A DIGITAL AGENDA FOR EUROPE'S UNIVERSITIES?

discussed at the EUA Council meeting (Galway, 6 April 2016) and at the EUA Board meeting (Zurich, 10 June).

Introduction

This paper presents issues which EUA considers important for universities in addressing the impact of digitalisation and thus which we propose to explore over the coming years in collaboration with members and partners. EUA's objectives in doing this are, as usual, two-fold, providing support to individual members, while also contributing to policy discussion at European level.

A first draft of the paper was presented to Council in Galway (6 April 2016), immediately before the 2016 Annual Conference "Bricks and Clicks for Europe: how to build a successful digital campus" (7-8 April). Ten topics were identified, formulated as questions, to be further developed in the light of the Galway discussions.[1] The present text takes account of comments made by Council members. A revised draft with 13 questions has been discussed at the EUA Board, in Zurich (10 June).

The results can be summarised as follows:

- The paper has been welcomed, as it addresses the right issues.
- Digitalisation is not an end in itself, but a means of supporting key university missions. Concretely, it was recommended to address the 13 questions in the context of research and learning and teaching.
- EUA's role should thus focus on exploring these opportunities and on assessing impact on the sector and society at large, and, on this basis contributing to policy development.

13 Questions related to the digitalisation of European higher education

1. Digitalisation and its impact on European universities

- How does the use of digital media and tools **impact on the central missions of the university**, in terms of education, research and service to society, as well as on university governance, administration and collaboration with external partners? To what extent will these developments change the university 'model' as we know it today?
- How can **institutional support and service structures** for digitalisation be best developed and implemented?
- What is the role of digitalisation in **institutional strategies** and planning in terms of **physical infrastructure**?
- How can leadership **support innovative bottom-up approaches and ensure that they are mainstreamed** into broader institutional governance and management systems across the university?

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1   As far as the impact of digitalisation on knowledge production and sharing is concerned, the paper refers to the ongoing work of EUA's Expert Group on Science 2.0/Open Science. In January 2016 Council endorsed EUA's broad vision to support universities in their transition to open access, while also approving the proposed EUA Roadmap on Open Access to Research Publications.

- How can institutions enable proper evaluation and assessment of the **benefits and costs** involved in the deployment of digital technologies?

- What is the likelihood of digitalisation leading to a **rationalisation of teaching and student support** from a predominantly economic perspective, and hence the incorporation of **new economic models** in the higher education sector?

2. Digitalisation in support of inter-institutional collaboration

- How can the exploration of **innovative practices** and the **diversity** this entails be managed, while at the same time recognising the strong **pressure for transparency and greater convergence**?

- To what extent do shared and collective solutions make sense from an **economic perspective** in as far as they contribute to making the best possible use of limited resources and avoid unnecessary duplication?

- To what extent can/do **joint initiatives** contribute to enhancing quality, improving standards and facilitating recognition, promoting virtual mobility and open access to information, materials and courses, thus benefiting students, staff, institutions, and other stakeholders?

3. Enhancing learning & teaching

- How can digitalisation and technological developments be used for the enhancement of learning and teaching, in particular with regard to **student-centered learning**?

- To what extent is digitalisation able to improve opportunities for **research-based and interdisciplinary learning, for community outreach, social and 'real life' learning**?

- How can new **collaborative ways of learning and conducting research** be reflected in the design of study programmes, curricula and learning outcomes?

- To what extent, and how, does digital learning and more flexible learning provision impact on the **relationship between students and staff**, on the **teaching profession** itself and on the **future careers of graduates**?

4. Skills for digitalisation

- What are the **'digital' skills** required by staff and students, such as digital literacy, including the acquisition of ICTs related practical skills, social, communication and organisational skills, and the required knowledge and awareness of the use of data, digital tools and processes?

- How do academic skills such as **autonomous learning** and the **ability to select, assess and integrate knowledge and information** from different sources lend themselves to digital learning situations?

- How are these skills best **acquired and developed** in the university environment?

5. Lifelong learning & continued professional development

- How can digital learning help in addressing a broad range of **lifelong learners**, including those who may or may not aim to complete a degree, as well as those who are interesting in learning to advance their professional goals or simply for their personal enrichment?

- More specifically, how can digitalisation support and enhance the contribution of universities to **continued professional development**? Some universities are already providing online and blended learning opportunities for working professionals, sometimes to accumulate them into a degree.

6. Open educational resources (OER)

- Open educational resources (OER) have existed for a long time, and their importance and use has grown steadily. However, unlike repositories in research, they have not yet become an important strategy in learning and teaching, for a variety of reasons.

