

QS

Reimagine Education:

Learning from '*The New Remarkable*'

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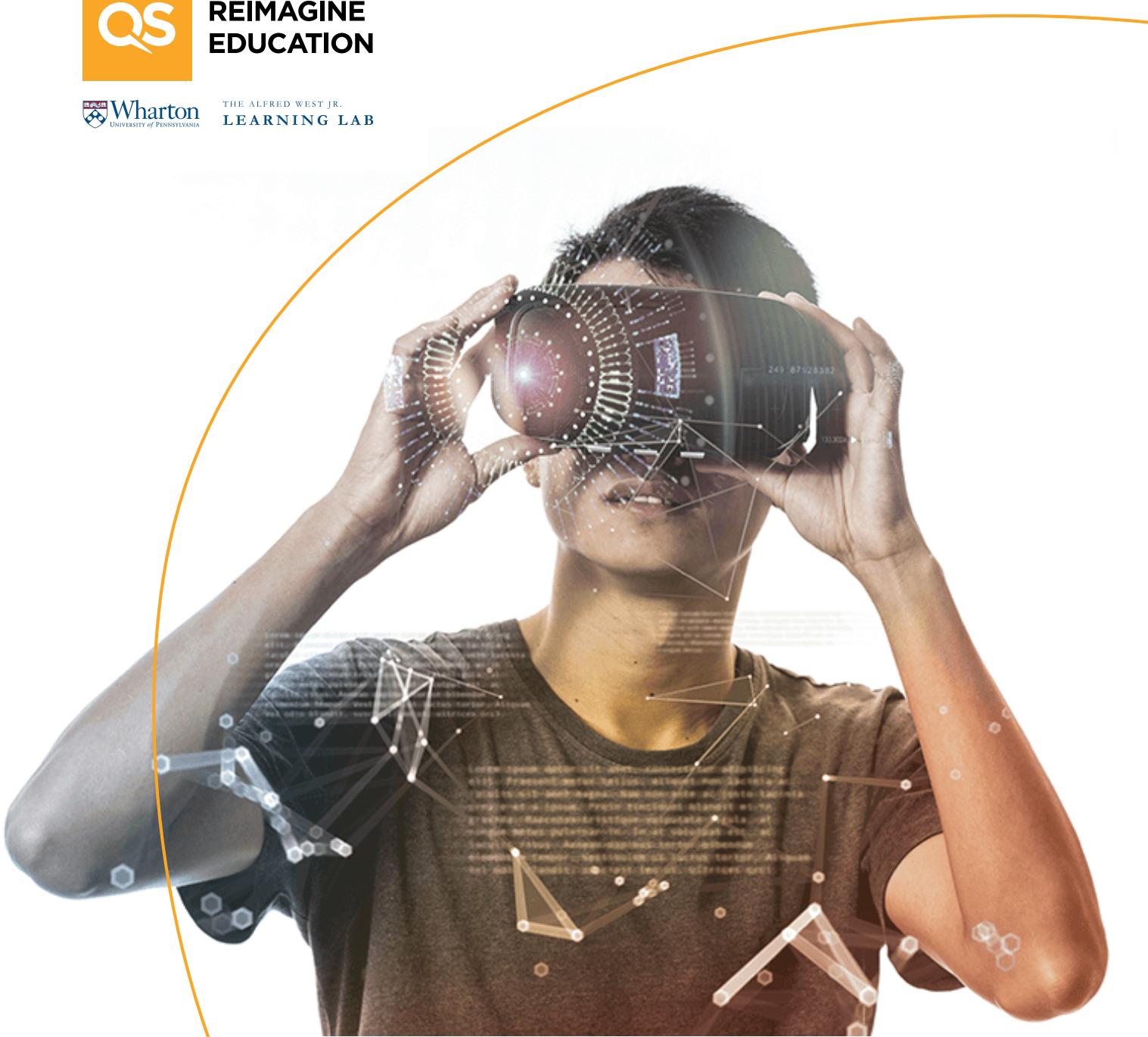
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