# Future Happens offers four high level responses which frame the influence and potential of digital technologies and the Web in higher education.

## Background

Within many higher education institutions, the patterns and responses of resistance to change make anything different from the norm forced into the position that has to justify 'why?' Debates about the potential of technology, the tensions of techno-determinism and the fears of replacement and redundancy have centred the discourse on service rather than pedagogy or research. The problem is that the genie is already out the bottle. There is no going back to chalkboards and overheads and we won't be shutting off the internet any time soon. Technology and the digital are already integral to what we do but the presence of technology does not automatically equate to a shift in practice.

The following four responses are the result of a collaborative 'hack' process which took place online and face-to-face. Participants in the hack included a wide range of roles within the higher education sector at many different levels. The aim of the hack was to design collectively a response to a the following:

- How do we change the discourse and empower people like us to actively shape teaching and learning at our institutions?

- What are the key messages, tools and strategies available that put the digital in the heart of the conversation and not as a freak show, an uncritical duplication of institutional norms or a fringe activity of the tech savvy?

The output from this process is four key 'responses' which include edited quotes from participants of the face-to-face element of the Future Happens hack. These responses have been written in a form which can be edited to use within your own institution and are offered here under a Creative Commons Attribution licence (Future Happens, 2017).

## Framing

We chose five scenarios which are often the catalyst for change in institutions. The hack took these scenarios and asked people to craft the 100 words they would use if they were in the room with the Vice Chancellor in order to make their case and effectively position what they do as a core part of the institution.

- Why is this going to make our institutional more successful/deliver our objectives?
- How do we demonstrate what we do will position the organisation effectively?
- How do we make sure we (staff and students) stay in the conversation and not be relegated to simply providing services aligned with other people's strategies?

## The process

We started this process by setting a Loomio site that was used to provide a platform for open, constructive and engaged debate. People on the platform could put forwards ideas, discuss the issues underlying the broad problem and get to know each other. We also held a face-to-face hack at the LSE, where 25 people from across the sector (representing sector coordination bodies, students, academics, technologists, IT specialists and researchers) came together to hack their version of the 100 words to say to the VC.

The face-to-face hack had the following rules:

## 1
### We are teaching and learning focused and institutionally committed

## 2
### What we talk about here is institutionally/nationally agnostic

## 3
### You are in the room with the decision makers. What we decide is critical to the future of our institutions. You are the institution

## 4
### Despite the chatter, all the tech 'works' – the digital is here, we are digital institutions. Digital is not the innovation

## 5
### We are here to build not smash

## 6
### There is no moaning (rehearsing systemic reasons why you can't effect change – see Rule 3)

Over four hours the groups delivered 25 ideas which were then put back to the larger Loomio community online, for further discussion and voting. Over the following three weeks there were hundreds of contributions, edits, votes and refinements. This work was then edited by Peter Bryant (Head of Learning Technology and Innovation, London School of Economics and Political Science) and David White (Head of Digital Learning, University of the Arts, London) into the following responses, which are written in a manner suitable for institutional engagement.

The quotes in the responses are from participants in the face-to-face hack.

# Response 1:

## Enable success through an agile approach to technology and teaching

**To take advantage of the digital we need to foster and support the evolution of research and teaching practices. Technical 'solutions-in-box' do not improve teaching or research practices in and of themselves. Providing time and resources for professional digital development backed by senior management is key. Creating and supporting an environment that encourages experimentation and critical thinking is fundamental.**

"We need to plan our budget to harness digital in expanding our reach and change the set-up of our learning spaces to empower use of technology. Our institutional and learning framework should enable more collaborative activities between disciplines"

"Contact time is precious, which makes it risky to innovate, particularly in a climate where students see themselves as customers. That means that we need to invest in time, use this to create space to rethink teaching and develop new approaches, value experimentation and learn from the evidence this generates."

# Response 2:

## Digital practice is central to delivering the institution's mission

**We need a practice-focused rather than technology-focused digital expertise, bridging high-level strategy and the realities of day-to-day work. The requires a 'middle-out' approach based on networks of staff which cross-cut institutional hierarchies and silos. We need to position digital practice as an integrated part of institutional practice, encouraging innovative and collaborative approaches to teaching, learning and research.**

"We need a unit to support the transition and the evolution and persistence of the digital practice -putting the front-liners into forefront of the decision making. This unit requires champions throughout the institution so that this a truly peer-led initiative, and a flow of new blood through secondments. A unit that is actively engaging with practitioners and the strategic level of the university."

"Our strategy and next steps should reflect and scaffold the whole student experience in its diversity and constant change, every student has a unique mix of individual and social experience and engagement with higher education, within and beyond, the taught curriculum and the 'official' spaces of the university."

# Response 3:

## Institutional and pedagogical change is informed by research

**Research informed and inspired scholarship is at the heart of our institutional ethos. We should apply the same methods and evidence-based approaches to informing the digital aspects of teaching and learning as we do in externally funded research and development activities. We will use critical evaluation and user experiences to inform and enhance practice and accumulate institutional expertise.**

"Focus on thinking, focus on exploration and focusing on creating networks is the most important thing that the university can bring. Teachers need more space to innovate their pedagogy and fail in safety. Focus should be on sifting through and evaluating the content and relationships between the elements."

"Theoretical and practice evidence is important for creating rationale and narratives to justify strategies. A balance should be struck incorporating research, development and practice."

# Response 4:

## Use digital data to support core values and secure sustainability

**We need to ensure that fundamental institutional values around teaching, learning and research are at the heart of the use of new forms of data and analysis. Elegant use of local data can be a means of responding to, but not being beholden to, national instruments such as the NSS and the TEF. There is the potential to shift the emphasis from data-as-policing to data underpinning institutional values, change and practices.**

"Universities should take a proactive approach and offer a collective response about the values and principles of higher education. Review the way in which the data is used to measure excellence in teaching practices, and involve individual institutions and disciplines to contribute to the design of measuring tools. Shift the focus from measuring contact time to more diverse evaluations of student engagement and student experience."

"We want to influence the implementation of the Teaching Excellence Framework, so first of all it measures teaching excellence, and secondly can be used as a tool to support, nurture and spread excellent teaching practice."