The Ukraine Narrative - A perspective on continued professional development.

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Abstract

The recent conflict in Ukraine has disrupted higher education, making continued professional development (CPD) a challenge due to displacement of educators, internet disruption, and limited access to resources. In response, the University of Salford Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre collaborated with colleagues at the State University of Trade and Economics (Kiev, Ukraine) to share experience, practice and resources.

Together, we developed a comprehensive guide with a complete set of learning resources supporting reflection and development of pedagogic practice in learning design, teaching, assessment, feedback, vocational and technical education, and learning technologies. This resource was unveiled at an online launch event in September 2023 to 38 staff at our partner institution. A year later, we have begun to assess the impact of this resource. Interviews, meetings, and surveys have revealed how these resources were adapted to local needs and priorities to influence the student experience and facilitated self-reflection and professional development despite the challenging circumstances.

This paper highlighted the impact of this global partnership through the inspiring professional development stories which have emerged. It demonstrates the resilience of academic communities in adversity, the power of shared knowledge and

how these resources have supported necessary changes in practice amidst post-pandemic and conflict disruption.

Keywords: International partnership, continuing professional development, educational technology, global citizenship.

Introduction, Context and Partnership

The armed conflict in Ukraine has had a profound impact on higher education and the academic community, presenting significant challenges including displacement of educators, internet disruption and limited access to resources. The war forced many educators to relocate, disrupting their professional and personal lives. According to Nikolaiev et al. (2023), 131 professional pre-higher and higher education institutions moved to other regions, displacing 91,000 students and over 11,000 teachers. This displacement has created a fragmented academic community, making it difficult to maintain continuity in teaching and research. Reliable internet access is crucial for modern education, especially during times of conflict when remote learning becomes a necessity. However, the war has caused significant internet disruption, making it challenging for educators to conduct classes, access resources, conduct research and communicate with students. These disruptions have hindered the ability of Ukrainian HEIs to function effectively. The conflict has strained the availability of financial, human, and material resources. Many institutions face deteriorating conditions, with limited access to essential teaching materials and technological tools. This scarcity has made it difficult for educators to deliver quality education and for students to engage fully in their learning.

During 2022 the University of Salford's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre (LTEC) formed an alliance with The State University for Trade and Economics (SUTE), Kyiv, Ukraine to support the enhancement of academic practice. The partnership aimed to offer continuing professional development to SUTE academic colleagues. Here, CPD is defined as learning experiences which help an individual develop and improve their professional practice (CIPD, 2024). Within the context of this partnership, a significant dimension of CPD is academic development. This is defined as a specific process within the wider concept of CPD, but where the focus is specifically enhancement of academic professionalism (Evans, 2024). By providing

CPD and academic development to SUTE colleagues. LTEC focused on helping them to adapt post-pandemic approaches to teaching, learning, assessment, and feedback, and to stay updated with recent technological innovations in the education sector. The partnership aimed to share learning and teaching practices and to support academic development more broadly. Despite being 1700 miles apart, through the alliance between LTEC and SUTE, the two universities were able to develop and share approaches to teaching, assessment and technology adoption for learning. This support was crucial for staff developing their practice during a time of significant disruption.

Founded in 1946, the State University of Trade and Economics (SUTE) in Kyiv, Ukraine is a large university with campuses across nine locations and a community of approximately 45'000 students and 500 academic employees (UniRank, 2024). Initial discussion between LTEC and SUTE highlighted many similarities between SUTE and the University of Salford which would reinforce our alliance. SUTE offers a diverse range of subjects with many aligning with those delivered by University of Salford, including finance, development studies, international trade, international economics, and investment banking. Underpinning this delivery is a shared ethos of industry collaboration and a focus on enriching lives. Also key to our alliance, as is discussed in this paper, is SUTEs provision of a wide range of programs taught in English. This spans 5 undergraduate and 13 post-graduate programmes including PhD study, demonstrating SUTEs commitment providing students with high-quality education in a global language, emphasising the important of global citizenship. Both university's commitment to academic excellence and international collaboration is evident in our comprehensive curriculum and the opportunities it offers for professional and academic growth.

