

COURSE HANDBOOK

**An Introduction to Digital
Environments for Learning**

Session 2018-19: Semester 1

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Welcome

Welcome to *An introduction to digital environments for learning* (or 'IDEL'), the core course on the Digital Education programme and the starting point for your studies with us.

This course is noteworthy for its diversity of learning environments and the collaborative and individual learning tasks we ask you to engage in. Our aims are to provide a snapshot of some of the current technological possibilities in digital education, and to use these to cover some of the key practical and theoretical issues in the field. During the course you will experiment with a range of media for communication and for learning – from discussion boards and social media to videoconferencing and gaming worlds – and engage with a range of conceptual areas important to research and practice in online education. In terms of assessment, you will use a blog to record and reflect on your studies, and will complete an additional assignment on a relevant issue in digital education.

The course is taught by several different members of the programme team so that you get a chance to get to know us all at this early stage of your studies. There is continuity, too, in that you will have a dedicated tutor during your time on the course, who will be reading and commenting on your blog and acting as your first point of contact for any academic concerns or questions. In most cases this person will remain your personal tutor throughout later courses on the programme. The course organiser this semester is Rory Ewins, so please contact him with any bigger course-related issues you might have.

All your course tutors are committed to working with you in online discussion, and in providing one-to-one support in your blog. In return, we ask that you demonstrate a commitment to the collaborative activities and that you engage fully with the learning opportunities offered.

We look forward to the coming weeks, and anticipate many interesting debates and discussions!

Course team



Siân Bayne

Siân is Professor of Digital Education and Assistant Principal for Digital Education. She is also Director of the Centre for Research in Digital Education.

sian.bayne@ed.ac.uk

+44 (0)131 651 6337

Twitter: @sbayne



Noreen Dunnett

Noreen is a PhD student with the School of Education. She is currently supporting the programme's use of Minecraft.

s0915696@ed.ac.uk

Twitter: @comcultgirl



Peter Evans

Peter is a Senior Teaching Fellow in the School of Education and course organiser for 'Digital education strategy and policy'.

peter.evans@ed.ac.uk

+44 (0)131 651 6345

Twitter: @eksploratore



Rory Ewins

Rory is a Lecturer in the School of Education and course organiser for IDEL and 'Digital education in global context'.

r.ewins@ed.ac.uk

+44 (0)131 651 4789

Twitter: @speedysnail



Jeremy Knox

Jeremy is a Lecturer in the School of Education and course organiser for 'Education and digital cultures'. He is Co-Director of the Centre for Research in Digital Education (Data Society).

jeremy.knox@ed.ac.uk

+44 (0)131 651 6347

Twitter: @j_k_knox



Stuart Nicol

Stuart is Head of Educational Design and Engagement with the University's Learning, Teaching and Web Services. He is currently supporting the programme's use of Minecraft.

stuart.nicol@ed.ac.uk



Clara O'Shea

Clara is an Associate Lecturer in the School of Education. She is course organiser for 'Introduction to digital game-based learning', 'Assessment, learning and digital education' and 'Understanding learning in the online environment'.

clara.oshea@ed.ac.uk

+44(0)131 651 6116

Twitter: @claraoshea



Jen Ross

Jen is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education. She is course organiser for 'Digital futures for learning' and 'Course design for digital environments'. She is Co-director of the Centre for Research in Digital Education (Digital Cultures).

jen.ross@ed.ac.uk

+44 (0)131 651 6133

Twitter: @jar



Phil Sheail

Phil is a Lecturer in the School of Education and Programme Director of the MSc in Digital Education. She is course organiser for 'An introduction to social research methods'.

p.sheail@ed.ac.uk

+44 (0)131 651 4192

Twitter: @philshe

Course learning outcomes

On completion of the course you will be able to:

- critically evaluate a range of technologies in terms of their impact on teaching and learning
- begin to design your own online learning resources
- contextualise your own practice in terms of the key issues emerging from current research in digital education.

Delivery and workload

IDEL is delivered entirely online using multiple tools, with the virtual learning environment Moodle as its starting point. As with all courses on our programme, there is no requirement to attend on-campus. This mode of delivery not only enables you to shape your study pattern around your working day and other commitments, it also lets you experience first-hand the dynamics which result from working in a class which never physically meets.

