

**LEARNING & TEACHING PAPER #17**

Strategy and organisational  
culture

Thematic Peer Group Report

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# DIGIHE

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# Introduction

This report focuses on the role of strategy and organisational culture in promoting digitally enhanced learning and teaching (DELT), leading to better outcomes for learners. It was collaboratively developed by a group of senior colleagues from diverse higher education institutions across 10 countries under the Learning & Teaching Thematic Peer Group “Strategy and organisational culture” (hereinafter referred to as “the group”; for details see Annex 2).<sup>1</sup> It was developed both as an activity of the “Supporting European universities in their strategic approaches to digital learning” (DIGI-HE) project and part of EUA’s Learning & Teaching activities.

Three assumptions underpin the report: i) the Covid-19 experience offers valuable lessons for the future; ii) the individual institutional context is crucial to strategy development; and iii) critical self-assessment is a valuable tool in fostering “a high-performing digital education ecosystem”.<sup>2</sup> In terms of this third point, findings from a review of 20 different institutional self-assessment instruments<sup>3</sup> help frame the discussion. The objective is to synthesise lessons from the literature whilst offering insights and practical suggestions from a group of experienced educators leading institutional change in teaching, learning and assessment.

The report begins by defining the concept of organisational culture and why a focus on this aspect of institutional change is crucial to successfully implementing educational innovation. The question of why a strategy is required is then addressed with a brief discussion of the choices available to higher education institutions in the way they position DELT in their policy architecture. The focus then shifts to the various components that need to be included in an institutional strategy.

The challenge of bringing all components together is discussed in the context of institutional self-assessment and the importance of a connected learning organisation. Finally, the report suggests selected actions (recommended by the group members) that institutions need to explore as they look to harness the transformative potential of DELT over the short, medium and long term. In addition, three overarching recommendations and advice from individual group members based on their own experience and good practice are interspersed as quotes throughout the report.

The report concludes with three key questions that may serve as beacons for guiding institutional decisions about how best to position DELT for the future, to advance both institutional missions and the EUA vision of “Universities without walls”.<sup>4</sup>

# Why is organisational culture important?

While organisational culture is a difficult concept to define and comes with a degree of ambiguity, for the purpose of this report it refers to the climate, atmosphere and practices that result from how a higher education institution chooses to define its policies, priorities and interactions with people. Put another way, organisational culture can be understood as the dominant values and beliefs that influence decision-making and which define the nature of the working environment. Prevailing cultures are often difficult to change, which is why educational leaders need to pay attention to culture when planning or implementing major learning innovations.

This point is evident from the literature on promoting transformative educational change. Culture plays an important role in mediating and influencing the way both institutions and teachers choose to adopt (or not) new digital technologies for learning and teaching.<sup>5</sup> This means that harnessing the transformative potential of DELT may require educational leaders and those at the forefront of digital innovation to push for a change of long-standing values, habits and beliefs. Importantly, culture can enable or constrain the level of innovation and is a critical component of any learning environment. As the late Peter Drucker is reported to have once said, “culture eats strategy for breakfast”.<sup>6</sup>

This famous quote strongly resonates with the experience of the group. A related question that arises from this claim is to what extent educational leaders can actually shape or influence culture, especially since organisational culture usually consists of many different subcultures as each unit, department and academic discipline has its own traditions and ways of working. The experience shared by the group has shown the importance of the early-adopters, i.e., the innovators that create small clusters of change, and of the impact good practices and examples have on the larger community, especially when the organisational culture encourages, enables and rewards innovation. Therefore, this report asserts that everyone needs to be seen as a valuable micro-leader with the ability to influence the work environment and, to a further extent, the institution and community with which they interact. The responsibility for shaping new learning cultures does not stop with senior management in the boardroom, but requires a commitment to a more distributed approach to institutional leadership.