To evaluate our partnership and activities impact, a four-phase research approach was adopted. Phase one involved initial relationship building with our partner institution to establish the scope of the resource. Phase two involved the design and development process. Initially pre-developed LTEC academic practice material was selected and socialised into the Ukraine context in terms of language and tone. Phase three launched the resource virtually to academics in business, law, finance and economics, and tourism. These programmes were selected specifically because the programmes are taught in English. The final stage was to gather insights from a

semi-structured questionnaire and interview with SUTE colleagues directly involved in the alliance.

This paper documents our collective learning and reflections from the varying perspectives of the research team, university leaders and academics who engaged with the resource. We provide an overview of partnership formation, resource development, and our approach to capturing impact. We present evaluation of the activities during this partnership, reflections on resources, aligned professional development, and the impact on staff wellbeing during a particularly challenging period. The analysis highlights impact, value and learning between two academic communities.

Defining and Designing an Appropriate Resource

In June 2022, around 5 months after the Russian invasion into Ukraine, the University of Salford international office approached LTEC to assist one of our academic partners (SUTE) with academic development enhancements aimed at supporting displaced colleagues continuing professional development. Alongside this, several areas across the University also entered into separate projects working specifically with individual SUTE colleagues and departments. It was identified that there was an urgent requirement to offer continuing professional development to SUTE academic colleagues supporting them to develop post-pandemic approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and feedback and to enable them to keep abreast in a time of much technological innovation in the education sector. The requirement was both for LTEC to offer insight into University of Salford approaches to teaching, developed during and post the COVID 19 pandemic, and to do so in an accessible format appropriate to the colleagues working under circumstances and restrictions of conflict and post pandemic times.

The initial discussions between LTEC and SUTE identified numerous areas of practice where development resources would benefit SUTE colleagues. Interests highlighted by SUTE included applying emergent technologies like generative artificial intelligence and implementing effective online learning methods established during the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, there was a keen interest in UKHEI's common pedagogical approaches, specifically those integrating equity, inclusion and

diversity into teaching and learning practice. These areas are ones for which LTEC, and the University of Salford, had extensive resources already developed for their staff. The intention was to provide a synthesised resource suitable for SUTE colleagues. Three key requirements were identified in the consideration of this resource: access (in an environment with potentially unstable internet), content (suitable and applicable to the international context), and tone (suitable language free from complexities of English context).

To ensure SUTE colleagues could access the resource without logging into a University of Salford platform, a secure but private format was required. The resource also had to be accessible offline. Considerations informing this were dissemination, access, portability, and stability. Various delivery platforms such as Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, Anthology Blackboard, and WordPress were considered but presented barriers regarding access. The most efficient solution proved to be PDF (portable document format). This format was simple, dependable, self-contained, and easily shared as a package. It enabled text-based but visually appealing presentations supplemented by additional web links to publicly hosted resources. This enabled LTEC to provide a core resource, rich in guidance that could be emailed, shared on a portable drive, or printed, with the option to access further recommended resources when circumstances allowed.

Our next consideration was which specific content should be included in the resource. A balance between not providing enough content to be useful, and overwhelming colleagues with information had to be found. It was also essential to review language and tone as many resources were developed in a University of Salford context and as such had specific references to internal policy and practice. It was decided that providing LTECs high level guidance across multiple areas of practice, with prompts for further exploration and reflection, would provide a useful level of information on why we adopt particular practices without overloading the reader with information on how to adopt that practice. To structure the resource in a clear and navigable format a common structure was given to sections addressing distinct areas of practice. Sections address teaching and learning, curriculum design, assessment and feedback, educational technology, and higher technical skills. Each section shared the University of Salford approach, principles, and delivery style, which were common across the institution; guided and endorsed by LTEC.

