

Executive summary

AHEAD International Horizon-Scanning: Trend analysis on higher education in 2030

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Executive summary

The AHEAD study was commissioned to look into the future on what the higher education landscape could look like in 2030. In doing so, it takes account of technological developments in society without seeing them as the sole driving force for future higher education. Rather, the study assumes that higher education will change by 2030 as a result of developments in the following areas:

- Knowledge and competence requirements from industry and social changes in an increasingly digitalised world
- New developments in didactics, which are expected based on current discussions in the field of didactics and learning theory
- Digital technologies and new uses of these technologies that make new forms and new environments of learning likely.

The study was conducted in two phases. First, preliminary studies were carried out on the three areas mentioned above through literature evaluations, surveys and interviews, and subsequent discussions held with the AHEAD International Advisory Board.

A comparative literature analysis at the beginning of the study clearly showed thematic focuses by discipline and can be summarised in three core statements that are important for the approach chosen in this study:

- It shows that the economic view of the future of higher education has a clear focus on students in the context of the labour market and labour market requirements.
- The educational science perspective, on the other hand, emphasises the role of learning and the skills and competences that students have to acquire for the labour market.
- Technology and digitisation only become a main topic for computer science.

This realization leads to the conclusion that a comprehensive view of higher education in 2030 must merge all perspectives into one picture for the future.

An examination of other foresight studies on higher education showed that many future scenarios focus on the institution of higher education and examine the question of what this institution could look like in 2030. However, it should be noted that this question is not only dependent on demand, but also on the scope for shaping and re-forming higher education, which is determined by governance regulations such as laws, financing methods and quality assurance.

Therefore, the AHEAD study has taken a different perspective. The project team, in cooperation with the Advisory Board and after discussions with many experts and stakeholders, decided to put learners at the centre of the concept. Because higher education is there for learners. The demands of the labour market and society have an impact on them; they are at the centre of good didactic concepts. Digital technologies allow more flexible learning and learning in very different learning spaces, blurring the boundary between physical and virtual presence.

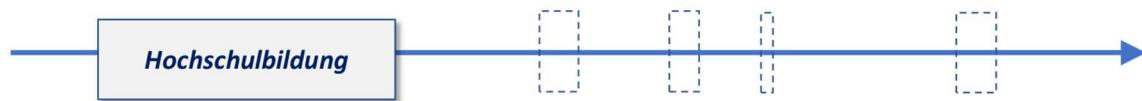
In the second phase of the project, four learning pathways were developed in a view of higher education in 2030. These learning pathways and their elaboration are based on interviews with experts and initiators of innovative learning opportunities, group discussions and an international survey conducted by the team during the project. In addition, innovative practice cases were

researched to illustrate these learning paths. The learning pathways are briefly described below (named after toy names for simplicity of recall):

- “*Tamagotchi*”: Here, as currently, the study programme serves as a basic and comprehensive preparation for subsequent employment, whereby the university functions as a closed ecosystem that supports and guides students in their pursuit of a course of study. This model is particularly suitable for people who go (almost) directly from school to university or college.
- “*Jenga*”: In this model, the ‘first degree’ programme comprises a solid foundation of knowledge and competences and can take the form of a shortened study programme. This foundation is built on as the curriculum progresses and is constantly expanded by the learner (student) through new learning blocks. These additional blocks are made available by various training providers.
- “*Lego*”: The course of study is no longer completed as a compact unit at a university or college but consists of individually combined modules of different sizes from different training providers. The learners themselves decide which learning phases or units they want to complete. In addition to providing the learning units, the university's task is also to recognise the learning phases completed through formal certificates or attestations.
- “*Transformer*”: The students in this model do not transfer directly to higher education as school-leavers but have already acquired their own professional identity and life experiences. They come later in their life to the university or college, where they also want to integrate this life experience into their studies. They need a flexible course of study that alternates between didactical control by teachers and advisors, and their own self-determination.

This vision of a higher education landscape emanating from the learner was found to foster open discussion. Questions about institutional support, governance and quality assurance as well as about institutional financing for restructuring and infrastructure, which otherwise have a major impact on the debate about the future form of higher education or higher education institutions, move to second place as a result of this change in perspective. Albeit the sketched learning pathways will have substantial impacts on the organisation and activities of universities and colleges, as well as on higher education policy and governance, which are not further elaborated in this study.

The practical cases described in this study show how technology can be fully-embedded into education initiatives. The practical examples show a new strategic approach that is not only additive and avoids the less promising approach of placing the new technology in the old structures, instead of more daring reform efforts. Innovation is therefore not based on technology, but rather on technology being used to achieve (higher) education goals better and more effectively for all.

Modell 1 - Tamagotchi (Status quo plus)**Modell 2 - Jenga****Modell 3 - Lego set****Modell 4 - Transformers**

Four learning pathways in higher education 2030

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