



# Assuring Quality amid pandemic: Case Study of the largest public-sector Higher Education Institution of UAE

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A stylized globe graphic in shades of blue and white, showing the continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia.

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Online

# The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)



- An agency with 20 years' experience in assuring the standards and quality of UK higher education
- Only body officially recognised for independent assessments and evaluations used for quality assurance in the UK
- Has a worldwide reputation
- Plays a leading role in international developments in quality assurance

**ENQA**

European Association for  
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

**eqar** ///

European Quality Assurance  
Register for Higher Education



**apqn**

ASIA-PACIFIC QUALITY NETWORK

Re-Imagining Higher Education Quality in an Age of Uncertainty



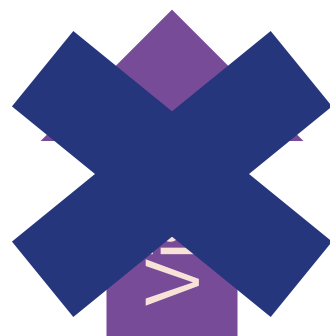
# QAA's International Quality Review (IQR)



- Independent institutional peer review
- Quality assurance against international standards
- An opportunity for international accreditation
- Challenges existing processes, promotes self reflection
- Enables identification of improvements and spreading of good practice
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)



# IQR Process and impact of COVID



Re-Imagining Higher Education Quality in an Age of Uncertainty



# IQR and HCT



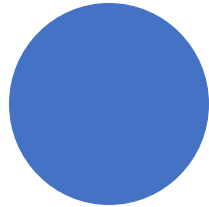
Comprehensive student support available throughout the student journey

Effectiveness of HCT's engagement of employers and other industry partners

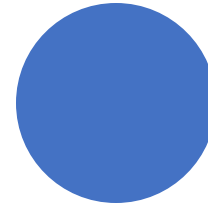
Academic programmes externally accredited by international bodies



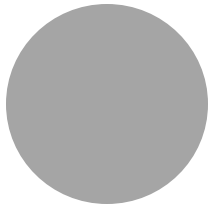
# HCT Profile



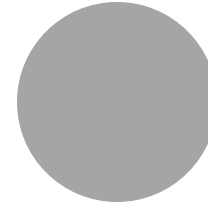
Established in 1988 by federal law 2 issued His Highness, late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding ruler of the United Arab Emirates..



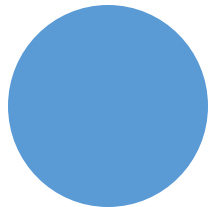
HCT offers many different, work-relevant, core programs in Applied Media, Business, Computer Information Science, Engineering Technology & Science, Health Sciences and Education



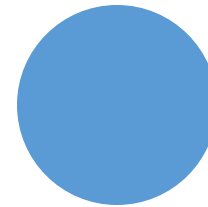
All programs are designed in consultation with business and industry leaders and are aligned with the National Qualifications Framework of the Emirates (NQFE)



HCT offers Diploma, Higher Diploma and Bachelor level Programs



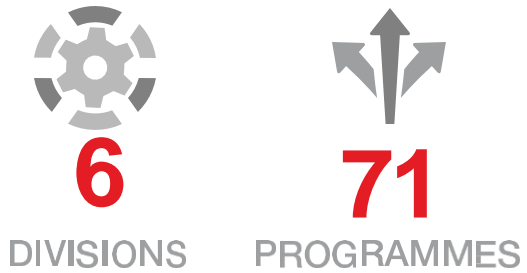
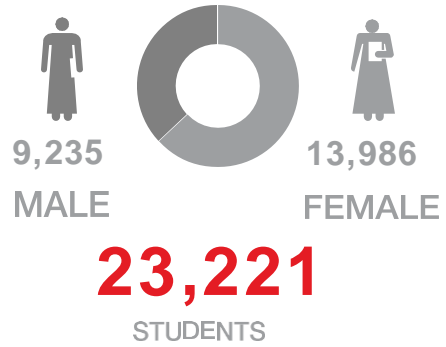
Federally funded higher education institution in UAE



16 campus across 5 emirates in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Dubai, Fujairah, Madinat Zayed, Ras Al Khaimah, Ruwais and Sharjah (The largest higher education in UAE).