The final key consideration was the tone and narrative style taken in the content of the resource. While the resource presented University of Salford approaches and pedagogic principles, it was important materials were presented as offering a suggestion of what works at the University of Salford, rather than attempting to dictate good practice. LTEC colleagues were acutely aware that principles and practices being shared were formed in a very different cultural context, political climate and external environment. The resources were presented in a format and tone intended to support SUTE colleagues to critique and reflect on their own practice through the lens of University of Salford practice. A section offering explanation of common models of reflection used in UKHEIs was provided, and each subsequent section addressed specific areas of practice through reflective questioning aligned to the Salford principles and practice shared.

The final resource was launched in September 2023 during a Microsoft Teams meeting with 38 colleagues at SUTE. The resource was presented in English with explanation of the structure and content, as well as the intended use and key considerations made when developing the resource. We also highlighted that this was a new venture, and the intention was to work with our SUTE partners to gather feedback on the resource to allow us to evaluate its efficacy, value, sustainability and impact.

Evaluation Methodology

In order to evaluate the efficacy and suitability of the developed resource provided to SUTE colleagues, a qualitative analysis methodology was adopted to gather comprehensive feedback and insights. Prior to commencing, full ethical approval was granted through the University of Salford. A structured online survey was designed and shared with all participants who attended the resource launch workshop in September 2023. The survey aimed to capture a broad array of feedback, focusing on the usability, relevance, and impact of the resources. Participants were asked a series of general, open-ended questions, designed to be non-invasive and allow for responses framed within the experience of the participant (Creswell, 2008). As well as information regarding their disciplinary background and tenure in academia, participants were asked to respond to the following questions.

- What did you learn from the session, please share three highlights in terms of your development?
- What can be commended from the resources you accessed?
- In your opinion what can be developed further?
- How do you plan to take your learning forward from this session, and in what time frame?
- Will you be revisiting the resource if available in the future?
- Please tell us about any further training or development that would be useful.

Due to the focus of the survey being on those in attendance at the launch workshop, a strategy of purposive sampling was adopted (Robinson, 2014). Out of the 38 workshop attendees, 12 responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 29%. The survey responses were systematically analysed to identify common themes and areas for enhancement.

In addition to the survey, further data was collected through interviews with SUTE colleagues, specifically the international lead, and the specialist lead for the department of grant projects. While the response rate to the survey alone provided partial insight into the experience of the group, the emergent themes identified underpinned the subsequent interviews, The interviews, one hour in duration and conducted in December 2023, provided a deep dive into the adoption of the resource by SUTE colleagues in order to gather detailed feedback and personal reflections on the resource. In addition to themes addressed in the survey, the interview explored the broader narrative of the experience of SUTE academics and their engagement with academic and professional development. Questions elicited responses regarding differences between provision for staff development prior to and during the conflict in the country, observable impact of the resource, and plans within SUTE for future development of staff development resources.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and, following the method of thematic analysis, coded to identify, interpret and summarise key themes and insights in the data collected (Clarke and Braun, 2017). This approach offered theoretic freedom and flexibility to 'examine the perspectives of different research participants,

highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights' (Nowell et al., 2017). The survey data and interview transcripts were combined to enable evaluation of the resource. The survey provided a broad overview of participant feedback, while the interviews offered nuanced insights and personal reflections. This approach ensured that the evaluation captured a wide range of perspectives and provided a detailed understanding of the resource's effectiveness.

Findings: The Impact Post Launch

Analysis of data collected illuminated four distinct themes relating to how SUTE colleagues utilised and valued the resource, and how they would like to see it develop. Four key themes were drawn from the analysis:

- digital learning relevant to current practice,
- how the resource supported continuous learning and development,
- where the resource highlighted commonalities in language used to describe pedagogic practice across both partners,
- and how the resource supported SUTE academics to feel connected to and supported by global partners.

Each of these four themes is discussed in more detail below.

Digital Learning

The most pronounced theme in both survey data and interview data related to the value of staff development and guidance concerning digital learning and educational technologies. While participants shared the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent conflicts significantly reshaped SUTE teaching and learning, it was acknowledged significant technological advances in communications platforms over the prior decade were key enablers to this reshaping. Participants commented that staff development opportunities and guidance prior to the LTEC resource was often unstructured and did not have a clear focus or meaning for academics. Respondents to the survey shared how the resource not only provided useful information but provided a structured path and clear focus which they could relate to their development and subject area. One respondent shared a highlight of their

development being their ability to envisage further development in current technologies aligning with their professional activity.

