

# Setting the curve

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**WONKHE**

# What pedagogic challenges are universities trying to solve?

Inclusion – disability/accessibility requirements, student diversity, commuter/carers/paid employment

Student attention and engagement – more interesting, more responsive

Independent learning - environment and practices that support this

Student employability – skills and knowledge, social capital

Student wellbeing – connecting students that need it to the support that is available

*The reason why most of these are challenging comes down to the scale universities are operating at and the increased diversity of the student body.*



# How are they looking to technology to help?

Learning resources – mostly about access but also potentially more engaging, richer, and more diverse

Doing more to engage in classroom – rich media, quizzes/polls, co-creation

A better-defined and designed student journey – integrating scheduled teaching time, independent study, and broader support offer – the “seamless user experience”

Data for engagement analytics

Digital skills development

Connection; communication

Cool stuff

Functional stuff



# What questions fall out of making technology part of the solution?

Where do we stand on in-person and remote work and learning? (Lots of views but people mostly want clarity)

What is the interaction of the physical and digital estate?

What is a reasonable expectation of digital capability of our staff and students, and what support (or penalties!) are appropriate to reinforce these?

Have we thought through all the practical and cultural implications (data management, infrastructure, connectivity, training, workloads, communications) – and how much it's all going to cost?

What aspects of tech use do we need to be critical about, and how do we keep that conversation moving forward? (Speaks to values, spaces for discussion, and innovation/evaluation systems)

AI, eh?



# Wonkhe/Kortext survey and leaders' interviews

Survey of 463 UK HE educators spring of 2023 and interviews/insights from HE leaders in summer of 2023

Educators:

51 % learning and teaching professionals

38% academics from a broad range of subject areas

11% senior teams

42% pre-92 universities

45% post-92 universities

11% independent, specialist or FE

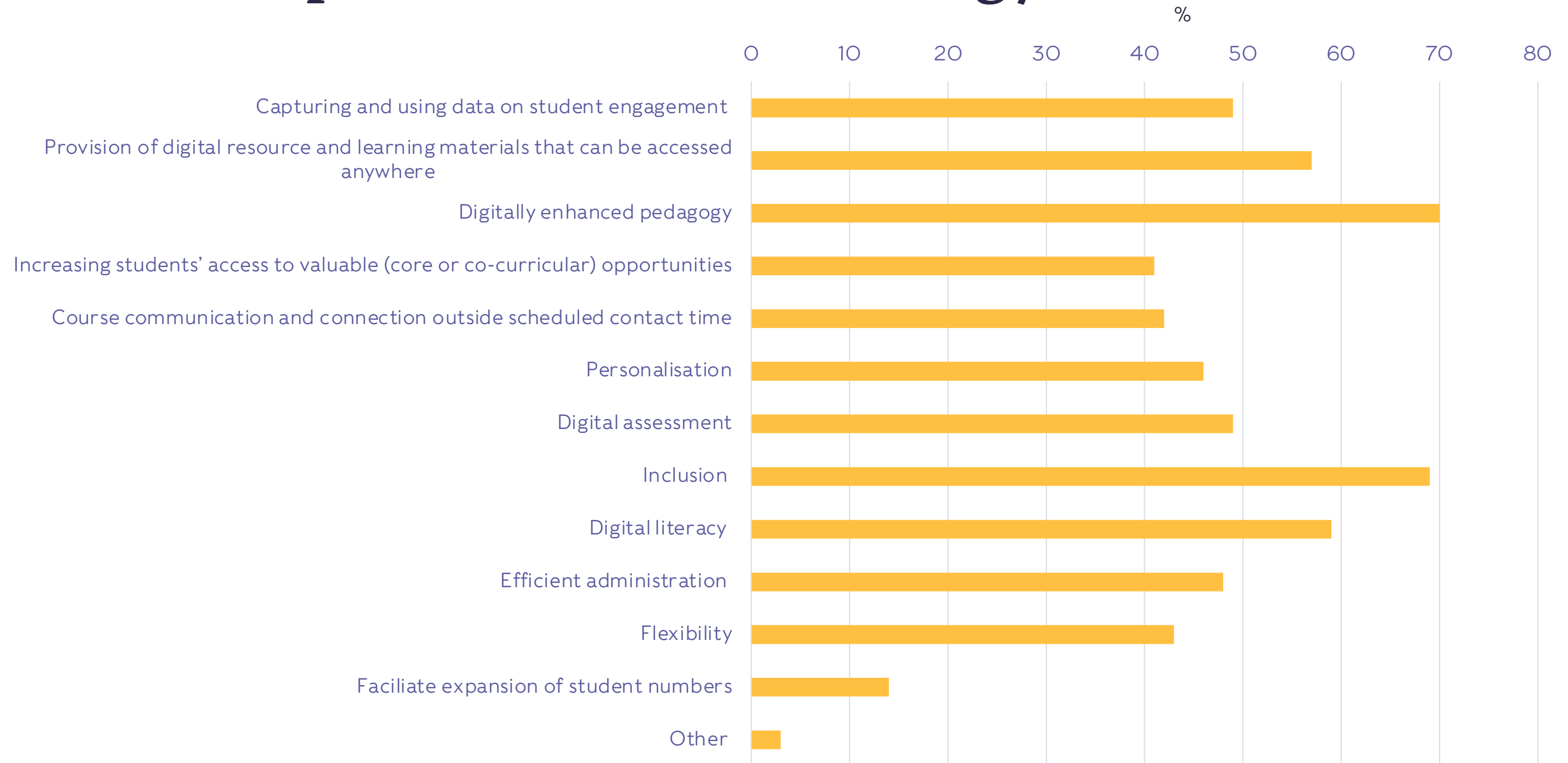
A broadly pro-tech group – many said they have responsibility for this in their institution