# Why do you need an institutional strategy?

*“Start with why and not with predefined formats. Do not try to revolutionise the system, but set up new structures that are sustainable enough for as many people as possible to join. Do not underestimate the potential impact of role models. Do not assume that everything has only technical implications. Without the right mindset and organisational culture, the structure will not change.”*

FernUniversität in Hagen, Germany

The answer to this question is that an institutional strategy is a key tool that most large organisations use to help intentionally design the type of culture they want to create and the outcomes they wish to achieve. Thus, strategy and organisational culture usually go hand in hand. As a recent report notes, if you want to change the culture then “start with the strategy”.<sup>7</sup> A common feature of any strategy is recognising that there are choices and that enabling incentives and interventions can help achieve preferred outcomes. It is notable that each group member already has some type of strategy for DELT, but they vary widely in focus and maturity, which mirrors the findings of a recent survey among higher education institutions.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the group’s discussions highlight

that the term “strategy” needs to be understood at different levels within an educational organisation. A review of current strategies in each group member reveals they are not limited to high-level institutional plans or policy statements as different types of strategies usually exist throughout the organisation. For the purpose of its work, nevertheless, the group primarily focused on the development of a high-level overarching strategy for harnessing the potential of DELT rather than local plans that may operate in central units or at the faculty level.

## WHAT TYPE OF STRATEGY?

When it comes to strategy development, a crucial question is whether institutions wish to develop a standalone or embedded strategy. On the one hand, institutions have the choice to develop a separate strategy for DELT that focuses on successfully implementing new digital technology to meet their mission for teaching and learning. On the other hand, the role of DELT can be embedded within existing plans such as the institution’s learning and teaching strategy. This choice is somewhat philosophical and depends on the institutional context. To date, there does not appear to be evidence of whether one approach leads to better outcomes than the other. However, in debating both approaches, the group reached a broad consensus that several key domains need to be addressed, regardless of the type of strategy an institution develops. These domains are outlined in the section “What key domains need to be in the strategy?”

## WHAT PROCESS NEEDS TO BE FOLLOWED?

The process of strategy development for DELT is crucial. The group acknowledges that top-down strategies are almost doomed to fail and, therefore, considers it important to engage an institution's entire educational community in the process. This includes harnessing the early adopters, amplifying their influence, augmenting their innovations so they can be multiplied, and enabling them as ambassadors of change. Creating a sharing and trusting culture that gives people the opportunity to offer their ideas and suggestions not only builds greater ownership but is likely to result in more successful and sustainable implementation of the strategy. A related point is that new digital technologies open up new ways for engaging people in the consultation process and can be used to model the type of inclusive learning culture institutions may wish to create. In 2017, for example, Dublin City University ran a 24-hour fully open online event to engage its community in envisioning the future as part of its strategy development. The key point is that institutions need to give serious consideration to how they will go about developing their strategy, how they will engage different stakeholders, and who will be responsible for managing, designing and building the different elements of the strategy.

# What key domains need to be in the strategy?

The short answer to this question is that many different components need to be incorporated into the strategy. After all, the digital education ecosystem is complex. However, some of the components of a well-conceptualised strategy are more important than others and can be summarised as key domains. What follows is an overview of these domains based on extensive group discussions with a focus on those domains that potentially have the greatest influence on reshaping learning culture.

## Getting started

The review of self-assessment instruments of the DIGI-HE project<sup>9</sup> provides a good starting point for identifying what is important for inclusion in the strategy. For example, the DigiCompOrg Framework<sup>10</sup> identifies eight domains that contribute to a digitally competent educational organisation. While culture does not feature in this framework, it appears as an explicit domain along with areas such as policy, strategic planning and leadership in the Commonwealth of Learning's Benchmarking Toolkit.<sup>11</sup> The group encourages those leading institutional policies for DELT to familiarise themselves with these existing frameworks as part of their policy development processes.

## Developing a framework

The group's work included discussions aimed at sharing the strategies in place among group members, looking at the various self-assessment instruments, reviewing the literature on other institutional strategies<sup>12</sup>, and considering different methods for strategic development.<sup>13</sup>

## The structure of a DELT vision

Three key domains emerged in the course of the group's discussions:

- \* Vision, Leadership and Governance
- \* People, Community and Stakeholders
- \* Tools, Spaces and Resources

The group also identified “Transformation”, “Collaboration” and “Change” as the three key integrating themes that need to be woven throughout the development of an effective DELT policy and strategy (Figure 1).

