

# **Active Blended Learning** **Tutors' and students' approach** **to a pedagogic shift**

19<sup>th</sup> Academic Practice and Technology Conference (APT2021)

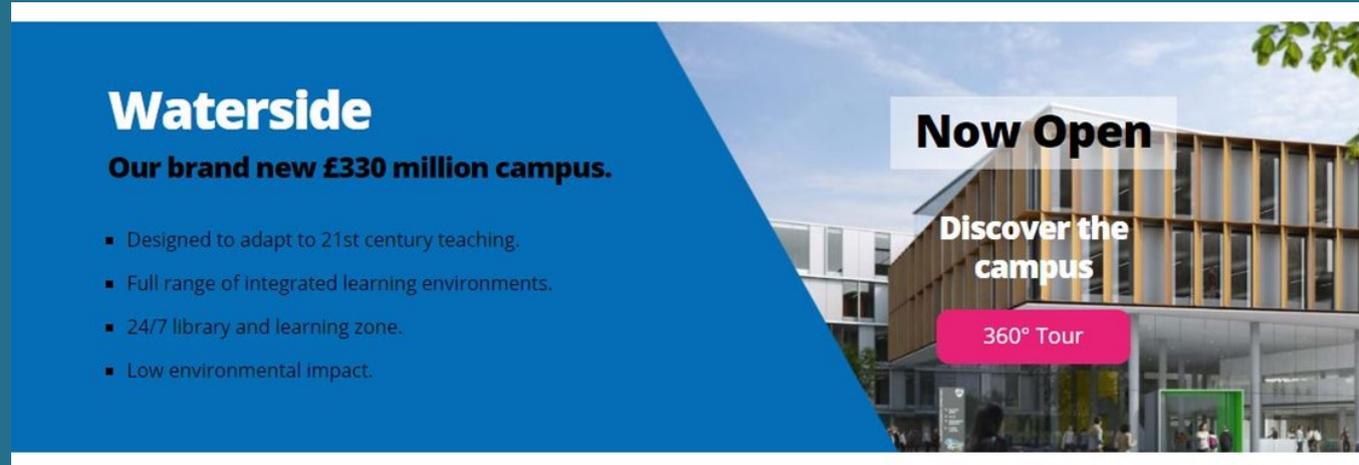
Friday July 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Virginia Teixeira Antunes** - Independent consultant

**Rob Howe** - Head of Learning Technology (University of Northampton)

# Institutional context (Northampton)

- 12,000 students; 1,500 staff; three Faculties.
- 2012 - Awarded Changemaker Campus
- 2014 - Adopted Active Blended Learning (ABL) as new pedagogy
- 2018 - Moved to a new purpose built campus without lecture rooms



**Waterside**  
**Our brand new £330 million campus.**

- Designed to adapt to 21st century teaching.
- Full range of integrated learning environments.
- 24/7 library and learning zone.
- Low environmental impact.

**Now Open**  
**Discover the campus**  
**360° Tour**

# ABL – a definition

---

**Active blended learning is a pedagogical approach that combines sense-making activities with focused student interactions (with content, peers and tutors) in appropriate learning settings – in and outside the classroom.**

ABL focuses on engaging students in knowledge construction, reflection and critique, the achievement of learning outcomes and the development of learner autonomy.

<https://www.northampton.ac.uk/ilt/current-projects/defining-abl/>

# A course follows an ABL methodology if it:

---

- Is taught through student-centred activities to develop knowledge and understanding, independent learning & digital fluency.
- Has a core, collaborative face-to-face component, explicitly linked to learning activity outside the classroom.
- Helps to develop autonomy, digital citizenship and employability skills.