Not a nationally representative sample – focus is on qualitative insight



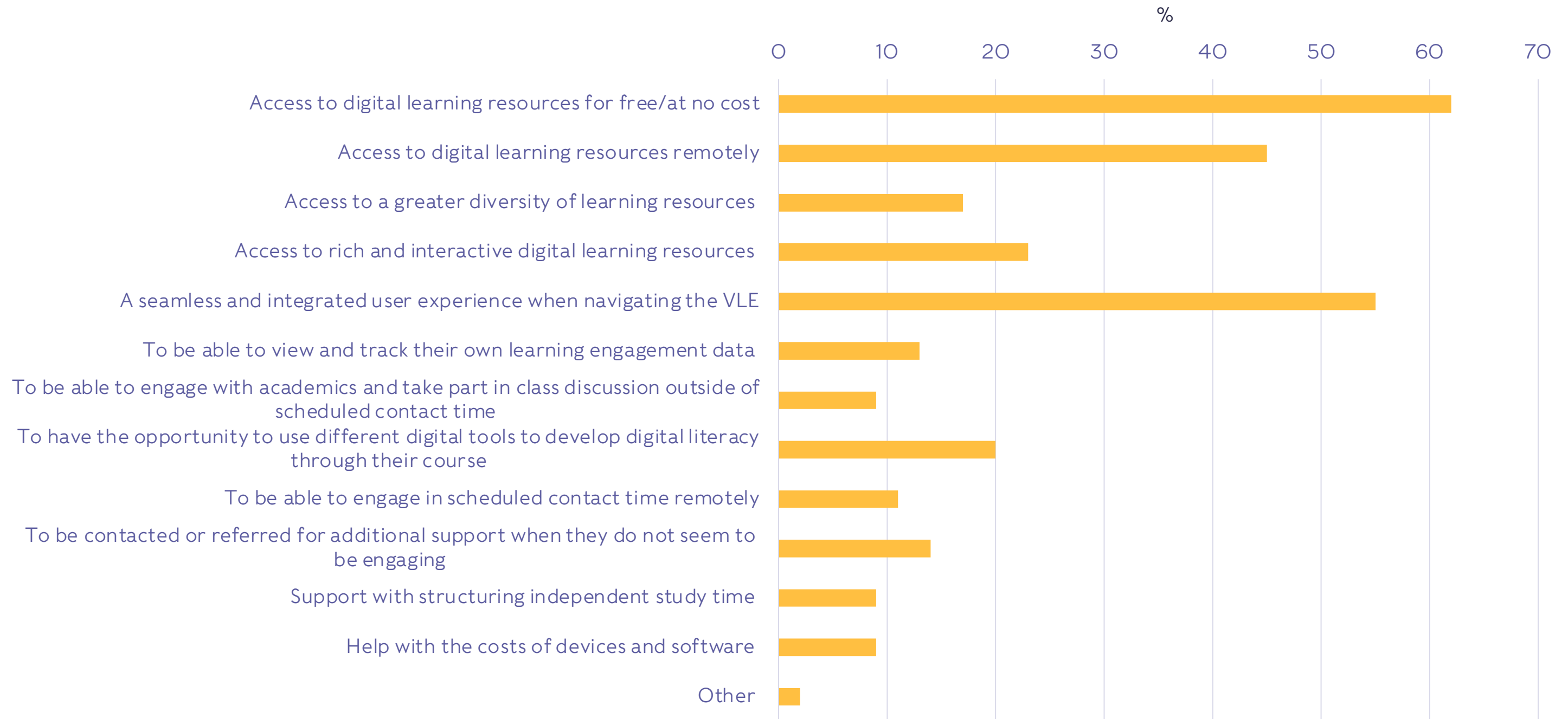
# Technology and student success

# Educators' priorities for technology



Thinking about the various uses of digital technology in the context of learning, teaching and student academic support - which of the below are your key priorities as an education professional? Select all that apply.

# What students' need from technology



In your judgement, what do you think your students most need from digital technologies to support their engagement with learning and academic development? (%) Select up to three.



“If students are savvy in the use of digital technologies they are more likely to engage with the platforms we use for teaching and learning but also be more comfortable learning about other technologies used in the degree. They will probably also be more digitally connected with their colleagues and lecturers...and thereby have access to more opportunities.”

