

Learning Together Reflection

March 2020

Introduction

1. Following the tragic events at Fishmongers' Hall on 29 November 2019, the University temporarily paused Learning Together courses and events involving its students and staff. The pause was intended to allow time for the recovery of those affected by what took place at London Bridge, and to enable a process of reflection on the future development of Learning Together's work.
2. To support this reflection, the Vice-Chancellor, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee for Benefactions and External and Legal Affairs, convened a group of individuals, internal and external to the University, to gather information and views about the Learning Together programme, and to bring forward recommendations on:
 - i. the safety and well-being of students and staff from the University who participate in the programme, both during and after such participation, including in connection with any subsequent involvement in the wider Learning Together network;
 - ii. the contribution of the programme to the mission of the University and specifically to the Institute of Criminology;
 - iii. the future organisation of the Learning Together Programme, including its legal structure and contractual arrangements, its connection to the University and how it employs its staff.

A copy of the Reflection Group's terms of reference and details of its membership are included at [Annex i](#).

3. The Reflection Group received a detailed set of briefing documents prepared by the law firm Kingsley Napley. In addition, the Group invited contributions from the Learning Together team, the Institute of Criminology, Her Majesty's Prison & Probation Service [HMPPS], and certain other individuals with relevant expertise. These contributions were made in person or via teleconference at a series of meetings and deliberations held from 3-5 March 2020, and a further set of contributions were received by correspondence. Details are given at [Annex ii](#).

Summary of findings

Development of Learning Together

4. The Reflection Group received a great deal of evidence about the positive impact of Learning Together's educational initiatives, for both participants under criminal justice supervision and those who are not. In particular, Learning Together programmes are highly valued by HMPPS for the innovative way that offenders are encouraged to interact

as peers with positive, socially engaged ('prosocial') role models, thereby helping to encourage desistance from crime.

5. In the five years since the first partnership was established between the University of Cambridge and HMP Grendon, Learning Together has experienced considerable growth in the volume and reach of its activities, bringing in multiple partners in the UK and, increasingly, overseas. Until recently, a significant amount of this work was performed by the Directors on a voluntary basis.
6. The scale and rapidity of this expansion had led the Learning Together Directors to begin a strategic review, supported by funding from HMPPS. The Reflection Group was informed that plans were being developed to establish a formal network as a coordinating organisation for the various local partnerships delivering Learning Together courses, e.g. to develop consistent policies, to support the sharing of best practice, and to organise community events for Learning Together alumni. This work was in nascent form when the current pause and reflection process were initiated; hence, questions about the funding and legal structure of the network, and its ongoing relationship to the University of Cambridge, remain to be resolved.

Safety and well-being

7. The reflection process was not focused on the events of 29 November. However, several contributors stressed their view that such an attack could not reasonably have been foreseen. Given this shift in the risk terrain, the Reflection Group sought to gather information about protocols in certain areas of concern now understood to have the potential for risk, and to make recommendations for strengthening these.
8. The Reflection Group was informed that the last audit by the University's Safety Office of risk management processes in the Institute of Criminology appears to have been in 2007 (i.e. prior to the establishment of Learning Together).
9. It was demonstrated that the Institute has well-developed, and nationally audited, protocols for managing risks which may arise through research in prisons and with offenders. Learning Together courses, which principally take the form of teaching interventions in a prison setting, do not align straightforwardly with these research protocols. Some uncertainty was also expressed about governance arrangements in cases where staff and students from outside the Institute of Criminology contribute to Learning Together activities.
10. A draft toolkit of policies, principles, and practices (in development for the wider Learning Together Network under the HMPPS grant) was reviewed, and there is an opportunity for these to be further strengthened. For example, the Reflection Group proposes that there should be:
 - i. more explicit arrangements on co-operation and co-ordination between the University and HMPPS, and how the Learning Together programme benefits from the expertise of the latter on risk management;
 - ii. introduction of regular audit and continuous, dynamic improvement of the toolkit;

- iii. implementation of a procedure for anonymous reporting of concerns, near-misses, or incidents, including an appropriate arms-length process for responding to these;
 - iv. a detailed needs evaluation for welfare support, and explicit systems to ensure the overall well-being of students and staff involved in the programme;
 - v. stronger governance for oversight of risk, safety, and well-being.
11. Importantly, the Reflection Group believes that careful consideration should be given to risk assessment for Learning Together community (sometimes referred to as ‘alumni’) events, which take place outside the prison estate and may include prisoners on temporary release or under licence. Specific protocols need to be developed to address this area of concern.

