

## Episode 023: The Return of In-Person Exams Special Transcript

Hello and welcome to Episode 25 of the Learning and Teaching at Newcastle university podcast.

My name is Ben Steel and I'll be doing this quick intro. This episode is our seventh instalment of ideas and academic practice.

In this episode Emma McCulloch, the academic practice team manager here in LTDS

we'll be talking to Kevin Johnson, a disability practitioner in the Student Health and Wellbeing Service.

In this episode, Emma and Kevin will be discussing how we can support students with disabilities and some of the

great tools and techniques that Kevin and his team use in the Health and Wellbeing Services.

Hi Emma. My name is Kevin Johnson. I'm a disability practitioner in student health marketing services.

So I support students with a range of neurodiversity like dyslexia, ADHD, dyspraxia,

but also support students with physical health conditions as well as a wide range of those.

And the service also supports students with mental health difficulties. Such an important topic to discuss.

I feel certainly. Just working with some of our new staff to get to the university.

It sometimes can be quite a daunting prospect to get things right in the way we support our students.

Now we see we want to make sure that everyone feels included. And so and I believe you've developed some kind of and supportive practice toolkit.

Kevin, if you could tell us how that came about, that would be really helpful.

Yeah, absolutely. I think that points exactly where I'm at about supporting stuff to upscale or to

to feel a bit more confident and a bit more aware of what can what can work.

And the supportive partners tool is essentially my effort to work towards that.

And the folks that support from colleagues in the LTDS department as well to develop the tool.

But it actually all started about five years ago.

I would a conference in 2016 in Glasgow and the buzz phrase for the event was inclusive teaching practices everywhere.

That's what everyone was talking about in pretty much every session it felt like.

I think those partly to do with the rising number of students with who are identified as having a disability nationally,

as you know, both in terms of numbers but also as a proportion of the total student populations.

It also is partly to do with the DSA restructure so that universities used to rely more on DSA funding to support their students.

So those that that sort of emphasis, if you like,

on universities take control of the provision and embed inclusive practices more readily across the universities.

So I pitched the project, my team and then started it in January 2017 and was supervised.

Ravensbourne University London is where I started this project. So the literature review obviously had staff interviews as well to understand really

good progress that was happening already and opportunities for us to develop as well.

And then in the student survey, sort of all the students in university and got really quite reasonable response rates to that.

And then we basically did a statistical analysis,

we did a thematic analysis of the questionnaire responses as well to produce some really clear findings and recommendations.

So there was a workshop that we delivered.

But actually, this was one of these resources that I produced was a basically a piece of paper by with clear recommendations on it in a matrix format.

So essentially had sort of common features in the teaching space, you know,

like social anxiety, social communication difficulties, processing difficulties overwhelm.

It can lead it didn't lead with the sort of diagnosis, if you like, of the student led with.

Yes, things that people experience are very common.

And then delved into here some evidence based ways to respond, if you like, and proactively embed adjustments for these for these individuals.

So it was trying to be a sort of one stop at a glance tool that people could glance at,

learn a bit more about why people experience difficulties and access in education and also learn about what they can do to actually respond to that.

And hopefully, you know, use this to the educational educational guide and then start at Newcastle University.

Obviously, the research was published last year in journalism and teaching at the University of Greenwich called Campus Actually the journal.

And then from start of the university in 2019

I was really keen to try and do something with this research because of the teachers which sits on a shelf then might never be used.

But I actually started working with colleagues in the learning teaching service at the learning teaching devolvement service in LTDS.

What we're colleagues on developing this too digitally so is essentially getting

the sort of matrix that was on paper into a digital accessible formats.

So the resource itself is easy to access and thankfully that's something that is being developed.

So added to that the NEPS course, the new teaching stuff. Yeah.

So yeah, that's an interesting point to make. So yes, we run the Newcastle Educational Practice Scheme and yes.

And we support those need to teach in Newcastle. And so with collaborate with a bit with Kevin.