**Academic, post-92 university**

“I feel that students are more likely to be successful if they are active and engaged. I think digital resources can help students to remain engaged and also help them to catch back up if they become disengaged. Digital resources can also improve the quality and quantity of feedback, helping students to better understand where they should target for improvement.”

**Academic pre-92 university**

“Students who engage in digital resources and learn the capabilities of digital platforms tend to engage more with the teaching and learning team, with their programme, with their assessments, and with other students. I think this is due to the increasing amount of resource which is available digitally, and the mode by which students communicate.”

**Learning and teaching professional, specialist institution**

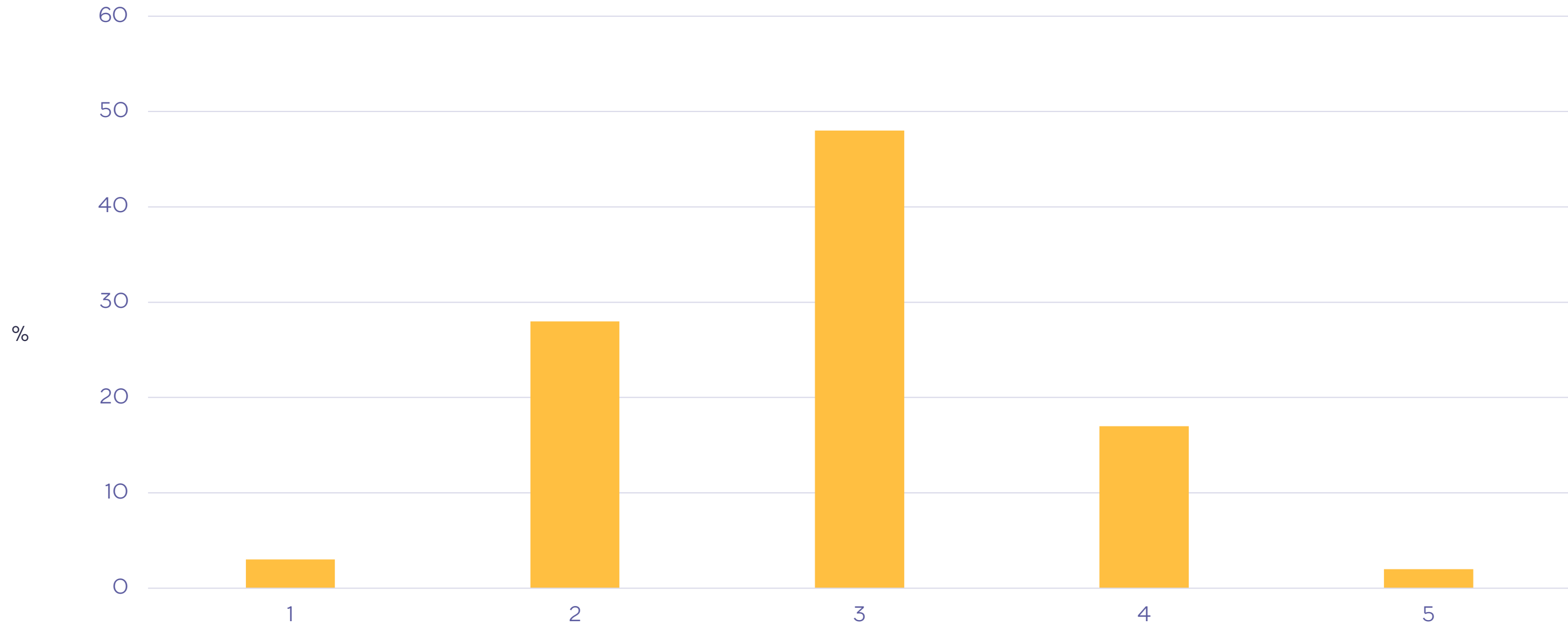
“Digital isn’t a strategy in itself. We need to think about what accessible and inclusive curricula look like and if there are requirements for digital infrastructure that fall out of that then we need to implement them. Digital capability has to be about selecting the right tools to achieve a goal - and that goal needs to be very carefully defined so that digital can deliver the right thing.

