

Putting King's Online podcast

Episode 1: There really is no 'i' in team

[Music] Introduction

Putting King's Online, a podcast exploring the process of designing online learning courses from the team which creates them.

I'm your host Rachele Wall and in each episode of Putting King's Online, I'll be talking to my colleagues about their roles here at King's College London, within the Online and Professional Executive Education team. We'll be delving into the processes of creating online courses. From ideation to delivery, inclusive design, accessibility and where we stand in the wider online learning community.

Rachele

Hello and welcome to the very first episode of Putting King's Online. To kick us off this week, I wanted to give you a little bit of background into who the OPEE team is. An acronym that you will hear a lot throughout the course of this podcast. OPEE stands for Online and Professional Executive Education. Quite a tongue twister. Now, under the banner of OPEE sits two teams, King's Online and KPED. The King's Online team specialise in producing online master's courses and short courses; and KPED which stands for Kings Professional and Executive Development, develop continued professional development and executive education courses. So joining me in this episode are seven of my colleagues who all have very different roles within our team and have all been part of the team for a varied number of years. What this episode will give you is a broad overview of how each team functions, how the teams grew and developed within Kings and ultimately, what makes our team special and a great place to work.

PART 1

Rachele

So the King's Online team that exists today has gone through quite a transformative few years. From humble beginnings to the backing of the principal and our continued partnership with Pearson. The journey of developing online courses has been an interesting one. So here to give you some insight into this is Karen and Rachel.

Karen

My name is Karen Greetham. I'm the head of Production and Partnership Operations at OPEE. I started at King's in, I think April 2014 and I was actually part of a team that existed before King's Online existed and then before OPEE existed. I've seen the journey of it right from the beginning [LAUGHTER].

Rachel

I'm working now as a User Experience researcher in the UX team and I've been working at King's Online since it began back in 2015. Actually, I was working in the

team that became King's Online that preceded. I actually started at King's in distance learning at the end of 2008 in the distance learning unit at the Dental Institute, and then the development team (that was only three people) that got moved out of that and became the Central Unit of Distance Learning (CUDL) and then we became King's Online. I think round about November, 2015.

Karen

I think it was around that time or just after, that CUDL became King's Online. Essentially that's when we got the new principal, Ed Byrne. He had experienced being in a university which was creating fully online programmes in Australia. He brought that idea over with him when he became our new principal along with Ian Tebbett who was King's previous Chief Operating Officer. They had this idea that they wanted to bring fully online master's education to King's. It was actually part of Vision 2029 which was to be the UK leaders in online and blended education by 2029, so they formed King's Online. Anna Wood was completely instrumental as well as she came in as director of King's Online.

Rachel

I think when we started there was about eight or nine of us. I think we already had a lot of the areas that we have in the team now, existed already. We had instructional design, we had media, we had visual design, learning technology, but one person had two of those roles. A lot of what we have now in the team was there we just didn't have so many people.

Karen

At that stage, the team was still very tiny. By then we were in the ground floor of Virginia Woolf building. The advent of King's Online was very exciting, but it was also a very fraught time because we had to do so much work in so little time with so few people. All I really remember is being quite stressed a lot. One of my favourite things to do was lie on the floor because I felt it grounded me. So whenever I got stressed, I would just lie on the floor and gather my thoughts. We were a small enough team for that not to be too weird.

Rachel

We've generally been working on smaller projects, so the English Language Centre we did things with the Graduate School, I think also the Law School as well as some health care projects. We actually also worked on the, we created the first MOOCs (massive open online course) the first Future Learn courses when King's signed up, we produced those. But when we became King's Online, that was when we started working on the big programmes.

Karen

That was an incredibly interesting time because there was the development of the programme at the IoPPN (Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience), which is the Psychology and Neuroscience of Mental Health. We were also at the same time developing the first online law programme, which is International Corporate Commercial Law. That was essentially Lindsey and I with a lot of help from other team members, but trying to get this course together.

PART 2

Rachele

KPED similarly underwent a process of development and transformation into the powerhouse team they are today. Originally King's Business, KPED was established in January 2010 and started as a team of just three, to help oversee, promote and encourage the growth of short courses. Their team has grown to a team of more than 10, now working with faculties to commercialise education offers for national, international, private and public sector organisations. Jo and Marsha give us their experiences working within KPED, what drew them to King's ultimately and what inspires them in their work every day.