> "I see further development in the field of using artificial intelligence in professional activities […], as well as mastering the experience of an interactive and varied format of conducting classes with students, taking into account the challenges of today."
>
> Survey Respondent

Respondents also shared that the shift to remote learning not only highlighted the importance of developing their own digital capability, but also their knowledge of suitable methods for remote and online learning. This was highlighted as a key area for further development of the resource by one respondent.

> "There is a need to develop learning methods that have advantages in online learning compared to traditional approaches."
>
> Survey Respondent

While principles and guidance on the adoption of hybrid learning approaches and educational technology were prominent within the resource developed, this highlighted a gap in support specific to the teaching circumstances SUTE colleagues found themselves.

Where respondents did recognise guidance on delivery of online learning suited to their circumstances was in the design of the resource itself, and how it modelled good practice. The use of a PDF resource was highlighted in the interview as addressing several challenges to teaching experienced by SUTE colleagues, offering a stable and accessible format that did not rely heavily on specific digital platforms, mitigating some of their connectivity concerns.

Continuous Learning

The theme of support for, and benefits of, continuous collaborative learning was also evident in the data collected. Participants shared how continuous learning was perceived as key to the resilience of SUTE staff during the pandemic and conflict.

Collaborative experiences such as discussion of activities presented in the LTEC resource were shared by SUTE colleagues during the interview as crucial in boosting colleagues' morale and supporting ongoing professional development. Interviewees shared their ability and that of their colleagues to adapt, utilising the resources and tools shared in the LTEC resource to maintain their professional development progress. They shared how the resource has highlighted limitations SUTE colleagues experienced, but also presented an opportunity for improvement.

> "[The resource] improved their capabilities, improved their capacities to lead better lectures and seminars."
>
> Survey Respondent

The sentiment of the LTEC resource informing areas for improvement as well as supporting development of practice in these areas was also shared in response to the survey. Responding to questions about planning for future learning, one respondent highlighted "the possibilities, by self-learning" which the resources presented to them. More specifically, responses suggested SUTE colleagues were keen to explore new areas or interest relating to educational technology, authentic assessment, higher technical skills, and curriculum design as defined in the LTEC resource. They also provided useful insight into how they would utilise the resource and would like to see this develop. Feedback suggested more specific guidance around key topics on artificial intelligence use in professional and academic practice would be welcomed. Encouragingly, in response to the questions 'will you be revisiting the resource if available in the future?', respondents stated "yes, of course" and "I am interested in revisiting the resource if available in the future".

Learning Language

While feedback for the LTEC resource illuminated some areas of difference from the University of Salford in relation to practice adopted by SUTE academics, what was clear from data collected was learning experiences were universally shared among participants. Both Salford and SUTE staff exhibited notable similarities in the focus and range of topics that garnered interest, highlighting a shared commitment to common practices and innovative approaches. Interviewees highlighted their recognition of inclusion, accessibility, openness and student support in their everyday practice. This was also evident in survey responses which highlighted

commitment to development of practice focused on clear and inclusive communication, authenticity, and student-centredness.

> "I use Assessment for learning (AFL) in my work with students. I create assignments in such a way that they are as close as possible to real-life situations that our graduates may face during their careers."
>
> <div align="right">Survey Respondent</div>

They also highlighted the critical role of reflection in enhancing the learning experience. A strong emphasis on reflection to develop pedagogic values around fostering a supportive and inclusive learning and teaching community. Common practices, innovation and guided reflection aligned activity at both institutions, and were viewed as key to the positioning of the LTEC resource in the practice of SUTE colleagues. This was highlighted specifically in survey responses. One respondent highlighted the "reflective questions, that stimulate [one] to think" should be particularly commended in the resource.

