Summary of Webinar "Supporting Quality Digital Higher Education in Hungary: Findings to Date and What's Next?"

18 November 2021

The Hungarian Ministry for Innovation and Technology (MIT), the European Commission (EC) and the OECD organised a public stakeholder event to conclude the project "Supporting the Digital Transformation of Higher Education in Hungary", which took place between July 2020 and October 2021 and introduce the new project "Ensuring quality digital higher education in Hungary" that began in November 2021 and will conclude in March 2023. Both projects received expertise and funding from the Technical Support Instrument managed by the EC Directorate General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM).

The event provided an overview of the findings and recommendations of the digital transformation project, an outline of the objectives and methods of the quality assurance for digital higher education project, and presented the perspectives and current efforts of higher education stakeholders to support the digitalisation of Hungarian higher education.

The webinar began with welcoming remarks by Dr. Balázs Hankó, Deputy State Secretary for Higher Education at the MIT, who highlighted the strategic importance of digital transformation to improve the resilience and sustainability of the national higher education system. Ágota Kovács, Country Coordinator and Policy Officer at DG REFORM , emphasised the EC's commitment to supporting national reform efforts through technical assistance projects that are driven by country demand, evidence-informed, and involve extensive stakeholder engagement. She emphasised the commitment of DG REFORM to continue accompanying Hungary on its road towards a systemic change in digitalising higher education, building on the joint achievements so far and taking the reform effort further. Paulo Santiago, Head of the Policy Advice and Implementation Division in the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills highlighted the importance of developing policies to promote the effective use of digital technologies to make higher education systems more efficient, accessible and flexible. He recognised the efforts made by the Hungarian government in that area, thanked stakeholders for their involvement in the concluding project and called for their renewed collaboration in the upcoming project.

The webinar continued with two presentation sessions, each followed by a discussion moderated by the OECD based on questions posed by the audience. In the first session, focused on international projects on digital higher education in Hungary, the OECD presented the findings and recommendations of the report "Supporting the digital transformation of higher education in Hungary" and the objectives and methods of the new project "Ensuring quality digital higher education in Hungary". In the second session, focusing on national initiatives on digital higher education in Hungary, experts from Digital Success Non-profit Ltd and the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates shared their views on the digital transformation of the Hungarian higher education system, and an expert from the Hungarian Accreditation Committee presented his perspective on quality digital higher education assurance.

The sections that follow summarise the key themes that emerged from the presentations and moderated discussions.

Session 1: International projects on digital higher education in Hungary

Supporting the digital transformation of higher education in Hungary: findings and recommendations.

Patricia Mangeol, Higher Education Policy Analyst in the Policy Advice and Implementation Division at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills presented the findings and recommendations of the report "Supporting the digital transformation of higher education in Hungary", published online on 2 November 2021 on the OECD iLibrary.

The OECD used three concepts to analyse the digitalisation of the higher education system: (i) digital readiness – the accessibility of suitable digital technologies and the public policies supporting the digitalisation of higher education; (ii) digital practices – the use of technologies by students and teachers and change of teaching and learning practices in a digital environment; and (iii) digital performance – how digitalisation impacts efficiency, quality and equity of digital higher education.

To understand and assess the state of digital transformation in the Hungarian higher education system, the OECD conducted an online non-probabilistic stakeholder consultation survey in February and March 2021, gathering more than 1 000 completed responses and providing valuable insights into students and teachers' experiences. Survey results pointed to broad – yet not universal – access to basic digital infrastructure and equipment, a large use of digital technologies by teachers and students as well as challenges in using these technologies, often found to be less effective and satisfactory than in-person teaching and learning.

The Hungarian government has developed national strategies outlining ambitious objectives and associated actions to promote digitalisation in higher education. However, digitalisation is uneven across institutions, and barriers to effective implementation remain, including funding, procurement, academic employment and quality assurance frameworks that do not yet facilitate effective digital provision of higher education. Despite an advanced higher education administrative data system, the current system does not allow to measure digitalisation in higher education.

In light of these observations, the report recommends adopting a comprehensive four-step approach to support the digitalisation of Hungary's higher education system, including 12 recommendations:

- **Setting the direction** requires understanding the needs of higher education students and staff and developing a suitable policy and monitoring framework for digitalisation, through 4 policy actions:
  - *Recommendation 1*. Create mechanisms to build (and regularly revisit) an understanding of higher education staff and students' digital practices, needs and attitudes to inform policy
  - *Recommendation 2.* Review the regulatory and funding framework for the digitalisation of higher education to encourage institutional strategies supporting the take-up of digital practices among students and staff
  - *Recommendation 3*. Encourage HEIs to draw on best practices in planning for and rolling out the digitalisation of HE
  - *Recommendation 4*. Design a plan for collecting and analysing data on digitalisation in teaching and learning
- **Building the foundation** requires effective national policies governing the acquisition and use of digital infrastructure, through 3 policy actions:
  - *Recommendation 5*. Reconsider the centralised approach to ICT systems procurement and collaboratively develop with HEIs criteria to support well-informed digital infrastructure strategies and investments