Jo

I'm Jo Fowler. I'm currently Head of Business Development and I've been in that post for one year and three days as we're recording this. I've finally made substantive on 1st November last year. Before then, I came into KPED as maternity cover for Tara Maguire as Business Development Manager for Arts and Sciences. So I've been here a grand total of two years and three days.

Marsha

My name is Marsha Gittens. I'm the Projects Officer for the Arts and Sciences section of OPEE or KPED. I've been working at King's permanently since 2018, but I've worked for them since 2017, so I've been with them for a while.

Jo

I've never worked in HE (higher education) and I thought, "Oh, oh Kings." Really it was the Kings that attracted me. Then I quite liked the job description because it had all these things about international travel and educational consultancy and financial margins and I thought, "That sounds really good." Low and behold I met Catherine and Grace, who was the previous Business Development Manager in the sumptuous settings of Somerset House. I remember thinking, "Wow, I want to work here in this amazing Georgian building with these amazing views over the quad at Somerset House." I took the job because A, I thought Catherine was mad and B, the team seemed really really great and it seemed pretty funky. I remember turning up for work on the first day, going into broom cupboard, feeling [LAUGHTER] slightly disappointed that I was in this Georgian building up on a mezzanine level with a window that wouldn't shut and a small team of people who worked between three, four different offices. I met the team and at that time there was a team of Catherine and Steve, Cleo, Marsha, Enni and Jamie. It was really small and it was really tight. Then, getting to grips with some of the contracts that the team were dealing with. [LAUGHTER] When you start reading and your first job is to look at a US State Department Award for Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaties, it's really exciting. [LAUGHTER] It's really interesting. That was my introduction to KPED. It's weird because I felt immediately at home and comfortable, but all I can say is that KPED at that time were amazingly welcoming, slightly mad.

Marsha

The jump to HE (higher education) wasn't necessarily intentional. It was education more so. I need to feel like what I do day-to-day brings value to someone else's life not just my own. So I think education is always about bettering yourself. It's always

about growing and you grow watching them do it, you grow from their feedback, so it works mutually.

Jo

The other thing around KPED, where we differ from online, is that online you have defined roles. You have your quality roles. You have your instructional designer roles. You have your learning technologists' roles. You have your media roles. You have your audio roles. I suppose with KPED, we'll dip in and out of each other's roles because we're such a small team, there's 12 of us. So we have to be able to jump in, support every other role in the team.

PART 3

Rachele

King's Online and KPED joined forces in January 2019, to become OPEE. Once again, that's Online Professional and Executive Education. The two teams aligned because each had several complimentary roles and responsibilities, such as design and development, partnership development, account management, business development, commercial focus and many cross-functional responsibilities. The joining together of King's Online and KPED was an exciting development, and one that saw new roles created to work across both teams. In this next clip, you'll be hearing from Jo and Marsha again about what this alignment means for each of our teams separately. As well as Mike, who gives us an insight into his recent experience joining OPEE and understanding how these seemingly different teams had the potential to do great things together and have started to do so.

Mike

My name is Mike Bennett and I'm the head of Portfolio and Instructional Design for OPEE. I started what feels like a long time ago now, but it was only January when we were actually in the office in Melbourne house. My first year, really at OPEE [LAUGHTER] has been dominated by the lockdown.

Jo

I joined KPED just as Anna and Catherine started having the discussions, I think. I sort of vaguely knew it was on the cards about three months in. Catherine was talking about a functional alignment, whatever that meant. It's not a term that I was aware of at that time. Yeah, I remember going into a whole team development day in the bowels of Somerset House and Anna turning up and I thought, oh okay, okay, this person seems all right. I think at that time, when it became clear we were going to move to Melbourne house and be functionally aligned, I couldn't see the synergies. I thought, hang on there's two disparate teams here. Ostensibly we have nothing in common, how wrong was I? How is it going to work?

Mike

Starting when I did, and in the role that I did, you go into OPEE thinking that it is one unit and that has actually been my experience. There's a period where I needed to sort of find my feet actually and work out where the King's Online bits of the job we're going to be and where the KPED bits of the job we're going to be. But actually, there has been a nice synergy between the two groups.

Jo

The beauty of online is that it's a big team and it's a diverse team and there's lots of different viewpoints and there's lots of different personalities and there's lots of different experiences which makes it fascinating, getting to know the component individuals. Whereas KPED, we're very small and we know everything about each other.

Marsha

What is our edge, what's our angle? What makes us different? I think us coming together actually gives us that edge now.

