

Attention: news desks/science and education correspondents

For immediate release

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**University leaders gather to discuss the impact of digitalisation
on Europe's universities, their staff and students**

The European University Association's (EUA) 2016 Annual Conference was hosted by the National University of Ireland (NUI) in Galway, and brought together more than 300 participants to discuss the theme "Bricks and clicks for Europe: building a successful digital campus."

The conference explored the various ways in which digital technologies impact teaching and learning and research in universities, featuring discussions on how to foster innovation, and best use digital technologies in managing change, and in enhancing learning and teaching. Participants also considered how digitalisation can be promoted at the institutional, national and European level.

A special highlight of the event, which ran from 7-8 April 2016, was an opening speech by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins. While pointing to both opportunities and challenges presented by the use of technology, President Higgins strongly emphasised the crucial role of education and especially of higher education in the development of our societies, in particular in the current political and intellectual crisis that prevails in Europe. "It is through the encouragement of creative and free thinking that our universities acquired their status in the past, and correctly claim it today as unique institutions that accept the responsibility of enabling and empowering citizens to participate fully and effectively at all levels of society," explained Higgins.

Ireland's digital ambassador, Lord David Puttnam, former Chancellor of the Open University in the UK, also made a major contribution to the conference, as the introductory speaker in a panel bringing together a broad range of stakeholder perspectives. Observing that change is taking place bottom up - through new approaches promoted by students and teachers - rather than top down, he posed the question of what should be digitalised in the educational process, and how to best use digitalisation to enhance teaching and improve educational outcomes. The panel also discussed the important question of enhancing graduate skills in the digital age, underlining the importance of promoting adaptability, and the ability to embrace change in a world where graduates will change jobs many times throughout their careers.

The conference provided an opportunity for representatives of European universities to share their experiences in promoting digitalisation. Participants confirmed that universities have embraced blended learning in recent years, and many of them also offer online courses. The main motivations include the need to address increasingly diverse student bodies and to explore opportunities for enhancing the quality of learning and teaching through improved pedagogical approaches. The conference also confirmed the major impact of digitalisation on the research process, and the importance of the ongoing discussions on open science/Science 2.0, including important issues for universities such as the management of big data and the requirements of storing data.

Many presentations addressed the need for more interinstitutional collaboration and sharing. While some institutions have established repositories for research results and learning and teaching materials, it is clear that there is still much to be done. Looking forward, participants also reflected upon how national and European level initiatives could help to enhance digitalisation. Case studies pointed to the obstacles that currently exist in different national systems, such as complex funding rules, physical presence requirements, and also outdated copyright legislation.

While EUA has addressed technological innovation in research and learning and teaching in many of its projects and events, this was the first conference dedicated exclusively to the issue.

Following the formal closure of the conference, as in previous years, EUA held a “hot topic” session. This year it focused on institutional mergers, a key issue for universities in many European countries.

Notes:

For complete information, including the program and presentations, [please visit EUA’s event page](#).

For additional conference content, please visit [EUA’s page on Scoop.it!](#)

Comments and reactions to the event can be seen on Twitter under the hashtag #EUA2016Galway

Ends

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The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of more than 800 universities in 47 European countries and 36 national rectors’ conferences (NRCs). The Council of EUA is comprised of the President, the members of the Board, and of the presidents of all of Europe’s NRCs. EUA works closely with its members to ensure that the voice of European universities is heard.