# HCT Profile



كليات التقنية العليا  
HIGHER COLLEGES OF TECHNOLOGY





## **Pre-Pandemic Era: HCT's Journey with QAA**

- **HCT began its journey with the Quality Assurance Agency QAA UK in 2019 – pre-pandemic as a result of the recommendation of the task force responsible for institutional accreditation and rankings.**
- **After mutual agreements, HCT initiated alignment with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) 2015 as these were the basis of QAA's review.**
- **After the successful outcome of the initial application, the HCT team under the leadership of the dean of accreditation, started preparing the institution to align with the ESG 2015.**
- **QAA appointed a team of two experts for the scoping visit. QAA provided detailed guidance on the steps, the preparation institution has to do and the ways to fill any gaps that were highlighted from the scoping visit.**
- **A special task force involving all Quality Managers, Accreditation team and other staff began the process of re-alignment to ensure that HCT sufficiently met all criteria stated in ESG.**
- **The QAA team visited HCT in January 2020 just before the Covid-19 pandemic travel restrictions were enforced worldwide.**

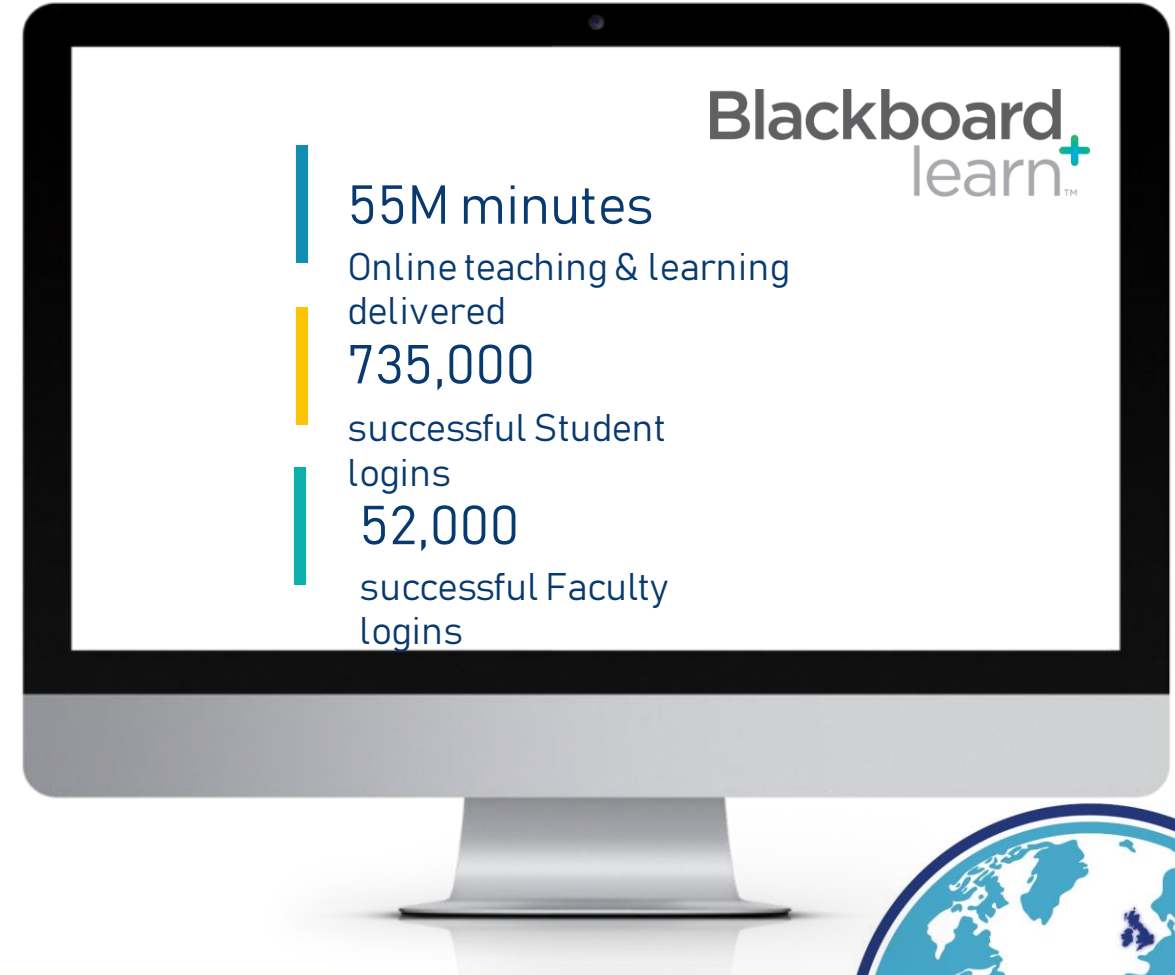




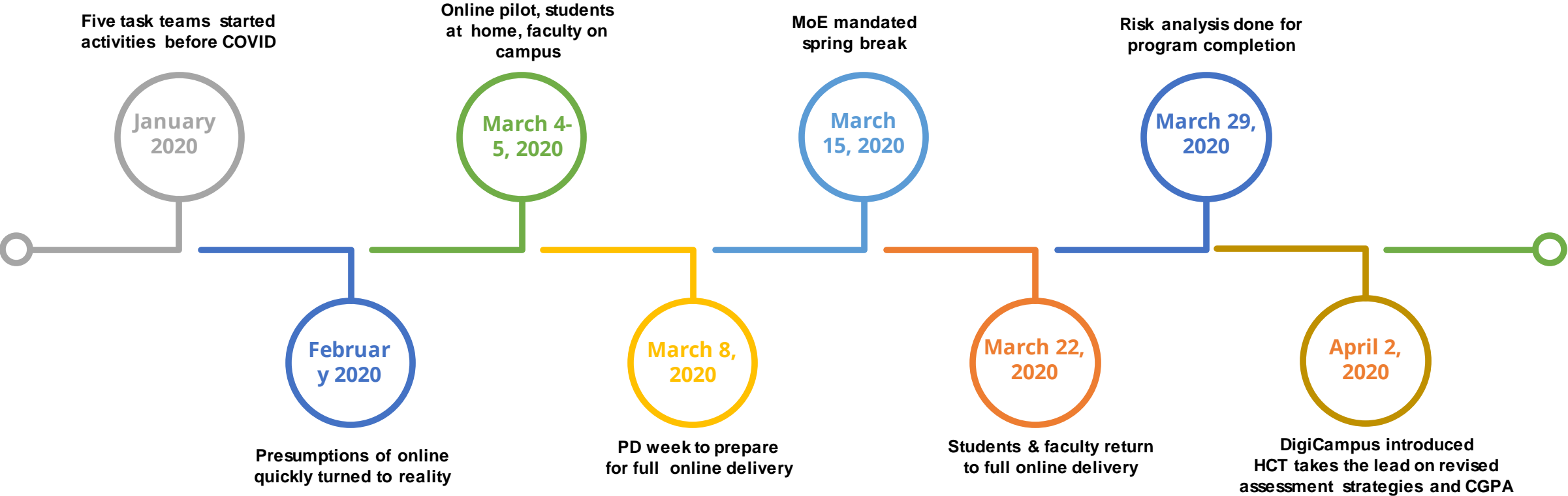
# **COVID-19 – Implications & QA Measures**

- **All higher education institutions were required by the Ministry of Education of the United Arab Emirates to switch to the complete on-line mode starting the beginning of March 2020.**
- **QAA also issued a series of guidelines and essential resources for higher education providers (QAA, 2020b).**

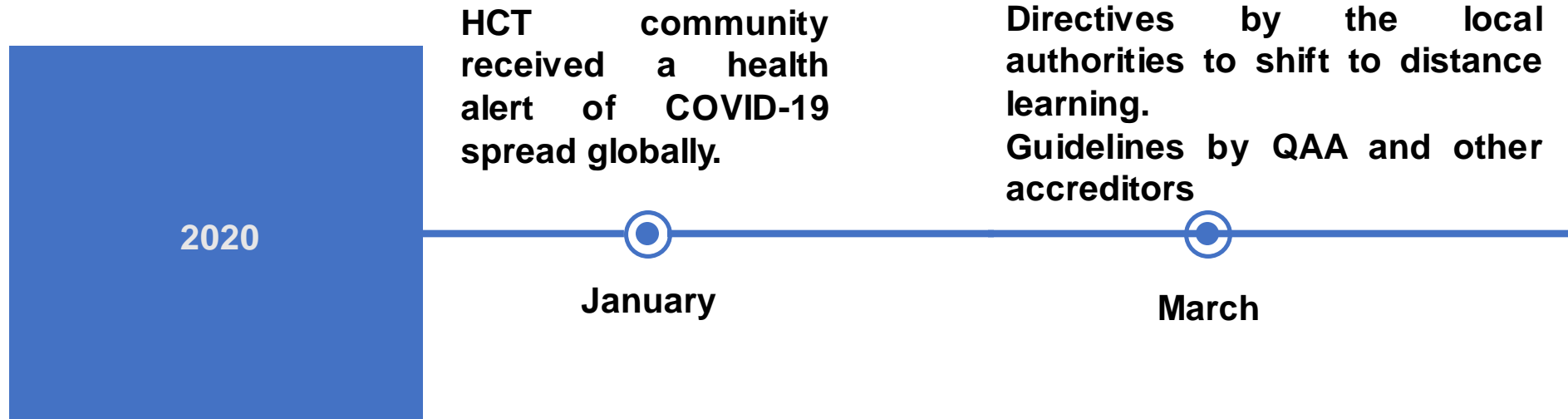
- Due to its investments and reliance on technology for its day-to-day operations, HCT was able to completely switch to on-line delivery mode immediately, without any hiccups.



# Planning for Uncertainty



# HCT's Timeline of Main Events



## April



- Award of IQR and QAA international accreditation.
- HCT adopted QAA guidelines to update assessments strategies.
- Modernise students' placements and internship processes in alignment with international best practices.

## May



**HCT carried out detailed the “Risk Assessment And Mitigation Plan for online delivery**



June

UAE's local accrediting body conducted an e-learning readiness inspection. HCT successful achieved "Ready" status.

