
Enhancing online climate change education: distance and conventional university collaboration for a Master's curriculum

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Abstract: This paper analyses the different ways in which both distance and conventional universities engage with learning and teaching. It argues that rather than seeing their roles as institutionally compartmentalised, there is much benefit in delivering online education through an institutional collaboration which develops synergies with a potential to contribute to citizen and professional practitioner empowerment, in this case, for debates about climate change. The example the paper draws on is that of a European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus) project 'The Lived experience of climate change (LECH-e): interdisciplinary e-module development and virtual mobility'. The project brings together five distance and three conventional universities across six EU countries, plus the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), to create a Master's curriculum in the area of climate change. It argues that universities across Europe have complementary strengths, both in terms of their disciplinary expertise and the ways in which they engage with students. Understanding the complex, real-world challenge of climate change requires a holistic approach which draws on these complementary strengths through collaborative work.

Keywords: conventional universities; distance-learning universities; Master's curriculum in climate change; collaboration.

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1 Introduction

This paper is a reflection on the author's participation in the lived experience of climate change (LECH-e) project as one of the three partners from a conventional university, working with five others from distance learning and teaching institutions spread across

the EU. The paper begins with an explanation of what is meant by ‘conventional’ and ‘distance’ universities within the context of the UK (focussed on as the author is based there), and the hierarchical relationships that exist within the higher education system as a whole. It also suggests that there are often compartmentalised views of online distance teaching, and critiques conventional university responses towards the virtual world of learning. Drawing on the LECH-e experience, the author instead suggests that partnering with distance universities can result in positive benefits that arise from shared skills and shared knowledge.

2 Of ‘conventional’ and ‘distance’ university hierarchies in the UK

To begin, by a ‘conventional’ (or a ‘traditional’ university as is sometimes known), this paper refers to institutions of higher education that cater for mostly young undergraduates (18 years onwards) who are usually registered as full-time students, having achieved specified examination grades which meet the entry requirements. These students usually reside at university student accommodation or nearby, sometimes with parents, to minimise costs. Having said this, conventional universities are currently offering an increasing number of places to mature full-time, part-time and post-graduates in an attempt to widen participation. Teaching is usually on campus on a face-to-face basis. Students thus have direct, on-campus access to various forms of educational resources including lecturers, peer groups, laboratories, computing technologies, university-based social activities and so on, the extent and quality of which being dependent on the wealth of their university! On finishing their degrees, students often move away and, bar comparatively few, will necessarily sever ties with the university.

‘Distance-learning’ institutions, as exemplified by the Open University (OU) (UK), also cater for both under- and post-graduate students but from a distance and virtually, although they will often have full- and part-time PhD students on campus. They organise residential schools for some modules where student presence is essential, as with modules which require laboratory exposure. Students at this type of university are regarded as life-long learners seeking to undertake a degree level study for a variety of reasons ranging from interest to bettering career prospects. Student motivation, age range and previous level of formal educational qualifications are hugely varied. Also, students come from very diverse backgrounds and life situations which involve juggling employment, family and other commitments with their studies [see Hollis (1997) and Mills (1999) for a fuller history].

The key approach to distance-learning is flexibility and study is carried out at a distance through electronic technology which students can tap into as and when they want to some degree¹. This is not to say that there is no face-to-face contact. The OU (UK), for instance, offers tutorial sessions which run in the evenings or weekends and where attendance is voluntary, in addition to compulsory residential schools of varying lengths. However, distance-learning, like any other higher-education institution is facing expenditure cuts and face-to-face provisions are constantly being replaced through new technological ventures and virtual participation (Tait and Mills, 1999).

