

Executive education adapts to the new normal

Bespoke programmes being developed to add greater degree of flexibility and personalisation

ROSEMARY GALLAGHER

One impact of the pandemic is the way that flexible working has become the norm, with employers realising that people can be just as productive, if not more so, working from home in hours that suit their lifestyles.

This demand for flexibility has also changed what people are looking for from executive education. As a result, universities, colleges and other providers are rethinking how, where and when they offer courses to professionals.

The University of Strathclyde is a major player in the world of executive education, with its qualifications recognised across the world as a sign of quality.

Dr Phil Considine, director of Strathclyde Executive Education and Development, says: "We are seeing a shift both in terms of content and consumption. Regarding delivery, people are now asking for flexibility and the ability to personalise their learning."

SUCH TAILORING TO suit individuals can be achieved in a number of ways, according to Dr Considine. Strathclyde uses 'micro-credentials' as a tool to build bespoke programmes.

He explains: "These are co-created to meet the needs of specific organisations and sectors – so we find ourselves working much more closely with senior leaders and their top teams within the organisations to craft programmes that are specific to them."

In terms of content, Dr Considine says all sectors want to understand the implications of digital transformation and the tools and techniques available to senior managers and leaders. "Pre-pandemic this was a trend that we knew was important, but that was sector specific. Post pandemic it impacts everyone and every sector, from the ability to work remotely to service delivery, order

fulfilment and customer interactions," he says.

Its MSc Digital Transformation programme is one of the flagship offerings developed during the pandemic that will start next year. Dr Considine says it typifies the flexible and hybrid nature of the post-pandemic world, offering a range of pathways and delivery channels.

Shona Struthers, chief executive officer of Colleges Scotland, which represents the college sector, says: "The pandemic has been a time of reflection for a lot of workers in Scotland and there is a huge appetite for continuous professional development at the moment. Businesses are also probably more aware than ever of the need to invest and nurture their staff and put a high value on leadership qualities and skills which are essential."

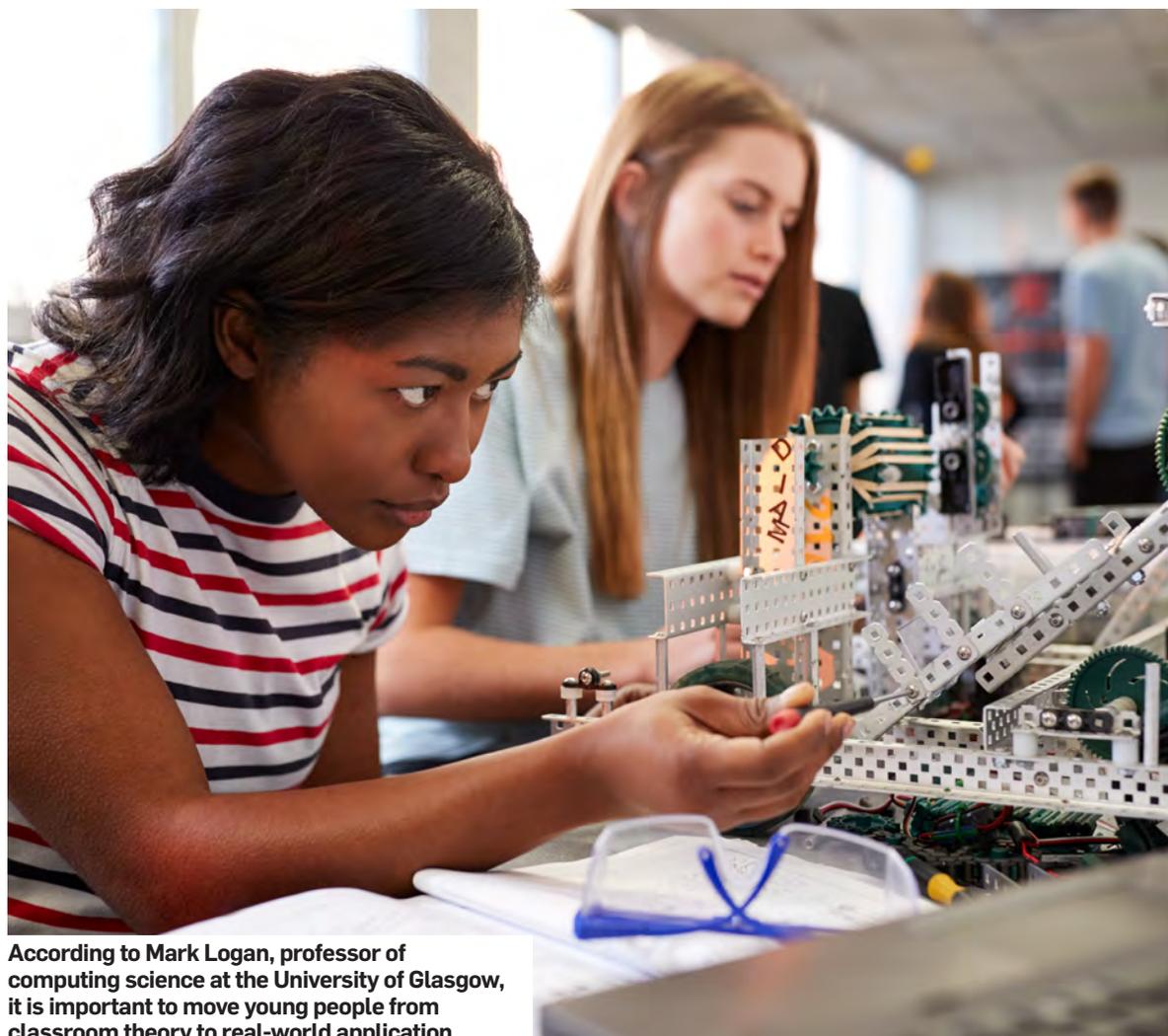
STRUTHERS ADDS THAT colleges offer world-class education in management, leadership and executive skills. She echoes Dr Considine's comments, saying that courses are increasingly taking the form of micro-credentials that can be accommodated within people's other work and life commitments.

