How has technology influenced the education sector?

Technologies in some form have always been integral to learning and teaching in higher education. Internet-based technologies have undergone their own evolution from the information focus of Web 1.0 through the collaborative and networked focus of Web 2.0 and more recently to the intelligent Web 3.0. In this way, Web 3.0 technology provides the basis for personalised and adaptive learning environments that have been regarded by educational theorists as the quintessential form of learning for decades.

However, open and flexible learning presupposes a system-inherent analysis and feedback of the learner's progression in order to continuously adapt the learning environment and its underlying curriculum. Recently, interest in collecting and mining large sets of data on student performance to conduct research on learning and instruction has developed as an area generally referred to as learning analytics. Higher education leaders are recognising the value of learning analytics for improving not only learning and teaching but also for the entire educational arena.

At the same time, the education market is increasingly competitive – especially given the introduction of for credit Massive Open Online Courses. Are we at a point where we cannot stretch the existing models and practices of higher education any further?

Paul Wappett will explore how retention and academic success are influenced by a complex mix of numerous interrelated factors, including emerging technologies, social and academic engagement, fit with institutional culture, timeliness of institutional support, the quality of academic programs and feedback. These factors are more acute in an open education environment, such as Open Universities Australia, which serves to capture a cohort that would have previously been isolated from higher education.