Call for evidence

Office for Students | OfS

Digital teaching and learning in English higher education during the coronavirus pandemic: Call for evidence

Digital teaching and learning review

This call for evidence runs from **3 September 2020** to **14 October 2020**.

Contents

About this call for evidence

1. In June 2020, the Secretary of State for Education commissioned Sir Michael Barber, the Chair of the Office for Students (OfS) to conduct a review of digital teaching and learning in English higher education since the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The review will consider:

   a. The use of digital technology to deliver remote teaching and learning since the start of the pandemic and understand what has and has not worked.

   b. How high-quality digital teaching and learning can be continued and delivered at scale in the future.

   c. The opportunities that digital teaching and learning present for English higher education in the medium to longer-term.

   d. The relationship between 'digital poverty' and students' digital teaching and learning experience.

2. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic most universities and colleges have adopted some form of remote teaching and learning. This call for evidence seeks to understand the challenges the sector has faced in making this change and the lessons it has learned. We would like to hear about experiences from across the full breadth of the sector.

3. We are keen to gather case studies, views, and perspectives to hear about what worked well, and what worked less well, to learn lessons about the potential, and the limitations, of this mode of delivery at scale.

4. The review will conclude with a report in spring 2021, providing recommendations for government, higher education provider leaders, teachers and students.

5. The information we receive from the call for evidence is intended to be used to inform the recommendations of the digital teaching and learning review and to identify case studies; the call for evidence is intended to collect ideas and responses.

Who should respond?

6. We welcome responses from anyone involved in the delivery, design and oversight of digital teaching and learning in English higher education.

7. We are particularly (but not only) interested in hearing from **higher education teaching staff**, **professional services staff** and **leaders in higher education** who have been engaged in the recent shift to remote delivery. We welcome views from all types and sizes of provider, and across all subjects. We would also like to hear from **students** and **students' unions**.

8. We welcome the insights of **employers, technology companies** and **start-ups, third sector organisations, professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)** and **policy bodies** with experience of higher education digital teaching and learning.

9. Not all questions are mandatory, and we invite participants to answer the questions they feel are appropriate in their context. Participants can choose to answer anonymously or provide their contact information if they are happy for us to contact them about their response.[1]

How to respond

10. Please submit your response by **14 October 2020** by:

    a. Completing the online form at https://survey.officeforstudents.org.uk/s/digital-teaching-learning-review/ ; or

    b. Emailing your response to: digitalteachingandlearningreview@officeforstudents.org.uk.

11. If you have any enquiries about the review, require this document in an alternative format, or need assistance with the online form, please contact digitalteachingandlearningreview@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Background

12. On 23 March 2020, the UK government imposed a national lockdown as part of a series of measures to slow the spread of COVID-19.

13. Universities and colleges stopped delivering teaching and learning in-person and moved to remote delivery, using digital platforms. This shift took place in the middle of the final term when final examinations were due to take place.

14. Some work-based learning, placements and study-abroad provision were delivered online, but some were significantly disrupted, and in some cases, suspended.

15. Social distancing advice remains in place and universities and colleges are in the process of designing teaching and learning programmes for the academic year 2020-21 which combine in-person and remote delivery. Current government guidance prevents large groups from multiple households mixing in close contact, which restricts the scope for teaching and learning in-person.

Objectives of the review

16. On 23 June 2020, the Secretary of State for Education commissioned the Chair of the OfS, Sir Michael Barber, to conduct a review of digital teaching and learning in the higher education sector in the context of the rapid shift to scaling up online delivery during the pandemic.[2] He asked the review to consider how providers could continue to enhance the quality of online delivery for the next academic year, and to examine longer-term opportunities to develop and innovate in digital and online provision.

17. This call for evidence is a key element of the review's research programme. The responses we receive will indicate how different higher education providers, subjects and students are

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[1] For more information about privacy, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/ofs-privacy/other-privacy-notices/
[2] Available at: officeforstudents.org.uk/media/a38d1e69-e1b3-4bcc-9904-e200dcf5d81c/sos-to-mb-letter.pdf

experiencing the change in digital teaching and learning delivery. This evidence will inform our recommendations to government, higher education providers, teachers and students.

