



REFLECTING ON RE-OPENING? YOU ARE NOT ALONE

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Introduction and Reflections on Practice

This work is a companion piece to the BASES Position Stand (PS) on '[Reopening of Sport and Exercise Science Departments in Higher Education after lockdown](#)'. The Stand concludes with figure 1, the inner ring of which lists the principles we suggested should guide reopening. The outer ring captures the key aspects of each principle which we unpack in the Stand.

As a lot has happened since the PS was published in the summer of 2020, the authorship Team thought it might be helpful to -

1. Reflect back on their drafting of the stand.
2. Capture their present experience of reopening.
3. Look ahead to Christmas and beyond.
4. Share some new resources which can be found at the end of this article.

Our intention is not to update the PS which we 'futureproofed' by focusing on guiding principles but to promote reflection on the actual experience of reopening. As Huntley et al., (2019) state reflective

practice (RP) 'has become firmly embedded in professional development and practice within the sport and exercise sciences...' and this piece aims to promote its use during the Pandemic. Arguably reflection has never been more important as Sport and Exercise Scientists practice in unprecedented times and operate in a new context and cultural landscape. We have drafted this work in such a way that it can be used i) to support the reflective practice of the reader (a core aspect of accreditation, reaccreditation, supervised experience and SEPAR) and ii) as a learning resource that may be used by students and those on supervised experience and SEPAR as an example of reflective practice.



Figure 1: Summary of the BASES Position Stand on Reopening

It is envisaged that this work will be the first in a series of informative and thought provoking 'pieces' delivered by members of the COVID-19 Special Interest Group (SIG) in partnership with colleagues from the Education and Teaching SIG. The aim being to support members of the Association as they strive to meet the needs of their students, clients and employers during these challenging times.

In response to the call to develop a body of literature that 'will provide a platform to support ongoing RP as part of the wider aspects of our roles' (Huntley et al., 2019) as well as capturing the reflections of the authors, this piece also includes contributions from other members of the COVID-19 SIG. These are embedded in the text as vignette tables which capture the experience of the contributors and also feature in the 'keyword section'.

Keywords

On reflection the authors offer the following words to capture their experience of reopening:

Dispersed; isolated; (un)supported; time-consuming; back-pain; inconsistency; tiring; emotional; uncertainty; communication; collaboration; online; pedagogy; safety; frenetic; exhausting; overwhelming; isolating; IT-heavy; late night working; opportunity; anxiety; teams; unprecedented; optimism and caution.

Contributor Ash Willmott (Anglia Ruskin University) offered: Prepare early, accept challenges, relish opportunities.

Contributor Scott Sinclair (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance) offered: Positivity, creativity, flexibility, supportive, patient & honest

Parts of the PS that are particularly relevant now

Three of the principles in the PS are particularly pertinent as we enter the winter of 2020 in the unwanted company of COVID-19. The standout one being *collegiality and intellectual generosity*. Since 'reopening', many of us have benefited from the selfless acts of others both from within and outside our own Institutions. This instinct within the Sport and Exercise Science community to help and support each other will foster stronger relationships in the future that can only be good for the sector.

As time has gone on, it has become clear that we are in for the 'long haul' with COVID-19 having a long-term impact on the health of the nation, the economy and Higher Education. Therefore, that part of the PS which deals with having a *future focus* is relevant as we think how we should shape rather than simply respond to what comes next.

Within the ever-changing Pandemic landscape both good and bad *leadership* has stood out as a determinant not only of how Institutions have performed but also of how safe and cared for the people within them have felt. It is likely that the next generation of Leaders in Sport and Exercise Science will have been shaped by their experiences during the Pandemic. This is another reason why reflective practice is so important at this time, as a method to ensure that our Leaders of the future are thoughtful and insightful.

Hindsight Draft of the PS

Knowing what we now know and if we had the luxury of time and 20/20 vision in hindsight, we would have included details in the PS on the importance of developing contingency plans. It strikes us that the ability to answer the question 'what if...' and to have in place plans to deal with several possible scenarios is becoming an essential leadership skill. Both the academic calendar and the business year no longer follow a predictable stable cycle but are characterised by turmoil and volatility.