- *Recommendation 6*. Consider targeted funding to expand access to hardware and software and increase the capacity of HEIs to provide support to students and staff
- *Recommendation 7*. Create data policies and standards (see Chapter 4 of the report)

- **Developing the processes** requires strengthening incentives that support digital innovation in teaching, research and engagement through 3 policy actions:
  - *Recommendation 8*. Strengthen support for higher education staff to expand the adoption of digitally enhanced, student-centred pedagogies
  - *Recommendation 9*. Revise the employment framework for Hungarian higher education staff to reward quality digital teaching. Identify and disseminate examples of excellent teaching
  - *Recommendation 10*. Explore the potential of using learner analytics to lift learner success

- **Delivering benefits to students, graduates and employers** by monitoring digitalisation, through 2 policy actions:
  - *Recommendation 11*. Engage in analysis and research into problems of access to higher education among some groups and develop interventions to enhance equity of access
  - *Recommendation 12*. Analyse patterns of students' take-up of and achievement in online learning

The final chapter of the report is dedicated to measuring the digitalisation of higher education and provides an analysis of different data collection methods to measure digitalisation used internationally. It provides a set of 30 indicators developed based on an analysis of international and Hungarian data collection approaches that can serve as a starting point for national stakeholders to develop a monitoring system. ***Ensuring quality digital higher education in Hungary: objectives, key milestones and methods.***

François Staring, Higher Education Policy Analyst in the Policy Advice and Implementation Division at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills presented the objectives, key milestones and methods of the upcoming project "Ensuring quality digital higher education in Hungary".

The long-term goal of the project is to enhance the quality of digital teaching and learning in Hungary and support a more competitive and attractive higher education system. In the near to medium term, it aims to support the MIT by identifying new quality frameworks, standards and processes that are relevant and applicable to digital higher education in Hungary and to identify supports and practices that HEIs judge to be relevant and useful in enhancing the quality of their digital teaching and learning, and in improving their capacity to manage the quality of digital teaching and learning they provide.

Ensuring quality teaching and learning in digital settings requires effective quality assurance standards, supports and practices. Policies should focus on providing: (i) adequate resource and investment in technology; (ii) digitally based student support services; (iii) training, support and incentives for instructors to deliver (quality) online instruction; (iv) institutional quality management processes for digital provision; and (v) external quality assurance of online and hybrid provision that is "fit for purpose".

The project started in November 2021 with a review of national and international evidence and involve various stakeholder interviews and roundtable discussions over the course of the project to inform relevant policy recommendations. The project will conclude in March 2023 with a final conference. The work will be led by the OECD in collaboration with DG Reform and a national project team including representatives of the MIT, HAC and national experts.

Discussion and Q&A

In the ensuring discussion, participants attending the webinar asked the following questions::

- Is there any existing practice of quality assurance dedicated to quality digital higher education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)?

- In line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG), it is HEIs that are primarily responsible for ensuring the quality of the education they offer. A principal focus in the months ahead will therefore be to better understand the emergent digital quality practices HEIs follow today in Hungary and the EHEA more broadly, in order to identify what measures might be taken to help Hungarian HEIs further develop their capacity to design and implement effective policies and practices for the quality management of digital education.

- In the context of COVID-19, how can hybrid education operate effectively?
  - Difficulties to provide education to students in-person and online is probably a consequence of the conditions of the quarantine itself and of the extraordinary health conditions we face. Under normal circumstances, hybrid education will offer similar a learning opportunity flexibly to both in-person and online students.

Session 2: National initiatives on digital higher education in Hungary

Supporting the digital transformation of higher education

A government agency's perspective

Dr. János Setényi, expert on behalf of the Digital Higher Education Competence Centre at Digital Success Non-profit Ltd, presented the government agency's perspective on digital transformation in Hungary.

Digital Success Nonprofit Ltd. produced two background reports supporting the OECD team's analysis, the first providing a broad overview of the state of digital transformation in Hungarian higher education and the second on existing data collection and their relevance to digital maturity in Hungarian higher education.

The digital maturity of Hungarian HEIs varies greatly depending on their location and size – larger HEIs and HEIs located in the capital were on average more advanced, and infrastructure development remains important. While the MIT managed successful digitalisation projects already before the COVID-19 crisis and envisions Hungary to be a 5G country by 2022/2023, further progress is required with respect to the provision of students' equipment.

The "model change" of HEIs currently taking place in Hungary with a number of state-maintained HEIs being transferred to a foundation status assigns a new role for the State in digital development. HEIs, while undergoing model changers currently work on their development strategies and at a time where digital transformation is gaining ground everywhere.

Because the accreditation of training programmes recognises separated categories reflecting the historical separation of programmes (i.e. full-time education, correspondence and evening education, online distance learning), the current system lacks flexibility to accommodate different forms of digital teaching and learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the "revolution of learning", which HEIs should take part in. In 2022, HEIs should empower themselves to respond to that learning revolution. The development of digital and smart institutions requires the implementation of an organisational competence framework that applies applying "soft" tools based on self-assessment and peer review and that areas embedded into the institutional strategic and operational documents and development plans. Setting a competence framework would help them HEIs manage their organisation and resources and move towards increased digitalisation. In addition, state organisations should forge partnerships with the newly founded management boards in order to achieve and sustain progress in the digital transition.

