Post-Pandemic Pedagogy: a report on best practice for history teaching after Covid

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated the greatest transformation to teaching methods in higher education during peacetime. The regulatory body QAA accepted that the 'emergency pivot' enacted during the first lockdown in March 2020 was undertaken 'quickly and under extreme pressure'. Every in-person element of teaching and assessment had to be immediately replaced by an online equivalent. The indefatigability displayed by students and their tutors in transforming teaching overnight was remarkable. But what appeared to them to be short-term expedients were envisaged in a more long-term perspective by the QAA as having 'accelerated change, brought forward strategic plans, and instigated new ways of working' that had preceded Covid and were expected to outlast it.

The *Post-Pandemic Pedagogy* project was driven by the realisation that universities were considering - and in some cases implementing - revised teaching policies and practices in response to Covid-19 that were intended to outlast the pandemic. Institutions conducted local-level enquiries into the effects of the various teaching innovations necessitated by the pandemic, while national bodies such as JISC, the Office for Students and the QAA conducted large-scale research into experiences of teaching and learning during the pandemic.

Institutional and sector-level analyses, in general, painted a picture of institutions responding successfully to the challenges of delivering teaching during the pandemic from March 2020 onwards. Such positive appraisals were used in some cases to propose quite radical changes to the delivery of programmes that extended beyond the 'emergency' phase of teaching. We were concerned about the scale of potential changes for history, given that the rationales underpinning changes to teaching and learning were either generic or institution-specific, with little consideration of discipline-level pedagogies or preferences. Further, we observed that the evidence-base for the research that was being invoked to justify changes seemed rather slim.

Building on History UK's *Pandemic Pedagogy* project (Cooper et al., 2020), we sought to gather evidence from within the discipline to inform history-specific frameworks for post-pandemic teaching, learning and assessment. *Post-Pandemic Pedagogy* attempted to achieve three distinctive objectives that set it apart from existing projects:

1. to examine the perspectives of teachers and students alongside one another;
2. to assess the effectiveness of pedagogic strategies devised and adopted in response to the pandemic in a single discipline – history;
3. and to gather data on respondents' preferences for the teaching of history *after* lockdown and the widespread availability of vaccinations.

To achieve these objectives, we designed a survey of students and teachers of history in higher education in the UK. The survey, which was completed by 565 people from 47 universities in 2021,

assessed the effects and efficacy of teaching and learning during the pandemic and respondents' post-pandemic pedagogic preferences. The survey is described in more detail in the methodology section below. Its findings are outlined in the following sections. Overall, the project collates evidence from across the sector, summarises the findings of the survey, and positions pandemic-related changes to teaching and learning in history in a broader perspective.

The project was funded initially by the East Midlands Centre for History Teaching and Learning (EMC: https://eastmidlandscentreforhistorylearningandteaching.education/). Follow-on funding was provided by History UK (HUK: https://www.history-uk.ac.uk/) and the Royal Historical Society (RHS: https://royalhistsoc.org/). One of the Co-PIs (Jamie Wood) was primarily responsible for analysing this qualitative data, while the other (Marcus Collins) was primary responsible for analysing the quantitative data furnished by the multiple-choice questions. Two research assistants (Aimee Merrydew and Elisabeth Trischler) were employed to support data gathering and to conduct desk-based research, including literature reviews. Interim project findings were presented in a range of venues (Collins, 2021; Collins and Wood, 2022; Collins and Wood, 2023; Wood, 2022a; Wood, 2022b).

Draft survey questions were circulated for comment from members of the steering committees of the EMC and HUK and the Education Policy Committee of the RHS. After ethical approval had been secured from Loughborough University, data were collected anonymously via a pilot survey among staff and students at seven EMC-affiliated universities in March 2021. The response rate and feedback from the pilot was sufficiently positive that we decided to launch a national version in May 2021 using the same questions as in the pilot (the one exception being that a single question about student learning was omitted from the national version issued to staff and students beyond their first year of study). Responses to the pilot and the national survey were accordingly analysed together for the purposes of the study.

Methodology

The survey ran from March to June 2021 and was open to staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students in UK history programmes. It was conducted using Jisc's online survey software (https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/) and circulated using a range of methods: emails to EMC and HUK departmental representatives who then disseminated it to staff and students; the RHS e-newsletter; and social media.

The first half of the survey asked respondents to evaluate whether thirteen dimensions of teaching and learning had improved, deteriorated or stayed the same after lockdown in March 2020. There were questions about: teaching methods; teacher-student interaction; feedback; learning; student learning; independent learning; attendance; student interaction/community; access to technology; access to study spaces; access to primary sources; access to secondary sources; and equal learning opportunities. Because first-year undergraduate students who had matriculated in autumn 2020 had not experienced pre-pandemic higher education, they were asked to complete an amended version of the survey that asked them to rate the same thirteen dimensions of teaching on a five-point Likert scale. The second half of the survey asked respondents to categorise the methods used in a typical lecture, seminar, one-on-one supervision, examination and piece of feedback before and after March 2020, and to express their preferred method once the pandemic had abated. For example, they were asked whether lectures were typically delivered in-person, online or in a hybrid format before March 2020 and after 2020, and then to state their post-pandemic preferences. Again, first-year undergraduates' lack of experience of pre-pandemic teaching methods meant that they were

only asked about methods during the pandemic and their preferences afterwards. The report distinguishes in several cases between the responses of first-year undergraduate students and those of what it terms 'advanced students': that is, postgraduates and undergraduates at a later stage in their studies (i.e. second year and beyond).

Multiple-choice questions were supplemented by free-text questions. For the first section, respondents were asked to write about the most effective and most challenging aspects of teaching and learning during the pandemic. For the second section, they were invited to explain why they would prefer any particular teaching method in the future and to provide any final thoughts.

The survey was completed by 565 volunteers from 47 universities: half the total number of universities offering history degrees in the UK. Though the survey's reliance on voluntary participation meant that we could not ensure a fully representative sample of respondents, they were nonetheless a varied group. Roughly equal numbers of respondents taught or studied at pre-1992, post-1992 and Russell Group institutions. 40% of the students were in their first year of undergraduate study, 25% were in their second year, 24% were in their third or fourth years and 11% were studying for postgraduate degrees. 5% of respondents were at Welsh universities, 1% were at Scottish universities and just two respondents (0.4% of the sample) were at Northern Irish universities. 58% of respondents were female, 37% were male and 2% were non-binary. The proportion of respondents who self-identified as white was 87%, compared to the 82% who said likewise in the 2011 census. However, another 4% did not disclose their ethnicity and the proportions of Asian respondents (3%), Black respondents (1%) and mixed-ethnicity respondents (4%) represent too small a sample to explore BME experiences in any detail. Their answers are nonetheless analysed in relation to issues of inclusivity and diversity, as are those of the 11% of self-identified disabled respondents.

Staff constituted 20% of all respondents and came from a wider variety of institutions than students, probably due to the survey's collection methods. Whereas staff were targeted through social media and mailing lists, students typically completed the survey at the instigation of their lecturers. Thirteen universities therefore accounted for three-quarters of all student responses. Fortunately, these thirteen universities were almost equally split between post-92, pre-92 and Russell Group institutions and between the different regions of England and Wales.

Literature review

While there is a significant amount of research on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education, there are few studies that focus on history teaching and learning specifically. While limited, these studies identify several positive and negative consequences of COVID-19-inspired changes to history teaching and learning practices. In what follows, we discuss the key themes that emerged from these discussions, focusing on primary source work, assessment, and accessibility.

