
Kingston Maurward College

Piloting the digital experience insights service (January 2019)

Evidence informed investment and development



Image: Kingston Maurward College

"Taking part in the pilot of the digital experience insights survey for students and staff has provided evidence to support investment and inform development plans."

Project lead: Christine Robertson, deputy principal*, Kingston Maurward College

Project aims: inspiring students and raising aspiration

Kingston Maurward College is a specialist provider serving the needs of land-based and allied industries in Dorset and the South West. It's core values are 'inspire, challenge and care'. Digital technologies have been identified as being a "key pillar" and as having something to contribute to each of these core values.

Agriculture generally has a high employability rate so the focus is more on asking students to look to the future rather than employability per se; and envisage what they think or would like their job to be in ten years' time and encourage progression to higher education.

Kingston Maurward College ran both the student and the staff digital experience insights surveys (previously known as the student digital experience tracker) and received a 39% response rate from students (293 students out of 750 completed the survey) and a 71% response rate from staff (50 out of 70 staff completed the survey).

Although project lead and deputy principal, Christine Robertson, had a strong professional instinct as to where to invest effort to make progress in effective use of digital technologies to enhance the learning and teaching experience at the college, the survey findings have provided a strong evidence base on which to act.

Strategies for engaging students

The college has a schedule of surveys each year including entry, mid-year and exit surveys and so the launch of the insights surveys was carefully timed to avoid a clash. The student survey took place between Christmas 2017 and the February 2018 half-term and the staff survey followed in May 2018.

Because the college is small it is relatively easy to reach a significant number of students, and as the college was running both student and staff surveys, teachers were a key audience to engage. The college worked with the staff to ensure they knew why they were running the surveys, could convey this to their students and encourage them to participate. It was particularly important to ensure staff were confident in managing survey engagement activities around their primary responsibilities of teaching, examinations and synoptic assessments. Staff had autonomy to decide how much time they could devote to the survey.

Getting staff on board from the outset meant that they were well informed and were prepared for the launch of the staff survey which achieved a high response rate of 71%.

Data analysis process

The college found the survey tool and the supporting systems easy to use and fairly intuitive. As a small institution, the college doesn't have a designated digital learning co-ordinator so Christine took responsibility for the survey and data analysis.

The staff and student surveys were implemented in the same way but in terms of the analysis of staff data, this is being triangulated with what the students have said to help common identify issues and responses as well as where staff have different opinions or want something different.

Resources provided by the Jisc insight team were helpful and the data analysis PowerPoint template was used as part of dissemination activities.

Key findings

The student survey showed that students feel safe in terms of online activities; they feel well trained and well supported. It also revealed areas where further work is required, for example:

- » Most students have some form of device of their own (eg smartphone, tablet, laptop) so greater use of bring your own device (BYOD) is an area to develop
- » Wifi reliability affects some parts of the large and spread out structure of the campus and the fact that some of the buildings are old
- » The college uses safeguarding software which blocks sites that students may legitimately need to access (eg game keeping students wanting to access gun related information). While these sites can be unblocked, it is distracting and diverting and interferes with the immediacy students expect when searching online
- » Students have told the college that they don't like social media being blocked (the college took the decision to unblock it from September 2018)
- » The survey highlighted how unaware students were about use of digital tools in industry and a general lack of student knowledge around this including misunderstandings as to what they were being asked and interpretation of common terms such as 'computer', 'Google' and 'laptop'. The word cloud template provided by the Jisc insights team as part of the analysis support materials helped to illustrate this visually

The staff survey was completed after the student survey. It revealed that staff want to use digital technology and would like to develop their skills and use innovative technologies to enhance the learning experience they offer. This provides a mandate to move forward in terms of technology enhanced learning. The survey also identified:

- » Safeguarding and protection issues and responsibilities were well understood by staff
- » In the same way that the word cloud revealed student uncertainty over how best to use digital tools appropriate, the staff results also revealed a need for support to enhance teachers' toolkits and to prepare learners for an increasingly digital workplace
- » Staff perceptions were that the hardware, rather than the wifi, can be unreliable. Given the financial constraints and the identification through the student survey that most students have their own device this highlights a need to have a more well-developed BYOD policy

A significant common finding across both surveys identified that both audiences were not as aware of what is out there in terms of using technology as they could be. This deduction came from analysis of responses to questions about things like collaborative use, using applications other than things like Word or PowerPoint, online quizzes, polling devices or games. Comparison with the national benchmarking data showed that this is an area we can develop further. People are perfectly happy using Google, Word, PowerPoint and other common applications but there is less action on more innovative things and there is more the college feels it can do to encourage use of a wider variety of tools and applications that will make learning more engaging and help students in their studies.

Acting on the findings

Work has already begun to respond to the survey findings and analysis which were reported to governors and the senior management team during the summer term. Some actions such as removing the social media ban were taken immediately along with work to ensure that students are aware of both the process for getting sites they need to access lifted and how important it is in terms of preventing problems for the next user.

Digital learning is a key focus for development and staff were tasked to complete at least one module from the Education and Training Foundation suite of digital training resources by the end of the summer. It was also a feature of the continuous professional development (CPD) week in June when key findings from the survey were shared with staff along with information on how the college is investing in digital practices and rolling out resources.

As a result of the survey, the college has allocated a sum of £10,000 for project work for individual staff to develop an aspect of digital practice within a department. This may be used to purchase resources, remitted time and training. Activities included developing the use of technology within the classroom, utilising student feedback through the Student Council as a method of improving staff and student skills and engagement, and understanding the skills gaps that existed that were potential barriers to improving student outcomes, including specifically looking at stretch and challenge for learners on Level 3 programmes.

Tips for others/lessons learned

- » Christine has already recommended the insights survey to other member colleges in [Land Based Colleges Aspiring to Excellence](#) (Landex).
- » The student council were not involved this time around because it was an online survey and the results were not going to be available in time for meaningful sharing. In the future the intention is to engage the student council as part of the survey implementation plan.

Next steps

"It is valuable to be able to compare where we are in relation to other FE colleges. Having access to the national pattern is reassuring and we can identify issues and areas where there is any significant variation from national picture."

Project lead: Christine Robertson, deputy principal, Kingston Maurward College

The findings from the surveys will be incorporated into the college's self-assessment report.

In addition to the new strategic plan and the focus on 'inspire, challenge and care' the college has created a new senior post for student experience and progression which will cover areas such as careers, work placement, student support and mental health. Digital provision is an integral element of this broad role.

Kingston Maurward are also working in partnership with Bournemouth and Poole College in an **Education and Training Foundation** project involving training advanced practitioners for a coaching qualification. One of the advanced practitioner coaches will lead on technology-related aspects.

Contact

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**note: Christine Robertson retired in December 2018*