Source: [ILT website](#)

```
graph TD; A((Pre-session sense-making activities with embedded content and resources)) --> B(( )); B --> C(( )); C --> A;
```

Pre-session  
**sense-making  
activities**  
with embedded  
content and  
resources

```
graph TD; A((Pre-session sense-making activities with embedded content and resources)) --> B((Real-time session (webinar): analysis, discussion, critique, Q&A and goal setting)); B --> C(( )); C --> A;
```

Pre-session  
**sense-making  
activities**  
with embedded  
content and  
resources

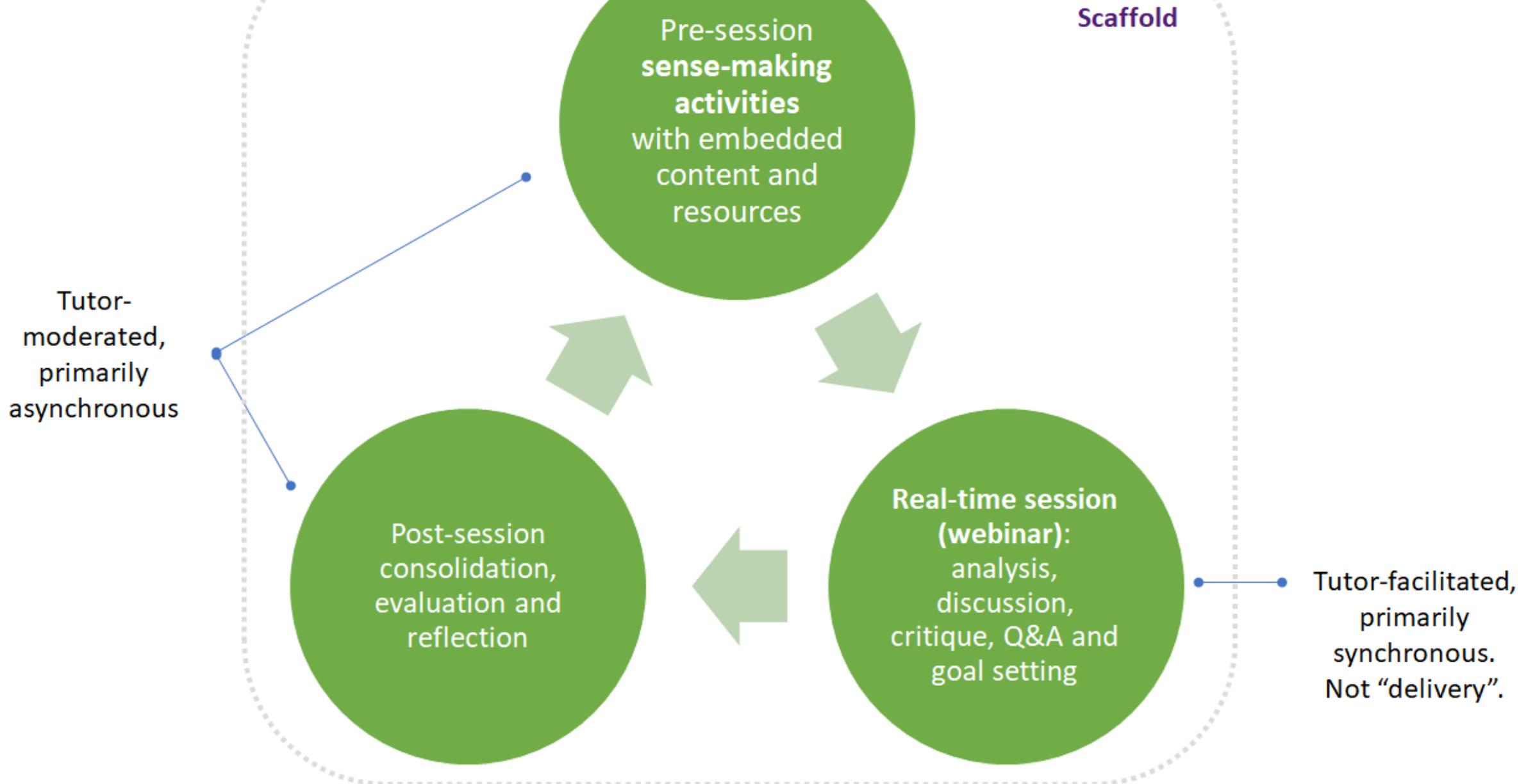
**Real-time session  
(webinar):**  
analysis,  
discussion,  
critique, Q&A and  
goal setting

```
graph TD; A((Pre-session sense-making activities with embedded content and resources)) --> B((Real-time session (webinar): analysis, discussion, critique, Q&A and goal setting)); B --> C((Post-session consolidation, evaluation and reflection)); C --> A;
```

