

# **Developing digital universities for the 21st century: The experience of UoN, UCDB (Universidade Católica Dom Bosco, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil), and University of Manitoba, Canada.**

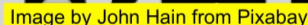
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**ECER 2021 online conference**

radical shift, fraught with challenges  
and rich with opportunities during  
which,

If we, after a year of online teaching and learning due to Covid19, are in such 'in-between' times, then:

1. how have we experienced teaching and learning?
2. how do we see it developing in future?
3. what would the Digital University of the 21<sup>st</sup> century be like?



# Locating the digital in the transformation of HE

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The Higher Education sector, together with schools, were seen pre-Covid and are seen even more now as major actors in preparing future generations. Within a policy of modernization of higher education, universities, in particular, are seen as key contributors on at least four fronts: teaching and learning, research and development, economic growth and social cohesion.

‘The challenge is how to build a university that is both connected with the world outside while also able to create an interconnected, agile, efficient and responsible structural and systemic internal response’ able to utilise technology in all its affordances’ (Devecchi, 2018).

# Project's aims and objectives

A comparative study of technology in use at three universities with the intention of staff mobility to share practices.

## Aims:

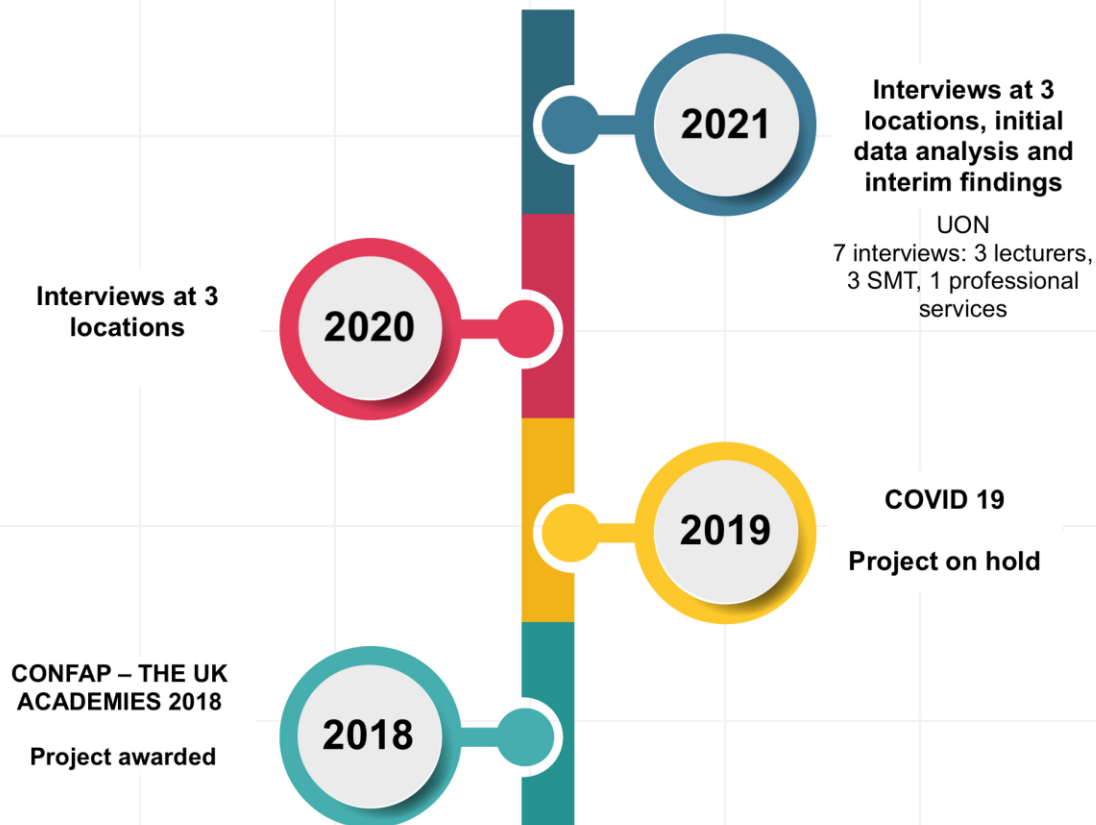
- To explore current conceptualizations and practical implications of developing digital universities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- To explore and compare the role of technology as a pedagogical tool and as essential employability skill
- To share pedagogical and institutional practices to act as a starting point for collaboration and shared development
- To set out recommendations for the development and implementation of technology-enhanced teaching and learning