We've been able to bring this toolkits to life a bit more I think from just the paper documents say as a dynamic,

sort of interactive little part of canvas. And and it was interesting what you said,

that it's about identifying those us identifying those traits and knowing how to

support rather than labelling somebody you can out that one specific and then in need,

for example, or someone with autism. What does that mean?

And so it's it's looking at those traits in terms of like, say, social anxiety and and knowing how to support those students.

It's not just about that one particular student, but those small changes you could make.

Thinking about that one student principal knew my students like your teaching.

So, yeah, it's it's it's it's a great little tool kit to get you started.

I guess so. It's absolutely that's that's what aimed for. I think a way to describe it quite well I would think is quick wins instead of trying

to trying to give people a window into just what you will be seeing in your classroom,

there will be students who experienced difficulties with reading.  
Difficulties with writing.

And difficulties concentrating, working memory difficulties. So that's that's  
ruining all that's really common.

Who experiences those two drilling deep out here, people with this idea or  
ADHD or dyslexia?

Depression can experience these sort of features, if you like, and explains  
why as well.

So there might be different underlying reasons as to why these people  
experiences, for example, difficulty concentrated.

And then what you can do in the future in space can actually be help in so  
many different students for so many different reasons.

But they can sometimes have a standard response in terms of embed and  
accessibility, that helps very students for various reasons, not the tools.

Something is more difficult to explain it to us. Quite a visible sort of simple  
dropdowns, a digital resource that helps with that.

That's that's what it tries to do. So nice easy at a glance, quick wind  
resource.

What I thought was really great about it is you can you can go and then  
you might have a

student in quite a bit about how we're going to support and we think  
processing skills.

And you click on it and it gives you some helpful tips. It also gets, you  
know, little if that research about how that student might present.

So identifying traits. And it also is really helpful in that it's could see the  
positives as well,

because I think a lot of the time when we start to think about it can it can  
be overwhelmed and think,

oh, it's going to be a big test day back to when you start looking at them.

It's an amazing set of positives to come out of some of these and specific  
needs.

So and I'm thinking, you know, our dyslexic students have amazingly creative ways of thinking and potentially

come at things with such a much more interesting angle and perhaps and the.

And so it's not to think of it as a negative at all.

It let's embrace it and bring that diversity in our classrooms.

And this toolkit sort of opened your eyes to that. So for thank you for that.

I think so as well.

And I think that's what I tried to make sure I was it wasn't just what we might perceive as negative things that I identified that, you know,

the feature isn't actually a feature of the dyslexia and a feature of autism is people are strong visual learner.

So that's one of the one of the features that's listed that, you know, for people with dyslexia and for ADHD,

And autism, that's really common. But what you can do in a class room or what can work and I'm just looking at the results now.

So encouraging the use of visual stimuli.

For example, mind mapping through learning or using the visuals in the development documents such as briefs and a synopsis to help understanding.

So if you have a mind map, which is quite clear in what it's describing at the front end up say you can work for a module,

it can work for even an individual lecture. It can work for know a brief or an assignment.

So if there's a if there's a sort of a visual that can be a window into what it is that's being described, you're not.

Because some of the concerns we teach and stuff when during the project was I'm worried that they I'm provide information and more simplistic terms,

then I'm going to be losing some of the depth of some of the complexity of what I'm describing,

whereas actually if you can be thinking about doing both and you can be thinking about having this visual.

Which student which students wouldn't find that useful?

Actually, so probably everyone would find a sort of something like zooms out of it.

And then all visual aid. So you can then zoom into the self as a bit of context, isn't it?

So like you say, I think that the two tries to lend or look at some of the positives or some of the strengths.

I mean, obviously people often have a strong vocabulary as well as strong good verbal reasoning.

So people with dyslexia and ADHD, often we perceive enough or imagined teaching stuff if they are not trained in this area already.

Might perceive dyslexia. So students just have difficulty with language.

But actually the reality is often people dyslexia needs to have fantastic vocabularies,

but it's more the reading of language or the writing of language that is challenging for different reasons.