Pre-session  
**sense-making  
activities**  
with embedded  
content and  
resources

**Real-time session  
(webinar):**  
analysis,  
discussion,  
critique, Q&A and  
goal setting

Post-session  
consolidation,  
evaluation and  
reflection



# Our study





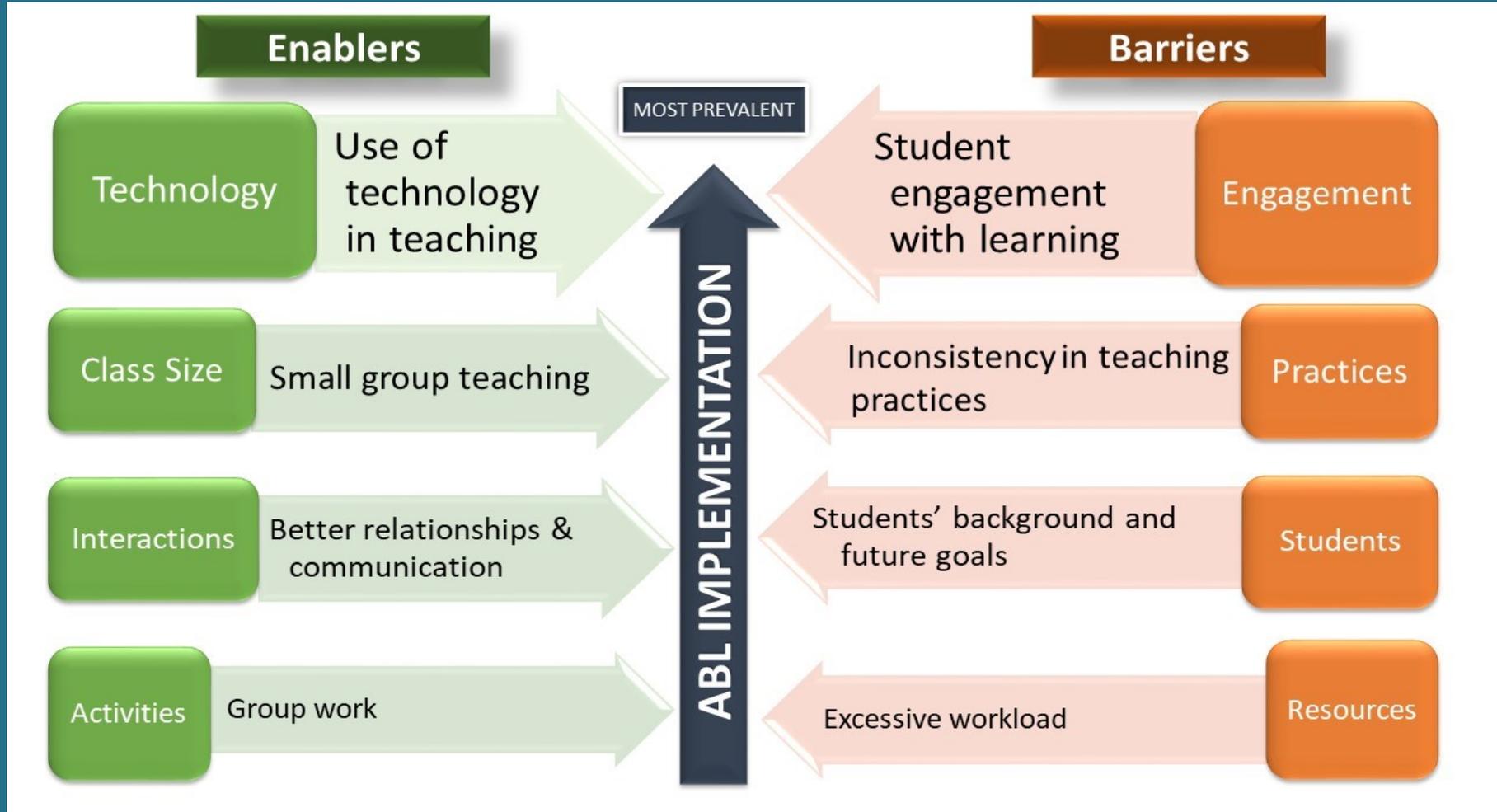
