



Hidden Potential or Hollow Promise? Can Technologies Deliver Wider Access and Success in Higher Education?

Higher education is changing, with the development and application of new technologies driving much of this change. For those of us concerned with achieving wider access and success a key concern is whether these changes can help or hinder our efforts. Can innovation accelerate progress, or will it have no effect or even worse, negative impacts?

New forms of provision and delivery are creating opportunities to participate in higher education such as through the development and growth of on-line courses and programs and new on-line institutions. These have the potential to open up access to those who might otherwise miss out, to programs offered by prestigious institutions otherwise often out of reach and to overseas institutions without incurring the high costs and disorientation of travel and relocation. Like more traditional distance education they also enable busy people to fit study around their other activities and commitments. But who is able to take up these opportunities? Does access favour the already advantaged? Do they provide real pathways to recognised qualifications? What are their implications for the student experience? For the costs and financing of higher education? For the structure of courses and programs, the recognition of prior learning and credit transfer?

Technologies are also increasingly being used by higher education institutions to support their outreach and recruitment activities. For instance, social media is used to connect with potential students, both near and beyond their immediate region. What can we learn from these experiences? Where and how are technologies being used most effectively to widen access? Are these institutions managing to reach people beyond their 'traditional catchments' or do the technologies reinforce existing advantage? What kind of connections are created and how do they help to raise aspirations and encourage participation? How are technologies being used to improve targeting? To engage with minority and disadvantaged groups? To support effective transitions to higher education?

We are also seeing growing instances of technologies being used to support students academically, socially and personally during their study, but also before they arrive at the institution to beyond their graduation. For instance, applications are being developed to create new connections and forms of interaction among students and between students and their teachers and students and institutional services, such as academic support and career development. What are the most effective uses? What more could be done? At what point in the student life cycle?

Finally, technologies are changing teaching, learning and assessment. For instance, new teaching rooms look very different from those of the past with live internet connections for research and participation by external individuals or groups and advanced technical facilities to support collaborative group work. Teachers are using technologies to track student engagement more closely. New forms of assessment are being trialled, such as the submission of podcasts. But do these types of changes support or inhibit inclusive practices? Are these changes supporting retention and success, especially by students from disadvantaged backgrounds or are they creating new forms of educational disadvantage?

At this conference we will learn about the technologies that are changing higher education now and will do in the near future. We will share what we know already about the effects and impacts of these changes and the best and most effective ways to use technological innovations to widen access and success. We will also look at the development of institutional and government policies to support the kind of changes we seek.

The 23rd EAN Annual Conference
2nd – 4th June 2014
University of Edinburgh
John McIntyre Conference Centre
Scotland, UK



Submissions are sought in:

- Higher education provision and delivery
- Outreach and recruitment
- Student Support
- Teaching, learning and assessment
- Policies to support effective change

All presenters will be required to submit a piece on their topic 3 weeks prior to the conference. This piece can be in a variety of forms from the more traditional (a short paper of up to 2000 words, a PowerPoint presentation of up to 10 slides, with or without embedded voice-over), to newer forms such as a short video, 'EANwiki entry' or podcast. Presenters are encouraged to be creative. These pieces will be 'published' by the EAN after the conference.