The impact of COVID-19 on working with primary sources cannot be understated and has been explored in multiple studies (Barrett et al., 2023; Cooper et al., 2020; East et al, 2022; Wood et al., 2021). Source analysis is a core disciplinary skill within history that typically takes place during in-situ classroom settings; as such, educators had to find appropriate solutions to support students in developing this skill while learning online during the

pandemic. Collaborative annotation tools such as Talis Elevate or Hypothesis.is and digital bulletin boards (e.g. Padlet) have been identified by researchers as effective platforms to engage students in critical analysis of primary (and secondary) sources during the COVID-19 lockdown periods (Cooper et al., 2020; and Barrett et al., 2023; East et al., 2022; Wood et al., 2021). As Cooper et al., (2020) argue, these platforms have the potential to impact positively on students' abilities not only to engage in primary source work in an online learning environment, but also to develop digital literacies and 'critical awareness of source quality and context' (2020). Barrett et al. (2023) also identify a positive consequence of the pandemic on primary source work in their empirical study on the use of the collaborative annotation tool Talis Elevate among students in first-year core modules in the School of Humanities and Heritage at the University of Lincoln. East et al. (2022) compare data from collaborative reading activities on Talis Elevate before and during the pandemic, demonstrating a 'significant increase in average annotations per student' in 2020-21 compared to previous years (Talis Elevate has been used in the history programme at Lincoln since 2018). This increase suggests a positive impact on the ways students read and interact with digitised primary sources; this finding is supported by student responses to the survey conducted by Barrett et al. (2023), in which students reported that collaborative annotation activities helped to enhance their understanding of historical sources and topics, among other factors that benefited their learning (e.g. supporting class preparation, participation in critical debates, and planning assessments).

Primary source analysis is not the only area impacted by COVID-19. The pandemic also impacted on the *types* of activities that students engage in for their learning (Barrett et al., 2023; Cooper et al., 2020; East et al., 2022; Larsen, 2021; Laughlin-Schultz, 2021; Reinke-Williams, 2021). Following the closure of universities and historical sites such as museums, history educators had to find alternatives to key learning activities such as in-situ field trips to museums and heritage sites. The pandemic created opportunities for students to access (inter)national field trips and engage in authentic learning experiences, as many museums and heritage sites opened their spaces and materials to virtual visits and viewings (Larsen, 2021). As Ruth Larsen (2021) observes, this new way of attending museums and heritage sites enables students to visit sites across the world, which may not have been an option for some students pre-COVID had they only been able to visit in-person (e.g. competing work responsibilities and financial constraints, among other factors, will have prevented some students from accessing field trips). In addition to widening the types of activities students could engage in for their learning, the pandemic helped to expand understanding of what 'counts' as primary source work and historical evidence (Laughlin-Schultz, 2021). The emergency transition to online teaching meant some students no longer had access to primary sources such as diaries, letters, and newspapers (to which, as Laughlin-Schultz observes, students typically gravitate in their work), as many of these materials are traditionally housed in undigitized library archives and special collections. For Laughlin-Schultz, the pandemic provided an opportunity to engage students in critical discussion about the types of sources they can analyse for their work (e.g. memes, posters on university campuses and in shops, as well as mass media advertisements, among other things). Laughlin-Schultz identifies several pedagogical benefits of expanding the types of historical evidence in students' work following COVID-19 disruptions including greater accessibility and understanding of sources among students, both of which increased students' motivation and ability to engage in the assessed project. Taken together, the aforementioned research demonstrates several positive impacts of the pandemic on history teaching and learning, especially in terms of broadening out and promoting digital source analysis.

Another area that has been positively impacted by COVID-19 is assessment. Several researchers have identified the shift to online learning as an opportunity to rethink the types of assessments we design and implement (Cooper et al., 2020; Jotischky, 2021; Collins et al., 2021). Of particular focus in discussions on history assessments is the traditional in-situ exam, which not only became impossible during the COVID-19 lockdown periods but also raises issues regarding accessibility and inclusion. Indeed, as Cooper et al. (2020) and Wood (2021) observe, traditional exams privilege certain types of students and disadvantage others, requiring history educators to develop new assessments that not only adapt to pandemic conditions but also promote equality of opportunity for all students undertaking the assessments. Debbie Bogard and Heather Sherman, drawing upon student feedback, echo these observations on assessments in an interview with Marcus Collins (Collins et al., 2021), when they argue that coursework and open-book exams are more compassionate forms of assessment that enable students to showcase their abilities and development more than traditional end-of-year exams. Nonetheless, Collins et al. agree this type of assessment needs to be well-managed and regulated for it to be equitable and academically rigorous. Innovative forms of assessment, which existed long before COVID-19, have been discussed as opportunities to move beyond traditional exams. For example, Wood compiles innovative assessments from a range of history modules, offering them as alternatives to the traditional in-situ exam for history educators to adopt in response to COVID-19 disruptions. Among these assessments are academic blogging, creating #un-essays, and re-writing Wikipedia pages on historical topics (Jones, 2018; Matthews-Jones, 2019; Kumar and Deese, 2010; West, 2018). Wood concludes by encouraging educators to take innovative assessments such as these beyond the pandemic because they have multiple pedagogical benefits, not least by encouraging students to develop their digital literacies and learn how to 'present information engagingly' in 'different registers' (Wood 2020). For Wood and many other history educators (Cooper et al. 2020; Collins et al. 2021; Jotischky 2021), the pandemic provided a chance to explore new assessment formats that have the potential to benefit students' learning into the future, demonstrating a positive, albeit unexpected, consequence of the current crisis.

While the pandemic inspired creative approaches to assessments, it is perhaps the online 'take-home exam' that was most widely and hastily adopted by history programmes across the UK higher education sector in the emergency transition to online teaching (Jotischky, 2021). This assessment format is similar to the traditional in-situ exam, but students complete it remotely and usually over a longer period of time (e.g. twenty-four hours rather than two). While Jotischky acknowledges the accessibility-related issues potentially caused by this format (a point to which we return shortly), he outlines a case for retaining this type of assessment beyond the pandemic because it provides students with more time to understand and structure their answers, often leading to higher quality work and consequently enabling students to reach their full academic potential. His views correlate with the preferences of some respondents in the Post-Pandemic Pedagogy survey. 46% of students and 23% of staff expressed a preference for 'take-home' assessments to continue beyond the pandemic because they were viewed as a fairer way of evaluating learning.

While the pandemic created opportunities to make the study of history more accessible by rethinking assessment practices and approaches to teaching more generally, it exacerbated other equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues. For instance, Andrew Jotischky (2021) maintains that while 'take-home' exams can enhance the quality of answers by providing students with more time to reflect on the questions and structure their answers, this format also exposes inequalities such as digital poverty and lack of appropriate space to work. Cooper et al. (2020) make similar observations in *The Pandemic Pedagogy Handbook*,

arguing that the pandemic exacerbated and/or created numerous barriers to (online) learning, including unequal access to technology, competing work and/or care responsibilities, physical and mental illness, and inadequate and/or unsafe home learning environments (2020, 6); these issues pose challenges for the creation of equitable teaching and learning practices, potentially preventing some students from reaching their full potential. Andrews et al. (2020) identify similar issues of accessibility and inclusion in their empirical study, though the survey and consequent report focuses specifically on LGBTQI+ histories and historians (resulting in 852 responses). This study, which was launched in July 2019 and completed under pandemic conditions, not only found that LGBTQI+ staff and student historians experience high rates of poor mental health due to discrimination (among other things), but also identified privacy and safety issues when teaching LGBTQI+ histories in online environments during the pandemic. Drawing on data collected from the survey, Andrews et al. argue that some students may not have access to safe spaces at home to engage in discussions that would normally take place in classroom settings (2020, 42), preventing them from (safely) participating in critical conversations for their learning development. While their focus differs, Andrews et al. (2020), Cooper et al. (2020), and Jotischky (2021) centre EDI principles in their discussions and encourage history educators to be mindful of the various barriers facing students – and staff – when designing learning activities during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has exacerbated other EDI issues, including social isolation, digital fatigue, and digital literacy. While several empirical studies demonstrate that students value the different types of teaching they were introduced to during the pandemic (e.g. asynchronous, flipped learning, synchronous live stream on MS Teams, and mirrored learning), emerging evidence suggests students generally prefer in-situ classroom teaching because they see learning as communal and miss the sense of connection they usually have when in a physical classroom space together (Barrett et al., 2023; Collins et al., 2021; East et al., 2022;). Unequal access to technology (Gehring, 2021; Collins et al. 2021) and digital fatigue (Cooper et al., 2020) have also been identified as potential barriers to history teaching and learning during the pandemic, although the Post-Pandemic Pedagogy survey did not reveal stark differences in attitudes of students along lines of gender, ethnicity and disability.