I worry about the argument that post-Covid students want to be able to access learning more flexibly. If that argument is grounded in the assumption that students can learn for themselves then it looks a lot like abrogation of responsibility for designing a learning environment that students are enabled to engage in.”

*Tony Moss, pro vice chancellor education and student experience, London South Bank University*



# Expectations of students



In your judgement, how confident are you that (your) students understand what is expected of them in their engagement with digitally enhanced learning, teaching, and academic support? (1= not at all confident 5=very confident)

“Comms with students about how and why digital tools are used, integrating digital in the curriculum and ensuring it is visible as crucial to subject specific knowledge, useful as a delivery mechanism and also to develop important transferable skills.”

**Member of executive team, post-92 university**

“I think all students use digital tools differently with some engaging in the bare minimum in order to complete their study. There are too many resources, which might make it difficult for students to navigate or understand what to use, and how.”

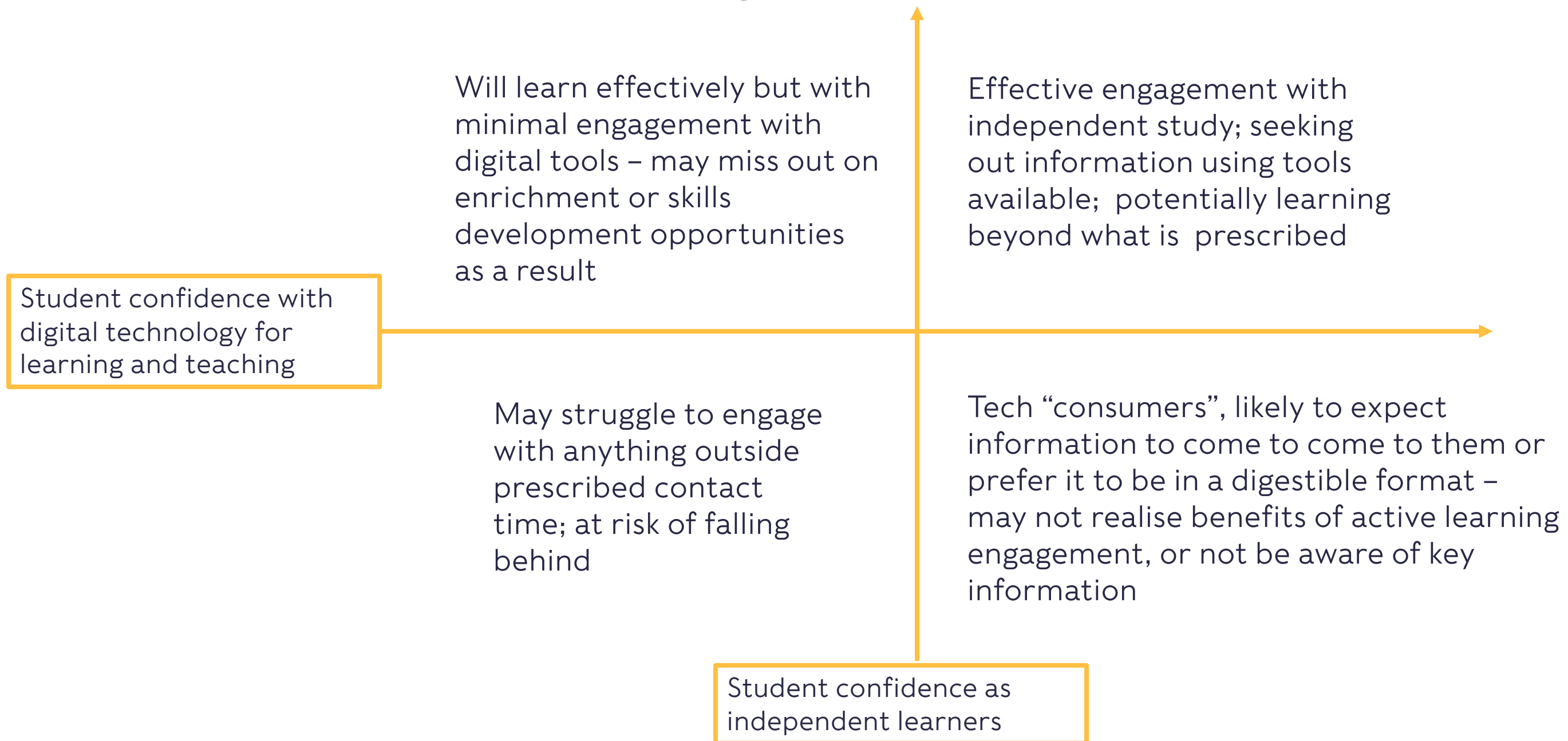
**Learning and teaching professional, pre-92 university**

