



Solutions Room

Introduction



Fola Ikpehai
SUMS Principal Consultant



Solutions Room

- **Purpose** – To engage in collaborative debate aimed at tackling current and future challenges in the sector
- **Outputs** – Key themes around opportunities and solutions to drive positive change for the future of the sector
- **Process** – Through discussion of a set of “core” and “enabler” statements”, against a “standard questions” framework



Framework for Discussion

With the core and enabling statements as a basis:

1. To what extent do you agree with the provocation (and why)?
2. What is your university already doing in this area?
3. What are the main challenges to progress in the future?
4. What are the main opportunities for the future?

Core Statements

Teaching and Learning

Research, Innovation and Impact

The Student Experience



Teaching and Learning



- The future of university teaching will require a delicate balance between harnessing the potential for personalised, accessible learning made possible by enhancements in digital technology, and the preservation of the irreplaceable human elements of mentorship, collaboration, and critical thinking.
- Is it possible for the Higher Education sector in the UK to adapt to meet the evolving needs of students in an increasingly digital and globalised world, **while maintaining the value of traditional education?**

Research, Innovation and Impact



- The future of university research lies in interdisciplinary collaboration, where the fusion of diverse fields of knowledge leads to breakthroughs that transcend traditional academic boundaries; fostering innovation that can push the boundaries of research to enable positive societal change and address the world's most pressing challenges.
- However, as universities face **increased financial pressures**, could there be a shift towards prioritising research that generates immediate financial returns at the expense of fundamental research that drives innovation and societal impact?

The Student Experience



- As students become active co-creators of their education, they will expect to engage in flexible, experiential learning that goes beyond the laboratory and lecture room; they will expect universities to be judged less by their degree programmes and more by their ability to foster a student's personal growth, collaboration, empowerment - enabling students to adapt to changing political, technological and environmental pressures.
- However, with the potential over-reliance on digital and remote learning in the universities of the future could students experience **an erosion in the in-person interactions** and community feel that are essential to achieve these expectations?

Core Statements – Workshop Outputs

Teaching and Learning

Research, Innovation and
Impact

The Student Experience



Teaching and Learning – Key Themes emerging



1. Disparate views regarding the purpose of education from the perspective of the individual, the institution and society/government; groups emphasised the importance of defining purpose, pushing boundaries, challenging the status quo - and the meaning and value of “traditional education”.
2. Challenges include time constraints to explore the art of the possible; failure to agree priorities and define a cross-institutional perspective; inability to ensure digital equity, or coordination of digital teaching; and the assumption that face-to-face education is always best.
3. Opportunities include positive impact on timetabling and estates management; access to international educational opportunities and global experts; and creation of innovative teaching and learning pathways, with the potential benefits of technology in teaching both virtually *and* in-person.
4. The importance of developing a culture that embraces learning and innovation; where individuals are key drivers of change to meet the evolving needs of education. There was a specific theme around the inclusion of mental health in the curriculum.
5. A recognition of the changing role of academics in teaching, and the challenge of ‘balancing autonomy with efficiency’. Query regarding the need for more specialists in different modes, or support for people to become fluent in varied spheres of delivery. The importance of peer-to-peer interactions, creating personal spaces, and addressing concentration spans were all highlighted.
6. The potential to use analytics in improving engagement and outcomes in education in the future.
7. Investment required to ensure that all possible mechanisms/approaches to deliver effective teaching and learning are viable (query regarding affordability of different elements and/or running different approaches simultaneously).