Reflecting on our experiences since publication of the PS we should have included a timeline to guide the adoption of the new online systems many of us have begun to use for teaching and / or to deliver services to clients. Figure 2 is presented to promote thought on what the ideal timeline might look like. When interpreting the figure in the context of their own institution readers may find it helpful to consider i) how this timeline differs for the leaders in an organisation (who purchase systems) and the lecturers / practitioners (who use them) and ii) the interaction of the timeline with the background cycle of the business or academic year. Ideally all these separate perspectives and timelines would be integrated to create a seamless experience for all concerned.

VIGNETTE FROM SCOTT SINCLAIR Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

I work in the field of Dance Science which has similar principles to Sports Science - but the realms are also miles apart. Since re-opening, the world of Higher Education (HE) has changed significantly. My experience has been a rollercoaster journey in which many twists and turns have occurred during this pandemic. From restructuring the design of our programme overnight to battling with the use of technology, it is fair to assume this global pandemic comes in varying waveforms– the good, the bad and the ugly. I will not pretend re-opening has been easy or sugar-coat my experiences because it has not. The work hours have been long, technology has failed me, the sheer under-current of this virus looming at the doorstep creates an added pressure and the list goes on. I will say that the journey has been made easier by the team and support around me. We are all in this challenge together, so my advice is to surround yourself with good people. Ensure you have a supportive network, which can help you both in work and outside work.

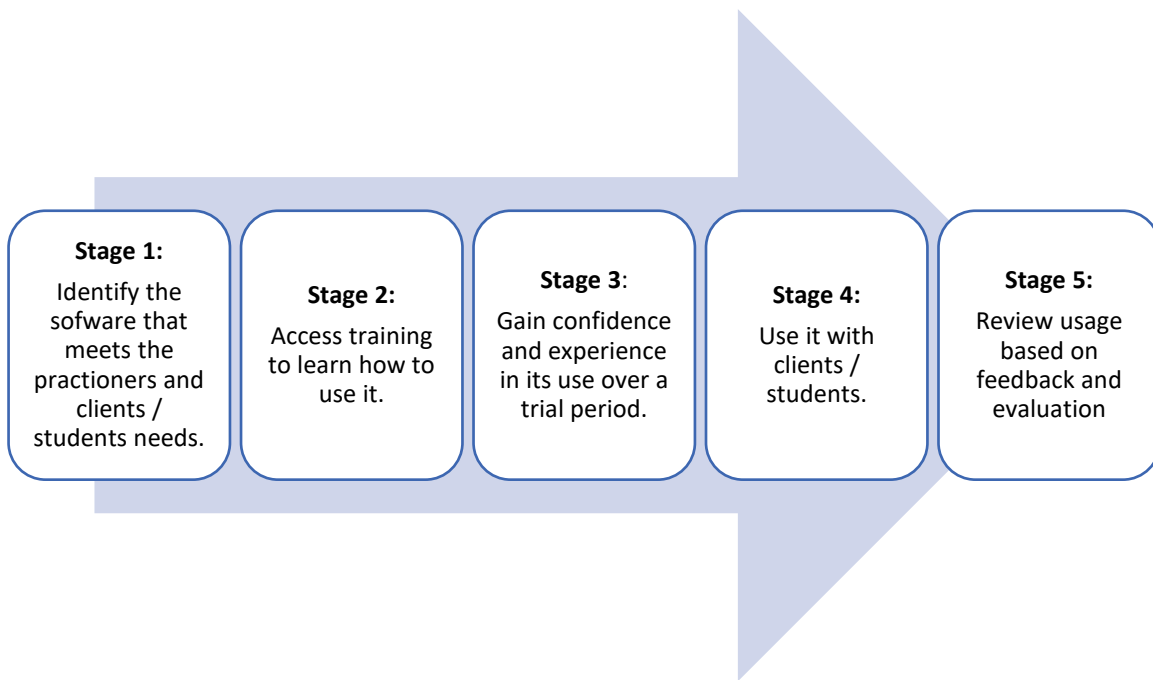


Figure 2. Stages to guide the use of new technologies in Sport and Exercise Science?

