

Dear Executive Board,

Student party Front would like to address the need for an interim solution leading up to the implementation of blended learning.

Last year, the Executive Board formulated the strategy for the next five years. One of the pillars 'Curious' describes the impact of digitalisation on society and therefore also on education¹. It states that digital sciences and social sciences & humanities are inextricably linked. This is because they influence our research and education, but also the social contribution that we as a university make. After all, it is becoming increasingly important to integrate technological (digital) sciences within the academy, which became particularly apparent during the pandemic and forced education to accelerate digitalisation. The strategy states that whilst online education can enhance the quality and flexibility of teaching in some cases, physical education has added value and therefore a blended learning model will be sought. This will then be developed and implemented over the next few years.

Although the elaboration memos for this plan are ready, this will only be implemented gradually over the next few years. This means that there will be a transition period between 2023 and 2027 as far as the application of digitalisation is concerned, something that we do not consider desirable. After all, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we made great strides in terms of the development and implementation of digitization in education, and in our opinion, now that we have to be fully present on campus again, this positive development has been completely reversed. This feels to many students as if the mindset of the university has been turned by 180 degrees, when in fact we can incorporate the lessons of this period and with it the technology developed in recent years. We as student parties regret this, since digitization as a means is postponed to a certain extent, costs were incurred for the equipment during the pandemic, teaching staff was trained in handling recording equipment and the positive points will (possibly) only be implemented within five years.

The digitalisation of education has created space for reflection on what future education should look like, which is increasingly important as students appear to have a greater need for personalized education that matches their extracurricular developments. After all, students themselves are asking for more flexibility in education so that they can combine study, work and life, especially now that lifelong learning is becoming more important². One possible solution is to record lectures, publishing them at least two weeks prior to the examinations. On one hand, this flexibility ensures that students can take part in extracurricular activities, and on the other hand it serves as an extra means of reference for students taking exams, ensuring that they have a better means of preparation. In addition, this ensures that students who cannot receive all education on campus due to personal circumstances, still have a chance to study without too many obstacles. It can be argued that inclusivity and the associated equity of opportunity is increased.

We've spoken with both staff and students about the current state of education and the online offerings that are available. There have also been several surveys distributed to students from faculty parties indicating a great need for more digital education, with recordings of lectures or some other digital form of reference being seen as first steps. The surveys show that some faculties already aim to implement some form of blended learning, but the actual steps to achieve this goal will only be taken in the next few years. In the student's view, it is not desirable that some form of digitalisation will only be evident in a few years' time. Although the quality of education has the highest priority for both the student and the teacher, it is indicated that it is

¹ *Strategie op weg naar 2027*. (januari 2022). Tilburg University. <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/nl/over/bestuur-en-beleid/strategie>

² Vereniging van Universiteiten, Vereniging Hogescholen, & SURF. (2017). *Versnellingsagenda voor onderwijsinnovatie*. <https://versnellingsplan.nl/over-versnellingsplan/>

impossible to reverse all innovations and go completely back to physical education. We are aware that digitalisation is different for each faculty and that it must also fit within the studies. Nonetheless, we hear from every faculty that education for many studies is back to being fully physical. Since this issue is widespread, it is important that it be addressed at the central level and the urgency of this need is emphasized.

For some lecturers, the digitalisation of education brings a fear of empty lecture halls. Interaction is important for the quality of education for both lecturers and students. Academic education involves dialogue and discussion. This is something that both lecturers and students value highly. After all, they receive academic education for a reason. However, many lecturers do indicate that they believe that simply sending information during a physical one-and-a-half-hour lecture is outdated. According to them, the university needs to move with the times, daring to experiment with various forms of digitalisation in education in the period before the implementation of the strategy.

As student parties, we recognize the importance of high-quality academic education. The current elaboration regarding blended learning is a good step toward digital education that fits the current state of the times. However, we believe that in some way digitalisation can be implemented earlier within the studies and a midway can be found between full physical presence and the implementation of blended learning in the future. Therefore, we would like to suggest to the Executive Board, the deans and the lecturers to take this need for an intermediate solution into their education. We also want to propose a practical interim solution to record the lectures and make them available online shortly before the start (at least two weeks) of the exams. In this way, this gives students reference material to better prepare for exams, but attendance, participation and interaction during the lecture weeks is still guaranteed.

Yours sincerely,



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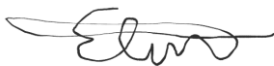
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**We, as members of the Faculty Council of Tilburg Law School (TLS), agree with the general message regarding digitalisation of education at Tilburg University. However, not all points made apply to TLS. Regarding Blended Education, TLS is very progressive and this way of education is currently already applied in practice. In response to this letter, we are of the opinion that a dialogue will have to take place involving all parties, including: faculty councils, the university, policy makers, etc., in order to come to a well-thought-out and well-designed solution. This is to arrive at a well thought out and nuanced result.*



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