

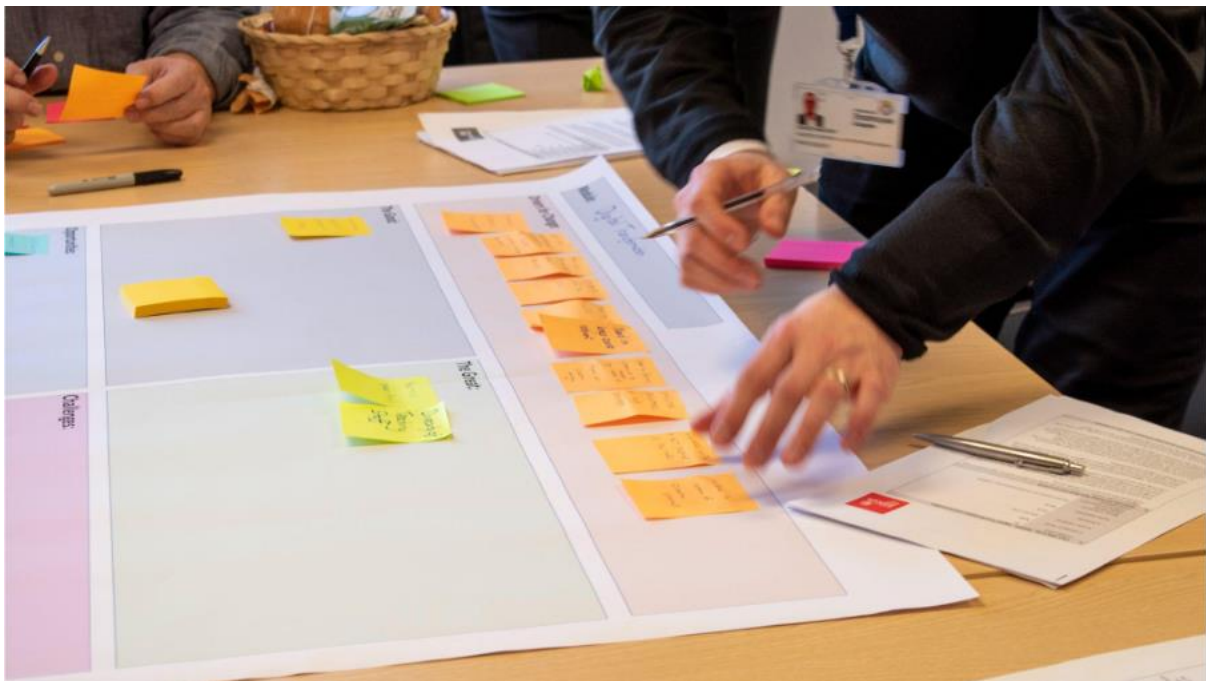
## Story 27: Come on feel the noise

**Sean Morrissey**

[sean.morrissey@strath.ac.uk](mailto:sean.morrissey@strath.ac.uk)

**Bio:** I am an Academic Developer at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. My scholarship and practice interests centre around the enhancement of learning and teaching within a few particular areas of focus. These include inclusive approaches to curriculum design, peer support networks, student and staff well-being, critical pedagogy and anti-racist curricula

### Come on feel the noise



**Image:** A group of university lecturers writing and placing colourful notes on a very large poster

Suddenly and all at once, the room burst into life. A few minutes ago, you could have heard a pin drop. Now Kerry and I could scarcely hear ourselves think! My earliest experiences of education reinforced the rather unhelpful idea that a good student is a quiet student. These days, I am an academic developer in higher education. So, a noisy classroom is everything to me.

The participants were arranged in groups around four large tables. Each table had become an organised mess of A1 posters, colourful Post-it notes, coffee cups and Sharpie pens. Some participants stood while others sat. Some wrote while others talked. But everyone was leaning in, as if each table had a magnet quality that drew the bodies in the room inwards towards a point of focus. Kerry was beaming as she turned to me and exclaimed, 'can you just feel the energy in this room? Gosh, I love our jobs!'

Later that day, the Principal of the university, who had been observing the workshops, pulled Kerry and me aside. "You know", she said, "I have been thinking about the future of universities. Today's students have access to the sum of all human knowledge at their fingertips. Some of them can even earn a degree without leaving their bedrooms. So, what is the future of our university? How does the campus add value? It's complicated. But workshops like this, where our staff can actually experience active learning as they design learning opportunities for their students, they really must be part of the answer".

In a pandemic-disrupted world, everyone involved in teaching and learning in higher education has had to navigate a number of existential challenges. An overwhelming concern, initially, was how to ensure continuity of teaching and assessment activities against the backdrop of so-called "lockdowns", campus closures and restrictions on travel. Questions then emerged around the student experience, issues around engagement and inclusion and how to adopt new digital technologies while maintaining professional standards. Solutions were found to challenges such as managing placements, conducting virtual laboratories and facilitating collaborative learning activities online.

Now that a 'new normal' is here, and campus-based learning has resumed, colleagues at our institution – and our academic partners around the world – are facing up to a new set of challenges. How to retain the best of over two years of digital innovation, while once more leveraging the opportunities of in-person learning?

If the past few years were all about pivoting online, this year I have (re)discovered the value of live, in-person, problem-based activities both for students, but also for our staff involved in our academic development programmes. As well as encouraging participants prepare for and extend through digital modalities at home, we strive to reflect this by offering interactive, peer-learning opportunities throughout our CPD and formal credit-bearing modules. The future of higher education is uncertain. But, for now, we're taking every opportunity to make our classrooms noisy places once more!