

# Putting King's Online podcast

## Episode 2: The Project Manager, as told by Jas

### [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.

### [Music] Rachele

Earlier this week, I sat down with my colleague Jas, who's a Project Manager within our team. We discuss everything from what a Project Manager is, to what they do and the vital role that they play in our wider team.

**Jas**

Cool, I'm ready.

**Rachele**

You ready? Okay. I'll start with the first question and then hopefully we can just flow into the rest.

**Jas**

I'm a bit nervous. [LAUGHTER]

**Rachele**

Don't be nervous. Your role as a Project Manager is a fairly generic job title that I think I've heard across loads of different industries. Can you talk me through a bit about the context of the PM role in the online learning community?

**Jas**

As you said, project management is quite a generic role that can be applied in lots of different projects and lots of different companies. But specifically for King's and for King's Online, I think the main part of being a Project Manager is about facilitating creativity. The process of developing online learning is incredibly creative, and we work with a number of creative people, creative teams, creative expertise, and the process to put the learning online for students is very creative in the way that we collaborate and work with academics.

So, I guess my job as a Project Manager is really about facilitating that creativity, making sure that we're getting the best out of those people, to create a great

experience for students. But also about helping to get the best out of the project and the best out of the situation to help develop those creative people further, and to help us keep up to date with the trends in technology and in the trends in online learning.

**Rachele**

We've talked a bit about the Project Manager role and the processes that you oversee. Can you talk a little bit about the detail around that? What do these project teams look like within King's Online?

**Jas**

Sure so at King's Online, we're blessed to have a massive creative team. We've got every one from Instruction Designers, Video Producers, Audio Editors, e-Learning Assistants. We've got Visual Designers, Content Developers, and I'm sure there's a few that I've missed as well. People with that individual expertise then work together, ideally on a whole programme, so a series of 12 modules that make up a Master's programme for students, or a series of short modules which can just be taken as one-offs. It really depends on the overall project and that's through weekly team meetings, workshops, creative discussions. We have a lot of fluid communications.

**Rachele**

That's really interesting that you focus a lot on the process of development as being a very creative process. Because I think a lot of people wouldn't necessarily associate learning, or particularly online learning with being a very creative process, and I guess from an outsider's perspective, it seems really difficult. How do you manage a very creative process in a very like highly structured and organised way? How [LAUGHTER] would you do that?

**Jas**

Well. [LAUGHTER] It takes a creative mindset to be able to manage creative people and a creative process. Being a Project Manager I think there's a lot of empathy involved, and a lot of understanding the psyche of how other people work in order to get the best out of them.

**Rachele**

You have to have, and I know we've talked about this in different contexts, but you have to have such an emotional understanding of people in general, not necessarily just in how people work. But it sounds like the focus really is on the people rather than necessarily the individual roles or the individual parts that they're working on to bring the sum of the whole together?

**Jas**

Yes. I definitely think being a Project Manager you have a bird's eye view, and you're looking at the team as a whole, and you're looking at the end goal as a whole, rather than all of the individual detailed aspects, so kind of managing everyone together.

**Rachele**

What would you say are some of the biggest challenges of this type of role?

**Jas**

I actually struggled thinking about this, because I think I enjoy my role so much that I enjoy the challenges so much, that it almost doesn't feel like a challenge anymore, because it's just become part of the fun of the everyday. Everyday is different. I'm working with different teams on different projects, and different modules and different academics. But I think perhaps overall, the hardest part, or perhaps the part which requires a lot more attention to detail, is around managing expectations. It might be that you can deliver on time and on budget with the majority of the features or quality, and then look at revisiting and upgrading and updating later on. But somewhere along the line and somewhere down the process, one of those things is going to have to give a little.

So I think it's about managing that expectation, that we can't do everything. We haven't got unlimited time, we haven't got unlimited budget, and being able to still come out of the process with a really good quality product that students are going to have a great experience from but also that academics are going to be proud of, and that, we as a creative team are proud of. That's obviously on time for students and within the amount of resource that we can offer that. So juggling that can be quite tricky.

**Rachele**

If as a team we were hiring for another Project Manager, what sort of advice would you give somebody? Or what sort of skills do you think somebody should have to be able to excel in a project management role within not only higher learning, but within our team specifically?

**Jas**

I think the first thing is, there will be a lot that you don't know, that you don't know, if that makes sense. There's a lot of different processes and roles and approvals, both within our team, and within King's as an institution, and it's a complete minefield. It takes a while to get to grips with the different roles and the different ways that people work, and the different processes that we use.

I mean, within King's Online specifically, there are so many different workflows and processes that we have in place to develop the specific components and elements that make up online. It takes, I'd say about six months to get to grips with what's really going on before you can turn around and say, "Yeah, I know exactly what that person does now." I'd also say, don't be afraid to make mistakes, and take risks I think, and make decisions.

**Rachele**

You have to try things at the end of the day, and I think that's the thing that I've learned working in different roles within the team is that, online learning is always evolving and always changing. That is not only applicable to the changing needs of students, but also the fact that how we develop what we develop is always changing as well. It's not a one size fit-all process and there's not a specific way to do online learning that once you've cracked that, that's it, you're good to go for the next 5-10 years. I think that's definitely applicable to the production side of things as well.

**Jas**

Yeah. If you don't ever say yes, take a risk, and try something new, or think a little bit more outside the box, we're never going to develop the way that we work and the offering that we give to students.

**Rachele**

Yeah. It's that student experience at the end of the day that is the one end goal that every single role within the team has.

**Jas**

Exactly. I also think, with the way that we've developed, so with the way that our head of innovation has developed the new design system, which overlays our learning management system to create a cohesive experience for all students, and a navigation system that cuts away all of the difficulties, and challenges, and niggles that students use to have. We're creating a much more unified experience, but also a really, really good quality experience in terms of just how a student learns, regardless of what content or teaching materials is applied to it or uploaded into it.

**Rachele**

I think that's a really good point to make actually because we are talking about two very different processes that are working alongside each other. They're not necessarily processes, but two different functionalities of the work that we produce. On the one side, we have the content itself, which is what students need to learn and get their qualification at the end of the day. But also there's the functionality which is, like you said, it's the system, it's the navigation, it's how they access and work their way through that content, and that is just as important as the content itself.

**Jas**

Absolutely.

**[MUSIC] Conclusion**

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