QAA's guidelines supported to enhance the quality of online learning.  
HCT implemented the hybrid learning delivery model

July





August

**HCT started new academic year with 30% capacity – New normal – Teaching from Away (Outside UAE for the first time)**

November

**HCT capitalizes on the successes and prepares for the post-pandemic model – Hybrid Education will continue**



# Assessing HCT's Readiness Results



- As of 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2020, a total of 5744 faculty responses and 19601 student responses were received to the surveys. Survey results showed that faculty had an overall satisfactory experience of 87% in comparison to the pilot survey results which was 71%. This shows an obvious improvement in the faculty confidence level to teach online.
- Survey is targeting 5 main categories, namely: online learning readiness; content evaluation; instructor delivery method; overall experience; and class preference.
- A total of 13687 PD hours were conducted to raise the standards of online pedagogy. Faculty testified that the PD training sessions were sufficient and has enhanced their creativity skills. In addition, faculty reported that students took responsibility and ownership of their work. Faculty and students agreed that recorded sessions were of benefit for students' review.
- Feedback received from faculty lack of assessment guidelines and cheating detection methods. While faculty do understand and respect the culture, they are finding it hard to identify students, especially when their cameras are off.

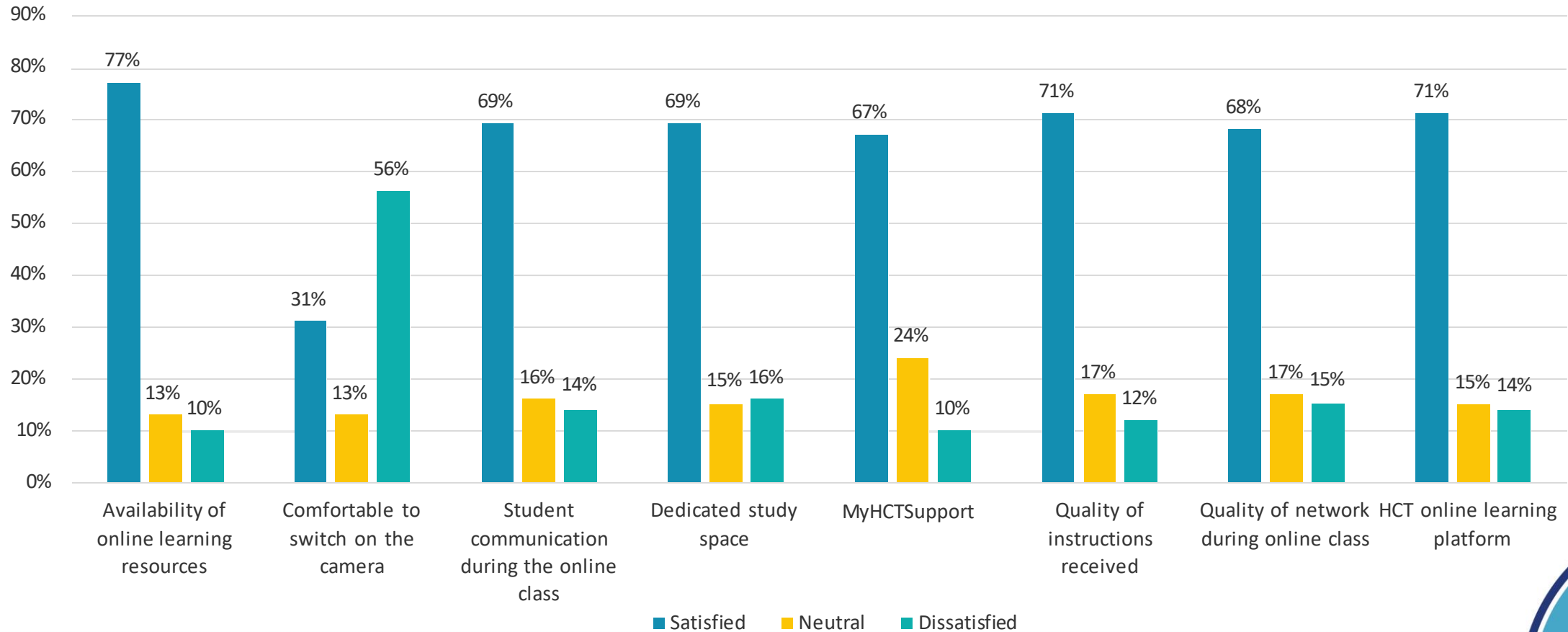




# Online Learning Readiness: Student Responses



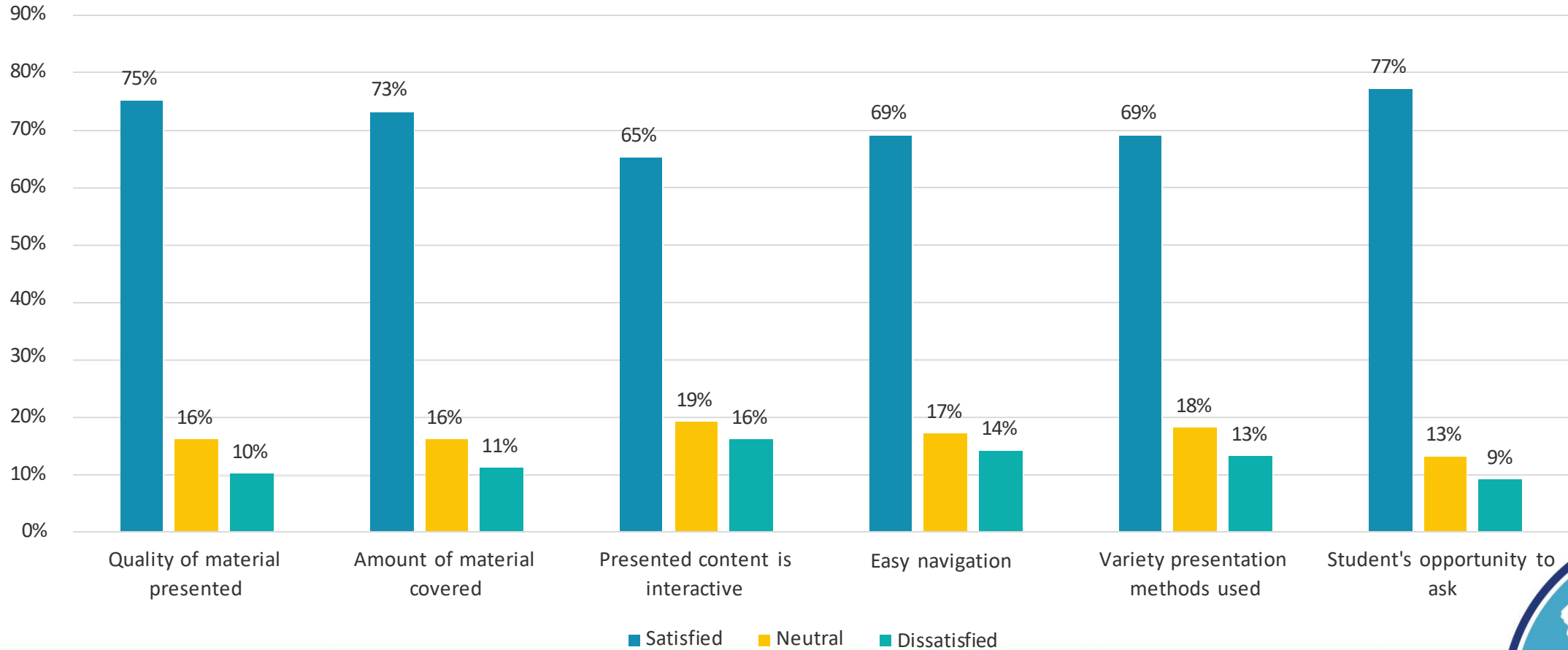
- **Lowest satisfaction level:** Comfortable to switch on the camera during the class (**56%**)
- **Highest satisfaction level:** Availability of online resources (**77%**)



