



Praxis
Centre for Scholarship and Innovation
Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies



Praxis Pulse July 2026

Welcome to the July edition of the Praxis newsletter. As we move through the middle of the year, it's a great opportunity to reflect on recent achievements, reconnect with our community, and look ahead to the opportunities that lie ahead. This edition highlights upcoming events, the latest developments from the WELS Scholarship and Innovation Centre, and inspiring examples of research, innovative teaching, and forward-thinking scholarship. Together, these stories showcase the creativity, collaboration, and commitment that continue to shape the future of education.



July 2026



A word from Director Prof. Carol Azumah Dennis



We have had a fantastic few months in Praxis, and it is no small challenge deciding what to highlight in this introduction to our July Newsletter.

Our first [Praxis Impact Report](#) has now been published and presented to the Academic Committee for Learning, Teaching and Assessment. The headline figure suggests that Praxis projects have contributed a 1–7% improvement in student retention and achievement.

We do not claim sole ownership of this progress. Rather, we recognise that we have contributed to it alongside many others. This distinction matters. Our first report, developed with the support of an external consultant, focused primarily on measurable data outcomes. However, we know that impact extends beyond headline figures. It is deeper, broader, and often more diffuse.

Over the coming months, we will build on this by gathering and sharing the stories behind the numbers—capturing the lived experiences and practices that underpin meaningful change.

Part of our contribution may lie in how we encourage and support colleagues to work differently: to rethink pedagogies, mobilise resources in new ways, and reflect more critically on what they do and why they do it. Teaching and learning are inherently relational practices, and this relationality includes how we connect with others, as well as how we understand our own role in the process.

We warmly invite you to share your Praxis stories of impact over the coming months. Whether your involvement has been direct or more tangential, we are keen to hear about the difference that doing things differently has made.

Prof. Carol Azumah Dennis

Praxis hosts Nord University delegation

Praxis recently welcomed three colleagues from Nord University, Norway, as part of a wider initiative to connect institutions through shared scholarship, ideas, and culture.

The visit to The Open University on 11–12 May featured a focused two-day programme of discussions, presentations, and collaborative planning. Highlights included a tour of



by Nord University)

This engagement marks the start of a promising partnership, with further joint initiatives already under discussion.

the XR Studios, offering insight into cutting-edge approaches to immersive learning and research.

The visit also established the foundation for a new international seminar series, with dates now confirmed and additional details to be shared. Please save the dates in your calendars!

- Thursday 3 December, 11:00–12:30 (hosted by Praxis)
- Thursday 15 April, 11:00–12:30 (hosted

Celebrating Praxis events



Annual Open Seminar

From Anxiety to Agency: Unlocking AI's Creative Potential in Higher Education

We welcomed 130 colleagues to our Annual Seminar, where Dr. Mark Carrigan delivered an insightful keynote on the role of AI in higher

education. He encouraged a reflective engagement with AI as a catalyst for creativity rather than a replacement for human intellect. The session sparked lively discussions, focusing on the ethics and value of AI in education.

The seminar included engaging presentations on various topics, such as GenAI in course production, supporting social work educators, and a collaborative lexicon for AI. Overall, the event provided valuable insights into enhancing educational practice with AI.

[Go to our website to find out more and to watch the recording.](#)

Praxis Festival of Scholarship 2026

The 8th Praxis Festival of Scholarship brought together WELS academics, lecturers, researchers, and students to showcase pedagogic research and innovation. The program featured a wide range of topics, including

research-informed teaching, student experiences, AI-enabled learning, and nursing education simulations.

Professor Paul Miller, CEO of the Institute for Equity, led a session on institutional equity action. The festival also highlighted Level 7 Institute for Equity Fellowship contributions and updates from Praxis Scholarship Hubs. Overall, it was a dynamic event

celebrating the impact and diversity of scholarship within the WELS community.

The keynote speech along with all the presentations will soon be available on the [**Praxis Website**](#).



Praxis project spotlight



Dr Joan Simons has created an OpenLearn course based on her Praxis projects:

Supporting university students with a mental health condition | OpenLearn - Open University

It's a stunning output that I hope we can recognise and celebrate

This short but impactful course explores how universities can better understand and respond to the needs of students experiencing mental

health challenges. Drawing on insights from both students and tutors, it highlights the importance of communication, inclusive support, and a whole-institution approach to wellbeing.

As part of The Open University's free OpenLearn programme – designed to make high -quality learning accessible to all – completion of the course demonstrates a strong commitment to continuing professional development and to supporting student wellbeing in practice.

LinkedIn

Earlier this April, we launched our new LinkedIn profile—and it's already off to a fantastic start. We've been connecting with colleagues, sharing

updates, and building our community, with over 150 followers so far (and growing!).

We'd love to reach 500 followers by the end of the academic year. Our page features regular updates on funding opportunities, events, and key news, so there's plenty to stay engaged with.

If you're not already following us, please do—and help us spread the word by inviting colleagues and sharing our posts. Together, we can grow a vibrant and connected community.

Follow us today!