# Tutors' voice

# Research questions

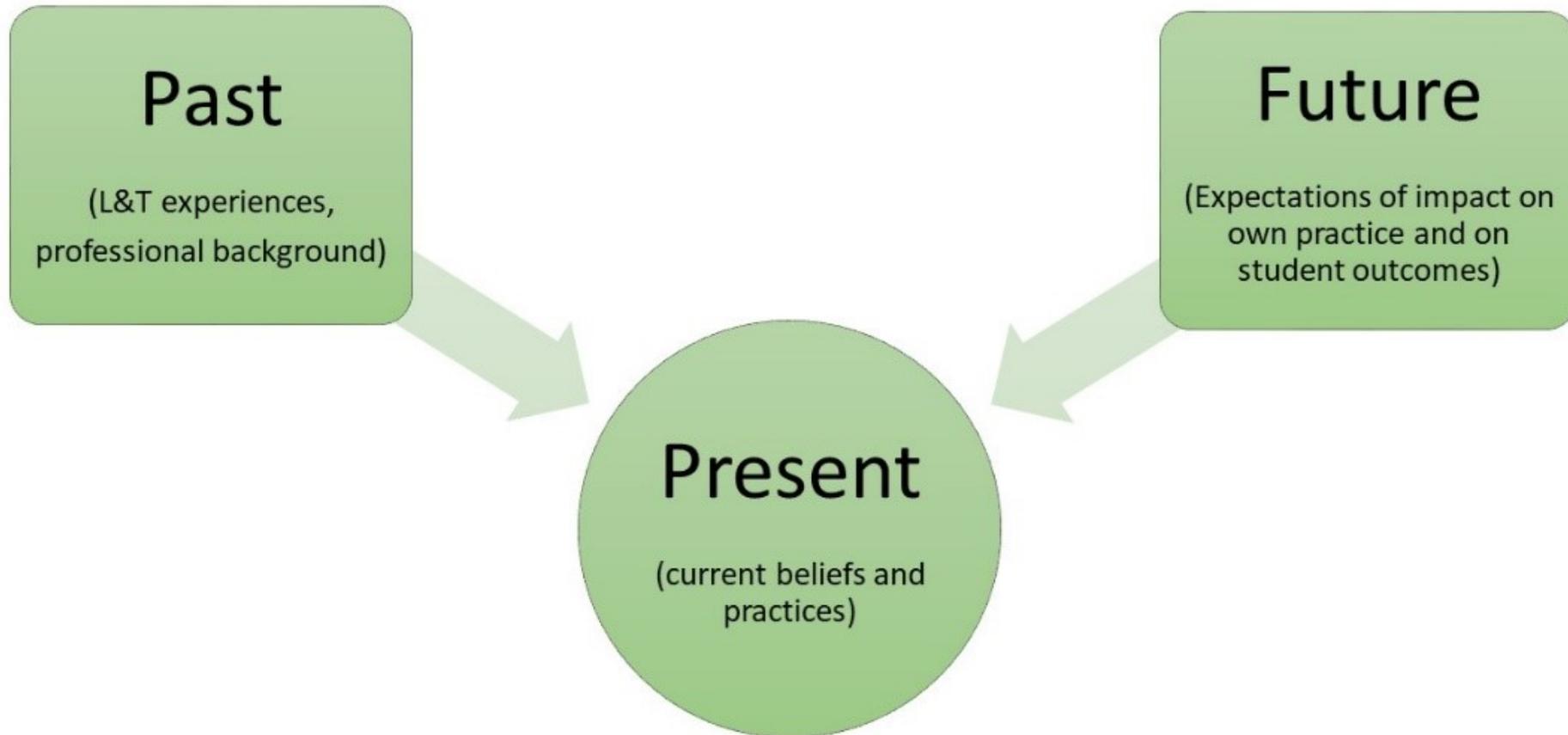
---

- (1) how are teaching practices **designed and implemented** within an ABL framework, and
- (2) what are the **attitudes and beliefs** of tutors about the implementation of ABL.