Findings: Continuity and change in teaching and learning during the pandemic

Quantitative evidence

The multiple-choice components of the survey captured views on which aspects of teaching and learning were changed most and least by the pandemic. Feedback methods were apparently the least affected, with a ‘roughly similar’ experience before and during the pandemic reported by over half (56%) of staff and ‘advanced students’ (the term we use to encompass all postgraduate students and undergraduate students beyond their first year of study). A third or more of staff and advanced students considered attendance, assessment and access to technology to be ‘roughly similar’ during the pandemic. Less than a third of staff and advanced students considered the other nine aspects of learning and teaching under investigation to have been broadly comparable before and after Covid. Most affected were the sense of community and interaction between students (with only 4% reporting ‘roughly

similar' experiences), access to study spaces (7%) and interaction between students and staff (17%).

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the scale of the transformation that occurred during the pandemic, when most in-person teaching was cancelled, and respondents typically taught or learnt online. Before the pandemic, almost all lectures, seminars, supervisions and out-of-class group work were experienced in-person, whether in lecture halls, seminar rooms, staff offices or on-campus study spaces. Just one in fifty respondents (2%) reported having experienced primarily in-person teaching in the year or so since March 2020. Over half (56%) had supplemented online teaching with some in-person interactions, while 41% had experienced all their teaching and learning online. Online-only teaching and learning was most prominent among postgraduates, only 38% of whom had experienced any in-person tuition.

Lectures

Lectures saw the most dramatic change. Before March 2020, over 94% of staff and advanced students had attended lectures in-person; after March 2020, under 1% did so and 89% switched to online-only provision.

Seminars and group work

Seminars accounted for the largest amount of hybrid teaching during the pandemic. A hybrid combination of in-person and online teaching represented the typical experience of 15% of staff and advanced students in seminars. However, hybrid forms of group work reportedly declined.

Assessment

Covid's impact on assessment was equally transformative. Before the pandemic, closed-book exams were typically experienced by 57% of staff and advanced students, compared to the 5% who experienced open-book exams. Almost no one had closed-book exams during the pandemic. Instead, open-book exams were set or taken by 54%, and the proportion dispensing entirely with exams increased from 24% to 37%.

Independent study

Half of staff and advanced students reported that independent study was typically conducted in the library or a study space before the pandemic, falling to 5% during the pandemic.

Figure 1: Typical methods of teaching and learning before Covid reported by staff and advanced students (i.e. excluding first-year undergraduates; all numbers are percentages)

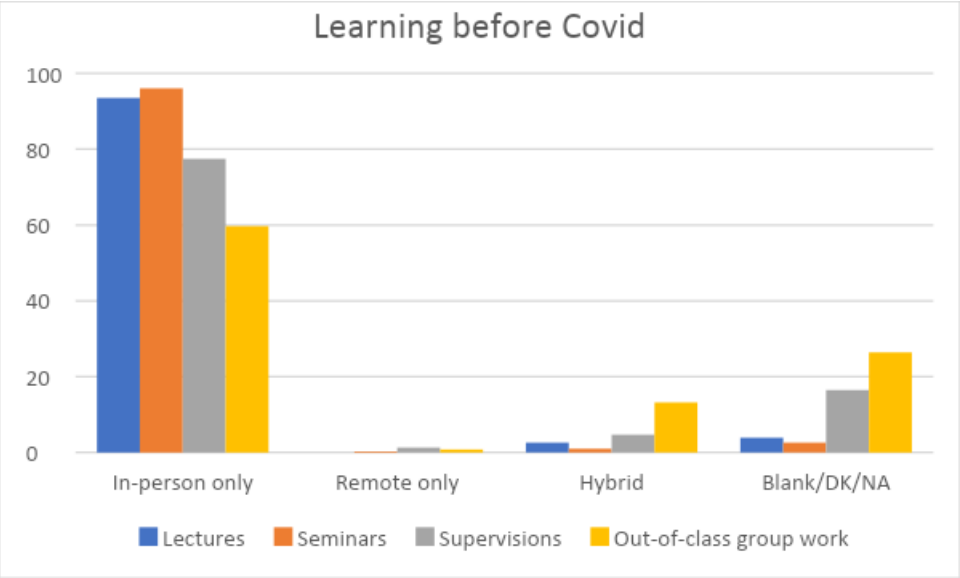
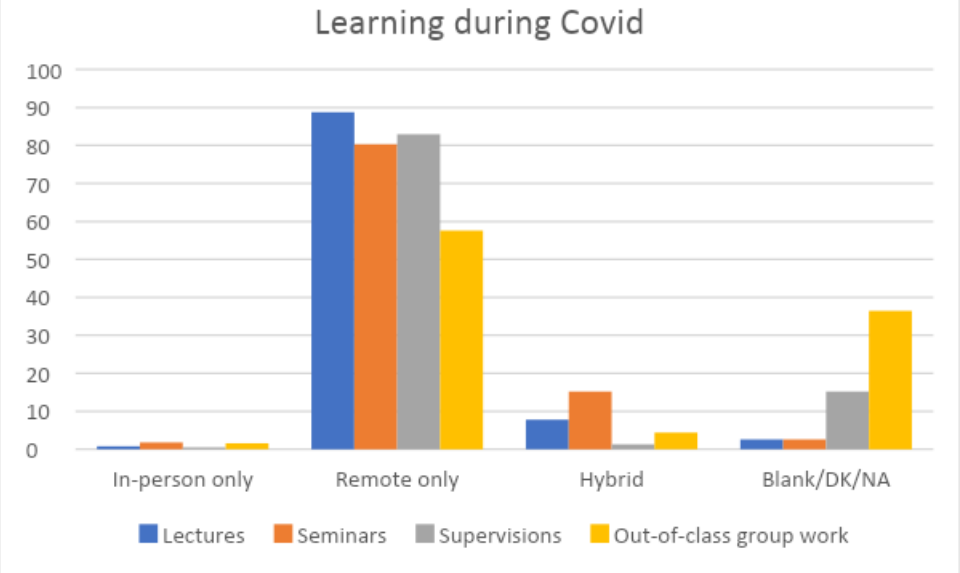


Figure 2: Typical methods of teaching and learning during Covid reported by staff and advanced students (i.e. excluding first-year undergraduates; all numbers are percentages)



Perspective of staff and advanced students

Multiple-choice responses on teaching before and during the pandemic make for sobering reading. Most staff and advanced students thought that teaching and learning had worsened during the pandemic in almost every respect.

Table 1 shows that greater numbers of staff and advanced students saw a deterioration rather than an improvement in twelve out of thirteen aspects of teaching and learning (i.e. a negative net score). For every respondent who considered student learning to have improved during Covid, there were six others who thought student learning had declined. Respondents who preferred teaching methods under Covid were outnumbered four to one by those who preferred pre-Covid teaching methods. Teacher-student interaction and access to technology and primary and secondary sources under Covid elicited similarly negative evaluations. Ten times as many respondents saw Covid as having a negative effect on equal learning opportunities than a positive one, and still greater proportions reported the deleterious impact of Covid on access to study spaces and interaction and community among students.

The one exception was that slightly more staff thought that feedback had improved (22%) than declined (14%) during Covid; advanced students disagreed, with twice as many of them adjudging feedback to have been of poorer (30%) than better quality (15%) during Covid.

