



Expert report: A strategic approach to the digitalisation of higher education teaching

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The digitalisation of universities offers great opportunities. However, inadequate framework conditions are holding back the necessary transition. This is the conclusion reached by the Higher Education Forum on Digitalisation in its final report which was presented in Berlin today.

Berlin, 01.12.2016. Universities should use digitalisation strategically because it brings lasting change not only to higher education teaching but also to the way courses of study and teaching are organised. Moreover, the process of digital transition affects all stakeholders and must now be actively shaped both in universities and by government, say the experts of the Higher Education Forum on Digitalisation.

Digital teaching and learning strengthen skills development

Employing digital media enables flexible study and supports interactive teaching and learning methods, along with collaboration across teams and national lines. This way, skills relevant to professional practice such as the ability to solve complex problems and to work autonomously in heterogeneous teams are encouraged.

“Digital teaching and learning changes the demands on institutions, teaching staff and students,” explains Volker Meyer-Guckel, Deputy Secretary-General of the Stifterverband. “Executives in the academic and research sector, in government and industry must be actively involved in this process in order to prepare students adequately for the challenges of the job market. We need highly qualified specialists for our highly industrialised economy. That is the crucial prerequisite for our continued international competitiveness.”

Digitisation promotes solutions to existing challenges

Digital forms of learning make personalised learning possible, even in periods of high demand for study places. They can increasingly offer today's very diverse groups of students tailor-made services and thus increase their study success. The use of digital media also improves universities' opportunities to position themselves internationally. This is an area where the experts see great potential. With the new challenges, structures for the organisation of teaching will

also change. The production and form of digital teaching will be organised collaboratively by teaching staff, media educators and programmers. Universities are not yet prepared for these new teaching support roles.

Jörg Dräger, Managing Director of the CHE Centre for Higher Education, explains: “Digitalisation leads to a pedagogical revolution at universities as well as a technical one. The importance of teaching increases, the role of teaching staff changes from a communicator of knowledge to a learning guide, personalised learning becomes possible. Digitalisation affects the university as a whole. For that reason universities need strategies for the digital age, rather than a digital strategy.”

New framework conditions will advance digitalisation

In order to exploit the potential of the digital shift, government and the academic and research sector must create the necessary framework conditions. In concrete terms, this requires, first and foremost, the adaptation of data protection and copyright laws. The use of digital media involves the collection of extensive data, the protection of which must be guaranteed. New approaches, such as learning analytics for a rapid, targeted enhancement of teaching quality can only be successfully integrated into teaching if transparency is created about the data collected and students are given the option of objecting to the data collection. Furthermore, guidelines must be developed for adequately crediting the work done by teaching staff to create and supervise digital teaching in line with their teaching hours.

“To ensure that German universities perform optimally in a digital age we need forward-looking framework conditions, both legal and financial,” summarises Horst Hippler, President of the German Rectors' Conference. “Both are still completely inadequate. This currently impedes the process of digitalisation at universities to a large extent. I very much hope that the report will promote political recognition of the situation.”

The full final report of the Higher Education Forum on Digitalisation (available only in German) can be downloaded at the following address: www.hochschulforumdigitalisierung.de/abschlussbericht (in German only).

The Higher Education Forum on Digitalisation is a joint initiative by the Stifterverband with the CHE Centre for Higher Education and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK). The project was funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. As an independent national platform, it investigated key issues relating to the digitalisation of higher education and its effects on the entire higher education landscape in Germany with over 70 experts for just under three years, linking important stakeholders from higher education, business and government.

www.hochschulforumdigitalisierung.de/en

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