Executive Summary

The Centre for Innovation and Development and the Centre for Technology in Education carried out evaluation of online education at SGUL, that ran from April to August 2022. The evaluation aimed to elicit and understand staff and students' experience of online teaching and assessments over the academic year 2021-22, their preferences for the future, and their preparedness for online aspects of education. This continues work from the academic year 2020-21 where a similar study was carried out. Whilst the 2020-21 study evaluated online teaching when significant proportion of teaching shifted online at the height of COVID-19, the 2021-22 evaluation covers a time period where teaching started to return back to campus. The evaluation employed a mixed methods approach comprising staff and student surveys, and focus groups with programme teams and student advisors. Link to evaluation reports.

Key findings triangulated and extrapolated from the results of the aforementioned evaluation methods have been provided below.

- Online aspects of education 'worked well' for majority of staff (80%) and students (60%) in 2021-22. In 2020-21, online education was considered "effective" by 87% of staff, and "worked well" for 49% of students.
- Whilst synchronous online teaching was found to be flexible and saved commute to campus, the following key challenges for this mode of teaching were reported by staff and students:
  - Low student engagement and participation
  - Students not switching on cameras, making it difficult to gauge how teaching is being perceived by students, and impacting quality of group-based, discussion-led activities.
  - Some aspects of the curriculum may not be replicable online (e.g., hands-on practical, development of professional identity, values, and practices required of healthcare)
  - Lack of adequate opportunities to ask questions
  - Technology issues/failures
- Asynchronous online teaching was found suitable for delivery of information, with students finding the ability to learn at their own pace valuable. Key challenges reported for this approach:
  - Students not completing and/or lacking the skills to complete asynchronous teaching tasks.
  - Teaching resources not of adequate quality (e.g., poor audio), and/or not updated regularly.
  - No immediate opportunity to ask questions from teacher.
- Online teaching, whether synchronous or asynchronous:
  - did not always replicate the social aspect of on-campus teaching; lack of interaction and community building contributed to feeling of isolation and impacted mental health.
  - did not provide adequate tools to monitor student engagement, presence, and progress.
  - was not considered good value for money by students when exceeding a proportion of overall teaching.
- Results reveal a number of contradictory views and trends e.g., online teaching resulting in higher attendance in some instances and lower attendance in others.
- Asynchronous online teaching was found more valuable to learning by staff than students, whereas quizzes and concept checks were found more valuable to learning by students than staff.
  - Most students required more opportunities for self-assessing learning.

- Most staff would like to have major proportion of their teaching on campus with much of content and informational material delivered asynchronously.
  - Whilst most students overall found on campus teaching more valuable to learning and engagement than online learning, moving forwards there appears to be a significant minority of students who would like more of the teaching to be remote. There is a similar split for preference of delivery of information synchronously and asynchronously.
- To satisfy varying student preferences, most courses plan to have a mix of online and on-campus, and synchronous and asynchronous delivery. However, this mix will vary between courses and modules, and will be determined by the following factors: nature and content of the course (e.g., practical component), year of study, whether students are full-time or working professionals, regulatory requirements, availability of classrooms on-campus, and teacher and students' technical skills.
  - Students report an overall preference for introducing hybrid teaching that can satisfy remote and on-campus preferences. However, staff have reported barriers to its adoption which include staff resources (e.g., ideally two lecturers per session), staff technology skills, the need for a critical mass of students to be on campus, and lack of teaching rooms equipped with adequate technology.
- Students' perception and expectations of blended learning are not always correct or clear (e.g., considering blended learning to be part-time).
- Staff and students reported the need for consistency of approach to online teaching, in terms of learning design and how material is presented/located on Canvas, both within modules and across modules.
- Lack of familiarity with educational technology tools can impact staff and students' experience and perception of online teaching (e.g., how to set background and hide self-view in MS Teams).
- Many students appeared to have developed skills in the use of institutional educational technologies with the aid of their teachers and peers, and/or by trial and error, rather than through institutional training or guides.
- Evaluation identified professional development and training requirements for staff and students.
  - Skills for designing and delivering online teaching particularly lacking in guest lecturers, clinical and research staff, who may not have time/and or incentive to develop skills for usually one-off teaching, in turn impacting student experience.
- Staff identified other factors that can impact effective blended teaching. These include students' motivation and skills for independent study, adequate student-centred support for health and wellbeing, the size of cohort (with resources for large modules not perceived to be allocated accordingly), lack of an effective attendance policy and penalties and/or tools and resources to enforce it, teaching timetable, and lack of available teaching space (with online teaching a fallback option).