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## **Re-building students' Post-COVID-19 confidence in Courses, Curriculum and Careers for Tourism, Hospitality and Events**

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## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the most significant disruption to education in history (United Nations, 2020), not least in Tourism, Hospitality, and Events (THE). While growing evidence explores the reshaping of higher education in a COVID-19 era, limited discussion exists on the specific impacts for current and future students of THE and the challenges of rebuilding student and wider stakeholder confidence in THE education and careers.

This paper advances this discussion by focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on the THE educational experience. A case example approach is adopted to illustrate the responses of four universities in the pre, during, and post phases of students' educational journey. Common approaches are drawn using lesson drawing, broader implications and issues affecting institutions and students are explored and lessons for the future of THE education are extrapolated. Finally, the paper also suggests avenues for future research.

Keywords: confidence; COVID-19; events; education; hospitality; students; tourism

## **Introduction**

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a cataclysmic, well documented and unprecedented impact on Tourism, Hospitality, and Events (THE) in all countries in terms of guest and visitor numbers, event cancellations and postponements, organisational finances, and employment (IMF, 2020; Tokyo 2020; UNWTO, 2020a). Recent health-related crises pale in their social and economic impact and significance alongside COVID-19; for example, the SARS outbreak in 2002-2003, which impacted international travel and tourism, was regionally limited in

significant scale to China and South-East Asia (McKercher & Chon, 2004). Academic analysis of various facets of the impact of COVID-19 have proliferated since relatively early in the pandemic and have provided a fascinating and changing narrative on the sector which has also created a valuable resource for researchers and educators (see, for example, Carr, 2020; Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Kaushal & Srivastava, 2020; Ludvigsen & Hayton, 2020; Miles & Shipway, 2020; Niewiadomski, 2020; Prayag, 2020; Sigala, 2020). Much of the industry, international agency (such as OECD, 2020a; PWC, 2020; UNCTAD, 2020), and academic literature (for example, Jiang & Wen, 2020; Wen, Kozak, Yang & Liu, 2020), have referred to the challenge of regaining consumer confidence in THE products, services and experiences and operationalising approaches that adhere to and go beyond relevant laws and guidelines to woo back a reluctant public. This is important because, without such renewed confidence, a return to levels of sustainable visitor activity for THE operations will not be possible.

At the same time, there has been scant reference to matters of confidence concerning the industry's current and future workforce although the impact of COVID-19 on employment at global, national, and local levels has been widely recognised (for example, Baum, Mooney, Robinson & Solnet, 2020; Mao, He, Morrison & Coca-Stefaniak, 2020; Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, Lemke & Hsieh, 2020; Yu, Lee, Popa & Madera, 2021). Such discussions are wide-ranging and address the accentuated challenges of how industry closures and curtailment have affected employment that is already widely recognised as precarious (Baum, 2018; Robinson, Martins, Solnet & Baum, 2019). What appears to be missing in current assessments of the THE environment is discussions and evidence that focus on how current and potential students who are engaged with these fields of study have been affected and what the future may hold for them and their colleges and universities operating in the vocational and higher education sectors. In particular, little has been mentioned about what needs to be done to give

these cohorts of current and future THE students confidence in the curricula, pedagogy, wider learning experiences, engagement with industry through internships, and, ultimately, their career prospects upon graduation. That is our interest in this paper. Students in our discipline areas were widely hit by multiple traumas as a consequence of the pandemic, including:

- Rapid retrenchment of workers and students with the onset of COVID-19 (Gössling et al., 2020; Jaipuria, Parida & Ray, 2020) with subsequent re-structuring and permanent closure of businesses making these job losses permanent.
- Cancellation of student internships, graduate job offers, and part-time working opportunities (Gill, 2020; Holt-White & Montacute, 2020; Sigala, 2020).
- Uncertainty about educational delivery in the immediate post-COVID period (Agnoletto & Queiroz, 2020).
- Elimination of international study and career development opportunities – ‘the world is no longer my oyster....’(Sigala, 2020).

Building and rebuilding the confidence of students currently studying THE, as well as those intending to join programs in the future (including their influencers – parents, high school teachers), will be crucial for educators and our industry partners going forward. By confidence, we refer to the factors that combine to frame choice and behaviour of (predominantly) young people, their families and other influencers such as school advisors in selecting or rejecting higher education programs in THE with a view to long-term and sustainable careers in the industry upon graduation. This is a concern that has previously been addressed in terms of longer-term trends such as responses to the automation of work and the consequent loss of career opportunities (Skrbiš & Laughland-Booÿ, 2019). Here, our interest is in the much more dramatic and immediate impact that the pandemic is likely to have had on perceptions that a selected program has academic and vocational worth, can lead to desired career outcomes and offers a value-for-money proposition in the eyes of all stakeholders. These are indicators of

such confidence in making program selections. Confidence also relates to how the pedagogical and professional experience processes are perceived by students relative to what they have been promised once they have commenced their studies in THE, particularly where there have been major changes in content, structure, delivery and assessment modes adopted by institutions, including internship arrangements. Confidence is a challenge that relates to all stages within the education to careers process (course choice and student recruitment; curriculum content and pedagogy including internships; and career preparation and development) (Bright & Pryor, 2008). They are challenges both for educators and their institutions as well as for the THE industry partners with which they work, recognising that these businesses are currently facing unprecedented crises in seeking to survive. The choice dilemmas facing, in particular, young people are unprecedented and have no parallels in recent experience, as evidenced in the virtual absence of relevant extant literature.

This paper is designed to address responses to issues of student confidence in the field of THE, recognising that we live in turbulent times at the height of the global pandemic. Clearly, while some impacts are universal across place and time, many others are localised to the specific conditions, structures and cultures that pertain to different countries and institutions. We take a case example approach to illustrate such responses in universities in Australia; Hong Kong, China; Malaysia; and Scotland, across the three dimensions of the student life cycle – pre-entry, during study and post-graduation and at the micro (individual student), meso (departmental/program) and macro (institutional, governmental) levels. In doing so, we are mindful that our cases are illustrative and not representative of either national responses across all universities or, indeed, the situation on a wider global stage.

This paper is organised as follows: After this introduction and linked literature review, we briefly explain our methodological approach and present the four case examples, drawing on the external context about COVID-19 and institutional responses within universities in the

four different jurisdictions. From these case examples, we then extrapolate lessons that can be of value to teachers, program managers, careers advisors and industry partners in re-shaping THE education. Future research priorities in this area are then suggested and the limitations of our work are acknowledged.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Confidence of THE students***

Confidence is a positive outcome of an individual's awareness of his/her ability (Morony, Kleitman, Lee & Stankov, 2013) and the degree of certainty in an event or situation (Cramer, Neal & Brodsky, 2009). Scholars of positive psychology suggest using confidence and efficacy interchangeably (Luthans, Youssef-Morgan & Avolio, 2015). Bandura and Locke (2003) indicate that belief in efficacy can drive one's motivation and performance.