It is important to note that online courses are also heavily supplemented with hard-copy reading materials, books, and increasingly interactive audio-visual materials. Students further have 24 hours access to electronic libraries. As such, these ‘life-long

learners' often display commitment towards their university even when they have finished their degrees, with some of them enrolling on other courses as well as taking an active part in alumni activities. Sometimes alumni even engage with their academic peers substantively on partnered projects. One example of this, which also involved the editors of this special issue, was to create an environment and development Reader (Wilson et al., 2010) with contributors drawn from Open University academic staff, module tutors and African alumni (who are also senior practitioners) from the University's MSc in Development Management. The design and structure of the Reader involved all of these categories at an initial three-day workshop.

The higher educational scene in the UK is hierarchical with many possible classifications of publicly funded universities², but here the paper adopts a simple three-fold classification:

- 1 The Russell Group, an elite group of 20 well-established universities (including 'ancient' Oxford and Cambridge) which are comparatively well resourced and where entry requirements are stringent. They usually claim to be 'research-led'.
- 2 The rest of the UK conventional universities, including those that were formed out of Polytechnics and Colleges of Higher Education in 1992 (the University of Derby, where the author works, being an example of the latter). These Universities tend to be less well resourced, are not strong in research except in some niche areas, and often focus on teaching but with a broader and flexible approach to widening participation for students from disadvantaged groups.
- 3 The OU (UK), founded in 1969 as a distance-learning university, being one of the largest and the most radical of such institutions in the world. It aims to reach out to all wishing to engage in life-long learning. It does not require any entry qualifications and thus is set apart in a category of its own. Since its establishment, it has gained high reputation for excellence both in research and teaching.

Whilst there is little doubt that even elite universities have attempted to enforce change and break down class barriers in, for instance, admitting students from state schools rather than private fee-paying schools, universities in the UK nevertheless remain hierarchical – albeit defined by different markers (Atwood, 2008). These markers include league tables which rank universities according to various indicators such as research outputs, teaching quality, student satisfaction, and resources. They are powerful markers which continue to reinforce hierarchies between UK universities.

The hierarchical edge to higher education and institutional culture in the UK thus influences how UK universities perceive each other. Unfortunately this often jeopardises a truly collaborative culture between distance-learning and conventional higher education institutions and relationships between them remains in a delicate balance.

3 Conventional universities and the current push for online distance-learning

The current economic and social climate in the UK is clouded, amongst other things, by a government austerity programme to deal with a perceived national debt, changing demographic patterns, lack of graduate employment and limited resources. There are thus serious questions challenging the legitimacy of higher education itself which is having a

considerable impact on student recruitment and institutional response, making it hard work for universities to fulfil their primary mission – that of creating and disseminating knowledge at a level required to meet society’s higher educational needs.

Specifically, there are higher educational funding cuts (BBC News Channel, 2010; *The Guardian*, 2010) which leave many of the conventional universities in a transitory phase, desperately looking for new opportunities to attract income from any learner markets they can find. Thus there are constant revisions and newer versions of older hats in the naming of on-campus degrees, short courses and dedicated professional certification based on distance and e-learning. In this, conventional universities particularly target on-campus, or distance international students as they bring in a higher fee income. Nevertheless, conventional UK universities continue to face severe competition internationally from countries that are developing their own distance education³ and home universities as they all scramble to get a foothold in a technology-led education market. Also as these markets have already been very successfully exploited by the OU (UK) establishing it as the leader in distance delivery, conventional universities are in direct competition with very high standards and established practices.

However, there are also several other reasons why conventional universities fall behind in this goal. One reason is the way conventional universities deal with the development of online teaching. For instance, with distance-learning institutions, familiarity and knowledge of online pedagogy is a necessary condition for teaching and it is essential that all staff keep up-to-date with new software and technology-led teaching packages. With conventional universities, however, online development and teaching is often seen as the responsibility of particular departments (such as computing or Information Technology) or particular individuals within specialist subjects. This means that institutions invariably end up adopting ‘champions’ of online teaching, while other teaching staff in the designated chain either remain peripheral to the developments or have little or no role to play, even if they wish to. In other words, conventional universities have no in-built structures which can act as inclusive spaces. The priority of conventional universities, which is ultimately institutionally and structurally embedded, is for face-to-face delivery. Therefore, excursions into distance learning are often seen as add-ons or supplements to that, and therefore distance-learning work is allocated far fewer resources and is done at the margins of academic time, competing with other priorities (e.g., research) when the day in the lecture theatre/seminar room has ended. Also, often at conventional institutions, online time is not necessarily recognised officially as teaching contact time for workload data. Therefore, under these conditions, it is almost inevitable that distance-learning will receive lesser priority and perhaps the quality of delivery will suffer⁴.