# Content Evaluation: Observation

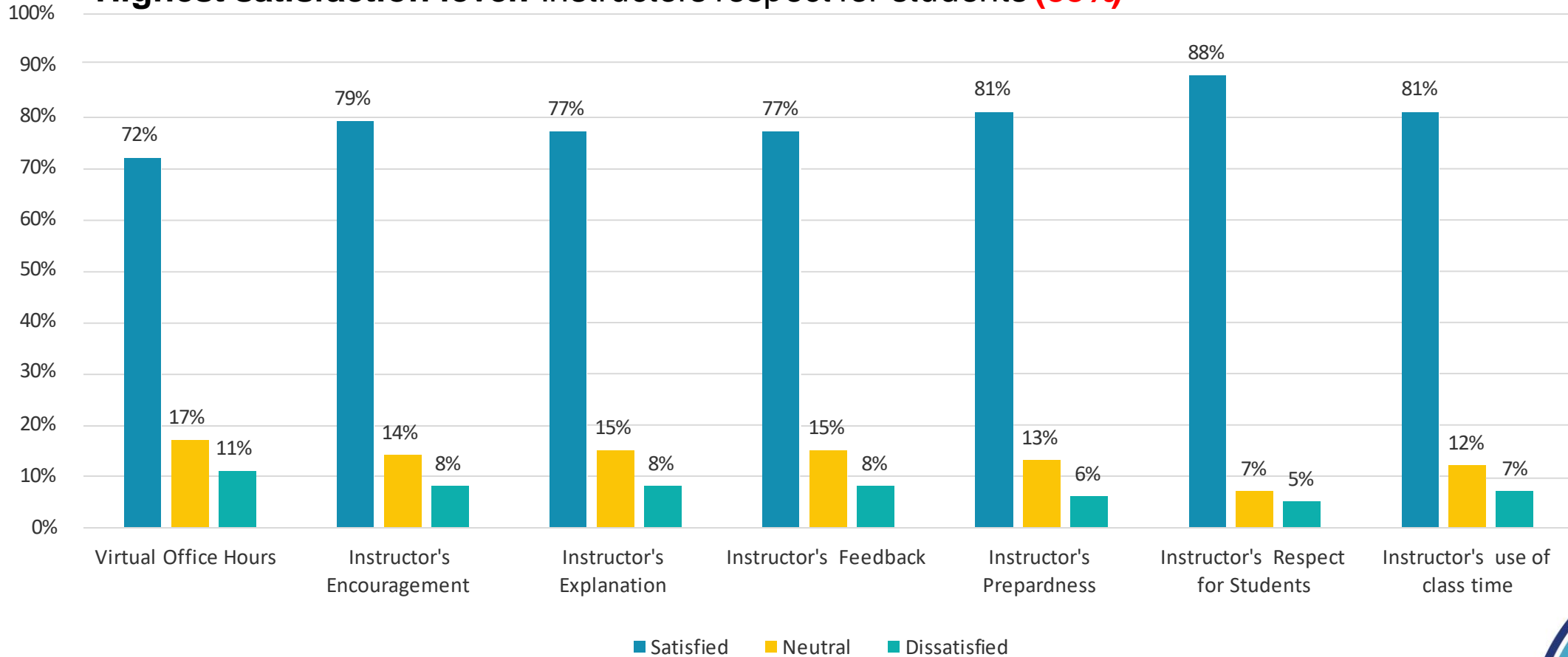


- **Lowest satisfaction level:** Presented content is interactive **(65%)**
- **Highest satisfaction level:** Student's opportunity to ask **(77%)**



# Instructor's Delivery Method

- **Lowest satisfaction level:** Virtual office hours (**72%**)
- **Highest satisfaction level:** Instructors respect for students (**88%**)





# Faculty Data Analysis

**Participants**

**5744**

**Overall Experience**

**87%**

**Student Preference: Face-to-Face vs.  
Online**

**55%**



# Online Teaching Readiness: Faculty Responses



Availability of online learning resources

Impression of student as recipients of online education

PD quality sufficient to prepare you for online delivery

Quality of student engagement during the online class

Your readiness to use HCT online learning platform (Blackboard Learn or Zoom)

