JUTLP
Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice

# SPECIAL ISSUE – CALL FOR PAPERS

## Reimagining Personalised Learning for Adult Learners in Higher Education Settings

For publication into the Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice.

### Guest editors


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### Background

In a time of rapid economic, technological, and social change, older adult learners are increasingly returning to higher education after spending time actively engaged in the workforce. Their intentions for engaging or re-engaging with higher degree studies are to upskill, reskill, or reorient their careers (OECD, 2021). The learning needs of this cohort of students can be significantly different from those students whose transition into university studies occurs immediately following high school (School to University Students: SUS). Students transitioning from the work force before entering university study (Work to University Students: WUS) have different challenges, namely, they have often had extended intervals away from formal learning (OECD, 2021) and have to acclimatise to the unique expectations of higher education studies. These work to study transition student also are more likely to have diverse motivations for their enrolment and more likely to have to navigate complex demands from work, family, and community life. On a more positive note, WUS students bring a wealth of lived experience to their studies that can be an asset and catalyst in the learning process. These factors and conditions make a compelling call for more responsive and personalised educational approaches.

This special issue invites contributions that explore how personalised learning can be *reimagined* and *enacted* to support more mature learners entering higher education studies after or while still engaged in work. Personalised learning is broadly understood as an instructional approach that tailors learning experiences to the unique needs, interests, goals, and pace of individual learners. According to the United States National Education Technology Plan (2017), it involves optimising the pace of instruction and instructional methods based on learner needs, with learning activities that are meaningful, relevant, and often self-initiated. Lee et al., (2018) and Shemshack and Spector, (2020) highlight key dimensions underpinning personalised learning, such as differentiation, individualisation, adaptability, and customisation. These dimensions allow for variability in learning goals, methods, and content presentation, shaped by factors such as learners' prior knowledge, capabilities, career aspirations, and motivational profiles. Technological systems (e.g., microlearning and adaptive learning systems) are increasingly employed to support personalisation. However, the literature also reveals a conceptual ambiguity regarding what constitutes the "needs" of

learners, whether cognitive, emotional, or social, and how these needs are to be interpreted and addressed.

In essence, personalised learning represents an andragogical orientation that foregrounds learner diversity, agency, and engagement. It challenges one-size-fits-all models by advocating for instructional practices and learning environments that are responsive to individual needs and differences. Personalised learning seeks to empower learners to take greater ownership over their educational journeys.

We seek papers that critically examine models and practices designed to empower WUS learners – and that demonstrate evidence of how these learners' agency can be supported, how flexible learning pathways can be enabled, and how educational outcomes can be aligned with what matters most to them. Case studies of programmes or initiatives in higher education should be investigated in the context of an international problem using local data sources.

We are especially interested in work that interrogates assumptions about teaching and learning in higher education, examines the distinctive needs of adult learners pursuing part-time study. The intention is to explore how learning can be designed to integrate meaningfully with their working and personal lives. Possible themes and topics Include, but are not limited to:

- Models of personalised learning tailored to WUS
- Leveraging WUS' prior knowledge, experience, and workplace practices in curriculum design
- Technology-enabled personalisation (e.g., learning analytics, mobile and bite-sized learning, prompt engineering for learning)
- Academic coaching, mentoring, and scaffolding approaches to personalise learning journeys
- Pedagogical innovations that support learner agency, reflection, and goal setting
- Tensions and challenges in implementing personalised learning for adult learners
- Case studies of programmes or initiatives in higher education that reimagine learning for adults
- Equity and access considerations in personalised learning designs

## Types of publications accepted into this Special Issue

We welcome theoretical, empirical, and practice-based contributions from researchers, educators and instructional designers. Submissions should clearly articulate how the work advances understanding or practice in personalised learning for WUS in higher education. The types of publications that are eligible for acceptance into this Special Issue include:

- Original research articles drawing on robust SoTL rather than practice papers,
- Theoretical and position papers situated clearly for L&T practice impact, and
- Systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and bibliometric analyses.

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## Developing a high-quality proposal

We recommend the creation of a single document (Word document preferably) that contains the following:

- Proposed article title
- Proposed authors names and affiliations
- A clear evidence-based rationale for the line of inquiry proposed
- Research question(s)
- Proposed method (for both theoretical and empirical manuscripts)
- Practice-based implications of the proposed research

The word limit for the proposal is 250 words (not including references) and is designed to give the Editorial Team a sense of the rigour of the manuscript proposed and the possible implications of such research. The Editorial Team may return with an invitation to combine similar manuscripts. Acceptance of proposals does not guarantee acceptance of final manuscripts.

## Timeline

- Abstract submission: 31 October 2025
- Acceptance notifications: 30 November 2025
- Full articles due: 31 March 2026
- Final revised articles due: 31 December 2026
- Final publication: 31 January 2027

For further information please email Associate Professor Jennifer Yeo, jenniferyeoac@suss.edu.sg. We invite proposals up to a 250 word limit to be submitted via JUTLP's submission portal. For submission, an identified and deidentified version of your proposal and a short cover letter will be required. When submitting, select the Section "Special Issues: Personalised Learning". Any submission not made to this section will not be considered.

## References

Lee, D., Huh, Y., Lin, C. Y., & Reigeluth, C. M. (2018). Technology functions for personalized learning in learner-centered schools. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 66*(5), 1269–1302. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-018-9615-9

OECD. (2021). *Education at a glance 2021: OECD indicators.* OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en

Shemshack, A., & Spector, J. M. (2020). A systematic literature review of personalised learning terms. *Smart Learning Environments, 7*, 20. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-020-00140-9

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology. (2017). *Reimagining the role of technology in education: 2017 National Education Technology Plan update.* https://tech.ed.gov/files/2017/01/NETP17.pdf