**Figure 1** - Structure of a DELT vision



### Integrating themes

While remaining respectful of contextual differences, the group identified three themes that are important to the development of an effective DELT strategy:

#### Fostering digital transformation

Digital transformation can take many different forms (digitisation, digitalisation, digital ecosystem) and implies a commitment to institutional change.<sup>14</sup> There can be big transformations that fundamentally challenge traditional practices or small incremental transformations that collectively influence the teaching and learning experience. The potential of small transformations to lead to bigger transformations should not be underestimated. As institutions differ from one another, the type of digital transformation and the time it takes to implement them will depend on the conditions and characteristics of each context.

#### Understanding that collaboration is crucial

*“Establish a platform or forum for discussion on available resources and interactions around shared experiences as part of the process of constructing strategies. Analyse outcomes of these discussions as part of the implementation process.”*

University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy

To develop and empower a comprehensive institutional strategy at a cross-institutional level, an ethos of collaboration and partnership needs to drive institutional change. Students, educators and the wider stakeholder community must be involved in this process to develop a shared perspective and ambition. Such collaboration helps to better understand to what extent new innovative approaches through DELT are realistic, share good practices, and identify what support and resources may be required for teaching staff and students. Collaboration

is also important to build shared ownership of the priorities and key performance indicators for monitoring progress and recalibrating the strategy.



## Recognising that change does not follow a straight line

Change is a process. It rarely follows a straight line and represents a constantly evolving and transformative condition. This means that periodic readjustment of the institutional strategy for DELT will be necessary due to changing internal and external conditions. An important aspect of change is that the institution needs to cultivate growth mindsets and create an organisational culture where new innovations and transformations can thrive. Such a culture requires leaders and ambassadors for change who can energise others and help drive continuous improvement. On the other hand, change is not benign, and building resilience in the face of uncertainty also requires listening to your critics. As well as identifying and celebrating what worked, institutions and their leaders have to be critical and honest about what did not work. The group proposes that institutions establish a quality assurance framework with defined guidelines or standards as well as maintaining an outward focus so they can benchmark their goals and outcomes for DELT with other leading and like-minded institutions.

The next sections focus on the important aspects and considerations underpinning each of these domains, along with key questions about the “Why?”, “What?” and “How?” of DELT.

## VISION, LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

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### Recommendation

In building up a DELT strategy, base policies or governance on the different forms and scales of digital transformation, on empowering collaboration with openness and shared ambition and on encouraging alignment of the institution’s quality assurance framework and benchmarks with the planned digital transformation.

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Having a vision of what institutions want to achieve from DELT is crucial, which in turn highlights the need to answer the “Why?” question<sup>15</sup>: Why is DELT important for the institution? Where does it ‘fit’ in the institution’s vision? What are the underlying goals’ drivers? How do these drivers align with the institutional mission and goals? Where does the institution want to end up? What is the end goal? The answers to these questions need to provide the foundation for any institutional strategy. To envision the actions but also to engage the multiple stakeholders around the institution the next questions are: How can this vision be achieved? Who will be responsible for leading the initiative? How does

the institution involve the different stakeholders in the strategy development? Who will manage and govern the strategy? True to the principle that context matters, there is no simple or right answer to these questions as the discussion needs to be framed around the institution’s wider strategic plan. Since institutional policies and strategies are highly interdependent, the combined actions of multiple stakeholders are required to achieve desired outcomes<sup>16</sup>.

## PEOPLE, COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDERS

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### Recommendation

Undertake an audit or self-assessment of the current situation in your institution to identify the gaps and strategic priorities for development over the next five years. When identifying those gaps and priorities, involve educators, students and stakeholders in the process and consider the impact on the institutional community in the planning of development measures.

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Higher education institutions are defined by their students, educators, various other stakeholders and, increasingly, the communities built within and by them. These communities play a central role in the cultural transformation of the institution. Higher education institutions have an opportunity to leverage the pandemic experience in order to accelerate institutional developments toward student-centred DELT. The group’s vision of a digitally hybrid or blended learning environment depends on purposeful, informed and focused communities with strong pedagogical, practice-based, and supportive characteristics.