“There is the assumption that the students are young, that they are digitally literate or have the underlying academic skills for more independent or self-directed academic practice. This is often not the case and students, teachers and others need to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to engage with learning via different modes with curiosity and criticality.”

**Member of executive team, FE college**



# The relationship between digital confidence and independent learning confidence



“Working in student representation I’m often struck by what can feel like a gulf between the lofty aspirations of institutional learning and teaching agendas and the often mundane realities of students’ lives. In engaging with technology we all want students to be digitally capable, benefitting from cutting edge innovations. But frequently overloaded students just want to know they are on track with learning and know they can easily find information and resources when they need them.

I do think there should be some joined-up thinking about what’s expected of academics in terms of using digital technology in learning and teaching, what skills students will need to be able to engage with that effectively - especially in establishing good practice around building skills for independent learning and their future employability - and the ways that the physical estate of the university supports those aspirations.”

*Bethan Dudas, director of membership services, Anglia Ruskin Students’ Union*



# The shape of the generative AI debate

69% think AI will be (very) significant in changing teaching and assessment. But feelings about this differ!

Some think it will tempt students to cheat and cause them to stop thinking for themselves:

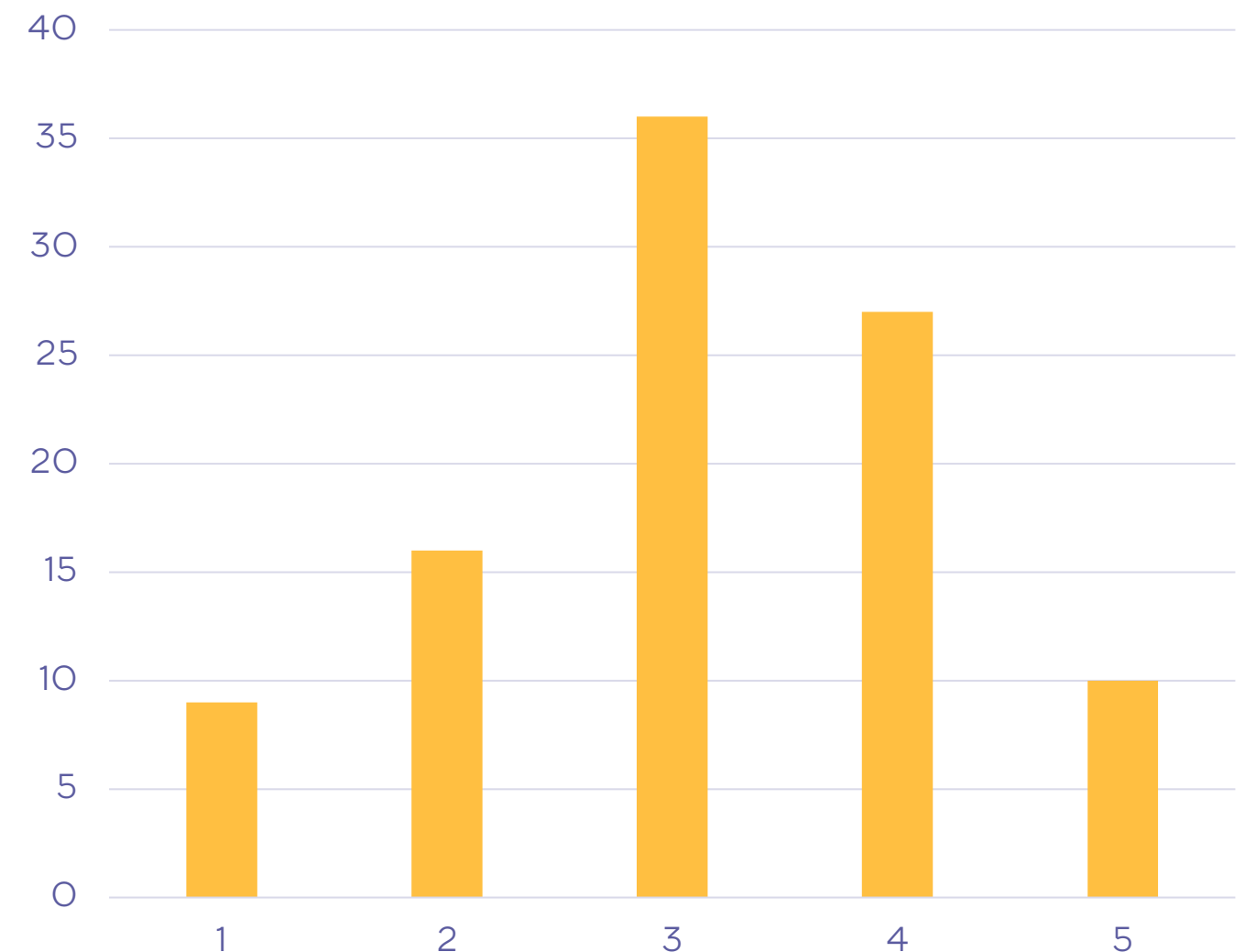
“AI will further diminish independent study skills and time management, etc. due to its ease of use, making students less employable.” %