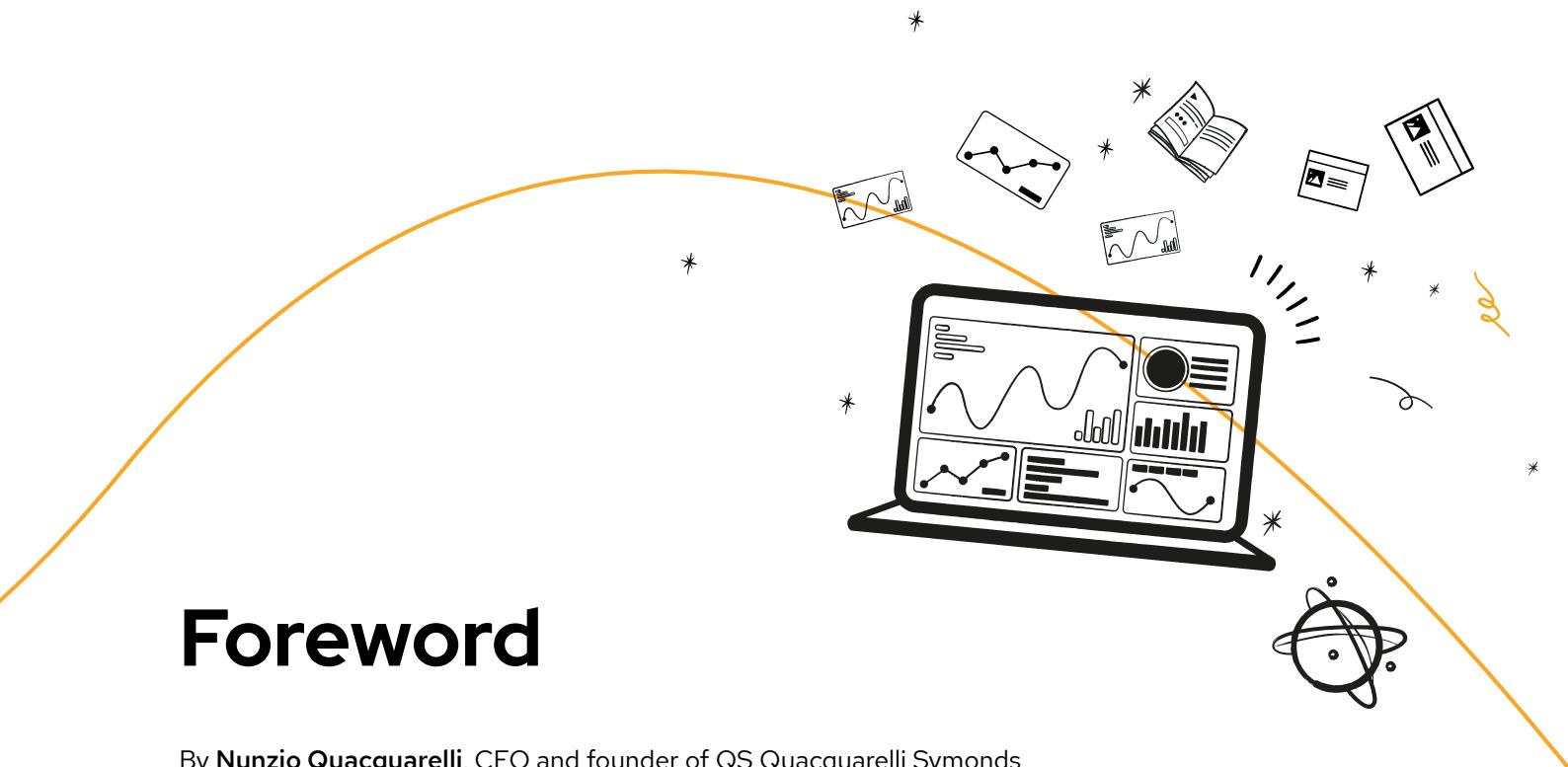
Wharton
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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Foreword