A PhD perspective

Viktória Lilla Pató, Vice-president in charge of international affairs at the Association of Hungarian PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) and DLA (Doctor of Liberal Arts) Candidates provided a PhD perspective on supporting the digital transformation of higher education in Hungary.

PhD students provide a unique perspective on digital education as they are both experiencing digital learning and digital teaching at the same time. Although Hungary is lagging behind other EU Member States in the 2021 Digital Economy and Society Index, investments in digital technologies are increasing, which is key for researchers. As highlighted in the OECD report, further progress is needed to support digitalisation.

Digitalisation opens a new dimension for the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA candidates, as it holds the potential to accelerate new scientific findings and progress – which is particularly relevant as a 2016 reform limited to length of PhDs to four years in Hungary. The availability of digital equipment and resources also encourage a new generation of researchers to go deeper into their research by focusing on findings rather than spending time on data analysis. Beyond that, digital skills are required to remain competitive both in the labour market and in the field of research; hence programmes should be developed and regularly updated to include more digital knowledge.

The Association participates in a wide range of initiatives to support the digital transition of Hungarian higher education. In particular, it cooperates with the Governmental Agency for IT development, participates in an Open Science Ambassador training course, provides recommendations for the elaboration of the Hungarian Open Science Strategy, offers non-formal education through a successful PhD career course, collaborates with national authorities (e.g., MIT) and contributes to science evaluations led by HAC visiting committees online.

In the future, the Association will increase its focus on organising more open courses focused on digital knowledge and supporting infrastructural developments that are essential for digital higher education (e.g., VPN, open source). It will also continue to negotiate with HEIs and local authorities to promote research while initiating international projects to support digitalisation. Additionally, as open source ambassador, it will accompany EURODOC in the distribution of learning materials.

The Association finally welcomes the recent adoption of open science recommendations by UNESCO and plans on pursuing its efforts to raise awareness on the needs of digital higher education, notably by giving feedback to authorities on national policy plans.

Ensuring the quality of digital higher education

A Quality Assurance Agency's Perspective

Péter Levente Lakatos, Deputy Director at the Hungarian Accreditation Committee shared a quality assurance agency's perspective on ensuring quality digital higher education.

The ESG were designed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders. They provide a comprehensive but general framework for both internal and external quality assurance applicable to different kinds of higher education and providers. The ESG are not static and rather translate operational standards into practical ones for digital education, which relies on different tools than in-person education but aims to achieve the same goals and learning outcomes.

As recommended in a 2018 report by ENQA, ESG should be adapted to the provision of digital education, notably with respect to:

(i) quality assurance policy –quality assurance policy and HEIs should use an adequate policy framework and governance structure when adopting new technologies to ensure the quality of digital learning provision;

(ii) learning – technical infrastructure should be aligned with the teaching methodology and staff need to be trained to provide digital content and appropriate assignments;

(iii) student support – HEIs should analyse the learning profile of e-learning students and ensure their access to library resources and labs – as indicated in HAC standards.

Other relevant projects on providing quality digital higher education include the Tesla Project (Enhancing Trust in E-Assessment) and the EUA - DIGI-HE Survey report

In Hungary, a government decree on higher education states that the quality assurance of teaching, scientific research and artistic activities is the primarily responsibility and task of HEIs to be carried out in the framework of the Higher Education Act.To support HEIs to strengthen their quality management practices, Dr Levente Lakatos suggested that HEIs could learn from each other by drawing on the decisions and reports available on the MAB and EQAR websites. Workshops with quality assurance practitioners to share good practices were mentioned as another useful way to develop HEI capacity for quality assurance. Finally, the Hungarian Accreditation Review journal offers an opportunity to publish articles and studies on this topic.

Dr Levente Lakatos continued by saying that the ongoing MICROBOL project, coordinated by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, and a recent OECD report, although primarily focused on micro-credentials, also provide relevant insights on digital quality assurance.

Discussion and Q&A

In the ensuing discussion, speakers were asked to reflect on the following two questions:

- How can we guarantee the integrity of assessments in a digital environment?
  - The speakers highlighted that this issue is central to guarantee quality digital higher education. A solution includes changing the nature of exams by shifting away from exams testing knowledge only, towards assessments focused more on to focus on testing students' skills through a range of assessment tools including for instance written assignments that 'help assess critical thinking. However, this type of approach requires instructors to give thorough feedback to students.

- Through which mechanisms can HEIs that are the least advanced benefit from the experience of advanced ones?
  - The speakers highlighted that appointing Chief Learning Officers in HEIs is likely to be a development that will support the advancement of pedagogy, which will become an increasingly important focus in digital higher education systems. HEIs currently lack staff who understand their HEI's vision, understand digital technologies, know how to manage funding and organisational challenges, and can convince their academic colleagues to improve their pedagogical skills. In the future, each HEI should hire a learning manager/pedagogical expert who will provide expert advice to the managing board and academic staff. While technology is important, pedagogy remains the key issue to address.