**Academic, post-92 university**

Others say it will enhance students’ ability to be creative, think critically and solve problems:

“It is exciting about making a level of academic literacy available and achievable to students or learners who often feel overwhelmed or intimidated about trying to 'sound' or 'write' in a formal academic tone. It should allow more space to read, to 'think', to critically analyse and explore texts, concepts, wider access and sharing of knowledge and understanding, VERY EXCITING.”

**Member of executive team, FE college**



On balance do you feel more concerned or more optimistic about students having access to machine learning and artificial intelligence tools? (1=more concerned 5=more optimistic)

“Despite an inauspicious start, I actually think that the conversation around AI has moved on much more swiftly than, say, that on the rights and wrongs of lecture capture. What I see now in the sector is sensible conversations about how we support students to use AI appropriately, and support staff to engage students on these issues.

The bigger challenge, beyond the immediate pressures of integration of AI into day to day learning, is reflecting on how changing technology challenges our values and preconceptions as educators...If in academia we value things like authenticity, integrity, and originality, we need to be able to articulate why those values remain important in the age of generative AI. Doing this can only help students to make meaning from their higher education learning experience - in fact, it's really what we should have been doing all along.”

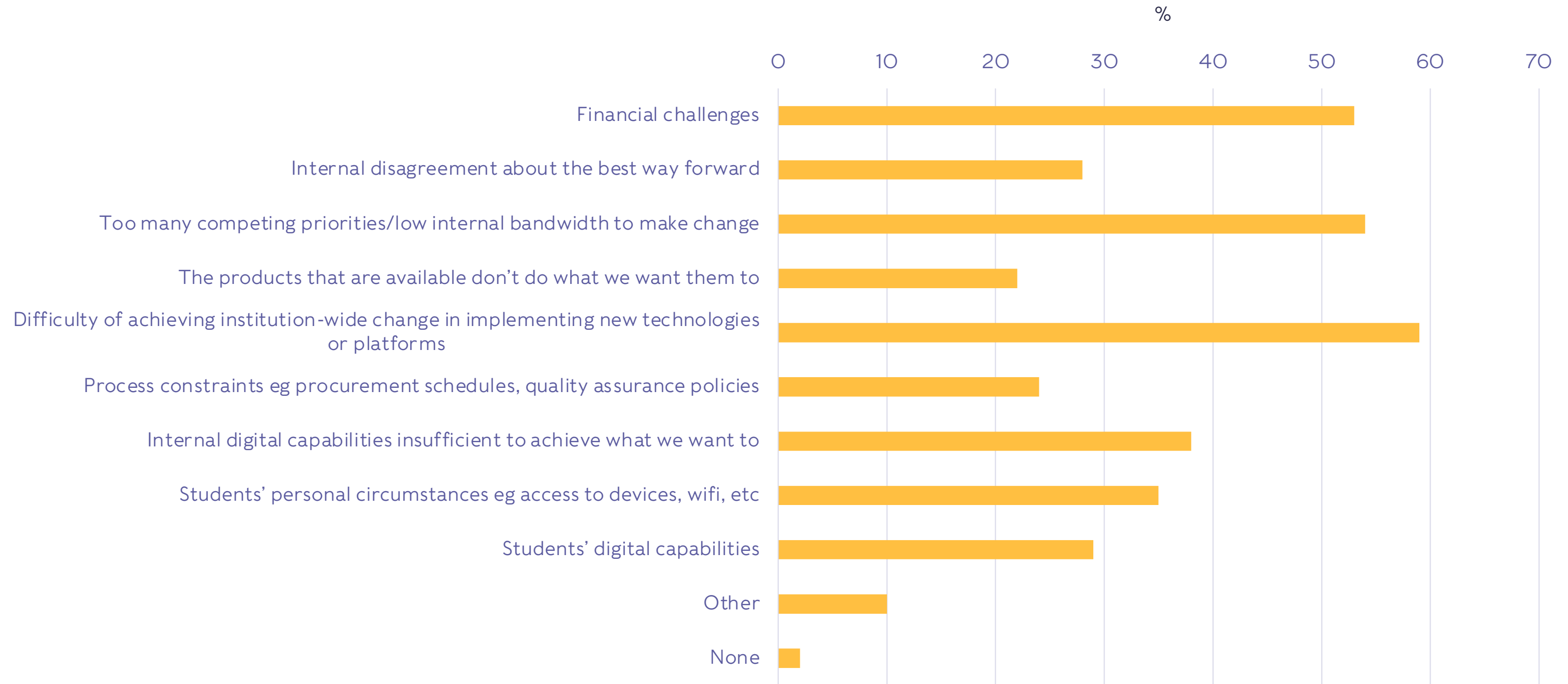
*Kelly Coate, Provost, Richmond American University London*