By Nunzio Quacquarelli, CEO and founder of QS Quacquarelli Symonds

What inspires me the most about the QS Reimagine Education Conference and Awards is knowing that the innovators involved in the competition, the influential speakers and the university leaders, employers and edtech entrepreneurs participating in the event, are creating the future of global education. It is an initiative that I'm incredibly proud to have co-founded with Professor Jerry Wind from The Wharton School. In its eighth year, Reimagine Education continues to go from strength to strength.

The 2021 conference (6-10 December) explored the theme of '*The New Remarkable*'. We received over 1,100 award applications from 74 countries and welcomed a record 3,100 delegates. The programme featured 80 experts, 40 panels and workshops. This report includes interviews with our global awards winners: Queensland University of Technology, Ubongo

and Brian Study. They share how the pandemic affected their respective projects and how they plan to evolve their winning initiatives. The paper also covers the themes and topics debated in some of the most popular panels featured in the latest edition of the conference, including the most valuable insights from the participating speakers.

I am particularly proud of the community of Reimaginers we have co-created. As the 2020 winner of our Global Education Award, Lucinda Crossley-Meates, Careers Service Manager at The University of Sydney Business School, said in a recent interview: "We are the group that is going headfirst, hurtling into the future! To do so together makes a big difference to our capability. So let's strengthen this community and keep up the great work."

Hear from QS Reimagine Education 2021 winners



Global Education Award

Winner: Queensland University of Technology, Australia

"We have learned that to achieve what is necessary for something of this scale, you have to bring people with you"

The Queensland University of Technology (QUT) won our Global Education Award, worth \$25,000 USD, for their Design for Impact programme. Transdisciplinary 'Impact Labs' were introduced across the QUT Bachelor of Design curriculum in 2019 as four units: Place, People, Planet and Purpose. They were chosen to reflect the shifting needs of employers and in response to student priorities. By working through experiential, inquiry-led design challenges, students develop core design skills including transdisciplinary collaboration, networking and profile building.

We spoke to the team at QUT to find out more about what winning the Global Education Award meant to them and what they've learned from their Design for Impact work:

How did you feel when you heard you'd won the overall award?

"We were utterly gobsmacked to hear we had won! There were so many incredible, innovative entries this year, and we are so thrilled that the judging panel recognised the multiple ways in which our Impact Labs offer solutions to future-focused learning approaches – from the overarching Place, People, Planet and Purpose concepts themselves, to pedagogies, design activities, trans-disciplinarity and sustainable partnerships. We believe our continually evolving model is highly adaptable across contexts and scales, offering a coherent set of critical 'thinking points' and activities that any combination of learners and/or disciplines might work through."

What difference will the funding make to your plans to further develop the project over the next 12 months?

"The funding offers the chance to further progress the evolution and impact of the labs in a range of ways. We will explore the potential for:

- Seed funding to implement students' design solutions into reality, in particular for our community partners who may not have the capabilities to do this. Partners such as [A Brave Life](#) (teen pregnancy support) and [Orange Sky](#) (homelessness). This would also extend the capacity for impact on student employability and network growth.
- Feedback and research. As part of QUT's core offer, we want to hear more from our students and partners on the impact of the real-world partnerships, and the ways in which the labs have elevated their learning and business models respectively and to grow our relationships further.
- A student bursary for sustained performance and entrepreneurial innovation throughout the four Impact Labs."

What aspect of Impact Labs are you most proud of?

"We are proud of the multiple ways in which the Labs have impacted on students' development and lives. Undertaking large-scale transdisciplinary, authentic learning in undergraduate curricula is complex and unwieldy and can be poorly received when perceived as bolt-on activities, or isolated boutique units. A key to the success of the labs has been ensuring that they form a fundamental building block within the design degree."

What have you learned about the effectiveness of virtual working during the pandemic?

"With the pivot to all online learning across the education sector during the pandemic, we have learnt that clarity of purpose, sustaining social interactions and collaboration have been key. With over 2,700 students and, at some points, six design intensives running at the same time, we found that there were increased opportunities in the online space for expanding online conversations and social interactions through Padlet, Miro, LinkedIn, Behance and social media channels. However, these things will never replace human interactions, (especially if cameras are switched off) and the collaborative, experiential learning that is a fundamental part of design and design studios.

"We were fortunate that prior to the pandemic, because of our large student cohort, we had already developed a model for working with partners (both external and internal) that did not overburden them and involved some virtual and in-person presentations. We found the move to virtual partner collaboration time enhanced the labs – as we embraced a range of digital platforms, for example Miro collaborative whiteboards where partners could become more engaged in the design projects. This also meant that students created lasting digital artefacts for continued collaboration with partners maximising external exposure."

What have you learned about the best approach to doing and delivering something new from your experience with Impact Labs?