Table 1: Evaluations of teaching and learning before and during Covid by staff and advanced students (all numbers are percentages; net percentage given in italics is calculated by subtracting percentage answering 'worse' from percentage answering 'better')

Teaching	Staff (N=115)				Advanced students (N=272)			
	Better	Worse	Similar	*Btr-Wrs*	Better	Worse	Similar	*Btr-Wrs*
Teaching methods	20	59	21	*-39*	13	63	23	*-50*
Teacher-student interaction	11	73	15	*-62*	15	67	18	*-52*
Assessment	23	35	43	*-12*	27	31	41	*-4*
Feedback	22	14	64	*8*	15	30	54	*-15*
Learning	Staff (N=115; *N=36)				Adv. students (N=272; *N=68)			
	Better	Worse	Similar	*Btr-Wrs*	Better	Worse	Similar	*Btr-Wrs*
Student learning*	11	54	31	*-43*	12	74	15	*-62*
Independent learning	27	40	33	*-13*	24	45	30	*-21*
Attendance	30	43	27	*-13*	23	38	39	*-15*
Student interaction/community	1	96	3	*-95*	5	89	5	*-84*
Access	Staff (N=115)				Advanced students (N=272)			
	Better	Worse	Similar	*Btr-Wrs*	Better	Worse	Similar	*Btr-Wrs*
Access to technology	17	46	36	*-29*	8	45	47	*-37*
Access to study spaces	1	91	6	*-90*	2	89	9	*-87*
Access to primary sources	14	65	21	*-51*	8	69	23	*-61*
Access to secondary sources	16	69	15	*-53*	12	60	28	*-48*
Equal learning opportunities	8	68	23	*-60*	4	51	45	*-47*

Perspectives of first-year students

The dire verdict given by staff and advanced students contrasts markedly with the evaluation of teaching and learning by first-year undergraduates (table 2). Since they were unable to compare their experience of higher education before and during Covid, they were instead

asked to rate the same aspects of learning on a five-point Likert scale ranging from very good to very poor. The results are not fully comparable to those of staff and advanced students; nor do they appear to be describing the same event. Whereas staff and advanced students gave negative net scores for all but one of the thirteen categories, first-year students did the exact opposite by giving positive net scores in all but one category. Their principal complaint concerned student interaction and sense of community and they were fairly evenly divided on whether access to study spaces and interaction with teachers was good or poor.

Over three times as many first-years judged student learning during Covid to be good than poor, while six times as many thought likewise about teaching methods. Outright majorities evaluated attendance, independent learning, equal learning opportunities, assessment, feedback, access to technology and secondary sources as being 'good' or 'very good', and a plurality was positive about access to primary sources.

First-years were more likely than advanced students to prefer studying at home, but they displayed no greater overall preference for online-only or hybrid teaching sessions. It should also be noted that satisfaction rates were lower in all thirteen categories among first-year students who had experienced online-only teaching. The average net score for first-years taught solely online was just +4%, in contrast to the net score of +38% awarded by first-years experiencing a mix of remote and face-to-face methods.

Table 2: Evaluations of teaching and learning during Covid by first-year students (all numbers are percentages; net percentage given in italics is calculated by subtracting percentage answering 'poor' from percentage answering 'good')

Teaching	1st yr undergraduates (N=178)			
	Good	Poor	Fair	*Good-Poor*
Teaching methods	59	10	31	*49*
Teacher-student interaction	36	29	35	*7*
Assessment	65	11	24	*54*
Feedback	59	15	27	*44*
Learning	1st-yr undergraduates (N=178)			
	Good	Poor	Fair	*Good-Poor*
Student learning*	49	14	37	*35*
Independent learning	55	11	34	*44*
Attendance	65	18	18	*47*
Student interaction/community	6	72	22	*-66*
Access	1st-yr undergraduates (N=178)			
	Good	Poor	Fair	*Good-Poor*
Access to technology	59	18	23	*41*

Access to study spaces	35	32	34	*3*
Access to primary sources	49	20	32	*29*
Access to secondary sources	65	11	24	*54*
Equal learning opportunities	52	23	25	*29*

Post-pandemic preferences

Shared staff and student views

Given the overwhelmingly negative verdict of staff and advanced students, one might expect there to be a correspondingly strong support to return to the status quo ante pandemic. In fact, the percentage of staff and advanced students who expressed a preference for the same practices after Covid as they had personally experienced beforehand varied widely from question to question.

Of those who expressed an opinion (that is, excluding 'don't knows' and non-responses), about four-fifths wanted to continue with pre-Covid practice for independent study (83%) and seminars (80%). There were also clear, if smaller, majorities in favour of reverting to pre-Covid forms of feedback (70%) and out-of-class group work (60%). For lectures and supervisions, however, only half of respondents wished to restore the methods they had experienced before Covid. The other half of respondents advocated replacing in-person lecturing and supervising with hybrid or (more rarely) with online-only delivery. Just 41% supported a return to pre-Covid forms of assessment, a significant rejection of closed-book examinations. This assessment method had been widely used by two-thirds of respondents before the pandemic, then, as we saw above, virtually disappeared after March 2020. Only 27% of those who had once been accustomed to closed-book exams favoured any return to the examination hall.

Preferences for future teaching methods were not greatly affected by the degree of online provision experienced during Covid. A very small proportion of the respondents who had experienced remote-only provision during Covid wanted such methods to carry on once the pandemic had abated. For seminars, the figure was 3%; for out-of-class group work, 4%; for supervisions, 16%; and for lectures, 17%. These figures are little different from the proportions who experienced other forms of teaching during Covid, indicating that remote-only provision made few converts among those who experienced it.

Table 3 aggregates results from all respondents (staff and students at all stages of study) about preferences for teaching methods after the pandemic. It shows that in-person provision was the most popular choice for every teaching format: lectures, supervisions, out-of-class group work and, most especially, seminars. Students who experienced exclusively online teaching during Covid were scarcely more likely to advocate for online-only versions than those who had retained some face-to-face teaching. Differences nonetheless emerged over seminars, with those who had experienced some in-person teaching being less open to the possibility of hybrid seminar delivery. Staff and students displayed similar preferences for the format of lectures and seminars after the pandemic. Just under half of the staff (45%) and students (49%) advocated in-person only lectures and the great majority of respondents preferred in-person only seminars.

Table 3: Post-pandemic preferences for teaching methods by all respondents (percentages)

	In-person only	Remote only	Hybrid	Blank/DK/NA
Lectures	48	16	33	3
Seminars	80	3	14	3
Supervisions	39	12	29	21
Out-of-class gp work	40	2	30	28
	None - coursework	Closed book	Open book	Blank/DK/NA
Exams	31	12	41	16
	Written/ recorded	Face-to-face	Hybrid	Blank/DK/NA
Feedback	35	15	40	10
	Working environment	Home environment	Blank/DK/NA	
Independent study	52	28	20	

Differences between staff and students

Although there was a high degree of congruence between staff and students in response to many questions, they did not see eye-to-eye over the future of supervisions, exams and feedback. For staff, online supervisions represented a rare example of a successful teaching innovation introduced during Covid. Two-thirds of them (twice the proportion of students) accordingly suggested either retaining them or introducing a hybrid model. The reverse applied to assessment. Here, twice as many students wished to keep the open-book exams which, from their perspective, were one of the few positive Covid-induced changes. Staff were more likely than students to favour coursework-only assessment or closed-book exams. First-year students were more likely than advanced students to prefer open-book exams.

Staff were also less keen than students on replacing or supplementing written or recorded feedback with face-to-face debriefs. In this case, students' enthusiasm for face-to-face feedback does not seem to have stemmed from their experiences during Covid, when, as we have seen, the use of such methods actually declined. Furthermore, the strongest proponents of face-to-face feedback were first-year students who had no experience of pre-Covid feedback methods.

Differences between types of institution

Marked differences also emerged across university type. History staff and students at Russell Group institutions perceived Covid as having a more deleterious effect on teaching and learning than was the case in post-1992 universities, with pre-1992 universities falling somewhere between the two. It should be noted that Russell Group and pre-1992 universities were affected by UCU strikes over pensions earlier in the 2019-20 academic year, whereas post-1992 universities were not owing to their different pension scheme. Although qualitative answers seldom mentioned the effect of industrial action, strikes may have compounded the dissatisfaction of students at Russell Group and pre-1992 institutions who were subsequently hit by lockdown. The average net score for the thirteen aspects of learning and teaching given

by staff and advanced students was a lowly -51% at Russell Group institutions, -45% at pre-1992 institutions and -37% at post-1992 institutions.

