## Special Issue Editorial: LTEC Scholars 'Innovating Tomorrow' - Future Curriculum and Student Experience

## Introduction

In an era of rapid change and evolving educational landscapes, the role of innovation in higher education has never been more critical. This special issue brings together a collection of scholarly projects that exemplify how inclusive, evidence-based, and student-centered practices are shaping the future of learning and teaching at the University of Salford. This compilation of practice forms part of the Learning & Teaching Enhancement Centre (LTEC) Scholarship Scheme, driving forward a culture of inquiry-led practice. Through a series of targeted bursaries, the scheme empowers staff to design, co-create, and deliver projects with students and other partners that make meaningful differences to student success. Responding to pressing educational challenges while aligning with institutional strategy, from academic growth to inclusive pedagogy, the projects enrich both student and staff experiences. The LTEC Scholars collective work encompasses three themes aligned to the institutional strategy:

* Community, collaboration and networking
* Future curriculum and student experience
* Digital Enablement

The emphasis is on bringing communities together to develop collaborative advantage, cutting edge creative, innovative and intentionally inclusive curriculum; incorporating current and future digital platforms, considering techniques, approaches and applications, the focus remains clear: empowering learners to succeed.

Through personalised academic support, co-created literacy initiatives, gamified induction activities, and learning initiatives to support transition, the future horizon is explored. This edition celebrates the people and projects driving meaningful change across the University of Salford.

## Student-Centered Innovation: Designing for the Future Student Experience

At the core of the Scholars initiatives is a commitment to enhancing the student journey through personalised, engaging, and inclusive approaches. From the Academic Personal Tutoring (APT) model led by Charlie Seager to gamified induction experiences developed by Rumana Rafiq and Holly Matthews, projects are reimagining how students connect with their learning and with each other. These innovations are not only improving academic outcomes through scholarly activity and evidence-based approaches but also fostering a sense of belonging and motivation—key pillars of the future student experience.

We explore Academic Personal Tutoring (APT), through immersive digital tools, and creative onboarding strategies, redefining how students engage with their studies from day one. Building on the work of Taylor 2022 and Thomas 2012, the importance of academic personal tutoring is spotlighted with the introduction of an Academic Personal Tutor (“APT”) Team. This unique pilot in Salford Business School initiated in 2023 offers personalised one-to-one academic support to students with a specific aim to improve the student experience and support progression. The intervention ran across modules and disciplines, with the students who worked with an APT for assessment support, outperforming the cohort average grade awarded on the same module. The APT approach also provided a personalised student experience, whereby students reported a positive impact on their confidence, motivation, and engagement.

Passive learning approaches are associated with lower student engagement and subsequent attainment as Rafiq and Matthews identified. In their article, the use of gamification in learning and engagement is explored, specifically using card games as a highly accessible form of gamified learning. However, the application of cards in specialist practical and professional settings is not well documented, and there’s limited evidence of their use within laboratory education. Adding to this specific context, the findings from the study highlight the benefits of card games to enhance health and safety practice by increasing student engagement and understanding of health and safety information through active, game-based learning. Other benefits also emerged from this approach such as providing a positive and equitable student experience during the induction period.

## Inclusive and Accessible Learning: Broadening Participation and Empowering Identity

Future-facing pedagogy must be inclusive by design. At Salford, this ethos is evident in projects supporting international students through Extensive Reading, led by Donna Cottrell, and empowering female creatives in technical fields via Growth Mindset strategies developed by Jayne Sayer. Embracing identities and diverse learning preferences through gamification and immersive e-learning, these initiatives reflect a deep understanding of learner diversity and a commitment to equity in access, engagement, and achievement. This understanding increases our evidence-based practice and reflective innovation through robust evaluation, combining quantitative metrics—such as reading speed and quiz engagement—with rich qualitative insights from students and educators. This evidence-informed approach ensures that innovation is not only creative but also impactful, scalable, and sustainable. It also supports a culture of reflective practice, where data drives continuous improvement and shared learning.