Contribution to mission

12. The Reflection Group heard that Learning Together has evolved considerably over its five years. It is clear that, at the outset, there was a strong criminological element to the programme’s activities, e.g. taking students from the Institute into prisons to learn criminology together with offenders. This was reported to be of considerable benefit to the Institute and its students.
13. Learning Together may now have a less direct relationship with the Institute. Examples to support this view include the fact that, in recent years, both participating students and the courses offered have been drawn from across the collegiate University; and the development, noted above, of a wider Learning Together Network spanning multiple partnerships in the UK and abroad, with the possibility that this could be managed through a spinout Community Interest Company. The Reflection Group received a number of different opinions on whether Learning Together had, in fact, outgrown its original home in the Institute.
14. In parallel, Learning Together’s contribution to the research mission of the Institute was not consistently understood. The Reflection Group concluded that, in order to enhance Learning Together’s research platform, it will be important to build collaborations with researchers who have a degree of personal and philosophical distance from the programmes, perhaps including quantitative researchers who can help to evidence longitudinal outcomes.

Future organisation

15. The Reflection Group invited opinions on where, in the future, the important work of Learning Together would best be hosted within the University, including the question as to what role the University may want to have in the emergent Learning Together Network. There was no consensus on these issues amongst the contributors.
16. The Reflection Group suggests that Learning Together’s local activities (i.e. the courses delivered in partnership with HMP Grendon, HMP Whitemoor, and HMP Warren Hill) and the development work for the network are a difficult fit for the risk assessment and oversight procedures in one of the University’s academic departments.

Recommendations

17. The Reflection Group makes the following two recommendations and suggests that these be put into effect as soon as practicable.
18. First, a process is needed in order to enable the pause on activities to be lifted whilst assuring the University that its students and staff are safe. Thus, the Reflection Group recommends convening an advisory body comprising an independent auditor and an academic, ideally external to the University, with appropriate expertise of work in prisons or with offenders in the community. Before activities recommence, this body would be asked to:
 - i. advise on the further development of Learning Together's safeguarding and risk assessment processes as suggested above, and sign these off;
 - ii. undertake an audit of all of the Institute's work with offenders.
19. Second, the Reflection Group recommends that the Learning Together team should be supported at this crucial period of transition by the installation of an interim Chief Executive with significant management experience and nuanced understanding of the risks of working in prisons and with offenders. This post would:
 - i. oversee day-to-day operational matters, including line-management of the Directors, risk assessment, and welfare support;
 - ii. guide and mentor the Directors in shaping their ideas for the future and their own roles;
 - iii. help, over the medium term, to steer the strategic development of the Learning Together Network, working with the various stakeholders to identify the proper legal structure and a sustainable relationship with the University.

The Group recommends that the role be fixed for one year. The post-holder should report to the Head of the School of the Humanities & Social Sciences, who should take responsibility for the design of the role and the appointments process, with appropriate consultation from the Learning Together Directors at an earlier stage.

Signed

David Greenaway
Phil Allmendinger
Shaun Lundy
Phil Wheatley
Susan Robertson
Richard Fentiman

Annex i. to the Report: Membership and Terms of Reference of the Refection Group

Context

In light of the events at Fishmongers' Hall on Friday 29 November, the University is pausing some Learning Together courses and events for a short while to give those connected with the programme time to recover and reflect. This will affect courses, events or other meetings organised by the University of Cambridge Learning Together [LT] Programme which bring together University staff, students, former students and visitors with those in prison or under criminal justice supervision.

The intention is to resume the full programme as soon as possible but ensuring sufficient time is taken for reflection, and for staff and students to be able to process the dreadful events of that day.

The LT team will be supported in this period of reflection by a group of informed individuals internal and external to the University who will take views from a range of people associated with the wider programme. The conclusions of this group are intended to support the LT Programme's continued work as it takes forward its vital initiative.

Terms of Reference

The group will make recommendations through the Committee for Benefactions and External and Legal Affairs to the Council and the General Board about the future of the LT Programme insofar as it involves the University's staff, students and visitors. In particular, it will consider and make recommendations on:

- i. the safety and well-being of students and staff from the University who participate in the programme, both during and after such participation, including in connection with any subsequent involvement in the wider LT network;
- ii. the contribution of the programme to the mission of the University and specifically to the Institute of Criminology; and
- iii. the future organisation of the LT Programme, including its legal structure and contractual arrangements, its connection to the University and how it employs its staff.

The group may also wish to make other recommendations or observations relating to the future of the LT Programme.