### Educators

Educators are leaders of the change in embedding innovative methods within their teaching approaches. Innovation in this context is not about delivering the same courses in a different way, but about reshaping teaching in order to offer personalised, flexible learning pathways. Training opportunities, constant support, validation of educators’

digital skills, communities of practice, support of innovative initiatives and explicit dissemination of good practices can help to activate educators and promote a transformative educational culture. Further needed developments identified by the group include initiating and nurturing an impactful professional development culture and building a community around the use of DELT. Also needed is the involvement of students and educators in governance matters, and the improvement of training and tools to allow them to co-shape governance.

## Students

Students' expectations of higher education are evolving, increasingly geared towards flexibility, personalisation and opportunities to acquire transferable digital skills. The group believes a DELT strategy must place inclusion and equality of access front and centre, and be informed by awareness of socio-economic barriers to participation. A successful strategy will also acknowledge that, despite the benefits of DELT, many students still expect synchronous in-person interactions with educators to continue. An effective strategy will also offer opportunities for student-led learning and co-creation. It will enhance flexibility, enabling students to switch between in-person and online modes of learning and engagement, and to study at their own pace within a clear framework for accumulation and transfer of credit.

## Stakeholders

*"Do not underestimate the impact of stakeholders. We can plan for a whole year but if we do not focus on the key stakeholders, they will reject the planned changes."*

University of Iceland

Higher education institutions do not operate in isolation from society. Therefore, discussions about DELT, including quality assurance processes, need to engage both internal and external stakeholders. The investment in DELT can benefit from an active engagement of stakeholders willing to share their experiences and help co-design strategies following collaborative processes, which support more inclusive and sustainable transformations. Crucially, the participation of external and internal stakeholders

needs to be built into the culture of the institution and validated through the existence of relevant committees or specialisation boards, involving a wide range of viewpoints in discussions around the future of learning and teaching.

## Communities

The aspects mentioned above imply a significant cultural change for institutions and a different conception of the student path. This includes the evaluation of needs and skills development for students, educators, academic and supporting staff for delivering a blended, hybrid, flexible or fully online mode of learning and teaching. The group believes that digital communities of practice are wielding the power of the collective, gaining traction from a range of players: from the early adopters to the transformative leaders that are co-creating the digital strategies within and beyond their institutions.

# TOOLS, SPACES AND RESOURCES

## Recommendation

Scale up the institution's infrastructure for seamless digital, virtual and physical spaces, including tools and a culture of open education.

The group considers that the future of higher education lies in more hybrid or blended types of learning. An important priority of DELT strategic development is dedicated investment in and development of digital tools, sustainable spaces and resources. For many higher education institutions, the digital transformation was already initiated several years ago, with a focus on digital support for education, research and academic administration. But the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was

paramount in the rapid growth of digital tools and resources, as institutions were in many ways not accustomed to "deliver" online. How can institutions capitalise on these rapid changes, turning them into an advantage for decision-making in the future? Transforming the digital and physical infrastructure of institutions while maintaining the focus on sustainability and adaptability represents a key priority. What is the end ambition, where and how much should institutions invest? Is the investment sustainable and ongoing as new digital tools emerge? What will the digital education ecosystem look like as actions taken will not only shape the future of learning and teaching

at the institution, but will also have considerable financial consequences? A broad strategic viewpoint with an eye of sustainability and as much stakeholder involvement as possible is required to help find the answers to these questions.

The group highlights the following considerations to implement the transformation of resources and tools and develop the digital skills of people:

### The digital architecture and ecosystem

*“Define the digital ecosystem first by analysing the digitalisation process (building up the ecosystem’s core with required digital tools, content and skills), then relying on collaboration and co-creation to empower the early adopters and enablers to become digital leaders.”*

Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania

IT tools evolve rapidly, they are costly and there are many alternatives for the same purpose. Investment in tools that will not be used by the learners and educators is a waste of resources. Devising an institution-wide digital framework that is adaptable to the different needs of teachers and students, integrating mobile and cloud technology and investing in continuous training and support will be needed. In addition, a focus on data management will allow us to identify any gaps, gather insights and, thus, enable an agile response to upcoming needs. Cybersecurity is another crucial consideration.

