

DMU Remote Work and Learning Experiences Survey

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1. Introduction

As a consequence of the rapid escalation of Covid-19, starting in China in January 2020, morphing into a global pandemic, recording a first encounter in Britain in late January 2020, and a shutdown by the middle of March, a seismic shift in human interaction has taken place. Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) have had to reconfigure how they reposition, reimagine and effectively deliver their core mandate, through blended approaches, and especially virtually, since the lockdown began.

At the centre of this reimagination is how, in the era of strict social distancing, and at a critical juncture in the academic calendar (March to July), core educational objectives are being delivered, and will be delivered in the future. Virtual and distance learning pedagogic approaches have been in existence for 25 years since the first web-based course at Penn State, and there is significant literature in this light (Shubham & Pirooska 2019). However, the scale and magnitude of recalibration of delivery imposed by the Covid-19 conundrum is unprecedented, and there is as yet very limited research into the impacts of the lockdown and moves towards more virtual teaching and learning solutions

This report brings together the findings of a snapshot survey exploring the remote working and learning experiences of DMU module leaders conducted between the 13th and 21st May 2020. The report has been developed in the context of remote working and learning heralded by Covid-19; it will briefly highlight the data collection approach, and then present the findings. Within the time-frame snapshot, the findings will present the self-reported remote working and teaching/learning experiences of 253 module leaders across all the four faculties of DMU, providing invaluable data into how they are experiencing and responding in the current situation.

1.1 Research objective

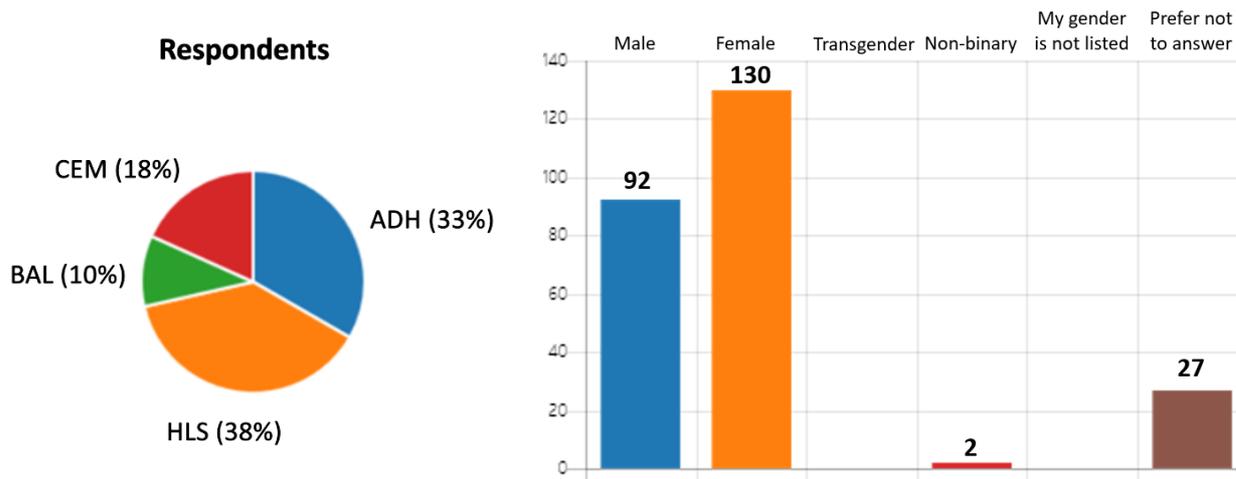
To gain an understanding of DMU staff's remote working and teaching/learning experiences in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.2 Data collection method/approach

Given the novelty of the HEIs' encounter with Covid-19, and the immediacy to locate DMU staff's encounters with the reconfigured ways of knowing and being in an exclusively online environment, this research was initiated by the PVC Academic and operationalised by the Directors of CAI, and LLS. This report summarises the key findings from the virtual survey based on the objective that was sketched out at the beginning. The data collection approach was to invite all module leaders across DMU to complete a structured online survey based on a sample developed by the EDUCAUSE team

of researchers and data experts. There are about 889 module leaders across DMU and through the four Associate Deans (Academic) and faculty managers (HLS, ADH, CEM, BAL), an invitation was extended by email to all module leaders and a window was opened for 8 days from the 13-21st May to accommodate this task. From those we invited, 253 responded, representing a 28% response rate. The questions asked in the survey were predetermined with closed responses, respondents had the choice of choosing multiple responses in answering the same question.