"We have learned that to achieve what is necessary for something of this scale, you have to bring people with you. The scale of collaboration, support and buy-in spreads well beyond the 15 named on the award – the labs would not function without the extensive support and collaboration from staff from our work integrated learning team, entrepreneurship experts, counselling services, design workshop staff, student career educators, student partners and at least 65 dedicated and passionate tutoring staff. And building and sustaining relationships with over 35 external community and industry partners who recognise the value for students' experiences, as well as their business endeavors.

"We have learnt that the systems and structures that make the labs happen are crucial. Such programs cannot work unless they are secure in their existence and championed by leaders who believe in them. And then they need to firmly exist in the degree program, where they might be sufficiently resourced to further develop and undergo constant evaluation and improvement. Transdisciplinary large-scale cohorts require support and communication from across often hidden services such as timetabling, room and space bookings, health and safety...the level of administrative, behind-the-scenes work is often underestimated. But we have proven that it can be done!"



How much do you think prospective students are considering environmental sustainability in their choice of programme and institution?

"We have all seen the immense worldwide groundswell of support for climate change activism and conversations about global environmental sustainability more broadly, and this has translated into students actively seeking courses that broach this area. And our students are no different. They are hungry to make a positive difference in the world, across environmental and social agendas. We are fortunate that [QUT now have dedicated strategic leadership in place for sustainability](#), and this includes a clear Education for Sustainability agenda, partly deliverable through formal institutional program review structures, and across all disciplines. With social, environmental and global issues at the heart of the Impact Labs, they have been acknowledged as leading the way in this space at QUT, through their themes and content, as well as authentic transdisciplinary pedagogies. Impact Lab 3: Planet, focuses specifically on the UN Sustainable Development Goals and addresses design challenges directly related to the goals, such as housing, poverty and education. One student noted how important the ethical underpinnings of the labs are to her: 'The Impact lab's purpose and moral standing is exactly why I chose to be a designer and exactly what I hoped to find in a university degree.'"



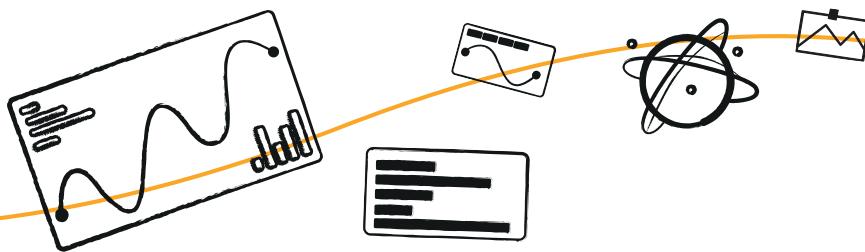


Global Edtech Award

Winner: Ubongo, Tanzania

"We are able to reach kids who otherwise have very limited access to any educational content"

Ubongo is a Tanzania-based social enterprise which leverages the power of entertainment and mass media to bring low-cost learning to African families, using technology they already have. Ubongo provides free edutainment programmes on TV, radio and digital, which are available in 11 languages in 40 countries, reaching 24.6 million families. The content improves cognitive development, learning outcomes, and social-emotional skills while ensuring every child can experience fun while learning. Ubongo was selected for the Global Edtech Award, sponsored by Google Cloud, and worth \$25,000 USD in Google Cloud credits.



We spoke to the team at Ubongo, including Imam Lipumba, Head of Marketing and Development, to learn more about their work and how they are trying to redefine edtech to ensure they reach as many children as possible:

How did you feel when you heard you'd won the overall award?

"We were incredibly excited! Reimagine Education is a big and credible platform in the education sector, so we were honored to be recognised by peers, scholars and other incredibly deserving innovations. Most conversations about edtech seem to focus on more high-tech solutions; tools or resources that require smartphones, internet accessibility and tablets - which most African learners don't have easy access to. At Ubongo we define edtech as simply using technology or technological solutions and tools to enhance learning for kids, and our approach is to reach people through the technologies that they already have access to - which in many parts of Africa is TV, radio, and simple feature phones. We hope that by winning this award and the visibility it may bring, we can be catalysts for conversations about making edtech solutions more accessible to the people they are made to help."

What difference will the Google Cloud credits make to your plans to further develop Ubongo over the next 12 months?