My HCT-Support responsiveness when I need support

Quality of network connection during the online class

My System Course Team Leader responsiveness when I need support

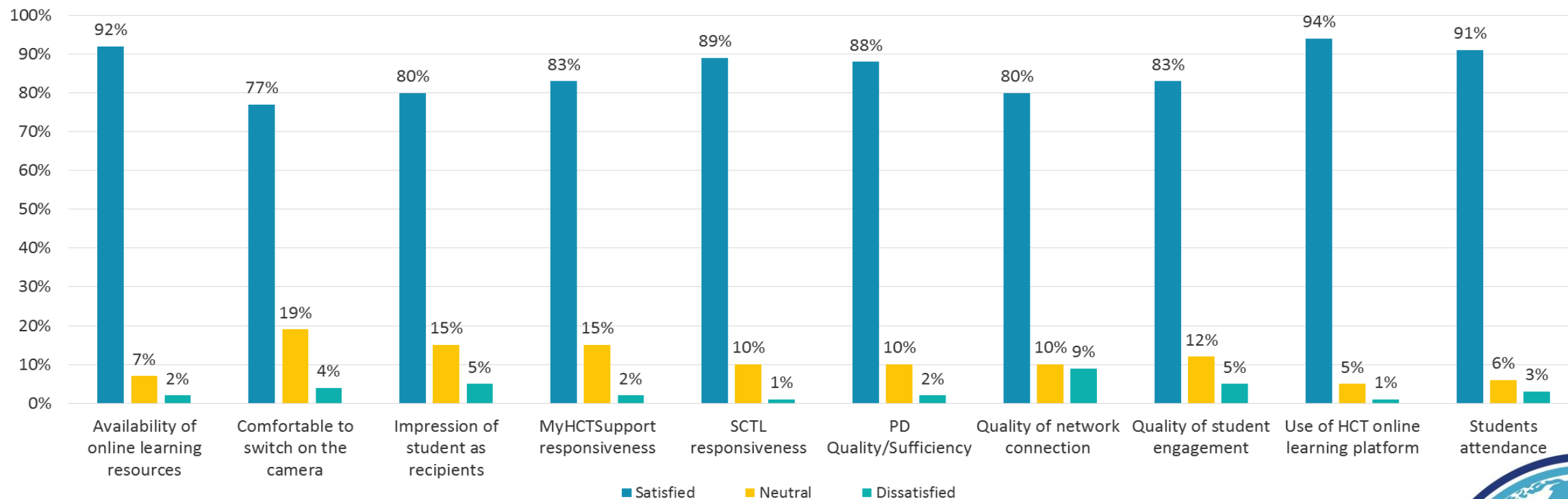
Students' attendance



# Online Teaching Readiness by Faculty



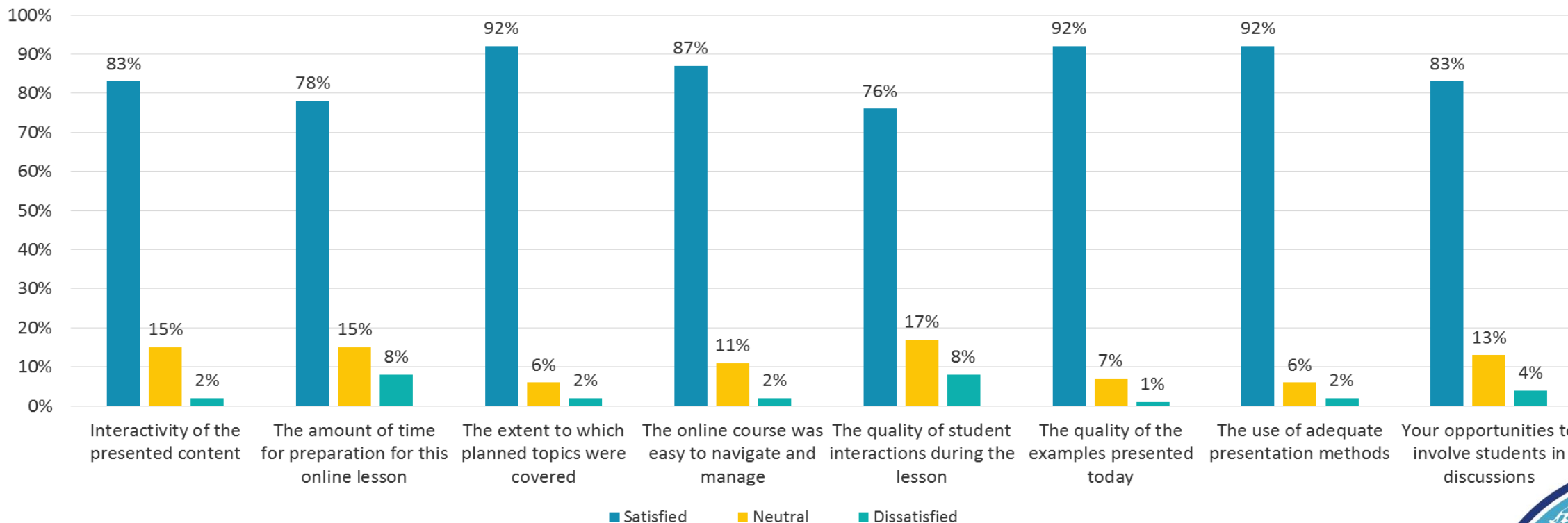
- **Highest satisfaction level:** Confidence of using online learning platforms (94%)
- **Lowest satisfaction level:** Comfortable to switch on the camera (77%)