Jo

I suppose it's like any couple moving in together, there's fuzzy bits, there's warm bits, there is bits that annoy, bits that irritate, but ultimately work at it and you get a much stronger team. OPEE as we have become is actually a fairly formidable vehicle for change and could be as an exemplar as how two diverse teams have come together, learnt to work together, shared best practice, shared thought, shared processes and we'll both be the stronger for it.

Mike

I guess one thing in particular has been the online CPD and executive education strategy in moving that through college education committee has been a real pleasure to be involved in. I think it has brought together KPED and King's Online really nicely, and I see loads of other opportunities to do similar things as we try and diversify the portfolio. For example, transnational education. Having regional hubs overseas and working to A, build those partnerships through KPED and global engagement, and then secondly to actualise an online learning solution for them through King's Online. Yeah, I think the synergy is there and it's something that I felt straight away between Anna and Catherine and all the different colleagues that I could see that the intention was to align the two together strategically, and then once you've done that, the operations would work for themselves.

Rachele

It's worth mentioning here that some of the experiences you'll be hearing in this episode, and in episodes to follow, will reflect on the COVID-19 global pandemic that saw the UK and many other countries around the world enter into a nationwide lockdown, forcing many people to work remotely from home since March this year. And whilst the pandemic has been a period of of course immense uncertainty and extreme worry for the health and the well-being of every person around the globe; what it's done is created a demand for online learning and an opportunity for us as a team to use our knowledge and experiences to help the wider college deliver online learning for thousands of students who chose, and continue to choose, a King's education.

PART 4

Rachele

So, in this next section, we explore the process of not only developing online courses, since the early days of King's Online, but also looking at how far that production process has come, as you'll hear from Karen's memories of earlier

learning design workshops. Nina and Tom, both fairly new members of the King's Online team describe their experiences coming into King's Online this year. It really becomes evident how listening and learning and improving how our team work lead to overall improvement in not only our final product, but ultimately that student experience.

Karen

There was a lot that we didn't know about online learning at that stage. There was a lot of learning happening whilst we were doing it. Lindsey and I would basically lock a module leader in a room for two days with us and get him to map out the student journey. We had the wall in the Virginia Woolf building that you could write on. So we got the module leader in there and we would just like literally sit there, we'd have two full days booked and we would just write on the wall and map out the whole module. Lindsey would then go away and put it together. Somehow we made these modules for the law school with a huge amount of help from Dan as well because I think Dan had just recently joined the team as well. He was completely instrumental in sort of creating these... You know we've got some really good videos in the beginning of the program for the International Corporate Commercial Law. When they took the module leaders out onsite, they had one of the Law School academics walking around Whitechapel and talking to camera. It was the first time that we were doing stuff like this for e-learning and creating these really amazing visual assets for the students. Yeah, it was exciting, but it was very stressful because there was a lot that we didn't know and we were learning whilst we were doing it.

Tom

I'm Tom Browne. I'm an e-Learning Assistant for King's Online. I've been in the role since mid-March this year. I've been in the office once. I got the role just before lockdown happened.

Nina

My name's Nina. I'm an e-Learning Content Developer at King's Online, and I joined in February 2020. I've been with the team for, I guess that's about nine months now.

Tom

I think there's such a solid sort of process pipeline for so much of what we do. I've been surprised at how easy it's been to get myself familiar with the team and with what's going on.

Nina

I was really struck by, I guess how the office was set up, just the open plan setup, which I guess is not particularly unusual. But I suppose the absence of offices for like more senior people and the fact that we hot desk, so we move around the office. One day you might be sitting beside somebody who's in your team or the next day you might be sitting beside, I don't know, the director or something like that. I guess that flat hierarchy if that makes sense. Just feeling that everybody's on the same level.

Tom

To see that sort of level of attention paid to specific, the specifics of e-learning, online learning to come into a department where it was like, we've got this design

system, we've got these style guides, and it's all been researched and there's a reason for everything. Right, we've done this UX research, there are ways we do things and reasons we do things in those ways and here it is, and there's this massive production team and there's all these different roles, so to come into that was like, oh right yeah, it makes sense, there's a way to do this. There's a path to follow.

Nina

I've always had an interest and belief that technology is so important in enhancing learning experiences. That was one of the things that drew me to working with King's Online. It struck me that the team was doing really interesting things with online learning and very visionary and ambitious about the kind of courses that it was developing, and wasn't just, 'we're going to put some content online and that's a course' it's really trying to be the best at this and use innovative ways to do that.