Membership

1. Professor Sir David Greenaway, external member of the Council and chair of the Audit Committee, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nottingham (chair)
2. Professor Phil Allmendinger, Head of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS)

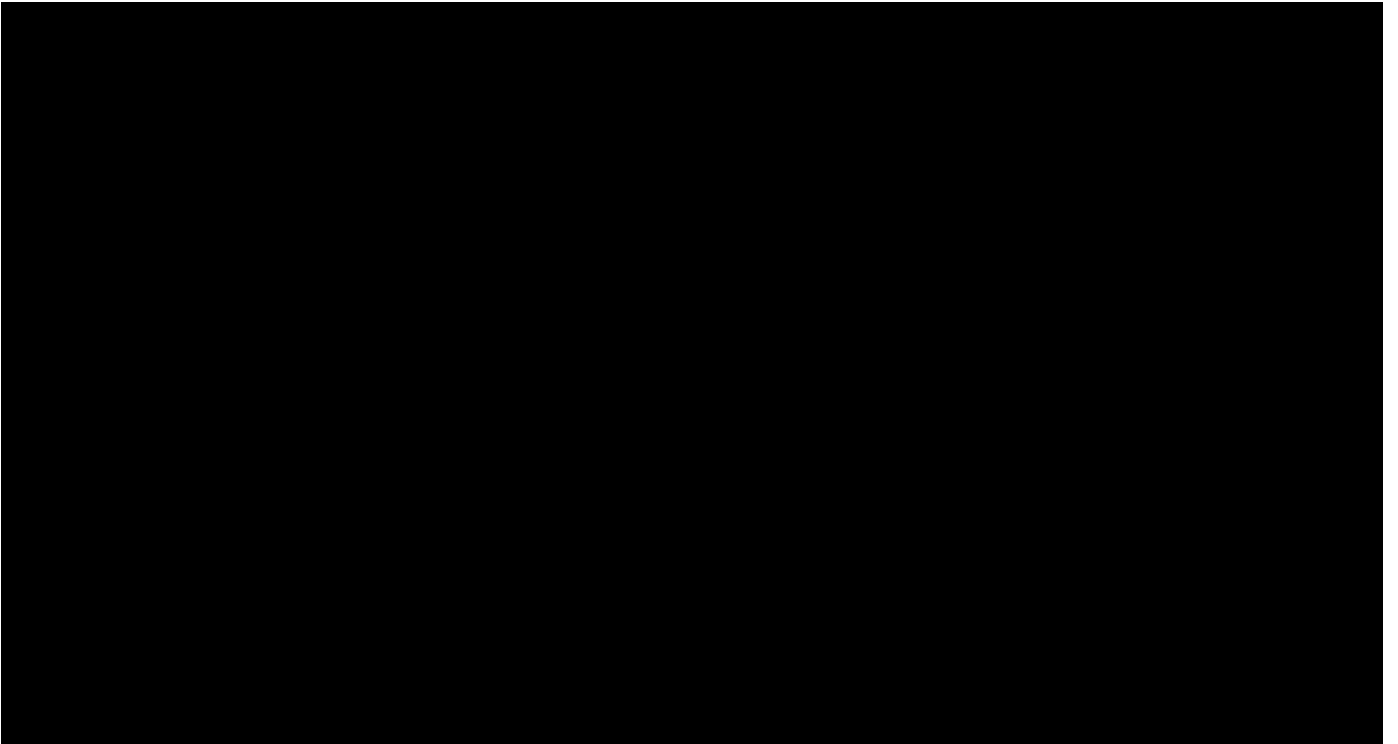
3. Dr Shaun Lundy, Director at Tetra Consulting Ltd; Chair of the Occupational Safety and Health Consultants Register (OSHCR); and Visiting Scholar at the University of Greenwich
4. Phil Wheatley, formerly the Director-General of the National Offender Management Service and before that, Director-General of HM Prison Service; current member of the Management Committee of the Institute of Criminology
5. Professor Susan Robertson, Chair of the Faculty of Education
6. Professor Richard Fentiman, Faculty of Law.

The group will have access to internal and external advisors as it considers appropriate, including from the University's Legal Services, Communications and External Affairs Office, and Health, Safety and Regulated Facilities Division.

The group will seek information and evidence from anyone within and outside the Collegiate University as it considers necessary to assist it in determining its recommendations. This includes those Colleges of the University whose students are or have been participants in the LT Programme.

The group will be provided with appropriate secretariat support.

Annex ii. to the Report: Contributors to the reflection



Corresponding contributors

