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# Co-creating LearnHigher: demystifying and shaping what we do

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## *Presentation abstract*

Established in 2005, the LearnHigher platform provides high quality, peer-evaluated resources which support students' learning development. It was developed through a collaborative network of 16 institutions and is overseen by a working group who support and encourage the submission of resources.

Following a summary of the past year and a demonstration of the submission process, the audience had the opportunity to reflect on LearnHigher and help shape its future. The authors aimed to hear about how LearnHigher had informed teaching and learning. This was a chance for the community to share experiences of using and submitting resources, and to consider ways to increase impact on professional development and practice. The session culminated in an open forum of discussion regarding future directions, enabling the community to shape how LearnHigher moves forward in 23-24 and beyond.

**Keywords:** LearnHigher, learning development; teaching resources.

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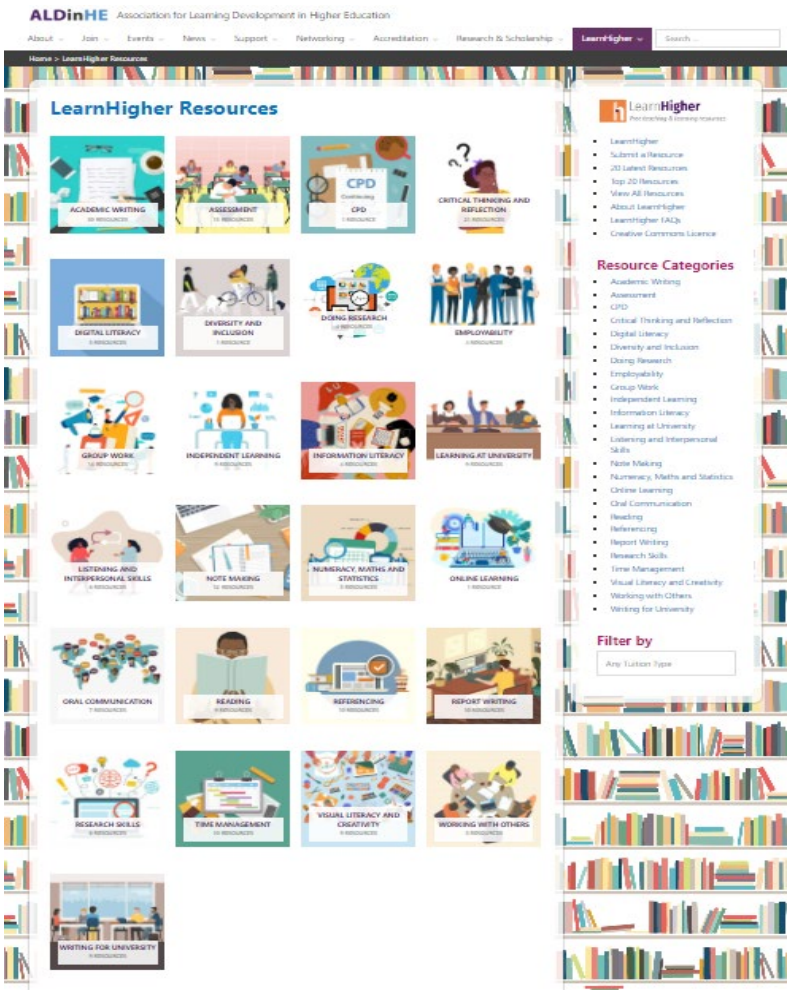
## *Community response*

The session introduced LearnHigher as a valuable resource and outlined how the resources hosted on the platform (see image 1) could help those working in Learning Development or other support roles in HE. Members of the community expressed appreciation for their newly established knowledge of the collection of resources, explaining: “This session helped me to understand what LearnHigher is and how I can get involved and use it. I just need to carve out some time to do it.”

**Figure 1. LearnHigher Resources (website screenshot).**




Several members of the community who attended the session said that they were aware of the LearnHigher resource platform and had ‘appreciated the content available’ but had tentative feelings about submitting a resource to the platform. The session, they explained,

had alleviated their worries: “I always feel guilty for not submitting to LearnHigher - hopefully this will be the kick I need!’

