

Professor of City, University of London Told about the COVID-19 Influence on the Education

Polytechnic University continues to receive words of support from its foreign partners. Recently, we had an interview with Professor of City, University of London (UK) Sanowar KHAN on a very important topic - COVID-19 and its influence on the education and international collaboration. Professor KHAN shared what they are doing to protect students and staff at the university, told about the advantages of distance learning and the changes in University life after the end of the pandemic. Read more details in our interview.



- Professor KHAN, we would like to support our university community and our international partners, and made a dedicated news resource news on our website. There we will tell a little how our partner universities react on such force-major situation, their experience in overcoming new challenges, etc.

- Thank you. This is a good idea. You will find plenty of open-access information on our website which can inform you about City's, rather comprehensive response to challenges posed by Covid-19 pandemic. If you require anything specific, please do

let me know and I shall try my best to help.

- How do you evaluate the current situation at your university with pandemic alert and restrictions applied due to this?

- We, like all other HEIs in the UK follow strictly the guidelines and advices given by the UK Government and Public Health England (PHE). Our President (and the senior leadership team - SLT) is constantly in touch with the HEI community and the HE sector regarding this. The primary driver here is the safety and wellbeing of our staff and students (who come from over 150 countries in the world).

- How does City react to the pandemic? How your educational and research processes were reorganized due to the restriction actions in place? What are the key challenges and difficulties?

- Our buildings were closed following the lockdown of London (now extended until 7 May) when we still had to do 2/3 weeks of teaching within the current academic year and we had to very quickly switch over all our face-to-face provisions online for remote delivery. Our IT services team worked many hours tirelessly with our academic and professional services (PS) staff, to make this possible in record time and we managed to finish our teaching term, I think successfully by remote delivery. We are now fully operational to conduct almost all our businesses online. These include staff and students' meetings, supervision of UG, PGT, PGR projects, all assessments of students, interactions with external stakeholders, etc. Of course, because of social distancing requirements under lockdown we had to postpone/cancel all our activities involving large gathering of people (e.g. graduation ceremonies, public lectures, etc.); and due to current travel restrictions worldwide, we had to postpone all overseas travels to partner HEIs, conferences, meetings, etc.

Of course, some of the challenges here involve the personal circumstances of staff and students some of whom have concerns for family and friends, some are looking after their children and family, and some may have been tested positive for the virus. This is in addition to negative economic after-effects which many countries are predicting following the pandemic. Needless to say, any laboratory-based work/research had to be postponed at present because of the closure of University buildings, etc.

- It's hard to replace face-to-face communication and interaction. However, what advantages do you see in distance learning?

- It is true some face-to-face interactions are difficult to replace with alternative means (e.g. laboratory work, graduation ceremonies, public lectures, etc.). Besides, we humans are social beings and, as such we interact with each other. However, distance teaching/learning seems to cope well and deliver when we are faced with extraordinary situations as we are at present due to Covid-19 pandemic. I feel for interactions with students/staff, online provisions can give an added flexibility. Of course, this alternative provision has now proven to be most valuable in circumstances like the one we are in at present.

- What you think will change in the University life after the end of the pandemic?

- Difficult to predict in specific terms but it is clear to me that some of the things are going to be quite different when we finally come out of the pandemic. I feel the the 'new normal' is unlikely to resemble the 'old normal' as we all know it. I also feel online/remote provisions for teaching/learning and research are going to be developed faster and further than before to create a strong, reliable and ready digital capability. Of course, for this a strong, reliable and flexible IT infrastructure is going to be needed.

- What would you recommend to your international partners and colleagues on how to be active in this difficult time?

- I think it is important to keep in touch irrespective of the circumstances, especially in difficult times as these. We need to keep on talking and communicating with each other, learning from each other, sharing good practices and offering to help if and when it is needed. This is a global problem and we need to be united to rise up to it, face it and solve it for now and for the future.

Most probably you are aware, many universities in the UK, including City are playing an active role in the UK's efforts to fight the current pandemic. Our colleagues and students are actively taking part in many local and national initiatives to help the current situation. Besides, we are all working online to carry on with our day-to-day University business.

- We hope that you will support our initiative.

- Happy to support and help in any way we can.

**- Professor KHAN, thank you very much for an informative interview!
Wish you strong health!**

Prepared by SPbPU International Office

For reference:

Professor Sanowar KHAN is Deputy Dean, School of Mathematics, Computer Science and Engineering and Professor of Instrumentation and Sensors, Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at City, University of London. He graduated and received his MSc degree with Distinction in electromechanical engineering in 1983 from Peter the Great St Petersburg Polytechnic University (SPbPU), St Petersburg, Russia. He received his PhD degree in electrical engineering from SPbPU in 1988. Professor KHAN is an Honorary Professor of Peter the Great St Petersburg Polytechnic University.

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