ARC8 Expert Group
Inclusive Learning and Teaching in a Digital World:
A view from the UK

Wayne Holmes, UCL
Friday, 5 March 2021
Higher Education and Digital Learning in the UK: The status quo

- **The Open University** (established 1969)
  - Currently, ~170,000 students (one of the largest in Europe).
  - Designed for students unable to attend campus universities.
    (e.g. people who did not ‘succeed’ in school, people who are in work,
    people who have disabilities, people who are carers).
  - ‘Open’ means ‘open to anyone whatever their qualifications.’
  - The first online courses were launched in 1998 (pg) and 1999 (ug).
  - **OpenLearn** (launched 2006) has had 80 million visits.
  - **FutureLearn** (launched 2013) hosts courses from 100+ universities worldwide,
    which have been taken by ‘millions’ of students.
Higher Education and Digital Learning in the UK: The status quo

- Other UK universities and online learning
  - Over the past decade, almost all other UK universities (~100) have launched online courses.
  - Currently, there are (according to UCAS):
    - >300 online undergraduate courses (from 42 institutions), and
    - >1,250 online postgraduate (from 130 institutions).
  - JISC (launched 1993)
    - The UK’s higher, further education and skills sectors’ not-for-profit organisation for digital services and solutions.
Higher Education and Digital Learning in the UK: The status quo: during COVID

- **Office for Students**
  - Before the pandemic 58% of students and 47% of teaching staff had no experience of digital teaching and learning.
  - By December 2020, 92% of students were learning either fully or mostly online.

- **Online learning mostly involved:**
  - PDFs;
  - Videos;
  - live and recorded online lectures; and
  - lecture slides.
Higher Education and Digital Learning in the UK: The status quo: during COVID

- Also involved:
  - online placements;
  - digitally simulated scenarios;
  - science experiments conducted with remote-controlled lab equipment;
  - online master classes and performances for music students;
  - digital exhibitions connecting portfolio students with industry experts and employers;
  - virtual writing cafés;
  - AI-driven adaptive learning technologies;
  - and many others...
Higher Education and Digital Learning in the UK: The risks

- **Costs**
  - £27,750 for an undergraduate degree;
  - ~£18,000 for an OU degree.

- **Access to technology**
  - 12% aged 11-18 years have no Internet access at home (www.ons.gov.uk).

- **Digital literacy**
  - The digital literacy of staff, not the students.

- **Poor pedagogy**
  - Instructionalism.
  - Prioritising content over learning.

Digital literacy by establishment type, UK figures:

![Digital literacy chart](chart.png)

Research report: UK. The road to digital learning. Intel and Fujitsu
Higher Education and Digital Learning in the UK: The opportunities

- **Artificial Intelligence** for:
  - learner assistance
  - curriculum design
  - augmenting teaching
  - supporting health and well-being
  - facilitating teacher-based assessment

- **Open Educational Resources (OER)**
  - Around the world, there are millions of OER. But therein lies their problem: how does a learner find the right OER to help their learning?
  - Projects like X5GON aim to help.