Another member commented that the session had improved the chance they would engage: “The session clarified the submission process so I’m more likely to submit a resource now.”

Further to this, one member explained that they were now more familiar with what kind of resources might be accepted. Additionally, the session provided them with vital information about the Creative Commons Licence, and the ‘ins and outs’ of the licence of which they were previously unaware.

The second half of the session consisted of the presenters gathering feedback on submission experiences from users of LearnHigher. The presenters led a table discussion with attending members of the community. Key points from this discussion were as follows:

### *Calls for resources and incentives*

It was suggested that gaps in provision should be made explicit to users of LearnHigher, so that the submission of associated resources would be encouraged. Gaps would therefore be filled more easily. Similarly, members suggested that calls for contributions could be made for certain topics or themes, boosting submissions in that area. Providing incentives for submission was also seen as a means by which to encourage further interactivity. It was suggested that the gift of a digital badge in bronze, silver, or gold as users become more involved might act as a positive incentive. Similar to this, identifying a ‘contributor of the year’ was suggested as another possibility.

A suggestion was made that co-creation could further encourage submissions of resources. This co-creation could take place through a workshop based on an area where there is a gap in resource submission. The act of ‘getting together’ to create might also be a way of developing ‘dynamic communities of practice’.

**Figure 2: Key highlights (presentation screenshot)**

### *Notifications, technical display of resources, and sorting ability*

Regarding the usability of the platform itself, the community offered ideas for technical changes that could be made to ensure the platform is user friendly. Firstly, it was suggested a notification could be given to all users when a new resource is added, to encourage exploration of new items. Secondly, the number of downloads and page hits could be displayed. In a similar way to journals displaying their most cited or downloaded articles, this could lead to further downloads and uses through showing popularity.

Members of the community suggested that a more comprehensive means of sorting resources might help to generate use in general. These included: being able to sort resources by author (to see all resources by the same author), having a filter for resource type (appointment, workshop, size of workshop), and having a tag/filter which suggests when a resource provides specific support for students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs). Finally, members suggested that resources could be sorted across multiple categories/tags.

### *Reflections and remixes of resources*

In order to further enhance submissions and ensure that they have usability for users of the platform, a suggestion was made that the submitting author could provide a reflection

about how the resource 'works in practice'. This could additionally notify future users of some of the practical or theoretical challenges that might potentially emerge when using a resource in their own teaching.

A suggestion was made that resources could have 'remixes' which are linked to from the original resource. These 'remixes' could be modified versions of the resource, for example versions which address different levels of study, different subject areas, or have differentiated versions according to complexity of technical or theoretical language.

### *Feedback*

Several suggestions were made for means of providing feedback on resources. These would provide further information on usage and might feed into improvements and modifications for future submissions. One suggestion given was for a button to be added to resource pages reading 'Used this resource? Tell us how' leading to an area in which users could give their own accounts. Alternatively, one member of the community suggested a discussion form could be used to discuss use of resources. Finally, it was suggested that an opportunity could be built in for students to give feedback on what they want from a learning resource.

### *Next steps and additional questions*

One member of the community commented that they would like to know: "...which of the suggestions we came up with are going to be implemented by the group." It would be pertinent therefore for the presenters to give feedback to members of the next conference (or forthcoming ALDinHE events) on improvements and modifications made to the platform and what future plans are in place regarding LearnHigher.

All of the above feedback will be considered by the LearnHigher Working Group, and we look forward to responding back to the community in the next edition of the #LoveLD magazine.

## *Authors' reflection*

Helena Beeson:
At the end of what felt like a really positive and relaxed conference (not just because of the weather and the seaside!), I wasn't sure what to expect at our LearnHigher workshop. It was great to see the room full of enthusiasm, as people really engaged with our discussions.