The lessons learned from previous disease crises such as the SARS epidemic are important reference points for managing future responses to such situations. The SARS outbreak in 2003 impacted almost 30 countries globally and had a severe effect on the THE industries (Law, 2005). However, the impact of COVID-19 worldwide is expected to be exponentially harsher, and deeper because of its rapid and wider geographic spread and contagious nature. Tanner and Doberstein (2015) found an overall low preparedness of university students in responding to natural disasters, despite their potential to affect individual well-being. This finding implies that university students may be psychologically unprepared and will feel stress and anxiety when they have to cope with unexpected disasters and crises such as the coronavirus pandemic. Their comfort zones are challenged and their confidence may subsequently be affected (Luthans et al.,2015).

During the SARS outbreak, students within geographical proximity to the outbreak experienced higher stress levels (Wong, Gao & Tam, 2007). The prevalence of social media today has reported news and information about COVID-19, which has exacerbated emotional consequences for students (e.g., anger, frustration, stress) (Wang & Zhao, 2020). Students have had to cope with the rapid switch to online learning and many universities have been struggling with generating desired students' learning outcomes. Additionally, there is a general lack of communication and interaction among students and teachers, especially for those students left isolated due to limited internet access in less developed countries (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Baloran, 2020).

Robinson, Ruhanen, and Breakey (2016) are of the view that students who complete internship programs have positive career aspirations and become more optimistic when they complete their degrees. Therefore, our interest here is whether the suspension and cancellation of internships during the pandemic may have created a disconnection between students and industry, and may have further weakened THE students' confidence, especially since internships are a focal point of many THE programs.

University campus life and associated learning are also pivotal to the psychological development of students (Wang & Zhao, 2020). Recent studies indicate that university students experienced higher levels of anxiety, particularly during the extended duration of COVID-induced national lockdowns (Baloran, 2020; Wang & Zhao, 2020). Considering the outbreak of COVID-19 has, as of writing, been lasting for almost a year, a prolonged negative psychological state will likely negatively influence students' academic performance in the short-term (Kwek, Bui, Rynne, & So, 2013). Perhaps more importantly, negative emotions such as helplessness, pessimism and deteriorating confidence may be detrimental to student confidence and may lead to dropping out of education (Luthans et al., 2015). Importantly, confidence and success play reciprocal roles, thus, people with high self-confidence experience



reduced anxiety and higher perseverance (Bandura & Locke, 2003, Luthans et al., 2015). Thus, THE students with higher self-confidence will have greater resilience to overcome difficulties and challenges (Cramer et al., 2009). Besides, highly resilient students who bounce back faster from adversity have higher self-esteem to cope positively with difficult times and to achieve better academic performance (Kwek et al., 2013). The confidence levels of students depend on their knowledge, skills and abilities. It also depends on their evaluation of their actual performances. Accordingly, educators should focus on the preparedness competencies of students as well as helping them to restore or even elevate individual confidence. It may also necessary to review or redesign the existing curriculum and the overall support provided to students, including on-going career advice.

### ***Curriculum and Courses***

THE programs routinely monitor changes in the industry and examine their curricula and wider approaches to learning to ensure that graduates have the necessary skills and competencies to cope and flourish in their future careers. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a major impact on the THE sector and this will likely affect the redesign of program curricula. More importantly, there is an urgent need to place the well-being of students at the centre of curriculum redesign and delivery (OECD, 2020c).

One of the earliest curriculum models (Tyler, 1949) generates basic questions about educational objectives, types of educational experiences, ways to organise such experiences and how to determine the achievement of educational objectives. Later, Kerr (1968) develops a basic curriculum model with core elements such as objectives, knowledge, learning experiences and evaluation. Traditional schools of thought in curriculum planning are the content approach, the process approach or a combination of both. The content approach is a teacher-led curriculum alongside the process approach, which is based on student needs, whereby the student is fully involved in the learning process (Cooper, Shepherd & Westlake,

1996; Knowles, 1984; Pickup & Wolfson, 1986). Further, Tribe (2002) defined curriculum as a full package of learning experiences for a degree program. However, currently full educational opportunities are compromised. Dobson and Tas (2004) emphasise the need to add practical content to curriculum planning and development and this is currently more difficult. However, regardless of the varying approaches to education, there is a common belief that input or evaluation and feedback from the community and various stakeholders should be maintained (Tribe, 2002).

Interestingly, there is no international standard for curriculum design nor redesign of THE programs (Dale & Robinson, 2001; Lee, 2013; Lewis, 2005). Therefore, educational institutions have sought to develop their curricula based on their regional stakeholders' demand for talent, and their institutional aims and intended outcomes (Wattanacharoensil, 2014). Nevertheless, a major impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is the call for recognition of worldwide educators' concern for new skills and knowledge that students will need during the future recovery of the THE industries. The existing goals of the THE curriculum may require modification and strengthening in order to focus on students' preparedness that will help to overcome the challenges of global disease outbreaks (Cahapay, 2020). Crisis and different types of disaster management including diseases and emergency preparedness content clearly have a place within the curriculum. These topics have generally been a niche part of THE degrees, which is insufficient to provide knowledge and skills for THE employees to deal with larger-scale crises in a resilient manner (Hsu, 2018).

One area of interest with respect to THE curricula relates to the future of practical, applied or laboratory classes, based on a training model in, for example, restaurants, guest services and aircraft cabin operations. There has been a marked decline in the position of such classes in THE curricula in many countries over the past 20 years (Alexander, 2007; Alexander et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2017). What, if any, role the impact of COVID-19 may have on

the declining trajectory of relatively high-cost practical training in THE education remains a question to be answered.

### *Careers for THE students*

Social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994; Lent et al., 2000) posits that students develop interest and pursue a career in a field at which they are self-efficacious. This theory suggests that instilling belief about their ability to effectively perform tasks is important in prompting career choice. The COVID-19 pandemic may have reduced student confidence in their credentials essential for their future employment (Franchi, 2020). Thus, it is important to understand how students' confidence can be restored to recruit and retain future talent for THE businesses.

While COVID-19 may have exerted minimal influence on science, technology, engineering and mathematics students' intentions to pursue a science career (Forakis, March & Erdmann, 2020), the situation is likely to be different for THE students given its immediate devastating effect on the industry. Thus, understanding what incentivises students to pursue THE careers is important. THE researchers have documented both extrinsic and intrinsic factors that influence THE students' career decision-making (Amissah et al., 2020). One stream of research attests to the relative dominance of extrinsic factors. For example, Maxwell, Ogden and Broadbridge (2010) found that achieving upward promotion, receiving good pay and having job security were the most important career factors for undergraduate THE students. Another line of research indicates the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. For instance, Richardson (2009) found that "a job that I will find enjoyable", "pleasant working environment" and "a secure job" were the most important factors for THE students. What is concerning is that students do not necessarily believe that the industry will offer these desired extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Richardson (2010) reported that some THE students lack the belief that the industry can offer important career benefits including an enjoyable and secure

job, and a pleasant working environment. Dampened perceptions of the industry caused by the ongoing pandemic may increase such pessimistic evaluations of the industry.

