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Transcript - The VICTVS Podcast Episode 9: VICTVS Shorts

## **Xanthe Mitten**

Hello everyone and welcome back to The VICTVS Podcast. I'm aware that this week your hosts look a little bit different but don't worry, we're coming to you with some really, really exciting new stories from all over the world.

I'm here with my co-host Katherine Barnett, we look after everything marketing, events and comms related for VICTVS and we're super excited to be here.

## **Katherine Barnett**

Hi Xanthe, hi everyone. If you're passionate about education, the future of learning, and even AI as well. You've come to the right place. We're going to be looking at the news making headlines in the education sector, covering everything from the digitalisation of exams, as well as AI in the education space. Let's get into it.

## **Xanthe Mitten**

So I think, first of all, I wanted to talk about the blog piece that you wrote this week which was focusing on a major shift happening in the UK, with Ofqual's push towards the digitalisation of exams. And as the UK transitions to more digital formats, there's the argument that there's both opportunities and challenges ahead. So yeah, what do you think of it?

## **Katherine Barnett**

Yeah so digital exams and their introduction can obviously bring people some massive benefits. They have their own challenges as well, but let's go through the benefits first.

Obviously we're aware that exams, at a very basic level, use an enormous amount of paper, so digital exams are better for the environment because people will obviously do those online. They also have major accessibility benefits. People who need larger fonts or who might need audio or video for an assessment, these students can actually get those accessibility requirements met through digital exams, which is obviously really great. They also - when done well, which we'll come back to in a minute! - can be more secure than paper exams.

We were having a conversation about this the other day where you mentioned that obviously with paper exams there's opportunities for them to be mishandled and potentially stolen, things like that, whereas that can be more difficult with digital exams.

And another thing: handwriting. Obviously, students who maybe have harder to decipher handwriting might get penalised for that from markers. That can't really happen with digital exams - it universalises that experience for every student and marker, which benefits both student and marker, so that's really great.

## **Xanthe Mitten**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's so interesting. I remember when I was setting my GCSEs I, as a dyslexic student, I was able to have a separate room and have my exam papers printed out on larger format in yellow paper. And I remember one time it hadn't been organised, and I was forced to sit for 20 minutes behind everyone else and not be able to sit my exam because it hadn't been set up. So, I think the idea of exams going digital is exciting because of those accessibility needs.

But the thing that pops into my head immediately is: what are the socio-economic issues? Especially for those students that don't have access to, say, computers at home, or can't afford it, or are in poverty, I think that's going to be a potential issue, making sure that it's even and it doesn't give students an advantage if they have computers at home and if the schools can afford them, etc.

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## **Katherine Barnett**

Yeah, I think it can be easy to look at exams from a place of privilege and just assume that everybody has access to good laptops at home and mobile phones, things like that. But obviously, as you mentioned, people from lower income backgrounds might not have that experience, or they might have limited access, and that would definitely unfairly disadvantage those students in a digital exam setting.

Also, there are issues regarding cybersecurity. Obviously, when you put things online, that becomes a huge issue. I mentioned earlier that digital exams can be more secure, but they can also be more insecure. There's vulnerabilities that only become apparent when you put things online. If a school doesn't have secure, strong and stable Wi-Fi, that presents a whole new load of issues, especially where there are students who will go to every length to make less effort for themselves during an exam. If somebody is particularly nifty when it comes to computers, they might be able to hack a school system and cause all sorts of havoc.

And of course, there's also issues with third parties who might be able to hack school Wi-Fi systems or the exam software itself. So yeah, there's a whole load of issues there which really need to be prevented before digital exams can be rolled out nationwide.

## **Xanthe Mitten**

Absolutely, and on top of that, when you have online exams you then have to get remote or digital invigilation for these exams, and obviously our listeners will know that [at] VICTVS we provide remote invigilation all over the world on a global scale, so this is an issue that we see all the time, if the school's internet...I mean, you were talking to a contract lead this morning about bad internet connection and how it can completely derail exams. So, are we at the point where we can have these exams online? I think VICTVS is going to have a big say in making sure that remote invigilation is kept at the highest level so that people cannot cheat, cannot hack into their exams.

It's really exciting that we are going to do the exam hack next year as well and invite people to test our products. We're the only company in the market that invite people to actively test our systems so that we can be the best. So yeah, I mean, fascinating. Let's see where it goes and maybe in the future everyone will be sitting their exams online.

## **Katherine Barnett**

If you want to read more about this as well, you can also check out the blog post that I wrote on our website.

## **Xanthe Mitten**

Okay, so now I want to try something a little bit different. I know that we've both prepared some of our top news stories from the ed tech, AI and exam industries. I'm going to start off with my story and then get your take on it.