When applied in a University setting this may have helped us all appreciate the time and stages needed to achieve effective teaching protocols in the new learning environment. Our sense is that because of understandable pressures many of us moved straight into Stage 4 with no or little time spent in Stages 1 – 3. If that is the case, then stage 5 is important particularly as the use of these technologies is likely to dominate modes of delivery throughout 2021 and so we need to ensure we are using the technology appropriately.

Reflections on best practice during reopening

We think that the term ‘best practice’ should be used with great care during the pandemic as it is too early to evaluate what has worked and what has not with any certainty. In addition, many of us have had to act pragmatically with limited resources, incomplete data, and little time. ‘Best Possible Practice’ may be a better phrase as would sharing, as we do later in this piece, things that we tried but which didn’t work. With these important caveats in mind here are 5 practices which we have found helpful.

1. Recognising that students can be part of the solution. If students understand the challenges that we face and work hard to engage with both online and face-to-face teaching, then they can help Lecturers and Departments create a positive learning environment.

ANNONYMOUS VIGNETTE

From a Head of Sport Psychology at a Championship Football Club.

The experience of returning to training and competitive football feels like a whirlwind. COVID-19, and this being my first season at a new football club, has created unshaped challenges in developing a new sport psychology department.

The new protocols of less contact with others and the scaling back of backroom staff to ‘essential only’ at games and training, has reduced the chances for interpersonal relationships and activities to flourish. Although not confirmed, the impact on quality of the pieces of work a newly forming, psychology department might wish to implement feels hampered. Whilst trying to develop relationships and facilitate behaviours between leaders and followers and balancing our new working ways of ‘get in, train, get out’ -it is difficult to foster a cohesive high performing environment that welcomes staff and athletes in but being adaptive has been key.

2. Breaking down barriers including those between 'the centre' and between academics and professional staff. Examples of this include support services setting up 'local help desks' at Departmental level.
3. Adjusting timetables and the running order of modules to best fit the circumstances. For example, moving more practical components of modules closer to the warmer months of the academic year when activities can take place outside.
4. Establishing 30-min weekly delivery monitoring meetings to share practice and problems with colleagues. It brings up many challenges that are usually solved by one colleague or another.
5. Animating health and safety risk assessments by finding new engaging ways to better explain how to conduct assessments and their outcomes.

A theme running through these five practices is the importance of good communication both within and beyond Departments. Throughout reopening, Sport and Exercise Scientists have received support from a range of Technical and Professional Staff including IT and Estates / Facilities. Time invested in building these cross Departmental relationships is well spent and communication and mutual respect is essential to create these high performing partnerships.

'Don't Try This' Reflections on the Experience of Reopening

Here are some things that we should all avoid doing –

1. Trying to carry on as normal rather than recognising the need to change attitudes, goals, and behaviours.
2. Being unrealistic in terms of how much research we can conduct when teaching / delivering services is taking so much time.
3. Sending too many emails, copying everyone into emails and hitting the 'reply to all' email button. Even better, don't send an email but when possible talk either in person (at a distance) or on the phone or using a video link.

Clearly not everything is under the control of the individual Sport and Exercise Scientist and we have to trust our Departmental and other Leaders to balance the wellbeing of staff with the needs of the Institution.

Christmas

At the time of writing the next big milestone on the horizon is Christmas. Before reflecting on what needs to be done to support students over this period, it is important to state the value of using the holiday period to rest and recover. For many of us the Pandemic has been like starting a race without knowing the distance over which we would run. What some thought would be a sprint has turned out to be a marathon, meaning that our pacing has been wrong. To bravely push on without taking time-out is to risk exhaustion and burnout. Our commitment to our discipline, students and clients should not blind us to the need to look after ourselves, our colleagues, and our families.

Ideally, those of us in leadership positions need to decide, plan, and deliver a well-considered idea about what is going to happen over the Christmas period and the early part of 2021. For students who remain on campus there needs to be regular contact and support from the University. As some of these students are the most vulnerable in our Institutions, this contact needs to be as frequent and personalised as resources allow. For all students, consideration should be given to the provision of study packs to enable them to keep learning over the festive period along with advice on how to remain resilient and protect their mental health.