"Ubongo uses the Google Cloud to produce our content collaboratively. From research and user testing, through scripting production reviews and sharing of finalised content with broadcasters, Google Cloud is at the centre of workflows across the team. Over the next 12 months, we plan to grow our team in order to increase our capacity to continue creating educational content for kids. The Google Cloud credits will enable us to become more collaborative, including more people in the process, as well as supporting us to make more content available both internally and to broadcasters."

From all of your successes with Ubongo, what are you most proud of?

"Simply put, our team, Ubongo was born in 2013, when a group of five people met up at a coffee shop in Dar es Salaam to share their passion for education, media, and kids in Africa. They had an idea, why not use mass media to reach kids with meaningful learning at scale? And 8 years later, we are reaching over 24 million kids across the continent. To get here, we had to build a Pan-African team of people who are motivated, passionate and committed to transforming education for Africa's learners. Ubongoers (our internal name for people who work at Ubongo) are always learning, creative, and above all else 'do it for the kids'. They are the reason for our success as an organisation, and are great role models for the kids we reach with our content."



What difference do you think the pandemic has made to global attitudes towards learning ‘outside the classroom’?

“The pandemic forced governments, education stakeholders and even kids themselves to drastically reevaluate learning ‘outside of the classroom.’ In a matter of weeks, schools closed across the globe; and in Africa, some schools have stayed closed for almost two years (Uganda). The pandemic encouraged educators to rethink what a ‘classroom’ actually looks like – and how to better actively engage children when they aren’t in person. Within a matter of months from the onset of the pandemic, Ubongo became Africa’s biggest classroom serving more than 25 million learners. For us, we suddenly had millions of kids and families depending solely on our content for learning – since most schools did not have the infrastructure to set up at-home/online classes. Moreover, we’ve seen shifts in the entire education sector, which is more and more focused on edtech innovations and unique solutions that promote engagement and fun in any environment.”

What do you think educators should learn from the impact of Ubongo on children’s learning outcomes?

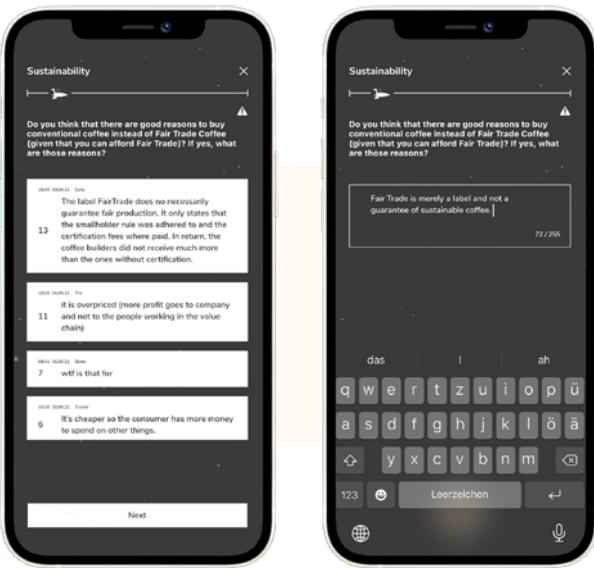
“That learning can be fun and effective! Ubongo improves cognitive learning outcomes by 13% by creating enjoyable and engaging learning content through unique storylines, songs, interesting characters, and interactive segments. Just by watching our shows a few times a week, we have seen improved performance.

“Secondly, when we include kids wholeheartedly in creating education content, engagement increases! We co-create directly with kids, bringing them into every step of our iterative design process, from user-testing to hosting workshops around storylines. Our content is also localized into over 10 languages and adapted to different cultural contexts. And this human-centered design approach has been, by far, the best strategy for us to produce content that is effective in engaging and improving learning outcomes for kids.”

You mentioned distributing your content through solar devices in your Reimagine application, who will that enable you to reach?

“The market of solar companies in Africa mostly targets the areas that do not have access to electricity which is also where we find it difficult to reach kids with our content. In our partnership with TrendSolar, we created an offline mobile application which was pre-loaded onto the phones that are a part of the kit that their consumers get. This year, we will be working with Buffalo Grid and Kuza to pre-load our content on their solar hub through which digital content is made available to everyone with a phone in refugee camps in Kenya. We are able to reach kids who otherwise have very limited access to any educational content.”