This is a double-credit course, successful completion of which will gain you 40 credits toward your MSc, Postgraduate Diploma or Postgraduate Certificate. This means that the workload is heavier than in our other, 20-credit, courses. Successful participation will require about 10-15 hours a week in discussion, reading, exploration and writing, with more than this likely around the time of assignment completion. As suggested in the introduction to this *Course Handbook*, you will need to make a significant commitment to the course in order to contribute to class discussions and fully take part in the course activities. We would recommend logging in every day to keep track of class discussions, in addition to setting aside good chunks of time 3 or 4 times a week for undertaking course activities, doing the readings and making blog entries. Although the course is designed to be as flexible as possible in terms of when you engage with it, you will need to keep up with the week-by-week structure in order to take part in the group activities.

Reflecting the pattern of work of many of our students, a week of study on this course includes the weekend, i.e. each week of work runs from Monday to Sunday. Discussion boards remain busy on weekends, and many students also post to their blogs at this time. Tutors and topic leaders are active during the working week, from Monday to Friday; blog tutors will discuss with you at the outset their planned schedule for commenting on your blog posts.

You will have access to the course Moodle space from **Monday 10 September 2018**. You can access it via the Digital Education Hub or directly from:

<https://www.moodle.is.ed.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1226>

Note that this link will not work before 10 September. You will need your student login (EASE).

Digital Education Hub

The Hub is a programme-wide resource open to all, with links to shared resources and announcements from the team:

<http://hub.digital.ed.ac.uk/>

Course structure

The course runs over 12 weeks, or one semester, from **Monday 17 September until Sunday 9 December 2018**. The week prior to the start of teaching (10-16 September) is an orientation week to become familiar with the basic online environments we use. The main course is divided into two sections, with a reading week in the middle and a blogging-only week at the end.

Community and criticality (weeks 1-4)

We begin with the theme of 'Constructing community' in order to start establishing ourselves as such and to explore how to engage with each other. In week 2, 'Technology and the teacher', we discuss how the role of the teacher might be changing in response to digital culture. Finally, in weeks 3 and 4 ('Critical perspectives'), we will discuss a range of general issues around digital education and how to approach them in a critical way. During week 3 you will be asked to complete a critical analysis of one of the core readings in order to receive feedback on your academic writing skills at an early stage.

Sanctuary (week 5)

This week we take a break from activities and discussion to give you time to read, reflect, build and blog, and for tutors to provide some half-way feedback on your critical analysis and on how your blog is going so far.

Spaces, openness and analytics (weeks 6-11)

In this second main section we will consider three broad themes in two-week blocks. In weeks 6-7 we explore issues of 'Spaces', looking at digital space and spatial metaphors, using Minecraft as a focus for our activities. In weeks 8-9, 'Open everything', we engage with the notion of openness, particularly in relation to MOOCs. In weeks 10-11 we look at 'Data and analytics', including issues of profiling and personalisation, privacy and surveillance.

Note also that your assignment is due at the end of week 10. If you would like some formative feedback on a draft outline, you should post it to your blog by the end of week 7 so that your tutor can review it.

Sanctuary revisited (week 12)

Week 12 is devoted to wrapping up your blog.

Participation etiquette

Much of the course discussion during the coming weeks will take place using discussion boards and other synchronous and asynchronous environments, and you will be expected to make regular contributions to these discussions. Details of synchronous 'real time' sessions will be posted in Moodle – please book these into your schedule as soon as they become available.

When taking part in online discussion, some basic rules of netiquette apply.

Please keep contestation polite and try to respond to others' contributions if no-one else has. Contributions to the discussion don't have to be beautifully structured, referenced and written in formal, typo-free academic prose. As long as they are clear, friendly and help move the discussion along in a positive way, all will be well! Try also to keep your discussion board postings reasonably short – long, intricate contributions tend not to be read, and can put others off contributing themselves.

Course blog

As a participant on IDEL you will have your own blog. Blogs can be collective and public, and are used as such in other courses on our programme, but on this course you will have your own individual blog, to be read (in general) only by you and your tutor. The blog is intended to be an online reflective diary: a place where you bring together your various threads of investigation and thought, and a record of your thinking and development, rather than a neatly finished 'place of arrival'. You may find useful this short article on the nature of reflection in education:

<http://infed.org/mobi/reflection-learning-and-education/>

Your blog is intended to function as an ongoing dialogue between you and your blog tutor, growing around your developing ideas and insights. By using a form specific to the online mode of delivery, it gives you the opportunity to think about how digital literacies might be used within teaching contexts.

See the *Technologies Handbook* for how to use the main features of the blog, and see below for vital technical information about how to set the blog up for this course specifically. There is also more below on the criteria we use to assess blogs.