Another point for education practitioners to note is their somewhat limited impact on advanced students' (students near degree completion) career decisions. Studies on who plays an influential role in THE students' career decisions have revealed that students tend to decrease their reliance on the university as they proceed toward graduation. In Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins' study (2010), seniors (vs. freshmen) reported that their career choices were less influenced by faculty members. Conversely, employers' influence in career decision-making increased for seniors, suggesting growing dependence on non-university sources over academic years. Similar findings were observed in Kim, McCleary and Kaufman (2010) wherein the authors asked THE students about the importance of eight information sources in career decision making. Teachers, class materials and career services, which were all university provided support, ranked fourth, fifth and sixth respectively out of the eight. Taken together, these findings suggest an urgent need for universities to gain students' confidence, particularly for those students in the earlier stages of their courses.

While there are views that the unavailability of internship programs and other work opportunities due to the pandemic could dampen pursuit of THE careers, previous research suggests that work experience may not always prompt the pursuit of THE careers. Some researchers have found that THE work experience decreases students' intention to pursue a THE career. For example, Richardson (2009) asked THE students about their career intentions and found that approximately half of the respondents with work experience stated that they were unlikely to work in the industry after graduation. Among them, almost all reported work experience, and the realities of work as the main reason for not pursuing a THE career. In contrast, other researchers have reported a positive effect of work experience on career intentions. For instance, 78.1% of THE students in Richardson and Thomas's survey (2012)

indicated that work experience positively influenced their desire to pursue a THE career. Though it remains somewhat unclear whether students' work experience enhances or dampens their interest in THE careers, work experience is advantageous in that it provides a realistic picture of the industry. Consistent with this notion, students tend to cite their own work experience as the most important source in career decisions (Kim et al., 2010). The importance of work experience in decision making is more pronounced among juniors and seniors (vs. freshmen and sophomores) who are closer to making consequential career decisions. Students may have heightened concern relating to their lack of practical training as a result of the pandemic (Byrnes et al., 2020; Franchi, 2020).

Having reviewed the literature on student confidence, curriculum and courses and THE careers, our paper turns to examine how each have been affected by the COVID pandemic in relation to its effects on THE education.

## **Methodology**

Here we adopt a case study approach, further informed in part by the lesson-drawing approach of Rose (1991; 1993).

The pandemic-related educational responses of four case study institutions formed the basis of the current analysis. The selection of these cases was pragmatic given the difficulties in collecting primary data during the pandemic. As such, the author's own institutions were used as the cases to ensure access to data. These cases include universities in Australia (Griffith University); Hong Kong (Hong Kong Polytechnic University [PolyU]); Malaysia (Universiti Putra Malaysia); and Scotland (University of Strathclyde), thereby reflective of a mix of geographies and developed and developing country contexts. Each case employed a mixture of data sources and data types to provide a complete picture of the phenomenon under study (Yin, 1996). These included the first-hand observations of the ten educators working at the respective

institutions, together with secondary sources including media reporting, government reports, institutional policies and academic articles on the emerging topic of COVID-19 and THE industry responses, with data collected from July-November 2020.

Intended to evaluate the successful adoption and transferability of individual public policies and/or projects or general best-practice (Nash, 2003), here we use two steps of Rose's (1991; 1993) lesson-drawing approach, namely, "scanning programs elsewhere" (1991, p. 19) to identify cases facing a similar problem, in this instance, the immediate response to the pandemic, and "compare models of foreign practice" (p. 20) to identify commonalities and differences between the cases upon which lessons can be drawn. Specifically, we used this approach to scan the macro (university and government and education sector response), meso (THE department/ program) and micro (individual learner/ student) environment of the four case study institutions. The approach has been found to useful in tourism research for establishing in what circumstances lessons can be transferred between different countries and/or regions (Nash, 2003). It also allows for comparisons across space, the proximity of which Rose (1991) suggests can be subjectively defined. For this study, space was confined to Australia, Scotland, Hong Kong and Malaysia, and the specific institutional cases.

Using template analysis (King, 2004), each case was prepared to an apriori template that reviewed the macro, meso and micro responses and student's observed reactions to COVID-related challenges across three dimensions of the student life cycle – pre-entry, during study and post-graduation. Colleagues working at each institution prepared their respective cases and these were then shared and discussed collectively amongst all researchers over three rounds of discussions held virtually using Microsoft Teams. Commonalities and differences amongst the cases were discerned allowing the researchers to extrapolate lessons from the experience of several different contexts, in this instance, the four case example jurisdictions. Our case examples do not necessarily adopt an identical approach to the presentation of

experiences in response to the pandemic and its impact on THE courses, curriculum and careers.

We see this as a strength rather than a limitation.

We now turn to discuss each case in turn.

## **Case examples**

### *Australia*

At the macro level in Australia affecting broader student confidence, international education pre-pandemic was Australia's third largest export industry, contributing \$37.6 billion to the Australian economy in the 2018/2019 financial year (van Onselen, 2019). Modelling suggests that depending on when Australian borders reopen to international students, universities could lose between \$10-\$19 billion from 2020 to 2023 (Carey, Hunter & Heffernan, 2020).

Additionally at the macro level, the Australian case study institution, Griffith University (GU), quickly pivoted to online delivery mid-way through the teaching trimester in late March 2020 in response to the pandemic. As of writing (December 2020), most teaching staff continue to work remotely from home, teaching at least partly from a distance using either MS Teams or Blackboard Collaborate. As is the case with other Australian universities and widely reported in the mainstream media, GU has flagged that there will be significant job losses, course rationalisations and a likely budget shortfall of between \$100-\$200 million in 2020 (Bourke, 2020).

The meso level focuses on academic staff working in Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management (THS). Prior to the pandemic, THS offered limited courses in online mode. From author observations, there has been substantial upskilling of staff over a very short timeframe in the development of online curriculum, the adoption of online teaching

platforms and appropriate pedagogies. This move has resulted in, a short-term reduction in research productivity and increased levels of stress among staff.

Turning to discuss pandemic inspired interventions across the student life cycle and the micro-level impact on student learning and confidence, in terms of the recruitment phase, GU moved quickly online. Rather than the annual on campus Open-Day, which is a popular tradition of physically visiting the campus, GU shifted to a series of virtual Open-House events. Operating between July and October 2020, prospective students were able attend live sessions and online chats with study area experts and industry representatives. There were also virtual tours of the campus(es) offered to simulate the all-important campus experience (Ahmed Kamil, 2020). The first-hand observations of the authors suggest that these THE sessions were not highly attended, with potential flow on effects for reduced student confidence in the disciplines and associated careers.