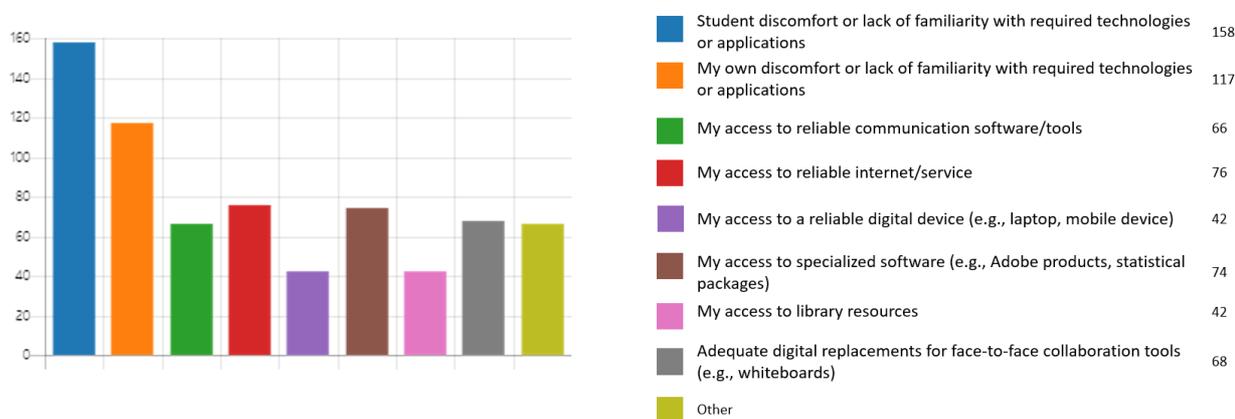
1.3 Demographics



It must be noted that the four faculties are not equally represented in the response rate, with Art, Design and Humanities (ADH), and Health and Life Sciences (HLS) making up over 70% of the 253 respondents. However, we can confirm that the data suggests that there was representation across most Schools and departments in DMU.