Professor Kevin Grant, Dean of Stirling Management School at the University of Stirling, says that the classical MBA model had taken a bit of a hit even before the pandemic.

He says: "There is some tension. The historic model of doing a degree that leads you to a profession and gets you up the corporate ladder is being challenged. It's being unbundled. That unbundling of the curricula seems to be leading to more short, snappy and engaging training with a clear and demonstrated return on investment, rather than a classical MBA."

According to Professor Grant, digitisation is one of the drivers behind such changes, along with a realisation of the benefits of wellbeing. He cites the rise of the likes of TikTok, shorter attention spans and corporations being less willing to support full MBAs as factors contributing to this trend.

It seems that executive education is as important as ever, but it is changing to suit new requirements, such as a focus on quality of life, that have been accelerated by the pandemic.



According to Mark Logan, professor of computing science at the University of Glasgow, it is important to move young people from classroom theory to real-world application

Helping create next generation of scientists and engineers

If Scotland is to have a workforce with the skills required for the science and engineering jobs of the future, it is vital that young people are inspired to study the relevant subjects.

That is why the Scottish Government, along with educationalists and policy makers, are making a concerted effort to attract youngsters to science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) topics.

One example is the Young Engineers and Science Clubs (YESC) initiative. It has been running in schools in Scotland since 1987, with support from the Scottish Government and industry. It currently works with more than 1,650 schools and STEM clubs across the country, with coverage in all 32 local authorities.

The YESC annual report for 2020/21 published by the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI), along with partners BP, Engineering UK, Scottish Government, Shell and Wood, points to a number of highlights.

THESE INCLUDE: adapting to deliver the programme online, providing 191 STEM resource kits to 160 schools free of charge; 37 teacher training sessions delivered over Microsoft Teams; the launch of a new digital coding competition called Code Versus Climate; and 'Future Voice', developed to complement the SCDI's new 2030 Blueprint report.

Other YESC achievements were the national delivery of the Energy Quest programme, running nine virtual workshops across Scotland; adding 52 new schools to the network and marking the end of the year with online celebration of STEM events.

Mark Logan, former Skyscanner executive and professor of computing science at the University of Glasgow, who is currently advising ministers on implementing the recommendations of his well-received independent review of the Scottish tech ecosystem, has praised the work of YESC.

He says: "YESC plays an essential role within our technology ecosystem in sparking the curiosity and interest

of young people in engineering and science. It moves children from classroom theory to real-world application and gives them a taste of what it feels like to work in such an exciting industry.

"The YESC team has created very exciting projects that engage young people in the search for solutions to the problems that we face as a society. What could be more valuable than that?"

Paul Winstanley is chief executive officer at CENSIS, a not-for-profit innovation centre in Scotland which supports organisations looking to exploit sensing, imaging and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies.

HE SAYS: "ONE of the most important ways of getting more young people into STEM careers is through inspiration. Immediately after the Second World War, a generation was inspired by the transformation and growth of civil aviation. At the beginning of the 1960s, President John Kennedy's pledge to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade was another catalyst. Now, we have possibly the biggest challenge of all to inspire and motivate the next generation: climate change."

Winstanley adds that there is a need to understand how to adapt physical infrastructure to cope with rising sea levels, and a requirement to feed a growing population while making fundamental alterations to the food system. "None of these issues are easy, but they can inspire young people to look at STEM careers as a way of taking them on and finding solutions."

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