



Ask the experts: What tech innovation is on the horizon for higher education?

Description

In the lead up to the [QS Reimagine Education Awards and Conference](#) (6-10 December 2021), we sat down with higher education experts and guest speakers at the event to talk all things tech innovation.

In your opinion, what is the most exciting piece of tech or innovation that higher education is, or could, benefit from?

Taylor Cyr (Practice Lead, Public Sector & Education at Quantiphi):

Adaptive Learning has always been the holy grail of education technology and, with recent technological development, it's close to becoming a reality. These data-adaptive solutions are designed to adjust to the level or type of course content based on an individual student's abilities or skill attainment in ways that accelerate a learner's performance. Powered by Data and AI/ML technologies, these systems are continually evolving and learning and will aim to better suit the needs of the learner, such as bringing about improved performance and engagement.

Anthony Tattersall (Vice President of EMEA, Coursera): The pandemic required universities to rapidly offer online learning but, when it began, many encountered the difficulty of developing high-quality teaching in this format, from scratch, fast enough. Unable to deliver this, they scrambled to provide continuity through emergency remote teaching. In many cases, this simply involved recording or live streaming content that would have otherwise been delivered on campus. While this approach allowed learning to continue, it did not permit remote teaching to be effective. Fortunately, universities were able to partner with other organisations and use technology to rapidly innovate and adapt for both the short and long term.

Dr Carmel Kent (Lecturer, Research Career Development Academic Lead at the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University): Choosing a technology as an innovation centrepiece is difficult. There is no one innovation greater than the human mind and its ability to excite us and learn. All the rest will simply count to the extent they augment that. I believe that the beautiful miracle of learning is purely a human one and it is firmly based on human connection: it would simply not be sustainable otherwise.

It is for this reason that I chose to focus on the way technology facilitates human communication through collaborative learning; more specifically, on asynchronous online discussions. When

facilitated effectively, group discussions can offer students many opportunities to reflect and self-regulate their learning. When facilitated online and asynchronously, learning can become more inclusive (beyond geographical silos, time zones or the regular five students who usually speak up in class) and resilient to barriers to school attendance.

Sophie Bailey (Founder and host of The Ed Tech Podcast): In the undergraduate world, higher education needs to get ambitious about student experience. There are now way more options to a prospective student, with both higher education and alternative provider competition online that offer consumer-grade experience. Universities need to be clearer on their value proposition to students and this will need to involve a portfolio of mentoring and coaching, mental health and wellbeing support, as well as real-world problem-solving with exposure to industry. My favourite example of a forward-thinking institution is the ambitious model set by Falmouth University who have spoken about moving from the university concept to an accelerator model; spinning out skilled up young entrepreneurs and problem-solvers. To do this, Falmouth University are looking to put creativity at the cross-cutting heart of everything they do, in the same way that technology is applied across everything that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology does; creativity being the human super skill that evades easy automation.

What are the biggest challenges facing higher education institutions in the adoption of this innovation, technology or process?

Taylor (Quantiphi): For many education institutions, especially larger organisations, alignment on strategic digital transformation initiatives is a common pain point. Legacy processes, policies, regulatory models and IT systems often inhibit information sharing, data-driven decision-making, automation, consolidation and modernisation. It's also common to have leadership and culture within the institution that values status quo and resists risk-taking. For example, they may not be ready to explore new business models or collaboration opportunities across the institution.

Carmel (Open University): Online learning, as we have seen in the case of COVID-19, can pose academic challenges for students, especially those who are less academically prepared. If not carefully planned, online discussions can quickly become yet another burden for students and teachers with little academic benefit. Online discussions will rarely form into learning communities if they are not moderated and regulated carefully. Academic institutions must acknowledge the challenge and the importance of allowing for debating platforms. They must offer support to community moderators, make sure the discussions are closely integrated with the courses' curriculum and assessment regimes, and that students are encouraged to openly and safely bring their own perspectives and viewpoints.

Sophie (The Ed Tech Podcast): We need to see regulation catch up with the world of online learning in order to aid quality innovation around adult learning offerings. The attitude and awareness around the use case for digital transformation is now mainstream but there is still a cultural hesitance among universities to bring transparency to student experience. Largely, the offering is built around university systems and timetables, not student expectation and convenience.

It's a huge project; digital transformation (not just digitisation), pedagogical training for online, business model and content evolution and monetisation, training of support and administration, partnership building with industry. Are established institutions up for the change involved? How many Gen Zs are on university governing boards? How close are these boards to the needs of students to not just assume everything will be okay?

What piece of advice would you give a higher education institution planning to adopt this innovation in the future?

Taylor (Quantiphi): Take full advantage of your data. Consider a unified data source to reduce the impact of data silos, as siloed data leads to complexity in interactions and creates challenges in data management and analytics. At the core of education is students and by using this data, organisations can improve their decision-making processes and identify investments, such as adaptive learning technology, which will help promote student success, both while in a learning environment, as well as post-graduation.