Futurology

If one considers how much things have changed in the few short months since the PS was published, arguably it is folly to try and predict much beyond Christmas. But to develop the scenario and contingency plans we referred to earlier we must try to do so. Whilst space does not allow us to develop a full futurology, we offer instead some prompts for reflection on what might be. Firstly, ultimately one must decide if there is cause for optimism or if the future will be dystopian. We believe that most Sport and Exercise Scientists are optimists, we are, as we are confident that with the right combination of teamwork, leadership and spirit of resilience, Sport and Exercise Science can come out of the Pandemic in a better position than when it entered. Specifically, we believe that a positive legacy from the Pandemic could include i) a new set of priorities for the discipline, ii) more team work and less barriers, iii) improved online learning and iv) the freeing up of large lecture halls for conversion to Labs and other specialist teaching spaces. As a result of this legacy, some of our students are going to become better independent learners whose transferable skills are increasingly recognised enabling them, for example, to apply for the types of jobs advertised by the NHS at <https://www.ttlaboratoryjobs.com/>. Conversely, there is a risk that some are going to 'fall through the cracks' and as we move forward we need to ensure we recognise the achievements of those who are thriving in 'the new normal' whilst supporting those who are struggling.

Whilst optimists, the authors' reflections are not utopian. We recognise that as well as the Pandemic, the profession will have to navigate the lasting financial damage it has done to the Institutions in which many of us work. Whilst there are things that can be done to mitigate the impact of an economic downturn on the Discipline (see Smith, 2010 for 10 actions that can be taken) it is reasonable to assume that we are entering a period of limited resources, difficult decisions and at best restricted growth and at worst severe financial cuts. We also recognise that whilst most colleagues have put in a colossal effort to keep Sport and Exercise Science going, there are a small number of individuals in every large organisation who have either not been up to the challenge or who have not put the effort in. Whilst difficult, it is important that in such situations Line Managers and colleagues hold such individuals to account and support and motivate them to contribute to the Team. Not to tackle such difficult issues in the current climate is unfair to those who are doing their fair share and having to pick up the work not being done by an underperforming colleague.

VIGNETTE FROM LUCY HALE AND THE SCHOOL OF SPORT AND EXERCISE SCIENCES TEAM

UNIVERSITY OF KENT

Teaching and learning: Online teaching is a learning curve for everyone who has predominantly taught face to face, this is also the case for students. Regular staff / student training is important to upskill where necessary and to learn how to optimise use of the platforms we have available.

When using a blended learning approach, student engagement is key. Monitor attendance and track how frequently online materials and resources are being accessed. Split pre-recorded or live online sessions in to bite size pieces supplemented with activities, filmed demonstrations, quizzes, polls, etc. This will help add variety to online sessions and enhance student engagement.

It is important to maintain frequent communication with students outside of teaching sessions for example, regular programme meetings or academic advisor meetings. Listening to the student voice allows us all to reflect on what is going well and where improvements can be made.

Work with dissertation students to re-design projects so they are flexible with changing times. Consider other methods of data collection that allow students to meet their learning outcomes and build in contingency plans.

It takes more time to prepare resources, so they are suitable for the online learning environment. Regular school meetings with colleagues are important to reflect on practice and share ideas. Team meetings also help cut down on email volume and provide staff with an important point of connection. Informal virtual catchups can also help replace those all-important corridor or coffee conversations that foster academic networking.

Practical work: The following points are subject to change and are dependent upon what the latest government guidelines will permit at any point in time.

Get all risk assessments in place in advance of all activities and have continuous communication with the health and safety unit.

If / when practical work is permitted, consider where activities can be located to ensure adequate ventilation, move equipment, and repurpose spaces as necessary. Allocate plenty of time between any practical sessions for cleaning and sanitizing and be efficient with room space and equipment requirements. Arrange training for FFP3 mask fitting where required.

