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NATIONAL FORUM FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Forum Insights for Students in Higher Education

REPORT

High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, Report to the European Commission on New Modes of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (October 2014), http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/reports/modernisation-universities_en.pdf.

Key Insights for Students

Introduction

This Forum insight paper provides a brief summary of the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education's *Report to the European Commission on New Modes of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.* For full details, please refer to the link to the entire report provided above. We have highlighted the parts of the report that we think are particularly useful for ****** to consider. The summary provided below is not exhaustive, but provides an overview of the themes and priorities emphasised in the report.

Background

Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, set up the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education in 2012. Following the first report of the Group, *Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions* (2013), this second report sets out recommendations for the enhancement of higher education through engagement with new technologies. The work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning to build the digital capacity of the Irish higher education sector will be guided and informed by these recommendations.

'Students are unique, and so is the way they learn. Therefore, the teaching tools used in universities and colleges should cater for individual ways of learning, with the student at the centre. Some of our students will learn better and faster with the help of interactive media that incorporate images, graphics, videos and audio elements. Others will prefer static text and numbers in different measures. Technology in the classroom can combine all of these for a personalised learning experience for each student, based on each student's strengths. As well as improving the effectiveness of learning, such adaptation to individual needs can also have a significant effect on the reduction of drop-out' (p.18).

The transformative potential of new technologies

- 'Traditional degree programmes are modernising. Teachers and students alike have access to a wider range of materials, and new technologies and pedagogical approaches are being "blended" with the traditional classroom setting. There has been a shift in the concept of and attitude towards distance education. Increasingly, people are opting to study online. In tandem, these forms of learning are becoming more recognised and more widely accepted in society. As a result both traditional higher education institutions and new types of providers are developing a range of online offerings' (p.15).

- 'New and emerging approaches to learning and teaching, made possible by new technologies' can enhance the provision of 'high quality, relevant and widely accessible higher education' (p.18).

- Online programme provision and open access to educational resources supports the internationalisation of higher education. 'Internationalising the student and staff body, and developing global partnerships with leading institutions worldwide enhances the quality of learning, teaching and research, and contributes significantly to the student experience' (p.20).

Skills acquisition, assessment and accreditation

- 'Institutions must [...] provide digital skills training for students, especially for first year students' in order to support their learning and enhance their skills-base (p.31).

- In the provision of online learning, 'institutions must [...] replicate the softer skills [e.g. peer-interaction] acquired during an on-campus learning experience', e.g. via Google hangouts (p.31).

- Assessing learning outcomes online is challenging because 'it requires trustworthy mechanisms for the verification of online participants' identities'. However 'new forms of authentication such as webcam identification, typing pattern recognition and online proctored exams with online simultaneous supervision are helping to develop credibility' (p.44).

- The recognition and accreditation of the skills acquired through online learning is essential to 'instil confidence in the quality of the learning outcomes'. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) provides a framework to facilitate this (p.44).

Learning analytics and personalised learning

- While 'almost all European universities use central electronic learning environments, giving access to course documents, multimedia material, simulations, assessment tools, discussion fora and learning communities', the 'absence of clear information on authorised uses of specific online learning deters users' (p.47).

- Institutions should obtain 'the full and informed consent of students' for the collection and analysis of data pertaining to their learning, which 'should only be used for educational purposes' (p.50).

- 'Advances in big data and data analytics are [...] creating opportunities for institutions to better understand the needs of students and develop more personalised learning pathways' with 'the potential to transform the learning experience and enhance completion rates' (p.49).

- Digital technologies can enable student-centred learning, providing 'a personalised learning experience for each student, based on each student's strengths' (p.18).

- 'Data can capture how students engage in the course, interact with other students and retain concepts over time. It can provide information on the learning process as opposed to just learning outcomes. Teachers can experiment with different approaches and examine the immediate impact. Data can also be used to identify at-risk students at an early stage, assisting in efforts to increase retention rates' (p.21).

Fostering active learning

- 'New technologies and communication platforms also allow for greater interactivity between the teacher and the student, and between students both inside and outside the classroom. While much of the content of programmes can be delivered through "self-administered" e-learning, teachers can concentrate on their role as mentor, developing with students the skills of information management, understanding and questioning, critical thinking and knowledge application. Thus, digital media can facilitate more active, problem-based learning which has been demonstrated to encourage greater student engagement and leads to better learning outcomes' (p.19).

- 'Digital assessment tools can enable quick feedback on student progress and curriculum adjustment to student needs. Technology's potential [...] to complete the move [...] from the mere transmission of information to a co-partnership in learning' can enhance the student-learning experience (p.19).