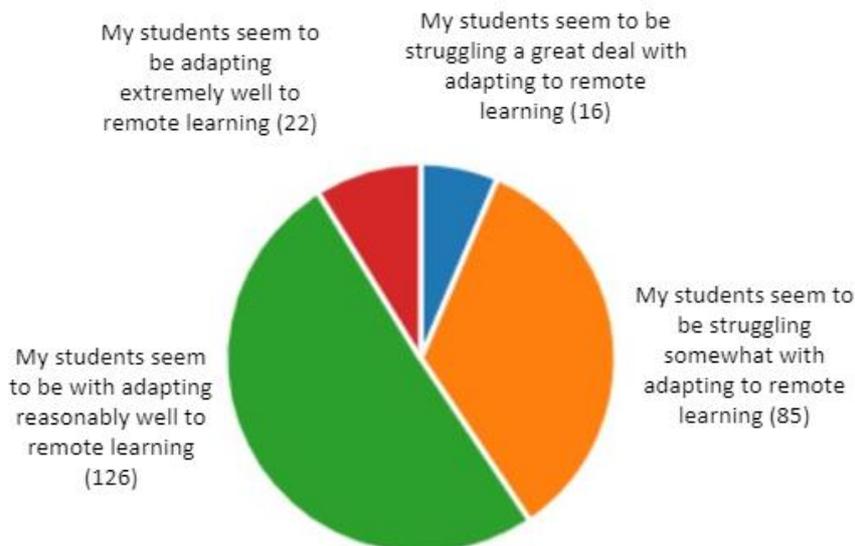
2. Findings and analyses

2.1 Challenging technological issues since the transition to remote learning



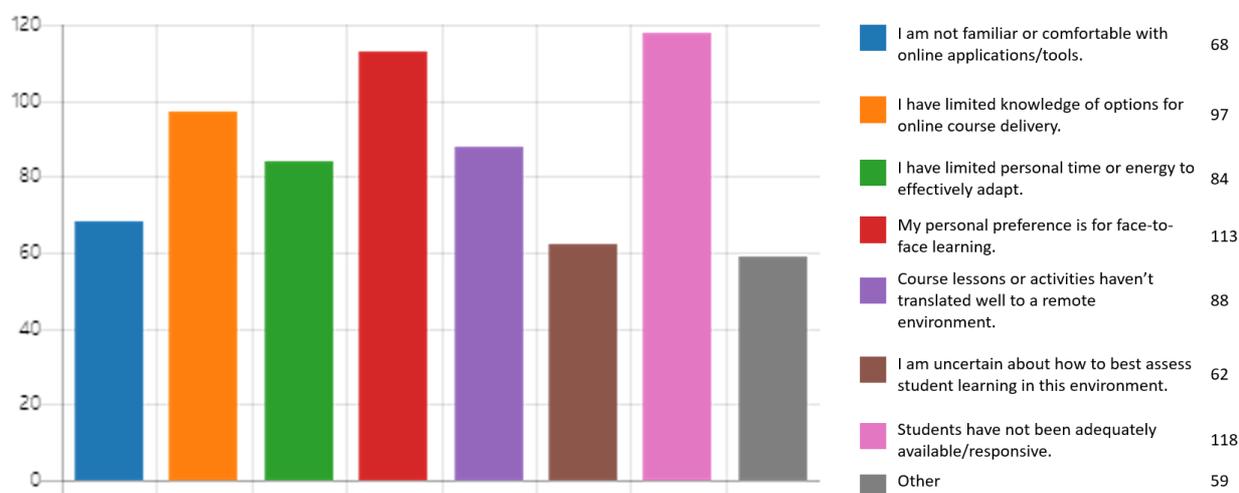
The main issue identified around the technology staff are required to use when working remotely is the discomfort students have when engaging with the required technologies and applications (158). This is echoed in staff's own comfort levels with technology, which is the second highest challenge. With training resources readily available on the CELT website and CAI Toolkit to support staff and students with technology, perhaps more research should be conducted to establish the reasons behind this discomfort (for example, are the resources promoted adequately and do staff have time to engage with them?).

2.2 Staff perception of how students have adapted to remote learning



Out of the responses received for this question, 60% perceive students to be positively adapting to remote learning, whereas 40% believe students are facing some element of difficulty, with 85 respondents stating that their students are somewhat struggling to adapt to remote learning.

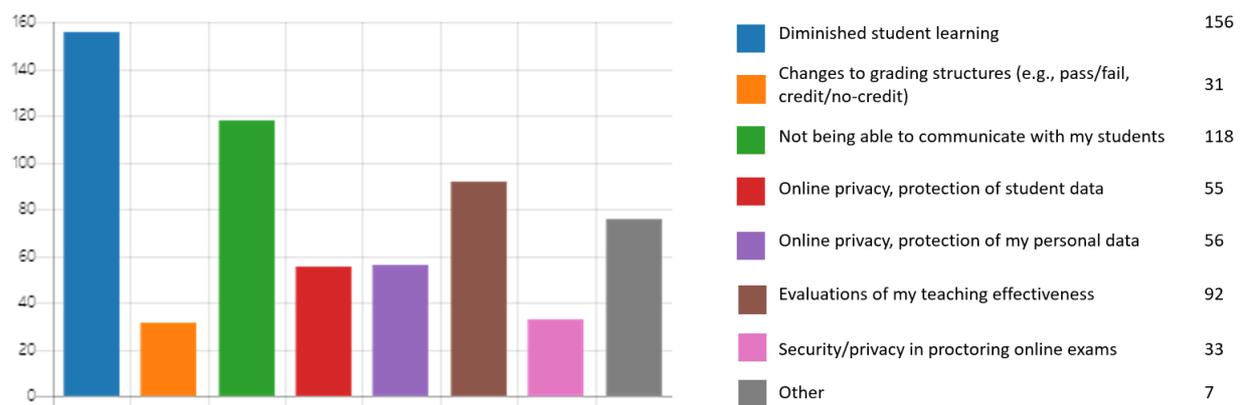
2.3 Challenges in adapting course design and/or assignments to remote learning



When transitioning their teaching to a remote environment, respondents stated that the lack of responsiveness from students has been their main challenge (118). Further research would need to be carried out to establish the reasons behind this drop in engagement, but as this report shows, a lack of familiarity with technology is likely to be one factor.

This is closely followed by staff having a personal preference for face-to-face teaching over remote teaching (113), which might be linked to having “limited knowledge of options for online course delivery” (97), “not being familiar or comfortable with online applications/tools” (68) or not being sure of the best way of assessing students (62).