- Given their potential in fostering the implementation of innovative learning approaches (such as the flipped classroom, student-centred learning), and contributing to quality enhancement of learning materials, what role could shared learning resources play in supporting a **paradigm change in European higher education learning and teaching**?

7. Open learning and credit award (including MOOCs)

- MOOCs have become an accepted addition to the portfolios of many universities, and are morphing into more distinct formats[2] and other more flexible, tailored and validated forms of learning.[3]

- How can such formats be used in a more effective way to **support student learning** (for degree course registered students and lifelong learners), **internationalisation, community outreach** or to enhance **collaboration with industry**?

- Is there a need to consider **recognising and awarding credits** to learning based solely on MOOCs and other formats of open learning, and is this possible? What are the consequences for the distinction between formal and informal learning?

- Is there a need for a closer **collaboration with the 'MOOC industry'**, i.e. producers and providers, on issues such as data protection, IP and copyright, to ensure that they comply with the accepted structures within the European Higher Education Area?

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2   *SPOC*: Small Private Online Course: *POOC*: Personalised Open Online Course, *SMOC*: Synchronous Massive Online Course; *DOCC*: Distributed Open Collaborative Course, to name only a few

3   E.g. EADTU launched an MOU on Short Learning Programmes (SLP), which all its members automatically recognise; the European Commission referred to "a virtual Erasmus" to be launched already under the present Erasmus + programme.

8. Recognising and validating digital learning

- How can universities **improve collaboration** and maximise learning opportunities for their students, e.g. through virtual mobility (i.e. distance learning)?

- What should be the principles and models underpinning **cooperation with other educational providers**?

- Should universities/networks of universities themselves seek to **validate different types of learning**, given that they are presently able to recognise prior formal and non-formal learning and contribute to introducing and validating new learning and qualification paths, involving different disciplines as well as academic and non-academic providers and partners (e.g. learning provided by companies, for profit education providers)?

9. Big data and text and data mining

- Universities have always been data-intensive in that they play a major role in producing and processing data. But the availability of ever larger amounts of data will have consequences for institutions' research, learning and teaching, data management and infrastructure, as well as their collaboration on data.

- Should this issues be explored with members and, for example, the European Commission?

10. Digital infrastructures

- Digitalisation can only work if the right infrastructure is provided, both on and off campus. This also raises the question whether and how the physical university changes it shape, features and functions: for instance, libraries are often becoming learning centres with a strong virtual dimension, and university may no longer need as many lecture halls as in the past.

- How do universities assess their needs and plan their infrastructure? Do good practice examples and opportunities for the sharing of expertise exist, for example at national level? Should EUA take action?

11. The importance of national support

- How can **governments** best support digital development in their respective national systems? In some countries, national agencies have already "proven a powerful means of driving change"[4], while in others national platforms have been launched (FUN in France, or the Digital Forum in Germany).

- To what extent could exchange among these initiatives help to **improve convergence** on digital developments?

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4   Report "The Changing Pedagogical Landscape" (2015)

12. The role of the European Commission

- How can better cooperation and greater involvement of Europe's university sector in the development of **European level policies for digitalisation** be ensured, given that the European Commission addresses digitalisation in different ways in different Directorates General (policy development, commissioned research and targeted project funding)? For example, what should be the follow-up to the 2013 "Opening up Education" communication? Beyond the "Digital Single Market", is there a scope for non-commercial European initiatives?

- How can the EC contribute to better **exchange and peer-learning between national structures and strategies**, and in this way contribute to developing the European dimension?

13. The role of the Bologna Process

- As European Ministers have addressed the question of digitalisation in the 2015 Yerevan Bologna Communique, what should be the next steps, how can **more convergence in approaches among European countries** be achieved, e.g. with regard to developing a common language and terminology for different digital learning and teaching formats, including for quality assurance, credit transfer and recognition related to digital learning?

- How can universities actively contribute to this through the current **BFUG** working group architecture? What should be the goals to be attained for the **2018 Ministerial Conference** in this respect?

Sources:

- "The Changing Pedagogical Landscape" (2015)

- EUA TRENDS report 2015

- E-learning in European Higher Education Institutions 2014

- EUA Roadmap on Open Access to Research Publications, 2016

- MOOCs: Expectations and Reality, May 2014

- EADTU 2016 Summit

- From Bricks to Clicks: The potential of Data and Analytics in Higher Education, January 2016

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info@eua.eu   ·   **www.eua.eu**