People's Choice Award

Winner: Brian.Study, Switzerland

"Winning the award was and still is an overwhelming motivation. It reassures us that we are on to something that will play a significant role in the future world"

Brian.Study was selected to win the People's Choice Award. The People's Choice Award was decided by votes from the 3,100 delegates who attended Reimagine Education. Brian.Study is an early-stage social and competitive app for students to master exams playfully. We caught up with CEO and co-founder Ralph Forsbach to learn more about Brian.Study and his plans for 2022:

Where did the inspiration for Brian.Study come from?

"Having been a student myself for many years I have experienced how hard it is to prepare efficiently for exams. In all the different universities I have been to, my best learning outcome always appeared once I had good learning material and someone to teach it. But unfortunately, this was not always the case since universities often did not support the students in their learning progress. That is why I wanted to build a platform that optimizes the learning path, and connects students to help and study with each other."



How did you feel when you heard you'd won the People's Choice Award?

"Initially, I could not believe it. Many good startups were participating, and the competition was powerful. Winning the award was and still is an overwhelming motivation. It reassures us that we are on to something that will play a significant role in the future world. Especially as an early-stage startup, this is important."

What do you think is the biggest barrier to universities adapting from their traditional learning materials and methods to combat 'academic boredom'?

"It comes down to whether teachers are willing to accept and embrace changes to the way they teach. Every change bears some work and anxiety, and is therefore a hurdle to overcome. So even though we have data showing fantastic student engagement and user outcomes, we often still struggle to convince teachers to use our solution."

What difference do you think the pandemic has made to global attitudes towards learning by more innovative methods like gamification?

"Last year once all exams and classes moved to Zoom, my thought was: "Wow... the pandemic changes a lot". A year later, I realized that this was not really the case. The things that changed were basically often just the minimum to reflect the old doctrine. For example, students are still taught using one-way communication on PowerPoint slides, and the only difference is, that it is online and not in the lecture hall.

"So to answer your question: Things have been happening, but in terms of real innovative learning, the pandemic has contributed little up to his point. But I still believe that there will be an impact. Last year universities were just busy keeping teaching alive. It was an exceptional situation and it had to happen quickly. However, this year, given that the basics of classic online teaching have been established, there might be greater capacity to look beyond the basics and to explore new methods."

What are you most excited about for 2022?

"2022 will be an interesting year. This year, we have to prove with facts and figures that our product has resonance on the market and a positive effect on teaching. The results of our studies will therefore be very exciting and decisive for us. In addition, we are building a feature that allows students to create and curate content themselves while blending it with official course material. A difficult undertaking that no other startup has done so far."





How should higher education and tech companies address the 'skills gap'?

Technology platforms and interfaces have become such a fundamental part of our personal and professional lives over the past two years that it should come as no surprise that there has been a significant rise in career opportunities in technology. In fact, there was a [36% increase in roles](#) in technology and digital advertised between June and August 2020, with software developers, web designers and data analysts the [most sought-after roles](#). Speaking at the Reimagine Education session on Learning and Thriving In the New Normal, panelists explore the reasons for this skills gap and what can be done to develop the capabilities which employers are looking for.

"We don't really have a talent gap in the world," says Anthony Salcito, Vice President of Worldwide Education at Microsoft, "It's really a talent opportunity or a talent alignment challenge and we've got to work hard to make sure that universities are providing relevant experiences with industry insight to help guide students on a pathway so that they can maximise their capabilities as they enter the workforce, but also to understand their motivations for how they can apply their talents and interests."

There is clear recognition among tech companies of the value of recruiting talented graduates, yet this skills challenge, which significantly pre-dates the pandemic, remains as technology continues to disrupt and evolve. As Rebecca Allyn, Education to Workforce Lead at Amazon Web Services (AWS) explains, technology is "driving innovation across all industries" and "the use case for tech is really as varied as the industries using it".

She says: "I talk to companies every day who are customers of Amazon and AWS who are having to pass on lucrative projects because they can't find the people to staff them," she says, adding: "We see a critical part of our mandate as needing to work with education to build this community of skilled folks who can enable innovation."