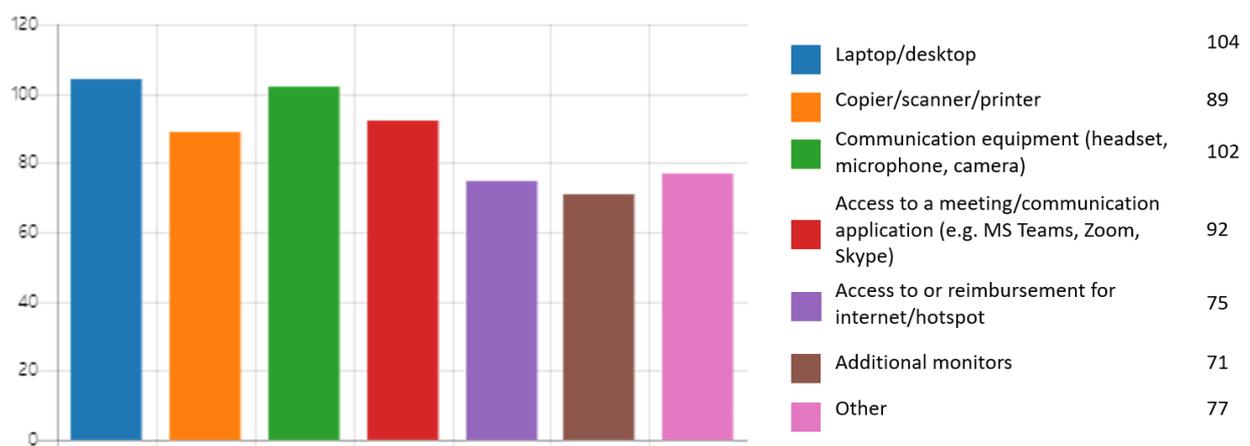
2.4 Biggest concerns with the transition to remote learning so far



The number one concern amongst respondents with the transition to remote learning is students' diminished learning (154). Their second highest concern is not being able to communicate with their students (118).

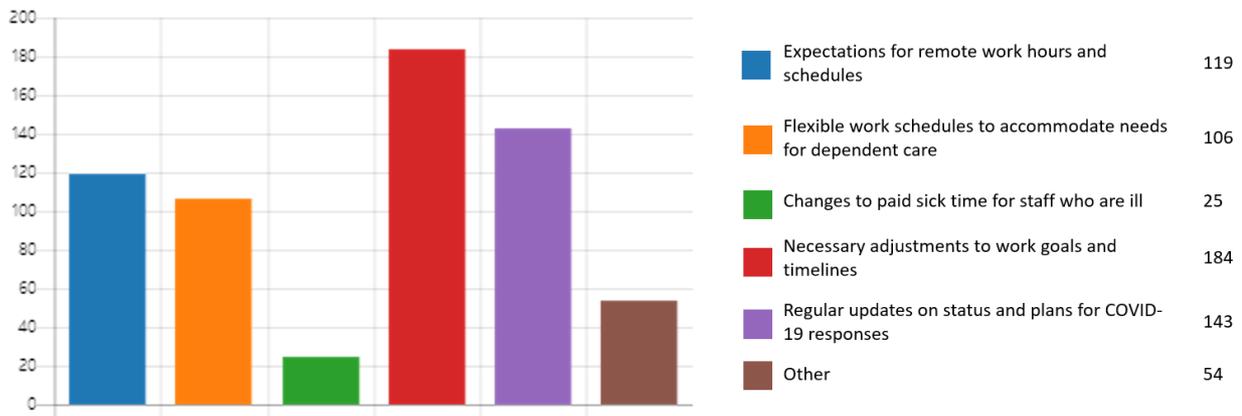
From their own perspectives, (92) respondents are worried about how their teaching effectiveness will be evaluated in this new environment. There is also concern about the online privacy of both student and staff personal data (55 and 56 respondents respectively).

2.5 Supplies or services my institution can provide to allow me to carry out my work remotely



The top supplies/services related to remote working that respondents stated they most needed were: laptop/desktop and communication equipment and applications. Software like MS Teams, Zoom and Skype were also high on the list.