So we can encourage the use of speech to text software. Is this the new Microsoft office

They can actually perhaps describe it verbally what it is that is in their mind and that can help them to formulate their assignments.

So this is all this is upskilling staff and it's perhaps offering better signposting from student services towards staff

And just a quick resource that can really help.

It's also worth bearing in mind that not all our students will disclose their disability to us so they could be students

sat there and or known to us for various reasons and they could be going through the process of being diagnosed.

So there are things we could do that will enable all of our students to be involved and engaged.

That don't necessarily just have to meet that one student's specific requirements.

So and I think once you start looking at this toolkit and urge our listeners to have a look,

you will really start to see that there's this overlap and commonality between lots of different conditions.

And I think. The tool kit just opens your eyes to that.

And actually it's such minor things that we could do through our home teaching that

would enable so many other people to access ex what we're doing such such as like speech

recognition and the bigger things of things thinking about assessment and how we could

potentially give more choice and freedom in some of our assessments and be less rigid.

I know that's controversial, but certainly I think one of the interesting things I read was that the disabled student leadership group suggested

that students with a disability potentially less likely to get a good degree been 2:1 or both.

And and they they tend to perceive that courses as as lower quality,

which is something that we obviously just one day and get rid of that perception and then to want our students to feel like that.

So at a certain urge, our teaching staff to go and take a look at this tool kit,

you can access it through our canvas unit, which is supporting students needs.

There's also a supplementary workshop, but you're more than welcome to come along to where we look at specifics.

We put and we make our students real. You know, we have real case studies.



it's easy to think about it. Is it without, you know, a face to a name?

So we see anonymize, but we make it real. So, yeah, I did you to come along and put that into real life.

And so I was wondering if you had any idea of Kevin or will our students say they want from the academic teaching side of things?

What do they want us to do? What even if, like you say, quick wins we could do?

Yeah, absolutely, I mean, as a status of the research included stuff interview student service and the literature

these findings from all three areas within the tool. But in terms of the student population, I think that's a really interesting question, isn't it?

What do the students actually want? Yeah, the thematic responses,

some of the similar themes there include a desire for consistency in the whereabouts of materials in VLEs Modules,

and that was in my previous university. And I think that's some also feedback from students now as well as is within

one course having a sort of a standardised approach to where things are kept.

So some of these things are they feel quite so hopefully manageable,

but actually can be really helpful to students who are experiencing various different modules and have profs, you know,

additional support needs consistency and uploading to as head of sessions, I know that's a difficult one as well sometimes,

especially with covid and everything else, all these competing priorities. But where there is consistency with the modern tools added sessions,

it does give students more time to prepare as well desire from a practical sessions.

In total, this is a kind of survey conducted in previous university.

But often the students find the ability to embed their knowledge practically to sort of making

or doing or embodying that message practically in in a group setting can be really helpful.

To further make links and just embedding further support and links between students, between teaching staff and students, help them up services.

And I know I know it's sort of what we're conscious of is not not sort of passing the responsibility of support to staff.

This tool is not about saying, here you go. Here's how you support students.

And that's that's it. In student services will be sort of finished.

It's actually about how do we sort of embed or upskill or integrate with teaching staff

to a great degree so that teaching staff feel that they're more implicitly accessible.

And students, you know, as you say, students who may not declared a student who have declared that their sort of dyslexia,

for example, just automatically find their courses more accessible and so positive knock on effects from that.

But also the two links very readily to health and wellbeing services, various workshops to the mental health services,

writing de development centre and and with links that we will continue to update as well.

So that's hopefully useful.

And the students also the one the last things I would mention is the varieties, the variety of options for access material.

So rather than solely having text documents offering a variety of video or audio sound visuals.

And it's not about simplifying, it's about offering options.

And students can kind of curate how they engage with the course.

And again, I'm understanding that this is this time, this time constraints for staff and the students.

What courses did provide more options? The feedback tended to be more positive as well.

If you give us some examples, so, for example, if a student has signs of a delayed processing speeds, for example,

and could you give us an example from the tool kit just just to sort of demonstrate what kind of information you'd get my listeners?