Available online spaces (e.g., Blackboard⁵), where students can communicate with each other and their tutors therefore have a limited scope and often just act to complement the ‘real’ teaching which happens in a live classroom. For example, at the author’s university, many blackboard users only use this space to post announcements (e.g., classroom times and room numbers) with only limited teaching information for students to access. This assertion is backed up by studies such as MacKeogh and Fox (2009) who in a study of staff interaction with e-learning at the Republic of Ireland’s Dublin City University (DCU) found that “almost 90% of Faculty staff and 100% of The Irish National Distance Education Centre, (OSCAIL) staff have used the virtual learning

environment (VLE) ‘Moodle’ in their teaching, indicating an extremely high penetration of the VLE in DCU modules”. However, MacKeogh and Fox (*ibid.*, p.152) also allege that the most common use is transmitting information, class notes and resources, with relatively low use of the more interactive and innovative features of the VLE. For example, less than one third of Faculty staff (31.6%) initiated online discussions and just one fifth (20%) assessed online contributions.

In all of this, what does need to be recognised is summed up in this quotation from Heppell (2007), who argues that “computers are everyday tools for us all, seen or unseen, but their value in learning is as tools for creativity and learning rather than as machines to ‘deliver’ the curriculum”.

Also, conventional universities sometimes give mixed messages about online teaching. For instance, on the one hand whilst specialist funding is given to selected staff ‘champions’ to develop online teaching, on the other, virtual spaces are also presented as a threat, a means of checking, controlling and policing activities, quality of communication and teaching that is carried out here. Any manager, at any time can access blackboard spaces, for instance, and critique these. It is, therefore, not uncommon to find that people are reluctant to engage in online activity as this makes them feel more vulnerable than those that do not. As Land and Bayne (undated) in their study on blackboard and VLE study at the Coventry and Edinburgh Universities, UK, suggest, “VLE surveillance tools record every move a student makes within the learning space, and provide intimate details of every student’s working hours and patterns of study”.

Thus both staff and students shy away from using these institutional learning spaces even though they will happily engage for many hours on social networking or other websites such as FACEBOOK or GOOGLE. Instead of being spaces where virtual staff and student communities can engage in constructive learning and teaching, virtual spaces at conventional universities often alienate potential participants in what feels like swimming through cages under water. Furthermore, staff in conventional universities are generally aware of the notions of copyright authenticity and usually pay regard to this, staff development presents copyright violation as a serious threats where disciplinary actions that will follow if they are broken, rather than providing opportunities for staff to understand the meaning of these properly. Copyright issues are, of course, more visible and exposed when in the global public eye online and thus certainly play a role in making many wary of online teaching.

All this makes a fuller online staff participation at conventional universities a threatening rather than a self-educating experience. For instance, in the department where the author works, she has attempted to get students to use the anti-plagiarism tool/software ‘Turnitin’ before submitting their work. This software allows students to review their submission a few times before it can be finally submitted so that students can assess the levels of plagiarism for them and correct any errors. This exercise is clearly beneficial for students who in fact may not understand what is meant by the term ‘plagiarism’ and the need to visibly reference someone else’s work whether this is from web sources, bought essays, electronic books and journals – all sources which are easily available on the World Wide Web (WWW). Checking for self-plagiarism is an important academic lesson, both so as not to jeopardise any academic offence rules but also to enable students to engage in their own reflective thinking and use of their own wording. However, rather than seeing it as a positive educational activity, students and some lecturers continue to perceive Turnitin assignment submissions as ‘catching out’ plagiarism as this is the mode in which it is presented.