Karen

You know, that was a very conscious effort to make that happen. Something like that doesn't just happen by magic. It takes a lot of thought and conversations and feedback from the team, listening to what people need, and then putting the structures in place to enable that. It's a credit to the whole team really that that was made so important as I said, stuff like being able to create an environment where people can be creative and that they have the time in order to do that, but also meet our deadlines is a fairly big piece of work. But from my point of view, that is as important as the product that we create for our students because I think that you can't create an excellent product if you don't have a team which is able to work effectively and there's so many things that a team needs in order to be able to work effectively.

PART 5

Rachele

As our team continues to grow and evolve, one thing that remains a constant is where we fit in that wider King's community and our understanding of the global reach that King's has.

Mike

For me what brings us all together is that sense of that global reach and the potential to achieve King's vision for diversifying our student population and enabling people from every continent around the world to access education. That's something that certainly drives me forward as well.

Nina

I think just like further to the vision of King's. I really think we should be using technology to help people learn and create better access to learning, than maybe was traditionally the case. It's exciting to me that you can get a world-class education through one of our courses and it doesn't mean that you have to go to the campus and do all that because it just doesn't work for everyone.

Jo

The biggest draw of King's is the fact that its 200 years old, it's established, it's an established institution and people know it's King's.

Karen

To King's College London, online is incredibly important because it is going to allow us to widen our student base and bring more students to King's without needing space.

Jo

It's the interdisciplinarity that King's affords. We have nine faculties. We don't just work in medical and health, we work across a very broad spectrum of arts and sciences. It's that crux, that pivot between the two worlds. There's something there around the brand and the value of King's.

PART 6

Rachele

One thing that's clearly remained in the growth and expansion of both King's Online and KPED, now united under that OPEE banner, is the underlying team spirit and culture that is cultivated through a genuine enjoyment of producing the work that we produce, and getting to do that with colleagues who share in that passion.

Rachel

I think although the team has grown a lot and expanded and it's so much bigger than it was. I think it has the same character in some ways. I think it's always been, without wanting to sound cheesy, it's a nice place to work. People here really care about what they do, who are trying to produce something really good and always to learn and always trying to do things better and wanting to be doing more exciting and innovative things. I think it's always been a little bit like that. We see people, so many, well not so many, but we've seen several people leave Kings Online and come back because I think it is just a good place to work.

Mike

I do get that sense people are so super friendly. When I started I had this amazing induction where I was introduced to a myriad of different people, and it was like goodness, how I'm going to remember what everybody's doing? But the amazing thing was how friendly everybody was, and that there were no egos and that everybody was working for the good of OPEE, was almost I thought neighbourly, in the way that people approached it and I thought that people care, which is not always a given as you know.

Nina

I'm connected to that like everybody is just so approachable. I only joined this February, and obviously we went into lockdown in March, but even with just that month or so, I already felt like I really belonged.

Tom

To come into this much bigger team was a very different experience, but despite the size, I think there's a real, you know there's a risk with a large team that you can feel

a bit lost or overlooked or shuffled into the pack. But I don't think that's been the case it all.

Karen

The reason why the team has been so successful is because we've been able to hire some really talented, creative, thoughtful people. Through collaboration I think that we've been able to create team structures which really work. I don't think it's perfect. These things never are and there's always room for improvement. Through being able to tap into the skills and the ideas of everybody in the team, that we've, I think we've been able to create team structures which really work.

PART 7

Rachele

I hope you've enjoyed this journey through the past and present years of King's Online, KPED and OPEE. I leave you with these last few words.

Jo

In times of adversity, innovation flourishes and it accelerates. That's been a lesson throughout history and it is worthwhile just reflecting on that in the current situation. Teams which are flexible, teams which adapt and teams which evolve, are the ones that are going to be winners, and I think within OPEE, we have that, and I think the evidence for that is coming out pretty strong at the moment.

Karen

Our numbers are just getting bigger and bigger and bigger. We've enrolled nearly 4,000 new postgraduate students for King's through these online programmes. In 2019, I think we enrolled something like 915 new students. This year that number has more than doubled. We're sitting at, I think about 2,205 new postgraduate students just in this year, which is extraordinary.

Mike

Anna leaving is tremendously sad, but the legacy that she has left and the foundations that she's left, we will just grow and grow from here. There is no doubt in my mind about that.

[MUSIC] Conclusion

You've been listening to Putting King's Online. Subscribe, rate and share us wherever you get your podcasts. Putting Kings Online is hosted, produced and edited by me Rachele Wall, and is a production brought to you by the Online and Professional Executive Education team here at King's College London.