Absolutely, I mean, the tool itself, you'll see when when you go into it,

it links to the research that links to talk that that exists earlier this year.

Explain the kind of research process and doing a bit of a demo for the tools.

Hopefully those can supplement it nicely, you mention.

So basically what you see when you look at the tool is a list of features that students commonly experience.

Some of the most common features that are experienced in the classroom.

So processing speed is something that is a difficulty that students often experience in the classrooms.

If I click on that, there's a list of just around 20 of these examples of curriculum processing speed.

And what we see there is we saw a drill into that.

We could see that students with depression, anxiety, dyslexia, ADHD and autism can experience difficulties with their processing speed.

So if I just click on the top on it almost, it's dropped down. It's like an accordion feature we call it drops down.

So with depression, there's quite the question of always asked is why and what can work.

So why consumed with depression, experienced difficulties with the processing speed.

So executive functioning can be impaired by low moods. And that's reference there as well.

And what can work? So terms of process and speed providing handouts ahead of sessions which highlighted key objectives,

for example, of lecture's modules, a briefs and of touch on that briefly before as well.

How helpful that can be. So this can help students to frame the lecture.

Much of a brief in mind more clearly at the outset and encourage preparation.

That's that could sort of aid and assist people who are experiencing difficulties with that.

So with anxiety. So this again.

So executive function can also be impaired by anxiety. So what can work?

So another example there is provide materials in various formats.

So you recorded, which is also true. We have it readily and most, most courses.

It's that we cut function or offer videos and obviously also encouraging things that the use of clareads.

That's something that we offer.

And the more we just review the licence for 21/22 so actually students can access a free licence of clareads, which is text to speech software.

And it also links to student services in that example as well. So you refer students to get that.

So and also just allowing time to respond to these recommendations are very straightforward, but just being conscious,

that seems many students in the classroom will benefit from having just that little bit of time to respond or just that little break in the middle,

for example, just so people can refresh and come back.

And that goes about other areas such as ADHD and autism that we just have a lot of the autism one that.

So persons could be affected by the question why sensory overload process and social context in that

that just being in a classroom space can be very overwhelming for people on the autistic spectrum.

And it gives several examples that, look,

the bottom example is signposting the student health wellbeing service that's that's hyperlinked an access to the Autism Support Network,

which is still have a question health and wellbeing service. So this is it's not only trying to offer here's what can work in the teaching space,

but it's also he has what is available outside of that with student services to try to do both.

Not so important. And from the teaching perspective, you're not alone.

You're not their to solve all of the problems.

You have lots of support around the university and in the toolkit.

So just directly to where to go. And I just want to say thanks ever so much, Kevin, for sharing this.

And and hopefully, you know, it's been so useful to myself.

And under this already. And I think sometimes we just need to.

Stop to understand how it may not succeed and stop the weight in some super challenging conditions and

acknowledge the diversity and how we can enrich our own learning experiences for all our students.

So to find out more you can pop over to the campus unit, which is self and wrote supporting students with specific needs.

And there's also a workshop. You can come along too on elements to book on to.

It's a one hour workshop, reconnect four times a year. And like I say, it looks at case studies and put faces to things and things.

And so thanks ever so much, Kevin.

That's been really an enlightening and I hope it's lovely just to sort of see your work being used and going full weight.

And it's not just a piece of research to say on a on a shelf. It's wonderful.

Thanks. Thank you, emma.

I really appreciate the opportunity to promote this and obviously to hopefully have a positive effect on on the accessibility for the students,

but also support and staff as well as so upscale stuff,

but also to make really clear the links by the students services because obviously we're not going anywhere as lots of support available.

Thank you very much to Emma and Kevin for that great episode.

We got a lot of interesting thoughts and ideas from the discussion that Emma and Kevin had there.

Thank you for listening remember to subscribe this podcast and for any of the links from today's episode, including toolkit Kevin goes through.

You can find them in our shownotes. Thank you again and we'll see you in two weeks time.

Bye.