Global Citizenship

While the above themes highlight aspects of the LTEC resource with immediate benefit to SUTE colleagues, it was also suggested that the development and content from Salford provided support and motivation which were beneficial beyond immediate staff development opportunities. The LTEC resource presented an opportunity to facilitate development of cross-cultural pedagogic development predominately unavailable to SUTE in the current climate and context in Ukraine.

> 'Western people they […] use […] every international opportunity more freely and it's like […] on a daily basis for them. For our academic staff it's kind of a new page'.
>
> <div align="right">Interview Respondent</div>

Interviewees highlighted how sharing understanding of the UKHE learning and teaching landscape by LTEC not only provided an alternative lens on shared practice, but emphasised SUTE colleagues position as global citizens. While the

conflict posed significant challenges to academic practice for SUTE colleagues, the opportunity to explore innovative approaches to learning delivery, provided an alternative perspective and necessitated creativity. This was something which survey respondents highlighted as activity which could be further developed through the partnership. In response to how the support from LTEC could be further developed, one SUTE colleagues shared:

> "To be involved as lecturers (representatives of other countries) at lecture meetings with students."

Survey Respondent

This motivation to have a more global outlook, despite many restricting factors faced by SUTE colleagues, was triggered by the LTEC alliance with SUTE, but extended beyond this with colleagues sharing their desire via the survey to '[participate] in international internships and international conferences'.

The Salford Narrative – Reflections and Discussion

While the circumstances faced by SUTE colleagues are extreme, the themes emerging from the evaluation of the LTEC resource are both common and applicable to other international partnerships, as well as to LTEC itself. Technical issues and barriers, understanding of language, motivation for continuous development and a drive for international collaboration provide useful insight into the sharing of resources and practice between international higher education partners. Looking ahead to development of the alliance between LTEC and SUTE, and widening LTECs international reach and network, there is much we can reflect on and develop from our partnership with SUTE to date. Building on the analysis in this enquiry, the following discussion and reflection highlights both possible future directions and next phases for the alliance between LTEC and SUTE, and areas of learning for LTEC as we look to connect with, support, share with and learn from new international partners.

Landscapes of Technology

Transformation of educational technology in global higher education has proved a common area of interest which bridges international partners practice. In recent years this transformation has been driven by a necessity to maintain continuity during unprecedented disruptions such as the recent global conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic (Zhou et al., 2023). While not all partners share the same drivers for transformation, or where those drivers shared have the same intensity, what has been illuminated in this analysis is the shared interest in increasingly common digital technologies and their application.

Prior to the pandemic, educational technology was predominantly adopted to 'enhance' traditional classroom settings, offering flexibility and access to information (Kirschner, 2015). The technologies adopted and their application was often varied, fragmentary and defined by local norms. As evidenced by our exploration of experiences of institutions like SUTE, and the similarities to our own practice this raised, these technologies have become more consistently and strategically adopted post-pandemic (Del Pino Espinoza et al., 2022) This has arguably resulted in practice and tools which can be more readily shared between international partners. The LTEC resource, for instance, has not only exposed SUTE colleagues to readily available tools they can adopt, but has also encouraged their use through innovative pedagogies clearly aligned to those technologies.

One of the impacts of this technological shift is the illumination of commonality in practice between academic staff at our institutions. Through the adoption of digital tools, and the principles and pedagogies underpinning their use, colleagues can share practice and cross-cultural learning. This is reflected in the sentiments of SUTE colleagues who have discovered new perspectives and methodologies through the UKHE learning and teaching landscape shared by LTEC.
However, with the increased reliance on educational technology comes a need for careful consideration. While these tools enhance common goals across this partnership including accessibility, inclusivity, and efficiency, they also present challenges which are common but nuanced to the partner. Common issues such as connectivity, access to resource, data privacy, and adoption of appropriate methodology are present in this enquiry but with very different causes and effects. For LTEC, guidance around these issues has emerged from our pandemic experience and post-pandemic practice. For SUTE colleagues, it is the restrictions

resulting from the disruption caused by armed conflict. It is important that in future iterations of the LTEC resource that the increasing range of common practice and educational technology is balanced with acknowledgement of the varying contexts international partners find themselves in, and that it does not obscure the very real effects of these.

