NY: Teachers College Press, pp. 172-182

Haigh, N. (2005) 'Everyday conversation as a context for professional learning and development'. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 10(1), pp. 3-16

Kellogg, R.T. (1994) *The Psychology of Writing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Mabe, C. (2009) 'Scholarly publishing', *European Review*, 17 (1), pp. 3-22

Mistry, V. (2017) 'Publishing or perishing? The scale and scope of institutional teaching and learning journals in the UK', *Innovations in Practice*, 11(2), pp. 100-122

Nash, W. (1971) *Our Experience of Language*, New York, NY: St. Martin's Press

Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R.B. and Smith, B.J. (1994) *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organisation*, London: Nicholas Brearley Publishing

Robinson-Self, P. (2018) 'In-house' journals and the scholarship of teaching and learning – thoughts from a discipline that is not a discipline', *Innovations in Practice*, 12(1), pp. 21-33

Wisker, G. (2013) 'Articulate – academic writing refereeing, editing and publishing our work in learning, teaching and educational development', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 50(4), pp. 344-356

**Virendra Mistry** (v.mistry@ljmu.ac.uk) is based at the Teaching and Learning Academy at Liverpool John Moores University, and is Editor-in-Chief of LJMU's *Innovations in Practice*.

# 21 indicators of Student Success – Exploring a new sector priority in an age of student outcomes

**Tom Lowe** and **Maria Moxey,** University of Winchester

## Introduction

Two colleagues from the University of Winchester recently ran a workshop at the Student Retention and Achievement Conference which asked the question: 'What indicates a successful student during a period in Higher Education obsessed with student outcomes?'

This workshop was inspired by the recently published Office for Students' (OfS) Regulatory Framework titled 'Securing Student Success', setting a target for all HEIs to ensure that 'all students, from all backgrounds, and with the ability and desire to undertake higher education…are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, Higher Education' (Office for Students, 2018, p. 14). This statement is both ambitious and complicated. Ensuring total student success is difficult and also complex when it is likely that the HE sector and its stakeholders within (students, staff, community, management etc.) will all respond to this ambition in several forms by defining *Student Success* in different ways. This paper reports on that workshop, as it was conducted to begin opening up the differing ambitions and definitions of Student Success from those with an invested interest in HE. The authors thank the participants at the recent Retention and Achievement Conference at Southampton Solent University who have fed into this debate.

In a predominately American literature, an emphasis on Student Success is not something new, with scholars such as Tinto and Astin stating that for a student to truly succeed in and from higher education they must be integrated within the HE community through engaging in academic, social and developmental activities (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Wolf-Wendel and colleagues place the emphasis on the student to take steps to become engaged and integrated to the HE lifestyle,