Anthony (Coursera): Coursera for Campus is being used successfully by higher education institutions in several ways that can serve as inspiration for other universities. Firstly, many universities are using Coursera for Campus to assign a set of for-credit courses to students, similar to an independent study. Secondly, many universities are combining their own curriculum with courses from the Coursera for Campus catalog, as part of their university blended learning experience. Thirdly, for non-credit-bearing, multi-disciplinary learning, improving student employability upon graduation (particularly in business, tech, and data domains).

Carmel (Open University): Effective learning online requires evidence-based practices. For example, encourage students to connect the discussed topics with their own lives, encourage them to provide elaborated responses, supported by evidence and the use of rich media. Provide timely feedback, which opens new discussions, instead of closing them with right and wrong answers. Foster an environment of tolerance for mistakes and misconceptions. Engage students in active listening to others before speaking up. Be clear about your expectations: provide students beforehand with the pedagogical goals of the discussion, clear instructions, grading rubrics and expected norms of behaviour. Last but not least, focus on a human presence (such as using videos) and on empowering and encouraging students to take a pro-active role in the discussion.

Sophie (The Ed Tech Podcast): Get ambitious. What you agree in the next six months will probably be out of date in another six months unless you really get ambitious. Look around you, do you have the team to deliver your vision? Don't try and achieve a new flexible university offering with an old, inflexible management style. Support your own team with mentoring and mental health support as you would your students. Look sideways; yes, at universities trialling things in Australia, but also at models like Guild Education, or at how large employers are reskilling their own teams.

What do they need; how can you support reskilling adults better? How can you geolocate your offering, both online and in-person, to what skills are in demand? How can you act as the convenor between stakeholders and add value along the way? Add soft skills development, IQ, empathy and real-industry problem solving into every course that you deliver as a signature part of your offer.

New educational approaches are everywhere, but only some of them are truly world-class. Identifying and rewarding those gems is the mission of

[the QS-Wharton Reimagine Education Awards & Conference: The Oscars of Education](#) (Virtual, 6-10 December 2021).

Join 2000 educational innovators at Reimagine Education to hear more from Sophie, Carmel, Anthony, and Taylor, and meet the 140 finalists of the Oscars of Education. Register here: <https://www.reimagine-education.com/register-as-delegate/>.

Meet the experts:

Taylor Cyr

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Taylor Cyr

Taylor Cyr: Practice Lead, Public Sector & Education at Quantiphi

Taylor Cyr is the Practice Lead for Public Sector and Higher Education at Quantiphi; an award-winning Applied AI and Data Analytics software and services company. With diverse experience in the public sector, Taylor has helped clients understand and leverage the transformative power of advanced artificial intelligence, machine learning and cloud.

To hear more from Taylor, please register for [Reimagine Education](#) and attend **Panel: AI For Personalised Student Success**, Thursday 09 December 2021, 6:55 AM – 7:55 AM GMT +0. In addition to this, Quantiphi's client engagement manager, Nishant Singhal, will be leading the 'Keynote: Improve Student Engagement and Boost Graduation Rates with AI', Friday 10 December 2021, 6:05 AM – 6:30 AM GMT +0.

Anthony Tattersall

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Anthony Tattersall

Anthony Tattersall: Vice President of EMEA, Coursera

As Vice President of Europe, Middle East and Africa for Coursera, Anthony brings more than 20 years of experience in the learning industry and has worked in multiple areas of HR and Education solutions, with a significant focus on learning and development.

To hear more from Anthony, please register for [Reimagine Education](#) and attend **Keynote: Preparing For The New Normal – The Promise of Online Learning**, Thursday 9 December 2021 5:00 PM – 5:15 PM GMT +0.

Dr Carmel Kent

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Dr Carmel
Kent

Dr Carmel Kent: Lecturer, Research Career Development Academic Lead at the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University.

Carmel has over 20 years of industry and academic experience, having worked for IBM research, EdTech and healthcare providers and start-ups, as a software engineer, data scientist, entrepreneur, teacher and researcher. Carmel's research focus is artificial intelligence in education, online learning communities and learning analytics.

To hear more from Dr Kent, please register for [Reimagine Education](#) and attend *Fireside Chat: AI for Learning – Sorting the good from the bad*, Wednesday 8 December 2021, 3:50 PM - 4:20 PM GMT +0.

Sophie Bailey

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Sophie Bailey

Sophie Bailey: Founder and host of The Edtech Podcast

The mission of The Edtech Podcast is to improve the dialogue between ed and tech through storytelling for better innovation and impact. The Edtech Podcast achieves over 1,500 downloads each week from more than 145 countries.

To hear more from Sophie Bailey, please register for [Reimagine Education](#) and attend *Panel/Debate: Pioneering Educational Models*, Wednesday 8 December 2021, 4:30 PM - 5:00 PM GMT +0.

This year's [QS-Wharton Reimagine Education Conference and Awards](#) took place from 6-10 December 2021. There is still a chance to register and attend the sessions, which will be available on demand until 31 January 2022.