Blog requirements

You should begin using your blog as soon as the course starts. **Please note that if you do not have any substantive blog entries by the beginning of week 3 we will assume you are not on-course and you will be withdrawn** – please speak to your blog tutor (or, if you prefer, the course organiser) in good time if you are having problems with the blog.

Your entries should be regular and frequent. This does not mean that you have to post an entry every day, but you should be adding some form of reflective commentary at each point of your engagement with the course material. We recommend aiming for two or three times a week, depending on the length of your entries; however, we recognise that some students focus their work at the weekends and might wish to write longer postings less often.

How your blog develops will be very much up to you and your emerging blogging 'voice'. You may, for example, decide to use it in a very structured way by entering relatively formal comments and reflections specific to each week's activities. Alternatively, you might decide that a less formal, more open-ended, 'stream-of-consciousness' mode suits you better.

You will also need to find some balance between your blog entries and your contributions to the group discussions elsewhere in IDEL. It is up to you how you negotiate this. You may wish to use the blog for more reflective or tentative commentary than you would wish to post to discussion, or you may find it works well as a space where you can expand on the points you make to the group as a whole. If you wish to re-use blog entries in the discussion board or vice versa this is acceptable, as long as you bear in mind that the audience for each is rather different (and always remembering that discussion board postings should be kept reasonably short).

As well as these more general entries, the blog also involves some more structured and specific tasks in certain weeks; more information about these is provided in the appropriate areas of the course Moodle site.

Very important: setting up the blog

The blogging environment for our programme (the multisite version of WordPress) has been selected for the control it gives you over the permissions and privacies associated with individual posts. Posts can be kept entirely private (in draft mode), shared with all other users of our WordPress site, or restricted to any one of a series of pre-defined groups, and this is entirely under your control as the blog author. This is exactly the degree of control we want, allowing programme participants to post blog entries relevant to any of their courses (or indeed none), and to address each entry to any desired audience.

For this course, however, you are expected to post entries which can only be read by tutors on the programme. **We strongly encourage you to keep course posts private between you and your tutor**, at least at first. Every blog is crafted according to its expected readership – for the purposes of this course, we would like you to be writing in a personal, informal style, and for the blog to be a place where you gain one-to-one support from your tutor.

The blog is high stakes in this course, contributing 60% to your final mark, so please do take some time to set it up properly at the beginning of the semester. To do this you have to set your 'tutor group' as described in the *Technologies Handbook*, and then remember to restrict access to each post to that group. For the purposes of this course, the 'group' will consist of your IDEL blog tutor and the course organiser (to help with tutor support and with marking arrangements at the end of the course). At the end of the semester, you can choose which posts you want to have included for assessment, and which (if any) you want to revert to 'draft' so that they are not assessed (see below for more information about this).

In summary, if a post is intended to be part of the assessed work it must be posted so that it can be read by your blog tutor and the course organiser.

Please note that only your blog tutor will be regularly reading and commenting on your blog. The course organiser will have access for tutor support purposes, and other tutors, and our External Examiner, will have access to a PDF of your blog for assessment purposes at the end of semester.

A small note on tags: Tags are a useful way of categorising the content of your postings, so that you can start to identify themes and issues of interest in your writing. For those students taking more than one course that uses the blog, keywords for the courses can also help you and your tutor keep track of your work across courses. We suggest 'idelsep18' as the keyword for this course.

Computer skills and equipment you need

Your *Technologies Handbook* gives a full rundown of what to do in terms of gaining access to University systems before beginning your studies.

You do not need to be an advanced computer user to do any of the courses on the programme, though you will need a basic level of competence in the use of your computer. You should know how to use a web browser, email, and a word-processor, and be reasonably confident in managing files on your computer, downloading documents from the internet and using the odd social media tool.

As with all of our courses, to take part in IDEL you will need regular access to a computer with a broadband connection. You will need Acrobat Reader or a comparable PDF application (such as Preview on Mac OS X) to access the course readings.

Some of the tools we use require access to a computer with a reasonably high specification, and for Minecraft a smartphone, tablet or similar mobile device. If this is a problem for you, discuss the situation with your blog tutor, who will talk through the options with you. The *Technologies Handbook* has more about what is required.

The voice and video sessions on certain weeks will require a microphone, headphones/headset, and a webcam. Again, if this is a problem for you, please contact the tutors for those weeks.