18. We want to gain an understanding of the sector's experience to build a picture of what the COVID-19 period has been like for students in England. To do this, we need contributions from various perspectives and insights from across the sector. This will help us to make robust and informed recommendations, implement lessons learned and inform how high-quality digital teaching and learning is delivered at scale in the medium to longer-term.

19. We will use the responses to identify potential case studies for the review report. At the end of the questions in this call for evidence, respondents will be asked if they would like their response to be considered for a further discussion and used as a potential case study in the report.

Call for evidence

20. The call for evidence asks for views on digital learning and teaching since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. We would like to hear more about:

- the successes and advantages of remote delivery
- the challenges and limitations of digital delivery
- digital poverty
- looking ahead.

21. We want to gather responses that reflect the successes and challenges of the swift move to digitally enhanced remote delivery. To achieve this, we need to:

a. Understand what teaching and learning has looked like in this period, hear examples of good practice as well as approaches that did not work.

b. Identify how students and staff engage with digitally enhanced remote teaching and learning and what difference digital poverty makes.

c. Understand the opportunities that the change in delivery presents for digital teaching and learning moving forwards.

22. We are not particularly seeking views on how extracurricular learning opportunities have been affected or the longer-term effects of the pandemic on the graduate labour market.

Definition of terms

23. For the purposes of this call for evidence we have taken some terms to have a particular meaning:

a. **Digital poverty:** We propose that a student is in digital poverty if they are without access to one of the core items of digital infrastructure, which are:

- appropriate hardware
- appropriate software
- reliable access to the internet

- technical support and repair when required
- a trained teacher or instructor
- an appropriate study space.

b. **Remote delivery:** Teaching and learning that takes place away from a central learning hub, where the teacher and learner are separate.

c. **Digitally enhanced remote delivery:** Teaching and learning designed for in-person delivery but is delivered remotely using digital technology. For example, a lecture designed for in-person delivery but because of campus closure is delivered online using video conference software.

d. **Digital learning and teaching:** Teaching and learning designed to be delivered using digital technology.

Interviews and surveys

24. Alongside this call for evidence we are conducting a series of interviews with digital teaching and learning experts and sector bodies. These interviews will help us build a comprehensive picture of the sector's experiences of digital delivery and construct a vision for the future.

25. We will also run two surveys:

a. **Student survey:** In October and November 2020 we will conduct a closed survey to gather individual student perspectives of the move to remote delivery. The survey will gather a fuller impression of students' experiences of digital teaching and learning during the pandemic and explore the barriers they face. The survey will ask about positive and negative experiences.

b. **Provider survey:** In October and November 2020 we will conduct a closed survey with lecturers who delivered remote teaching and learning during the pandemic. This survey will focus specifically on teachers in higher education settings. It will explore how they adapted, the impact going forward, and lessons learned.

26. Further information about these surveys will be available on the OfS website in the coming weeks.[3]

List of questions

Section 1: About you

1. **Which category best describes you?**
   - student
   - student representative or from a student organisation
   - teaching staff, professional services staff or higher education provider leader
   - higher education sector body

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[3] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/digitallearning/

- employer, PSRB, technology company or start-up
- other, please specify

2. **How many students does you provider have?**

- 0 – 499
- 500 – 999
- 1,000 – 4,999
- 5,000 – 9,999
- 10,000 – 19,999
- 20,000 – 39,999
- 40,000 +

3. **What is your expertise in the following areas?**

- subject
- level
- mode

4. **What type of provider(s) are your part of, or do you represent?**

- multi-faculty provider
- small and specialist provider
- micro provider
- further education college
- other, please specify

Section 2: Context

In this section we want to understand how you, (or your affiliated organisations) have been affected by the pandemic and how you have responded.

5. **How did the move to remote teaching and learning affect you (or your university or college, subject, students, or business)?**

Please explain the operational approaches used to meet the new demands, in the first few months of the lockdown period.

Section 3: Challenges of remote delivery

In this section we are interested to know about the challenges you have encountered, those that you have overcome and those that you are still addressing.

We would also like to know how and why the change has affected the ability of students and staff to engage with remote teaching and learning.

6. **What were the immediate challenges (in the first few months of the lockdown period) of the move to remote teaching and learning?**

Please give examples and explain the challenges you have, and have not yet, been able to overcome.

7. **Have any planned aspects of teaching and learning not been delivered or been significantly changed, delayed, postponed or of compromised quality because of remote delivery?**

Please give examples and explain why.