Teaching and Learning – Key Quotes

- The future of university teaching will require a delicate balance between harnessing the potential for personalised, accessible learning made possible by enhancements in digital technology, and the preservation of the irreplaceable human elements of mentorship, collaboration, and critical thinking.
- Is it possible for the Higher Education sector in the UK to adapt to meet the evolving needs of students in an increasingly digital and globalised world, **while maintaining the value of traditional education?**

“Challenge to assumption that face-to-face is best...But why would you want to keep traditional education practices – times are changing. What is the definition of traditional anyway? Each institution varies massively”

““Education sector needs educating to move forward. Academic and Professional Services colleagues need to be able to operate successfully in both worlds – virtual and in-person (to meet the evolving needs of students). Engagement with employers is critical to the future of HE”

*(Need) more sophisticated understanding and pedagogy to teach well using a range of tools and techniques –
Support to academics to enable digital skills not just replicating BAU experience; additional roles and/or capabilities required to translate academic content to engaging online delivery; enhanced VLE functionality”*

Disagree with provocation!

Research, Innovation and Impact – Key Themes emerging



1. Collaboration between universities and the NHS is successful (and there is potential to learn from, and expand this partnership).
2. The strategy and decision-making process for research priorities needs transparency – contention that there is often nothing unique about an Institution's Research Strategy.
3. Interdisciplinary activities face barriers due to cross-subject nuances.
4. While access to inter-disciplinary connections may be limited in some areas there is general agreement that longer-term cross-disciplinary/cross-agency collaborations are necessary for success; strong potential for public/private partnerships and hybrid employment.
5. Efficiency and agility of research are important in order to address global problems - learning from “newer and agile organisations” is important in order to ensure readiness for the future.
6. Universities should explore other income-generating opportunities – however, incentivising academics to explore income generation is important.
7. Larger universities need to work in groups rather than in competition.
8. The future of Research needs to recognise that universities are more than just “hosts of researchers”

Research, Innovation and Impact – Key Quotes

- The future of university research lies in interdisciplinary collaboration, where the fusion of diverse fields of knowledge leads to breakthroughs that transcend traditional academic boundaries; fostering innovation that can push the boundaries of research to enable positive societal change and address the world's most pressing challenges.
- However, as universities face **increased financial pressures**, could there be a shift towards prioritising research that generates immediate financial returns at the expense of fundamental research that drives innovation and societal impact?

“The future is asset sharing, resourcing sharing, expertise sharing with companies, industry, other HEIs and FE colleges...virtual laboratories (where possible) with access for students and staff in different locations”

“Incorrect presumption around funding from bids for research. Not fully costed - Student fees fundamentally subsidise research.... Don’t want to lose our strengths in Research and Innovation but needs a balance with applied learning”

“We don’t agree (entirely) as suggest that the shift has already happened with Universities focused on research in Medicine and Science and not the Arts and Humanities (i.e. going where the money is)”

Disagree with provocation!

The Student Experience – Key Themes emerging



1. A recognition that curriculum design and learning approaches will never be the same following the Covid pandemic. There is a need to design learning for a post-COVID world focused on active learning, experiential co-created learning, and external engagement.
2. There should be a focus on attracting and retaining individuals who have been under-represented in higher education. This includes creating spaces and opportunities for engagement and collaboration between universities and communities.
3. There is an emphasis on involving students in the design process and promoting interaction and collaboration among students. The aim is to create a cohesive and supportive learning environment that addresses mental health concerns and reflects learner preferences.
4. There is a need to equip people to deliver learning in new ways, and the potential for flexible learning models.
5. A good student experience requires more collaboration between universities to share expertise and avoid working in silos. The focus is on promoting collaboration both within and between institutions.
6. There are challenges such as misalignment of IT strategies, broken internal processes, slow pace of change, and the need to shift cultural attitudes.
7. Enablers include funding, commercial inclination, expertise, and the willingness to bring in external expertise (on a global scale).

The Student Experience – Key Quotes



- As students become active co-creators of their education, they will expect to engage in flexible, experiential learning that goes beyond the laboratory and lecture room; they will expect universities to be judged less by their degree programmes and more by their ability to foster a student's personal growth, collaboration, empowerment - enabling students to adapt to changing political, technological and environmental pressures.
- However, with the potential over-reliance on digital and remote learning in the universities of the future could students experience **an erosion in the in-person interactions** and community feel that are essential to achieve these expectations?