The move from confined classroom spaces to those of global virtual classrooms is another daunting aspect for many in conventional universities. Conventional face-to-face teaching styles, often dependent on providing students with lectures which are simply frameworks that students are then supposed to research and embroider details around, now have to be very detailed. From my own experience of writing distance-materials, this is a very difficult change, where instead of providing references for students to explore in learning centres, or asking them to visit you in your office to resolve any queries, online teaching requires clear-cut materials, fuller, accessible detail, up-to-date information, and a sensitivity towards a global reach. For example, the tendency of using UK-based examples when teaching in a UK classroom is not necessarily appreciated by those studying the course online in Africa. Course examples and case studies therefore need to be broader so that both UK and African students understand them and find them relevant. Also, producing visible materials for world consumption online rather than a local peer-reviewed critique of one's work, which distance-learning often engenders through the creation of collaborative course production teams, is not only demanding but can be frightening. It is not surprising therefore that academic staff may continue to feel more comfortable with the lecture mode of teaching, even though there are several pedagogical issues with this⁶. Further, academic staff is also increasingly pushed for time as they face more and more cuts in staffing. Together with other factors such as growing scepticism about new management strategies, 'interference' in educational developments and the overall confidence in university management, new innovative ideas are not always welcome.

Finally, note that the paper is not suggesting that conventional universities are not good at online development and distance-learning. There are some excellent examples of university engagement into distance courses all over the UK. Most higher education institutions have in fact invested much money into the development of e-learning mechanisms and even opened up specialist departments to deal with this. However, as argued above, the main difference remains that, whilst for distance-learning universities this is a condition of learning and teaching, this is not the case with conventional universities.

To refer to MacKeogh and Fox (2009) again, whilst conventional universities have grand visions of entering into the e-world of distance-learning, "the realisation of this vision of ubiquitous and lifelong access to higher education requires that a fully articulated e-learning strategy aims to have a 'transformative' rather than just a 'sustaining' effect on teaching functions carried out in traditional universities". In other words, rather than just facilitating universities to improve their teaching, e-learning should transform how universities currently teach" (p.147). This transformation requires conventional institutions to reassess their very structures, strategies and policies from rigid to more flexible, for instance, in relation to entry requirements, modes of study and teaching. You cannot just take conventional teaching and learning methods and hope they fit equally with distance-learning trends, but need to implement newer arrangements such as for accreditation, assessments, cross-institutional collaborations, and an all-out commitment to value students both on and off the campus in equal measure. This is backed up by Russella (2009, p.3) who argues that her study on the framework for managing e-learning adoption in campus universities suggests that "systemic transformation of a university's learning and teaching requires coordinated change across activities that have traditionally been managed separately in campus universities. Without

such coordination, established ways of organising learning and teaching will reassert themselves, as support staff and lecturers seek to optimise their own work locally.”

4 The LECH-e project: conventional and distance university collaboration at a European level

Prior to the start of the discussion here, the author wishes to clarify that, whilst there are three conventional universities – KU Leuven (Belgium), Wageningen (Netherlands) and Derby (UK) on the LECH-e project, this section refers to her individual perspective only. This collaboration is therefore viewed from the author’s personal perceptions which arise from her own experiences of teaching in a new ‘modern’ university (Derby) in the UK.