So, MP Helen Hayes has been elected as chair of education committee which is really exciting. This is significant because the committee plays a vital role in shaping education and assessment policies, so moving forward it'll be really interesting to see what she does, especially with exam fairness, access to resources (if exams are going digital, making sure that no one is left behind), and her leadership will probably lead in the decisions of future policies within the education landscape in the UK, which is exciting for us as a company as well.

So yeah, hopefully it brings on some fresh perspectives and some positive reforms, but who knows. Is there anything that you'd like to see from our government in terms of education policy moving forward.

## **Katherine Barnett**

I think with this new labour government and with Helen Hayes coming in, I would just like to see some more stability and cohesion across the syllabus, and also the way that students take exams. We've got things like T levels, written exams, potentially digital exams as well which we've just discussed. I think it would be nice to just see some cohesion within that so that students don't have to keep changing the way that they do things.

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Potentially some development of the syllabus as well. I think it's been fairly, well, my opinion is it's maybe been a bit stagnant over the last few years [with] the last government. So I think it would make sense if the labour government developed that, or brought in some new topics.

Yeah, I think just stability really for the students is super important. And it will be interesting to see how the labour government does handle the digi-digitalisation...Hard word to say!

**Xanthe Mitten**

I know, and we're going to say it so many times as well today!

**Katherine Barnett**

The digitalisation of exams, how they handle that obviously is really important given what we just discussed. So yeah it will be really interesting to see what happens there.

**Xanthe Mitten**

Yeah, absolutely. It'd be nice to see not so much chopping and changing between what things are called or what assessments are sat, and also catching up on the Covid years. I mean, students sitting or joining university now went through so much turmoil with Covid and whether they could sit exams or whether they could get their exams increased and all of that, so hopefully that stability [will come in] and things will be a bit easier for students now. Fingers crossed.

**Katherine Barnett**

Hopefully we won't have some other global disaster which upends things even more. We can only hope and pray.

**Xanthe Mitten**

Absolutely not.

**Katherine Barnett**

All right, Xanthe, let's switch gears to talk about something else. The DVSA, so the driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, released their annual report for last year, and they revealed that they've delivered a massive 2.9 million theory tests last year. That's a lot of theory tests. Next year actually marks the 25th anniversary of the theory test being delivered on screen. So they started doing them back in January 2000, which feels much closer than it actually is.

**Xanthe Mitten**

Yeah!

**Katherine Barnett**

As a side note, in Bulgaria they've actually introduced a limit of four times for this driving theory test, so you can only take it four times and that's it. I think it's interesting to consider how different countries vary, and how many times they let someone sit an exam. What do you think about that?

**Xanthe Mitten**

Yeah, so I actually passed my theory test first time.

**Katherine Barnett**

Congratulations.

**Xanthe Mitten**

I know you're getting at the fact that I've done my driving test four times now, so if I was in Bulgaria and it was for the actual physical exam, I'd be out.

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I think it's really interesting. I think it's...I think exams should have a certain level of pressure. And like they do everywhere else, with a driving test - which is essentially giving you permission to drive a killing machine - to have that kind of pressure that if you fail four times at the theory of driving a car, then you're not allowed...I'm not actually against it, because you do want people on the road that haven't just memorised answers for the sake of memorising you know, you want people to understand the content. So hopefully they'll be encouraged to revise and to focus on it and then pass their exam first time. So yeah, I'm glad it's not for the physical though!

**Katherine Barnett**

Yeah, you'd be a bit screwed.

I think you raised some good points there actually, exams do need to have a certain level of pressure and [people] taking them seriously, especially when it comes to driving and being allowed to go on the road.

**Xanthe Mitten**

Absolutely.

**Katherine Barnett**

Now, let's head over to the US for some news from there . UCLA has made headlines by recently appointing their first ever chief data and AI officer, Chris Mattmann, who actually comes from a background at NASA, which is super interesting.

But basically this, the hiring of Chris Mattman ,signifies how AI is obviously going to be taking a more permanent role in education across the globe, wherever it's available.

**Xanthe Mitten**

AI is just everywhere man.

**Katherine Barnett**

Unfortunately.

**Xanthe Mitten**

You can't escape it now. This is really exciting, though.

**Katherine Barnett**

Yeah. I say "unfortunately" - obviously using AI can have benefits, but there's lots of challenges ahead which is partly why Chris Mattman has been hired.

His role is going to be focusing on developing an ethical framework for AI and driving collaboration across UCLA's campus. He'll be looking at how they can ethically use AI, basically, and also managing the challenges that comes with that. I think it's really interesting that they've made that appointment and I'm wondering if we'll see a lot more of that across different universities and different institutions all over the world really.