“Erosion will only result if HEIs are not fully equipped to deliver a high-quality interactive experience, with experiential co-created learning (not due to an over-reliance on digital and remote learning!)”

*“Examples of good practice -
Keele approach to curriculum
design – IDEA – Inclusivity, Digital
Capabilities, External
Engagement, Active Learning”*

Northampton – ABL Pedagogy

UCL Connected Curriculum”

*“Students are not (and
will never be) a
homogeneous group –
need to accommodate
different student groups
(some of this segments by
institution).”*

Disagree with provocation!

Enablers

- Human Infrastructure
- Digital Infrastructure
- Physical Infrastructure



Human Infrastructure



- The future of Human Resources in higher education will be defined by an ability to foster a culture of continuous adaptation - balancing the preservation of academic traditions with the dynamic demands of a rapidly changing educational landscape - where talent management for both Professional Services and the Academic community is focused on nurturing innovation and inclusivity.
- However, as universities start to compete for talent beyond the sector, will Human Resources in higher education be able to evolve to **attract and retain** top talent – especially noting the changing needs of a diverse, multi-generational workforce, with varying skills, preferences, and career expectations?

Digital Infrastructure



- In the future, the digital infrastructure of higher education will not only support remote learning and administrative efficiency but will also be a key factor in shaping pedagogy - influencing how knowledge is created, shared, and absorbed.
- The integration of digital technology in higher education has the power to enhance learning, but it also raises profound questions about the role of Academics, the nature of knowledge, and the potential consequences of an increasingly data-driven and automated educational landscape.
- While on balance, the future of digital in the sector is positive, **how do universities address resulting challenges** such as enhancing the skills/competencies of Academics; addressing potential disparities in access; and dealing with concerns about privacy of personal information and data security?

Physical Infrastructure



- As the higher education evolves, the purpose of physical buildings will shift from being primarily spaces for lectures and examinations to becoming hubs of collaboration, innovation, and community - where students, academics, researchers and external partners come together to share knowledge with the view to addressing complex societal and global challenges.
- What should universities be doing to adapt existing physical infrastructure to meet evolving educational needs and stakeholders' expectations?

Enablers – Workshop Outputs

Human Infrastructure
Digital Infrastructure
Physical Infrastructure

Note: There is some repetition here with outputs from Core statements which can not be avoided to maintain a clear narrative.



Human Infrastructure – Key Themes emerging



1. The importance of equipping people in higher education institutions (HEIs) with the necessary skills to deliver a high-quality interactive experience.
2. Attracting and retaining top talent requires a focus on noble goals, innovation, reward, autonomy, and strong partnerships to attract candidates.
3. There is a need for revised pay structures (especially for specialist skills), increased salaries, promotion opportunities, and personal development to retain professional services staff.
4. Collaboration within the sector, closer working with industry, and establishing communities of practice for professional services are all critical to success.
5. Higher Education institutions are currently set in their ways and a cultural shift is required to increase the pace of change, as well as a willingness to recognise the need to bring in external expertise.
6. There is a need to utilise the opportunities of being in a learning organisation to train and develop staff. This could include using professional services staff to “test” the real-world applications of courses.

Human Infrastructure – Key Quotes

- The future of Human Resources in higher education will be defined by an ability to foster a culture of continuous adaptation - balancing the preservation of academic traditions with the dynamic demands of a rapidly changing educational landscape - where talent management for both Professional Services and the Academic community is focused on nurturing innovation and inclusivity.
- However, as universities start to compete for talent beyond the sector, will Human Resources in higher education be able to evolve to **attract and retain** top talent – especially noting the changing needs of a diverse, multi-generational workforce, with varying skills, preferences, and career expectations?

“Not enough focus on talent management in professional services – how can it become a more appealing career)”

“The challenge is whether you can recruit now based on what universities will need in the next 5 (to 10) years - requires real thought to the job/person specification”

“There are financial constraints. We need innovation/partners to attract (and retain) the right candidates....?”