Focused on the during study phase of the student lifecycle, the limited adjustment time for adapting curriculum activities led to various issues from a student learning experience perspective. Firstly, student engagement in online classes became a concern. Lectures and workshops changed structure and delivery format, significantly increased in size, which drastically changed classroom dynamics. From author observations of the student experience, evidence is mixed as to student engagement in online modes. Their presence has increased relative to on campus delivery, however their engagement in online discussions has been curtailed, often to the role of passive participant.

Secondly, given the dramatic consequences of COVID-19, academics have been quick to include COVID related content with case studies, discussion of impacts and long-term consequential trends. While topical, there is a clear risk of COVID-19 fatigue if there is an overuse of related content in several classes.



Thirdly, a growing concern is the quality of assessment. Academic integrity has become an ever-important issue (Casey, Casey & Griffith, 2018; Holden, 2020), with the potential of affecting students' confidence in their institutions (Ghosh, Whipple, & Bryan, 2001). The reduced engagement from students, coupled with internal pressure to reduce the number of assessment items and limitations of a prescriptive marking allocation, open a myriad of possibilities for academic misconduct. There is a clear need for further adjustments towards more rigorous, authentic, yet still effective forms of student assessment.

Lastly, these changes have also impacted on student welfare. Students too saw their lives disrupted by the pandemic. This was particularly strenuous for international students who already are away from their support networks. While more convenient, online learning has led to a more isolated learning experience, without the whole campus experience. This isolation, added to broader COVID-19 related anxieties, has the potential to lead to increased mental health issues, which can be particularly challenging to identify in an online learning setting. GU provides a range of online resources and other forms of support particularly relating to self-care and studying effectively during the pandemic with a view to bolstering student confidence.

In terms of creating employability opportunities for students as a conduit for building their confidence, when there was initial evidence of COVID-19 community transmission in Australia and tourism businesses were beginning to be impacted, understandably industry partners were quick to suspend students' internships. Some organisations were able to transition to remote online internships, however, due to the face-to-face nature of many internships, the majority could not be continued. In trimester two (from July 2020), limited internships were able to be offered in person. Indeed, online/virtual internships have been a consequence of COVID-19 in Australia universities. In terms of promoting employability through industry engagement, maintaining contact with industry partners became

problematic as the pandemic crisis evolved, because, most organisations were concentrating on their own significant challenges. However, by the third quarter of 2020, when most parts of Australia are experiencing very low levels of community transmission, some industry engagement with tourism businesses has recommenced.

Post-degree, the employability of graduate students has also been heavily impacted. The graduate employment market was already competitive, but this situation has intensified and students graduating at the end of 2020 are pessimistic. The impacts of COVID-19 on the broader THE sector has been extensively reported in the Australian media. For example, Qantas Airlines, Australia's national carrier, announced job cuts of at least 6000 and a further 15,000 employees will likely be stood down (Khadem, Janda & Chalmers, 2020). This negative coverage highlights career impacts within the THE sector and has certainly affected graduate prospects. However, at the time of writing, Australia has reopened most of its domestic borders, increasing confidence with a shift to domestic tourism and an international travel bubble with New Zealand is imminent.

### *Hong Kong*

Turning to examine Hong Kong as the next case, at the macro level, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown signs of improvement as of Fall 2020 with new cases of infections declining. As a result, the Education Bureau (EDB) of Hong Kong decided that face-to-face classes for kindergarten, primary and secondary school should resume while putting in place the necessary anti-epidemic measures (Education Bureau, 2020). Meanwhile, the management of universities in Hong Kong can refer to the EDB's guidelines and, depending on the needs of different faculties and students, execute their discretion to determine teaching modes and associated arrangements.

Most residents in Hong Kong were generally satisfied with EDB's response to COVID-19 according to the results of a survey conducted in March 2020. It was noted by a lawmaker, Ip Kin-yuen that other policy areas (vs. education) faced more challenges as they were more obvious and closer to residents' daily lives (Cheung & Wong, 2020). Another survey was conducted in May 2020 with 1,227 students studying in higher education institutions in Hong Kong. The results revealed three key challenges faced by students learning online during the COVID-19 outbreak: 'lack of self-discipline', 'poor learning atmosphere' and 'eye fatigue due to long screen time.' Only 27% of respondents were satisfied with their online learning experiences (Lingnan University, 2020).

Also, at the macro level, examining the response of PolyU to the epidemic, it switched on-campus classes to online teaching at the end of January 2020. As the pandemic situation in Hong Kong continued to improve, PolyU decided to partially resume face-to-face teaching for selected classes of 50 students or less from early October 2020. These classes are conducted face-to-face on campus and simultaneously online so that students are not compelled to return to campus to attend classes.

PolyU has reinforced technical support and teaching resources for teaching staff since the implementation of online teaching. For example, an Online Teaching Website was launched and E-learning clinics and webinars were offered regularly. Teaching staff can find the University's guidelines, standards and training schedules for online teaching on this new website. Moreover, the PolyU Educational Development Centre provides a weekly Subject e-Engagement Report including statistics on students' online activity (e.g., the number of students who have logged into an online course).

Student feedback was collected to improve the quality of online teaching and learning. For example, PolyU has added four items specifically related to online teaching in

its teaching evaluation questionnaire (e.g., “There are adequate opportunities to interact with the teaching staff for this subject”).

The sudden change to online classes has imposed stress on students. To complement online academic studies, PolyU offered various online complementary studies, ranging from interest classes (e.g., guitar, language) to practical ones (e.g., digital audio using Audacity, digital retouching with Affinity Photo). Students may choose to attend any of these free courses to relieve their stress while enhancing their knowledge and skills.

Maintaining mental health is as important as physical health during the prolonged epidemic situation. To provide peer support to students in need, a caring leadership program was implemented at PolyU. Students attend activities and workshops designed to nurture their empathy and counselling skills and are trained to communicate with their peers more effectively. Moreover, PolyU Mental Wellness Clinic has expanded its communication channels to maximise its reach to students. In the past, the clinic services were provided by phone calls and face-to-face visits. During the COVID-19 pandemic, students can now seek help via MS Teams, FaceTime and Whatsapp.

Examining the phases of the student life cycle in greater detail, at pre-entry, despite the suspension of face-to-face school visits, PolyU held multiple online admission talks for high school students. One example was the Online PolyU Education Info Day, in which the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) ran a virtual exhibition booth and program information seminar. Distinct from previous years, besides introducing campus facilities, program features and career prospects, recent graduates were invited to share stories of their college life and study in the hopes of triggering high school students’ interest and motives to study with SHTM.

Moreover, the PolyU Global Engagement Office organised recruitment activities such as Online Admission Talks and Virtual Fairs. SHTM academics also contributed to an

Online Lecture Series. Specifically, Prof. Haiyan Song, Associate Dean and Chair Professor at SHTM gave a lecture on “Why people travel? The determinants of tourism demand.” To convince potential applicants of the resilience of the THE industry and the long-term advantages of studying at PolyU, SHTM has been transmitting the “Hospitality is a tool for success” message via social media.