Our goal was to promote LearnHigher as a resource database and encourage submissions, as well as to convince everyone that we are approachable and friendly, should they have questions going forward! I certainly felt as though we were successful in this, and we came away with lots of valuable feedback which has already been reviewed. I'm really impressed with how quickly some of these changes have been implemented. In particular, the reworked website is looking great, so we extend our thanks to Katharine Jewitt.

The team has been writing a response article detailing our thoughts and the changes made, which will provide specific details. Some of these feel like fundamental changes, so looking ahead we are excited to see how people engage with the site and resources. We plan to feed back at ALDCON '24!

Jennie Dettmer:
Being one of the last sessions of the conference, I was pleased to see so many colleagues still enthusiastic about contributing to LearnHigher. As a working group, we really wanted to get feedback as to what we can do to create community and belonging for the submitters and users of the LearnHigher site. We had some ideas ourselves and wanted to see if these correlated with those of the users. For example, of the eight tables, six wanted to see reviewer feedback available on the site. I was pleased to see this feedback as on the old LearnHigher website, we had a 'like' button, which was popular with both users and submitters to the site. Half the tables also wanted to see a 'Submitter of the Year' prize awarded. This could have been prompted by the award ceremony that took place the night before, which included an award for 'Journal Editor of the Year'. Such an initiative should also help with submissions to the site, if submitters can see that they might be further rewarded. Using the feedback from the community to improve the LearnHigher website will lead, hopefully, to further usage of the site – from both for submitters and

users – and ensure that LearnHigher is the go-to place for Learning Development resources for the community.

Lee Fallin:
I sometimes feel like LearnHigher is a forgotten member of our community. For this reason, I was thrilled to see a full room for our session, and to see genuine enthusiasm for the principles of LearnHigher - the dissemination of high quality, peer-reviewed resources for Learning Development in the Higher Education sector. There was lots of interaction in the session, and it was good to see so many people enthused to contribute to LearnHigher, and that we had been able to clarify the process and build interest. My genuine call for action is for participants to convert their enthusiasm into reality. Make a submission! It is really easy to Submit a resource, and in doing so, you make a valuable contribution to the Learning Development community.

For me, the idea of community is important. LearnHigher should represent the best of our resources – a peer-reviewed archive of materials that simply work. I fear that Learning Developers sometimes reinvent the same things over and over. We need an institutional memory, and where the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education records our scholarship and research, it is LearnHigher that should preserve and propagate our learning materials.

**Figure 3. LearnHigher Badge.**

I'd also like to reflect on community in a different way. LearnHigher, as a working group, is also a community. I enjoyed this session so very much as it was my first opportunity not only to represent the group, but also physically to meet some of the people I had been working with virtually. One of my little contributions this year was the design of our new LearnHigher badges (see Figure 3) to try and bring visibility to the LearnHigher team at the conference. I know it was a conversation starter for me, although there is a long way to go! I was thrilled to see so many positive contributions from the community, and I love the ideas around remixes, calls for resources, and reward and recognition. I really hope we can work to realise some of these ideas over the next academic year.

There should also be an acknowledgement of where we have come from… a nod to the past. LearnHigher originated in 2005, funded as a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, comprising 16 institutions (Hilsdon, 2018; ALDinHE, 2022). A precursor to ALDinHE, LearnHigher should have a sacred place in our community *now*, not just in its history. Help us continue to build this fantastic repository by getting involved and submitting resources that you feel would benefit others.

**Laura Key:**

While I was unable to be physically present at the conference this year, I helped to plan the LearnHigher session and am thrilled that it was so popular and successful! Particularly exciting are the number of changes that we have been able to implement in a short time since the conference, all thanks to the brilliant ideas of both the working group and the wider LD community (as well as fantastic technical work from Katharine Jewitt!). The ability to track downloads, review and rate resources is transformational for LearnHigher, as it will enable submitters to demonstrate their impact on a national (perhaps even international) scale. Our plan for the conference was to provide ALDinHE members with a space in which they could tell us what *they* wanted, rather than us dictating the future direction for the group. In this regard, I think the roundtable discussion was a particular success, and I hope that users will be pleased by the changes already in place.