Collaboration on Continuing Professional Development

Similar to the drivers for adoption of educational technology, this enquiry has also highlighted increasing commonality in the focus of continuing professional development by colleagues in both partner institutions. While, again, these drivers are located in vastly different contexts, there is overlap in the interests and motives driving this for both SUTE and LTEC colleagues. From this, there is an opportunity for both partners to share and collaborate on CPD so as to gain cross-cultural insights on the topic of development, enriching the development opportunity for all. A specific example from the enquiry is the integration of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) in education and the possibilities for both pedagogical approaches and professional practice this presents. GAI and the desire, based on existing guidance in the LTEC resource, to consider the possibilities, risks, and disadvantages of using artificial intelligence in education were prevalent in the data collected. This was aligned by SUTE colleagues with a clear interest in UKHE adoption, and advice from the UK sector on reducing negative factors and leveraging advantages.

SUTE colleagues recognised GAI platforms have the potential to, for example, analyse student data, tailor their teaching to individual student's needs, and to perform administrative tasks, freeing up valuable time. Beyond the guidance provided by LTEC, it became apparent that the partnership could act as a conduit of collaboration and best practice sharing among academics from both partners. The effective use of AI in education has been highlighted as a key area for this development.

Through our ongoing partnership, it is possible not just for LTEC to share its support, but for both institutions to facilitate forums, workshops, and conferences where our academics can learn from each other's experiences and innovations. This

collaborative approach can drive the development of, returning to the above GAI example, inclusive and culturally sensitive GAI application in education. Continuous learning opportunities, supported by technology, were shared by SUTE as not only boosting morale but also promoting reflective practice and common values by encouraging staff to consider their own cultural biases and strive for inclusivity. This is, for LTEC, a sharing and collaboration which is recognised as also being beneficial to University of Salford academic colleagues as well.

Advancement of Academic Practice

The LTEC resource has played a pivotal role in advancing academic practice among SUTE colleagues during this project, fostering a dynamic approach to advancing academic practice which encourages continuous improvement and innovation in education. One significant way LTEC supports the advancement of academic practice, but which has not formed part of this partnership, is through its comprehensive professional development programs. These initiatives equip University of Salford academics with the skills and knowledge needed to integrate new technologies and innovative teaching methods into their curriculum effectively. Such exposure not only improves their technical proficiency but also inspires a more creative and adaptive approach to teaching, which is essential in the UKHE sector. The success of our partnership with SUTE has laid the groundwork for future collaborations. We are keen to explore new projects that further integrate international best practices into our curriculum and expand our global network, ensuring that our students are well-prepared to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. We are eager to continue building on this partnership, exploring new avenues for collaboration, including the integration of AI in education. Our focus remains on continuous improvement, with a strong commitment to advancing the quality of education and fostering an environment that promotes lifelong learning by colleagues in both partner institutions. This collaboration has given LTEC an opportunity to work towards our international presence. By initiating and participating in future in joint research projects, we will strengthen our ties with the global academic community. This will not only elevate our institution's profile but has also provided our team with valuable international exposure.

Cultural Inclusivity

A final key area LTEC have developed as a team during this project relates to how we develop cultural inclusivity. By facilitating opportunities for international partnership and practice exchange, as we have done with SUTE, LTEC immerses itself in different cultural environments, broadening our perspectives on worldwide educational systems and practices. The stories highlighted, experiences shared, and practice developed, focused on the resource we have developed, play a key role in LTECs ability to maintain and build a global reaching and representative network and community. This aligns with our drive to promote cultural inclusivity through staff development opportunities for University of Salford colleagues that expose them to diverse viewpoints and practices, enriching their professional development. Engaging in international partnerships has been shared as enabling SUTE colleagues to interact with global counterparts, encouraging the exchange of innovative ideas and inclusive teaching practice. However, this is also impactful on LTEC as a team. These experiences compel us to reflect on our own cultural biases and strategies to be a more supportive and inclusive team in the opportunities we offer. Additionally, these international engagements drive our continuous professional development and deepen our understanding of cultural inclusivity. The knowledge and skills gained from such experiences are critical in transforming pedagogical approaches, ensuring that LTEC remains a leader in the University of Salford, and UKHE sectors, educational innovation while embracing diversity and inclusivity. This collaboration has also expanded our global outlook, providing our team with opportunities to engage in cross-cultural dialogues and international learning experiences. The exchange of ideas and educational practices has enabled us to begin to align our activity with global standards. The partnership has opened up opportunities for our staff to engage in meaningful cross-cultural dialogues. Through our activities and engaging development opportunities, these interactions will be passed on to enhance our academic community, broadening perspectives and promoting a deeper understanding of global issues.