In the study phase, physical hotel visits and workshops were suspended. To deepen students’ understanding of hotel operations, a hotel subject team coordinated with luxury hotels in Hong Kong to jointly organise virtual demonstration workshops for students to view hotel staff demonstrating operational tasks (e.g., bed making, room inspection). SHTM also arranged virtual tours of Hotel ICON, a teaching and research hotel owned by PolyU. Webinars were also offered for teaching purposes. Invited hotel and tourism practitioners described their job and current challenges and shared their views on the post-pandemic THE industry.

To show support for students during the crisis, SHTM staff contributed to the PolyU COVID-19 Student Support Fund set up to alleviate student hardship. Staff also had an option to designate their donation direct to SHTM students. Students have also received intangible support from their academic advisors. Teaching staff serving as academic advisors have utilised online platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams to engage and show care for students especially during difficult times.

In terms of embedding employability options during the pandemic, altogether 34 SHTM students’ internships were suspended earlier than scheduled due to the pandemic. SHTM communicated with students and companies concerned to make alternative arrangements. For example, some of the affected students were redirected to continue their internship at Hotel ICON.

In addition, to bridge the gap between academia and industry, thus creating an ‘impact’ in the THE community, the Impact 2020 conference themed ‘Crisis Management and Recovery Strategies’ was held in Hong Kong and online in October 2020. The conference was jointly organised by the SHTM, the Hospitality and Tourism Research Centre and STR, and run by SHTM students from the Special Events class. As a further initiative, the Hong Kong PolyU Winter School (HKWS), an annual executive development program aimed at for senior hospitality industry managers, in 2021 will run online as HKWS-X and will offer modules related to business recovery. The program is co-organised with the Hong Kong Hotels Association.

Invited industry guests joined online interviews for domestic applicants for the SHTM’s undergraduate programs in August 2020. Selected practitioners in the THE industry, along with the school’s faculty members, served as interviewers. Such collaboration helped the school identify applicants who were likely to meet the industry’s needs and it also strengthened industry ties.

In the post-degree phase, SHTM has been active in revamping its online job portal for students and employers. Organisations can create their own accounts and post job and internship opportunities, and students can view job details and apply for jobs using the portal.

### *Malaysia*

Tourism is vital to the economy of Malaysia. The Tourism Satellite Account (2018) estimated 3.4 million jobs are related to THE. A conservative estimate of 30 percent of jobs is at risk due to the pandemic, which may translate to approximately 1 million THE jobs affected (Ong, 2020).

At the macro level, the Malaysian case demonstrates substantial upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Prime Minister announced a nationwide restriction on 16 March 2020 to enforce the Movement Control Order (MCO). The enforcement of MCO led to the closure of all public and private institutions of higher learning nationwide, including skills training institutes. During the MCO phase, the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE) complied with the physical movement control requirements but allowed higher education institutions with the capacity and capability to conduct learning online, while considering students' digital accessibility (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2020). Additionally, at the macro level, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) decided not to proceed with MOHE's recommendation due to the students' digital limitations, especially those who had returned to their homes in the interior of Malaysia and who were more likely to experience internet connectivity issues.

At the meso level, Departmental staff during the initial MCO phase were required to respond to any form of work-related virtual communication, assess and evaluate students' thesis progress and continue their supervisory and academic roles. Lecturers had to prepare for online learning, including upskilling in virtual learning platforms by attending webinars and learning to use asynchronous and synchronous methods of teaching and learning. UPM instituted various digital approaches to provide recruitment support during the COVID-affected period (Centre of Academic Development UPM, 2020). This included digital counselling, the hosting of a digital Open Day, and the use of social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram) to disseminate information. UPM also used virtual interviews for selection, allowing students to be recruited digitally for the new semester.

For existing students, various approaches and virtual learning environments were adopted to mitigate the risk of interruption to teaching and learning activities. Platforms including Zoom, WebEx, and Google Classroom proved to be popular choices for

synchronous teaching and learning. For asynchronous mode, LMS (Learning Management System), YouTube, and WhatsApp were popular choices.

There was also a focus on enhancing student engagement beyond usual teaching pedagogies using platforms like Zoom to facilitate breakout rooms and screen sharing features for group discussion. To spark further interest using an andragogy approach, synchronous virtual activities continue to be conducted through third-party platforms such as Kahoot and Mentimeter. Labs and practical classes are offered using face-to-face interaction with required standard operating procedures in place and with no more than 20 students in class at one time.

For internships, some THE companies have facilitated virtual internships via live video conferencing sessions (webinars, professional skill development training), and others chose to develop industry-based projects. Students who were involved in these activities could learn about crisis management and the post-COVID-19 response plans of THE companies.

In terms of post-degree outcomes, THE graduating classes of 2020 will enter a sluggish job market, which may make them susceptible to underemployment or unemployment. Some of THE students chose to defer the semester to delay their entry to the job market and allow them to take advantage of face-to-face rather than virtual learning. Malaysian universities have not penalised students for making this choice. In recent months, more opportunities are available for those seeking jobs in event management (especially virtual events). Improved employability prospects for THE graduates currently looks bleak.

Some private higher education institutions have liaised with key industry players to boost student confidence. For example, the PATA (Pacific Asia Tourism Association) student chapter association is available for graduates to connect with. THE education plays an important role in sustainable tourism awareness. Student confidence is built through



increasing awareness of industry resilience. This has been encouraged by UPM through having industry partners relating stories of how past pandemics (SARS, EBOLA) affected the industry and how it can bounce back. It is important for industry partners and education providers to credibly disseminate this information to boost student confidence.

### *Scotland*

The THE sector is a major contributor to the Scottish economy, with over 15 million visitors and accounting for a spend of £10.5bn and employment of 207,000 persons in 2018 (VisitScotland, 2019). At the macro level, the extended lockdown from March 2020 resulted in the initial closure of all tourism and hospitality businesses for a period of up to four months and the cancellation of all events, including the world-leading Edinburgh International Festival and the Edinburgh Fringe. Industry employment, as a consequence, was decimated and continues to struggle in the face of stop-start regulation from the UK Government. The lockdown measures have also meant that all universities across Scotland immediately ceased all on-campus activities including face-to-face teaching. All national secondary school examinations were cancelled and new student entry was assessed on the basis of teacher assessments.

The Scottish case study institution, the University of Strathclyde (US), saw a sweeping move to online teaching. With only three weeks left of the academic term, it came at a crucial junction for many students, notably those about to embark on examinations and those about to finalise their final year dissertations. This proved immensely disruptive to both staff and students as no time remained to consider the pedagogical implications. As a result, from E-learning webinars to pedagogical workshops, the US offered a large variety

of training and support sessions. The library was quick to make necessary adjustments, including the purchasing of online textbooks and other resources to facilitate online examinations. The Organisational & Staff Development Unit within US made significant changes to their training program delivery, moving as much as possible to online Zoom training to make it as widely available as possible. Moreover, US has increased its provision of free online courses, MOOCs, and in partnership with The Skills Network, US designed a range of interactive distance learning courses. IT support, as well online safety and Cyber security courses, were also expanded.

