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What will University education be like in 2026?

A price should not be put on education – it is the invaluable resource behind every development in history. It should be accessible to as many people as feasibly possible, at the lowest possible cost. There are multiple rationales behind this statement. Firstly, education fuels innovation; secondly, it is the fundamental factor behind social mobility; and thirdly, the greater the general level of societal education the more egalitarian a society becomes. Amongst the lines of potential action that could be taken are: further digitalisation of course material and an increased effort to proliferate course material amongst students on campus, as well as to the wider public.

The University of Birmingham has embraced the idea of *cyber learning*, *Canvas* and *Panopto* proving to be useful tools (as well as beneficial investments) in order to keep students up-to-date with lecture content. There is potential to further progress made into the digital age, though. For physics undergraduates, for example, it is mandatory to submit weekly problem sheets pertaining to the material they have studied in the previous week of lectures; however, this has to be done in the form of a hard copy. An option to submit problem sheets through digital means should be made available to students, either as a *PDF*, or through using platforms such as *Latex*, *Microsoft Word*, or through an in-built system to *Canvas*. This would serve to improve the quality of student lab reports at an earlier stage of their academic careers, as *Latex* vastly improves the aesthetic presentation of digital work. Furthermore, an interactive live stream of lectures could prove advantageous for some students, where they could watch lectures from wherever they want, in real time, and potentially be able to communicate with their lecturers. Admittedly, this idea is somewhat of a *Catch-22*: students will have less incentive to come on to campus, which may impact them negatively, but the same argument was doubtless made about *Panopto* which has now been embraced. Additionally, students would likely save money by not having to buy expensive food on campus, improving accessibility to education.

All students should have access to all lecture material taught at their respective university regardless of the course they are enrolled on. The proliferation of education is a positive concept, at least in the microcosm of a university. It seems strange that if Joe, for example, studies chemistry that he should not also have access to material on mechanical engineering taught by the institute that he is attending. Additionally, students should be offered more freedom to pick courses in other departments. At the moment, although one can pick up a *Module Outside their Main Discipline*, the structure of a degree in the United Kingdom seems rigid, juxtaposed with a degree taught in the United States. A degree there is more malleable, with students being allowed more control in their educational path. Self-discovery is an intrinsic part of education and with students being given more options to find out what they like and do not like they will be in a better position to contribute to society once they have graduated. Furthermore, free access to education could be extended to the wider public, mirroring what MIT have done. This move has enhanced the public perception of MIT and would serve to do the same for the University of Birmingham.