Teaching methods, independent learning and access to primary sources were the most pronounced areas of dissatisfaction of Russell Group staff and advanced students. The gap between first-year students in different types of universities was even wider. Whereas post-1992 first-years gave an average net score of +38% for the thirteen categories, the number fell to +29% for their counterparts at pre-1992 universities and +15% at Russell Group universities. First-years studying at Russell Group universities were much more likely to be disappointed by access to primary sources, the quality of feedback and their interactions with staff and other students.

The preference for in-person teaching is strongest at Russell Group universities and weakest at post-92 universities. This preference for direct interaction in Russell Group institutions extends to feedback methods, with 62% of staff and students advocating face-to-face feedback, either in addition to or instead of written feedback.

Assessment methods before the pandemic differed markedly between post-1992 institutions on the one hand and pre-1992 and Russell Group institutions on the other. Coursework-only assessment was predominant in post-1992 history degrees before Covid, remained so during Covid and retained its popularity after Covid. The pandemic forced both Russell Group and pre-1992 institutions to end their traditional reliance on closed-book examinations. Roughly a fifth of staff and students at these universities favoured following the post-1992 practice of abandoning exams for good. A larger proportion (39% in the Russell Group, 54% in pre-1992s) preferred instead to adopt open-book exams, having become accustomed to them during the pandemic. In this manner, pre-1992 and Russell Group universities could in future change assessment methods while remaining distinctive from their post-1992 counterparts.

Accessibility and EDI issues

Disability

Analysis of staff and student evaluations of teaching under Covid reveal few clear-cut differences relating to disability. Among staff and advanced students, respondents with and without disabilities awarded similar average net scores for the thirteen aspects of learning and teaching. However, first-year students with disabilities were markedly less satisfied than their counterparts without disabilities, especially on matters relating to assessment, access to primary and secondary sources and equal learning opportunities. Respondents with disabilities were, overall, keener than respondents without disabilities in implementing hybrid teaching methods after Covid for lectures, seminars and out-of-class group work. Half of all respondents with disabilities preferred coursework-only assessment, compared to just 28% of all respondents without disabilities. No comparable divisions appeared between respondents with and without disabilities about their preferred formats for feedback, supervisions and independent study.

Ethnicity

The small number of non-white respondents cautions against drawing conclusions about ethnic variations in the survey data. After all, a single non-white respondent constituted 3.3% of the entire non-white sample, so any apparent differences (such as non-white respondents' greater partiality for open-book exams) are based on a handful of answers. Much the same proportion of white and non-white respondents preferred in-person lectures, seminars, supervisions and out-of-class group work. This limited evidence suggests that ethnicity was

not a major determinant of preferences for post-pandemic teaching methods, though further study would be necessary to reach reliable conclusions on this matter.

Gender

The data on gender are more extensive and therefore revealing. Male and female students expressed similar preferences in relation to most aspects of teaching after the pandemic. Female students were more likely to want written feedback to be supplemented by face-to-face discussion. Slightly more male students preferred exclusively in-person lectures and studying from home. The eleven non-binary students were less keen on all forms of in-person teaching than male or female students, and were the most attached to studying at home, but extreme caution should be exercised in generalising from under a dozen responses.

When broken down by gender, attitudinal differences were much more pronounced among staff. Male academics evaluated twelve of the thirteen dimensions of teaching and learning under Covid more negatively than female academics. For example, two-thirds of male academics thought that student learning had worsened during Covid and none thought it had improved. In comparison, while two-fifths of female academics identified a decline in student learning, a fifth detected an improvement. For every man who thought teaching methods had improved, there were another seven men who thought they had deteriorated. Women were more divided on the matter, with 29% seeing an improvement and 47% a decline. Female staff were also strikingly more sanguine about Covid's effect on independent learning, teacher-student interaction, assessment and feedback and access to primary and secondary sources.

The varied perspectives of male and female staff on the impact of Covid translated into different preferences for post-Covid teaching methods. Male academics were more likely to advocate the revival of orthodox teaching methods: in-person-only lectures, seminars, supervisions and out-of-class group work, closed-book exams and (especially) written or recorded feedback, which was the preference of 77% of male staff but just 17% of female staff. Female historians were more attracted to using a mixture of in-person and online methods.

The male staff were older (38% being in their 50s and 60s, versus 12% of women), but most gender differences persisted when the further analysis was undertaken comparing male and female staff of similar ages. Only in certain matters, such as younger staff's greater enthusiasm to online-only lectures and coursework-only assessment, did staff divide less on gender than on generational lines.

Qualitative evidence

This section outlines the results of a thematic analysis of this qualitative data as a counterpoint to the quantitative material reviewed above. The free-text replies add texture and nuance to this overwhelmingly bleak portrait of teaching and learning after lockdown. Where relevant, we draw connections between the two datasets and, in particular, seek to understand points of convergence and divergence between staff and student perspectives.

Many more respondents filled out the box about 'challenges' they had faced than that on 'effective' techniques used during the pandemic, and such responses were generally longer. The overall tone was negative, with numerous respondents replying 'Everything' or similar to

the challenges question (or, conversely, ‘nothing’ to the question that asked for more positive reflections), while a number of student respondents continued to list negatives in response to the question asking about positives. Both staff and students from Russell Group institutions tended to write more and were, in general, more negative in their appraisals than were their post-1992 peers. Most respondents assessed pandemic teaching in history for what it lacked, especially in comparison to the ‘normal’, in-person experience.

The experience of staff and students in our survey population was not unremittingly negative, however, with some respondents articulating a positive vision about how what had happened during the pandemic could inform future teaching and learning in the discipline. ‘We shouldn't rush back to how things were pre-pandemic,’ maintained one member staff: ‘This has been a sharp learning curve, but an important one to bring our practice into the 21st century.’ So, while the qualitative responses do largely align with the quantitative data and their negative vision of student and staff experiences during the pandemic, they also indicate that some elements went well for some students and/or staff at some institutions. They also offer some constructive suggestions for the future beyond an outright rejection of pandemic teaching and learning practices.

Interaction and community

For undergraduate students, the key challenge was the lack of opportunity for social interaction. Although postgraduate students noted lack of access to sources as a challenge more often (a distant, if still significant, second for undergraduates), the social aspect was something that they missed too. Students reported reduced opportunities to connect with their peers during learning, especially in class (whether online or in-person), with tutors, and with fellow students outside of formal teaching (e.g. not making friends or losing contact). The result of this reported lack of interaction and connection was a failure to build a sense of community, which was perhaps the number one challenge noted by staff too, and which resulted in a lack of identity and cohesion among student cohorts. Many staff simply stated that it was much harder to ‘get to know’ their students and for the students to get to know one another (‘many of us - staff and students - want to return to the pre-pandemic arrangements as quickly as possible. There are good reasons for this, not least the erosion of community, peer group and motivation/engagement which has taken place online.’ - staff).

In qualitative responses as in quantitative ones, staff nonetheless welcomed how online teaching furnished more opportunities for one-to-one engagement with students. Indeed, the introduction of individual online supervisions was by far the most frequently mentioned beneficial effect in free-text comments by staff. While some students also wrote favourably about this innovation, more saw online interactions with staff as distinctly second-best. Students’ more negative view of online interactions can be related to their correspondingly greater dissatisfaction with feedback during the pandemic and desire for one-to-one contacts. It was also because they viewed online platforms to be good for formal meetings but less so for the sorts of informal interactions that in-person delivery promotes (e.g. chatting before or after class, bumping into one another in the corridor or elsewhere on campus). Students also seem to have appreciated the chance for focused interactions with staff that mirrored face-to-face sessions, but somehow felt simultaneously more accessible and less intimidating (‘It often felt personal because more often than not the lecturer and I were the only ones who turned on the camera so it felt face to face.’ - student). The availability, helpfulness and enthusiasm of staff were repeatedly credited by students with maintaining their engagement in learning.