8. **Has the move to remote delivery presented new barriers for student and staff engagement with teaching and learning?**

Please explain any specific impacts caused by the change in delivery.

Section 4: Successes in digital delivery

In this section we want to identify the advantages of delivering teaching and learning digitally, and what has contributed to success.

9. **How has digital technology supported the move to remote delivery?**

Please give examples of the digital technologies used and explain how they supported your success.

Please also provide information about any external networks or sources of support that contribute to your success.

10. **What are the advantages of delivering teaching and learning digitally?**

Please give examples of how teaching and learning has been improved or enhanced by digital delivery.

11. **How do you envisage teaching and learning delivery will change in the next three years?**

Please give examples.

12. **How will the lessons from this experience shape your approach to digital teaching and learning and inform your organisational culture in the medium to longer-term?**

Please give examples.

Section 5: Digital poverty

In this section we would like to gain an understanding of what the term 'digital poverty' means to you and how it has affected student and staff engagement with remote delivery of teaching and learning.

13. **To what extent does digital poverty among students and staff have an impact on the delivery of high-quality digital teaching and learning?**

Please explain any approaches used to address digital poverty among students and staff since the start of the pandemic.

We propose that:

A student is in digital poverty if they are without access to one of the core items of digital infrastructure, which are:

- appropriate hardware
- appropriate software
- reliable access to the internet
- technical support and repair when required
- a trained teacher or instructor
- an appropriate study space.

14. **Do you agree that these items of digital infrastructure underpin digital poverty?**

Please also explain if and how you currently, or could in the future, use mechanisms to measure students' access to these items.

Section 6: Looking ahead

In this section we want to understand how the lessons learned from the pandemic will inform your planning and delivery of higher education teaching and learning in the future.

15. **What new digital and blended teaching and learning approaches have been gained from the shift to remote delivery that will be retained?**

16. **What are the challenges still to be overcome to enable high-quality digital teaching and learning in the future?**

17. **What are the cost vs quality implications of digital teaching and learning delivery in the medium to longer-term?**

18. **What are the strategic opportunities arising from the shift in delivery mode for the medium to longer-term?**

19. **What is the main way government, higher education provider leaders, teachers, or students could improve digital teaching and learning across the higher education sector?**

Section 7: Student perspective

We want to understand what the change to remote delivery felt like for students and how it can be improved in the future.

20. **What has been your experience of the shift to remote teaching and learning since the start of the coronavirus pandemic?**

Please describe your experience and give examples of the changes from in-person teaching and learning.

21. **How could your experience have been improved?**

Please describe what you found difficult about remote teaching and learning and what could be changed in the future.

Section 8: Additional evidence

22. **Is there anything else you would like to add, to be considered as part of the digital teaching and learning review?**

How we will treat your response

The responses to this call for evidence will inform our recommendations and identify case studies which we will feature in our final report. We may wish to contact you to find out more information about your response. If you are happy to be contacted, please either:

- tick the relevant boxes at the start of the call for evidence survey – survey.officeforstudents.org.uk/s/digital-teaching-learning-review/

- provide your consent in writing when you return your response to digitalteachingandlearningreview@officeforstudents.org.uk together with your name, email address and organisation.

We will contact anyone whose response we would like to consider for a case study. Responses can be withdrawn at any point.

The OfS is committed to protecting your personal information. Our privacy notice (see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/ofs-privacy/other-privacy-notices/) explains how the information you provide will be stored and used.

We will summarise the responses to this call for evidence in our final report. This may include a list of the providers and organisations that respond, but not personal data such as individuals' names, addresses or other contact details.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please tell us but be aware that we cannot guarantee confidentiality in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not be regarded by us as a confidentiality request.

The information we receive from the call for evidence responses is intended to be used to inform the recommendations of the digital teaching and learning review and to identify case studies; the call for evidence is intended to collect ideas and responses.

The OfS will process any personal data received in accordance with all applicable data protection laws (see our privacy policy[4]).

We may need to disclose or publish information that you provide in the performance of our functions or disclose it to other organisations for the purposes of their functions. Information (including personal data) may also need to be disclosed in accordance with UK legislation (such as the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 2018 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

Notification of any matters that may be of regulatory interest to us should not be submitted through this call for evidence. Further information about notifications is available on our website: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/contact/complaints-and-notifications/

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[4] Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/ofs-privacy.