If / when practical work is permitted, in addition to the main guidance about sanitizing and wearing masks etc., it is useful to send students/ participants some information about the route of entry to the building and room. Photographs and video clips might be helpful. This ensures they know where to go and understand any one-way systems that have been put in place.

If / when research activities are permitted, for participants entering university facilities, it's important to carry out screening / checking for symptoms [in line with current / latest Government / Health services guidelines] and have a way to get this info (and re-check) before they travel for each visit by phone or other means.

Conclusion

Our reflections on the experience of reopening leads us to conclude that a key to success is good communication and Leadership. Communication within and between individuals and organisations is important but also very difficult and something we should all try to do better. As good communication does not happen by accident, we conclude with the following reflections to aid good communication. In addition, in the resources section we include material readers may find helpful in improving their own and Departments' communication.

As good communication is not easy, it poses the question why is it so difficult? Obviously the Pandemic has made it more challenging as we have all had to get used to i) relying on online systems, ii) the background 'radiation' of anxiety and iii) trying to read people's body language through a mask, PPE and at a distance. But arguably there are deeper and sometimes uncomfortable truths about why communication is so challenging. These include having to communicate with (apparently) difficult people and sometimes having to communicate bad news which people do not want to hear or who are not willing to listen. Thankfully, such people are rare but perhaps we could all benefit from differentiating 'how we feel' about bad news from what 'we think about it'? Consider the scenario where a Head of Department ('the Talker') has to tell members of their Team that the Departmental budget is being cut by 50%. Figure 3 attempts to capture both the responsibilities of the 'talker' and the 'listener' in this situation. Perhaps the best advice in such difficult communication contexts is to try and 'put yourself in the shoes of the other person'. That is, in this example, what is it like to break bad news and what is it like to hear it?

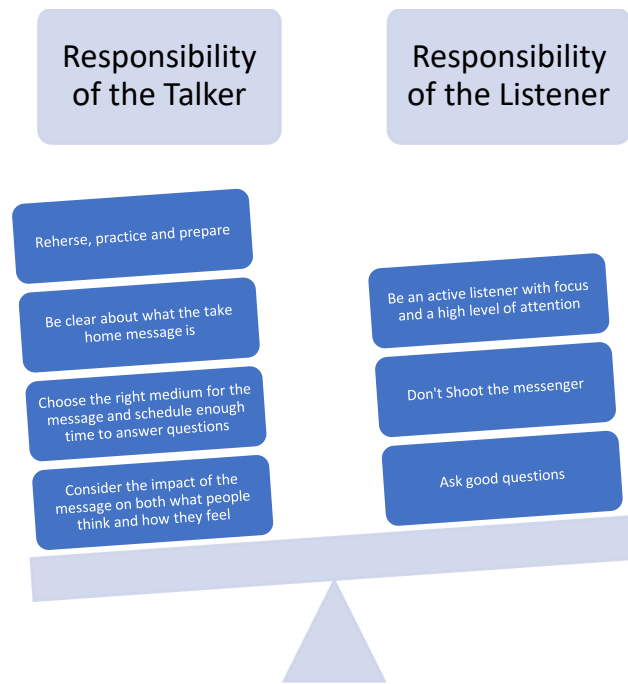


Figure 3. The Communication Balancing Act

To state the obvious we live, practice and teach in challenging times. So, it is worth reflecting on the importance, meaning and value of what we do. Sport brings great joy and fun to millions of people. Exercise leads to health and wellbeing. Science uncovers wonder, knowledge and satisfies our curiosity. Together Sport and Exercise Science can and does transform lives and is worth 'fighting for'.

Next Steps

These next steps were drafted by the authors and the following representatives of the Education and Teaching SIG. Joanne Hudson (Swansea University), Thomas Craig (Robert Gordon University), Lucy Hale (University of Kent), Laura Mason (Swansea University), Oliver Runswick (King's College London) and Ian Sadler (Liverpool John Moores University).

