

Foreword

Tim Oates

“...Education will never be the same again, post-pandemic...” is one view. “Back to normal...” is another. Neither position captures the reality of what we experienced and what we now see. For sure, following the wide and accelerated adoption of digital learning during the pandemic we need to understand and implement best practice in hybrid learning. We must understand this massive natural experiment in educational innovation, ensuring that we can regain the progress in closing gaps which we saw prior to COVID. Research and monitoring needs to regain the front foot, not simply seeing in hindsight the impact of what we have done, but providing evidence to better guarantee the quality of what we are doing and plan to do. “Back to normal” denies the fundamental and wide-ranging shifts which COVID response effected. “Everything has changed” undermines the continuity of good science and system improvement which we have seen for the decades preceding COVID. The article on checklists exemplifies this. Checklists were not in use when the flight crew tested the complex Boeing B-17 in 1935, leading to the death of the crew and loss of the aircraft. Modern practice in aviation on checklists began with the analysis of that specific incident and has protected the lives of millions of people. Checklists now are fundamental throughout the aviation industry, in maintenance as well as active flying. But despite their proven value, adoption in other fields has been strangely slow in the past 80 years, with research papers in medicine repeatedly expressing surprise that checklists have not been routinely introduced into areas such as interventional cardiology. COVID may have changed some things, but not the need for expanding and rolling out things which were of demonstrable value prior to the pandemic. The humble checklist, deployed properly, can yet improve the development and practice of assessment, digital or not. Despite COVID, principles of good assessment and high-quality assessment continue to obtain. “Everything has changed” is a voice which discourages something of vital importance – the need for scientific accumulation of knowledge of what works and what does not. The need for this has not diminished at all, nor has it eroded our need to understand exactly how each innovation impacts on both equity and attainment.