

AFTERWORD

By Andy Hockley

ELT Management and Leadership author and trainer

This vitally important report contains a lot of extremely significant findings, which everyone connected to the field of ELT should read and take heed of. There is a lot of depth contained in the report, and though some findings may be unsurprising, there are many key issues covered here. Arguably, there are lessons here for three main groups of people – teachers, academic managers, and policy makers. Those at the chalkface (or, now, at the Zoomface, perhaps) are mostly well aware of the challenges they have faced, though, of course, in reading the report, they may learn of other issues that they haven't yet had to face, and as a result be better prepared to handle them in the future. However, it is the other two groups – managers and policy-makers – who could perhaps most benefit from reading this report.

Policy-makers must take heed of the comments of educators herein – especially as they relate to the following points: (1) connectivity – ensuring that no student is disadvantaged and has unequal access to the basic human right of education; (2) eSafety – making sure that policies are in place to guarantee the eSafety and privacy rights of both learners and teachers; (3) exams and assessment – as we live at a time during which exams are seen by many governments as the primary measurement of educational effectiveness, it is essential that, if this is to continue, the way assessment is carried out is questioned and developed to take into account the new realities; and (4) curriculum and training – more focus on student autonomy and learner training needs to be written into the curriculum, and there needs to be more provision of well-designed teacher training.

Academic managers can perhaps gain the most from a careful analysis of the report and its findings. There is a clear acknowledgment here that most were put in a very difficult position, trying to cope with the demands of the emergency and how it impacted education, and that by and large they responded well. However, two areas stand out in which perhaps more could have been done – and which are still vitally relevant today as we move forward.

1. **Support for teachers.** This covers a number of areas, but chief among them are teacher wellbeing and professional development. Everyone in the field of English language teaching has been emotionally affected by the crisis, including managers themselves. Dealing with working from home, taking care of their own children's schooling, handling student crises, dealing with teaching in an entirely different way, the sense of isolation, and of course for many people, sadly, the grief of losing loved ones. As we move back into the classroom and the staffroom, it also includes dealing with the visible changes in our schools – colleagues who have moved on, new working practices, and students who may have different expectations and needs. Above all else, it is essential that managers take care of both their own mental health and wellbeing and also that of their staff.

Professional development programmes also need to be thought through, investigated and adapted. Necessarily, at the beginning of the pandemic, emergency PD was focused on getting teachers up to speed with the functionality of the various tools and platforms that schools were using to deliver lessons online. However, now it is clear that what is needed is in-depth and supportive PD programmes which offer teachers genuine online teacher training, adapting what they know about teaching and learning to the new reality. There needs to be a reimagining and revisioning of education in general, and teachers, supported by a well-designed professional development system need to be in the vanguard of this. They are the emerging experts, and they should drive the direction and provision of PD.

2. **Academic Management.** In addition to the above training and development, academic managers also need to focus their attention on curricula and assessment. It's clear from the findings of the report that curricula need to be redesigned and rewritten to take into account the different ways that learning happens online and the different pace at which it does, as well as ensuring that student training and learner autonomy is brought to the forefront if it was not already there.

Likewise, the methods of student assessment, both formative and summative, need to be addressed and thought through. It is notable just how heavily teachers' responses to the survey presented here came down on the subject of assessment, and it is clear that this is the area that teachers have been struggling with the most – not so much with testing perhaps, but with receiving and processing feedback – body language, use of target structures, clear understanding, and so on – that is the natural part of the in-classroom experience. Working with teachers to develop ways to better assess learning in the new reality seems to be an urgent project to undertake.

As I write, the impacts of the pandemic are seemingly subsiding, and for many of us the face-to-face classroom is again becoming the primary venue for education. However, it is clear that from now on much more can and will be done in an online form – both synchronous and asynchronous. One thing that has become clear over the pandemic period is that online education offers many affordances that possibly most educators were not aware of. As we move forward into whatever educational model becomes the norm in the future, this knowledge will not be forgotten. To put it another way, the doors that have been opened in the last three years will remain open. In this context, what will be most vital for academic managers is leading the process and supporting those in the forefront of the work.