The Ukraine Narrative – Reflections and Discussion

It was acknowledged by the international lead at The State University of Trade and Economics that academics have faced significant disruptions post-covid, due to the

ongoing war. Some of the challenges identified were: the displacement of educators, limited access to resources and blackouts and infrastructure damage. Despite these challenges SUTE remains committed to fostering academic excellence and providing opportunities for professional enhancement in learning and teaching. It was acknowledged that even under martial law and amidst frequent interruptions, SUTE has maintained its commitment to academic excellence. They acknowledged that their staff have shown remarkable determination, finding innovative ways to deliver lectures, conduct research, and support students in this difficult environment.

It was acknowledged that Internationalization has proved to become a cornerstone of SUTE's resilience. Leadership viewed the partnership with the University of Salford positively, commenting that it had provided a crucial lifeline, helping them navigate the complex landscape of higher education during tumultuous times. The exchange of resources, knowledge and best practices has enabled us to overcome some of the immediate challenges and set a foundation for long-term sustainability and growth within academic programs. Furthermore, it was felt that the collaboration had not only provided practical support but also boosted the morale of faculty staff and students. They felt that being part of an international academic community, reinforced their belief in the importance of education as a tool for societal recovery and development, even in the face of adversity.

Some of the challenges identified compounded post COVID-19 recovery with the ongoing armed conflict in the region (Law of Ukraine, 2023b, 2023a, 2024). It was noted that SUTE valued academic enhancement and professional growth as fundamental in the face of these challenges and saw them as a mechanism for reducing "brain drain". And that SUTE remains focused on providing high-quality education, guided by the dedication and resilience of its faculty and students. Collaboration with the University of Salford as well as strengthening international partnerships proved to be one of the pillars in the university's ability to meet these challenges. Sharing knowledge, practices, resources and being a part of a wider international educational community through this partnership has provided SUTE with the instruments to address current challenges while setting a course for future sustainability. The cooperation has become a mainstay for the SUTE. It provided not only practical support but also opportunities for professional growth and global interaction.

The Contribution of International Collaboration

From the work undertaken as part of this international partnership, cooperation has emerged as a key component of SUTE's wartime disruption strategy. The university's collaboration with the University of Salford has been crucial in assisting SUTE in overcoming the challenges of conducting business during hostilities. Through this collaboration, SUTE has gained access to a multitude of resources and expertise that have been crucial in preserving the calibre of its educational offerings.
This partnership resulted in implementing new teaching strategies, improving assessment techniques, and expanding SUTE's curriculum. This contributed to that HEI can adjust to distant learning environments thanks to the particularly beneficial incorporation of digital resources and techniques into its educational approach when in-person instruction is not entirely feasible due to Ukrainian legislation and under the martial law. Such advances have ensured that SUTE delivers high-quality education to its students.

Internationalisation, including cooperation with the University of Salford, promoted the enrichment of the academic environment and strengthened its connection with the global academic community. The outcomes of the aforementioned have fostered professional development and resulted in many faculty members taking the opportunity to improve their English language skills, with some finishing courses that have significantly enhanced their ability to collaborate and communicate with international colleagues. Under resolution of the Research Council of the SUTE (2023), nineteen faculty members were awarded with B2 language fluency certificate.