## Objectives:

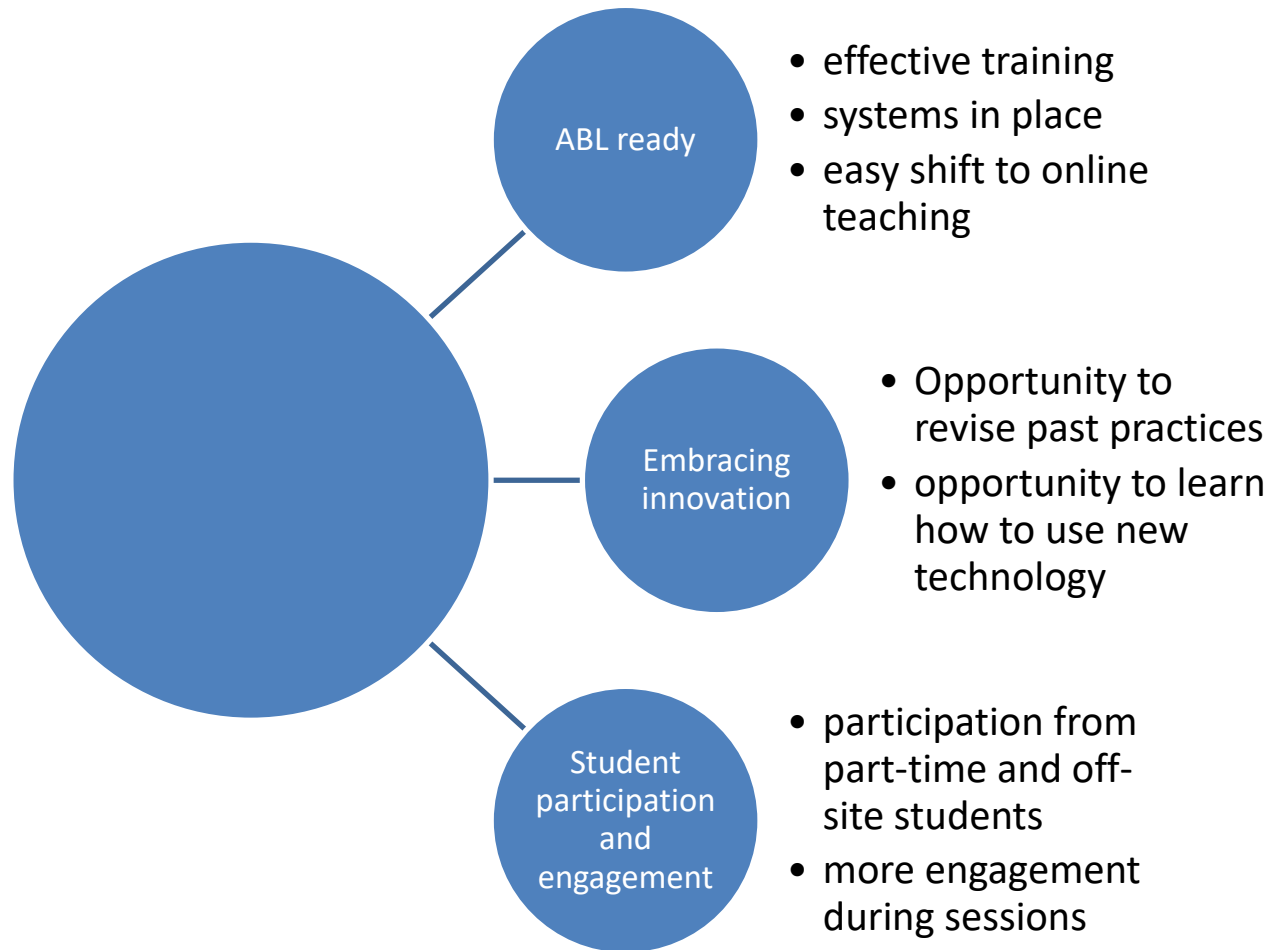
- Reviewing and comparing national and institutional policies and their practical implementation across the two institutions
- Seeking the views and exploring the experiences of senior management, academic and administrative staff and students on the role of technology for teaching and learning