Cottrell's Extensive Reading uses short, transparent diagnostic tests to help staff and students understand their reading levels and accessible approaches such as Day & Bamford’s Extensive Reading Principles to frame the sessions. The interventions demonstrated an increase of 13% in words read per minute and 6% increase in learners’ comprehension on average. All the participants reported improved reading skills and wellbeing, highlighting the importance of holistic approaches embedded within academic support.

Holistic approaches are further applied in Sayer’s work that builds on Dweck’s Growth Mindset whereby participants’ engagements with sessions were specifically designed around this concept. A ‘Learn and teach’ model was adopted with participants learning how to use differing processes for technology and then took the role of ‘teacher’ demonstrating and explaining how to use it to other participants. This fostered a strong sense of identity, and confidence for individuals as well as the opportunity to form and be part of a supportive community.

## Collaboration and Co-Creation: Strengthening Networks and Communities

The future of learning is collaborative. Salford’s Scholars exemplify this through partnerships with students, educators, and external organisations. David Savill’s Literacy Champions initiative, in collaboration with the National Literacy Trust, and Jamie Southern’s work with placement educators in the School of Health and Society, highlight the power of community and shared purpose. These initiatives demonstrate how co-creation can enhance authenticity, relevance, and professional identity in learning environments and beyond.

Savill’s work on supporting changes in Literacy education in Salford and the inaugural Literacy Symposium, builds a knowledge base around the impact of educational partnership and networks – within and beyond UoS – that support literacy interventions. In creating a network of research and practice expertise that can focus on literacy and reading motivation initiatives, the network serves to support both students and staff in developing and enabling higher levels of literacy. The scholarly activity is driven by a ‘place-based’ focus and co-created by those within and outside of the University. A sense of belonging and pedagogical approaches to enhance literacy are key emerging themes through the utility of a community approach. This idea is further expanded on in Southern’s Enhanced Learning Networks that utilises Practice-based learning to underpin development and training in a professional practice setting. The work centers on three key concepts of co-creation, conference and celebration delivered through bespoke training and development. The project further underscores the need for personalisation in learning and that the learning community can support, strengthen and cocreate the learning environment.

Situated in this work, collaboration is positioned as a cornerstone of success. The projects are co-created with students, educators, and external partners, fostering a sense of shared ownership and purpose. From Literacy Champions working with the National Literacy Trust to immersive peer-to-peer teaching environments, these partnerships enrich learning, building communities and contributing to national conversations on teaching excellence.

## Shaping the Future Together

These projects are more than examples of good practice—they are blueprints for the future of learning and teaching. By aligning with the themes of Community, Collaboration and Networking; Future Curriculum and Student Experience; and Digital Enablement, Salford’s educators are creating inclusive, evidence-informed, and digitally empowering learning environments. Inclusivity is embedded across these projects, with targeted support for international students, female creatives in technical fields, and learners with varied learning preferences. From Extensive Reading programmes that boost comprehension and confidence, to growth mindset workshops and gamified learning environments. These efforts ensure that every student feels seen, supported, capable and confident.

The future horizon of the learning and teaching landscape is unknown, however with a student-centered approach, creative teaching methods and technology-enhanced learning woven into these initiatives, Salford educators are pushing boundaries to make learning more engaging and impactful. These projects are not only transforming Salford—they’re gaining international and national attention. Awards like the UKAT Outstanding Student Support (Seager), publications in the National Teaching Repository (Rafiq & Matthews), international recognition that’s shaping both education, industry practice (Sayer and Southern) and high-profile events such as the Salford Literacy Symposium (Savill) highlight the sector-wide relevance and excellence of this work.

The collection of articles provides a unique view of technology - not just as a tool but as a catalyst for pedagogical transformation. Reimagining pedagogical innovation and digital enablement, Salford’s LTEC Scholars are leveraging digital platforms to create immersive, interactive, and student-led experiences. We see this in-particular through gamified health and safety training, e-learning, or interactive reading strategies, all of these projects showcase how digital enablement can enhance engagement, accessibility, and learner autonomy.

These initiatives represent more than isolated successes—they are part of a growing movement to embed inclusive, impactful, and student-centred practice across the University. As we move forward, we continue to scale these innovations, sustain their impact, and continue to lead with creativity, compassion, and collaboration. The future of education is still being written, and at Salford—it is inclusive, connected, and transformative.