Minecraft activity

We use Minecraft in 'creative mode' as an environment for building and experimenting on the course. Minecraft is what is described as a 'sandbox' game, where you can create your own world by building and crafting with blocks. There are no extrinsic goals or rules – players are free to explore the world and build things as they wish. It is particularly popular with children, and is being used increasingly for education and learning at all levels. The element of hands-on crafting of space connects with many of the areas of research and practice we study on this course. It is also great fun, and we hope it will help students come together to co-create some exciting spaces and to discuss the ways in which virtual spaces, maker cultures and the joy of building can support educational innovation.

You can start your explorations of Minecraft at any point in the first half of the course – the break in week 5 is a good opportunity to spend time on it – but our main focus on it will be in weeks 6 and 7, when 'Space' is a core theme. We will be encouraging you to build a learning environment of your own within the shared space that we provide: this could be a building, an educational activity of some kind, a story path, a challenge, or something else that you devise. During these weeks there will also be organised Minecraft tutorials in which we will walk around these learning spaces to discuss and share them.

You can find further technical details in the *Technologies Handbook* to get you up and running, and further background and support in Moodle. The important thing to remember about Minecraft is that the learning comes through doing. When constructing a learning space, remember that it is about constructing scaffolding for learning – opening up possibilities for people to explore and learn in their own way rather than providing directed learning. For some examples of the kind of things you can build and ways people have set up learning in Minecraft, see the curated set of resources in the Minecraft area of the Moodle course.

Readings

You are not required to purchase any books for this course; all core readings are provided in the course Moodle site. Some are provided through e-reserve, which means they have been copyright-cleared specifically for this course, and are available to download in PDF format from the course site. Others are journal articles made available via the University of Edinburgh e-journal collections, or are openly available on the web.

Beyond the core readings, most topics of study will guide you toward useful secondary and additional readings. Some of these may require you to track down journal articles or book chapters yourself, using the University Library's search tools. References to secondary and additional readings are collected together in the relevant areas of course content. The Digital Education Hub also contains a list of relevant journals, all of which are either open-access or available via the University of Edinburgh library online.

The collection of resources and readings is quite large. Please don't be put off by this, or feel you have to read everything! The core readings for each block of study will always be made clear. Any readings recommended beyond this are simply to follow up on if you wish to, particularly for your assignment. You are not expected to do all the secondary or additional readings for each area of study, though you should aim to do some of them.

Good academic practice on this course

During this course you will be doing quite a bit of reading, alongside the activities and course discussions. It will be particularly helpful at this early stage to get into the good note-taking habit of **always including the sources of quotes or summaries you are jotting down**. This will prevent having to retrace your steps to find sources later on, and the danger of accidentally using other people's words or ideas without attribution in your assessed work. Copying and pasting key passages from online sources and PDFs might be convenient, but you **must** properly indicate when you are quoting a passage directly and always remember to reference your sources; **accidental lack of attribution in assessed work is still considered academic misconduct**, so you should always be attentive to this. It's also important to keep track of the sources of images and videos, and to credit these if you use them in your own work. The *Programme Handbook* provides more guidance on referencing, and your blog tutor will be happy to discuss any questions you have.

Academics and researchers tend to each have their own (sometimes arcane) systems for collecting references. If you can get into the habit now of saving all the references you are reading and using in one place, this will help you a lot in your assignments on this and future courses. There are a number of good online and hybrid systems that can help you, such as EndNote, Zotero and Mendeley, some of which are free to use.

The University's Institute for Academic Development offers some helpful online workshops on citing sources and other academic writing skills:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/postgraduate/taught/courses-events/online>

Assessment

The course will be assessed in two ways:

1. by your personal blog (60% of your final mark)
2. by an assignment (40% of your final mark)

Your assignment should be submitted by the end of week 10 of the course, **Sunday 25 November 2018**, using the drop-box on Moodle – instructions for this are in the *Technologies Handbook*.

Your blog should be finalised by the end of week 12 of the course, **Sunday 9 December 2018**. Posts made after this date will not be assessed.

1. The blog

Blog assessment criteria

In assessing the blog, the following criteria will apply. The criteria are based on the university's Postgraduate Common Marking Scheme, which is more fully described in your *Programme Handbook*.

– **Reflection**

Does the blog demonstrate sustained reflection on the course content and its application for the participant's professional practice?

– **Regularity**

Are entries into the blog frequent and substantial enough to demonstrate such sustained reflection?

Are they spread throughout the duration of the course?

Was the critical analysis task properly attempted?

– **Knowledge and understanding**

Does the blog demonstrate a good critical understanding of the technologies and ideas introduced?

