Section 1: About you

1. Which category best describes you?

- higher education sector body

ucisa is the member-led professional body for digital practitioners within education.

2. How many students does your provider have?

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

Not applicable

3. What is your expertise in the following areas? • subject • level • mode

ucisa covers the entire range of professional IT staff from Chief Information Officers and IT Directors to those working in corporate information, networking, infrastructure, and front line, student-facing support desk staff as well as technology enhanced learning specialists.

ucisa member institutions cover all subjects, levels, and modes.

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

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.

IT staff from ucisa member institutions acted swiftly to move students and staff exclusively online as the country went into lockdown.

In the weeks preceding this, IT staff in universities across the country worked with academic and professional services staff to ensure that that move to remote teaching and learning was as seamless as possible for students. IT and learning technologists partnered to produce guidance that covered both basic technology challenges as well as policy and pedagogical issues (e.g. how remote supervision might be conducted or whether lecturers should attempt to deliver live lectures or move to pre-recorded).

Institutions issued reminders about how to use their institution's Virtual Private Network (VPN) and asked teaching staff to think about any software that currently was only being accessed on campus, so that licenses could be extended for remote use, or alternatives found.

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?

One immediate challenge was moving hundreds of staff off campus in a very short space of time to either directly support students or support services that students rely on from remote locations. To enable this, ucisa created guidance for IT staff on issuing equipment for home working, which included a template permission letter for IT staff who needed to return intermittently to campus to perform their role.

Other universities issued up to 500 laptops to students, as part of their hardship schemes.

Many institutions reported access to broadband as significant challenge for students (more on this below in the responses contained in Section 5, Digital Poverty). Some institutions also reported that this was an issue for staff, either because of patchy broadband provision in their locality but also sometimes due to a lack of awareness of the limitations of broadband.

Naturally, information security and ensuring compliance with was also at forefront of many institutions' minds. Guidance from bodies such as the Nation Cyber Security Council was highlighted to members, and advice on GDPR in the context of working from home was shared.

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

- "We faced challenges with capacity from one of our suppliers, as their platform was not capable of supporting the large numbers of concurrent users that were being seen. It was eventually fixed but it took a number of weeks and we had done all of the groundwork to implement an alternative platform in case the original one was not up to the job." ucisa member institution

- "Significant resource investment in hardware/software and substantial time in developing new/enhanced skills, adapting materials/approaches and delivering flexible/personalised learning support." ucisa member institution

- "Rapid conversion to remote teaching and learning required significant time, skill and negotiation to ensure continued compliance with regulatory and Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements with ongoing negotiations with professional bodies providing accreditation for diverse programme portfolios." ucisa member institution

- "Trying to offer a single, simplified, cost effective set of remote working options. Having selected Microsoft Teams as the standard collaborative working platform and managing the resistance of those arguing for Zoom whilst waiting for some of the technical gaps to be filled by Microsoft (e.g break-out rooms)." ucisa member institution

Some ucisa member institutions experienced difficulty in obtaining rapid funding for purchase of physical equipment, whilst others had trouble sourcing AV equipment such as headsets due to high demand.

Digital capabilities of staff in HE institutions and their level digital learning and teaching experience were varied. Across our members situated in the Technology Enhanced Learning teams (or equivalent) many were supporting their whole academic community to transfer their face to face learning and teaching to remote delivery. Often this required upskilling staff on a range of webinar software (i.e. Microsoft Teams, Blackboard Collaborate, or Zoom) and familiarising staff with digital learning and teaching techniques and approaches that could be applied within their subject/course.

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.

We do not have any evidence of any planned aspects of teaching and learning being delayed or compromised quality because of remote delivery. Rather, our members tell us that the pandemic has led to teaching and learning projects being prioritized. More broadly, many institutions have seen this as an opportunity to push forward the digital transformation agenda, delivering, as one Vice-Chancellor has put it, "four years of IT strategy in approximately six weeks."

- "Practice-based programme elements which are difficult to replicate/replace via online provision – e.g. lab practical's, objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs) and placements – have been adapted or rescheduled to enable successful completion."
  ucisa member institution

- "Re-evaluating our suite of remote access technologies which were not designed to scale out to student use, and potentially adopting Windows Virtual Desktops". ucisa member institution

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.