Reduced engagement

Both staff and students listed loss of motivation and disengagement with learning as negatives almost as frequently as they did the loss of interaction. Many students do not seem to have found online seminars to be particularly stimulating, with specific complaints about a lack of discussion and their peer being too silent. Some students critiqued the repetitiveness of the teaching that they received, although others thought that there was a lack of routine. Others recognised that they and their peers sometimes lacked focus and energy, were distracted and/or found it difficult to manage their time.

Staff responses relating to engagement track closely what the students had to say. Engagement was, in general, lower, and it was difficult to track participation or even just to 'check in' with students (e.g. to gauge their understanding; less often, this was framed more explicitly in relation to pastoral care/ personal tutoring). Both staff and students commented that attendance was poorer than 'normal'. Re-engaging students once they had 'checked out' was difficult ('the distance imposed by COVID has been hard - particularly when it comes to reaching students who have been struggling to engage' - staff). Group work was more likely to malfunction, while generating discussion in (online) class was problematic.

Appraisals of pandemic teaching and learning were not wholly negative, though. Some students and staff reported having worked effectively during the pandemic and even preferred to teach and learn online. A number of others acknowledged that while they did not personally find the approaches adopted during the pandemic as effective as 'normal' teaching, others did:

> 'For some students, the barriers to contribution in class have been lowered: they can contribute anonymously via digital whiteboards …. For those who find speaking up in front of others difficult, the chat opens up an entirely new way to contribute to discussion. As a teacher who struggles a lot with being at the front and centre of a classroom and finds facilitating in-person discussion challenging …, being in a teaching space where those cues are de-emphasised has felt like a real gift.' - staff

There was a sense among some staff that the shift online enabled them to engage a different group of students to those who might normally be most engaged in in-person teaching, resulting in improved attendance and increased levels of participation. Such students seem to have found a voice in our survey, in which they praised the shift online for promoting participation, interaction and preparation, partly because it felt less pressurised and it became easier to share their views via online platforms.

Staff and student respondents also reported that their experiences during the pandemic had developed their learning. As one might expect, all groups noted that they had learnt how to make use of new technologies. Others pointed towards students developing a range of skills, with the ability to work independently being mentioned repeatedly. Digital literacy and research skills were also listed by some as having been impacted positively.

Access to resources and spaces

While there was a consistent recognition across student and staff responses that pandemic-related restrictions had reduced access to physical resources and spaces (e.g. books, libraries, archives, study spaces), there was a sense that the shift online had improved access to digital resources and learning for many, including for disabled students and those who live far from campus. The increased availability of online research and training events was pinpointed by several postgraduate (and staff) respondents as a particular positive.

Access to resources was mentioned by students more often as a positive than a negative (and was the main in-pandemic improvement for postgraduate students), although a significant number did mention it as a difficulty. Digitised readings, online reading lists, and support for finding materials online (e.g. from library staff) were all praised repeatedly by students, with particular benefits noted for those with disabilities. Staff less often mentioned the difficulty of accessing resources than did students, perhaps because they had a greater awareness of what was available online to begin with. Some, though, noted potential inequities concerning access to resources online. This was sometimes related to the challenge of digital poverty (e.g. lack of appropriate equipment, no/slow wifi). Inadequate space for working at home was mentioned by some students as another barrier to access.

In general, though, students (both postgraduate and undergraduate) and staff felt that 'access' had improved during the pandemic and become more equitable for those with disabilities and/or caring responsibilities. In many cases, especially for undergraduate students, this seems to have meant access to digital tools and resources, but reduced travel, lower costs, greater flexibility to around work commitments were mentioned by a number of respondents, as was the fact that traveling less was 'greener'.

Pedagogy

As noted at the start of this section, throughout the response sets under analysis, there is fairly frequent reference to in-person or 'normal' teaching being superior to whatever was on offer during the pandemic, even in the case of responses that were broadly positive on pandemic teaching and learning ('but not as good as an actual seminar' - student). There were also responses that took a reflective approach to thinking through the implications of teaching and learning experiences during this period and how they might inform the future:

> 'The most important lesson has been that things can change - there is extreme reluctance to innovate, but when forced, it proved possible to make extensive and experimental changes. This suggests that previous reluctance was down to inertia. I am looking forward to a more open landscape in the future.' - staff

Issues relating to pedagogy were mentioned often across all of the responses analysed, with an emphasis on a shift to more transmission-based, teacher-centred modes of delivery that were not generally welcomed. Online platforms were felt to lack the authenticity of in-person classes, particularly because they were not being used to promote interaction between students or with staff, except in the case of Q&A sessions. It was also felt that online platforms made it easier for some students to disengage. Respondents to the staff survey critiqued all modes of online or blended delivery, with the consistent message that they were not as good as in-person teaching ('Remote learning can work, but the blended version we attempted was a fudge that satisfied none.' - staff).

Group work, field trips, and discussion were missed by students and staff. Although a small number of students bemoaned staff conservatism in not making better use of the available online tools (e.g. 'Tutors all too often have not accommodated the full potential of online resources, and have tried to use traditional classroom methods in a space that has far more potential'), many more recognised that their lecturers had tried their best in difficult circumstances.

In terms of positives, some members of staff appreciated the opportunity that the shift online had provided for pedagogic experimentation and innovation. Others noted that it had forced

them to focus on their teaching more and to adopt a more organised and structured approach. Staff and postgraduates both noted that asynchronous activities had been positive, encouraging students to prepare and providing greater flexibility for engagement.

Students made more positive than negative references to pedagogy in their written comments. Particularly effective in their view were methods that were structured and promoted interaction with lecturers or fellow students. Some of these methods were synchronous and some were asynchronous, but key elements include the extent to which they encouraged students to engage with one another in or before online seminars, or helped them to prepare for class.

Although staff noted that the recording of lectures had improved their accessibility and, for some, had reduced their anxiety, for students this was far the most positively received element of online teaching. They liked the fact that pre-recording meant that lectures were available ahead of time, could be (re-)watched at their own pace, and were accessible for those with disabilities. This allowed students to reflect on their content and meant that they were helpful for assessment.

> 'Not having to waste time at lectures, instead just doing prerequisite readings and then discussing them in class seemed a much better use of my time and I felt I learnt far more this way.' - student

Although a number of academic respondents did note that digital poverty hampered engagement in online learning, very few of them connected this to perhaps the most frequently mentioned specific element of the teaching experience: whether students had their cameras (and, less often, their microphones) on or off in class. Staff consistently reported that not being able to see their students was personally demoralising, inhibited efforts to build a sense of community and, especially due to the lack of visual cues, meant that it was much more difficult to check whether students were actually engaged. There was a strong sense among staff who raised this as an issue that students should have their cameras turned on and infrequent reflection on the reasons why students might choose not to do so, although there were some exceptions:

> 'The technology- my own on occasion, but students having trouble logging on is sometimes an issue. Not everyone has great broadband. Also, many students prefer to be quiet and keep their cameras off, which in fairness helps with the bandwidth but not with the sense of community.' - staff

A small number of students discussed the 'camera-off' issue and respondents were split evenly between those who emphasised its negative effects and those who focused on reasons why students might not have wanted to be seen.

Although the majority of students found teaching and learning during the pandemic to be inferior to what they usually received, many did appreciate at least some elements of the experience, with a number advocating for a continuation of the blended approach, with the adoption of online elements to support face-to-face interaction. As we have just seen, they were especially positive about having access to recorded 'on demand' lectures and students were well aware that certain technologies supported particular modes of learning better than others:

> 'Where communication and discussion [are] needed (seminars/feedback)- face to face is a lot better. Where there is little communication (lectures/exams)- online is better' - student

In open responses at the end of the survey, a number of academics also called for reflection on what had been learned during the pandemic in order to inform future teaching within the discipline.