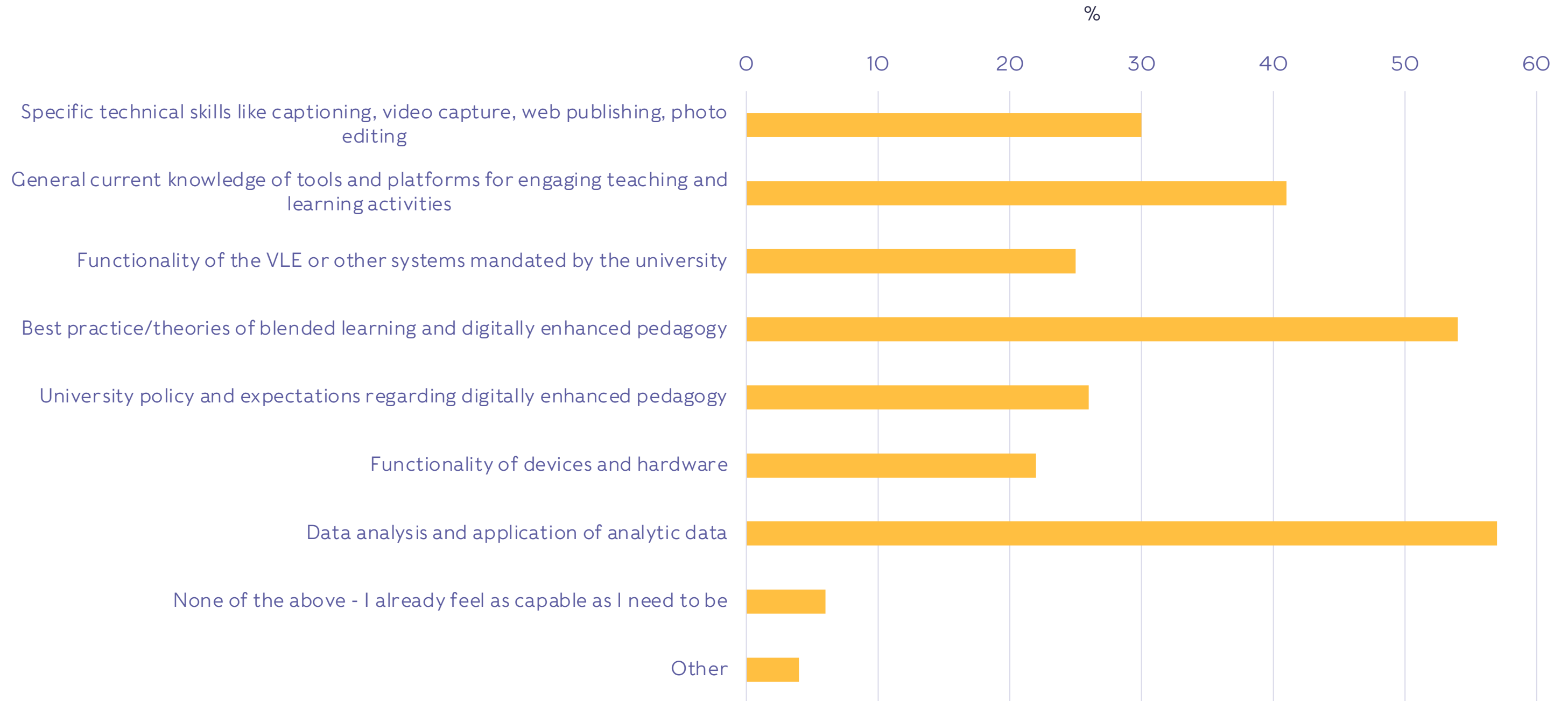
# The challenge of change

# Challenges and constraints



What challenges is your higher education provider facing that are creating constraints in the implementation of plans for digitally enhanced learning, teaching, and student support? Select all that apply (%)

# Development desires



What areas do you think, given time and space, you personally would like to develop further in your professional practice?  
Select all that apply (%)

# What are institutions doing well?

**Retaining expert staff** – learning technologists, central IT teams, academic innovation leads, (paid) student digital mentors, helpdesk staff

**Development and practice sharing** – ranging from formal training, bite-sized provision, to more informal “community of practice” and peer review facilitation

**Focus on students’ needs** – skills assessment, digital inequality, consistent application of accessibility standards, involving students

Innovation/cool stuff

External partnerships with technology providers

Effective project/change management

Well defined and mandated consistency in standards and/or practice

Adoption of digital literacy as a graduate attribute



# What improvements are needed?

**More thought given to engaging and developing staff and students** – acknowledging time and workload pressures; improving communications; more cooperation between academic and professional teams; more critical engagement with academic insight

**Joined up and coordinated strategies and systems** – digital architecture; clear strategic direction

**More investment in scaling development and training** – more varied/tailored provision; more focus on digital skills

**Retention of core academic values in digital practice** – community and pedagogy, not just efficiency

**Better everything** – systems, connectivity, accessibility, data, physical estate

“Thinking beyond substitution, thinking what is possible with technology rather than simply substituting previously analogue activities in exactly the same form digitally (e.g. considering how assessment can be enhanced, rather than examinations being moved online in exactly the same fashion as in-person exams but just typed).”