However, this individual perspective is also shaped by the fact that the author has been both an under- and a post-graduate (PhD) student with the OU (UK). In addition she has also held appointments as a Research Fellow, an Associate Lecturer and has taught on various online modules for the OU (UK). She has also acted as a consultant and written distant-learning course materials for the OU. In all, therefore the author has been lucky enough to enter the project with knowledge of both conventional and distant-learning methods, at least at the UK level. The work carried out on the project so far has shown that there are some similarities with the UK experience, but there are also differences between working in a European partnership with a much wider range of cultural and academic contexts. To discuss this, the author will reflect on her personal experience of some of the processes that have gone into meeting the aims of the LECH-e project so far.

The author was invited to a project application planning meeting in Leuven, Belgium, which was the last of several meetings of a Task Force on Sustainable Development that had been convened by the umbrella European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU). She then entered the project as someone who could offer skills to lead a module on interdisciplinary research methods. At this stage, neither was she clear what the project was wholly about, and in fact felt out of depth in the grand surroundings of the Leuven Katholique University plus leading academics that she met as a group for the first time! The first thing that struck her was that all participants had familiar academic titles (Professors, Readers, Lecturers) but these meant different things and gave different rankings across the proposed partnership universities. At home, in a conventional university set-up this would have been much easier to fathom and the hierarchies would be much clearer. It was, however, apparent that some academics that were present held very senior management posts, yet everyone appeared to be working as a team, equally participating in workshops to develop the funding application, and its focus, aims and objectives. From her experience with the OU (UK), it seems to her that team work is engrained in a distance-learning culture right from the start and the planning is not top-heavy as is mostly the case with the conventional university set-up that she is familiar with⁷. Thus when a plan was formed to apply for funding, everyone’s disciplinary background and specialist skills had a clear niche in the project whilst, at the same time, workshop discussions opened up new ideas and approaches.

Once the application was successful, the next meeting involved the working out of financial and other arrangements between the partners. This is where working in a conventional university created problems for the author as the project started in October,

a very busy term time for a conventional university which starts its academic year in September. This made it very difficult to get away whilst it was easier to do so for distance-teaching institutions that do not teach undergraduates on campus and also have differing term times. This meeting also identified differing models of accreditation, and student workload expectations which needed to be rationalised and standardised for the project. There were other issues of how to develop a virtual community resource repository where students can share their views with each other in a virtual cafe.

The model of working as a team has continued in the planning of the module development. Unlike at a conventional university where each lecturer is responsible for the leadership of their own modules and produces their own lecture materials and student activities, the LECH-e team-working revolves around the production of the whole course. Everyone participates at one level or another, either as a leader of a particular workpackage and other associated activities, or as an author of particular sections of modules (For instance, the author is leading module 3 in Workpackage 3, but has also contributed to a section on Workpackage 2 which concerns the project design). A members' only area has been developed on the LECH-e website where all work is posted for critical comment from other members. The work is therefore transparent to all members and benefits from different disciplinary perspectives as well as different (European) pedagogical styles.

This style of working is very different from singular exercises to produce classroom materials at conventional universities. Team working to produce materials that will be in full public gaze involves a lengthy process which in fact ends up by being peer-reviewed with a critical eye at every stage of the production. Whilst at one level this is comforting because the course materials are bound to benefit from others giving critical perspectives from differing expertise, it is much harder work for the person both reviewing materials and writing them. For instance, the perspectives can arise from different writing styles, different disciplinary boundaries, different knowledge-bases, and differing views of the student audience. In spite of this, the whole process of producing materials is a huge learning curve for all involved. Also, as with the OU, many of the course materials and books that are published as hard copies are sold to wider markets and it is quite common to find these being used at conventional universities across the globe as set text books⁹. Thus the materials also have to be considered for a non-distance learning market. Team working that offers the potential of peer reviews and constructive critics for producing high-quality materials is missing from conventional universities (which are often in fact submerged in underlying currents of academic rivalries).

