Paper 30mins (20 presentation and 10 min questions)

Title: An interdisciplinary approach – connecting beyond the curriculum

Jess Power, David Hawkins and Andrew Lawrence
Staffordshire University

## Abstract

2020 will be remembered as a critical turning point for Education. An unpredicted pandemic took nations leaders by surprise and led to freedoms we had become accustom to, being suspended. The response from education was to diversify into virtual/blended learning models to support the continuation of learning and knowledge generation. A case study is presented from a UK higher education institution that responded, reframed and re-thought learning and teaching in the wake of the global crisis. By adopting an opportunistic approach to innovate teaching and learning practice though transforming physical interdisciplinary collaborations, into flexible virtual creative spaces it was able to provide a blue print for lockdown learning to enhance engineering.

At Staffordshire University we have embraced Creative Branding within the higher education experience to give our engineering students the opportunity to network with key community stakeholders whilst working in interdisciplinary teams with non-engineering disciplines and different year groups. This extends opportunities to build: lifelong networks, communities of learning, advanced skill sets and enables teamwork in a competitive environment to co-create, problem solve and more importantly "play", to discover, invent and grow into the rounded Professional that the discipline requires.

"Creative Connections" at Staffordshire University focused on: resilience building and flexibility, adopting novel approaches to deal with the challenges, it captured opportunities within what became an extended period of uncertainty. This teaching and learning initiative, funded through the Royal Academy of Engineering Visiting Professors Scheme, adopted to the pandemic to provide virtual innovative interdisciplinary challenges to: increase learning opportunities within a world of uncertainly, build sustainable networks to ensure participants were best placed for life after study, cultivate employability skills through introducing the concept of "play" (risk taking) within the new norm for learning. The pedagogical model was based on embedding interdisciplinary creative "virtual" design challenges into the learning journey. Working with externally stakeholders from the technology industries, creative/heritage disciplines and education, we bought together students from different locations into a virtual space to co-create, collaborate and network.