### Scaling learning spaces

*“Focus on intelligent investment in technology and programmes to support faculty members.”*

Sabancı University, Turkey

Institution-wide self-assessment of the digital and physical environment will allow institutions to identify good practices and then to scale and multiply them across the whole system. Building on existing tools and resources is good from both an investment point of view and for smooth adaptation to users. Unlike technology and tools, spaces evolve slowly. Hence, venues should be

adapted or created that will allow education to be delivered in HyFlex (hybrid and/or flexible) mode,<sup>17</sup> to allow for real-time streaming, integrated digital assessment, group work and collaborative learning, individual and collaborative workspaces for students, as well as virtual and physical spaces that bring together learners, educators and digital specialists.

### Open education

Open education tools and shared resources are an important aspect of sustainable digital ecosystems. This includes the creation of platforms for exchange of ideas and good practices within the institution, involving students as co-creators of educational resources, and ensuring the overall quality and validation of open educational resources with policies, guides, tutoring and publishing platforms. Collaboration inside and between institutions fosters learning from each other but will also lead to sharing resources and linking tools and communities.

# How to bring everything together?

The music we enjoy is usually produced by the sound of an entire orchestra playing in harmony rather than from a single flute. This analogy illustrates that the sum of the whole is greater than the individual parts in efforts to harness the potential of DELT. It also suggests that the process of how an institutional strategy is developed is just as important as the strategy itself. Indeed, the degree and way in which the institutional community is engaged in the consultation around the strategy can have a significant impact on its success and organisational culture. Equally, organisational culture will to some extent shape the nature of strategy development. In other words, this is not a one-directional relationship. However, regardless of the specific institutional culture, the best strategies for DELT are likely to arise from listening and taking into account stakeholders' voices and experiences.

With this in mind, the report returns to a central assumption underpinning the group's work: the value of self-assessment as an important tool in fostering a high-performing digital education ecosystem. While there are different approaches to self-assessment, the group was unanimous that this should engage as many stakeholders as possible to provide a top-down, middle-out and bottom-up perspective which helps to connect the many different parts and components of any institutional strategy. Importantly, self-assessment of DELT should not be left to chance or be an afterthought as this is something that needs to be planned for as part of the overall institutional strategy. After all, a large orchestra can only give a truly commanding performance if it has a great conductor, a collaborative vision on what and how it wants to play, does lots of practice and learns from the critical reviews it receives from the intended audience. This extended orchestra analogy demonstrates that self-assessment is one of the most important ways of helping to bring everything together.

# What actions need to be taken?

While this report included several key priorities, one central assumption underpinning the group's conclusions is that the individual institutional context is crucial to strategy development. Proposing generic actions and best practices based on other higher education institutions may not always be effective in meeting a specific institution's mission and local challenges. This point is evident from the diversity of the top challenges identified by group members, as summarised in Table 1 below.

Notably, the majority of identified challenges in the table falls under the domains of "Vision, leadership and governance" and "People community and stakeholders", while digital tools and infrastructure do not feature prominently. Again, the diversity of responses underscores the importance of developing future-fit actions for the local context. As the group chair from Politehnica University of Timisoara stated on one occasion:

"We need a clear analysis of the actual situation, a self-review, to identify our priorities and seek a method to renew and restructure."

This comment further underscores the value of critical self-assessment in identifying specific actions. Given the importance of local context, three examples of specific actions – one under each domain – that partner institutions plan to implement are listed below. The actions outlined in Table 1 illustrate the need to develop solutions that adequately meet local challenges and opportunities.