Subject to approval by the BASES Board, ethical and legal compliance, and enough volunteers, the COVID-19 and Education and Teaching SIGs will work together throughout 2021 on the following four projects. In providing these free to access services for BASES members, they will be cognisant of the need to i) take into account regional and national variations in infection rates and associated restrictions and ii) take a long term view and provide ongoing support in the months and years ahead.

1. The creation of a digital repository of learning, teaching and assessment resources that members can access and use free of charge.
2. A webinar series on topics to include i) communication ii) placements; iii) data collections for dissertations; vi) Student hints and tips for learning; iv) Open Science & Intellectual Generosity and v) blended learning.
3. Conduct research on what students need and want at this time.
4. That BASES write to senior institutional leaders, including Vice Chancellors, to articulate what members and the Association are doing to keep SES going during the Pandemic.

POSTSCRIPT

During an advanced stage in the drafting and review of this document, several significant new developments took place including –

1. The announcement of a second lockdown in England whilst different restrictions applied to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
2. Progress was announced regarding a vaccine.
3. Plans relating to the testing and travel arrangements for students were announced to enable those who wished to go home for Christmas.

Whilst some small changes were made to this paper as a result of these announcements, the submission and publication timeline did not allow for i) the implications of these developments to have been experienced and ii) a period of mature reflection to have taken place.

The following links may prove helpful to readers in following these developments -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campus/higher-education-new-national-restrictions-guidance>

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

References

Huntley, E. et al, (2019). BASES Expert Statement on Reflective Practice. *The Sport and Exercise Scientist*. Issue 60. Summer edition. Pages 6-7.

Smith, A. (2010). Resilience in an Age of Austerity. *The Sport and Exercise Scientist*. Issue 26. Winter edition. Pages 25-26.

Resources on Communication

<https://www.ausmed.co.uk/cpd/guides/communication-skills>

<https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/careers/soft-skills/communication>

<https://careers-in-sport.co.uk/career-advice/effective-communication-skills/>

<https://www.makingbusinessmatter.co.uk/communication-skills-ultimate-guide/>

Resources on Reflective Practice

The BASES Expert Statement on RP is available here

https://www.bases.org.uk/imgs/8009_bas_tses_magazine_summer_2019_online_version_pg6_759_5.pdf

On the 4/11/20 Amy Whitehead (Liverpool John Moores University) delivered a BASES Webinar tomorrow on 'The Think Aloud Programme: Considerations for developing reflection within sport practitioners' which is available here [member-only page](#).

Readers may find the following publication helpful -

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227105978_Building_a_Metacognitive_Model_of_Reflection

AUTHOR BIOPICS

The Authors volunteered to write this reflection and asked for and received no payment.

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Andy is a BASES accredited sport and exercise scientist and former Chair of the Association. He is a 'retired' Professor of Exercise Science, Convenor of the BASES SIG on COVID-19 and Co-Author of the BASES Expert Statement on exercise and COVID-19.

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Dr Mark Ross



Mark is a BASES accredited sport and exercise scientist and Steering Group member of the BASES COVID-19 SIG. He is a lecturer in Exercise Physiology and Programme Leader of the BSc Hons Sport and Exercise Science degree programme at Edinburgh Napier University. His research interests include the effect of exercise, physical activity, and dietary interventions to improve cardiovascular repair.

Dr Neil Maxwell



Neil is a Reader of Environmental Physiology at the University of Brighton. He is course leader to the MSc Applied Sport Physiology and Applied Exercise Physiology degrees at the university and is responsible for leading the return to the SES laboratories this autumn.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS REFLECTIVE STATEMENT IS FOR GUIDANCE ONLY. FURTHER INDEPENDENT LEGAL GUIDANCE SHOULD ALWAYS BE SOUGHT IF NECESSARY.

This Reflection was reviewed by:

Prof Zoe Knowles FBASES, James Tugwell and Ian Wilson, on behalf of the BASES Board.

In addition, Dr Joanne Hudson FBASES (Swansea University), Thomas Craig (Robert Gordon University), Dr Lucy Hale (University of Kent), Laura Mason (Swansea University), Dr Oliver Runswick (King's College London) and Dr Ian Sadler (Liverpool John Moores University) commented on a first draft of this paper.

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