

## **A Vision for Digital Higher Education in Kenya Concept Note**

### **Background**

Covid-19 has had a profound impact on the delivery of higher education. It has been estimated that almost 90% of students globally have not been able to access universities physically during the pandemic (Kandri 2020). As universities were forced to close campuses, the initial use of digital platforms was for emergency or “continuity” teaching (Morales 2020). During these early days, the intention was to cause the least disruption to students rather than explore new pedagogies. However, research indicated that teaching staff who had undertaken professional development in online and blended learning were much better prepared for the move online, and had a much more positive experience (Littlejohn et al. 2020). Where they had not, and universities had not invested in infrastructure to support online teaching, things were more difficult. For example, there was uneven success at maintaining a ‘semblance of normality’ across universities in Kenya (Nganga, Waruru, and Nakweya 2020).

It is almost a year since the rapid shift online, and it is now time to take stock of the impact of the pandemic on shaping the future of digitalisation of higher education in Kenya. Digital technology could transform the university’s capacity in its ‘public good’ mission in an era of massive long term increases in inequality, mobility and displacement and health and environmental crises. Using the full range of digital technology capabilities, universities in Africa could have a major impact on delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in education and health and wellbeing, for example, to increase access to technical, vocational and tertiary education and to train more school teachers and health workers. On the other hand, without addressing some of the systemic practices within higher education that pose a persistent barrier to a deeper and more productive engagement with digitalisation, universities in Kenya will not be able to realise the potential of the digital university.

The Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) and the University College of London (UCL) are convening a series of three sessions (both online and face-to-face) bringing together university leaders in Kenya as a community of practice to support them to shape the future of digital higher education. Through these sessions, participants will collaboratively:

- i. Reflect on what we have learnt from the rapid shift online necessitated by COVID-19 pandemic, what we need to keep and what we need to change;
- ii. Develop a vision for digital higher education in Kenya that reflects the mission of the universities;
- iii. Plan for how to put the vision for digital higher education in Kenya in place, and consider the opportunities and obstacles we might encounter.

## Approach

We will use the *Utafiti Sera*<sup>1</sup> approach; a participatory methodology pioneered by PASGR to dig beyond the surface of digitalisation and collaboratively construct a future vision of higher education in a digital age. In the first session, which will be a two-day face-to-face meeting, international and national digital education experts will provide short presentations to stimulate discussion, while members of the *Utafiti Sera* house will provide their reflections on the shift online.

This process will examine the values and vision behind the digital mission of universities in Kenya. As we reconvene the *Utafiti Sera* house in sessions 2 and 3 (to be delivered online), we will drill into the details and support members to create strategy and implementation plans to bring about digitalised higher education in Kenya. The resulting plans will no longer be a rapid response to a world in crisis, but an informed and thought out plan focusing on the unique mission of the university and the needs of its staff, students and alumni.

## Overall structure

Sessions	Dates	Description	Delivery Method	Outputs
First convening:  A vision for digital higher education in Kenya	April 12, 2021	Day 1: Reflections on lessons learnt from Covid-19	Blended: face-to-face with online input	Lessons learnt: successes and persistent challenges;
	April 13, 2021	Day 2: The potential of digital higher education for Kenya	Blended: face-to-face with online input	A vision for digital higher education in Kenya
Second convening	April 29, 2021	Making the vision a reality 1	Online	Plans for digital higher education and guidelines for successful implementation
Third convening	May 13, 2021	Making the vision a reality 2	Online	

## About PASGR

PASGR is an independent, nonpartisan, Pan-African not-for-profit organisation established in 2011 and located in Nairobi, Kenya. PASGR works to enhance research excellence in governance and public policy that contributes to the overall wellbeing of citizens. In partnership with individual academics and researchers, higher education institutions, research think tanks, civil society organisations, as well as business and policy communities both in the region and internationally, PASGR supports the production and dissemination of policy relevant research; designs and delivers suites of short professional

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<sup>1</sup> *Utafiti Sera* refers to 'research-policy communities'; a platform that facilitates the convening of stakeholders working together to ensure that appropriate and negotiated policy uptake occur around a particular public problem for which there is evidence. It is expressed in the form of "policy-communities" houses, which are spaces, places and processes for policy engagement. *Utafiti Sera* houses set relevant agendas, generate debates and awareness, and provide comparative evidence for formulating and debating programme design, policies, or administrative action.

development courses for researchers and policy actors; and facilitates the development of collaborative higher education programmes.

## **About UCL**

Founded in 1826 in the heart of London, UCL is London's leading multidisciplinary university, with more than 13,000 staff and 42,000 students from 150 different countries. UCL is London's Global University with a diverse intellectual community, engaged with the wider world and committed to changing it for the better. We are recognised for our radical and critical thinking and its widespread influence, along with our outstanding ability to integrate our education, research, innovation and enterprise for the long-term benefit of humanity. UCL Institute of Education (IOE) has been ranked as the world number one for Education for the seventh year in a row. Within UCL IOE, UCL Knowledge Lab leads on the design and evaluation of digital innovations and researches learning and social practice in the digital world with stakeholders across the public and private sector.

## **References**

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