**Table 1** - Summary of top institutional challenges and actions taken by group members to address individual institutional challenges

DOMAIN	CHALLENGE	ACTION
<b>Vision, leadership and governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Establishing the current state of practice, how to develop the right type of strategy and rethink teaching approaches for best practices</li> <li>♦ Promoting leadership, quality assurance and self-assessment</li> <li>♦ Defying delivery modes and exploring partnerships</li> <li>♦ Ensuring quality and revising the quality assurance framework to support new models</li> </ul>	<p><b>Re-envisioning the future of examinations</b></p> <p>Written exams were previously held in rented rooms at other higher education institutions. As a result of the pandemic, there are now many fundamental questions about what requirements are attached to an exam and what the students' performance actually consists of. As a result of this cultural change, new concepts are now being experimented with. This means that institutionalised structures are also concerned with why traditions endure and how other forms of learning and assessment can be made possible.</p> <p><i>FernUniversität in Hagen, Germany</i></p>

DOMAIN	CHALLENGE	ACTION
<b>People, community and stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Promoting a mindset shift amongst teachers and administrators and transforming assessment practices</li> <li>◆ Developing support for teacher and students</li> <li>◆ Increasing continuous professional development</li> <li>◆ Promoting shared ownership of developments towards digital transformation</li> <li>◆ Developing a community of practice, growth mindsets and shared ownership</li> <li>◆ Increasing flexibility and more authentic and relevant assessment models</li> <li>◆ Supporting students and mapping the study lifecycle</li> </ul>	<p><b>Developing a community of practice for heads of studies</b></p> <p>Unit heads are key constituents, as they represent the central connection between the institution, educators and students. They can help realise institutional ambition by orchestrating the educational environment. A new internal training program for unit heads is underway with the main goal to develop a community of practice. The topics covered during these sessions will be discussed in a participative mode. This action aims to develop academic leadership within the organisation and connect the rectorate to the educational realities of learning and teaching.</p> <p><i>HES-SO University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland</i></p>
<b>Tools, spaces and resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Upgrading digital infrastructure</li> <li>◆ Integrating digital infrastructure in the wider DELT ecology</li> <li>◆ More fully harnessing the pedagogical affordances of digital video</li> <li>◆ Ensuring a more sustainable platform for the recording and delivery of digital video</li> <li>◆ Future proofing digital infrastructure for further growth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Finding a replacement platform for Unicam</b></p> <p>The Covid-19 crisis has seen a significant increase in the use of recorded videos for learning and teaching. An internally developed video platform known as Unicam built in conjunction with an external company has been part of the central digital architecture since 2019. However, the platform that integrates with YouTube is no longer able to support the rapid growth in demand with on average around 20 new videos uploaded per day. A decision has been made to identify the future requirements and based on this analysis to follow a formal tender process to find a suitable replacement platform.</p> <p><i>Dublin City University, Ireland</i></p>

The final observation from group members is a reminder that the digital education ecosystem consists of a diverse range of macro, meso and micro-layers. Impactful DELT strategies need to extend to each of these layers.

# Conclusion

This report has focused on the role that organisational culture and strategy plays in influencing decisions related to DELT. The basic premise of the report is that, especially since the experience resulting from Covid-19, the need for an institutional strategy to address the challenges and opportunities arising from DELT has never been more important. This is why the report suggests various priorities for institutions to consider when identifying urgent immediate actions. A related theme is a need for collaboration and an ethos of institutional community in the process of strategy development. Importantly, it is evident from the group's discussions that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to developing a DELT strategy as this very much depends on the individual institution's mission, organisational culture and the learning environment the institution wishes to create for its teachers and students.

Therefore, this report concludes with three guiding questions that all educational leaders need to ask themselves in the context of their own institution. If clarity is the new clever, then what is the answer to the following questions:

1. Why is DELT important for your institution?
2. What do you want to achieve from investing in DELT?
3. How will you go about implementing DELT to achieve your goals?

## ANNEX 1: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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Morris, N., Ivancheva, M., Coop, T., Mogliacci, R., & Swinnerton, B., 2020, 'Negotiating growth of online education in higher education', in *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 17 (48), pp. 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00227-w> (accessed 10/01/2022).

National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2021, *Guide to developing enabling policies for digital and open teaching and learning*. <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/our-priorities/digital-transformation/enabling-policies-for-digital-and-open-teaching-and-learning/> (accessed 10/01/2022).