Transforming Educational Approaches

The cooperation with the University of Salford has brought significant changes in SUTE's approaches to teaching and learning becoming another landmark in mutual partnership. The University of Salford Learning & Teaching Enhance Centre (2023) guidance and support provided to the SUTE has brought in more flexible and innovative teaching methods, utilizing digital platforms to enhance both instruction and students' engagement. This not only affected overcoming the challenges posed by war but also prepared the university for the future of higher education.

Alongside that, cross-cultural dialogue was put in the limelight of this collaboration becoming one of its most notable outcomes. Both SUTE's staff and students were given an opportunity to deepen meaningful interactions with their counterparts from other parts of the world. This intangible exchange has contributed to the understanding of global issues, thus fostering a more culturally aware and inclusive academic community and broadening perspectives.

Such cultural interactions gave impetus to continue harmonising educational practices with international standards, especially in terms of inclusivity. New pedagogical approaches were introduced to create a more equitable educational environment for all the participants regardless of their backgrounds. This includes the use of gender-neutral language and teaching methods that are sensitive to the diverse needs of student population. Additionally, special attention was given to feedback-oriented practices in teaching.

Challenges as Grounds for Innovation

SUTE has undoubtedly faced significant challenges due to ongoing crisis in Ukraine, particularly concerning maintaining access to resources and ensuring the sustainability of its academic programmes. Many scholars, academic staff and students have been displaced. Moreover, the intermittent access to essential services including electricity and internet has further complicated the situation. But the university has shown remarkable adaptability with innovative solutions used to continue delivering education in the most difficult circumstances.

Digital technologies made it possible to maintain SUTE's academic performance. Relying on remote learning platforms as well as using other digital tools ensured students to fulfil their studies. With the support provided by University of Salford, SUTE advanced in implementing effective strategies to maintain academic community. This support has greatly boosted the morale of both academic staff and students. It reinforced their belief in the value of education as one of the means of resilience and recovery.

Future Aspirations

The Development Strategy of SUTE (State University of Trade and Economics, 2017) is dedicated to building on the success of its global partnerships, in particular with the University of Salford, and exploring new opportunities for collaboration. The prevailing area of focus is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into educational processes and practices. The potential of the AI is evident in relation to enhancing the learning experience, streamline administrative processes and improving student outcomes.

The other priority is for SUTE to expand its international presence through participating in joint research projects, academic exchanges and global conferences thus strengthening its ties to the international academic community.
Fostering continuous improvement and a culture of lifelong learning supported by a strong partnership with the University of Salford not only will help to transform SUTE's educational approaches, focusing on the commitment to academic excellence and alignment to world standard, but also facilitate development of the university in an increasingly interconnected world.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the University of Salford's UK-Ukraine twinning programme, and proposed sharing of LTEC guidance and resources to assist our SUTE colleagues, has proven to be and innovative and valuable collaboration for both partners. The war in Ukraine has impacted substantially on academic's access to material and the ability to develop resources to aid staff development across learning and teaching within HE. Together, we have leveraged digital technologies and remote learning practices to sustain academic development and boost the morale of the SUTE academic community.

This partnership has underscored the value of practice sharing, collaboration, focus on colleague wellbeing, and global and cross-cultural perspectives for all in academic alliances such as that between LTEC and SUTE. While its scope is limited in relation to the number of participants, range of resources and representation of colleagues in both institutions, it provides significant and useful insight into the power

of collaboration on CPD through partnerships such as this. Furthermore, this work has opened up other connections and opportunities across both organisations in a number of areas. Looking forward, SUTE is committed to building on the success of its global partnerships and exploring new opportunities for collaboration, developing their global academic outlook even under the most extreme of circumstances. The strong partnership with the University of Salford will continue, with LTEC furthering its support for SUTE colleagues' continuous academic development as well as developing and returning to evaluation of its shared resources. In doing so, they will continue to learn from the experience and from collaboration through our alliance, drawing on the valuable experiences and perspectives of SUTE colleagues to critique and further develop our guidance, principles and approaches to academic development.

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