Praxis Podcast



Listen to the latest Praxis podcast – Implementing a racially inclusive framework in an ODL institution with Mel Green and Dr Paul Ian Campbell

In January 2025, Praxis launched a podcast series interviewing people involved in Praxis funded research and scholarship projects. The episodes focus on pedagogic practice in online and distance settings. Since the launch, the podcast has published 16 episodes with topics ranging from AI, peer-

mentoring, social media, EDIA, anti-racism design and joint degrees. The podcast now has a listenership of 330 people with 47 followers. These figures are high for an academic podcast and demonstrate the expanding reach of this academic publishing format. Series 1 of the podcast has now come to an end, and the team are currently planning Series 2 with new guests and topics for discussion. You can listen to any of the episodes from Series 1 [here](#) and make sure to 'Follow' to be notified when the episodes of Series 2 start to drop.

Praxis Scholarship Hubs



Into Practice Scholarship Hub – Leigh Worrell & Ursula Stickler

This year marked the launch of the Praxis *Into Practice* Scholarship Hub, bringing together expertise in teaching, learning, and scholarship across WELS. The Hub has fostered new collaborations through the Praxis Festival of Scholarship and partnerships with colleagues at Gothenburg and Nord Universities. We were delighted that Dr Kris Stutchbury chose to spend her last day at the OU sharing her wealth of experience and expertise relating to teacher development in Africa at our inaugural seminar. Our current Praxis-funded project entitled ‘Setting the baseline: what triggers online teachers’ changes in practice’ is looking at how educators (specifically in WELS) adapt their teaching practice and we are looking forward to share early findings soon.

[Register for the Into Practice hub.](#)

The Anti-Racist and Inclusive Assessment Scholarship Hub (ARIA) – Mel Green

Social Media Scholarship Hub – Olivia Kelly

The Social Media Scholarship Hub continues to grow, with membership now reaching 49 colleagues. Meeting quarterly, the Hub provides a space to discuss emerging social media issues in higher education, with two meetings each year held as public seminars. Recent highlights include a seminar by Dr VaNessa Thompson on building student communities through social media. During 2025/26, Hub lead Dr Olivia Kelly shared findings from Praxis-funded research on using Discord for tutor support, supported by Dr Ellesar Elhagaggi, with further funding secured to extend this work. The Hub is also developing a university-wide review of social media use, with findings expected next year.

[Register for the Social Media hub](#)

The Immersive Technology Scholarship Hub – Lisa Bowers

The WELS Immersive Technology Hub

The ARIA Hub has had a busy year, bringing together around 50 colleagues across the university, with its influence continuing to grow. A previous ARIA podcast is now used in WELS/FASS student intern inductions. The ARIA Speaker Seminar Series has attracted over 100 attendees, featuring talks on culturally sensitive assessment, generative AI, and student belonging in online learning. This year the Hub has focused on scholarship, including a Praxis project applying the RIPIAG framework within a Level 2 module and another exploring student experiences of inclusive assessment. Findings from both projects are due in September.

[Register for the ARIA hub](#)

brings together 14 academics, associate lecturers and professional services colleagues to scale extended reality (XR) across the Open University. Its aim is to develop immersive open pedagogies that make digital learning more equitable, inclusive and engaging. Key projects include a 360° classroom simulation for teacher training (Matthew R. Jones), enabling trainees to observe classroom practice in a realistic, low-stakes environment. In languages, the Hub is developing VR scenarios such as cafés and markets to support conversational practice and build confidence. The team is also contributing case studies to the upcoming CreaTech paper and welcomes further collaboration across WELS and beyond.

[Register for the Immersive Technologies hub](#)

Impact Report



We were delighted to produce the Praxis Impact Report earlier this year—the first of its kind.

The report highlights the breadth and impact of Praxis activity across the faculty, from projects and events to scholarship hubs and support for staff and students. It showcases how practice-led inquiry is enhancing teaching, enriching the student experience, and strengthening a vibrant, research-informed community, while also evidencing

growing collaboration and impact.

We hope you find it an engaging read and welcome your feedback. We look forward to producing this as an annual report going forward.

[**Read the Praxis Impact Report**](#)



One of the greatest challenges of academic life is the intensity of the workload. I am not referring here to cognitive load – the complexity of tasks or the mental energy required to complete them – but to something more fundamental: the physical load. There is simply more work than can be comfortably contained within the time available. We have to compromise, or more accurately, prioritise.

Once we do prioritise, the immediacy of the demands placed upon us – deadlines, tasks that carry the risk of sanction if incomplete, responsibilities that others depend on, activities to which we have a heartfelt commitment, and student-facing work – quickly fill our diaries. Writing, and the activities that support it – reading, thinking, planning, and reflecting – are often squeezed into the margins of the week, if they appear at all.

Writing Days

This year, Praxis has hosted three successful online writing days and our Annual Two-Day Writing Retreat this July. The latter event brought together fifteen colleagues for immersive workshops and focused writing time, fostering collaboration and creativity.

Writing days allow us to dedicate protected time to our craft, making it easier to prioritise writing in our schedules. They remind us that writing – along with thinking, reading, planning, editing, and collaborations – is fundamental to our roles, not just an afterthought. Writing alongside others also provides a gentle form of accountability through shared experiences.

We are here to help with all things scholarship so please do get in touch or visit us online for more information.

Email WELS-Praxis (WELS-Praxis@open.ac.uk).

Visit the **Praxis website**.

Follow us on **LinkedIn**.



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