A Futures Curriculum for the University of Birmingham

Traditionally, the University only offers full-time programmes for students to enrol on for Social Work courses. One of the reasons is probably due to its nature. It may sound ridiculous to have a Social Work course without direct practice with service users in the programme. In fact, it is part of the national requirements for practice learning, set by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), to have 70-day and 100-day of placements for student social workers. In the current classroom setting, the university has good collaborations with various NGOs, service providers, and service users to share their experiences with students in the preparation for the placements. Nevertheless, during classroom practice, the students are limited to practice among themselves. In my opinion, it seems as though the blind leads the blind as neither could imitate the exact situations and perceptions of service users.

With globalization, the internet has become an indispensable communication tool for the modern world. Though the administrative division may persist, through the internet information and global development are borderless. Technology has changed the way people live, including higher education. In the blink of an eye, students in 2026 will have more advanced technology to assist them. Presentations, videos, and online lectures may not be interactive enough for students to learn about social work and the impact of globalization on its practice.

Perhaps, the reason for the university not offering enrollment for part-time and distance learning programmes for Social Work is because of an issue around how the programme should be taught and direct practice. I imagine with the rapid development of technology, it is possible to have Virtual Reality (VR) and hologram technologies integrated as teaching media. By developing this system, the university may offer not only full-time programmes but also part-time and distance learning programmes, enabling students to have a study experience that imitates the actual social workers and service users' interaction. All groups of students would then have the same quality and experience of the programme. Besides, just like Canvas and Panopto, it would allow students the opportunity to review the course materials repeatedly in their own time.

VR would enable part-time and distance learning students to have the real feel of a classroom experience, as full-time students do, while holograms would present all students with almost real images and sound effects of the situations that are happening in the real world. The hologram would assist students to have some appreciation for the situations that they may face during their practice.

Furthermore, VR could be integrated with Canvas and Panopto functions whilst a hologram system might be integrated with a system that could be set up to show a pseudo-service user with details that imitate the real object and situation, including computation of age, gender, physical condition, personality, etc. This could then be used as a tool to interact with students as practice in or outside the classroom setting. Additionally, this system could be combined with a computerization system in order to respond to the conversation with students and analyze if students' responses are appropriate and what the estimated feeling of the pseudo-service user during the conversation with students might be. In a nutshell, I believe this concept of technology is also applicable for the Medical School, Sportex, Psychology, and Law.