For Rebecca, higher education has not been able to "move at the speed of business when it comes to responding to the skills and competences that tech companies" want. She continues: "I think the focus has remained very diligently on the two year and four year degrees and less so on the skills and tech required for those hands-on, real world experiences that prepare students and learners" for graduate employment.

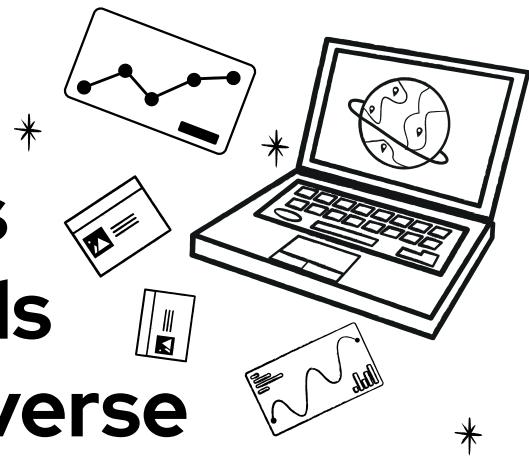
The rise of micro-credentials has long been on the risk list as a disruptor to the traditional degree, which has been the backbone of higher education since its inception. The desire for purpose and flexibility among Generation Z makes the ability to select specific, bite-sized courses an attractive option.

Rebecca adds: "If you think about just artificial intelligence and machine learning as an example of the level of specialisation that is required, there are not many higher eds which have the capacity to really respond in the way that creates that alignment [between education and technology] and that's when incremental credentialling becomes so incredibly important. From an employer view, it can accelerate people into careers more quickly, it can help match the demand for talent, it can serve as a way to signal and communicate the alignment between skills and jobs. It can also improve inclusivity as it is an approach which is more accessible for people who can't take the time off to do a full degree. It also fits with how people actually learn, which isn't necessarily always in a very linear, straight-through way."



For Sarah Toms, Executive Director of Wharton Interactive at The Wharton School, specialising too early in technological skills carries different risks. She feels that channelling learners into specific career paths when they're young can be a "mistake" and will not contribute to the tech sector's needs in the long-term.

She says: "When an 18-year-old is graduating from high school, they don't know yet what is available to them. That is the wonderful thing about a four-year degree that is working well, it should begin with an undecided major that enables them to explore and see what the possibilities are out there. Secondly, innovation comes from a diversity of background and skills and if we're allowing our learners to get funnelled into one set of very specific skills too quickly that's actually not going to help with the overall meta of growth of innovation in our economy."



How the pandemic has been a catalyst towards education in the metaverse

"A platform to facilitate human co-experience" is how Rebecca Kantar, Head of Education at Roblox, describes the 'metaverse'. It is a term which is familiar to gamers but remains a puzzling concept for most, partly because there is no single or simple definition to be found. Justin Edwards, Director of Learning Programmes at Microsoft's Minecraft Education Edition, says that for him it's a space where people can "learn and participate together in solving activities" and "sharing, understanding and creating social constructs". Rebecca and Jeremy joined panel moderator Dr Dave Ranyard, CEO of Dream Reality Interactive Ltd, in a Reimagine panel exploring Learning in the Metaverse.

Though the pandemic forced most educators to engage with students via virtual technology, many chose to 'translate' their in-person teaching online, rather than fundamentally alter their teaching practices. Many switched from lecturing in a lecture theatre to lecturing on platforms such as Zoom but did not necessarily embrace the wealth of exciting opportunities for new approaches which technology could bring.

Justin feels that the pandemic did make people more open to new possibilities that would have been anathema 20 years ago, particularly around working and studying from home. He observes that educators went through three distinct phases since March 2020: "I think in the initial phase, as school systems started to enter into lockdown when we were having to disconnect people from the classroom or the lecture theatre or wherever they were studying, it was a rapid transition. We had a lot of educators who were familiar with edtech,

familiar with the games or familiar with various elements of learning content, but not enough. There was a scrabble to come to terms with the technology and how to use it, to continue learning and to just sustain learning."

