# City, University of London, 3rd Learning and Teaching Exchange,

# Turning the Tables: Listening, and Learning from a Student Perspective

May 2021 Online

Transcript created by Learning Enhancement and Development (LEaD) 2021

Table of Contents

[City, University of London, 3rd Learning and Teaching Exchange, 1](#_Toc75366305)

[Turning the Tables: Listening, and Learning from a Student Perspective 1](#_Toc75366306)

Closing Panel Discussion [1](#_Toc75366307)

[Speaker Description 2](#_Toc75366308)

[1. Start of discussion [Begins at 0:00] 2](#_Toc75366309)

## Closing Panel Discussion

The transcript contained in this document represents the written form of the closing panel discussion from City’s third annual Learning and Teaching Exchange – Turning the Tables. In this discussion, Susannah Quinsee has an open conversation with the panellists: Melissa, Raqaiyah, and Kyla about the contents of their presentations and asks them side questions on their thoughts on several topics which could be used by academics and the schools to improve the University experience, not just in terms of academic achievements, but also in terms of community, wellbeing, and mental health.

The recording from which this transcript originates, [Our Turn to Teach](https://mediaspace.city.ac.uk/media/Closing%20Panel%20Discussion%2C%203rd%20City%20Learning%20and%20Teaching%20Exchange%2C%2028th%20April%202021/1_lq6zb1nv) can be accessed directly for an audio version.

## Speaker Description

Susannah: Susannah Quinsee [AVP Educational Development and Director at the Learning Enhancement and Development (LEaD) team] - Moderator

Melissa: Presenter/Second-year Law student

Raqaiyah: Raqaiyah Javaid - VP Education - representing the Students’ Union (SU)

Kyla: Presenter

# 1. Start of discussion [Begins at 0:00]

Susannah: [Begins at 0:00]

So I'm going to welcome our student speakers back now into this last session. So hello again, and feel free to have your camera on or off. It's great to see and thank you again for your reflections. So we thought it would be useful to just finish the day hearing from you and also this gives you an opportunity if you've thought of anything else to bring it in at this, at this point. So really just to start off, what's been the key message for you this afternoon in terms of the presentations that you've heard and that you will take away. And I'll start with, with Melissa..

Melissa: [Begins at 0:37]

I think one of the key takeaways is that online is actually not as bad as people make it out to be. There are, the online students are taking in more information, we are adapting. But yeah, I think the key message would be online's working. So good job.

Susannah: [Begins at 1:00]

Great. Thank you. Kyla?

Kyla: [Begins at 1:05]

Yes, I agree with Melissa a lot. Because, you know, at the beginning. I think were quite hesitant if online learning would actually work, but in my experience, because I also have accommodation in London, but I'm actually you know, in Kent at the moment. It's like, well, online learning. Is it worth it to actually have accommodation in London and blah, blah, blah, but as much as I hate to admit it, I actually prefer online learning because I can do it in my own pace. And it's not actually like a bad thing overall because you know I could pause it and then have a coffee and then do it again, whereas in person, it's quite, like, it's hard to focus sometimes, especially when there's distractions. But I think the key takeaways, I think overall we should focus on engagement with students. It's not, you know in surveys sometimes they're saying not a lot of students are answering surveys. Or they just don't want to fill up the survey sometimes when they should because it's for their improvement. Highly recommend the breakout rooms as well. Yeah, I think I think there's good overall key takeaways from this one. But yeah, I love online learning and I love interacting with my lecturers, interacting with students, and I hope we could promote more social engagement even though it's just online.

Susannah: [Begins at 2:31]

Super. Thank you. Raqaiyah?

Raqaiyah: [Begins at 2:35]

# Yeah, thank you. And I'd probably agree with what Melissa and Kyla have already said, that online learning isn't all bad. And there are some ways that it can be really helpful for students and their different circumstances when it's used in an effective way and is used with those students in mind. So you know it definitely isn't all bad. And so much has been learned over this year in terms of making improvement to online learning. I mean, if we look at sort of where we were in September to where we are now, leaps and bounds have been made. So that's really positive. I mean, I probably agree with Kyla in that probably the only, or the main thing that is actually lacking in online learning in comparison to on, in person is probably that sense of community. So less sort of academic and educational, but that is well on its way. But you know so at the students union, we sort of do have student societies that you can join. And that's quite a nice way to build your own community, but also doing the things that have been mentioned before, like utilising the breakout rooms and, you know a student, student society as I already said, but also those group chats are all really nice ways to make sure that students feel part of a group and part of a community. Erm, because yeah, that, that's sort of the only difficult, not the only difficult but a difficult thing about the online context so that's all I'd add.

