



# The value of innovation in teaching and learning

Today, more than ever, innovations in university teaching are supporting universities to prepare students for their future careers, equipping them with the skills and experience they will need to succeed.

Innovation in university teaching is nothing new. Today's best practice represents centuries of incremental changes, each improving students' learning, and each making use of the most up-to-date teaching research and developments in technology.

During the twentieth century, lecturers moved from using blackboards to using overhead projectors to using Microsoft PowerPoint. Students have gone from completing assignments using pens, then typewriters, then computers. Adopting new technologies in educational settings is not unusual.

The past decade especially has seen education providers expanding the use of digital enhancements to teaching. As well as the fully online courses delivered by some universities, there has been a growth of blended learning (a mix of in-person and online content within a course), hybrid learning (providing both online and in-person provision for individual lectures or other course content), and increased use of digital tools and resources within the physical lecture theatre, seminar room, or laboratory.

## The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

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would do. Delivering online content was also necessary for all courses irrespective of subject.

However, many of the changes demonstrated that embracing online components could bring benefits, such as improving accessibility. Recorded or live online lectures



have ensured that students finding it difficult to attend in person due to work, caring responsibilities, or disability are not missing out. Similarly, the wider move away from examinations has also shown that moving to more authentic assessment methods can help to address awarding gaps.

The pandemic's unplanned experiment with the expansion of digital provision has also identified where digital tools, either online or used on campus, supplement and reinforce learning outcomes. This prepares students for life after graduation, and helps them to advance in their chosen careers. Digital devices and online applications facilitate this by:

- Allowing students to learn old skills in new ways by improving understanding and competencies.

- Providing students with the opportunity to practise new skills that are increasingly relevant in the modern workplace.

Against the backdrop of the pandemic's innovations and cultural shifts, we have investigated how universities can rethink curriculum design and the ways teaching and assessment are provided. These changes could benefit graduate skills and employability. If universities give themselves the freedom to invest in digital innovation, they have an opportunity to empower a better prepared graduate population.



# Skills and knowledge

## The value of a degree

No matter how a degree is taught, it provides students with expert, subject-specific knowledge. Degrees aren't just about learning knowledge, however. Students also develop skills during their degrees, such as necessary critical thinking skills to help them to understand the context and the limits of what they have learnt and to make appropriate use of their newly acquired knowledge. On some accredited courses, students are also required to demonstrate professional competencies.

While students' reasons for studying a degree vary, most hope to use their newly acquired knowledge and skills when they move into or return to the workplace. In a







represent the best of innovation, allowing both new content and the more effective teaching of existing course aims.

### **Online discussion**

Online discussion has been shown to be a useful aid to learning. This has ramifications for the ways that universities design their courses and supports the actions of institutions. For example, the University of East Anglia's Peer



experience, providing an opportunity to reinforce lessons learnt and, being guaranteed to produce the correct results, disrupting the acquisition of misconceptions.

None of these uses of simulation are about replacing the real-world practical experience; instead, they ensure that when students reach that stage, they can maximise the effectiveness of their learning. Employers can be reassured that new recruits are well practiced in the skills required.

### **Medical Schools Council: Virtual Primary Care**

Using recordings of real GP consultations, accompanied by teaching points and student activities and managed by a tutor, provides students at UK medical schools with learning content intermediate between traditional classroom teaching and healthcare placements.

The videos and activities delivered in the Virtual Primary Care programme provide students with exposure to the content of GP consultations, with the additional benefit of these being contextualised, and curated to provide exposure to a more diverse array of people and conditions than will be encountered on most students' placements.

Initially provided to medical schools due to the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic, Virtual Primary Care has ongoing value as a supplement to other teaching and learning.

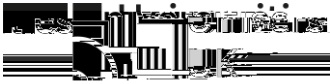
## **The new normal workplace**

Graduates are now expected to be competent in digital skills. The pandemic saw dramatic shifts in working patterns and flexible working models are becoming increasingly popular, with 65% of employers now expecting new hires to be able to work remotely. Just as past shifts in the labour market changed skills needs, as the focus of the economy moved from manufacturing to business services, higher education must adapt again to the needs of employers by instilling essential digital skills so that our graduates remain competitive.









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When done well, digitally-enhanced learning has the potential to improve quality in teaching and learning and student outcomes, whether it is used alongside more traditional approaches or on its own. As the sector looks ahead to how it can deliver high quality higher education not only for the graduates of today but the graduates of the future, consideration needs to be given to where digital enhancements can be introduced and further developed.

## **This can be supported by:**

### **Targeted investment**

There are many demands on public and university finances, but these discussions need to also think about where there might be opportunities for more targeted investment. In particular:

Investment in up-to-date technology, for innovations in teaching to be used effectively and to keep pace with developments in the sectors where graduates will be working.

Investment in staff, to use technology effectively and to develop future innovations. This includes provision for specialist support that can stay up-to-date with the most suitable innovations in education technology, in addition to supporting wider teaching staff to make use of these.



## **Support from regulatory and professional bodies**

The OfS' [response](#) to the [review of blended learning](#) sets out how universities can make use of innovations while still meeting regulatory requirements. By linking those requirements to examples of good practice, the OfS provides universities with more certainty about whether planned changes are in line with the OfS conditions of registration. This also provides institutions looking to innovate further with guidance on how they might move forward.

Meanwhile, many professional bodies publish guidance or requirements for the approval or accreditation of degree programmes. Explicitly acknowledging and approving of technology-enhanced learning – as in the Nursing and Midwifery Council's [standards framework](#) – supports universities to innovate with confidence.

## **Strengthening communities**

Online delivery cannot be pursued at the expense of building the community of learners. We would encourage the identification and sharing of best practice to mitigate or minimise any negative impacts of online delivery, for example the best uses of communication technology, as well as the role of co-creation in engaging learners.

## **Updates to the design of courses**

As part of both updates to existing courses and the creation of new courses, universities can move beyond the lessons learned during the pandemic. They can also be making use of the wide range of emerging evidence, practice, thinking, and technology to design courses in a way that will best meet the needs of students and employers. This can be aligned to more strategic thinking on the digital transformation of their offer, and can be supported by tools including Jisc's ['Framework for digital transformation'](#).