# Enablers and barriers



# Beliefs and practices...



# Tutors' expectations of impact on student outcomes

		Staff expectations of impact of the shift on student outcomes	
		Negative	Positive
Staff expectations of impact of the shift on own practice	Positive	Only staff focused on own development will engage despite potential negative impact on student outcomes	In-depth engagement
	Negative	Surface engagement (if required by the institution) or non-engagement	Staff focused on student outcomes will engage despite possible negative impact on own practice

Beliefs	Practice
ABL as <b>dichotomous</b> – focus on AL or BL as separate	Focus on <b>Active learning</b> <b>Blended learning</b> as more challenging and “different”
Technology should be <b>integrated and meaningful</b>	Strong inconsistency in <b>use of technology</b>
<b>Student engagement</b> is a core concern – particularly with pre-session tasks	<b>Pre-session tasks</b> and blended activities seen as more difficult to get students to engage
Facilitates <b>student-centred</b> aided by small group teaching	Focus on <b>theory and practice</b> link
ABL as <b>flexible and effective</b> for most – for some “one size fits all” approach	Some felt ABL as an imposition in practice
Varied views on <b>lecturing</b> suggesting different understandings of meaning	

# Beliefs and practice

		Consistency of practice with the principles of ABL	
		<i>Inconsistent</i>	<i>Consistent</i>
Beliefs on ABL as a pedagogic approach	<i>Effective</i>	<b>Lagging Innovators</b>	<b>Active Innovators</b>
	<i>Ineffective</i>	<b>Sceptical and resistant</b>	<b>Sceptical but obliging</b>



# Students' voice

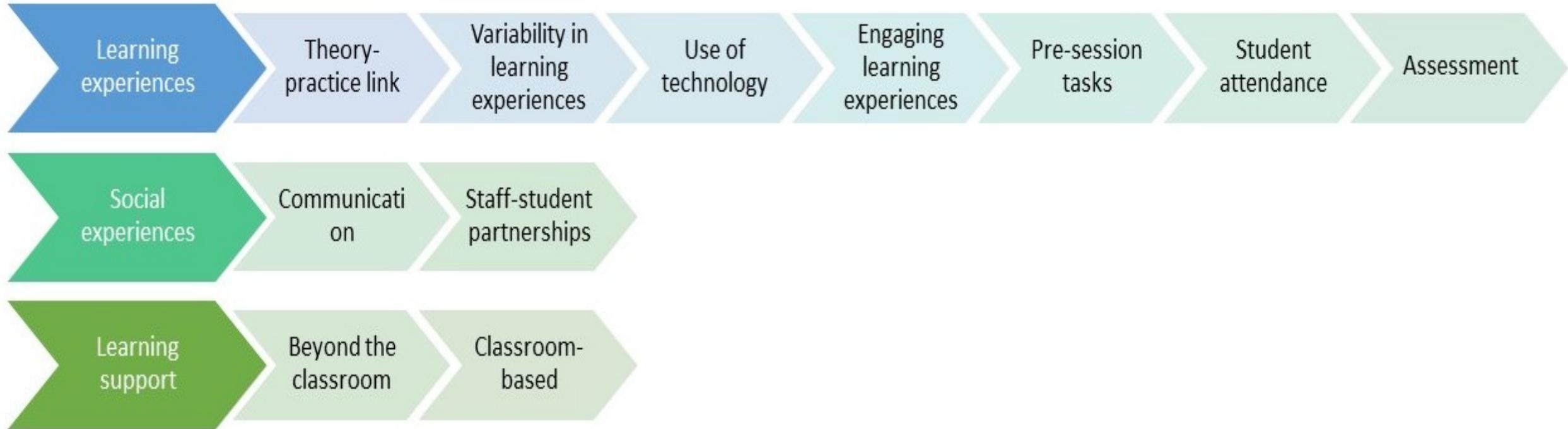
# Research questions

---

(1) What are students' **perceptions of ABL** in relation to their learning, social and support experiences?