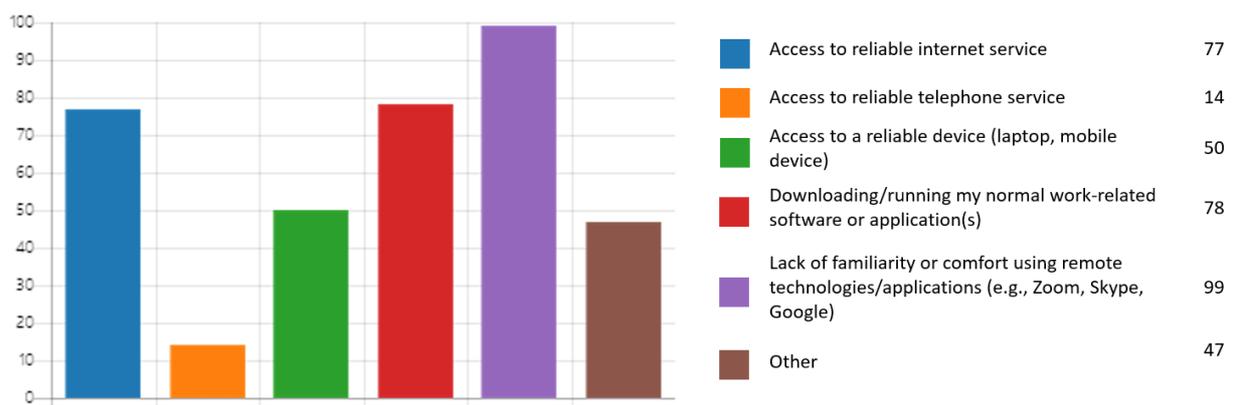
2.6 Information from leadership (e.g., system office, departmental, central administration) that would be most helpful to me in carrying out my work



The information that staff would most like to receive from leadership to help them carry out their work is:

1. Necessary adjustments to work goals and timelines (184),
2. Regular updates on status and plans for Covid-19 responses (143) and
3. Expectations for remote work hours and schedules (119); flexible work schedules to accommodate needs for dependent care was also highlighted as significant (106).

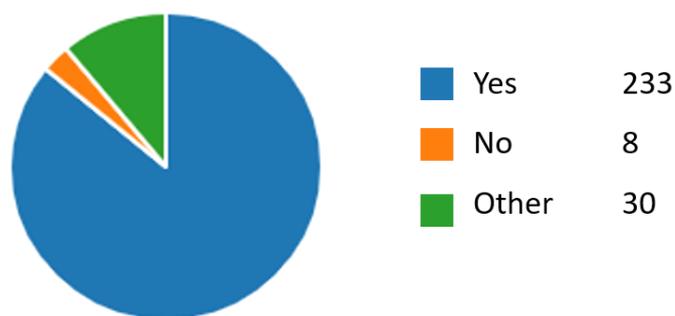
2.7 Challenging technological issues since the transition to remote work



The top technological challenges respondents have faced when transitioning to working remotely include:

1. Lack of familiarity or comfort using remote tech (99);
2. Downloading/running my normal work-related software (78);
3. Access to reliable internet service (77).

2.8 Are you able to maintain necessary connections with colleagues?



Eighty-six percent said that they are able to maintain the necessary connections with colleagues, however comments show that current methods are not as effective as face-to-face communication and the sociable element is lost.

3. Conclusion

This report hopefully provides a snapshot in this moment and time, of how a sample of DMU module leaders are experiencing remote working, teaching and learning in response to Covid-19. A significant minority have reported that their students are not adjusting as well as could have been anticipated. There are also large numbers of reports of staff and students being unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the required technological solutions. Concerns about communication with students and lack of responses from students, perhaps linked to the concern that student learning is diminished, needs further exploration. Respondents also reported that staff are concerned about work goals and timelines. Additionally, the numbers reporting concerns around reliable internet and difficulties with downloading software seem quite significant which also requires urgent redress. As evidenced in this findings' section, this report provides invaluable data to inform planning and intervention, however the researchers plan to implement phase two of the project which will focus on gathering qualitative data to unravel and unpack some of the quantitative data presented here. The data was largely gathered before most of the interventions instigated by the PVC Academic, some of which have already been addressed in the various workstreams; the research team looks forward to studying the impact of these interventions on the teaching and learning experience as well as how remote working is being experienced by staff across DMU.

22/06/20

4. References

Shubham D. & Pirooska, B. (2019) "Exploration of Factors Affecting Learners' Motivation in E-learning" , International Journal of Scientific Research in Computer Science, Engineering and Information Technology (IJSRCSEIT), Volume5 Issue 2, pp. 1269-1275, March-April 2019.