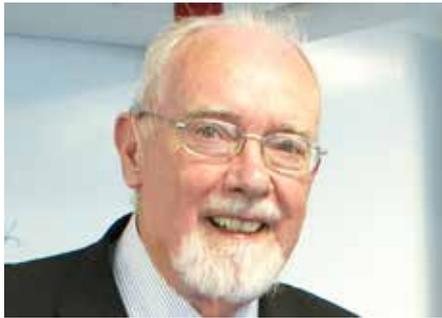




Lifewide Education Honorary Fellow Professor John Cowan



We are delighted that Professor John Cowan has accepted Lifewide Education's first Honorary Fellowship. John embodies the spirit and practice of lifelong lifewide learning. Since the birth of our ideas in 2009 he has provided encouragement, guidance and practical support during the early development of Lifewide Education and contributed greatly to our programme of research and development.

John was born in Glasgow and educated during the Second World War in six different Scottish schools. As a child he suffered from poor eyesight. He had wanted to become a lawyer, or rather an advocate but that called for 4 years of study, and he was advised that his eyes would not last for more than 3 years. So he opted instead to study civil engineering, motivated by the prospect of designing and building useful things. After a successful career as a structural engineering designer he entered academia in 1964 as a teacher and researcher in structural engineering.

In 1982 he became the first Professor of Engineering Education in the UK, at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, where his educationally-oriented research and development concentrated on student-centred learning and the learning experience. On moving to the Open University in Scotland as Director in 1987 he encouraged innovative curriculum development and campaigned nationally for rigorous formative evaluation in higher education.

His passion for and professional interest in student-centred learning spans 50 years. During this time he has placed an ever increasing emphasis on preparing students to exercise stewardship over their lifewide development while at University, and in lifelong learning thereafter. The practice of personal development planning in these developments is a central feature of enabling learners to take responsibility for and exercise stewardship over their own reflective and self-assessed development. He is exemplary in demonstrating his own use of planning and critical reflection in order to continually develop and improve himself.

But he is a modest man, in describing himself a few years ago he said, *"It's best just to think of me as an active part-time teacher nowadays, with personal history to draw on and a willingness to share with some colleagues, if they want to innovate in areas where I have some experience."*

His collegial spirit is known and experienced throughout higher education and he has inspired many higher education teachers (including me!). We all need mentors and role models and over many years John has combined friendship and mentoring to perfection. Educational development can be a lonely business sometimes and his encouragement, wisdom, carefully constructive criticism and practical support have been immeasurably valuable and helpful to me. We don't need people to tell us our thinking is great or conversely it's rubbish. What we need are people who can question our thinking and arguments and point us in the direction from which we might develop deeper of understanding. Forever, I will associate John with the future-oriented idea of *'feedforward'* in which a carefully crafted and analytical critique is combined with emotionally engaging and motivating ideas to help you progress.

Being a Scot John is a great story teller and he passed on much of his accumulated experiential wisdom through his stories. In 2010 while working at SCEPTRe we recorded some of these stories around the theme of engaging students and they are now available as a free download together with a talk he gave at:

<http://www.lifewidescrapbook.co.uk/heroes.html>

John has influenced many higher education teachers through his writing. In reviewing his bestselling book 'Becoming an Innovative Teacher' Professor John Biggs wrote' *"...a delightful and unusual reflective journey...the whole book is driven by a cycle of questions, examples, strategies and generalizations from the examples. In all, it is the clearest example of practise-what-you-preach that I have seen."*

I would go further and say that John's life as a lifelong lifewide learner and educator *'is the clearest example of practise-what-you-preach that I have seen'*. It is appropriate to finish this citation with his own words¹.

"At an age when most old men like me would be left in peace to sit by the fireside in their slippers, I found myself encouraged to write two reflective pieces in which I looked back over my life experience. In so doing, just as Moliere's M. Jourdain had discovered late in life that he had been speaking prose for over forty years, I discovered.....to my delight, that I had been profiting throughout my life from what [I have come to understand] was lifewide learning. This learning and development had gone far beyond and was much more important to me than what I had learnt in the various courses I have taken in my formal education and the academic awards I have gained."

Thank you John for all you have done for our community of lifewide learners.

Norman Jackson
Founder Lifewide Education

Discover some of John's recent contributions at:
<http://www.lifewidescrapbook.co.uk/heroes.html>