- "Students, particularly from widening participations background, have been materially disadvantaged from 'digital poverty' and the digital skills gap. Likewise, the pivot to blended learning, for staff with high workloads or low digital skills have been challenged to upskill and adapt under significant pressure with an inevitable reduction in capacity for other work (such as research and advanced professional practice)." ucisa member institution

- "We needed to supply a number of students with devices and 4G dongles in order for them to complete their learning and also for remote exams. We had over 35,000 exam papers submitted remotely." ucisa member institution

The issue of digital poverty presented barriers in some cases where staff were seeking to engage students (especially those located in rural areas) with online activities and broadband/bandwidth issues restricted students ability to participate in online synchronous lectures or activities.

More broadly we consider that parity of esteem for online vs. face to face is a significant issue for students and therefore institutions. Institutions and sector-wide bodies need to address the perception that online delivery is of a lower quality, or less pedagogically rigorous, than face to face delivery in our universities.

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.

- "Uptake of webinar technologies has greatly increased. We had over 20,000 Collaborate sessions between January and July. We also have electronic marking of assessment established (Blackboard integrated with TurnitIn Feedback Studio) and while the majority of courses have assessments rather than exams we used the system for online submission, marking and feedback of 78 online exams in May." ucisa member institution

- "The University's previous IT Strategy and current Digital Strategy had successfully delivered many of the foundational elements required to enable the institution to pivot to remote teaching and learning. Through a combination of the Virtual Learning Environment, Lecture Capture and the completion of Microsoft Teams and Outlook Online mail for staff (completed 18 months ahead of schedule). In addition, expanding our use of VMware Horizon View for student access to laboratory computers, expanded access to online library materials thanks to the lifting of restrictions by publisher and the expansion HyFlex classroom resources." ucisa member institution

Many ucisa member institutions have reported that Covid-19 has brought about a paradigm shift in their teaching and learning offering. Here's just one example:

- "In early summer 2020, the University introduced a new online flexible learning platform for delivering its courses in the most unpredictable context in living memory. The platform allows smooth transition between face-to-face learning (which remains our students' preferred mode of learning) and our online learning programmes of learning. Our online model is shaped by world leading research into online pedagogy (Laurillard, 2009)[1], and an approach that places the student at the heart of the learning experience.

We have designed a pedagogically cogent and structured online set of learning activities, combined with meaningful access to peripheral learning support. From a landing page in or Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard Ultra), students can access, by default, a bespoke learning-to-learn online module which explains the platform's pedagogy as well as providing direct online access to student support and welfare services, online library resources, the Students' Union, careers advice, and a host of services underpinning the student learning experience. From the same page, students can access selected LinkedIn Learning and Macmillan online resources.
Communities functions are used to engage students in group events.

The pedagogy model used is simple. It is based on three 'moments' of learning that enable the move from discovery to reflection. We use a three-stage model through the phases of 'investigate', 'apply', and 'consolidate', pacing students through a series of learning events and activities that enable them to iterate logically through the learning journey.

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[1] Reference link supplied by ucisa https://www.learntechlib.org/p/105891/

The online platform is acting as a complement to face-to-face activities in the 'normal' and preferred type of delivery, face-to-face. It becomes the main place of retreat for anyone who at any time cannot attend face-to-face. Equivalent online content enables students to continue to progress through their course. Where possible we maintain a contact to 'live' events – face-to-face seminars are recorded and posted to Blackboard; online webinars are accessible to face-to-face and online students if a lecturer is unable to be onsite for delivery.

We have adopted this 'learning together' approach to ensure we provide a supportive, collaborative, and flexible learning experience, that is as anchored as can be in the campus experience, when conditions become adverse. Our approach spearheads a pedagogic transition from traditional higher education learning settings to more flexible and context adaptable environments, where the campus remain at the heart of the student experience." ucisa member institution

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.

The situation has presented both individual staff and institutions with the opportunity to understand more deeply both the benefits and considerations of online and blended learning and teaching. The opportunities and immediate needs of the pandemic have allowed staff to try innovative and different approaches to digital learning and teaching and it is anticipated that some of those digital learning and teaching approaches will remain with the curriculum.