**Learning and teaching professional, pre-92 university**

“Reduce the number of systems used to maintain records, support students and keep the university running. We have systems upon systems upon systems, and many don't talk to each other well. Or you have one system, updating another and then that system updating further systems.... information is 3rd hand by this point. Something is bound to go wrong.”

**Learning and teaching professional, post-92 university**

“Rather than using technology as an alternative to or replacement for the in-person offer, we need to be actively designing hybrid learning - making much more thoughtful choices about what needs to be synchronous and in person in the interest of community building and engagement, and what technologies can best support independent learning, especially in the time between scheduled classes.

In practice, this comes down to changing the process of course and service design, enabling co-creation between IT, learning technologists, professional services, academics, and students. The conversation needs to be opened up to more people and focus on both pedagogy and student support. Once we have established what the ethos is, we can look for the technology that can realise it.”

*Emily McIntosh, Director of student success, University of the West of Scotland*



“While the basis for digital transformation remains a robust, secure digital, data and physical infrastructure, in many ways, these foundational elements are the easiest to get right. Networks, hardware, software – all these can be planned, implemented and managed through tried and tested processes. Once the technology is in place, it will quietly get on with the job, without arguing back.

The hard bit is the values, beliefs and practices affected by digital technology – and this is where we need to direct the most attention. In other words, people, not technology, should be the major focus of the transformation process. As Peter Drucker’s famous quote goes, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” Changing the digital culture across a whole institution is a much more complex proposition than putting in place the technology to enable it.”

*Heidi Fraser-Krauss, Chief executive, Jisc*



Thank you

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