The second phase was when educators started to return to teaching but in a 'disrupted' pattern, perhaps with some students in COVID isolation at home. He says this is where more strategic thinking was applied to how game-based learning could "interface with educational programmes". During the third phase, a wider return to physical learning, he expected to see a drop-off in engagement with Minecraft Education platforms but, in fact, levels of engagement seen in the pandemic were sustained. He adds: "One of the other things we've seen on returning to school or the physical environment, where that was possible, was a dramatic increase in social and emotional learning. Historically, game-based learning would be very comfortable in mathematical education or computer science or STEM and suddenly we saw a threefold increase in our mindfulness content or our content to do with Sustainable Development Goals."

Reflecting on what education might look like in the future and how the metaverse might be embraced alongside face-to-face learning, he says: "I don't think it'll ever get to the point where it is 100% learning on a VR set. I think we will find places in and out of game. The games add opportunities to experiment, to test, to problem solve, to experience risk and understand learning in the context of risk but then to go back into the social arena

of learning in the classroom or learning in group to have a discussion about what that meant and contextualise that and inform the next development before going back into the metaverse. This hybrid scenario I think is here to stay."

For Rebecca and Roblox, the pandemic was also a "catalyst for organic adoption" that was already under way. She says: "I think in five to 10 years you'll see more and more organisations, large-scale curricular and instructional providers primarily incorporating Roblox into their curricular modules in the first place, as opposed to building something 2D or on a PDF. If they're trying to teach physics and airplanes and flight, perhaps they're using something like Roblox as a medium for that lesson plan or that module within a curriculum."

She also takes the view that progress to education in the metaverse will likely be gradual and calls for greater collaboration between educators and tech companies to "bring these primary technologies into the classroom in a way that's really useful" and not just "hype". She raises the need for tech companies to consider the challenge of "device penetration", which she describes as "underwhelming" in many educational settings, particularly in lower income schools. She adds that standards around content need to be embedded into any approach to the metaverse to ensure "safety and civility".

Dave asked both panelists to share how educators interested in understanding the educational possibilities of the metaverse might find out more. Justin says: "I think one of the interesting things you always come across when educators enter this space is that the children or young people are going to know more than me and my view is yes they probably are, they're

used to the platforms they're engaging with them but what a great opportunity for them to teach you something, while at the same time you can bring them to the product and then start looking at the educational content and looking at features and issues that otherwise they wouldn't address as young people."

He adds: "If you accept that point of view then there's nothing stopping you from adopting the game straight away. The average age of a Minecraft player is 24-years-old so it's not a teenage audience any more. There is a growing population of young people who are engaged with this and some of those people have children and they're bringing up their children through the game as well. Get in there, get stuck in! The young people are already playing it and they will absolutely love you for bringing education to them on a platform that they love."

Rebecca agrees that there are many benefits to educators bringing the metaverse into their teaching, saying: "That secret ingredient that educators are always trying to cultivate is motivation and I think students are highly motivated in places where they're highly engaged. It's clear that on platforms like Roblox students are highly engaged, they're having fun with their friends, they're learning, they're gaining creative confidence. When we speak to students who are using Roblox already, they talk about how they're able to express themselves and share their identities in ways that they can't anywhere else in life. I think there is already such a premium placed on just being in this familiar and beloved environment that students are using day in, day out at home that being able to bring that into the classroom for the educator is a really powerful and new way to be relevant, interesting and compelling."



QS 2022 conference programme

QS Higher Ed Summit: Middle East & Africa
(1-3 March, hybrid, Dubai)

QS Higher Ed Summit: China
(13-14 April, hybrid, Shanghai)

EduData Summit
(9-10 June, hybrid, New York, USA)

QS Higher Ed Summit: Europe
(6-7 July, TBC)

QS Higher Ed Summit: Americas
(September, virtual)

QS Higher Ed Summit: Asia Pacific
(November, hybrid)

QS Reimagine Education Awards & Conference
(5-9 December, hybrid)



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About QS

QS Quacquarelli Symonds is the world's leading provider of services, analytics, and insight to the global higher education sector, whose mission is to enable motivated people anywhere in the world to fulfil their potential through educational achievement, international mobility, and career development.

The QS World University Rankings portfolio, inaugurated in 2004, has grown to become the world's most popular source of comparative data about university performance. Their flagship website, www.TopUniversities.com – the home of their rankings – was viewed over 147 million times in 2021, and over 96,000 media clippings pertaining to, or mentioning, QS were published by media outlets across the world in 2021.



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