Considering HR we need to:

- Focus on culture
- Reward
- Retention/movement of staff
- Autonomy of decision-making”

In general, agree with provocation (with the exception of the focus on “preserving academic traditions”)

Digital Infrastructure – Key Themes emerging



1. Digital technology is a key enabler to support personalised learning and education, learner analytics, and to identify/address the skills required in education. It can complement the support provided to students and can be used to continuously upskill the workforce as technologies evolve. The potential use of digital technology in defining educational algorithms and using real-world connections through AV/VR was stressed by the groups.
2. The sector has not yet maximised the use of available digital infrastructure to support in-person and online learning. Some learners will benefit from in-person interactions (enhanced through use of digital technology); a (balanced) hybrid approach is ideal. There needs to be a recognition that inter-personal skills can be enabled through both physical *and digital* infrastructure.
3. There are challenges and opportunities of using digital technology in education, such as the need for a more sophisticated understanding of the possibilities, and impact on pedagogy; support for academics to develop digital skills; and ensuring accessibility for all students.
4. There are EDI/Equity considerations when reflecting on the design, development and use of digital infrastructure (learning disabilities, child friendly solutions cited by groups).
5. The role of libraries in enabling digital transformation was stressed - Libraries access Scheme (i.e. Students use all University libraries), OpenLearn etc.
6. Groups highlighted that the effectiveness of digital technology depends on the institutional culture.

Digital Infrastructure – Key Quotes

- In the future, the digital infrastructure of higher education will not only support remote learning and administrative efficiency but will also be a key factor in shaping pedagogy - influencing how knowledge is created, shared, and absorbed.
- The integration of digital technology in higher education has the power to enhance learning, but it also raises profound questions about the role of Academics, the nature of knowledge, and the potential consequences of an increasingly data-driven and automated educational landscape.
- While on balance, the future of digital in the sector is positive, **how do universities address resulting challenges** such as enhancing the skills/competencies of Academics; addressing potential disparities in access; and dealing with concerns about privacy of personal information and data security?

“Tendency to blame systems when it is the processes behind the system that need addressing first.

There is (however) a significant lack of investment in the hygiene factors required to maximise the use of digital technology (e.g. wifi)”

“Technology enables greater reach of research and impact”

“Technology is an enabler – to critical thinking in Higher Education ”

“Technology is a tool – but needs to be adapted for best use.”

In general, agree with provocation!

Physical Infrastructure



1. The value of physical infrastructure in enhancing the student experience and supporting various learning needs – university buildings are important to create inviting and flexible spaces for students (where students express their interests and collaborate with their peers); there is a need (where possible) to involve students in the design process and consider their views and needs in any modernisation.
2. Requirement to add value to students being on campus which goes beyond the formal learning spaces – the Students Union is a key partner to achieve this outcome.
3. The physical infrastructure and digital infrastructure should be complementary to ensure a seamless experience
4. The future infrastructure will need to focus on community/city spaces that are shared between universities and communities.
5. Recognition of challenges of older buildings with constraints and the need to accommodate different student groups.
6. The need for optionality with parameters - the importance of creating flexible spaces that can be re-purposed. This includes the need to create approaches to managing space and the required data to analyse availability and/or use of physical infrastructure.

Physical Infrastructure – Key Quotes

- As the higher education evolves, the purpose of physical buildings will shift from being primarily spaces for lectures and examinations to becoming hubs of collaboration, innovation, and community - where students, academics, researchers and external partners come together to share knowledge with the view to addressing complex societal and global challenges.
- What should universities be doing to adapt existing physical infrastructure to meet evolving educational needs and stakeholders' expectations?

“Could there be shared facilities between universities for in-person collaboration? Pushing the University out into the community.”

“Key question – how do we make spaces inviting.”

“The future is asset sharing - with companies, industry, other HEIs and FE colleges...”

- *“Universities are (physical) asset heavy – need ‘lean universities to release cash to invest in quality research and impact. Older buildings have constraints (around modernisation). Need to create flexible spaces that you can re-/multi-purpose”*

In general, agree with provocation!