With regards to early recruitment, US responded by holding virtual open days, in addition to targeted taster sessions and introduction lectures for strategic partners. Based on author observations, the nature of the sessions did not encourage any ‘real’ engagement or interaction other than via the chat window. In previous years, these sessions were held in a recruitment fair style fashion, which allowed for active and meaningful engagement between the teaching staff and prospective students. Nonetheless, while the international recruitment team saw a broad slow down not just for THE pathway but for all business subjects, domestic demand by all accounts had not suffered.

At the micro level, those involved in the delivery and design of the THE curriculum adjusted their ways of working in order to support student learning. First, a vital part of Strathclyde’s THE curriculum included site visits to hotels, conventions centres and museums. Several assessments across the undergraduate degree were designed as mock consultancy projects with real-life applications to employers. Lockdown saw several THE businesses closing temporarily with a large majority of their workforce entering furlough. This has led to an adapted curriculum that offers virtual tours and more theoretical centric teaching. A few external partners have sought to continue established partnerships in the new term, however with limited contribution. Moreover, a notable difference in the way material

is now delivered is by having introduced ‘discussion sessions’. At the end of each ‘learning block’ (usually 2 weeks), a panel discussion or debate is staged over Zoom including guest lectures, PhD students and other teaching staff. During these sessions, material is discussed in an organic, opinionated yet theoretically stimulating way, which led to a huge increase in student engagement compared to regular lecture discussions. It also provides an interesting platform to draw on class material within the context of COVID-19, without causing fatigue or letting it overshadow the core material.

Secondly, the COVID response facilitated a stronger engagement with the university’s careers services. The career services saw a strong increase in the use of their services and role in supporting fresh graduates into employment during lockdown. As a result, the career services have sought out pathways to consult on tailored contributions to their curricula. For example, industry specific CV building, finding work experience with a diverted focus on virtual internships, local as well as internationally. Moreover, supervised job application workshops, mock interviews, and a firmer accent on technology-driven forms of employment and recruitment training is now part of the THE pathway.

Third, while recruitment for the THE pathway in previous years relied heavily on a message of ‘international opportunities’ and ‘global’ employment, the revised strategy now centres around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and pushing the sustainability agenda within THE. Crisis management and resilience studies also saw a more prominent place within the curriculum.

Lastly, post-degree engagement and alumni community maintenance has significantly increased with a particular focus on current graduates. Specific LinkedIn groups have been set up to retain active channels of communication between staff and recent graduates and to trace careers and employment destinations. The scheme aims to facilitate

the transition of students into the labour market as well as encourage expanded involvement of the alumni network with the THE curriculum.

## **Analysis**

We have adopted an approach to our analysis of the four case examples in terms of the lessons extracted from two perspectives. The first or horizontal axis is temporal in the sense that response to issues of student confidence as a result of the crisis by universities and other stakeholders has been in terms of three phases – pre-entry, while in education and post-graduation into the workplace and their careers. The vertical axis relates to scale, from micro at the level of the individual, meso addressing actions at the level of individual programs and teams and, finally, macro pertaining to initiatives by institutions, whether universities, industry and/or government.

### ***Pre, during and after***

Overall, both student experience and institutions' modus operandi have been severely affected in the three phases of the educational journey. In the pre-entry phase, recruitment difficulties, of international students in particular, have been felt across all four institutions and countries. THE degrees often have significant international cohorts and the travel limitations imposed by governments have become an obstacle for students looking to pursue education overseas. The case universities have also established or expanded their virtual recruitment activities as well as digital communication strategies. Recruitment messages to potential students had to be adapted to be realistic yet still appealing in a COVID era.

At the onset of COVID-19, universities quickly moved most of their teaching online and suspended internships, or these were undertaken virtually. Physical industry visits were also moved online and, in order to facilitate some operational experience for students, PolyU

also arranged a hybrid conference in Crises Management and Recovery Strategies in late October 2020, which their event management students helped to organise. At some institutions the curriculum had to be modified, and both staff and students quickly started to adapt to the new online learning environment, although this was challenging for all initially. Given the abrupt changes, some institutions allowed for flexibility in the workload and study options of students. Such flexibility is fundamental, particularly in times of uncertainty in order to maintain students' confidence and motivation in their degrees.

An anticipated outcome from COVID-19 is that it will drive on-going change in course delivery. It is unlikely that the standard on-campus education delivery formats of the past will remain, post COVID. Universities will use this period to improve efficiencies and review their approaches to course delivery, where a form of hybrid (a mixture of both face-to-face and online) delivery methods are likely. During this transition it will be important to monitor students' engagement, perceptions and overall educational outcomes.

Consistency among the four represented destinations is that the immediate job market for graduates will be sluggish and, in an increasingly competitive environment, graduates will need to be better prepared than ever. Thus, it was recognised that the role of careers and employment services departments within universities will be critical in helping students to best prepare for recruitment and produce high quality graduate applications. In addition, graduates' networking will become paramount, because, when employers have a vacant position, they may be reluctant to openly advertise, due to the anticipated high number of applications they are likely to receive, and the associated time required to review. Hence, an important cohort for both students and universities with whom to network is their alumni. Alumni can be involved to also mentor students and graduates during these challenging times to offer career advice and optimism. It is suggested that student confidence is built through increasing awareness of THE industry resilience, and long-term alumni can offer this insight.

### *Micro, meso and macro*

Re-building confidence among the current cohort of THE students as well as those who have recently graduated and are seeking careers in a decimated workplace, requires a complex amalgam of responses that can be seen at all three levels, micro, meso and macro. Our case examples illustrate approaches at all levels but also highlight where possible gaps remain.

At a micro level, reverting to what was common practice in the past and the use of personalised communications and interviews for prospective entrants alongside engaging with their families is one strategy adopted by some schools in an effort to build interest and confidence among prospective entrants. Our cases illustrate this in action through online chat rooms and online interviews. This is time-consuming from a staff perspective and can be further reinforced through partnering with established industry professionals in the recruitment and selection process. Similarly, working with students on an individual basis in order to design their curriculum in a bespoke and personalised way, where bureaucratically possible, so that they have greater control over the direction it can take them can also be used to help maintain faith with a future career in THE. Finally, a similar, personalised approach to careers and further education advice will be important in order to support students who may feel left high and dry by a jobs market that has been frozen in time by the pandemic.

Meso-level initiatives by teams responsible for THE programs included re-building partnership arrangements with feeder high schools and colleges and revisiting articulation agreements with technical and vocational schools to credit prior learning in new, flexible ways. A radical overhaul of curricula content, approaches to teaching delivery, learning support and assessment methods in light of local but also international requirements has placed significant burdens on program teams. But, at the same time, this has also provided an opportunity to engage students in aspects of co-creation across all these dimensions in previously atypical

ways. Likewise, exploring new relationships with industry partners, while acknowledging the pressures they face in battles for business survival, has enabled the conceptualisation of virtual internships, remote research and consultancy projects and widespread engagement of industry in online course delivery. This can help to reframe programs in ways that are likely to be more suited to new industry realities going forward. Such new-found relationships can also extend into exploring new career opportunities for students as the THE industry re-emerges from its current tribulations (e.g., greater focus on digital competencies).

