The Year Abroad Student as Pioneer: seizing creative learning opportunities through the Year Abroad online

This workshop is intended for teachers of MFL at degree level who are involved in the preparation of students for the year abroad and who have oversight of the work they do whilst abroad. The workshop takes as its starting point the principle that good elearning environments and good year abroad experiences should give rise to productive ‘cognitive and experiential disturbance’ (Barnett), and that students should be pushed to reflect on these metacognitively. It will invite participants to explore how online spaces can transform the processes of preparation, support and aftercare for Year Abroad students by encouraging them to act as producers in the learning process. It will particularly examine the following points:

1. Endorsing the student as expert: for each other, future Year Abroad students, school pupils
2. The pursuit of convivial familiarity and the pursuit of rigour – conflicting aims in the online space?
3. Academic activities before, during and after the Year Abroad
4. Careers-based and personal development activities: developing the Year Abroader as a global citizen

Following exploration of the above topics the workshop will seek to:

1. Map aims and outcomes for the Year Abroad online across institutions
2. Scrutinize different models, learning resources and technologies across institutions
3. Explore possibilities for the establishment of a community of practice for resource- and ideas-sharing across institutions
4. Investigate the importance of viewing Year Abroad study involving blended learning as a unique discipline within MFL degrees, adding an extra pole to the language, linguistics and area studies divisions that currently hold. The Year Abroad can be held to involve knowledge exchange predicated upon: high-level metacognitive awareness of shifting self and identity in the undertaking of intercultural transactions; challenge-setting and risk assessment; the creation of a personalised curriculum; the adoption of collaboration as a self-evident model of practice in a plural and diverse global arena. It encourages the natural assimilation of these learning dispositions so crucial to the 21st-century learner: how can these skills be recognized and credited within MFL departments?

A team from 4 institutions: Southampton, Durham, Newcastle and Reading, will showcase online resources that they have created and will invite participants to share their experiences around topics 1-4 above. The workshop will end with a plenary session that discusses points 5-8.