Susannah: [Begins at 3:52]

Thank you. I think that that's one of the things that I'm taking away is that sometimes quite small things that actually, you know, that like sending a welcome email or doing a little bit about you know where you've come from or what your bucket, you know where you've been on holiday that kind of thing or something to kind of give, give your students something to engage with has been really helpful in terms of that engagement and they're quite small things, but they make a big difference. And I think that's something that I'll take away. So that's really useful. Thank you. Also, I should say if there's any other students who want to, who are on the call that want to contribute, please do either put your hand up or post something in the chat, we can come to you as well. Just, I mean we've covered some of this, but I think what would be the key, if you were giving any advice to staff next year? I think particularly thinking about the fact that we may well be or will potentially be in a blended mode with on campus and online delivery. What one piece of advice would you give to staff preparing teaching for, for next year? And perhaps I'll start with Kyla this time.

Kyla: [Begins at 4:50]

Erm, I think the only difficulty that I've noticed with some of my lecturers eh, sometimes transcripts doesn't work. Sometimes like the subtitles when they're you know presenting online. It's like all over the place. Like I experienced that with one of my lecturers or modules and she had to re-upload it again. But there's some support for her, that maybe like during the summer there will be like some session or seminar and hacked how to tackle those problems or what to do you know when you upload, like online lecture. But apart from that, I think well, for for my course anyway, I couldn't ask for anything more to be honest. They've given us everything, all the resources that we need, all the links that we need. And it's just up to us to utilised it, we can't really fault them you know for not getting a good grade I guess, but, yeah, I think it's all good.

Susannah: [Begins at 5:50]

That's brilliant to hear. Thank You. Good shout out to Law colleagues there. Thank you. Melissa?

Melissa: [Begins at 5:56]

Yeah. So I probably got a couple of pieces of advice. Not just one. But mainly I would say is try to think outside the box when engaging the students. So if it's a case of at the end of the term with one-to-one sessions, why not suggest maybe four to one sessions? I know last term sort of four of us students spoke with one of our professors and it's just an easier environment. Remember that as students it is quite confronting to go on a video phone call with your professor. So having you know less or a couple of students that would facilitate an easier forum to talk. The other thing that I want to say about video is that it is really confronting to turn your video on and to see yourself. I think when we go to a lecture hall we can see everyone, but you don't have to look at yourself. So that I think most students struggle with. It's not about showing yourself to others, it's about seeing yourself on a screen. And then I also wanted to talk about community briefly. So we've spoken a lot about how students use WhatsApp groups, which I do think is fantastic. But I also think that it needs to be recognised and maybe not from the school's perspective, but online can be really detrimental to your mental health when you're interpreting how people write stuff in text and their tone. I knew I had to leave a couple of group chats just because I found that I was reading into what people were saying too much. And then that can also be translated into e-mail. So for us students, it's our first time sort of interacting on a professional manner and emails. And sometimes the tone of an email from a professor, while it can be quite straightforward and professional, it can come across as not very nice. So maybe consider that when emailing students and try and be personal.

Susannah: [Begins at 7:57]

Thank you, that's hugely helpful and I think your point there about how much words can impact on your mental health, particularly when you haven't got the other contexts around it is, is, it's such a, is so well-made actually and something that we should really be mindful of. So thank you. And Raqaiyah, what would what would be your key tip?

Raqaiyah: [Begins at 8:16]

Yep. So I think it's a difficult one to answer, isn't it because nobody actually knows what teaching will look like next year because just we don't know what the government restrictions will look like. But I think that in terms of at least the online side of things, we have learned a lot this year. And there are certain things that we should be holding on to, even though, even if things do go completely back to normal. So one of the things that had been picked up is that the degree awarding gap has been sort of shortened and reduced. And so that is a testament to sort of the alternative assessment arrangements and some of the teaching changes that have been made this year. And so although there is this rush to go back to normal, there is, there does need to be that side of retaining things that have made a real difference for students in our university that perhaps ordinarily would have been overlooked or would have suffered a little bit more. Like we've said before, online learning has been good for a good number of students. And I think also the advice that I would give to staff is that I think with, with sort of learning and teaching, it is really a two-way street. And as Melissa has already picked up on, I think students do tend to take their lecturers' lead in you know how you present yourself and how you interact with them, and how forthcoming you are with information and how helpful you are. So you know if you put loads of effort into your teaching and have live lectures and have Q and A's and make sure that students understand all of the content, then naturally, you know the students will put more effort into sort of understanding your content and revising and doing better on their exam. So it really is about that you know back and forth and two-way sort of interaction. And equally, both parties trying to make sure that they're performing to the highest standards. So I think that's something that I would add.