Does it show a critical awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of a range of technologies and pedagogical approaches?

– **Communication style and multimodality**

Is the style of the blog vivid and personal?

Are the ideas discussed well-structured and well-argued?

Are sources cited – either conventionally or via links?

Does it make creative use of the blog form via inclusion of image, media and linkage?

For example, a blog graded at 70% or above (an A) would meet the criteria in the following way:

70% - 100%

Reflection

Writing is consistently and deeply reflective, with many insightful connections made between the participant's professional practice and course content.

Regularity

Entries are made more than once a week, and are evenly spread throughout the duration of the course.

Knowledge and understanding

Writing critically engages in a consistent way with the content of the course and the course readings. Evidence is shown of reading and thought which goes

beyond the immediate course content. The process of developing understanding is coherently described and reflected upon.

Communication style and multimodality

Writing is grammatical and flows well (though this need not be in conventional academic style). Original ideas are well and creatively expressed, and argumentation is coherent and clear. A sense of creative and personal ownership of the blog is conveyed and imaginative use of multiple media and modes is made.

By contrast, a failing blog (0-39%) would demonstrate the following in relation to the criteria:

0% - 39%

Reflection

Writing shows no reflection, and no connections are made between the participant's professional practice and course content.

Regularity

Entries are made very infrequently, or are very unevenly spread throughout the duration of the course.

Knowledge and understanding

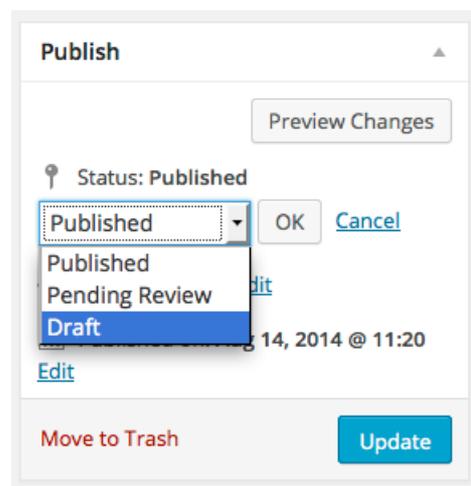
Writing does not engage with the content of the course, and no evidence is shown of sustained reading within course content. There is no evidence of the process of developing understanding.

Writing style

Writing is consistently ungrammatical and difficult to read. There is no evidence of original thinking in terms of ideas or creative usage of the blog form.

Submitting your blog for assessment

At the end of semester, you can choose to include all or some of your blog posts for assessment purposes. To remove a post so that it is not assessed, click the 'edit' button on the post, edit its status in the Publish panel to 'Draft', click 'OK' to save this change, and click the 'Update' button to apply the change to your blog.



This will ensure that no one except you can read this post. Use this with care – don't leave a post out of your assessed blog just because you no longer agree with it! Each substantive post you include will show something of your reflections on the course and help demonstrate the regularity of your contributions.

Do not hesitate to ask your tutor if you have any questions or anxieties about the blog assessment.

2. The assignment

Rationale and requirements

In addition to the blog, you will also be required to produce a written assignment on one of the questions in the Assessment area of the course Moodle site.

The form of the written assignment may be experimental or conventional, as you choose. For example, you might choose to present it as a wiki, or a hypertext or illustrated web essay, with the proviso that they can be preserved and submitted in a reasonably stable form for assessment. The aim is to give you space to experiment with alternative ways of presenting scholarly discourse in a digital environment, if you wish to do so. If you prefer simply to write a conventional essay, however, this too is perfectly acceptable.

You may also produce the assignment collaboratively with a partner. Should you choose this option, there are additional possibilities for your assignment format – a series of email exchanges with reflective commentary, for example, or an annotated chat session. If you decide to collaborate, you and your partner will each be given the same mark and feedback for the piece of work you submit.

The assignment should be **2,500 words in length +/-10%**, not including the reference list but including footnotes and tables where present. For some formats, such as hypertext or video, this can only be a loose guide to the amount of work you should be putting into the piece, and it will be up to you to consider how this length guide translates.

If you would like some formative feedback from your blog tutor on a draft assignment outline (of no more than 700 words), please post it to your blog **by the end of week 7** so that they can see and review it during week 8. Please indicate explicitly that this is your assignment outline rather than a regular blog post.