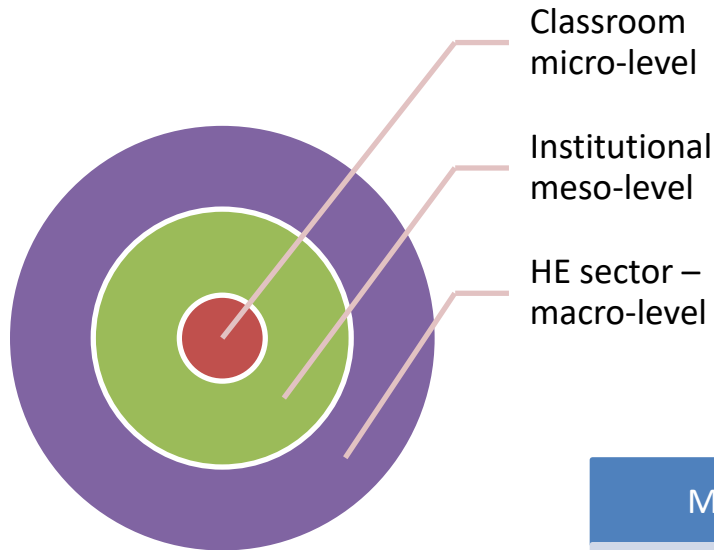
# The project plan



# The 'bright' side: pedagogically ready



# The 'darker' side of being digital



## Micro-level

- poor social experience
- increased workload
- Hi-flex exhausting and not effective
- Range of digital skills and capabilities
- diversity, inclusion and accessibility

## Meso-level

- Testing the technology
- positive response to crisis, but uncertainty about future
- cost of technology and being digital

## Macro-level

- diversification of offer (micro-credential, distance learning, etc)
- diversification of learners
- national, and international competition
- need to keep up innovation



# More than the 'four-walls' pedagogy: bringing down time and space barriers

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**More than teaching strategies** - However, becoming a 'digital' university requires more than just changing teaching practices. Becoming digital requires universities to embrace a form of disruptive innovation (Christensen and Eyring, 2011) whose impact is felt across all functions of the organisation. While primarily focused on the training and development of academics and student-faced support staff, the digital university would also need to develop more agile systems and flexible institutional architectures (Nixon et al, 2021), harnessing the power of diffused leadership (Devecchi et al, 2018) to be able to set forth the transformation needed at all levels.

**An e-cology of spaces** - The Digital University will need to thread between spaces (physical, virtual, geographical, socio-emotional, and cultural), and consider and reconsider time both as resources and barriers.

**Ethics and business exploitation** - It should also be mindful of the shortcomings of becoming digital, such as increased surveillance and dependence on EDTech companies and their political, social, pedagogical and economic influence (Mirrlees and Alvi, 2020; Selwyn, 2016)



# Recommendations

As we reflect on past experiences, we should forge a Digital University which fosters an inclusive approach to using technology for teaching and learning. Caldwell, Whewell, Devecchi, Quirke, and McGuckin (in press) suggest to:

- ‘Recognise the process of active and creative social online learning leading to collective knowledge-building
- Use technology tools that allow for multimodal responses that foster inclusivity and allow for responding and remixing to amplify learning within a community
- Embrace a model of universal and active inclusion by creating online learning environments that intentionally address the full diversity of our student populations’.

# **Addendum post-research: after the Delta variant (UK only)**

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Return to face-to-face teaching as 'ideal' solution

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Backlash against online teaching

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Innovative teaching practices vs. manipulation of 'student experience'

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Competing discourses, policies and practices

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**What next for the digital university?**

# Thank you!

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