

What are lecturers' and researchers' views on digitisation at the UvA?



How can digitisation provide maximum support for lecturers and researchers at the UvA? This question was the focus of a roundtable discussion on 31 March 2022, and a number of interviews with lecturer-researchers. After earlier meetings with students and with support and management staff (OBP), the floor was now given to lecturers and researchers of the Faculty of Science, FEB, FMG and FGw. This provided valuable insights for the further development of the Digital Agenda.

The Digital Agenda

Together with more than 100 focus group members and many experts, the 'Digital Agenda core team' worked on developing digitisation plans for the UvA. The Digital Agenda, which will be finalised in the coming months, will give direction to the further development of digitisation at the UvA in order to anticipate the rapidly changing world. This agenda is an elaboration of UvA's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan, the strategic plans of faculties, and input from shared service units.

It is crucial that the Digital Agenda actually supports lecturers and researchers. After programme leader Maarten Emons had briefly shared the main points of the draft plans, he therefore invited lecturers and researchers to share their perspectives on the following questions:

- Does this Digital Agenda match your needs and experiences as a staff member?
- What would make you even happier? What other points would really help you?

Lecturers and researchers about digitisation

The lecturers and researchers then shared their feedback on the draft plans and their needs with regard to digitisation at the UvA. These were their most important thoughts and comments:

1. **Reduce the time that lecturers and researchers have to spend behind their screens.** We have many procedures that are constantly changing and becoming more complex. The result is that people spend more and more time behind their screens. This has an impact on the health of staff members (blue light, sitting still too much, not being social) and means they have less time for the work they are good at and find satisfaction in.

2. **Optimise the speed of change, ensuring that changes don't happen too fast.** Much is going well at the UvA, and we are leading the way in many areas. But we must ensure that people can keep up. Make things better, faster and easier for lecturers and researchers.
3. **Focus on us as users.** Minimise the number of mouse clicks. Make it clear what can be improved and why it will save us time. Then we will definitely use it. It is important that users are involved. Many improvements require a course for lecturer-researchers. This requires an investment of time. It must prove useful and not change too quickly.
4. **Test new tools and systems thoroughly, before using them.** We understand that it is important to pay a lot of attention to certain matters, for example because of security reasons. But when rolling out new tools or systems, make sure they work well and are tested thoroughly, so they do not lead to frustration and a large time investment.
5. **The ability to collaborate is a precondition, also outside the institution.** Currently, being able to collaborate requires a lot of time from lecturers and researchers, for example because a UvAnet ID is required. Resolve this.
6. **Make sure things work for everyone, without losing our flexibility or independence.** Fortunately, there is room and attention for differences within the UvA. We must arrange a number of things so simply and unambiguously that it works for everyone, without losing this flexibility. It is also important not to become too dependent on Big Tech. Otherwise, we also lose our ability to influence the direction of further development.
7. **Within degree programmes and faculties, there must be room for supporting innovation.** This way, lecturers and researchers can focus on the content and the rest is taken care of.
8. **Provide instructors and researchers with better information about (new) opportunities.** There are many facilities and possibilities that we do not know about. At the same time, we do not want to receive too much communication. Communicate what we need and when we need it. Students can reach the lecturers through many channels. They often ask non-substantive questions. It would be better if students ask the lecturer substantive questions during the lecture and use other channels for other questions.
9. **Reduce the administrative burden and the number of systems.** There is a tendency to administrate more, because it is possible. Administrative tasks are often passed on to the instructor. They have to settle in again and again, which is inefficient. There are also more and more procedures. Be critical of them: in some cases, they will have clear added value, but often they do not. And then they create stress for employees. Simplify where you can, reduce the number of systems, and support us.
10. **Create buy in for changes, especially in the area of sustainability.** If we see the benefit, our behaviour will change. Also provide the facilities that make this possible. For example, facilities to work well with an online work group, so that travelling is no longer necessary.

Embedding outcomes in the Digital Agenda

Maarten Emons concludes that the input from lecturers and researchers has provided important points of attention for the Digital Agenda. It is very important, for example, that improvements are realised on the basis of collaboration and are not 'imposed'. Change management is an important success factor, whereby we must ensure that we develop new tools in consultation with users. And just as with students and OBP staff members, good information and communication are also crucial for lecturer-researchers. In the further development of the Digital Agenda, we will certainly take the input of lecturers and researchers to heart.

Questions or ideas?

The plans for the Digital Agenda are now being discussed with various bodies. We expect to be able to share a final version of the Digital Agenda in April or May 2022. Do you have questions or ideas about the UvA Digital Agenda? Then send an email to digital-agenda@uva.nl.