Finally, macro considerations are located in wider university, industry and government contexts where policy and practice can impact on university entrance in terms of access and program choice. Issues with public examinations at high school level in Scotland in 2020, for example, have resulted in inflated numbers entering universities across all disciplines, including THE, posing academic as well as organisational challenges but also creating opportunities to retain and develop this larger talent pool for a future in the industry. Government, of course, has a major role in determining how the industry is perceived in the current pandemic and ‘stop-start’ messages about THE in many countries are undoubtedly contributing to low levels of student and stakeholder confidence at the present time. In response, industry messaging about its undoubted challenges hardly presents images to young people of a workplace with a positive and sustainable future.

**Table 1: Summary of university responses**

	<b>Pre-</b>	<b>During</b>	<b>Post</b>
<b>Macro</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cancellation of national secondary school examinations and use of teacher assessment resulted in need to accommodate increased number of students at short notice for online delivery (Scotland).</li> <li>- Closure of all public and private institutions of higher learning nationwide, including</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Management of the Universities able to execute their discretion to determine their teaching mode and associated arrangements (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- Three key online learning challenges faced by students: ‘lack of self-discipline’, ‘poor learning atmosphere’ and ‘eye fatigue due to long screen time’ (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- Allowed higher education institutions with the capacity and capability to conduct learning online,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most domestic borders have re-opened and an international travel bubble with nearby countries is imminent, thus, improving graduate employability prospects (Australia).</li> </ul>

	<p>skills training institutes (Malaysia).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prospective student confidence in the THE sectors was concerning, and combined with border closures continues to impact international student recruitment (Australia).</li> </ul>	<p>while considering students' digital accessibility (Malaysia).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quickly pivoted to online course delivery, many staff working from home, course rationalisations and some job losses resulted (Australia).</li> </ul>	
<b>- Meso</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recruitment activities such as Online Admission talks and Virtual Fairs organised by University Global Engagement Office (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- Student recruitment fairs moved online (Australia &amp; Scotland).</li> <li>- Digital counselling, the hosting of a digital Open Day, and the use of social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram) to disseminate information (Malaysia)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- University reinforced technical support and teaching resources for teaching staff by creating an Online Teaching Website and regularly offering E-learning clinics and webinars (Hong Kong and Australia).</li> <li>- University Education Development Centre provides a weekly Subject e-Engagement report including statistics on students' online activity (Hong Kong).</li> <li>-Online student feedback questionnaire to evaluate online teaching (Hong Kong).</li> <li>-Supporting students' well-being by offering online interest classes or practical classes to complement online academic studies (Hong Kong).</li> <li>-Launching a caring leadership program to train empathy, caring and communications of students to their peers (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- Student welfare became an increasing concern. University Mental Wellness clinics expanded their communication channels to maximise reach to students (Hong Kong and Australia).</li> <li>- Timing in the academic year necessitated a rapid response to initial lockdown through a wide variety of online methods (Scotland).</li> <li>- Library purchase of wide array of additional e-books and MOOCS to support student online learning (Scotland).</li> <li>- Staff Development Unit launched range of faculty support short courses in online teaching and resource development as well as areas such online safety and security (Australia &amp; Scotland).</li> <li>-learning to use asynchronous and synchronous methods of teaching and learning (Malaysia).</li> <li>- Online class size increased, class dynamics changed, and students' engagement declined (Australia).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extended careers support for recent graduates in order to better position them for a changing job market (Scotland).</li> <li>- Some THE companies have facilitated virtual internships via live video conferencing sessions (webinars, professional skill development training), and others chose to develop industry-based projects (Malaysia)</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Many classes addressed COVID-19's impact, while topical, the risk of COVID-19 fatigue was noted.</li> <li>- Due to online assessment, academic integrity issues needed closer attention (Australia).</li> <li>- Employment opportunities reduced, and internships were suspended or quickly moved online (Australia).</li> <li>- Industry engagement suffered; many THE organisations focused on their core business (Australia).</li> </ul>	
<b>Micro</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement online lecture series contributed by SHTM academics (Hong Kong)</li> <li>- Invite industry guest to collaborate with SHTM colleagues to e-interview undergraduate program applicants (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- Lecturers had to prepare for online learning, including upskilling in virtual learning platforms (Malaysia)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School participated in the university promotion to provide an online lecture (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- Hospitality subject team coordinated with luxury hotels in Hong Kong to deliver virtual demonstration workshops for students to view the operational tasks (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- Teaching hotel, Hotel ICON arranged virtual hotel tours and webinars for teaching purpose (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- School re-arranged affected student internships to relocate in Hotel ICON (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- Tangible support such as financial donation from staff to students. Academic advisors provide intangible support to students by online career and emotion counselling (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- An industry conference, IMPACT 2020 organised to share crisis management and recovery strategies with industry practitioners (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- An annual Executive Development Program, Hong Kong Winter School was conducted online running a series of modules related to business recovery (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- Adaptation of industry familiarisation and engagement sessions to online, involving contributions from a wider range of organisations and locations (Scotland).</li> <li>- Increase in time allocated for careers support and education for final year students with subject-specific emphasis (Scotland).</li> <li>- Curriculum adaptation to increased focus on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and crisis management and resilience (Scotland).</li> <li>- Pedagogies using platforms like Zoom to facilitate breakout rooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online job portal revamped to post jobs and internship opportunities (Hong Kong).</li> <li>- Enhanced post-degree engagement with recent graduates and the wider alumni community to provide mutual support and advice via social media conduits (Scotland).</li> <li>- Student confidence was built through increasing awareness of industry resilience (Malaysia and Australia).</li> <li>- Graduate employability was negatively impacted, however, is showing some signs of recovery (Australia).</li> </ul>

## **Conclusions**

Based on a comparative analysis of the four country and institutional cases, we have identified that our key learnings during the pandemic can be classified into four categories.

### ***Create engaging online learning experiences***

Universities in all four countries moved rapidly to cease face-to-face teaching and learning approaches during the pandemic period. Instead, a blended approach of both face-to-face as well as virtual learning was incorporated in the teaching and learning approach as well as the curriculum. Online technical or teaching support resources were arranged or strengthened in the four country cases to help staff and students to transition. In the case of Hong Kong, its student feedback questionnaire was revised to include questions about online learning experiences. This timely evaluation of teaching effectiveness will no doubt suggest further improvements to the online learning experience.

As evidenced by Scotland, universities can offer students varied online courses by designing them on their own or with other distance learning providers. However, as indicated by Australia, the possibilities for academic dishonesty due to the reduced level of student scrutiny needs caution from universities and educators.