> ‘There is a lot to learn and gain from this experience, so we now should be able to develop our teaching drawing on the most effective elements of both online and face to face teaching.’ - staff
>
> ‘I'd counsel against seeing teaching and learning in this context in very binary terms: online vs. in-person, pre-pandemic vs. pandemic etc, with 'blended' teaching and learning largely dismissed as illusory. There are possibilities for us in this moment to take things out of the online experience and apply them to our practice going forward.’ - staff

Assessment and feedback

In line with quantitative data, qualitative responses suggest that changes to assessments during the pandemic were viewed a lot more positively by students than they were by staff. Students from institutions which traditionally make more use of closed-book exams (Russell Group and pre-1992 institutions, generally) focused on the end of exams within their positive responses. Across the board, students repeatedly stated that exams were unfair, that open-book tests (and/or, ideally, coursework) were a fairer test of knowledge and skills in History that led to better quality work. Many academic respondents were also very positive about the diversification of assessment that they reported to have happened during the pandemic, including the removal of exams, their replacement by alternative methods and changes to their form.

Assessment-related challenges reported by staff included a growth in plagiarism, an increased readiness by institutions to give out apparently unwarranted extensions, and an increased marking and feedback burden. Some students felt that expectations were not communicated clearly enough, that deadlines were disorganised, that marking and feedback were not completed in a timely manner, and that the latter was of insufficient quality, although it is important to note that some respondents also mentioned all of these elements as positives of pandemic approaches to teaching and learning.

More sustained was the critique of open-book exams that was proposed by some lecturers. During the pandemic, many institutions replaced traditional examination papers (generally, of 2-to-3 hours) with alternatives that students could do over a longer time period (generally 24 or 48 hours, sometimes longer) at home. A number of members of staff were highly critical of these changes, feeling that they lacked rigour and led to increased plagiarism, consequently arguing for the return of closed-book timed examinations in future. Some students shared their tutors’ concerns:

> ‘Genuineness of assessments: online timed assessments were no harder than regular in-person assessments, except students have way more time to complete answers. the students love it but I feel like it fails the purpose of a timed examination.’ - student

A number of staff members made a case for the pedagogic benefits of closed-book examinations:

> ‘Of course, students hate exams. They are not making an informed argument, just one out of personal preference. Supervised exams are the _only_ effective way to assess students' overall absorption of module material across the breadth of the module. They are also the only method by which one can reliably prevent cheating.’ - staff

Nonetheless, the vast majority of students were highly positive about the changes that had been made to examinations and many staff shared their views. Examinations - in particular closed-book exams - were viewed by students as unfair and references to them being little more than a 'memory test' were so frequent as to be almost ubiquitous.
Many staff shared similar views:

> 'I distrust exams: they do well at assessing people who do well on exams but not so well at measuring the effort and knowledge of those who for whatever reason don't test' - staff

Coursework was viewed by many respondents as being a fairer test of the students' abilities, more accessible and more appropriate for the skills and knowledge that are developed in the discipline.

Mental health and disability

Mental health was acknowledged by respondents across our sample as a key challenge during the pandemic, with students reporting increased depression, anxiety, stress and other mental health issues. There were also references to a failure of support mechanisms and lack of reasonable accommodations being put in place, including for disabled students (including those with learning difficulties). Some students clearly lacked the confidence to ask for help and/or to contribute to discussions or ask questions in online classes, several reporting that they felt nervous or uncomfortable there. Some staff respondents related this lack of confidence and increased anxiety to sector-wide concerns about students' mental health (see Lewis and Bolton 2023).

Having said that, as we outlined earlier in this section, numerous students and staff pointed towards the gains offered by online teaching and learning in relation to the accessibility of resources such as recorded lectures and the removal of physical barriers to attending teaching on campus. We also note reports of how the shift online reduced anxiety around examinations, and in-person teaching in general, due to a reduced pressure to speak ('A presentation for one of my modules was much easier done online. I would have died having to say it in person' - student). Some students felt less shy online and that they were less likely to be judged.

Workload, work-life balance and university management

An issue that was mentioned repeatedly by staff (especially) and students was workload, with a consistent sense that it had increased significantly during the pandemic. The need to record lectures, to produce 'content' and sometimes to prepare for online and in-person versions of the same session meant that teaching preparation simply took much longer than usual. As a result of the move to teaching online, students and staff both reported experiencing screen fatigue and that they took fewer breaks than they would normally.

Another key issue reported by members of staff was that they found it harder to maintain a balance between home and work, with work increasingly invading their home spaces.

> 'now more than ever my house feels more like my place of work and I find it hard to relax at home because work is still ever-present and I worry about not being 'logged on' all the time' - staff

There was a sense not only that work was increasing, but that it was much harder to 'switch off'.

Finally, surprisingly few students or staff mentioned 'value for money', fees or refunds. More consistent were their collective condemnations of the effectiveness of university management.

They noted how university policies and expectations shifted often and at short notice, that preparations by (and communication about them) from university leaders were poor, and that 'central' support was limited.

> 'I also worry that university managers are unaware of just how hard the transition to online teaching has been (for staff and students), and how much work it has entailed. There must be consideration for the impact that all of this has had on our research and other elements of our work, but instead I fear many university managers will draw the conclusion that staff have adapted once in an emergency and can do so again.'

Conclusions and recommendations

The post-pandemic period offers a unique opportunity to take stock and reflect on teaching. Covid has concentrated minds and focused efforts on teaching methods to an extent inconceivable in normal circumstances, when it vies for attention with research. Establishing what did and did not work during Covid for different groups and different disciplines within higher education is essential for successful teaching in the future.

The experience of Covid has demonstrated that it is possible to deliver almost all teaching online, but this study indicates that in most cases online provision is perceived to be a second-best option for historians. Teaching of the kind provided during Covid has been demonstrated to be an inadequate model for future practice. That lecturers did not alight upon radically superior teaching methods in their improvised responses to a global emergency would not be surprising were it not for the remarkably utopian tone adopted by national higher education bodies at the time. A Jisc report entitled *Learning and Teaching Reimagined: a new dawn for higher education?* envisaged online provision during the pandemic as a rising sun which was 'illuminating new digital models of learning and teaching, while at the same time casting a shadow of darkness across some traditional, increasingly old-fashioned, ways of working' (David Maguire in Jisc 2020a: 4). The Office for Students offered an equally sunny appraisal in its *Gravity Assist: propelling higher education towards a brighter future*, which likened the pedagogical impact of the pandemic to the 'gravity assist' employed by a NASA probe to propel it past Jupiter to Pluto, notwithstanding the makeshift improvisation of the former and the meticulous planning of the latter (Michael Barber in OfS 2021: 3). QAA likewise reported that 'providers and sector leaders' shared the belief that 'all future higher education programmes will incorporate a substantial component of digital learning' (QAA 2020: 6).

The optimism expressed by the QAA, Jisc and OfS about online teaching during Covid appears in retrospect to have been sorely misjudged. The 'new dawn' was a false one; the 'gravity assist' returned to earth with a bump when overall satisfaction in all disciplines was scored at 75% in the 2021 NSS in comparison to the 83-84% figures achieved in previous four years from 2017 to 2020. Official bodies accentuated the positive and eliminated the negative during Covid, attributing any difficulties as 'challenges' to be overcome and areas requiring 'further development' (Jisc 2020a: 6-7; OfS 2021: *passim*). But this report has showed that misgivings about online teaching cannot be dismissed as teething problems, technical issues, inertia and the 'preparedness' of teaching staff. They indicate widespread concerns among both teachers and learners borne of real experiences, preferences and needs.

Any evidence-based reform of teaching formats should begin with the quality of learning they facilitate through constructive alignment between teaching, learning and assessment

(Biggs 1996). Prioritising the educational value of higher education might sound obvious, but learning outcomes were not utmost in the thoughts of students and senior managers when asked by Jisc to consider the pros and cons of online teaching. For students, the top five benefits of online learning were essentially practical in nature: reduced travel, convenience, easier access to course material, saving time, reduced costs. The top five disadvantages all concerned the lack of human contact: reduced social interaction, isolation/loneliness, difficulties in communicating with others, lack of self-motivation, absence of a sense of community (Jisc 2020b: 18-19). The top five advantages of online learning chosen by higher education leaders shared a similarly practical bent to those of their students, with learning outcomes again a secondary consideration. Only 15% of them considered improved learning outcomes to be one of the 'major advantages of online teaching and learning when compared with traditional face-to-face teaching'; 10% thought online teaching would inhibit learning (Jisc 2020b: 10-11).