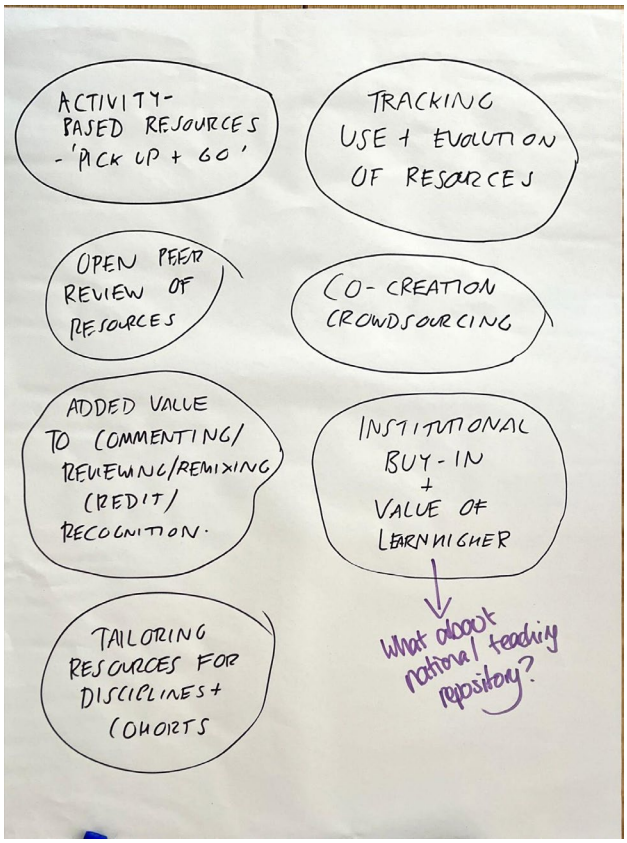
In my role as co-chair of the group (since March 23), I hope that this will encourage an increase in the number of submissions to LearnHigher, as I feel we have gained interest and momentum over the past year, which, ideally, should be matched by further

development of the LearnHigher database. In this way, we can make LearnHigher a bigger and better resource for the community. This is certainly my vision for the coming year. So, now, as a working group, we must sustain this momentum and work to develop community and belonging around LearnHigher. To this end, we look forward to featuring in LoveLD magazine very soon and will continue to communicate with the community through JiscMail and other relevant media. Watch this space!

Sumeetra Ramakrishnan:

The workshop was a culmination of the discussions and reflections of the LearnHigher team, sharing our desire to promote and highlight the valuable resources and learning opportunities existing within the LearnHigher platform. As a community, we are passionate about co-creating high quality, useful, peer-reviewed resources to support learning development in higher education, and hope to widen our community and benefit as many users as possible. The conference for us was an opportunity to introduce ourselves and remind ALDinHE colleagues of what we do and how people can get involved. As a team, we identified and agreed on key objectives: to explain what we do in brief, and then be guided by the reflections of audience, what they want from LearnHigher and how we can achieve this together. We were also very keen to invite more submissions to LearnHigher and wanted to use the workshop space to engage in insightful discussions. We were genuinely pleased with the workshop attendance, particularly as the session was one of the final ones on the last day of the conference, and we were overwhelmed with the enthusiastic contributions of colleagues from wider ALDinHE.

**Figure 4. Example flipchart of ideas gathered during the session discussion (photograph).**




The “old- fashioned” flip charts and prompt questions allowed for an easy flow of discussions, with groups enthusiastically discussing and populating the sheets with pictures and writing. There was plenty of food for thought for the thematic analysis post-workshop, which was guided by our simple objective to create a community and belonging for submitters and users of LearnHigher. Going through the flipcharts, a few common themes arose, like recognition for authors, how the website is designed and availability of user reviews, many of which had also been identified by us in LearnHigher meetings previously. A few new themes provided us with pause for thought and perspectives which added value to the discussions, like institutional buy-in, including student suggestions and so on. The workshop has been invaluable in terms of sharing our aspirations for LearnHigher, listening, and learning from ALDinHE colleagues and planning our next steps to make LearnHigher a platform for all.

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