



## **Starting from scratch: creating a new learning development provision**

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### ***Presentation abstract***

BPP University provides degree and professional qualifications across our Schools of Business, Law, Nursing and Technology, predominantly at postgraduate level, but with a growing undergraduate portfolio. We are also the second largest provider of apprenticeships within the UK and have an international reach, with provision as far afield as Canada and Australia. There are eight locations in the UK, with four in London alone, and we have over 35,000 students globally, 16,000 of whom are international students from over 100 different countries. The institution does not currently have a dedicated learning development team. In early 2025 a group of librarians and learning and teaching specialists came together to create an online academic and study skills resource to support students with their academic skills needs. The project has a strong focus on co-creation with students. We aim to create resources to enhance the student academic skills experience, with a focus on accessibility and ensuring that students' needs are met through collaboration with them. In this practitioner mini keynote, we outlined the project approach and outcomes so far and invited our delegates to discuss the following prompts:

1. How have you enhanced the accessibility of resources at your institution?
2. Do you co-create with students and work with them to understand their needs?
3. Have you sought to understand the impact and value of the academic skills resources within your institution? And if so, how?'

**Keywords:** asynchronous; accessible; student co-creation; resource; language; inclusive.

## ***Community response***

The greatest gift of a conference is when a presentation ostensibly about resource development and co-creation with students becomes, unexpectedly, something much deeper and richer. Co-creation, accessibility and the impact of digital resources are in themselves valuable topics of conversations, and delegates greatly enjoyed learning about this cross-departmental project to develop digital resources to support students, finding the ASSK! Roadmap a really clear process for the different stages involved. However, the emergence of threshold concepts as a topic in the session provided a vibrant and striking context to inform that conversation; the emphasis on the bigger picture of what learning development support should be striving towards was met with very favourably.

Threshold concepts, introduced by Meyer and Land in 2005, posit that some learning outcomes are transformational in that, to achieve them, the students must come to see some aspect of their subject – some ‘troublesome knowledge’ – in a new way. Designing and co-creating learning resources with students confronts this troublesome knowledge and in doing so reveals where those threshold concepts lie. The question presents itself, then, as to what those threshold concepts are in learning development, and is it only by co-creating with students that we can truly give an answer to that question?

One delegate shared that they will be revisiting their self-selecting workshop offer for students this summer to address changes since the rise of GenAI and so on, and recognised that they were in the fortunate position of not starting from scratch. Nevertheless, even where resources already exist, the idea of being guided by core threshold concepts really struck this delegate, and it will be something they incorporate into their design approach.

And how might someone get started with this? The presenters provided a mantra to carry forward into resource development: be relevant, accessible, and interesting!

### **Next steps and additional questions**

What are the threshold concepts for Learning Development, and are there multiple ways to approach them?

## ***Authors' reflection***

We are intrigued by the community response that takes 'threshold concepts' in a direction that was not intended. Having said that, Meyer and Land's theory is still an interesting hook on which to hang our already-discussed decisions on priorities for resource content and staging. In fact, the 'threshold concepts' we talked about in this project were something we distilled from our work with students in order to create a basic framework for the resources we are designing. In this way, we can ensure every item in the resource meets these baseline requirements in order to be effective for learner development. Coincidentally, it seems threshold concepts as outlined by Meyer and Land (2005), although with a very different meaning, may also be applicable to our project in as much as student voice has informed us as to what threshold concepts should be prioritised for resource creation.

We floated our current thinking, that our asynchronous LD resources must meet the following threshold concepts:

- Be prioritised by common assessment feedback comments.
- Meet needs of tight student time-constraints.
- Have accessible/multiple entry points/doorways, including sign-posted based on feedback comments AND student language.
- Use minimal meta-language (unless required by the skill).
- Use 'student language' to talk about skills and concepts.
- Be consistent in approach, format and structure.
- Offer accessible examples that do not obscure the skill (i.e., short passages in plain English on everyday concepts).

Main themes that came out of our mini keynote sessions:

- Diversity of content format.
- Structure.
- Branding.
- Collecting authentic common feedback comments.
- Interpreting feedback.

- Collaborating with teaching colleagues to ensure consistency of feedback interpretation.
- Embedding resource in assessment experience.
- Accessibility of content.
- Using relatable topics.
- Exemplars.
- Diversity of student language.
- Inclusivity.
- Affirmation for multi-doorway approach.
- Bite-sized/ chunking approach.
- Removal of time-consuming barriers.
- Promotion of resource.
- Focus on the learners.

Next steps: we have noted lots of ways in which this feedback will impact the process and product of our project. However, in terms of chronology, the first five actions we plan to take are:

- Survey teaching and marking colleagues to collect/gather common feedback phrases.
- Investigate functionality of Articulate Rise in the light of various suggestions on structure, diversity of resource, branding, etc.
- Start to produce skills-based material on relatable topics.
- Get more feedback from students on what we are proposing so far.
- Extract design principles from UDL.

We were pleased to find that a substantial number of the responses coincided with factors already taken into consideration in the details of our planning. We were equally glad to receive responses that gave us food for thought and further investigation. Ideas for research possibilities are buzzing around our heads! The post-it and coloured pen approach seemed to spark creativity and innovation!

We have collated the email addresses of those who left their details with us to show interest in our project; we will endeavour to reach out and connect with those colleagues as we move forwards in our journey, and welcome any further advice, anecdotes or ideas

you may wish to share. We are very grateful to have benefitted from both the experience – and dreams – of expert LD colleagues.

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## ***References***

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