Assessment criteria for the assignment

This assignment will be assessed according to three core criteria:

- **Knowledge and understanding of concepts**
Does the assignment show a *critical* engagement with the concepts and theories introduced? (Descriptive accounts lacking in analysis will be marked down.)
- **Knowledge and use of the literature**
Have relevant key references been used?
Have other relevant sources been drawn on and coherently integrated into the analysis?
- **Constructing academic discourse**
Is the assignment produced with careful attention to the quality of the writing and the skilful expression of ideas?
Is it within word count?

The Postgraduate Common Marking Scheme described in the *Programme Handbook* gives more detail on how the core assessment criteria are graded.

Since the assignment offers such broad scope in terms of topic and form, you are also encouraged to suggest up to three additional criteria defined by yourself.

This can seem like more work at the time, but offers a valuable way to think through some of the crucial issues around how we should go about assessing learning in such digital environments – particularly if you are experimenting with media forms. For example, if you were working with the web and hypertext, you might wish to include visual impact and effective linking as additional criteria or, if you choose to submit with a partner, you may wish to include effective collaboration as a criterion.

Please discuss any proposed criteria with your blog tutor before committing to them, ideally at the same time as you submit your draft outline. You should indicate your final additional criteria in a note submitted with your assignment.

The postgraduate common marking scheme

Grades will be awarded in line with the University’s postgraduate common marking scheme:

Mark (%)	Grade	Description
90-100	A1	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
80-89	A2	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
70-79	A3	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
60-69	B	A very good performance
50-59	C	A good performance, satisfactory for a masters degree
40-49	D	A satisfactory performance for the diploma, but inadequate for a masters degree
30-39	E	Marginal fail
20-29	F	Clear fail
10-19	G	Bad fail
0-9	H	Bad fail

The pass mark is grade D (40%).

For more detail on the regulations governing the course and the programme you should consult your *Programme Handbook* and the University’s Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study (DRPS), which can be found at:

<http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/>

In particular, the regulations governing taught postgraduate programmes are at:

<http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/18-19/regulations/PGDRPS2018-19.pdf>

Credit and continuation of study

Successful completion of this course will give you 40 credits at postgraduate level 11 within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). More details of the SCQF can be found at:

<http://www.scqf.org.uk/>

The full MSc in Digital Education will comprise one foundation course (this one) and four additional 20-credit courses, one of which should be 'Research methods', plus a dissertation worth 60 credits. The list of available options can be found at:

<http://digital.education.ed.ac.uk/>

The regulations governing satisfactory progress for continuation to Masters level (that is, the dissertation stage) are given in your *Programme Handbook*.

Advance HE Fellowship route

For those working in higher education there is an optional route through the programme which meets the requirements of the UK Professional Standards Framework and results in accreditation as a Fellow of Advance HE (formerly the Higher Education Academy or HEA). See the *Programme Handbook* for more information about Advance HE, eligibility, and accreditation.

Those following the Advance HE route will need to meet some additional requirements in this course. In IDEL, **at least three of your blog posts** during the semester need to include discussion of how the following topics are relevant to your own professional Higher Education role and context:

1. assessment and feedback
2. student diversity
3. effective learning environments
4. participatory learning environments

You should refer to course readings and topics in these posts wherever possible. In short, we are looking to see you connect your own practice in these areas with what you have learned on this course.

At the end of semester, you will need to submit, along with your blog, the information highlighted in the Advance HE Fellowship Route form, which you can find in the assessment area of the IDEL Moodle space. Your blog tutor will then fill in the rest of the form, confirming that you have satisfactorily addressed each of these four topics in your blog. This will be returned to you after you have received your course marks and feedback.

If you have any questions about this, please contact our Programme Secretary, Victoria McIntyre, at victoria.mcintyre@ed.ac.uk in the first instance.

Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC)

The SSLC provides a forum for discussing issues arising on the programme and potential changes to it. The committee is chaired by a student and there is representation of students from across the programme and a smaller number of staff. The committee meets once a semester. Meetings are held online at a time that fits in with varying timezones.

Opportunities to join this committee will arise from time to time; think about whether you would like to be considered for membership. There is also a discussion forum where all students are welcome to contribute views and suggestions. You'll find this, minutes of meetings, reports and other documentation in the SSLC section of our programme-level Moodle site:

<https://www.moodle.is.ed.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=131>

This is only available when you are logged into Moodle, so new students will not be able to access it until they have been given access to the Moodle platform.

Course contact information

For help and advice, contact your blog tutor – whose details you will find in Moodle – or the course organiser:

Rory Ewins
r.ewins@ed.ac.uk
+44 (0)131 651 4789
Twitter: @speedysnail

Good luck with your studies, and we look forward to seeing you online!