The principle of constructive alignment applies equally to assessment. Whatever form of assignments are used, the basic principle that assessment incentivises and measures intended learning outcomes must be maintained. Even though a wholesale return to sit-down pen and paper exams does not seem likely, serious questions remain about the rigour and integrity of off-campus replacements. In the same Jisc survey, only 55% of university leaders considered online assessment tools to be 'good' or 'excellent' and 51% thought likewise about plagiarism detection tools (Jisc 2020b: 12). This lack of confidence in the ability to ensure that assessments are cheat-proof makes it all the more perplexing that universities are moving so quickly away from sit-down closed-book exams which, for all their drawbacks, guarantee that students submit their own work.

Universities should also consider the varying expectations of their staff and students. For example, Russell Group universities should not underestimate the pitfalls of a rapid shift to online teaching. The greater dissatisfaction among Russell Group students found in this survey helps to explain why not a single Russell Group university featured in the top quartile of history programmes for overall satisfaction in NSS 2021 and only two of them (Durham and Glasgow) appeared in the top half of the league table. Ten of the twenty lowest scores for overall student satisfaction were obtained by Russell Group history programmes. As one of the authors of this report has demonstrated, prior to Covid history programmes at Russell Group offered fewer contact hours and relied more on examinations for assessment (Collins and Stearns, 2020: 126-130). Covid therefore introduced greater disruption to their assessment regime. Another salient difference was that Russell Group institutions offered fewer contact hours, ostensibly in order to facilitate small-group teaching. The greater unpopularity of online seminars therefore affected them the most.

The issue is not whether blended learning will continue as Covid recedes, but to what degree, in what areas and to what effect. Blended learning has been standard practice in higher education since the 1990s, when universities introduced VLEs, tutors and students acquired email addresses, library catalogues went online and web browsers began to be used for studying and research. From this perspective, Jisc's statement that 'before March 2020, very little university teaching was delivered online' is far off the mark (Jisc 2020a: 9). What was genuinely new during Covid was the shift to scheduled online teaching sessions and the suspension of access to on-site resources, whether libraries, study spaces, offices, classrooms or examination halls.

Compelling evidence is required to justify continuation of changes of this magnitude post-Covid, but this study indicates that the pandemic has thrown up more questions than answers. There is only one example in our data of an overwhelming consensus favouring a return to pre-Covid norms: the preference for in-person seminars. Conversely, the lack of support for reinstating closed-book exams represents the sole example of a widely popular change introduced under Covid but, as we have seen, this is not unproblematic. In other respects, the pandemic has undermined existing practices without establishing widely accepted new ones in their place. Thus the in-person only lectures and supervisions which predominated before Covid are the preferred option by a plurality of respondents after the pandemic, but in both cases their numbers are matched by the combined total of respondents favouring hybrid and online-only methods.

The wholesale introduction of online teaching during Covid neither proved nor disproved its long-term efficacy. Further experimentation and evaluation are required to produce a successful balance of in-person and online teaching. The immense experiment in e-learning undertaken during Covid was necessarily unplanned and conducted in abnormal circumstances and, in the case of staff, without baseline measurements of the sort provided by the NSS and SAES. Attempts to measure its success (our survey included) were inevitably influenced by wider attitudes towards the pandemic in its various phases. This was part of the reason why students were more positive in NSS and SAES in spring 2020 than after a year of Covid fatigue in 2021.

Flaws in research methods conducted during Covid indicate how future research could be improved. First, researchers should be explicit about what they mean by ‘blended’, ‘flexible’ and ‘hybrid’ learning, which are in peril of become marketing terms rather than practical, never mind analytical, ones. In some ways, it is more useful to distinguish between synchronous and asynchronous learning than between in-person and online learning. For example, the synchronous character of a live, interactive online lecture means that it bears more resemblance to an in-person lecture than to a pre-recorded lecture. The distinction between synchronous and asynchronous methods extends to assessment and feedback, so that proctored exams and conversations are synchronous methods while coursework, non-proctored exams and written feedback are asynchronous ones.

Second, the views of teaching staff need to be given more consideration. Key organisations advocate on behalf of students or university managers. We know that students were highly critical of teaching under Covid in spring 2021 thanks to the NSS and SAES surveys, but we have no comparable surveys of teaching staff opinions from this period. Jisc explicitly addresses many of its publications to ‘university leaders’ and draws most of its evidence from the same pool; 82% of the staff who participated in its virtual meetings held managerial responsibilities. The OfS surveyed both staff and students, but only students were quizzed about such crucial issues as motivation to learn and satisfaction with provision during Covid and assessment preferences thereafter. WonkHE and Pearson teamed up with student unions to conducted student surveys and, whereas the NUS conducted large-scale surveys of its members’ experiences of studying during Covid, the UCU did not and concentrated on Covid’s threat to its members’ health and job security.

Third, findings need to be evaluated in a dispassionate fashion. This was not always the case during Covid, when the upbeat assessments of the regulatory bodies indicated a tension between their role of assuring educational quality and that of protecting the international reputation of the UK higher education sector. It would be naïve to expect the QAA to air

higher education's dirty laundry in public, but in our view its efforts to 'highlight aspects of [digital] delivery that surveys suggest have had a positive effect' went too far in the opposite direction (QAA 2021: 1). From our perspective, eliminating the negative hinders its quality assurance processes and its ability to conduct disinterested research. The OfS' claim in *Gravity Assist* that 'there was a consensus that innovation forced through lockdown may lead to lasting and positive change' was not supported by the polling evidence contained within the same report (OfS 2021: 8). Two-thirds (67%) of students said that they were less motivated by online learning, as opposed to just 13% who were more motivated (OfS 2021: 47). When students were asked 'Which, if any, aspects of your course should your university continue delivering online once the COVID-19 pandemic is over?', not a single type of online teaching received majority support. The 29% of students who wanted no online delivery whatsoever post-Covid was a higher proportion than those who favoured live streamed lectures (25%) or supervisions (26%), online seminars (19%) or online group work (14%) (OfS 2021: 109). The report interpreted the staff's general agreement that 'Digital teaching and learning provides opportunities to teach students in new and exciting ways' as the green light for wholesale implementation of online teaching (OfS 2021: 7). It was not; of all online methods post-Covid only one-to-one supervisions secured majority backing (51%) among staff (OfS 2021: 129-130).

History and other humanities subjects are particularly likely to have their teaching moved online for two reasons. The first is that their degrees are not subject to the professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements which govern vocational subjects. The QAA subject benchmark statements provide more than enough latitude for universities to teach and assess history as they see fit. The second reason is that virtually all history teaching can be delivered online, as history students do not require labs and fewer of them undertake work placements and fieldtrips than is the norm in many other subjects. The one factor working in the opposite direction is the decidedly double-edged fact that there is less international demand for UK history degrees and, by extension, for introducing distance-learning methods.

Against these practical considerations are the entrenched traditions of the history lecture and seminar and the fact that excellent teaching is the main selling-point of history degrees (Collins and Stearns, 2020). The relatively small number of contact hours provided by history programmes means that each contact hour in history is especially precious in terms of educational benefit and (from students' perspective) value for money. It will be hard to convince history students that they would benefit from having still less in-person contact with their tutors.

Some shift of time and attention away from teaching and towards research once the pandemic receded was inevitable, especially with the advent of a new REF cycle. Too drastic a shift, however, would be ill-advised. This study has demonstrated that continuing with Covid-inspired teaching changes will probably prove unpopular with most staff and students. Yet reverting to pre-Covid teaching methods will not represent a return to 'normal' for the new crop of undergraduates entering university in the next few years, who will have experienced significant parts of their secondary schooling under pandemic conditions. They will require extra support from tutors and support services to benefit fully from a university education.

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