There are many lessons to be learnt here. The first is that e-learning and distant teaching (and therefore the pedagogic practice) which are both technology-led are essentially of a collaborative nature. This requires a joint discussion on how to develop within students an ability to select relevant information from the vast bank available on information highways and organise it so as to make sense. This discussion crosses language and knowledge boundaries as the author noted on the project, and has the potential to offer a constantly expanding knowledge bank which crosses over disciplinary limits. Also the student is not seen as a passive recipient and a blank page to throw information at in a lecture mode, but one who is proactive in managing their own study and time and in being a part of a virtual learning community with other students and academic staff. Virtual learning spaces further give students an ability to enhance their knowledge through gaining immediate and open access to alumni, experts in the field,

active researchers and practitioners – which is not always possible in conventional universities where such access is limited to formalised sessions and seminars. In addition, the fact that these resources are to be available as open resources means that a collaboration between the two types of higher education institution has additional potential to create an European dialogue between citizens and academia, through providing open resources which can be used to enhance individual interest and knowledge (in the case of LECH-e, on climate change and sustainable development) as well as support formal study.

Importantly, the project has also been instrumental in developing key skills for sustainability. A major aspect of collaborative working is one such skill, interdisciplinary working is another, but these are usually posited in terms of key skills for students. In fact, the LECH-e project also demonstrates the importance of these skills for academics as well. Whilst the project emphasises transboundary skills for students, the LECH-e project actually crosses several boundaries for both students and academic partners, including both disciplinary and country boundaries, and (as highlighted by this paper), boundaries of distance/conventional university teaching. This last adds another dimension of diversity as a resource for sustainability which is not normally considered).

But working as an academic-based at a conventional university, the way the LECH-e project has developed has also highlighted problems. There is, for instance, the time pressures where my ‘home’, non-project students have to be seen on a daily basis to sort out queries. Time management between ‘home’ teaching and LECH-e project work, grappling with my university’s complex financial systems and procedures for travel arrangements, and juggling to fit in team meetings whilst students are just beginning new terms or exam periods has all been difficult. There is also a sense of isolation in producing materials when away from the team-mode of working and a feeling that others in my department are not quite aware of what the author is involved with or understand it. Most just see the visible aspects of the project, i.e., that from time to time she disappears for meetings in Europe, and some, especially those who do not seriously engage in online teaching or research even regard these as ‘jollies’!

Collaborative working too can be critiqued. For instance, this requires significant time and commitment because of the many transactions and dialogues involved. Everything does not always run smoothly and there are misunderstandings, areas of agreement but there can also be strong disagreements. Therefore it is inevitable that a degree of instrumentality (which may not at all appear democratic) in process is needed to get the job done.

Also, the project workshops take place every six months only, with an enormous amount of business to get through in a day and a half. As well as the educational content and its pilot delivery (work packages WP 3 and 4), these workshops also require discussion of general management (WP1), project design (WP2), Quality (WP5), dissemination (WP6) and sustainability/exploitation after the project funding period has ended (WP7). This is possibly too much to discuss collaboratively in widely spaced meetings. Project workshops thus tend to be tiring and a lot of hard work both for host organisations and various project partners who have to travel distances to the meetings.

Furthermore, most of the discussion of module drafts has to take place asynchronously on the electronic forum between meetings. This requires a significant investment of time, possibly above that allocated within the project which has to be found among the other demands on participating academics. It is possible that some will provide little or no comment, others will only comment briefly on matters of detail,

leaving just a few to engage deeply with this educational content-in-the-making. In these circumstances the practice of collaborative working can depart significantly from the ideal. This does mean that the more active (or proactive) members might appear to dominate the project, rather than the fact that they are simply keen to get things moving.

Compounding the last point is the inescapable fact of power relations within collaborative working. Some participating academics, for example, do have greater authority to speak on matters of good distance teaching styles than others. It is therefore inevitable that they will take on a larger interventionist or 'advisory' role.