Volungevičienė, A., Brown, M., Greenspon, R., Gaebel, M., & Morrisroe, A., 2021, *Developing a High-Performance Digital Education System: Institutional Self-Assessment Instruments* (EUA, Brussels). <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/digi-he%20desk%20research%20report.pdf> (accessed 10/01/2022).



## ANNEX 2: EUA LEARNING & TEACHING THEMATIC PEER GROUPS

As part of its work on learning and teaching, EUA engages with leadership and professional staff overseeing or implementing learning and teaching activities at the institutional level. Coordinating the work of a set of Thematic Peer Groups is a key aspect of EUA's work in connecting with university communities. The groups consist of university representatives selected through a call for participation; the core of their remit is to:

- discuss and explore practices and lessons learnt in organising and implementing learning and teaching in European universities, and to
- contribute to the enhancement of learning and teaching by identifying key recommendations on the selected theme.

The 2021 Thematic Peer Groups were organised as part of the DIGI-HE project with a focus on digitally enhanced learning and teaching (DELT). The Thematic Peer Groups, active from March 2021 until February 2022, facilitated discussion among group members through their engagement in peer-learning exercises and exchange of experience. Similarly, the group members contributed their expertise to develop EUA's input in policy debates, such as the Bologna Process.

Each group was chaired by a member representative from one university and supported by two coordinators – one from within the EUA Secretariat and another from within the DIGI-HE Consortium. The groups met in several online meetings organised throughout 2021 and despite challenges presented by the virtual setting, were successful in identifying the major issues related to all three themes – strategy and organisational culture, curriculum and assessment, and international partnerships.

Each group discussed the key challenges related to its respective theme, explored ways to overcome challenges through innovative practices and approaches, and drew conclusions as regards institutional policies and processes that would support the enhancement of learning and teaching. In addition, the groups served as platform for members to put forward and discuss other issues relevant to the theme. Members of the groups also presented the outcomes at the 2022 European Learning & Teaching Forum, with the objective of obtaining feedback on the groups' conclusions and recommendations.

### **Composition of the Thematic Peer Group 'Strategy and Organisational Culture'**

(starting with the group chair, then proceeding by alphabetical order of the country name):

- **Politehnica University of Timisoara (Romania)**
  - Diana Andone, Director of eLearning Center (chair)
  - Gabriela-Alina Dumitrel, Vice-Rector
  - Alexandru Iliescu, Student
- **Charles University (Czech Republic)**
  - Milena Kralickova, Vice Rector for Education
  - Josef Fontana, Member of the Rector's board
- **FernUniversität in Hagen (Germany)**
  - Annabell Bils, Senior Strategy Advisor Digitalization
- **University of Iceland**
  - Róbert H. Haraldsson, Head of Division of Academic Affairs
  - Páll Ásgeir Torfason, Head of Department Digital Learning
- **Università degli studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia (Italy)**
  - Giacomo Cabri, Rector's Delegate for Teaching
  - Tindara Addabbo, Rector's Delegate for Equal Opportunities
  - Laura Simoni, Student
- **University of Turin (Italy)**
  - Veronica Orazi, President of the QA Board

- **Mondragon University (Spain)**
  - Jon Altuna, Academic Vice-Rector
- **HES-SO University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland**
  - René Graf, Vice Rector Education
  - Laurent Dutoit, Assistant to the Vice-Rector/Head of Studies and Training Department
- **Sabancı University (Turkey)**
  - Cem Güneri, Vice President for Education
  - Cüneyt Evirgen, Director of Executive Development Unit
  - Behice Pehlivan (back-up)
- **University of Saint Andrews (United Kingdom)**
  - Stephen Tyre, Associate Dean Students
  - Margaret Adamson, Head of Learning Technology
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# Endnotes