### ***Raise the competence levels of educators***

Creating and delivering engaging online learning experiences requires specific competencies of academic staff. As illustrated in all four cases, this was done by raising the e-learning knowledge, including the upskilling of staff in a limited time frame to adopt online

teaching platforms with appropriate pedagogies, at the same time to raise awareness of staff and students' health and well-being in respect of the consequences of this revised teaching and learning approach.

Furthermore, as highlighted by Hong Kong and Scotland, there is an evolving need to increase awareness of sustainability agendas and resilience and crisis management within the THE curriculum. This was also done by partnering with the industry where case studies of previous crisis management (SARS, EBOLA) saw a dip in activity but an eventual resilient THE industry.

The four countries also adopted virtual internships to respond to the suspension by industry partners. These initiatives were driven by the need to better equip students and strengthen their competencies and professionalism during this critical period, while teaching staff contributed their efforts towards liaising with industry partners in virtual mode. In the case of PolyU, students were provided with a series of additional complementary courses to enhance their technical and digital skills.

### ***Increase support levels***

Across all countries, teaching and learning related stress has been witnessed, in part, as a result of a lack of institutional and infrastructure support. For instance, in Malaysia, a lack of infrastructure support resulted in stressful conditions for academics and learners, particularly as e-learning platforms were not suitable for students learning from a significant physical and virtual distance (e.g., in remote areas of Malaysia).

In the case of Hong Kong and Scotland, universities took a rounded approach to provide physical and mental wellness services to students to relieve their stress and anxiety. PolyU initiated and reinforced its mental wellness service from the direction of peer-to-peer, staff-to-student and specialist-to-student in order to offer effective emotional support to students.

In Australia, academics have been reacting to revise the course content to include COVID related content with case studies, assignments and discussion. The abundant information and emphasis of COVID-19 pandemic in almost all courses could lead to COVID-19 fatigue for students. Moreover, reduced engagement from students might affect their learning outcomes, more importantly, using online platforms for distance students can open up opportunities for them to abuse the learning process in the form of academic misconduct.

It was observed that online recruitment events were not particularly successful due to a lack of engagement. As indicated in Scotland and Australia, online open days were marked by poor attendance and limited interactions. Consideration needs to be given to blended approaches in the future for these events.

### ***Create a new reality***

Blended learning pedagogies will increasingly need to mix both face-to-face and e-learning and be agile enough to be interchangeable when the situation eases. An agile system that enables students to meet teaching and learning outcomes in different states of pandemic response is required. For instance, during low peak allowing face-to-face teaching and learning to commence and this is seamlessly interchangeable to e-learning at high peaks during the pandemic.

Alternative assessments will also be needed that do not involve physical presence on campus, i.e., an examination centre. This also applies to internship and industrial THE related attachments. For instance, Hong Kong has created a virtual platform to virtually demonstrate operational jobs in hotels.

Recent experience demonstrates that THE educators benefit from working closely with industry to incorporate best practices into THE pedagogy and to instil confidence among students and other stakeholders. Different learning experiences can also be created for learners

during e-learning classes. This can be done through enhancing student experiences beyond pedagogy alone by incorporating breakout sessions and by creating interest by incorporating engagement tools into the teaching and learning sessions such as Mentimeter and Kahoot.

### ***Implications, Research Limitations and Research Agenda for the Future***

The implications of this snap shot study of how 4 universities responded and adapted to the onset of the global pandemic highlight rapid adaptability at macro but particularly meso (university) and micro (subject area) levels in a way that academic process has not always reflected in the past. As a consequence, the need for curriculum, delivery and external stakeholder engagement agility going forward, post-pandemic, will represent a major change in an institutional and subject sense. Building courses and career paths for what is likely to be a very different industry must be a priority but also revising internal process and procedures while maintaining academic standards to enable rapid and flexible responses. Technology enablement is clearly part of this strategy but, at the same time, it will be important not to lose sight of the people-facing nature of the THE sector and the need to prepare students for this real world. The THE industry, once it is back on the road to recovery, will need to be engaged in both their own new realities and that of their educational partners, students and educators. Bringing industry back aboard new models of THE education in a co-creating role, across both curriculum and delivery, will be vital for the credibility of programmes and the career prospects of graduates. Perhaps equally important is the need to likewise move to greater co-creation of curricula and delivery methods with current and former students.

Universities offering THE programs faced the consequences of the global pandemic 'blind', having to respond to uncertainty and a lack of any form of equivalent precedent. Responses on the ground to all facets of student learning, support and advice were very rapid, varied and, in some cases, speculative. However, what is especially impressive is the 'can do'

actions taken in all four case examples. Universities largely laid aside traditional bureaucratic, governance and academic quality impediments to change in order to adapt to innovative approaches, notably through the use of technology, in order to ensure that THE students were not disadvantaged in terms of educational outcomes. Some of the steps taken will not be repeated as systems, support and collective learning guides the direction of THE education in the future. Rapid acceleration of moves to technology-framed educational delivery in THE has seen faculty respond in this ‘can do’ manner across all 4 institutions, adapting existing and adopting new skills in a remarkable way. This has significantly changed the role of the educator and tutor and tested traditional pedagogic capabilities to the full. It is unlikely that these changes will be wholly reversed and new models of higher education teacher will emerge from the ravages of the pandemic. What these look like in THE only future research can ascertain.

Up to the onset of the pandemic, THE curricula and the manner in which it was delivered was largely predicated upon a strongly optimistic reading of the sector’s future and its sustained growth potential (see for example, World Tourism Barometer, Statistical Annex, January 2020b). It is clear that such optimism needs to be tempered in a pandemic and, probably, a post-pandemic context, by a rather soberer re-assessment of the industry’s vulnerabilities. This will require major curriculum revision and, potentially, the use of alternative teaching materials.

Addressing both the limitations of our study as well as future research needs and a suitable agenda to accommodate these, we are conscious that the present study only draws upon the perspective of educators who are directly involved with the design, delivery and management of THE programmes in four institutions. Future studies should seek to include a wider cross-section of international universities as the value of lesson drawing is enhanced by breadth of coverage. Further, the study, does not draw directly on data from our student communities (a critical cohort of stakeholders) or the THE industry itself. We recognise this as a notable limitation of our study.

Our paper is, therefore limited by its design as a snap shot in time of four institutions and jurisdictions and their responses to the impact of COVID-19. We acknowledge that the current research gives little consideration to temporal changes in what has been a very fluid environment. Future research could include a longitudinal analysis to examine how students' confidence in the field of THE evolves over a longer period of pandemic. We also invite future researchers to compare the effectiveness of different measures in enhancing students' confidence during turbulent times. In other words, it would be meaningful to test what changes in courses, curricula and pedagogy are particularly effective during and in response to a crisis. While this research focused on four countries, future research can include more countries in the analysis. This study was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic. It could be replicated when the pandemic is largely over to identify to what extent the universities in the four countries have adapted to the 'new normal' of THE education and the resilience of student confidence in THE has rebounded.

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