Nevertheless, the author's overall feeling about doing collaborative work is that both distance-learning and conventional universities share some commonalities of working, for example, use of PhD students and research assistants in managing workloads. However, the team spirit of distance-learning institutions is much stronger and open to newer ideas and not afraid of transparency. The organisation of this at first appears daunting, but everything such as each person's role, deadlines, expectations become clear very quickly and through the critique received at various stages of course production, the final materials have the potential to achieve world class quality. Conventional universities have a lot to learn from the way distant institutions work.

5 Conclusions

In summary, this paper has highlighted the differing perceptions of online and distance-learning and teaching generated by the differing frameworks within which both the conventional and the non-conventional higher educational institutions operate. As competition for online students intensifies, conventional universities are thrown into territories which they are not institutionally geared towards or mentally prepared for. Their perceptions are thus often clouded by the online 'threat' of delivery beyond the classroom, management control and exposed teaching in visible spaces.

There is little doubt that differing perceptions of what is online learning and how it is to be delivered needs much discussion and address within partnerships. All the same, we are all into a 21st century digital age of new millennium learners who, as Prensky's (2010) describes, are 'digital natives', being those (young) people for whom digital technology has been a part of their growing-up process through the internet, mobile phones, IPOD and games technology. In comparison, many of us who currently teach online came late onto technology as 'digital migrants' who have had to learn to adapt to this in their adult lives. Thus we may have a tendency to regard virtual online learning and teaching as compartmentalised, belonging to one camp (distance) and 'proper' classroom teaching as another (conventional).

Instead, there is much collateral and benefit in partnerships that attempt to bring the two together. As the LECH-e project indicates, shared partnership skills and expertise in differing teaching and learning delivery modes can produce world-class learning materials. In fact, such partnerships are capable of generating new methods and new knowledge through other related collaborations, for example, through interdisciplinarity between 'pure' and 'social' science (as discussed in the Foreword of this Special Issue). Universities both in the UK and across Europe have complementary strengths, both in terms of their disciplinary expertise and the ways in which they engage with students. Understanding the complex, real-world challenge of climate change requires a holistic

approach which draws on these complementary strengths through collaborative rather than competitive approach which can only enhance and benefit online education.

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Notes

- 1 Study is of course structured and paced to a significant degree by the timing of formal assessments. Also, individual modules provide planners to help students manage their time.
- 2 Private universities are not included in this classification. Their role in UK higher education at present is small, but it is likely to grow significantly in coming years.
- 3 Both India and China have not proved to be as lucrative student a hunting ground as many of the British universities have hoped. This is because these countries
 - a have their own excellent long-standing universities

- b there is a certain amount of nationalist pride in educational self-sufficiency and, certainly in India, there is a strong call for ‘Indianisation’ of education with a severing of old colonial ties with British educational systems (e.g., the University of Baroda’s radical departure from British academic dress)
 - c both countries are well-versed in technology and related educational developments.
Some UK universities have now thus shifted their focus to eastern European markets in the hope that they do better in terms of recruitment.
- 4 See also Boon and Sinclair (2010) for other points on the positives and negatives of online teaching for conventional university teachers.
 - 5 ‘Blackboard’ is an electronic learning platform which has been purchased by many UK institutions of higher education in order to create personalised learning and teaching virtual discussion spaces. As such Blackboard, as a software tool, has an extensive capacity and scope to generate efficient and useful means of achieving lifelong learning.
 - 6 For instance, how much information does a student retain during one/two hour lecture session? What is the educational value of someone standing in front of the class with facts and information, often without further classroom interaction?
 - 7 This is not to say that conventional universities do not attempt the ‘breaking into workshops and discuss’ mode, but compared to distant university teams, this is very confined (often to ‘awaydays’), and lacks the team spirit as:
 - a it is often led from central administration and ‘everyone knows’ that whatever results, decisions will be made by central management rather than academics
 - b hierarchies appear to determine whose points are most valid rather than fresh ideas!
 - 8 For instance a book that the author is very familiar with, and one which has a wide audience across universities throughout the world and has sold thousands of copies is Allen and Thomas (2000).