- 1 The contents of this report were first presented during a focus group that took place as part of the 2022 European Learning & Teaching Forum. The group would like to thank the participants of the focus group for their feedback and further input.
- 2 European Commission, 2020, *Digital education action plan 2021-2027*. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/digital-education-action-plan>, (accessed 10/01/2022).
- 3 Volungevičienė, A., Brown, M., Greenspon, R., Gaebel, M., & Morrisroe, A., 2021, *Developing a High-Performance Digital Education System: Institutional Self-Assessment Instruments* (Brussels, EUA). <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/digital-desk-research-report.pdf> (accessed 10/01/2022).
- 4 European Universities Association (EUA), 2021, *Universities without walls: A vision for 2030* (Brussels, EUA). <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities-without-walls-vision-for-2030.pdf> (accessed 10/01/2022).
- 5 Bates, T., 2019, *Teaching in a digital age* (2nd ed.; Vancouver, B.C., Tony Bates Associates Ltd.). <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/teachinginadigitalagev2/> (accessed 10/01/2022).
- 6 Engel, J., 2018, 'Why Does Culture ,Eat Strategy For Breakfast'?', in Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2018/11/20/why-does-culture-eat-strategy-for-breakfast/?sh=1de53a1f1e09> (accessed 22/02/2022).
- 7 Sumpter, J., 2022, 'Building the foundations of a digital culture', in Jisc. <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/building-the-foundations-of-a-digital-culture-10-feb-2022> (accessed 22/02/2022).
- 8 Gaebel, M., Zhang, T., Stoeber, H. & Morrisroe, A., 2021, Digitally enhanced learning and teaching in European higher education institutions: A survey report (Brussels, EUA). <https://eua.eu/resources/publications/954:digitally-enhanced-learning-and-teaching-in-european-higher-education-institutions.html> (accessed 22/02/2022).
- 9 Volungevičienė, A., Brown, M., Greenspon, R., Gaebel, M., & Morrisroe, A., 2021, *Developing a High-Performance Digital Education System: Institutional Self-Assessment Instruments* (Brussels, EUA). <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/digital-desk-research-report.pdf> (accessed 10/01/2022).
- 10 European Commission, 2015, *Promoting effective digital-age learning: A European framework for digitally-competent educational organisations*. <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomporg> (accessed 10/01/2022).
- 11 Sanky, M., & Mishra, S., 2019, *Benchmarking toolkit for technology-enabled learning*. Commonwealth of Learning (Vancouver, Canada). <http://oasis.col.org/bitstream/handle/11599/3217/TEL%20Benchmarking%20Report-Final-Fillable.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y> (accessed 10/01/2022).
- 12 Flavin, M., & Quintero, V., 2018, 'UK higher education institutions' technology-enhanced learning strategies from the perspective of disruption', in *Research in Learning Technology*, 26, pp. 1-12. <https://journal.alt.ac.uk/index.php/rlt/article/view/1987> (accessed 10/01/2022).
- 13 For example, as outlined in Carleton, T., Cockayne, W. & Tahvanainen, A.-J., 2013, *Strategic Foresight & Innovation Playbook*. <https://www.innovation.io/playbook> (accessed 10/01/2022).
- 14 Hall, R., & Lulich, J., 2021, 'University strategic plans: What they say about innovation', in *Innovative Higher Education*, 46, pp. 261-284. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-020-09535-5> (accessed 10/01/2022).
- 15 See also Serrat, O., 2017, 'The Five Whys Technique', in Serrat, O. (Ed.), *Knowledge Solutions: Tools, Methods, and Approaches to Drive Organizational Performance* (Singapore, Springer), pp. 307-10. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0983-9\\_32](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0983-9_32) (accessed 10/01/2022).

16 National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2021, *Guide to developing enabling policies for digital and open teaching and learning*. <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/our-priorities/digital-transformation/enabling-policies-for-digital-and-open-teaching-and-learning/> (accessed 10/01/2022).

17 HyFlex mode of delivery combines the terms “hybrid” and “flexible” and refers to face-to-face delivery in a physical classroom with synchronous online live streaming at the same time. The sessions are typically also recorded so that students can go back to the sessions in asynchronous mode.

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, websites and publications.

This paper, prepared within the framework of the EUA-led DIGI-HE project is one of a series of reports specifically focused on learning and teaching. It is designed to gather the knowledge and experiences of experts on the topic from across Europe. EUA's activities in learning and teaching aim at enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education provision, underline the importance of learning and teaching as a core mission and advocate for learning and teaching activities to be geared towards student learning and success.