- "Expands access to higher education learning to those who may previously have been unable to commute, have family and work commitments or live in different time zones." ucisa member institution

- "Provides the opportunity to rethink our approaches to assessment, away from the traditional timed examination assessments." ucisa member institution

- "Relooking at approaches for measuring engagement which traditionally focused on attendance but will now focus more heavily on access to online lectures, the VLE and engagement in Teams activities." ucisa member institution

- "Colleagues have expressed that they have found the flexibility of digital learning and teaching to be of benefit to both them and their students. Colleagues have often reported that they have observed engagement from students who have often been reluctant to contribute to in-person on-campus classes." ucisa member institution

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

Across the sector, we envisage ongoing discussions with students about the value of the campus experience within the curriculum and the broader student experience. It could be envisaged that those discussions would elicit a different perspective regarding where the balance between on-campus and online digital learning and teaching should lie. Another area where teaching and learning could change is in the types of courses on offer. More opportunities to offer online, distance learning either as short CPD type courses or longer post-graduate courses could start to emerge as more consideration is given to international students and markets and how to mitigate other disruptions to international travel – due to climate and sustainability mitigations, for example.

- "A significant reconsideration of the role of place and space in learning with a focus on distinctive benefits of on-campus delivery and stronger integration between on- campus and online student experiences." ucisa member institution

- "There will need to be a more inclusive and authenticated learning experience - accessible digital teaching, learning and assessment approaches and tools which more closely mirror the workplace." ucisa member institution

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.

There are lively discussions across the sector regarding investment in digital estate – alongside considerations about the physical estate- to maintain and develop digital learning and teaching capabilities.

During the pandemic universities have excellently demonstrated rapid deployment of digital strategies in short time frames – this will inform future approaches.

- "Our graduate attributes also recognise the impact of digital technologies beyond their time at the University and we have incorporated a graduate attribute around digital citizenship to support our graduates to have high degrees of digital capability to actively and responsibly, create, communicate and collaborate online. With many employers considering a more permanent shift to flexible and home working, equipping our students with these graduate attributes will become more vital for their future employability." ucisa member institution example:

- " Ongoing monitoring and review of the emergency changes made to garner lessons learned to enhance future practice." ucisa member institution

- "Re-evaluation of staff workloads to create capacity for continuous improvement and further upskilling." ucisa member institution

- "Balancing the need to remain agile and innovative with the requirements of regulatory bodies and the needs of our students to have a clear, consistent, and high-quality teaching and learning opportunities." ucisa member institution

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.

Research from the OfS report "Digital poverty risks leaving students behind" (September) reflects the key findings of ucisa's survey results (March, Covid-19 ucisa survey with Universities UK and April, survey to assist Department for Education on negotiations with Internet Service Providers). Three dominant concerns emerged when we asked about the impact Covid-19 was having on students in relation to technology:

- "digital poverty" for some students including no or limited access to equipment and broadband at home,
- rural broadband issues and

- students accessing resources through their mobiles and therefore getting through excessive amounts of data.

At the start of the pandemic many universities issued 4G dongles via their hardship funds as broadband access for Virtual Learning Environments and other resources was difficult for some students. At this time, a ucisa survey respondent shared with us that one undergraduate student wrote to their university when unable to afford or access lectures or reading material, saying:

- " Now that the government have declared a lockdown, I find myself without internet access. I cannot access lectures, attend online seminars, or even do any reading. I am currently using data on my phone, but I do not have much and cannot afford to add any more. I have already applied for hardship this year so cannot do so again. I face physical and mental health issues as well as struggling for money and I fear that now I will have to drop out of uni because I cannot get my assignments done without internet access."

In response to feedback from members, ucisa and other sector bodies called on the government to make education websites free for UK students. The request to zero rate these sites would remove remaining barriers for students who are relying on broadband or on mobile data, by allowing them to access the vital resources they need without charge. Despite an increased return to campus this term, this remains a live issue for students who are living out in private accommodation or who are studying remotely.

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.

ucisa agrees that these items of digital infrastructure underpin digital poverty.

We would highlight that affordability is a significant element to reliable access to the internet (broadband or mobile data).