**Xanthe Mitten**

I saw something about this appointment and then the idea in general of automated grading, so using AI to grade assessments or exams, and I'm really interested by this because it might give academics and professors more time to focus on the research that they do at their institutions rather than grading the students work.

However, I'd be really interested in seeing the students reactions to results or grades that they've gotten via AI. So yeah, I'm going to keep my eye out for that definitely.

**Katherine Barnett**

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Yeah, I think there's also other issues that need to be looked at with AI, which I'm sure will be part of this role that Chris Mattman's taking on. So the use of AI in...well, students own use of AI and writing their assessments and their work, as well as the use of AI detection software to find out whether students have been using AI. I think that will be really interesting. It's going to be a tough job for him, I think.

## **Xanthe Mitten**

Yeah, that's really interesting and it actually brings us onto our final news story today, the story of the teacher in the UK, Jack Dougal, who was a humanities teacher... mean, hopefully he still is, I hope he hasn't lost his job because of this experiment! But he challenged all of his students to use AI, such as ChatGPT, to cheat on their homework without getting caught.

He actually sat them down and said, "okay, listen up kids, I want you to sit this exam, use AI, don't get caught." And basically [he was] expecting them to not be able to, or for him as a teacher to be able to spot the AI.

The results were absolutely nuts: a whopping 50% of the 12 year olds succeeded. 30...I think it was 38%. Let me check. Yeah, 38% of the 13 year olds was successful, and then 100% of the 17 year olds were able to bypass AI detection software and the eyes of the teachers.

So yeah, 100% of 17 year olds successfully did an assessment, used AI, didn't get caught. And I think in the overall experiment, 62% of the students had never used AI before anyway, so obviously it's a very intuitive thing to be able to do now, and it's such a clear reminder of how quickly students will adapt to new technology. Taking us back to the story from before, it's interesting to see that these institutions are now bringing in specific people for the function of looking after AI. We are now entering the era of AI being involved in every part of education assessment.

So yeah, I just thought this was absolutely nuts and really, and really cool as well. Well done to those kids for absolutely smashing the assignment!

## **Katherine Barnett**

Yeah, they did smash it. I don't know why I was surprised when I saw that 100% of 17 year olds managed to get around the AI detection software; of course they did, they're 17 year olds!

I think that really summarises how kids who want to get away with doing very little work will go out of their way to make that happen. As ironic as it is, they will do a lot of work to do no work, which I do kind of respect. But it's just, it makes a challenge that will keep on growing for schools and different educational institutions which will be so tough to manage, especially as software like ChatGPT and other AI software continues to develop and learn and get around these AI detection systems.

I think teachers, and everyone really at an educational establishment, will need to undergo significant training in how to manage these challenges. Yeah, it's a really, really complex and daunting issue, which I'm really glad I don't have to solve personally.

## **Xanthe Mitten**

Yeah, absolutely. And I think the key take away from it is that AI software such as ChatGPT, they're not foolproof, they're not perfect. And they're also continually improving and adapting, so institutions just need to evolve as quickly as they are.

And I think, especially with the introduction of this AI officer and so many institutions now being fully involved in how much AI is playing a role in their student's degrees, they're just going to have to step it up a notch because AI isn't perfect. It's a great tool for certain things but students will still get caught out, 100%.

## **Katherine Barnett**

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Oh, yeah absolutely, I don't doubt it. Especially as teachers catch on as well, they'll be able to look out for certain signs.

You can always tell when something's been written by ChatGPT when it starts with the exact same phrase at the beginning of every sentence, I'm sure that will be something that these teachers can look out for. But yeah, definitely an area which is going to continue to challenge teachers and students alike, I think.

## **Xanthe Mitten**

Okay, so I guess as we wrap up this episode it's clear that education is at a crossroads. Whether it's through digitising exams, integrating AI or shaping policy, the future of education is rapidly changing. And I'd like to thank you Kat for joining me - I hope we get to do this again in the future, this little mini pod 'news of the week' kind of thing for Edu-tech. Thanks for joining me.

## **Katherine Barnett**

You're so welcome, I've had a lovely time.

## **Xanthe Mitten**

Thank you again and thanks to our wonderful listeners and viewers for joining us this week, I hope you've enjoyed it. And don't worry, all of the stories and stats and facts that we mentioned today will be listed in our blog. Make sure to check it out, and all of our previous podcasts as well as I'm sure you'll find them fascinating. You can visit at [www.VICTVS.co.uk](http://www.VICTVS.co.uk). and you can also learn more about VICTVS and what we do at VICTVS Assured as well.

We will be joining you back in the future in our usual format, getting industry professionals and academics in to [talk about] interesting topics from all over the world, and we'll also be doing mini pods bringing you the latest news in Edu-tech, AI and exam assessment industries from all over the globe. Thanks and have a wonderful day.