

## Strap in you're at Banford now!

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### Abstract

As higher education continues to reel from pandemic, austerity policies, generative AI (GAI) tools, and a war on DEI work, we are witnessing the impacts of polycrisis. Leaders across the sector have argued for snapping back to the powerful experiences of face-to-face (and the leveraging of the billions spent on infrastructure to sustain those experiences). In 2025 we continue to hear from venture capitalists selling digital tools that they say heralds “efficient” academic work, “the irrelevance of assessment”, and “the death of the essay”. Arguments about rigour in measuring a student’s learning, and the role of GAI tools in the workplaces of the future (or, now?) fuel calls for analogue assessment over digital flexibility.

This immersive and playful workshop is set in September 2025. We’ve been through some of the most disruptive times for education in a generation. Through that disruption we saw glimmers of the bright future that digital has been promising since we first had access to computers. Now those working at the forefront of online and digital are faced with demands for physical teaching and pen-and-paper exams. Voices of politicians, senior academics, and administrators are filled with reverie for an imperfect analogue past, railing against all that is digital, whilst simultaneously senior leaders, and governments pay homage to the silicon valley ideology, believing that “edtech will save us”.

Participants will assume the role of University of Banford staff, navigating a series of interactive, hyper-reality exercises over the course of the 90 minute workshop to:

- Rethink curricula in response to sudden strategic pivots
- Address the perceived tensions between analogue and digital practices and approaches to education
- Co-create innovative and novel solutions to the challenges that are developed through the exercises.

Using hypothetical scenarios and hyper-realistic simulations, delegates will explore the implications of a fully analogue university. They will then work to rebuild a model for a digital-first university reconstructing staffing, skills, and strategic frameworks. Finally, they will experience a version of a

post-digital, AI centred institution. Participants will work together to traverse the transitional, uncertain spaces of a post 2020 university using these hyper-realities, to develop a deeper understanding of strategic priorities, and gain insights into the pressure from real world situations. The use of time-limited activities and structured rules to the scenarios will immerse the participants in the imagined, but deeply real world of Banford, to help them navigate their own realities.

This work builds on the team's own research interests, including digital leadership, post-digital learning environments, and how universities react in crises. More explicitly, the scenario explored in this workshop directly influences the work undertaken in the presenters forthcoming book chapter, *Beyond the Borderlands: Reimagining the Competencies of Higher Education Digital Leadership in an Era of Coalescing Geopolitical Crisis*.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Disruption, Simulation, Curriculum

### **Aims and Outcomes**

Participants will:

- be able to identify the challenges and opportunities of the current higher education landscape, for learning designers, academics, educational developers and technology professionals, particularly in light of the pandemic and the emergence of new digital tools.
- be able to co-design strategies for balancing digital and analogue teaching practices and ensuring that innovation in teaching and learning is deeply embedded in institutional strategy.
- develop an understanding of the potential threats and opportunities that generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, pose to online pedagogy and assessment, and the roles of workers across the HE sector.