Susannah: [Begins at 10:02]

Fabulous. Thank you. Yes. And as Deborah has just put in the chat the point there that you've just made about the changes that we did this year in relation to our degree awarding gap are so important, and something that we really need to, to takeaway and learn from that and look about how we can make that more sustainable. And lastly then, what, what can the university do to support our students more effectively? I think we've covered some of that but it would be really nice to hear from you again, just kind of your key, key point about perhaps, you know, how, what we can do to support students and what we may have perhaps missed a bit this year. Raqaiyah, I'm going to start on you.

Raqaiyah: [Begins at 10:37]

Yeah, sure. I'm probably going to reduce my answer to talk about a specific cohort of students. So looking to the next academic year with the students that will be first years coming into university for the first time. The university on the whole has started to have conversations about what we're going to dp with that because they may not have taken A levels, they may not have taken all of their GCSEs. So taking formalised sit down exams is going to be something that is really foreign to them and they might struggle with that formal structure of a degree course and the expectations that come with that because they have such little experience in that area. And so the university has sort of began to have conversations about maybe doing like a summer study programme to try to bridge the gap in, in terms of where students are at in terms of their knowledge. And then bridging that with what the expectations would be of a, a sort of a normal first-year student. And so it would just be really good to sort of see academics really engaging with that because nobody knows your content better than you do. Nobody can design a summer programme better than you can. And it's really going to rely upon the initiative of those academics and them really putting in the effort to make sure that those students are supported in terms of filling that gap. But yeah, I think that is something that is going to be new for next year.

Susannah: [Begins at 11:54]

Yes. Thank you. And that point about exams and students not having exam since GCSEs is a really, is well-made, again, something that we need to be very mindful of. So definitely those bridging activities in the summer will be hugely helpful. Thank you. Eh, what about Melissa, is there anything, anything else that we could do?

Melissa: [Begins at 12:10]

Yeah. I briefly mentioned it, but just be personal, erm, let us know you know who you are as our teachers erm will encourage us to interact more. So share your story, I think that would be very nice to hear as students.

Susannah: [Begins at 12:24]

Great. Thank you. Yes, and I think that is, you know we're all struggling with similar things. But your point there that you were making earlier on about the you know the WhatsApp groups and some worry about words is something that you know that I've experienced as well. And you sit there anxiously looking at your phone thinking were they going to reply and have they misunderstood what I've meant? So thank you. Yes, sharing stories. Definitely. And Kyla, you get the last word here in this panel.

Kyla: [Begins at 12:46]

Yes. I think something that I would like everyone to consider is like in my experience, we have you know module representatives. So it's not just law representive for a whole. We have like a module representative for the specific module. So not that, it only helps, it helps us as a student, but it also reduces the workload for lecturers. Because, for example, you know, Melissa said, sometimes lecturers could email and it could be quite formal and it's quite scary sometimes, well am I disturbing them when I'm asking this question? So sometimes they would ask, I would ask something and they would just reply after like a week. But when you have like module reps, you could like as a student, in my perspective, I could ask that module rep because they have the same like perspective as me as a student, I don't feel shy asking them questions because I know they're not gonna answer me in a formal way, but also at the same time like the lecturers are not going to receive like tonnes and tonnes and tonnes of emails about like the same question. I could just like say it to them, to the lecturer, whatever, the questions, but I think as well in terms of like meeting with the personal tutor erm, sometimes some personal tutors don't actually reach out to you. You have to reach out like to them or sometimes we actually forget we have personal tutors, we would just be reminded about it when you know we get like an email saying, oh, this is the time to book and see your personal tutor but there's no like consistent you know informal email, the How are you doing? What's happening with your course? How are you getting on? And I think nowadays when it's all online we actually appreciated that we would have like an outlet outside of our you know classmates or whatever, we have our personal tutor to talk about everything mental health, academic, something to do with life. And yeah, I think that's, that's something I'll propose.

Susannah: [Begins at 14:51]

Great. Thank you. I'm aware of time and we've got one final activity, but just to thank you all again and also for the other contributions that couldn't, the other students that couldn't make the final panel discussion. But it's been hugely, hugely beneficial to me to hear your stories and been very informative. So thank you very, very much. and I'm going to hand over...

[End of discussion]