(2) What are students' **perceived enablers and barriers** to successful learning experiences?

# Findings





# Quality learning experiences not enough

Academic support



Pastoral support



Holistic L&T experiences

(engagement, interaction, belonging, retention, satisfaction... )

# What matters to students?

---

- Learning experiences beyond the classroom
- Tasks and assessments linking theory and practice (employability)
- F2F sessions with “added value”

## **BUT ALSO...**

- Social interactions and communication (synchronous and asynchronous)
- Tutors who go the “extra mile” (personal traits)

# So...

---

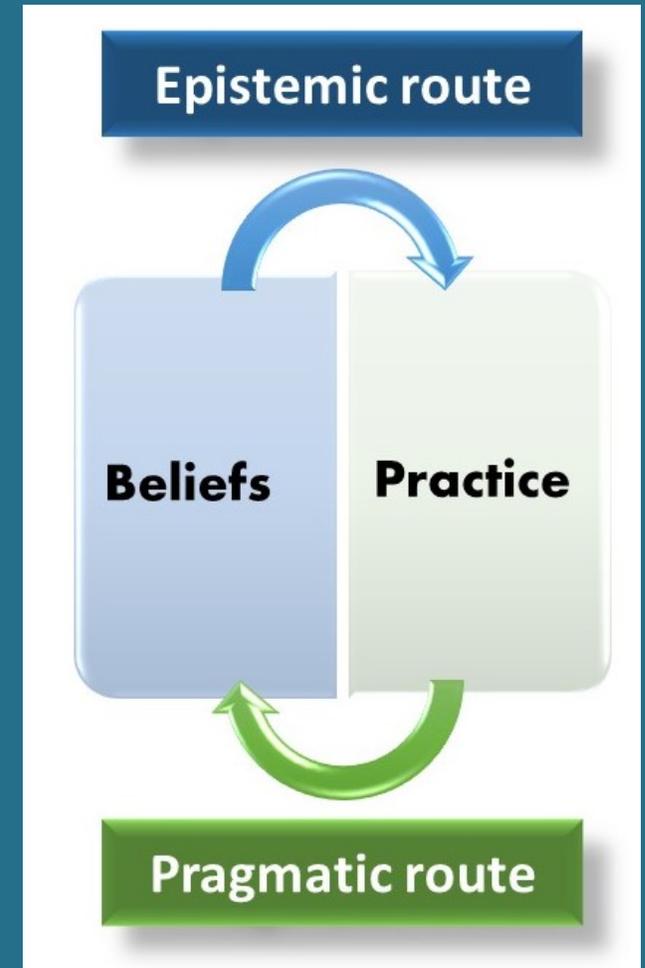
- Tutors-students as partners
- Digital technology as a tool to:
  - ◆ Blur boundaries (asynchronous / synchronous)
  - ◆ Promote interaction (with peers, tutors and content) within and beyond classroom



**What to take away**

# There are two routes to tutors' engagement

<b>Lagging Innovators</b>	<b>Active Innovators</b>
<b>Sceptical and resistant</b>	<b>Sceptical but obliging</b>



# So...

- Change must be **communicated, not imposed**
- **Student engagement** – rich positive interactions and meaningful tasks
- **Quality learning experiences are not enough** - academic and pastoral are both essential to promote engagement, belonging and meet metrics
- **Digital technology** helps blur the boundaries of “learning spaces” and promote a **more holistic student experience** – tutors’ digital literacy and effective integration of technology are key
- To promote tutors’ engagement initiatives can initially impact *beliefs or practices*

# References

---

Armellini, A., Teixeira Antunes, V. and Howe, R. (2021) Student perspectives on learning experiences in a higher education active blended learning context. *Techtrends*.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-021-00593-w>

Teixeira Antunes, V., Armellini, A. and Howe, R. (2021) Beliefs and engagement in an institution-wide pedagogic shift. *Teaching in Higher Education* [online first]

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1881773>

**Thank you**