Sir Michael Barber's digital teaching and learning review

Issue

1. Sir Michael Barber recently published his review of digital teaching and learning.

Recommendations

2. The board is invited to:

    a. Comment on the report.

    b. Reflect on its implications for the OfS.

Further information

3. Available from Sir Michael Barber and Josh Fleming (josh.fleming@officeforstudents.org.uk).

Discussion

4. The review was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education in June 2020. During the course of the review, Michael and his team conducted 52 interviews with experts and higher education professionals from across the globe. These interviews brought to life the thoughts and ideas gathered through a call for evidence and review of the pre-existing literature of the subject. The review was further supported by polling of 1,285 students and 567 staff during, conducted during 18 November and 2 December 2020.

5. The final report can be found at https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/gravity-assist-propelling-higher-education-towards-a-brighter-future/ and in the 'resources' section of Diligent. The document first outlines the potential benefits of digital teaching and learning, before setting out a model for how to do it effectively. The model has six interconnected components:

    a. 'Digital teaching must start with appropriately designed pedagogy, curriculum and assessment.

    b. Students must have access to the right digital infrastructure.

    c. Good access enables staff and students to build the digital skills necessary to engage.

    d. Technology can then be harnessed strategically, rather than in a piecemeal or reactive way, to drive educational experience and outcomes.

    e.   Inclusion for different student groups must be embedded from the outset.

    f.   All the elements need to be underpinned by a consistent strategy.'

6. Each component is accompanied by a set of recommendations for the medium to long term. The review also contains six immediate recommendations for provider leaders to implement immediately for the coming academic year. The report does not argue for universal digital teaching and learning; instead, it advocates for digital delivery's potential, and for digital delivery to be implemented effectively whenever it is used.

7. Although the recommendations are not directly targeted at policymakers, nor do they constitute regulatory guidance, they do provide a framework for the OfS to consider how its activity intersects with digital teaching and learning. In particular, the report is a useful tool to think about how the incentives the OfS imposes on the English higher education system will encourage or dissuade effective implementation of digital teaching and learning.

8. The board is invited to discuss the report generally, and with respect to three areas in particular:

    a. Whether the six immediate recommendations have implications for our regulatory approach in the long-term.

    b. The implications for our new strategy, and the extent to which digital delivery is part of that.

    c. The potential for digital teaching and learning to improve access and inclusion.

Paper publication date

9.   Sir Michael Barber's report has been published on the OfS website. This paper can be published immediately.