# Content Evaluation: Observations



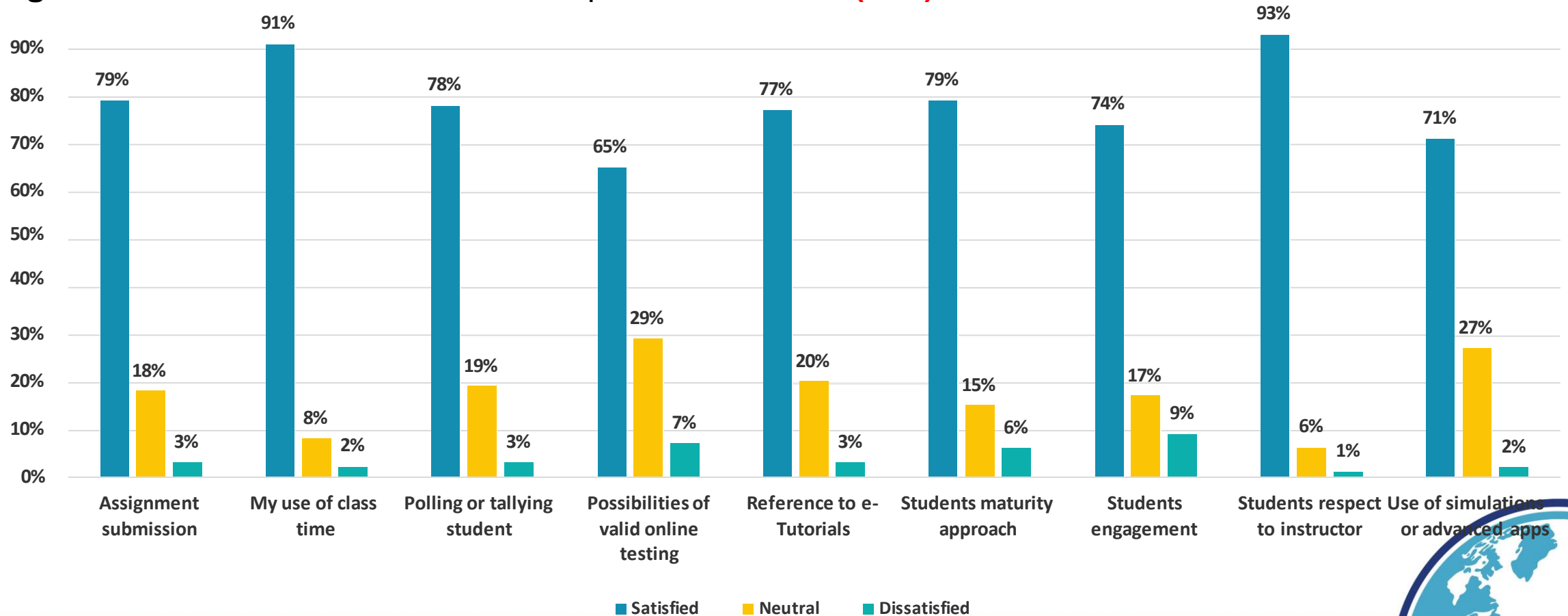
- **Highest satisfaction level:** Planned topics covered and quality of examples presented (92%)
- **Lowest satisfaction level:** Students interaction during the class (76%)



# Instructor's Strategy Delivery Method: Observations



- **Lowest satisfaction level:** Possibilities of valid online testing (65%)
- **Highest satisfaction level:** Students respect to instructors (93%)





# HCT's Early Successes



HCT's readiness with technology led to seamless transition from face to face mode to complete online mode during the pandemic. Statistics of during the March – July 2020 reveal some interesting facts. Some of the key achievements include

1

Over 45,000 online professional development hours were made available to the faculty.

2

Over 2,324 students participated in our online employability skills development program (this program was specially prepared for the final year students).

3

Over 14,296 students participated in almost 700 Digi Campus activities (e-life skills, e-competitions, e-sports, e-reading, and e-volunteering activities).

4

Over 1,900 employees have been working from home with a noticeable improvement in productivity.



# HCT's Early Successes



5

Over 9,100 human resources-related transactions fully delivered online

6

Over 400,000 square meters were disinfected in a record time

7

Over 320 online contracts executed by the procurement department

8

Rapid transformation to on-line education at all 16 branches and more than 23,000 students were able to continue their studies without interruption

9

Launching of the Digi-Campus to promote the integrated transformation of student life activities and online (more than 700 activities).



# HCT's Early Successes



10

Completion of more than 1.6 million distance on-line teaching hours, which was among the largest number of completed on-line globally.

11

Delivery of more than 61,000 live on-line classes through Blackboard collaborate ultra

12

Over 115,000 on-line exams.



# Work Placements During the Pandemic

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**Opportunities for compulsory work placement to enable students to graduate on-time had been a real challenge. With massive lockdowns and restrictions on movement during the early days of the pandemic, it was virtually impossible to arrange the work placements for the students.**

**This challenge was overcome by the aggressive campaign with the employers by HCT's employability team. Moreover, students were offered a unique opportunity to work on the research projects with the faculty who had secured seed grants and required assistance for the research project.**

# Professional Development of Faculty and Staff

**Another challenge faced by HCT was to carry out massive professional development activities for faculty and staff equipping them with necessary tools for online delivery and assessment.**

**This was a mammoth task and over 2000 professional development sessions were planned and delivered during the Summer and Fall semesters of 2020.**

# Meeting the Regulatory Requirements

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- **HCT made use of time-to-time guidelines issued by its regulator (Commission for Academic Accreditation CAA) as well as QAA UK.**
- **In addition, international regulators such as ABET, ACBSP and AACSB, etc., HCT has demonstrated sustainability and reliance in all administrative processes – all administrative systems were converted to accommodate online activities.**

# Learning from the e-Learning Experience:



- Within the first two months, HCT swiftly transformed from the physical campus space into the DIGI Campus mode which is a complete online platform for students.
- The DIGI Campus provides a unique experience to the students as it delivers standardized similar learning experience to students irrespective of principal their affiliation to a specific city. It serves as a system-wide online environment for all members of HCT community and students are able to personalize their experience according to their interests. Students can access learning resources, access all services including co-curricular activities.
- HCT was able to able achieve significant milestones and led its way in online delivery, Based on HCT's initiatives, the Ministry of Education recognized HCT's effort and was awarded leader in e-learning in the country.



# Questions?

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