Experiences in Digital Learning Webinar

AI as a learning support

The Centre for Online and Distance Education has run four webinars in the academic year 2023-24 in a series under the banner 'Experiences in Digital Learning'. The final webinar in that series was held on July 4th and covered the exceptionally 'hot' topic of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education. Although it was the first CODE webinar to focus on AI, it was by no means the first CODE event to do so: one recent example was the Supporting Student Success workshop in May, which had made a feature of the use of AI in assessment.

This webinar was chaired by CODE Fellow Martin Compton, who leads on AI and innovation in education at Kings College London. The two speakers, Kerith George-Briant from Abertay University in Dundee, Scotland and Laura Brammar, Associate Director of the University of London Careers Service, discussed contrasting but complementary aspects of AI – particularly generative AI – as tools for learning support. This was clearly a popular topic, as the number of people on the call remained over three figures throughout most of the session.

Kerith, who was the first to speak, discussed how generative AI can be used as and with assistive technology. Then, Laura explained how it has been integrated into careers work and employability education for University of London students based around the world.

Kerith began by introducing some of her 'drivers' as an explanation of why she believes she is qualified to discuss generative AI and learning support. She believes that higher education can help create 'independent, productive and participatory citizens' and advocates making the 'hidden curriculum' – that is, that part of a curriculum that is not explicit, but based on norms and expectations – visible. She works as a learner development advisor where she advocates for the use of assistive technology for all students, not just those with additional needs, and has been an early adopter of generative AI 4.716.elg l22d5rks

The University of Abertay has produced one guide to the use of generative AI for all students. This specifically rules out prohibiting its use but asks students to consider whether their planned use is 'reasonable' or whether it might be interpreted as giving them an unfair advantage over others.

Planned new guidance will also ask students to acknowledge and describe their use of the technology so that their lecturers can give them appropriate feedback. This will apply equally to students with assistive technology support plans, but these students will be given 'digital stickers' explaining that their support plans allow for extra use. She will also be holding focus groups for staff and students and writing a student guide to enhancing writing with genAI.

In concluding, Kerith stressed that she and her colleagues 'didn't have all the answers'.

students in resource poor situations. Just as with automation in earlier decades, some countries are ahead of the game in developing and using AI, and we should all be aware of the need to close the gap.

So, what is the University of London Careers Service offering its worldwide body of students to help them make the most of AI in their careers? Laura listed three things:

- Supporting students in the smart use of AI tools during job searching, helping them to keep up with developments

- Offering them career-specific AI tools such as CareerSet, which helps with developing CVs, cover letters and LinkedIn profiles that match their career ambitions

- Using genAI to enrich the generic, cross disciplinary and inter-cultural training activities that are offered to all students.

Under the third heading, this training encourages students to look at themselves and their career options through three different 'lenses': an academic or disciplinary lens, a cultural or lived experience lens, and a career stage lens. Under London University's Career Stage Framework, their students are divided into career starters; career developers, who are seeking promotion or new opportunities, and career changers, who are likely to be further on in one profession but would like to move sideways. Online and distance learners are more likely than face to face students at conventional universities to fit into the two latter categories.

The Careers Service offers students a wide variety (r)-0.8 (sr)-0.8 (sr)-.7 (ude)0.8 (n)-5.1 (t)1.7 (s)-li disa (r(y)