Moreover, we would suggest that digital capability – that is to say, a student's ability to make the best use of digital tools and processes– is also considered here. Access to tools is important; understanding how to use them is vital. IT staff and learning technologists, and staff who work at the intersection of these disciplines, play a significant role in supporting students here.

It should also be noted that these core items could also be applied to the range of casual hourly paid teaching staff employed across the sector who may equally be without some of the above list and should not be overlooked in considerations regarding digital poverty within the sector.

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?

- "Flexible and personalised learning opportunities for students using inclusive and authentic teaching and learning approaches".
- ucisa member institution

- "An integration of on-campus and remote teaching and learning providing a holistic academic experience for students." ucisa member institution

- "There has been a rapid expansion in the understanding of online pedagogies and designing for blended and digital learning teaching. These include online approaches to student engagement and communication through developing use of interactive approaches during live lectures, e.g. polling systems, the use of whiteboard and collaborative tools such shared Office 365 documents to foster that sense of presence and belonging within a student cohort. Staff have been exploring more of the tools available to them through the VLE and Blackboard Collaborate as well as Office 365. Complementary to this has been the appreciation of online models such as Gilly Salmon's Five Stage Model[2] and designing learning through application of the Diana Laurillard's Conversational Framework[3] and learning types through application of UCL's ABC learning design methodology[4]." ucisa member institution

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

Staff have had to rapidly expand their digital capabilities, and relevant learning technologies teams and support staff have been stretched to accommodate the demand. Significant investment will be required over the next few years to ensure that the rapid shift to remote learning and teaching is embedded within the curriculum. While academic staff skills and capabilities have come a long way since March 2020, sustaining that transition and ensuring high-quality digital learning and teaching, at scale, will require investment in expertise and support staff to facilitate long-term change in learning and teaching.

- "Additional training and support for delivering a high-quality provision, combined with the necessary adjustment to staff workloads to permit further upskilling". ucisa member institution

- "Ensuring a consistency of approach across a large institution". ucisa member institution

- "Access to materials from China." ucisa member institution

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[2] Reference link supplied by ucisa https://www.gillysalmon.com/five-stage-model.html

[3] Reference link supplied by ucisa http://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Laurillard_conversational_framework

[4] Reference link supplied by ucisa https://abc-ld.org/6-learning-types/

ucisa will continue to work with Jisc, the British Council and UUK International to address challenges associated with supporting online access to UK HE international students who remain abroad. We have supported members by running Improving online access in China (June) and "Improving Online Access Overseas: new models for supporting international students" (October)

Increased software licence costs to permit off-campus use remain a sector-wide concern.

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

- "High quality digital teaching and learning requires the same if not greater investment of staff time as on-campus delivery". ucisa member institution

Quality must be maintained for regulatory as well as reputational reasons. Dual delivery of teaching and learning (face to face and online) can be time consuming and costly.

Digital infrastructure expenditure will need to be maintained in the medium term before return on investment is seen in the longer term in terms of impact and scale of use digital learning and teaching alongside new, innovative approaches.

There is likely to be a need for continued resource either through recruitment of specialist digital learning and teaching expertise and/or providing opportunities for academic staff to continue to upskill their digital capabilities to ensure institutions are able to sustain the delivery of quality digital learning and teaching that has occurred over the last six months.

With all of this, there is also a need to consider the current mental wellbeing cost to staff of the rapid transition to digital learning and teaching which needs to be recognised across the sector. There is a risk to retaining both the digital learning and teaching skills and knowledge if workload or pressure to maintain/improve quality of digital learning and teaching is not supported well.

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

Many member institutions report a greater appetite to diversify into online courses for CPD/short courses of study, and for international students residing overseas (e.g. partnership agreements).

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?

We suggest that digital poverty remains a major barrier to teaching and learning for students (see responses in Section 5, Digital Poverty).

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.

ucisa does not directly represent students.

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.

ucisa does not directly represent students.

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?

ucisa notes that this consultation has been circulated at a busy time of the academic year and therefore the number of responses may be reduced, or less detailed. We would therefore like to offer to coordinate more in-depth discussions later in the term with representatives from our member institutions if that would be useful to y you. This could include those ucisa members who have provided the examples included in this consultation.